



INTERNATIONAL FORUM OF  
NATIONAL NGO PLATFORMS

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GUIDELINES FOR  
**CSO SHADOW REPORTS**  
MONITORING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF  
AGENDA 2030 AT NATIONAL LEVEL



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- The purpose of these guidelines is to assist CSOs in producing effective shadow reports to monitor their government's implementation of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development at a national level.
- These guidelines were developed by the IFP Secretariat with inputs from IFP members to help its members to achieve high quality participation in the Agenda 2030 monitoring process and to assist them to build their capacity for this work.
- These guidelines are not intended as a strict formula that must be followed. Much will depend on the resources available to CSOs who are interested in producing a Shadow Report. The document is intended as a helpful set of guidelines that can be drawn upon by CSOs who want to know how to develop and use their Shadow Reports so as to influence the implementation of Agenda 2030 in their countries.

## (A) WHY CIVIL SOCIETY SHOULD CONSIDER PRODUCING SHADOW REPORTS LINKED TO AGENDA 2030 MONITORING

- Governments are expected to **take the lead** in monitoring and reporting on progress made against each of the SDGs and targets. However, there are many opportunities for civil society organisations (CSOs) to participate either as part of the official review process, or independently through parallel reviews and shadow reports.
- CSOs are a crucial link between national concerns and international frameworks. They are important partners where public commitments made by states are concerned, because of their advocacy and monitoring activities. **Independent public scrutiny** by civil society of governments has the potential to make sure that reports of national level Agenda 2030 implementation provided by governments for national, regional and global-level monitoring are accurate. CSO shadow reports can also provide key findings and make recommendations for Agenda 2030 implementation at a national level.
- While some countries involve civil society in the VNR process and even include them in official VNR delegations at the HLPF, in many other countries civil society is **excluded from official processes**. CSO shadow reports become even more relevant and necessary in these contexts, so that the perspective of civil society can be provided.
- CSO involvement is also important because there are some **limitations in the official monitoring mechanisms**: (i) the inadequacy of the officially-selected indicators (ii) the unavailability of data for official indicators in many countries and (iii) questions around the credibility of data generated by government agencies.
- CSOs should strongly consider **working in coalition** to produce their shadow reports. A single shadow report supported by a large alliance or a collection of shadow reports submitted by a broader network is more powerful than scattered submissions by individual CSOs.

- Civil society shadow reports can expect to have some impact not just at a national level, but in regional and global forums in particular. National governments are usually keen to make a good impression in these forums, and to avoid having any shortcomings in implementing Agenda 2030 highlighted in the presence of other governments. This can give CSOs some **leverage with their governments**, and can lead to important concessions, linked to the VNR, being made to civil society.

