Chapter 5

From numbers to action - how to leverage the 2030 Agenda reporting structure to accelerate SDG 16 implementation.

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Introduction

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 on Peace, Justice and Inclusive Institutions breaks new ground in development thinking. For the first time Peace, Justice and Inclusion issues are being addressed in an explicit global development goal with detailed targets. It is also recognized that SDG 16 is both an outcome and an enabler of sustainable development as SDG 16 is closely interlinked with other SDGs. Without peace, justice and inclusion, ending poverty, ensuring education, and promoting economic growth can be difficult or impossible (Note 1).

Today, 70.8 million people are forcibly displaced as a result of persecution, conflict and violence; 650 million children lack proof of legal identity. Civic space is shrinking across the globe with 181 restrictions having been imposed on civil society organizations in 82 countries since 2013(Global Alliance for Reporting on Progress on Peace, Justice and Inclusive Societies, 2019). The risk of failure to address these challenges, and the lack of investment in SDG16+, are worsening violence, injustice and exclusion. This will reverse development gains across all SDGs, including education, health and climate action. Political and financial investment in SDG 16+ needs to be amplified to accelerate progress on SDG 16+ and to achieve the whole of Agenda 2030 (Global Alliance for Reporting on Progress on Peace, Justice and Inclusive Societies, 2019).

SDG 16 uplifts the human rights agenda and demonstrates that sustainable development cannot be achieved without civil and political rights. At the same time, unlike many other thematic areas of the 2030 Agenda, governance remains a relatively new domain in official statistics with few international standards defining its measurement.

The Voluntary National Reviews presented during HLPF 2019 highlight that several countries are challenged by the lack of robust data to monitor progress against SDG 16 targets (White & Case, 2019). Too few countries have truly inclusive monitoring systems that engage a broad range of stakeholders and are built on a consensus of what is important to measure and how.

Institutional mechanisms at the national and local levels to gather data and monitor policy efforts and impact of SDG 16+ are weak. One estimation shows that it will take at least 5 years before data becomes available for many of the missing indicators for many countries and especially the many population survey-based measures. (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2019) The question is how to fill the data gaps on SDG 16?

Data informed reporting is important – and possible

The Global Alliance for Reporting on Promoting Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies brings together diverse stakeholders - Member States, civil society, private sector and UN agencies - to support effective and meaningful reporting on the achievement of SDG 16. During the HLPF 2019, the Global Alliance launched an evidence-based SDG 16+ Report entitled "Enabling the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda Through SDG 16+: Anchoring Peace, Justice and Inclusion". The Report is based on inputs received from 6 regional multi-stakeholder consultations, more than 25 case studies showcasing best practices of SDG 16 actions, a global eConsultation and existing research in the field. One of the key findings of the report is that measuring progress in achieving SDG 16 is politically, technically and financially possible and would enhance implementation of the SDGs. The report makes three key recommendations (Global Alliance, 2019)related to measurement and reporting on SDG 16+:

Firstly, *political and financial investments in SDG 16+ data and statistics are required*. Countries need to promote and fortify the independence of National Statistical Offices (NSOs) to fulfil their dual roles as primary generators of data and as coordinators of national monitoring. This must be done in an impartial manner and in line with international standards, including respect for human rights of those who have shared their information. Countries need to ensure that NSOs are adequately resourced and have the capacity to develop and implement monitoring and accountability frameworks. Countries also need to be more engaged in producing data that covers issues related to SDG 16 and to overcome resistance in the production and use of official statistics on sensitive topics, i.e. pertaining to governance and human rights, and those that are perceived difficult to measure. The UN should support countries by developing international methodologies to ensure measurability and comparability of data.

National governance statistics give policymakers the means to conduct their own analysis of the situation and its evolution over time, instead of using international governance indicators that may not always fit the specificities of their country. However, statisticians explain that the resources needed to collect, analyse and quality-assure SDG 16 data are acutely lacking. A UNDP/SAIIA report launched in 2019 showed that only 16% of government survey respondents across 38 countries in Africa said their country had allocated national funding specifically for the production of SDG 16 data. (UNDP, 2019)

Secondly, a *broad range of data producers must be involved to address existing data gaps*. NSOs and governments can benefit from a broad range of non-statistical data sources, including non-official data to track SDG 16. The UNDP/SAIIA study referred to above, shows that, at least in Africa, traditional barriers between official and non-official data producers remain in a majority of countries. While less than a third (32%) of respondents said their country was able to report on 'more than half' of the 23 global SDG 16 indicators, only 27% said that unofficial data was being used when official sources were lacking.

