Approaches and Methodologies for Civil Society Reporting on the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda

TAP Network Spotlight Reporting Guidelines

TAP NETWORK

Transparency, Accountability & Participation for 2030 Agenda
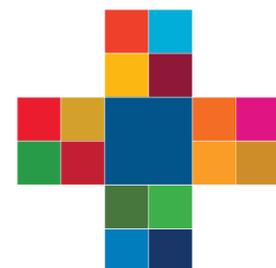
Approaches and Methodologies for Civil Society Reporting on the SDGs and 2030 Agenda

Updated 2021

Introduction

Since the 2030 Agenda was adopted over five years ago, civil society has mobilized to provide valuable reporting to complement official state sources and fill in critical data gaps. In many ways, civil society stakeholders serve as the most indispensable part of the measurement, monitoring and accountability framework for the SDGs, as they often provide a critical link between governments and stakeholders. Nationally and locally-focused civil society stakeholders can therefore play a key role in monitoring and reviewing processes at the national level.

Recognizing the critical importance of civil society "Spotlight Reports" and alternative instruments in the monitoring and review of progress on the SDGs, the TAP Network hopes to continue to support civil society in providing updated guidance on how to prepare a national-level Spotlight Report on SDG implementation. While there is no one-size-fits-all approach to reporting on the SDGs, this newly updated guidance aims to guide civil society stakeholders to reflect on their own national and local priorities, as well as the state of SDG implementation in their countries, with the aim of supporting robust and comparable civil society reporting.

For more information on Spotlight Reporting, please refer to the following TAP Network resources:

- *[SDG16+ Civil Society Toolkit (2021)](#)*
- *[SDG Accountability Handbook (2019): Publishing Civil Society SDG Spotlight Reports](#)*
- *[Empowering Civil Society for National Reporting and Action on SDG16 (2019)](#)*

Guidelines for SDG Civil Society Reporting

The following section provides a drafting framework for CSOs to consider utilizing when putting together a civil society report on SDG implementation in your country. Additionally, detailed guidance on how to approach drafting each section is provided, including some key questions to consider and other relevant information to the drafting process.

Proposed Outline for SDG Civil Society Reports

I.   INTRODUCTION

	a. Executive Summary
	b. Background Context
	c. Process: Data & Methodology

II. CONTENT

    a. Review of Legal and Legislative Framework and Policies
- i. Brief introduction
- ii. Assessment of frameworks
- iii. Challenges and recommendations

    b. Review of country-level Implementation
- i. Brief introduction
- ii. Assessment of progress
- iii. Challenges and recommendations

    c. Review of International Commitments (if applicable)
- i. Assessment of progress
- ii. Challenges and recommendations

    d. Civil Society participation in SDG Implementation / Follow-up
- i. Assessment of civil society space around the SDGs (and in general)
- ii. Challenges and recommendations

III. CONCLUSION

    a. Conclusion
    b. Recommendations

IV. ANNEXES

    a. List of organizations consulted
    b. Data Sets utilized
    c. National Development Plans or Frameworks
    d. Other sources (if applicable, such as databases of law and development plans, official statements, videos of statements by leaders of private or social sectors, non-official information sources, expert reports, etc.)

I. Introduction

a. Executive Summary

The executive summary should present a synthesis of your most important findings and recommendations. It should mention that the report provides an independent account of the government's progress towards certain SDG 16 targets, includes a short explanation of the SDG process so far in your country, and provide the main findings from the report itself. The executive summary should also summarize the key recommendations that the spotlight report outlines for spurring additional progress on SDG16-related issues. You can also highlight issues that you deem most important given the context in your country and the work of your organization. It may be relevant to note key challenges related to SDG work in your country, and ways to overcome them.

b. Background Context

This introductory section should include background and context on why your organization is drafting this report. It is also important to outline the scope of what you'll be reviewing, and why you feel the report is necessary and how it will contribute.

This section should include one to two paragraphs to summarize what will be discussed under this section. Then, the introduction should provide an assessment of frameworks, including constitutional, legal and legislative frameworks and the policies that have been formally established within your country. Finally, you should highlight challenges and provide recommendations.

Based on the assessment of the legal and legislative framework and policies in your country, it is important to draw out some key questions and challenges for your government to continue to address in order to make progress on these issues. The challenges should be followed by recommendations on what is needed in your country to move progress forward on the issues covered in the spotlight report.

The assessment of the current state of legal and legislative frameworks and policies, combined with the report's next section on what your government needs to do to achieve progress, can be used as a "gap analysis" for further advocacy work.

c. Process: Data & Methodology

Outline the methodology, approach, data sets, and sources referenced and used in the report. A short one to three paragraph description of the methodology is important to help the reader understand how you went about your analysis throughout the report, and will lend significant credibility to the report and the organization itself. Without outlining this clearly, the reader might otherwise be able to question the validity of your analyses.

