

MAINSTREAMING SDG16

Virtual Learning Series Policy Brief





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Background

In December 2020, the TAP Network and Global Alliance launched a first-of-its-kind resource on “[Mainstreaming SDG 16: Using the Voluntary National Review to Advance More Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies.](#)” This resource outlines practical guidance on how to utilize the VNRs to mainstream SDG16 into national and local planning and actions. It explores means of utilizing the SDG 16 framework to strengthen the preparatory and follow-up work of VNR processes, and in doing so highlights important cases and examples from around the world.

Building on key thematic issues in the Resource, the TAP Network and the Global Alliance hosted a [virtual learning series](#), which brought key SDG 16 stakeholders together to further look at how to mainstream SDG16 at all levels. The focus of this learning series was to help governments and stakeholders alike in advancing SDG16 at the national level, particularly through this second cycle of VNRs through 2023. The series covered the following thematic issues addressed in the resource:

- i) [Practical approaches to engage in VNR processes in challenging settings \(March 31, 2021\)](#)
- ii) [Mainstreaming SDG16 to Realize the Principle of LNOB \(May 6, 2021\)](#)
- iii) [Localizing the VNR process and engaging on SDG16 at subnational level \(June 2, 2021\)](#)

Introduction

Amidst extraordinary and unprecedented challenges posed by COVID-19, compounding already strained systems of governance globally, failing institutions, shrinking civic space and increasing social unrest driven by entrenched, structural injustice, this policy brief puts forward recommendations to advance the realization of more peaceful, just and inclusive societies through Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16), the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Voluntary National Review (VNR) process.

Five years into the 2030 Agenda, the world is backsliding on SDG 16. Intended for a range of actors and institutions, this policy brief will provide guidance and case studies for actors and institutions at all levels on advancing SDG 16 implementation at national and subnational levels by more effectively leveraging VNR and post-VNR processes. **Ultimately, it seeks to answer the question: how can we ensure that the VNR is maximized for SDG 16 impact, including improved subsequent reporting?**



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1. [Practical Approaches for Mainstreaming SDG 16](#)

KEY LESSONS AND INSIGHTS

- Strong **whole-of-government ownership** of SDG16 with strategic coordination by lead agencies is key for SDG implementation.
- The creation of institutions within the architecture of the state and with a **built-in system of coordination** is a concrete commitment that pushes back against the obstacle of intangibility.
- **Innovative advocacy approaches** are needed to ensure citizens are informed of their rights and build trust.
- It is critical to enhance **multi stakeholder collaboration and sustain partnerships** created during the national planning and reporting processes.
- It is also important to use the VNR consultation process to **mobilise different sectors** (including the private sector, academia, civil society, media) to take ownership of SDG implementation.
- When designing the VNR process, **immediate next steps should be identified**, such as reporting back to citizens and the media about the VNR presentation, and feeding recommendations into longer term national priorities and planning
- Even though it is the 6th year of the SDGs, there is still a significant amount of **capacity development** that is needed of both Civil Society and local administrations/central government for effective SDG implementation and monitoring.
- **Civil society engagement on data** creation and collection is a complementary approach that can benefit Member States.
- There is also a need to explore how **non-traditional data** and analysis of big data can address data gaps.

The learning series began with a discussion on how SDG 16 stakeholders can practically mainstream peaceful, just and inclusive societies in national development planning, by asking panelists and participants the following guiding questions:

- *What are the biggest challenges that the SDG16 community faces when it comes to mainstreaming SDG16 into national programming and actions?*
- *What are some positive examples of where governments, institutions and/or civil society stakeholders have successfully mainstreamed SDG16 into national programming and action? And what are some of the lessons learned from these examples?*
- *What does the SDG16 Community need to do to further support countries in mainstreaming SDG16, including through the VNR processes or the SDG16 Thematic Reviews through the HLPF?*
- *How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the VNRs, and follow-up from these processes? How can governments and stakeholders ensure that SDG16 remains a priority in SDG implementation going forward?*



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Responses conducted through a survey of participants revealed that the biggest challenges that the SDG16+ community faces when it comes to mainstreaming SDG16+ into national programming and actions are:

1. Lack of capacity, awareness and resources amongst government representatives, as well as from other stakeholder groups and the general public
2. Moving beyond short-term political commitment – the challenge of institutionalizing responses and obligations
3. Ensuring long-term political will, while prioritizing action-oriented commitments in the short-term
4. Bridging connections between national commitments and efforts and the local level, where service delivery occurs
5. Ensuring that SDG16 is seen as contributing towards the achievement of other SDGs, and using this to bridge collaboration across ministries and sectors of society
6. Bringing together official and non-official (disaggregated) data, and improving data quality, accessibility
7. The decline of accountability and civic space

Dr. Diana Sadia Wati, Special Advisor to the Indonesian Ministry of Development Planning showcased Indonesia's active stakeholder engagement processes in the VNRs through online and in-person consultations with government representatives and over 100 CSOs. She also identified three main challenges towards mainstreaming SDG16: (1) identifying government institutions and budget allocations for each target, (2) ensuring data availability and reliability in measuring progress, and (3) integrating nonstate actors in the planning and implementation process.

