

SDG 16 PLUS AND PROMOTING CIVIC SPACE



WHITE PAPER



Authors

Dr. Jyotsna Mohan - Asia Development Alliance

John Romano - TAP Network

Sanjeeta Pant - Accountability Lab

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JANIC - Japan NGO Center for International Cooperation

Forus

TAP Network



Executive Summary

Today the world is witnessing geopolitical issues that are challenging international security and multilateralism. Additionally, the global scene has pushed donor funds to focus on military expenditures rather than allocating resources towards conflict prevention, peacekeeping and improving people's lives. Finally, the limited opportunities to collaborate on SDG implementation in the sphere of existing fragmented coordination at the national level also poses its own challenges. Non-governmental actors need to be involved in projects to achieve real outcomes and sustainability. Structural obstacles, lack of political will, and lack of commitment to foster inclusive partnerships are hindering effective collaboration. Governments have promised to reduce violence and conflict, but accountability and transparency remains a major problem. Recognition and urgency for a committed and strong partnership is needed apart from ensuring National Commitments to SDG Transformation with transparent and inclusive platform for showcasing these commitments, helping to ensure follow-up and accountability.

Introduction

The world is recently recovering from the Covid-19 pandemic and being challenged by the pressuring threats and risks of climate change to human security, it is persistently confronted by tectonic geopolitical developments that keeps challenging international security and multilateralism. Next to the full-scale invasion in Ukraine that has translated into a global energy crisis and an intensification of food insecurity and famine. The war in Ukraine illustrates that war and conflict occurs in all parts of the world, but also highlights that there is an evident inconsistency in how conflicts are given attention to from the international community. This must be challenged as all conflicts must be given the same attention. Around 80 percent of the world's current conflicts are concentrated in Asia and Africa

The year 2022 was confronted with a decrease in global instability that included increased violence, persecutions, demonstrations, and divisions. The situation in countries like Ethiopia, Myanmar, Afghanistan, Yemen and the wider Sahel has escalated and expanded with instability, military coups, country divisions and perilous humanitarian conditions. The political situation in Afghanistan and Colombia has further worsened, in that civilians are the primary target of armed conflicts and violence. There is widespread destabilisation as we are witnessing democratic backsliding and expanding authoritarianism globally. The global conflictual scene has pushed donor funds to focus on military expenditures rather than allocating resources in conflict prevention, peacekeeping and improving people's lives.

Recognising the geopolitical challenges the world is facing today, we are witnessing the increasing global trend of attacks on civil societies. Amidst expansive digital space for expression, civil society is in numerous countries restrained from operating, delegitimize and faced with constant threats and intimidation. Constrained civil society participation has repercussions on the performance of global governance institutions in addition to hindering the possibility of inclusive and participatory decision-making processes that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development promotes. Limiting expression towards journalists is also increasing , giving restricted space for freedom of expression and access to fact-based and accurate knowledge. The promising role of peace journalism in conflict and security is increasingly threatened by market driven journalism and poor incentives that undermine any possibilities of institutionalisation.

Another challenge is the limited opportunities to collaborate and fragmented coordination of SDG implementation at the national level. Without the involvement of non-governmental actors, the resulting projects are not inclusive, do not have accountability in their implementation to achieve real outcomes, and will not be sustainable over time. More avenues for civil society to collaborate and participate in such partnerships need to be created. Further, even among existing efforts, structural obstacles such as lack of coordination mechanisms, and competing interests can hinder effective collaboration among stakeholders, resulting in duplication of efforts, lack of coherence in strategies and actions, thereby minimising impact.

Lack of political will, courage, and commitment to foster inclusive partnerships is often a hindering factor. The silo approach to development is the main barrier to cross-sectoral partnerships, with some sectors and groups historically excluded, such as animal welfare, or women youth and indigenous peoples. Recognition and urgency for a committed and strong partnership to take action as stated in the previous Rome Civil Society Declaration SDG16+ in 2019, 2021 and 2022 is urgently needed.

