

Engaging with the Media

What is it?

“The media” or “the press” refers to the collective entities and individuals responsible for producing news, information, education and/or entertainment, that reach or influence people regularly through various means such as television, radio, newspapers, magazines, the internet and social media.

Why is it important?

The media can be a powerful tool for promoting accountability in relation to government actors. A free and independent media can inform and influence public opinion about government policy. It can monitor the performance of public institutions, expose misconduct and advocate for change.¹⁹⁶ The media can also provide a platform for public debate and dialogue, ensuring that the voices and needs of citizens in relation to government policies and actions are heard.

The media is not only just an instrument to create awareness about the SDG agenda, but also play a crucial role in the implementation of it. Inclusive, just and strong institutions are the pillars a healthy society is built on. However, these institutions are not sufficient by themselves. They need to be maintained carefully. Any thriving society is built on citizens’ participation, in order to hold governments accountable and exert influence over decisions that affect the lives of people. Providing citizens with access to information (SDG target

16.10) is an essential requirement in this regard. Independent, pluralist media enable citizens to have access to information and subsequently can build well-informed, critical and resilient citizens that are empowered to shape their own development, and to participate, advocate and monitor for just and democratic societies regarding their governments. The media is a pre-condition for meaningful progress and implementation on the 2030 Agenda.

In relation to overall accountability for the 2030 Agenda, the media can provide a platform to raise awareness of the SDGs and present information as to what decision-makers and government actors are, or are not, doing. It can convey messages of progress and challenges in relation to the SDGs, highlighting the human story behind the data and numbers, and increasing pressure on governments to take action to implement the SDGs.

The media may also be used to promote the SDGs and raise awareness and expectations for credible, inclusive and participatory follow-up and review consultations.¹⁹⁷ The outreach of both traditional and new forms of media can play an instrumental role in broadening engagement in SDG follow-up and review processes, involving people who otherwise might not be able to participate, enhancing the participation of those who can engage, and potentially uncovering issues that otherwise might be overlooked.¹⁹⁸ The media can also widen the dissemination of findings from follow-up and

¹⁹⁶ UNDP and Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) (2008), p. 84; CESR and OHCHR (2013), p. 37-38.

¹⁹⁷ Amnesty International (2016), p. 13.

¹⁹⁸ UN Development Group (UNDG) (2017). Guidelines, p. 39.

review processes and mobilize people to act on different issues related to the SDGs.¹⁹⁹

 **TIP:** *“Work with the media, as it has an especially important role to play. The media has to be capacitated in covering SDGs, including monitoring progress made on the 2030 Agenda and ensuring accountability for commitments made by the government.”* – Sanele Hanyana, Save Matabeleland Coalition, Zimbabwe²⁰⁰

How can it be used?

There is a range of ways in which CSOs can engage effectively with the media to promote the 2030 Agenda and ensure accountability in its delivery, including the following:

1. Develop a strategy to work with the media – As a starting point, CSOs wishing to work with the media should develop a strategy for engagement. At a minimum, the strategy should identify the media engagement goals or objectives, target audience(s), key messages,

type of media to engage with (e.g. print, television, radio, social media etc.), and target journalists and/or media outlets. Focusing on how to get the media to engage with you (as a CSO) should be a priority. This is, for most CSOs, the biggest challenge.

2. Identify your media engagement goals or objectives – There may be a number of different objectives for working with the media to further accountability for the SDGs. For example, CSOs may wish to use the media to raise awareness of the SDGs among the general public, highlight specific problems or gaps in implementation to be addressed by governments, or communicate opportunities for engagement as well as follow-up and review consultations with specific groups.

3. Identify your key target audience(s) – CSOs should identify their target audience(s) – i.e. whom they wish to reach with their messages via the media. Target audiences may include government policy makers, the private sector, civil society, specific population groups, etc. It is important to differentiate between types of audiences, as the target audience will impact your

Social Media: The benefits and challenges for SDG accountability

Online platforms and social media can help to promote the SDGs and ensure that follow-up and review processes are participatory, open and inclusive. In particular, social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram are an increasingly effective way to reach out to people who are more likely to use web-based platforms than traditional ones to access and share information.²⁰¹ However, the use of online platforms and social media is not without its limitations. Many populations remain excluded from online access due to extreme poverty, rural locations and/or Indigenous community practices.²⁰² Social media also facilitates the distribution of inaccurate, discriminatory and even wilfully violent content. These are all real challenges for CSOs seeking to maximize their impact through social, internet-based forms of communications. As a result, the use of social media and other online platforms for SDG accountability should be carefully balanced with other opportunities that allow for the offline participation of people, especially vulnerable and marginalized groups.