The CSO representative, Ms. Jyotsna Mohan Singh, Coordinator of the Asia Development Alliance felt that progress remains elusive as inclusive processes in the VNRs in Asian countries are weak. Elevating civil society voices and linking the SDGs and human rights at the grassroots level i.e. [localizing the SDG agenda, particularly SDG16](#) is key to advancing the 2030 Agenda. This is particularly challenging given the lack of awareness and relevance of the 2030 Agenda at the local level and for key social movements. It is imperative to localize the SDG at every level to counter these backsliding trends.

Mr. Daniel Zavala Porras, Diplomatic Minister for the Permanent Mission of Costa Rica to the UN spoke of the political and institutional challenges to mainstreaming SDG16, particularly given the “intangibility” of SDG16. Costa Rica has taken concrete steps to mainstream peace, justice, and inclusion at the national level, institutionalizing it within the government framework (Ministry of Peace) and national curriculum. The creation of institutions within the architecture of the state and with a built-in system of coordination is a concrete commitment that pushes back against the obstacle of intangibility. Nonetheless, difficulties and challenges to realizing progress lay in institutional coordination between agencies and across stakeholders both at and between the national and local levels.

Mr. Patrick Bwire, CECORE Uganda partnered with GPPAC and drafted [a study to review Uganda's progress on SDG16](#) that would feed into the VNR and the CSO Report. These findings show that while the commitment is there, seen particularly in the creation of a coordination framework, SDG 16 continues to stagnate. To counter the stagnation, CENCORE took on innovative advocacy approach, including its feature in the Voices of SDG16+ campaign at the 2020 HLPF to bring awareness to the collective work taken by national and grassroots civil society in Uganda to send the message to “localize global agendas and globalize local voices.”



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2. Mainstreaming SDG 16 to Realize the Principle of “Leaving No One Behind”

KEY LESSONS AND INSIGHTS

- Investment in **meaningful, inclusive Civil Society participation** in VNR and post VNR processes is critical to leave no one behind.
- **Political momentum** needs to be strengthened to secure commitments and financial investments in leaving no one behind.
- **Inclusive decision-making processes** with the people who are most likely to be left behind at the table and in decision-making positions to create responsive policies to address people’s needs and safeguard the rights of all people.
- The collection and use of **disaggregated, quality data** that captures people’s multiple and intersecting identities is imperative to provide a holistic understanding of who is being left behind.
- **Support to Civil Society from international organizations**, such as the UN, can safeguard the rights of all people.
- A **whole of society approach** requires broad consultations at different levels - national and sub-national - and using different means - including online, and in person.
- An inclusive and comprehensive VNR process can be a critical means to **raise awareness** of SDG implementation. One of the **biggest challenges is quality data** related to SDG 16+. Few VNRs contain data on SDG 16+; and data available is rarely disaggregated to allow for analysis of who is being left behind.

The second session of the learning series focused on how to utilize the VNR and post-VNR processes to mainstream SDG 16 while also advancing the principle enshrined in the 2030 Agenda of “Leaving No One Behind (LNOB).” The following guiding questions were posed to panelists and participants alike:

- *How can SDG16+ be leveraged as an ‘enabler’ for Leaving No One Behind, and reach the furthest behind first?*
- *How do we know which groups are being left behind?*
- *What groups are commonly left behind, and why?*
- *How can the VNR process be leveraged to promote inclusion and participation?*
- *How can “spotlight or shadow reports” be used to strengthen accountability?*



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The panelists of this webinar showcased practical examples of the efforts of different stakeholders in leveraging SDG 16 to Leave No One Behind (LNOB). Civil society at the global and local level shared their reflections on their work towards advancing SDG16 and the principles of LNOB.

At the global level, **Mr. Mandeep S. Tiwana, Chief Programmes Officer, CIVICUS**, emphasized the link between SDG16 and LNOB and the importance of the inclusion of SDG16 in the 2030 Agenda, more generally, as a holistic global partnership rather than a development framework imposed from the Global North. The protection of civic space and fundamental freedoms is the foundation for LNOB because speaking truth to power is the main vehicle to catalyze change, realize the 2030 Agenda, and ensure no one is left behind. The [CIVICUS Monitor](#) is one powerful example of how civil society can hold governments accountable to their commitments.