Promises that couldn't be Achieved

Despite commitments to reduce violence and conflict, conflicts and violent incidents continue to occur in many parts of the world. For example, the ongoing conflict in Syria, the Yemeni civil war, and the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. Governments have promised to tackle corruption, but it remains a significant problem in many countries. For instance, 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) scandal, Petrobras scandal, Brazil, the Panama papers, have shook the world in past few years

Despite promises to ensure access to justice for all, many people still lack access to justice, particularly the poor and marginalized. In many countries, the justice system is slow, expensive, and often biased against certain groups, such as women, minorities, and indigenous communities. Governments have committed to building effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions, but many institutions are still weak and ineffective. For example, the police and judiciary in many countries are often accused of being corrupt and lacking independence. Notwithstanding commitments to promote gender equality, women and girls continue to face discrimination and violence in many parts of the world. For instance, child marriage and female genital mutilation are still prevalent in many countries. While some countries have made progress in improving public access to information, many governments still restrict access to information. For instance, some countries have been accused of censoring the media and blocking social media sites. Despite commitments to promote peaceful and inclusive societies, discrimination, inequality, and exclusion still exist in many parts of the world. For instance, ethnic and religious tensions continue to fuel conflicts in many countries.

G20 and the SDG + Agenda

The G20 signed up for the SDGs in 2016 by adopting the G20 Action Plan on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Without the support of all G20 countries to SDG16+, the international community's collective commitment to fostering peaceful, just, and inclusive societies is deemed to fail. Member countries have committed to work across the relevant G20 working groups and streams to contribute to implementing the 2030 Agenda and follow up on collective actions through existing accountability processes and follow-up mechanisms. In 2018, the G20 made commitments to review progress on its Action Plan.

G20's commitment to empowering local grassroots civil society groups is crucial to ensuring the implementation of SDG16+ and that the 2030 Agenda is people-centered and community-led.

As we reach the halfway point to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, civil society has called on the G20 to intervene and take bold actions - including through substantial financial commitments

Why SDG16+?

Strong, transparent, and accountable governments, a key element to SDG16+, paves the way for a more effective public health response “rooted in trust and social cohesion” Trust in public institutions also allows for a fair allocation of key resources and crisis relief to the most vulnerable— paramount to an effective response to the pandemic. Fragile states plagued by pervasive conflict, violence, poverty, inequality, and poor public services are extremely vulnerable to the widespread and compounding repercussions of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

All government emergency responses, regardless of institutional capacity, must take on a “peace-building” approach to avoid potential sources of conflict, while ensuring an inclusive and just crisis response that takes into account the societal cleavages and needs of vulnerable communities. An SDG 16+ – centred approach, that addresses the disproportionate health and socioeconomic effects of the crisis on the most marginalised in our societies, presents the most effective strategy to delivering an effective public health response as it mitigates the pandemic’s potential to deepen exclusion and inequality and inflame sources of conflict. A testament to this fact is the recent mobilizations against police brutality and white supremacy around the world. As a result of a poor public health response, the black community in the United States has disproportionately endured the acute consequences of the pandemic, effectively deepening the existing fault lines of marginalisation and inequality.

The degree to which governments and public institutions are accountable to their populations, providing an inclusive response under girded by the commitment of “justice for all,” will determine the outcomes of this crisis. Historical precedence has demonstrated the potential for crises to be exploited for political gain and the suppression of opposition. The propensity for exploitative anti-democratic forces to take advantage of the crisis further underscores the need for accountable, inclusive and transparent institutions. Consequently, we must be vigilant to “defend and strengthen our institutions” through the lens of SDG16+.

To effectively manage the crisis there must be a focus on good governance, inclusivity, and “justice for all.” In other words, an SDG16+ approach would “reduce the spill-over effects of this pandemic,” ensuring that the public health crisis does not generate secondary effects of conflict and socioeconomic instability.

Using SDG16+ as a road map, we can build more resilient societies that are better prepared to confront the existential global challenges. We must also demand more accountable public institutions while forging more peaceful, inclusive and just societies to break cycles of conflict in the long term. In the midst of this turning point after over a year of a worldwide public health crisis, we must double down on our commitment to SDG16+ and the 2030 Agenda, not only to salvage the global goals and ensure no one is left behind but also to create a more resilient and sustainable future .

