

Connecting with Designated Government SDG Bodies and Ministries

What is it?

“Designated government SDG bodies” are the main government entities or coordinating mechanisms responsible for the implementation of the SDGs. They may take different forms ranging from Inter-Ministerial Committees to National Committees on the SDGs to High Level Commissions to Ministries of Sustainable Development. They may be new bodies, or existing councils or committees with an updated mandate to implement the SDGs. While they tend to differ in name, they all generally share a similar function – to coordinate and oversee the implementation of the 2030 Agenda across government ministries, departments and organizations.

In terms of their composition, a representative from the executive branch of government – such as the Head of State or Government – may lead designated SDG bodies with members composed of ministers, government department heads and other sectoral focal points. In some cases, these bodies may provide for non-governmental stakeholder representation – including from civil society – or there may be other special technical committees for non-governmental representatives to support, guide or oversee national SDG implementation. According to one report, at least 18 countries volunteering for voluntary national reviews at the 2017 HLPF formally included non-state actors in governance arrangements.¹⁷

National Councils for Sustainable Development

In addition to official government SDG bodies, National Councils for Sustainable Development (NCSDs) exist in some countries to further sustainable development at the national level. NCSDs usually operate as an advisory body to government, examining sustainable development issues and offering expert advice on national sustainable development strategies and policies in public and private reports. NCSDs are often comprised of representatives from government, academia, the private sector and civil society and can offer advice of their own volition or at the request of the government or legislature.¹⁸ The Global Network of National Councils for Sustainable Development and similar bodies (GN-NCSDs) currently lists the contact information for 54 NCSDs. See: <https://www.ncsds.org>

¹⁷ The Canadian Council for International Co-operation (CCIC) (2018). Progressing national SDGs implementation: An independent assessment of the voluntary national review reports submitted to the United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in 2017, p. ii. <https://ccic.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/ES-Eng.pdf>

¹⁸ TAP Network (2016). Goal 16 Advocacy Toolkit: A practical guide for stakeholders for national-level advocacy around Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies, p. 22. http://tapnetwork2030.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/TAP_AdvocacyToolkit_1pgFINAL.pdf

Why is it important?

Designated government SDG bodies can be critical to accountability for the 2030 Agenda given the central role they play in SDG implementation. They are responsible for coordinating the development of national SDG implementation plans and/or integrating SDG implementation into existing plans. They may also design and implement sustainable development policies and are often mandated to provide advice to the executive branch of government on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Importantly, they are responsible for ensuring that national SDG implementation plans include specific timeframes, clearly defined responsibilities for government actors and institutions, and transparent deliverables that are subject to regular reporting.¹⁹ In some cases, these bodies may also serve as a platform for multi-stakeholder engagement.

These bodies thus represent a key opportunity to ensure accountability for the SDGs by defining who in government will be responsible for what and by when, and how information on actions, progress, gaps and challenges will be made available for public scrutiny and/or input.²⁰

How can it be used?

CSOs can take the following actions to engage with designated government SDG bodies in order to promote accountability for the SDGs:

1. Identify designated SDG bodies and key decision-makers in government – Before engaging with government actors, it is essential that CSOs identify the main coordinating body and/or individuals responsible for implementing the SDGs and at which level of government they operate. In some cases, there may be multiple bodies responsible for SDG implementation.

Where there does not appear to be a designated body, CSOs should demand clarity from the government as to which government agency, institution, ministry or individual is responsible for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including by submitting an official infor-

mation request to determine who is responsible for SDG implementation and review.

2. Determine whether designated SDG bodies provide formal or informal opportunities for non-state actor engagement in SDG implementation and/or review – In some cases, there may be formal mechanisms or platforms established by government bodies to ensure the participation of non-state actors – including civil society – in SDG implementation and review. In other cases, there may only be informal opportunities or no opportunities at all.

Where formal mechanisms exist, CSOs should assess whether they are meaningful, inclusive and allow for the participation of marginalized or vulnerable groups. Where mechanisms are inadequate or non-existent, CSOs should advocate to government to establish or improve opportunities for non-state actor engagement in SDG implementation and review. CSOs may also wish to create an umbrella body or independent CSO forum that can act as a focal point for engagement with government.



TIP: Where designated SDG bodies exist, CSOs should assess the mandate, strategy and working methods of such bodies in order to identify opportunities for CSO engagement.



TIP: “Be pragmatic and precise: When approaching to government, present a clear initiative or plan, in order to assure the engagement and interest of authorities... Bring aggregated value to the discussion: Collaboration goes beyond CSOs telling governments what is missing. Civil society must propose solutions, initiatives, and innovative approaches.”²¹

3. Engage designated government SDG bodies or government actors through:

a. Formal meetings – Formal meetings offer a key opportunity for CSOs to share new or innovative ideas on SDG implementation and review with government bodies, and to provide concrete and practical recom-

¹⁹ CESR and UN Women (2017), p. 8.

²⁰ UN Women (2018), p. 39.