Key Tips

- This section can also include information or reflections of your organization on your country's most recent Voluntary National Review (VNR) on SDG progress. It may also be relevant to begin this section with a brief summary of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, as it may be important to help readers understand the context of the report, if they are unaware of the 2030 Agenda.
- This section could also include an initial introduction and review of current government commitments to the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. This could include institutional mechanisms created to coordinate government action towards the SDGs or relevant policies or laws that your government has in place that works to advance SDG progress. Remember: Many laws, policies, processes or institutions might not be specifically aimed at "achieving the SDGs" or the targets within, but they can still contribute significantly to this end.
- You may also find it relevant to consider reviewing your country's progress against some of the underpinning commitments of the SDGs, including but not limited to:
  - i. Universality (the principle that commits all countries, developed and developing, to achieving the 2030 Agenda),
  - ii. "Leaving no one behind"
  - iii. "Reaching those furthest behind first"
  - iv. Special focus on the most vulnerable and marginalized people
  - v. "Realizing the human rights of all"
  - vi. Integration and policy coherence.
  - vii. Justice, transparency and equality for all

II. Content

    a. **Review of Legal and Legislative Framework and Policies**

        i. **Brief introduction:** Create a one to two paragraph introduction to summarize what will be discussed under this section.

        ii. **Assessment of frameworks**
The purpose of this section is to assess the constitutional, legal and legislative frameworks and the policies that have been formally established within your country. For this section, you will assess various legal frameworks or laws/policies in your countries that are related to the issues that you'll be reviewing for this report. In this case, the existence of legal frameworks or laws/policies on these issues is the first indicator for measuring progress. However, it is also important to review the robustness of these legal frameworks, and various mechanisms that they might have for engaging with governmental actors and stakeholders. Reviewing these frameworks and laws can also track a country's progress on introducing and improving key policies and legal provisions over time. Reviews of these legal frameworks and policies will vary depending on the issues you intend to cover in this report.

iii. **Challenges and recommendations**
Based on the above review of the legal and legislative framework and policies in your country, it is important to draw out some key questions and challenges for your government to continue to address in order to make progress on these issues. Based on these challenges, it is important to provide recommendations on what is needed in your country to move progress forward on the issues you're covering in this report. This assessment of the current state of legal and legislative frameworks and policies, to what your government needs to do to"successfully'' achieve progress on certain issues, can be used as a "gap analysis" for further advocacy work.

Key questions to consider answering in this section:

1. Which government body or bodies are in charge of the implementation of the national SDG implementation process?
2. Has your country's current political leadership made public declarations about your issues in the past two years?
3. Have there been high-level commitments by the current administration to strengthen the legal framework, policies or institutions that are relevant to your issues?
4. Have there been significant reforms or advances in the fight for your issues in the past two years?
5. Is there an enabling space for civil society in monitoring the implementation and the commitment of SDGs, particularly at the grassroots level?

6. Which government body or bodies are in charge of the implementation of the national SDG implementation process?

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8. Have there been high-level commitments by the current administration to strengthen the legal framework, policies or institutions that are relevant to your issues?

9. Have there been significant reforms or advances in the fight for your issues in the past two years?

10. Is there an enabling space for civil society in monitoring the implementation and the commitment of SDGs, particularly at the grassroots level?

b. **Review of country-level Implementation**
   i. **Brief introduction**
   Create a one to two paragraph introduction to summarize what will be discussed under this section.

ii. Assessment of progress

You should provide an assessment of progress highlighting some of the important issues related to implementation of laws and policies in your country. For this, it is important to consider an overarching analysis of the entire system of implementation in a country and to compare your analysis with what your government has reported through its latest Voluntary National Review (VNR), if it has conducted one. While some degree of subjective analysis on implementation is appropriate and inevitable for these reports, it is critical that they be founded on and supported by robust and verifiable indicators and data sources, as well as non-official data sources.

iii. Challenges and recommendations

Finally, this section should cover challenges and recommendations, including where your government currently stands with regard to SDG implementation and what it needs to do to achieve progress on certain issues. To further this, it might be useful to identify what kinds of gaps exist.

Key Tips

- This section will attempt to highlight some of the important issues related to implementation of laws and policies – including by your government country to achieve progress on the issues you're covering in this report. For this, it is important to consider an overarching analysis of the entire system of implementation in a country – such as legal and legislative frameworks and policies (as covered in the section above), executive leadership and action from heads of state/government, civil society contributions, etc. Is it working? Is it failing? And why?
- This section can also be used to compare your own analysis of progress on your issues, compared to what your government has reported on through its latest Voluntary National Review (VNR).
- While some degree of subjective analysis on implementation is okay and inevitable for these reports, it is critical that these analyses should be founded and supported by robust and verifiable indicators and data sources. This data can come from governments, National Statistical Offices (NSOs) and other public institutions, academia and other independent research institutions, NGOs and civil society, and from multilateral institutions or bodies such as National Human Rights Institutions. Without strong, robust and reliable/verifiable data to support your analysis on these issues, your reviews and the credibility of the report itself can easily be dismissed by the government and any other readers as illegitimate and unfounded, which can work to undermine the great advocacy work that your organization undertakes otherwise. All of these references to data sets throughout the report should be consistently and clearly cited using footnotes or endnotes.
- Your analyses should also ideally involve non-official data sources (including those from the UN, other multilateral institutions, civil society organizations, research institutions, academia,

the private sector and citizens) as well as survey-based citizen perception and experiential data. Ensuring that you have citizens' voices in your report, helps you guarantee that your analysis is people-centered, and fully reflective of people's views beyond your own organization. Furthermore, surveys are shown to best meet the criterion of being easy to understand and are as universal and aspirational as administrative or treaty data. Civil society and academia has considerable experience in undertaking systematic and regular surveys for the purposes of assisting governments to monitor the effectiveness of programs. Harnessing this data for your reports not only helps build the case for utilizing these types of data sources, but helps ensure that your reports take into consideration the perceptions of progress from citizens themselves.