Analysis

In spite of global challenges, we must take this opportunity to advocate stronger for the achievement of SDG16+, as it remains critical for the resolution of the ongoing perilous crises and for building resilience to prevent future grievances, crises and conflicts. It is an opportunity to synergise societies worldwide, bring the 2030 Agenda back on track and bring the voice of the furthest behind at the front. We therefore take the words of Secretary-General António Guterres further and demand Member States, UN bodies, multilateral agencies, donors, the private sector, CSOs, think tanks, academic institutions, and others to congregate and collectively work on advancing and bringing progress on SDG16+ for the realisation of peaceful and inclusive societies. Therefore, it is critical that the concerns and voices of local civil society and other stakeholders are taken into account and acted upon, with civil society committed as ever to advancing SDG16+ at local, national, regional and global levels. This 2023 declaration is issued to call upon Member States and other actors to translate commitments into action and proper evaluation of resources allocated to actions plans and commitments previously made.

At the mid-point of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development we call upon members to announce bold and ambitious commitments that accelerate needed greater action on SDG16+. Without a strong and steadfast focus on the SDG16+ targets for peace, justice and inclusion, none of the Sustainable Development Goals will be able to be delivered in full.

The Working Group, therefore, **has identified the following priorities for 2023, G20 Presidency.**

Promoting Civic Space

It is essential that sufficient civic space is available for civil society around the world to enable it to fulfil the role envisaged for it as part of a multi-stakeholder approach to the implementation, follow up and review of the universal 2030 Agenda. As the former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has stated, ‘according space to civil society is not optional’ since for most countries human rights are part of internationally agreed upon obligations

Target 16.10 of Goal 16 commits states to: “Ensure access to public information and protect fundamental freedoms” These freedoms include fundamental rights to associate, assemble peacefully and to express views and opinions. These civil and political rights are protected in international agreements and national legislation in many countries and are integral to the concepts of “civic space” and an “enabling environment” for civil society

However, despite the clear aim of Target 16.10 to protect fundamental freedoms, existing global-level indicators adopted to date by the international community to assess progress do not adequately measure the extent to which these basic freedoms are being protected. Unfortunately, the VNRs submitted by UN Member States between the years 2016-2020 have not addressed the issue of closing civic space or how the challenges and systemic barriers facing civil society in achieving

the SDGs are being tackled. Between these years, VNR reports have been largely silent on this issue despite increasing calls for action by civil society organizations and others around the world to address the deteriorating human rights situation in many countries and protect human rights defenders and environmentalists.

Leveraging SDG 16 + to strengthen civic space

Civil society must be proactive in advocating for adequate civic space at multiple levels to allow it to play its part in realising the 2030 Agenda's positive vision of multi-stakeholder participation. SDG 16 of the 2030 Agenda can provide important leverage for civil society everywhere in its efforts to create and defend civic space, and to be more effective in monitoring and implementing the agenda.

The UN Secretary General's VNR guidelines has just been updated in January 2021 and they bring some stronger language on participation, inclusivity, accountability as well as national human rights institutions and their role in the VNR reporting (which is often not fully explored) :

https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/27171SG_Guidelines_2021.final.pdf

The Secretary-General's Call to Action for Human Rights identified public participation and civic space as one of the key areas to focus the UN's attention. Under the overall aspiration of the Call to Action, the newly adopted UN Guidance Note on the Protection and Promotion of Civic Space emphasizes that more strategic and effective civic space action hinges on stepping up work around the "3 Ps": Participation of civil society in UN processes, Protection of civil society actors through clear protocols and procedures, and Promotion of civic space and participation in national decision-making processes, both online and offline.

