



The SDGs in an advocacy and social accountability perspective

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How to conduct advocacy that influences duty-bearers' accountability and answerability towards the SDGs

The following is a brief introduction to the Sustainable Development Goals (the so-called SDGs) and how these can be used as a means for advocacy towards local and national duty-bearers. The guidance note takes you through the SDG framework and introduces ways to influence the national SDG process and strengthen social accountability.

Please bear in mind that advocacy is about seeing a problem and addressing it for the purpose of solving it! Advocacy is thus a tool for creating change – not a goal in itself, and your entry point for advocacy should always be an issue that you desire to change.

Advocacy are strategic initiatives aimed at influencing political, economic, cultural and/or social conditions and practices as well as mal-practices with the goal of improving the living conditions for poor and marginalized people – positively and permanently.

A brief introduction to the SDGs

In 2015, the UN member states decided on a set of global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In doing so, the members committed themselves to an agenda of achieving sustainable development over the coming fifteen years towards 2030.

The SDGs consist of 17 goals – illustrated by the colorful and well-known icons. Together with 169 targets and even more indicators the goals constitute the most ambitious plan for global development ever. The plan has three integrated dimensions – economic, social and environmental development, and with an overall principle of leaving no one behind it aims to reach all even the most marginalized and vulnerable people.

The global SDG framework will be explained later, but before so, we will take a look at the nature of the SDGs and seek to understand who's accountable to the achievement of the goals.



Whose goals and whose responsibility?

The member states' commitment to the SDGs are not legally binding. What makes the SDGs particularly interesting in relation to advocacy and social accountability are therefore the members' voluntary commitments to realize the goals through a so-called "domestication" process, where the goals are adapted to the local context and integrated into national policies, development plans and budgets. By domesticating the SDGs the goals become part of the member states' national policy and development framework and the governments can consequently be held accountable if they do not meet their own promises.

So, are the SDGs legally binding?

No, success relies on the national policies, plans and programmes, and their voluntary implementation.

But, if the SDGs/targets are integrated in national policies, plans etc. you can hold government accountable!

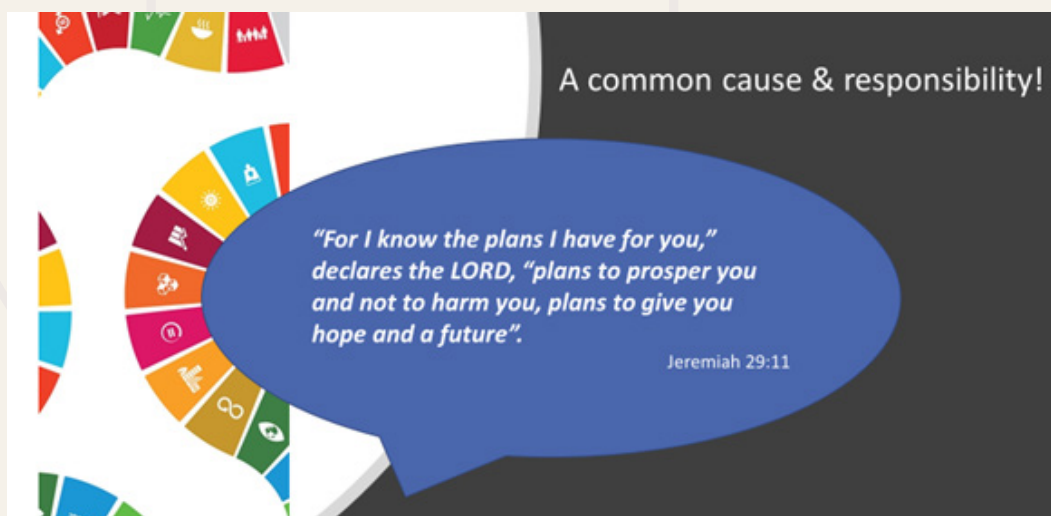


The Danish Institute of Human Rights has developed a database that maps the links human rights as well as monitoring information from the international human rights system to the 17 SDGs. It allows users to explore recommendations and observations of international human rights bodies such as Universal Periodic Reviews and UN Special Rapporteurs. The purpose of The Human Rights Data Explorer tool is to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs by linking them to more legally binding human rights conventions and mechanisms and thus to empower civil society actors to hold government accountable to the SDG agenda through linkage to international human rights.