199 Ibid

200 Cited in: Together 2030 (2016). Experiences from national voices, p. 9.

201 TAP Network (2016). Goal 16 Advocacy Toolkit, p. 19.

202 UNDG (2017). Guidelines, p. 39.

Identifying and Analyzing Your Target Audience²⁰³

Government/ Organisation/ Name (plus contact details)	How Much Expertise Do They Have On Your Prior- ity Issue(s): Rate 1 (low) – 5 (high), or qualitatively	How Much Influence Do They Have On Your Priority Issue(s)? Rate 1 (low) – 5 (high), or qualitatively	What Is Their Attitude To Your Priority Issue(s)? Rate 1 (very anti) – 5 (very pro), or qualitatively	How Important Is Your Priority Issue To Them? Rate 1 (low) – 5 (high), or qualitatively	Total Score/Sum- mary Of Qualitative Judge- ments (Highest = likely target)	Likely To Be An Ally/ Opponent/ Target? (see crite- ria above)
Minister of Foreign Affairs, Brazil	4	5	3	3	15	Target

choice of message, type of media and media outlet. CSOs should try to identify the specific characteristics and interests of the target audience, including the type of media they are likely to engage with.²⁰⁴



TIP: In order to reach policy makers, CSOs can target business editors, in contexts where politicians are most likely to read newspapers' business section first.²⁰⁵

4. Tailor key messages for media engagement – CSOs should create compelling and simple key messages that are tailored for their target audience. A key message is what you want the target audience to understand, hear about, and/or do. In crafting effective key media messages for general public use in relation to the SDGs, CSOs should use everyday language, avoid jargon and acronyms, give the message a human and local face (i.e. a real-life story), refer only to simple statistics and limit the number of messages. CSOs should be aware that the media might not necessarily tell a story in the exact manner in which a CSO wants it to be told.²⁰⁶ Accordingly, CSOs should keep messages short and simple and use the following questions as a guide in designing key messages for use with the media:

- What do you want the audience to understand?
- What do you want the audience to remember?
- What do you want the audience to do?²⁰⁷

If targeting an audience beyond the general public, the language, manner and style of key messages should be tailored accordingly.



TIP: When appearing on television, radio and other live forms of media, make the most important points first, and always bring the conversation back to your key messages.

See also: “Tips for creating effective key messages” in our chapter on awareness-raising.

5. Identify the type of media to engage with – Depending on the target audience(s), CSOs should consider the type of media to promote the SDGs and accountability in their delivery, such as print, television, radio and/or social media. The selection of type of media should be based on what is typically used by the target audience. The biggest challenge in identifying the type of media to engage with, however, can be finding media outlets that will actually carry your message, as well as those that reach your audience.

²⁰³ CIVICUS (2015). Advocacy Toolkit for Influencing the Post-2015 Development Agenda http://civicus.org/images/stories/SD2015%20Post-2015%20Advocacy%20Toolkit_FINAL.pdf

²⁰⁴ CIVICUS and Stakeholder Forum (2014). Engaging with the Media: A Companion to the Advocacy Toolkit for Influencing the Post-2015, p. 5. http://civicus.org/images/stories/SD2015%20Post-2015%20Advocacy%20Toolkit_FINAL.pdf

²⁰⁵ Transparency International, Bahamas.

²⁰⁶ UNDP and DCAF (2008), p. 113.

²⁰⁷ CIVICUS and Stakeholder Forum (2014), p. 4.



TIP: Do not underestimate radio as an effective means of communication, particularly in poorer countries where cell phone penetration is limited. According to one CSO working in rural areas in Nigeria, “everyone carries a transistor radio, so if you want to reach them you have to go to radio, and you have to speak in the local language.”

6. Identify specific journalists and media outlets to work with

– CSOs should identify specific journalists and media outlets that are best suited to convey its messages to its target audience. CSOs should conduct research on media outlets and journalists – by reading newspapers and magazines, watching TV, listening to the radio and researching online – and make note of any journalists who cover stories related to development, the SDGs and/or wider public sector issues.²⁰⁸

7. Be proactive and contact journalists – Once CSOs have identified specific journalists, they should be proactive in reaching out to them. CSOs should contact journalists directly by phone or email, express interest in the stories they cover and, in certain instances where strong relations already exist, ask them what sort of stories they are looking for. CSOs should explain how they may be able to help with new, interesting and/or relevant information about stories related to SDG accountability that the journalists may already be interested in and confirm the best method and timeline for contacting the journalist in the future. Once initial contact is established, CSOs should find ways to communicate regularly with the journalist.²⁰⁹