Preventing illicit financial flows, stolen assets and organized crime

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 is focused on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all, and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. One of the ways it aims to deliver its goals is by addressing the interrelated issues of illicit financial flows, stolen assets, and organized crime. The latest trade related illicit financial flows (IFFs) from a report published in 2020 by Global Financial Integrity (GFI) estimates \$8.7 trillion between 2000 and 2018. The total amount of stolen assets and cost of organized crime worldwide is difficult to know. However, it is estimated that \$20 billion and \$40 billion in stolen assets are moved across borders every year, and the growing influence of criminal networks in the digital realm, as well as the increased use of violence by criminal groups to maintain control over their operations have cost implications. The data and trends on Illicit financial flows, stolen assets and organised crime highlights the significant scale of this problem and the impact it has on achieving the SDG 16+ targets. There is an urgent need for action to promote greater transparency and accountability through measures such as strengthening anti-corruption laws and policies, increasing

financial transparency and accountability, and supporting international cooperation to prevent illicit financial flows, stolen assets and organized crime.

The G20 recognizes these issues are a significant obstacle to sustainable development and economic growth, as they drain resources from developing countries and undermine the integrity of the global financial system. The G20 Indian Presidency has included asset recovery, information sharing and integrity and effectiveness of public bodies under its anti-corruption priorities for 2023. In the past the G20 has adopted the various High-Level Principles, including on Cooperation on Persons Sought for Corruption and Asset Recovery, Mutual Legal Assistance, Beneficial Ownership Transparency, Public Procurement. It created a Step-By-Step Guide to Requesting Mutual Legal Assistance from G20 Countries and formed the Global Operational Network of Anti-Corruption Law Enforcement Authorities (GlobeE). It has also made sought to address these issues by making specific commitments to

- implement the UNCAC, which includes provisions related to asset recovery, anti-money laundering, and cooperation between law enforcement agencies;
- implement high-level principles on asset recovery, which provide guidance on issues such as asset tracing, asset freezing, and mutual legal assistance;
- promote greater transparency around beneficial ownership of companies and other legal entities, which can help prevent illicit financial flows and money laundering;
- strengthen efforts to counter the financing of terrorism, including through implementation of enhanced cooperation between financial intelligence units and law enforcement agencies; and
- promote greater transparency and accountability in public sector institutions, including through measures such as open data initiatives, public reporting on budget and spending, implementing anti-bribery laws, enhancing whistleblower protection, and promoting competition, enhancing transparency, and preventing conflicts of interest in public procurement.

However, there are still significant gaps in implementation and progress. The G20 ACWG 2020 Accountability Report, for instance, highlighted the lack of timely provision of mutual legal agreements, inflexibility in legal measures, the absence of minimum tools to trace, freeze, and confiscate the proceeds of corruption, and undefined focal points for cooperation on issues of AML and asset recovery. There is a lack of coordination and cooperation among G20 member states on addressing illicit financial flows, including in terms of information sharing and enforcement. The lack of transparency in financial transactions and beneficial ownership information makes it difficult to identify and track illicit financial flows, particularly those involving offshore entities and tax havens. G20 countries have weak legal frameworks for addressing illicit financial flows, including inadequate anti-money laundering and anti-corruption legislation. Most importantly, there is a lack of political will among some G20 member states to address illicit financial flows, particularly those involving politically connected individuals and entities.

Commitments and collaborative action to Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies. At a time of the midpoint of the 2030 Agenda, the international community is severely impacted by escalating humanitarian crises due to geopolitical conflicts and its consequences, and climate-induced events and lack of proper evaluations and follow up of nation leaders and government commitments. These challenges demonstrate the crucial state of putting SDG16+ at the forefront of the international discussion this year and bring civil society stakeholders in the wider decision-making processes. This is particularly important as we move towards the High-level Political Forum in July and the SDG Summit in September. These moments of reflection serve as an opportunity and the platform for the international community to redirect its priorities and political engagement to implement SDG16+. In the absence of true and bold commitments from governments and stakeholders towards SDG16+, we are at greater risk of not accomplishing leaving no one behind.