The mapping of the relation between SDGs and the international human rights system, can be seen here: [The Human Rights Guide to the Sustainable Development Goals | The Danish Institute for Human Rights](#)

Another important element in relation to social accountability and advocacy is the recognition that the SDGs will not be realized if states, civil society (including churches) and private sector are not cooperating and contributing jointly to their achievement. Thus, the SDGs represent a fundamental shift by explicitly acknowledging the need for close cooperation and partnership across societal sectors, where everyone plays an important role, and where everyone forms part of the solution (cf. SDG 17).

Civil society is thus also obliged to work for the achievement of the SDGs. You can do so by actively engaging in how the goals are domesticated into the national policy and development framework and by pushing for the establishment of accountability mechanisms for the SDG implementation and reporting, e.g. in the form of a multi-stakeholder forum where different actors jointly plan and monitor their performance and common results.



The SDG framework

The starting point for an effective focus on SDGs in advocacy and social accountability is a basic, solid knowledge of the goals and the framework they form part of. The SDG framework consists of the well-known 17 goals. Behind these goals we find not less than 169 targets and 232 indicators which are used to measure if the member states are able to make their contributions to achieve the global goals.

To exemplify the logic and hierarchy between Goals, targets and indicators let's take a look at SDG 2:



The goal reads: “End hunger, achieve food security and improve nutrition and promote agriculture”.

SDG 2 is supplemented by 8 targets that the member states are committed to reach by 2030. The targets represent the more specific achievements within nutrition, food production, genetic diversity, rural infrastructure, and trade and market information which collectively will contribute to reaching the goal.

As an example, one of the targets on food production explains explicitly what should be achieved, for who and how:

“By 2030, double the agricultural productivity and income of small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous people, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including thorough secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment” ¹.

¹ Target 2.3

In order to measure if targets are achieved [a global SDG indicator framework](#) provides the measures / indicators. In this case the indicators are:

1. Volume of production per labour unit by classes of farming/pastoral/forestry enterprise size, and
2. average income of small-scale food producers by sex and indigenous status.

[For more information on SDG 2 and the other goals click here.](#)

Goal achievement remains theoretical and hypothetical unless the goals, targets and indicators are domesticated and integrated in national policy and development frameworks.

How to influence the national SDG process?

Churches and church-based organizations have a role, even a significant role, in impacting the national SDG process towards a domestication of the SDGs and fulfillment of the goals. The most common ways to impact the national SDG process is by:

Raising awareness on the SDGs; i.e. ensuring public knowledge of the goals and create a public demand for their realization.

Conducting advocacy towards governments and local authorities to influence the domestication of the SDGs, including the implementation and financing of national policies and development plans supporting the realization of the SDGs.

Monitoring the national progress towards the fulfillment of the SDGs and linking them to international human rights system in order to hold governments and local authorities accountable for their commitment to the SDGs. Please note that advocacy and monitoring require a strategic approach in order to be effective.



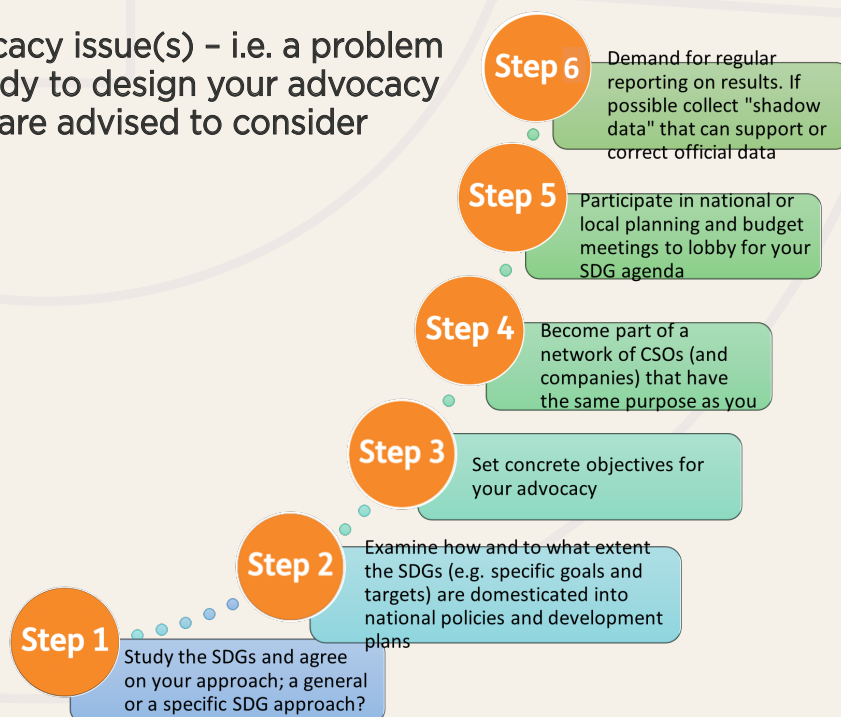
A strategy for advocacy and social accountability