²¹ Philipp Schönrock, CEPEI, cited in: Together 2030 (2016). Experiences from national voices: Civil society engagement on national reviews of the 2030 Agenda, p. 18. https://www.together2030.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Case_Study_Compilation_FINAL_DRAFT_styles-1.pdf

mentations to government for action. Meetings may be held with individual members of designated bodies or they may be held as formal briefings or discussions with the entire body. Regardless of the form, CSOs should ensure that all meetings are structured effectively and offer clear and concise information and concrete recommendations to government bodies.

b. Networking – Networking directly with government officials on designated SDG bodies can help to build relationships and trust with key decision-makers and can open the door to informal opportunities for civil society to provide input and influence into SDG implementation and review. CSOs should seek to identify opportunities for networking with decision-makers and their staff at both formal and informal events. Once contact is established, CSOs should be proactive and seek to maintain regular communication.²³

c. Technical Support – Some CSOs may be in a position to offer technical support, research and advice to government bodies in charge of implementing the 2030 Agenda. Technical support may include providing comparative data and information on what other countries are doing

to implement the SDGs, offering specialist training to government officials in relation to specific goals or targets, or seconding expert advisers to ministries or government departments. Technical support from CSOs may be particularly valuable in countries where resources to implement the SDGs are limited.

 **TIP:** Consider engaging with government officials in a constructive rather than adversarial manner. Constructive and positive engagement with government officials can help to build trust and relationships, allowing CSOs to maximize their influence when opportunities present themselves.²⁴ Further, emerging research suggests that accountability can be more effectively fostered when approached as a collective action problem, rather than an adversarial process where citizens are pitted against government agencies.²⁵

d. Facilitating Input – CSOs that have a membership base or are part of a network can also assist designated government bodies by facilitating inputs from citizens in relation to consultations on SDG implementation and/or review. Civil society is often effective in working as an

Structuring your meeting²²

Preparation	During the meeting	After the meeting
Know your key messages	Be positive about certain aspects of the policy or legislation	Keep notes of the meeting – what happened, who was there, agreed actions
Identify mutual interests	Focus on one issue and stick to key messages	Follow-up on the meeting with a phone-call, letter or email
Prepare information for your target	Offer solutions, not problems	Provide additional information if promised
Timing of the meeting	Be truthful and credible – if you do not know, say so	If suitable to the type of meeting, send a letter to restate your views
	Offer to provide more information	Finalize your official position on an issue before any vote on policy and related legislation takes place
	Leave behind a briefing paper	Stay involved
	Make suggestions about other people to talk to	

²² Public Oversight, p. 108.

²³ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) (2008). Public Oversight of the Security Sector: A Handbook for Civil Society Organizations, p. 109. http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/documents/partners/civil_society/publications/2008_UNDP_CSO-Handbook-Public-Oversight-of-the-Security-Sector-2008.pdf

²⁴ TAP Network (2016). Goal 16 Advocacy Toolkit, p. 12.

²⁵ CESR and OHCHR (2013), p. 15.

intermediary between government and the public to help explain complex technical information and to channel public inputs back into policy processes.²⁶



TIP: CSOs should ensure they adhere to any deadlines for inputs to government bodies in order to impact their work and to build a reputation of being able to deliver results in a timely and effective manner.

Key Resources:

- **High-Level Political Forum's website** provides a list of all countries that have participated in a Voluntary National Review (VNR) with many country reports outlining their governance arrangements for SDG implementation. See: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/>
- **Progressing National SDG Implementation: An Independent Assessment of the Voluntary National Review Reports Submitted to the UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in 2017 (2018)**, by a group of CSOs, outlines the SDG governance and institutional arrangements of 42 countries presenting VNRs in 2017. See: <https://ccic.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/ES-Eng.pdf>
- **Progressing National SDGs Implementation: An Independent Assessment of the Voluntary National Review Reports Submitted to the United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in 2018 (2019)**, by a group of CSOs, is the third edition in an annual series commissioned by civil society organizations. See: <https://ccic.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Full%20Report%20Eng.pdf>

Case Study: Identifying National-Level Institutions Implementing the SDGs

Kenya: The Ministry of Devolution and Planning in Kenya is mandated to coordinate the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs. The SDGs Coordinating Department has been established within the Ministry, supported by an Inter-Agency Technical Committee (IATC), comprising officers from key government ministries, CSOs and the private sector. For ownership and ease of follow-up, entry points for the private sector, CSOs, subnational governments, youth and persons with disabilities are typically their umbrella bodies, such as Kenya Private Sector Alliance (KEPSA), SDG Kenya Forum, the Council of Governors (CoG), National Youth Council and the Association of Persons Living with Disabilities.²⁷

Germany: The German Federal Chancellery is the lead agency for the national sustainable development strategy, with all government departments having primary responsibility for their own contributions to implement the 2030 Agenda in their respective policy fields. The institutional structure consists of: the State Secretaries for Sustainable Development, which steer the implementation of the sustainable development strategy, and which invite external experts from the private sector, the scientific and research community, civil society and the federal states and local authorities to attend its meetings; the Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development, which raises policy-related sustainable development concerns in parliament; and the German Council for Sustainable Development, which is an advisory panel consisting of 15 individuals who represent the economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainable development.²⁸

²⁶ TAP Network (2016). Goal 16 Advocacy Toolkit, pp. 23-24.

²⁷ Handbook for VNRs, p. 17.

²⁸ The VNR of Germany, 2016 Handbook for VNRs, p. 27