In spite of global challenges, we must take this opportunity to advocate stronger for the achievement of SDG16+, as it remains critical for the resolution of the ongoing perilous crises and for building resilience to prevent future grievances, crises and conflicts. It is an opportunity to synergise societies worldwide, bring the 2030 Agenda back on track and bring the voice of the furthest behind at the front. We therefore take the words of Secretary-General António Guterres further and demand Member States, UN bodies, multilateral agencies, donors, the private sector, CSOs, think tanks, academic institutions, and others to congregate and collectively work on advancing and bringing progress on SDG16+ for the realisation of peaceful and inclusive societies. Therefore, it is critical that the concerns and voices of local civil society and other stakeholders are taken into account and acted upon, with civil society committed as ever to advancing SDG16+ at local, national, regional and global levels. This 2023 declaration is issued to call upon Member States and other actors to translate commitments into action and proper evaluation of resources allocated to actions plans and commitments previously made.

At the mid-point of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development we call upon members to announce bold and ambitious commitments that accelerate needed greater action on SDG16+. Without a strong and steadfast focus on the SDG16+ targets for peace, justice and inclusion, none of the Sustainable Development Goals will be able to be delivered in full

Examples

- **Samagra Bharat - Saksham Bharat (Inclusive and Entrepreneurial India):** Social inclusion is pursued through universalizing access to nutrition, health, education, social protection, and developing capabilities for entrepreneurship and employment. Financial inclusion through Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile (JAM) trinity – near universal access to bank accounts aided by the Jan Dhan Yojana (National Financial Inclusion Scheme); Aadhaar card (National unique identity number) for over 90% of the population; and expansive access to mobile phones, has propelled new avenues of credit, insurance, and Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT) to the poor, including to over 200 million women, thereby accelerating their economic empowerment.
- **Localizing SDGs and Whole of Society Approach in Japan:** According to Hamamatsu City Plan for Human Right Policy Promotion, in order to prevent child abuse and for improved early detection and response, personnel are actively put in place including social workers, clinical therapists, and public health nurses, aiming to expand support based on more expert knowledge and techniques, and as part of measures to provide family care environments for victims of child abuse, the city is raising public awareness on its foster parent system (giving lectures at companies and universities, holding salons and training for foster parents) and providing support to foster parents
- **National Judicial Data Grid:** The government has created this grid to provide information on the status of cases pending in different courts across the country. This grid enables citizens to track the progress of their cases and enhances transparency in the judicial system.
- **Digital India:** The government has launched the Digital India initiative to promote digital literacy and to provide online access to government services. This initiative aims to make government processes more transparent and accessible to citizens, which promotes accountability and strengthens institutions.
- The Japanese government released the **National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights (NAP)** on 16 October 2020 after the declaration of developing NAP following the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) in 2016. In the process of developing the NAP, the Baseline Study Opinion Exchange on Business and Human Rights was established. The Opinion Exchange Meeting was held to review the current status of Japan's legal system and initiatives regarding the protection and implementation of human rights in the business sector

- In 2014, the Kazakh government reached a settlement with the United States government, under which the Kazakh government agreed to receive \$115 million in recovered assets from a corruption case involving James Giffen, an American businessman who was accused of paying bribes to Kazakh officials to secure oil contracts for American companies. The settlement agreement stipulated that the recovered assets would be used to establish the BOTA Foundation, a non-governmental organization (NGO) aimed at promoting transparency and accountability in Kazakhstan. The Foundation has since funded a range of projects in the areas of education, healthcare and social services, and has provided grants to civil society organizations working to promote good governance and anti-corruption efforts. The BOTA foundation is widely regarded as a model for asset recovery initiatives, as it demonstrates the potential of recovered assets to support development and civil society initiatives, while also promoting transparency and accountability. The Foundation is also notable for its governance structure, which includes a diverse range of stakeholders, government officials, civil society representatives and experts in various other fields.
- The Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) issued a ruling on beneficial ownership registries in the case of Austria v. Germany (C-648/17) in October 2019. The case concerned a German law that required companies to disclose information on their beneficial owners to a central register, which could be accessed by certain authorities and members of the public. Austria challenged the law, arguing that it was incompatible with EU law, including data protection and privacy rules. The CJEU ultimately ruled that EU law does not prevent member states from requiring companies to disclose information on their beneficial owners to a central register, as long as certain conditions are met. This has provided guidance on how beneficial ownership registries should be designed to ensure compliance with EU law. The ruling is significant for the fight against money laundering and other financial crimes, as beneficial ownership information is a critical tool for identifying and tracing illicit financial flows.
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Recommendations