To be effective in advocacy and social accountability you need to define a clear purpose and strategy for your interventions. When working with advocacy and social accountability in relation to the SDGs you can choose three different approaches:

1. A general all-inclusive SDG approach; aiming at creating general awareness on the SDGs and a general domestication of the SDGs into national policy and development framework for the benefit of the broader population, or
2. A specific and focused SDG approach; aiming at integrating specific SDGs or targets into specific policies and plans that are implemented for the benefit of a particular target group – typically a target group with whom you already work and have legitimacy with.
3. Linking specific targeted SDGs to the international human right system by reference to relevant conventions and articles as well as relevant human right recommendations and observations.

As a tool for creating change, advocacy is strategic process involving analysis and linkage to human rights, alliance building, lobbying and constructive engagement with decisionmakers to influence policies and development plans, resource allocation and implementation in favor of the SDGs.

Having formulated your advocacy issue(s) – i.e. a problem you aim to solve – you are ready to design your advocacy strategy. When doing so, you are advised to consider the following 6 steps:



By working systematically with advocacy and social accountability in relation to the SDGs the result can for example be an appropriate (e.g. a pro-poor) integration of one or more SDGs into a local development strategy and local budgets, or you can experience that the local authorities begin to document and publish their results in relation to the fulfill the SDGs.

Issues for advocacy

Advocacy is about seeing a problem and addressing it for the purpose of solving it!

The SDG Agenda presents problems at a very high level – poverty, hunger, poor education, gender inequity, environmental degradation, etc. – your task is to articulate the problems you experience in relation to the this agenda; for example:

- What does hunger look like in your community and what are the main reasons for food shortage; e.g. inefficient/unsustainable agricultural production or lack of title deeds to land?
- What is the impact of poor education in your local area and what does it mean in concrete terms; e.g. high proportion of the adult population without basic literacy and numeracy or many young people with poor job opportunities?
- What does gender inequality look like in your country and what are its concrete impacts on the lives of women and men respectively?
- What is the impact of climate change in the region and what does that mean in concrete terms such as drought and food access?

These problems and impacts must be articulated in ways that are rooted in local facts, data and evidence and made compelling with authentic and specific local stories.

**NOT
WITHOUT
AGENDA**



Monitoring progress towards the SDGs

Advocacy interventions should be followed by monitoring in order to track progress of governments and other duty-bearers (private sector and the civil society) in relation to the implementation of national policies and development plans and the realization of the global goals. By acting as watchdogs, churches and church-based organizations will contribute to the demand for accountability and be able to highlight areas where there are shortcomings in the implementation or financing of the SDGs.

Follow-up and review are key aspects of the SDG agenda and states are encouraged to put in place statistical systems, capacities, methodologies and mechanisms to monitor progress and ensure accountability in relation to the implementation of national policy and development plans. States are also encouraged to conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels. The voluntary reviews aim to facilitate the sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned, with a view to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. You can find information about the voluntary reviews and any reviews conducted in your country [here](#).

FOR FURTHER READING:

About the [SDGs](#)

About the [members compliance](#) with the SDGs

Localizing the SDGs: [tools and guides](#)

Examples of regional and international [movements contributing to the SDGs](#)

About specific SDGs of particular relevance to projects supported by DMCCD:

[Child protection](#)
[Agriculture](#)
[Gender equality](#)