Civil society organizations, academia and the private sector are all producing data which can provide valuable information. Engaging in public-private partnership on data collection is encouraged, if it is done in an ethical way. The UN should also encourage Member States to support institutional cooperation between National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) and NSOs to include groups that are at risk of being excluded in data collection efforts. Member States and other stakeholders should also adopt complementary human rights indicators, as for example those that are part of

internationally recognised human rights mechanisms to reinforce the linkages between human rights and SDGs.

Thirdly, ***data disaggregation is required to ensure no one is left behind***. Countries need to invest in data sources such as surveys, census and administrative data to better understand disparities across population groups to ensure no one is left behind. This includes auditing the availability and quality of data that is disaggregated to ensure the visibility of vulnerable groups. Countries should moreover consider if targeted data collection tools are needed to cover those furthest behind, including those forcibly displaced, refugees and stateless persons. Countries could also strengthen – or establish – collaboration between NSOs and National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) to leverage the institutional independence and mutually reinforcing monitoring of these state institutions. This could help ensure that key population groups are not further marginalised by SDG-related data collection and data management efforts.

Current initiatives to strengthen SDG 16 monitoring and reporting

Several global initiatives and organizations are working with national stakeholders to address the data gap and enhance reporting on SDG 16. UN Agencies, civil society organizations, private sector partners and others are working to leverage partnerships to develop tools, methodologies and approaches to advance reporting on SDG 16.

One of the initiatives aimed at strengthening national efforts to collect and manage SDG 16 data is the **SDG 16 Survey Module**, developed jointly by UNDP, UNODC and OHCHR. The goal of this initiative is to offer ready-made survey modules for National Statistical Systems to produce data for 10 SDG 16 indicators of which very few countries have data. Population surveys presents numerous advantages – including high data quality and the possibility to produce indicators disaggregated by demographic and other variables. The modules can be included by NSOs in on-going household surveys for regular reporting on SDG 16 indicators and will enable the collection of nationally representative and internationally comparable statistics. The SDG 16 modular questionnaire is currently being piloted in a diversity of country contexts and will be ready for global roll-out by June 2020.

Another important initiative is the **Handbook on Governance Statistics** currently being developed under the auspices of the Praia Group on Governance Statistics (Praia, 2019), which was established in 2015 by the UN Statistical Commission and mandated to develop "a handbook on governance statistics for national statistical offices". It is a collaborative effort of national statistical offices, international organizations and civil society organizations. The purpose of the Handbook, which will be launched in March 2020, is to provide a foundation for the development of international statistical guidance and standards in all areas of governance statistics. It takes stock of existing practices in governance data collection and proposes guidelines for the improved production and compilation of governance, peace, security, human rights and rule of law indicators. To this end, it conceptualizes and systematizes the various dimensions of governance statistics, takes stock of and qualifies existing practices in governance data collection, highlights the most important metrics in each dimension of governance statistics, and discusses the way forward required to achieve international statistical standards in each dimension. It is intended as a guide for those wishing to understand, produce and analyze governance statistics, and is primarily targeted towards national statistical agencies.

Led by UNDP, with support from other Global Alliance partners, **the SDG 16 National Monitoring Methodology** supports national reporting processes by engaging a diverse group of national stakeholders to establish country relevant monitoring systems for SDG 16. The initiative is built on a three-step methodology that countries adapt to their national context. The three steps include:

1. Definition of indicators and baseline data collection. In consultation with national statistical offices (NSOs), drawing from sub-national, national, regional and international and national (official and non-official) indicators and data sources.
2. Multi-stakeholder consultations and review of progress. Joint reviews by government and civil society of the indicator framework including baselines and progress and joint formulation of policy and program responses.
3. Periodic scorecards. Periodic tracking of progress based on open and accessible data reporting platforms.