• Promoting Civic Space

- The international community, especially the G20, institutions of global governance, donors of development assistance and philanthropic organisations and foundations should play a stronger role in efforts to preserve civic space. Preserving civic space is about helping citizens learn how to stand together in the same public space, free of hostility and persecution. A robust and protected civic space forms the cornerstone of accountable, responsive democratic governance and stable societies which is the aim of Goal 16 of the SDGs. The flow of global aid, and in particular an increased percentage of ODA flows should be targeted at funding the promotion and protection of human rights and civic space, increasing the sense of security for communities everywhere, and promoting fair access to the law and to information.
- A formal space should be established at the international level to facilitate governments and other diverse stakeholders to focus on monitoring and consultation activities related to civic space. This work should be based on reliable and publicly available information to facilitate adequate measurement of civic space in different countries of the world.
- The meaningful participation of poor and marginalised constituencies in civic space monitoring and activism should be strongly encouraged at every level. Every effort should be made to ensure that the realities of these marginalised groups are not overlooked or excluded in online consultations or virtual meetings as a result of a "digital divide".
- Key international bodies, including the G20 and the UN and its agencies, should encourage national governments to enact laws which regulate in a fair way the relationship between governments and civil society, ensuring the existence of healthy civic and democratic spaces. In this regard, the adoption of civic space indicators as part of the monitoring framework of SDG 16 would provide important leverage for civil society organisations to maintain pressure on their governments to demonstrate progress on the promotion and protection of civic space nationally as part of annual review processes.
- International donors should simplify and expand their financing processes, especially in countries where governments are attempting to control the finances and overall structuring of civil society organizations because they work with particular constituencies or on specific issues and are implicitly or explicitly critical of government policies. A greater level of international resourcing should be provided to support civil society working on civic space in these countries.
- We call on governments to establish and strengthen mechanisms for meaningful and sustained consultation with CSOs at all stages of the policymaking processes around SDG16+, from planning and design to implementation and monitoring.
- We also call on governments to ensure that civil society is included in the Voluntary National Review (VNR) processes at all stages, including in follow-up to the VNRs.

- We call on governments and the international community to expand the use of civil society, citizen-generated data and all other “non-official” data sources . This includes not only entry points for this data to be included into official statistical systems and in Voluntary National Review processes, but also includes additional funding to support civil society to produce and generate data within their own communities.
- Recognizing the multi-dimensional nature of SDG16+, we also encourage the international community to consider utilising alternative indicators and measures of progress that capture and reflect the full scope of issues contained within SDG16+. This includes the need to invest in more perception-based and experiential data collection, which more adequately takes into account how people are experiencing progress in their everyday lives.
- Civil society actors, especially grassroots communities and indigenous populations, face structural financial barriers that must be addressed by the financial architecture of public development banks, catering to their specific context and needs to leverage their contributions to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda
- We call on all providers who have adhered to the OECD Development Assistance Committee’s Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance to fully implement this Recommendation with full participation of civil society in both provider and partner countries.

Preventing illicit financial flows, stolen assets and organized crime

- Ensure faster, wider, and more effective use of mutual legal assistance through the application of a Mutual Recognition Agreement among G20 Members and/or bilateral agreements of this kind. These should include mutual enforcement of “freeze and confiscate” orders, authentication of public records, and transparency of documents. When assets are returned they need to be aligned to GFAR principles, including through the engagement of civil society and community groups to support the transparency of this process.
- Define and commit to global standards on beneficial ownership transparency, i.e. the disclosure of the ultimate owners of an entity- in a central, public registry with free and open data, and supported by international cooperation on these issues among law enforcement agencies. Such standards should be drafted with consideration of the specific characteristics of non-profit entities and public benefit foundations to ensure that they do not disrupt these legitimate activities.
- Ensure all member countries are party to the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention and private sector bribery is criminalized in line with UNCAC provisions. Policies and procedures for several acts of high-risk corruption- including bribery toward domestic and foreign civil servants, bribery towards a third party, facilitation payments, gratification, political donations, and social donations- should be in line with the G20 High-Level Principles on Private Sector Transparency & Integrity.