8. Develop professional working relationships with journalists – CSOs should seek to develop positive professional working relationships with journalists by adhering to the following:

a. Make it easy for the journalist – Provide concise and clear written or visual information via press releases, opinion pieces, story pitches and/or press briefing information packs. Include contact information, background information on the issue, facts and statistics,

quotations from experts and/or infographics where relevant.²¹⁰ Also, CSOs should tailor their story to the established reporting line. In other words, present what you want to get across as fitting into what the journalist or media outlet already wants to talk about;

b. Know and adhere to deadlines – Be aware of the journalist’s deadline – which can vary depending on the type of media – and as far as possible work within their timeframes;

c. Be credible – Always provide accurate, reliable, and high-quality information and statistics so that journalists will come to know your CSO as a trustworthy source for information;

d. Respond promptly and professionally to media enquiries – Return phone calls and emails promptly and commit to get back to a journalist if you don’t know the answer to a question. Never lie or make up facts;²¹¹ where you are not 100 per cent sure of the facts, be open about their degree of reliability;

e. Develop a positive relationship over time – Invite journalists to learn about your CSO before stories develop. This is more often how strong relationships with the media are developed than through a particular story. Get to know what kinds of stories the journalist likes to cover;²¹²

f. Link specific SDG themes to journalists’ professional expertise, and present the specific SDGs as an instrument to create more awareness and hold governments accountable – For instance, explain linkages between a journalist’s expertise in environmental issues, health care and education and the relevant SDGs.



TIP: Consider different ways to engage with journalists, including writing press releases and letters to the editor and holding press briefings and media events. For helpful guidance on writing press releases and holding press conferences, see: *Engaging with the Media: A Companion to the Advocacy Toolkit for Influencing the Post-2015 Development Agenda*.

208 CIVICUS and Stakeholder Forum (2014), p. 5.

209 CIVICUS and Stakeholder Forum (2014), p. 6-8.

210 UNDP and DCAF (2008) p. 113.

211 CIVICUS and Stakeholder Forum (2014), p. 8.

212 CIVICUS and Stakeholder Forum (2014), p. 8.

Key Resources:

• ***Engaging with the Media: A Companion to the Advocacy Toolkit for Influencing the Post-2015 Development Agenda (2014)***, by CIVICUS and Stakeholder Forum, provides a guide to the strategic use of the media and social media and includes a useful set of tools and tips to help civil society develop effective communications strategies. It offers advice on how to target messages for broadcast, press and social media, identify and build relationships with journalists, conduct interviews and hold press conferences. See: <https://www.sustainabledevelopment2015.org/AdvocacyToolkit/index.php/media-guide/journalists-toolkit>

Case Study: Media as Partner in Raising Awareness about SDG 16

Nigeria: An NGO in Nigeria has had success getting the media to report on the SDGs, and particularly Goal 16. “We involve media in everything we do, we are friends to the media, so all the policy areas that we work on are always on the news.” One of the reasons why this NGO has been successful in engaging the media is the Nigerian media’s steady appetite for stories about corruption. “Anything that has to do with corruption is news - they like to report on it.” The relatively free environment for the media in Nigeria has also helped to facilitate this relationship. The NGO has been able to cultivate good relationships with the media by making journalists feel like they are involved in the programmes, rather than just calling on them when they need media coverage. “Normally in my country if you want to engage the media you have to have a lot of money in your purse, but if you know how to manage your relationship with the press a lot of things are given to you free of charge – even free advertisements, because they feel like they are part and parcel of what you are doing.”²¹³

Case Study: Media’s Crucial Role in Implementation of 2030 Agenda

Indonesia: In Indonesia, Tempo Magazine enables citizens to keep State institutions accountable. Last year, the magazine reported on widespread corruption in the Sukamiskin prison complex, one of the most well-known prisons in the country. The investigation led to the arrest of the head of the prison on bribery charges.

Bangladesh: In Bangladesh, large parts of the population have trouble reading and writing. Local radio stations enable people in isolated parts of the country to know what is going on around them. They can use this knowledge to take part in public debates and influence decision-making.

Zambia: In Zambia, vulnerable women in townships are taught how to make short videos and audio reports with their mobile phone on issues they are facing. These stories have contributed to holding the local government accountable for failing to supply water, health care and education.²¹⁴

213 TAP Workshop (2018). Case study.

214 Free Press Unlimited (2018). Case study.