Launched in 2017, the methodology has been applied in 14 countries to establish reliable, objective and independent monitoring systems of Goal 16 indicators and to promote the integration of indicators into national planning process. One key focus has been on sharing experiences between participating countries through a virtual community of practice on the SDG 16 hub (Note 2). The SDG 16 monitoring initiative has just been relaunched to include additional countries.

The Voluntary National Reviews – An Opportunity to Effect Real Change on SDG 16

An increasing number of countries are reporting their progress on SDG implementation through the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). The number of VNR submissions has increased every year and the number of VNRs submitted in 2019 was more than double the number of VNRs submitted in 2016 (White and Case, 2019).

There is a trend for countries to report for a second time with more comprehensive reviews. Looking at SDG 16 reporting across the VNRs, countries now have more **detail on** progress, while most Member States note that **SDG 16 data availability and statistical capacities at country-level is challenging**. Strategic approaches that cover the broader thematic aspects of SDG 16 and its interlinkages are rare. Countries are asking for guidance on how SDG 16 principles can be used to guide the process of developing the VNR and its follow up but also how to best document progress. (Partners for review, 2019) Most countries continue review progress goal by goal rather than looking at the interlinkages across goals. Only one country has referred in their VNRs to the importance of approaching SDG 16+ from an interlinked perspective. While the 2019 VNR reports list many independent initiatives that contribute to SDG 16, strategic approaches to the overall thematic aspects – peace, justice and inclusion - and the enabling feature of the Goal are rare (Partners in Review, 2019).

All 47 reporting Member States in 2019 declared that their VNRs were the result of an inclusive and participatory process with various stakeholders. While Member States might view the importance of inclusivity these voluntary statements could be further vetted by citizen led inputs and civil society "shadow" reports (White and Case, 2019).

While the VNR drafting process provides a good opportunity to reflect on and report on the status of SDG 16, a VNR cannot be an end in itself. It needs to be an effective tool to maintain the momentum and accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the sub-national and national levels. The VNR report itself needs to feed into the national planning and budgetary processes to ensure advancement in achieving the SDGs and to ensure that peace, justice and inclusion are addressed holistically. Member states need to fully own their respective VNR findings and focus on actioning them. One civil society actor who was part of his country's delegation at the HLPF said it best *"Most of the value of the VNR process lies in the preparations at the national level and how it feeds into SDG implementation, not in the 15-minute presentation in New York."* (UNDP, 2019)

With the increasing number of countries reporting more than once, there is a great opportunity to strengthen VNR and post-VNR processes as a tool for improved monitoring and action on SDG 16+. The VNR processes provide an opportunity for inclusive public policy dialogue and support to civil society in demanding accountability for action.

Looking Forward

As we move into the Decade of Action we need to continue to fill the data gap and amplify reporting efforts on SDG 16 to enhance impact. The global SDG 16 community will need to focus efforts on the following elements to realize the 2030 Agenda:
1. Emphasize to Member States that accountable reporting on SDG 16+ is essential for overall SDG implementation.
2. Support Member States in strengthening collection of quality data, including unofficial and citizen driven data to fill data gaps and the inclusion of marginalized and vulnerable groups at risk of being left behind.
3. Strengthen quality reporting on SDG 16 in VNRs and develop overview of best practices for post VNR processes.
4. Undertake concerted advocacy for governments to make concrete and ambitious commitments on SDG 16+, mobilize resources and be accountable for implementation.
5. Promote sharing of knowledge, resources, learnings, successes and challenges on SDG 16+ monitoring and reporting.

Notes
1. Thematic Review of SDG 16 at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) in 2019
2. SDG 16 Hub www.sdg16hub.org
References

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3. White & Case Review of the 2019 Voluntary National Reports on SDG 16, (2019) https://www.sdg16hub.org/content/global-alliance-white-case-review-2019-voluntary-national-reports-vnrs-summary-report

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5. Global Alliance (2019) Enabling the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda Through SDG 16+: Anchoring Peace, Justice and Inclusion, p. 77 -78.

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