Delivering catalytic financing for SDG16+ and fixing a broken global financial system

- In addition to coming to the 2023 SDGs Summit with clear “National Commitments to SDG Transformation” to act on SDG16+ and the 2030 Agenda, governments must also come to the SDGs Summit with financial commitments – including around domestic resource mobilisation and budgetary commitments to deliver on the SDGs. For donors, this also includes financial commitments towards SDG16+ and the 2030 Agenda, which can also play a key role in helping donors meet their commitments to 0.7% of GDP for development cooperation.
- We strongly support the Secretary-General’s call for an ambitious “SDGs Stimulus Plan”, which calls for an additional \$500 billion per year towards sustainable development financing.
- In addition to scaling up financial commitments towards SDG16+ and the 2030 Agenda, Member States and the international community must reform the global financial architecture and development system. This includes comprehensive reforms to International Financial Institutions to ensure a fairer system that addresses the debt crisis faced by many countries today, fairer taxation and tackling illicit financial flows.
- We reiterate our call from the 2022 Rome Declaration for donors to develop and invest in a comprehensive donor-collaborative “ Global SDG16+ Fund”. This will provide an opportunity for governments and donors, including the private sector, to showcase themselves as “champions” that literally and figuratively support SDG16+, while providing critical resources for civil society and grassroots groups to advance SDG16+ at the local and national levels that are so urgently needed. The development of a fund such as this will be critical to turning the tide of SDG16+ towards a more positive outlook towards 2030.
- Additionally, we call on governments to ensure continued investment and replenishment of other funds around specific SDG16+ issues, such as the UN Peacebuilding Fund, Global Legal Empowerment Fund, the UN Democracy Fund, and ensure that increased core, flexible funds are provided to grassroots organizations close to communities.
- We support the call for expanding measurement of economic progress to a “Beyond GDP” model. This is of particular importance for SDG16+, as measurements Beyond GDP are critical for identifying where investments and actions for SDG16+ result in quantifiable positive impacts for governments and their people. By looking beyond GDP and considering a broader range of indicators, such as measures of social inclusion, access to justice, peacebuilding or investment in institutions and governance systems, we can more accurately gauge progress towards SDG16+ and make informed decisions about how to allocate resources and address areas where progress is lacking.
- Governments and the international community must make efforts to solve the increasingly urgent sovereign debt crisis. To do so, debt cancellation or restructuring must be considered, as well as other innovative mechanisms such as “debt swaps” that will further incentivize action towards SDG16+ and the 2030 Agenda overall.

- We reiterate the call from many civil society groups for the establishment of a Global Tax Body facilitated by the UN, to help reduce tax evasion and illicit financial flows, and help ensure fairness and transparency of the global tax system.
- The G20 countries should take measures to effectively involve companies, international financial institutions and communities in the implementation of global agendas and demand transparency and credibility around their contributions .

Recognizing and utilising SDG16+ as an enabler for achieving the 2030 Agenda and responding to current global crises