- In the case that data is not widely or publicly available for these indicators, other data sources could potentially be used as a proxy to measure progress against these indicators as well
- Based on these challenges, it is important to provide recommendations on what is needed in your country to move progress forward on the issues you're covering in this report. This assessment of where your government currently is in implementing the SDGs, and what your government needs to do to "successfully '' achieve progress on certain issues, can be used as a "gap analysis" for further advocacy work. To further this, it might be useful to identify what kinds of gaps there might be. For example, there may be gaps in ambition and coverage, between targets and policies, between policies and implementation, between policy implementation and change

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Key questions to consider answering in this section:

1. What is the current SDG process in your country? Outline how has your government taken action related to the issues you work on, and how have they shown progress.
2. How has your government reported its progress on the SDG issues that you cover, and does it differ from civil society's assessment of progress?
3. Has the government encountered any unanticipated obstacles in making progress on your issues? How have they worked to overcome these challenges?
4. Has the government developed an SDG implementation plan in order to implement the Agenda 2030 and/or the SDGs at the national level?
5. Has the development of national SDG implementation plans been open and inclusive?
6. Are there any important issues which are omitted or not adequately addressed in the official national report?

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c. **Review of International Commitments (if applicable)**
   i. **Assessment of progress**

This section should begin with an assessment of progress, where you can consider if your country has joined various international conventions/initiatives and the role it has played in these bodies. This section's analysis should be very brief, unless they have played a major role in initiating or expanding this international work. Include if they have made major changes because of joining this international convention/initiative, and if the body had made recommendations for changes in your country. Determine if the action plans of the entities have any SDG related commitments.

ii. **Challenges and recommendations**
It may also be relevant for you to outline any potential challenges and recommendations for your country in regards to any international commitments

Key Tips
- Other international conventions/initiatives that you might consider include, but are not limited to: UN Human Rights Council, UN Convention against Corruption, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Open Government Partnership (OGP), Community of Democracies, Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI), etc.

d. <u>**Civil Society participation in SDG Implementation / Follow-up**</u>
   i. **Assessment of civil society space around the SDGs (and in general)**

   This is the final section, and it should begin with an assessment of civil society space around SDG16, and in general. The 2030 Agenda explicitly recognizes the role of civil society in helping spur implementation of the SDGs, and governments have committed to conduct regular "open, inclusive, participatory and transparent" reviews of progress. CSOs have the ability to influence policy decisions through advocating, educating, mobilizing and analyzing, and have demonstrated this engagement throughout the development of the 2030 Agenda. Experience has shown that ongoing monitoring, review and recalibration of such plans will be critical to ensuring that governments stay on track and deliver real progress. As such, the 2030 Agenda outlines a list of guiding principles for follow-up and review by governments and other stakeholders, including civil society organizations (CSOs), which can form the basis for your assessment of national follow-up and review processes.

   ii. **Challenges and recommendations**

   The section should conclude with challenges and recommendations. Based on the above review of civil society space in your country around the SDGs, it is important to draw out some key questions and challenges for your government to continue to address in order to open more space for civil society. Then, based on these challenges, your report should provide recommendations on what is needed in your country to create and open additional spaces for civil society and civic engagement.

Key Guidance

- The Agenda also calls upon all stakeholders to "report on their contribution to the implementation of the Agenda." Consequently, you may consider including information regarding your own organization's contributions.

- Paragraph 74 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development outlines a list of guiding principles for follow-up and review by governments, which will be helpful to utilize as a basis for your assessment of your national follow-up and review processes.
- Paragraph 89 of the 2030 Agenda calls upon all stakeholders to "report on their contribution to the implementation of the Agenda." Consequently, you may also consider including information regarding your own organization's contributions on this front, or more broadly how civil society in your country is mobilizing to support the 2030 Agenda, including through this report. Since the language in Paragraph 89 is so broad and vague, the approach you take here is really up to your own interpretation of how to best report in this regards.

Key questions to consider answering in this section:

1. Does civil society have the opportunity to provide input to the SDG process?
2. Has your government set national-level indicators to track country-level progress on the SDGs? And if so, has civil society been able to provide and contribute to this national indicator process?
3. Have there been discussions between civil society and the government on how SDG targets will fit into implementation of the national SDG plan?
4. Are there any entry points for these SDG civil society reports for your government to formally consider your progress assessments and recommendations?
5. Have there been legislative amendments or policies formulated that are in line with the SDGs at National Level?