Micah Grzywnowicz, Program Manager, 2030 Agenda, Multilateralism, Norms and Governance, Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, stressed the importance of addressing contextual specificities and nuances when discussing leaving no one behind to ensure meaningful policy guidance. Micah proposed a holistic approach to development that addresses people's intersecting identities and the groups most likely to be left behind. However, to better understand these realities and develop more reflective policy, she stated that stakeholders must first fill the data gaps to adequately reflect the complexity of people's identities.

Filling the data gap requires political will and substantial resources to build statistical capacities. Providing a grassroots perspective on civil society's efforts towards LNOB in Sierra Leone, **Musa Ansumana Soko, Executive-Director, Youth Partnership for Peace and Development** discussed their experiences with working alongside the government on SDG16+. The organization emphasized the role that SDG16+ has played in holding the government accountable to the commitments of the 2030 Agenda and the principle of LNOB, which hinges on meaningful and inclusive civil society engagement at every level of planning, implementation, monitoring and review. CSOs in Sierra Leone, for example, worked with government officials to identify concrete recommendations and actions that the government should prioritize to advance national level efforts to leave no one behind.

From the perspective of member-state, **Dr. Maher Johan, Minister of Planning, Iraq** discussed the country's experience in the VNR process and their efforts towards LNOB by providing inclusive government consultations at the national level. Dr. Johan noted that the Government of Iraq integrated the SDGs into the National Development Plan (2018 - 2022) and Iraq Vision 2030 due to a belief that ensuring good governance, enhancing citizens' confidence in the state, strengthening community participation in priority setting and decision-making, and ensuring equal opportunities among citizens, is critical for achieving development. Three governorates piloted the localization of SDG targets and indicators based on local needs and priorities. These pilots focused on community consultations, effective participation of local academics, private sector, and NGOs, including youth, women and vulnerable groups. An innovative approach was undertaken involving NGOs in deriving informal data on SDG16 Indicators using Social Media Platforms.



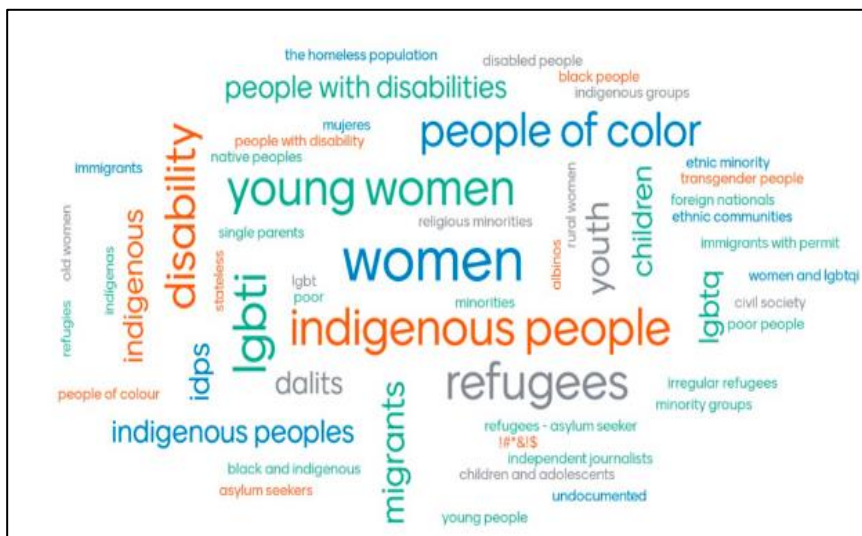
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Participants rated the following questions



Participants listed three stakeholder groups that are most often left behind in your country



Key recommendations that were put forth from the session were as follows:

- Strengthen political momentum to secure commitments and financial investments to LNOB.
- Ensure inclusive decision-making processes with the people who are most likely to be left behind at the table and in decision-making positions in order to create responsive policies to address people's needs and safeguard the rights of all people. Discrimination is a key barrier to LNOB, that can affect the ability for different groups to participate in political and decision-making processes and enjoy their rights and freedoms.

The image shows a circular icon for Sustainable Development Goal 16, 'Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions'. It features a central globe surrounded by 17 colored segments, each representing a different SDG. The number '16' is prominently displayed at the top of the circle.

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- Collection and use disaggregated, quality data that captures people’s multiple and intersecting identities is imperative to provide a holistic understanding of who is being left behind.
- Harness the connection of international organizations such as the UN in supporting civil society organizations to safeguard the rights of all people.