- The G20 through the C20 should anchor the process where the Governments would include direct references to SDG16+ as a linchpin for the 2030 Agenda in SDGs Summit Declaration, recognizing the critical enabling role of SDG16+ for achieving all the other SDGs, and addressing the complex challenges and crises facing the world today.
- We also call for the 2024 Summit of the Future to ensure that SDG16+ is high on the agenda, including through the various discussions around the Secretary-General's Our Common Agenda Report, including discussions around a New Agenda for Peace and other key processes.
- Allow civil society to have adequate access to resources and financing for water programs and solutions, considering that if public servants and governments define the civil society organizations that will support those plans, the resources will end up in personal benefits and not where they must be destined.
- Include proper follow up to the resources destination.
- We also call on governments to include civil society at all stages of the commitment-making process, to ensure that any commitments made are people-centred and responsive to the needs of citizens themselves.
- In addition to governments delivering commitments to act on SDG16+ at the SDGs Summit, civil society and other stakeholders should also be encouraged to outline similar commitments to action.
- Recognizing the potential for civil society commitments to act on SDG16+, the G20 in coordination with the UN and Member States must recognize and showcase commitments from civil society in playing a critical complementary role to supporting government commitments at the Summit.
- We also call on the United Nations and its partners to ensure that “National Commitments to SDG Transformation” called for by the Secretary-General are adequately compiled and tracked around the SDGs Summit, including by providing a transparent and inclusive platform for showcasing these commitments, helping to ensure follow-up and accountability.
- We reiterate our call for SDG16+ to be reviewed annually at the HLPF going forward, including through the negotiations around the review of the HLPF modalities taking place in 2024. This affirms that SDG16 strongly links with all other goals, in line with the integrated and indivisible nature of the 2030 Agenda.
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A thematic review of SDG 16 at each forthcoming HLPF will also help realise the Agenda's universal vision with scale and ambition, balancing all dimensions of sustainable development and ensuring we should leave no country and no one behind.

1. Policy implications

SDG 16+ as an 'Agent' of 'protecting fundamental Rights

Development is a comprehensive and complex economic, social and political process. And this process is about human rights: about the right to development; about economic, social and cultural rights; and also about the civil and political rights which uphold people's capacity and right to raise their voices, and participate in decisions.

The multiple and overlapping structural impediments that prevent justice from being done, express the relevance of indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights. As the 2030 Agenda recognizes, freedom from fear and freedom from want cannot be achieved in isolation from each other.

This is why the concept of SDG16 plus is so persuasive. Because the multifaceted disempowerment of those who are left behind will not be adequately addressed if we adopt fragmented approaches, designed in silos and applied as band-aids.

We need integrated approaches, grounded in broad participation, which build on the mutually reinforcing work of many communities. And it is this integrated, indivisible approach to promoting and protecting all rights which drives the work done by my Office around the world – in close partnership with States, stakeholders and civil society groups of all kinds

End Notes

<https://www.visualcapitalist.com/mapped-where-are-the-worlds-ongoing-conflicts-today/>

The latest update from CIVICUS Monitor from March 2023 states that in 117 out of 197 countries, physical harassment and murder, or negative labelling, or restrictive legislations are used to constrain the civic space. The CIVICUS Monitor rates 38 countries as Open, 42 countries as Narrowed, 40 countries as Obstructed, 50 countries as Repressed and 27 countries as Closed.

2019 Rome Civil Society Declaration on SDG16+ “Amplified Commitments and Partnerships for Accelerated Action: Rome Civil Society Declaration on SDG16+”, available here. SDG16 was reviewed for the first time at the UN High-Level Political Forum 2019 (HPLF), marking the need for civil society to congregate and to provide an update on the (lack of) progress towards the achievement of SDG16 and to share recommendations in the 2019 Rome Civil Society Declaration on SDG16+. The 2019 Declaration received endorsement from over 130 civil society organisations and networks.

2021 Rome Civil Society Declaration “A Renewed Call for Strengthening Commitments, Partnerships, and Accelerated Action for SDG16+”, available here. SDG16 was reviewed for the second time at UN HLPF 2021, the Rome Declaration was revisited in 2021. The Rome Declaration was endorsed by over 215 civil society stakeholders, and looked specifically at the impacts of COVID-19 on the promotion of just, peaceful and inclusive societies.

2022 Rome Civil Society Declaration. “SDG16+ in Peril: An urgent call-to-action for safeguarding commitments to Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies”, available here. The Rome Declaration was revisited in light of backsliding on SDG16+. Building on previous years, the 2022 Declaration reflects entry points needed for the key events of 2023.

<http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/analysis/commitments-18-buenosaires.html>

<https://impakter.com/covid-19-and-conflict-is-peace-the-cure/>

<https://medium.com/sdg16plus/sdg16-the-key-to-managing-the-covid-19-crisis-f3f5cb577699>

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