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3. Localization of SDG 16 and the Voluntary National Review Process

KEY LESSONS AND INSIGHTS

- **Localizing the SDG agenda, particularly SDG16** is key to advancing the 2030 Agenda. Collaboration and partnership happens most efficiently and effectively at the local and subnational level. This is in part because development and delivery are realized at the grassroots level. Furthermore, impact can be maximized at the local level, not just in implementation, but also for facilitating engagement and broad participation.
- Engaging **local stakeholders** in development planning & implementation is critical to accelerate SDG implementation.
- **Civil society voices must be elevated** and link the SDGs and human rights at the grassroots level;
- **Building awareness** on peaceful, just and inclusive societies and the SDGs **at the local level is critical.**
- Local governments and grassroots civil society organizations are **the most accessible** actors to constituents and are best equipped to understand their local context and facilitate trust, which allows them to integrate the SDGs in their local context pragmatically.
- A reflection is needed on the changing role of government in development towards the local level which requires **more networks, platform-based approaches for engagement, and effective coordination.**
- Local and regional governments (LRGs), with strong, democratic and accountable institutions, are prerequisites for achieving SDG 16. As communities continue to struggle with COVID-19 globally, it is critical to focus on **localizing SDG 16** and, to this end, to linking VNRs with **Voluntary State Reviews (VSRs)** and **Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs)**.
- The 2021 VNR process has been innovative in finding solutions to the constraints to participation brought by the pandemic through **online engagement**. Digital divide however has also caused challenges to engage in the reporting process.

The third and final session of the learning series explored various approaches to mainstreaming SDG16 into local action plans, and how a wide range of stakeholders have worked to localize SDG16, particularly in follow up from a country's VNR. The session provided an opportunity for experts working on SDG 16 to unpack the key challenges on localization efforts, while sharing best practices and lessons learned for meaningful inclusion in VNR and post-VNR processes. The discussion focused on the following guiding questions:

- *What are some of the key challenges to effectively “localizing” SDG16?*
 - *Based on existing experiences from governments and stakeholders to mainstream SDG16, what are some of the challenges and lessons learned that we will need to better address localizing SDG16?*



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2020. He noted that citizen mistrust towards the government and local authorities comprised the most pressing challenge. To confront this challenge, they emphasized the importance of mobilizing the youth, ensuring transparency in the process, and partnering with other stakeholders, particularly academia, to rebuild trust within communities.

In terms of localizing SDG16 in national and subnational planning processes, **Ms. Susset Rosales Vásquez, Ministry of Economy and Planning for the Government of Cuba**, shared approaches and progress of mainstreaming SDG 16 in Cuba, particularly the SDG Lab Initiative. The initiative aims to enhance and promote the role of municipalities and local authorities in mainstreaming and implementing the SDGs, and in particular SDG16. Ms. Vásquez discussed in detail the institutionalization of the 2030 Agenda in Cuba's Development plan as well as the mechanism for coordination from the national to provincial to the municipal level. **Mr. Zia Ur-Rehman, Director, Pakistan Development Alliance (PDA)**, a long-standing civil society organization advancing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, provided an overview of their experiences in coordinating civil society in Pakistan, with a particular focus on mobilization at the provincial level to pressure officials to prioritize and localize the SDGs. While the Pakistan National Parliament adopted the SDGs as its national development objectives, the lack of government capacity at the local level and shrinking civic space prove challenging for the localization of the SDGs. Civil society in Pakistan at the grassroots level has had to work in partnership with one another and other stakeholders to ensure that localization still materializes.

Participants rated the following statements



Key insights and recommendations that were put forth from the session were as follows:

- Case studies demonstrated how collaboration and partnership happens most efficiently and effectively at the local and subnational level. This is in part because development and delivery are realized at the grassroots level. Furthermore, impact can be maximized at the local level, not just in implementation, but also for facilitating engagement and broad participation.

The logo for the SDG 16 Hub, featuring a circular arrangement of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) icons. The number 16 is prominently displayed in the center, and the text 'SDG 16 HUB' is written around the perimeter of the circle.

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- These cases studies reveal how local governments and grassroots civil society organizations as the most accessible actors to constituents are best equipped to understand their local context and facilitate trust, which allows them to integrate the SDGs in their local context pragmatically.
- It is critically important to raise awareness of the SDGs and SDG16 in society, particularly at the local level
- A reflection on the changing role of government in development towards the local level requires more networks, platform-based approaches for engagement, and effective coordination.

For more information about the Global Alliance/TAP Network “Mainstreaming SDG 16” Virtual Learning Series please visit the [SDG 16 Hub](#).