## **(B) KEY ISSUES FOR CSOS TO CONSIDER WHEN UNDERTAKING SHADOW REPORTS:**

- **Fundraising** - Producing a CSO Shadow Report requires human and financial resources. It may be necessary, for example, to hire a consultant to work on more technical aspects of the report. It is important to secure the necessary finance and other resources early on. This can be done by approaching international or larger NGOs or philanthropic organisations to seek financial support. Alternatively, each CSO involved in producing the shadow report could make a financial contribution to cover the costs involved.
- **Preparation** - It is important to start the preparation of the shadow report in time. A comprehensive civil society shadow report which monitors Agenda 2030 implementation at the national level, and which involves numerous CSOs can take between 3-6 months to produce from start to finish. This depends on the number of people involved and the amount of time that they can spend working on the report. It is safer to assume a 6-month period for the overall production of the Shadow Report, which should be ready to share with other stakeholders approximately 1-2 months before the UN HLPF in July.
- **Core Team** - Conducting a joint project involving multiple CSOs can be a real challenge. A collective effort to develop a CSO shadow report will probably require one or a few organizations to form a Core Team. This team should take the lead (at least in the early stages) and do some advance planning, including identifying potential partners with the necessary expertise. It is important to make sure that expertise in all of the key aspects of sustainable development (Social, Environmental, Economic and Governance) is present in the Core Team. This should make sure that the CSO Shadow Report is coherent and balanced.
- **Partners** - It is important from early on to identify other organizations or experts who might be interested in collaborating on the report or in “signing on” to the shadow report once it is completed.
- **Goals and scope** - It is important to be clear about the goals of the shadow report and to clarify its scope from the outset. Many CSOs do not have the capacity to carry out a full assessment of the implementation of all 17 SDGs. The role of national CSO development platforms can be very important in this regard. Some platforms have developed shadow/spotlight reports by sending a short survey to their members asking for each organisation’s assessment of the progress made by its government in implementing the SDGs in their particular area of concern, backed up by facts or data if possible. This information is then collated and forms the basis of the CSO Shadow/Spotlight report. One of the best ways to make a Shadow Report effective with limited time and resources available is to decide on a limited number of key messages or priority areas to highlight for the country in question. From this it should be possible to build the data and narrative of the report.
- **Data and information** - It is important to ensure that the report contains data and information which is credible, relevant and up-to-date. Focus on qualitative as well as quantitative data. For example, qualitative data such as interviews with individuals who have expert knowledge in specific areas can be a good way of filling information gaps that might exist because of the lack of both independent reports and statistical data on a given subject. It is important to identify experts who both have an in-depth knowledge of the relevant subject areas and who are, at the same time, unlikely to be affected by affiliation with the government or a political party. Also consider other sources of information for the shadow report including focus groups, thematic discussions with relevant stakeholders, media reports, responses to written questions to authorities, structured surveys and case studies. See the following link for more information on data (<http://civicus.org/thedatashift/>)

- **Be clear and brief** - It is important for CSO shadow reports to be clear and brief, as this is likely to be appreciated by those who read the shadow report. Instead of including long explanations in the report, reference can be made and links provided to reports which provide more detail or evidence, and supplementary information can be provided in annexes to the report.
- **Neutral & balanced style** - The report should try to be balanced - reflecting both positive and negative aspects, and should adopt a practical style using neutral language. The report must not contain unfounded statements which are not supported by facts or documents, especially if statements relate to particular individuals or legal entities. Such statements should be verified by using several sources. The report should contain references to the information sources used.
- **Rating your government's performance** - The report should try to find a consistent approach to rating your government's success in implementing different aspects of the Agenda 2030. For example, some shadow reports use the visual aid of a "traffic light system" for evaluating government performance in different areas. The use of a green light indicates positive progress, an orange light indicates intermediate progress and a red light indicates little or no progress at all. Alternatively, the shadow report might use a simple rating scale for different areas such as (i) Substantive action taken, (ii) Initial Action Taken, and (iii) No Action Taken.
- **Concrete, realistic and action-oriented recommendations** - CSO shadow reports should avoid focusing exclusively on the shortcomings of governments where Agenda 2030 implementation at a national level is concerned. Furthermore, general or sweeping statements are difficult for governments to respond to, and easy for them to ignore. The reports should make constructive recommendations about how progress on the national implementation of Agenda 2030 should be achieved. Recommendations should be concrete, realistic, and action oriented. It is useful to suggest practical and realistic solutions and, where appropriate, time frames for their implementation and the specific body that should be responsible.
- **Value of civil society engagement** - Shadow reports can be used to showcase the value of civil society engagement, demonstrate good practice in civil society collaboration and reinforce its commitment to implementation. Civil society shadow reports should make it clear that civil society is a supportive partner and important stakeholder in Agenda 2030 implementation. It should demonstrate this with examples of the activities that civil society will be undertaking to deliver the Agenda 2030 either independently, alongside other stakeholders, or in partnership with government.
- **Language of report** - In addition to providing a CSO shadow report in the national language, translating the report into one of the official UN languages (such as English, Spanish and/or French for example) will ensure its wider dissemination. Alternatively, it may be possible to submit the shadow report in the national language, and to make an executive summary available in one, or all of the UN working languages.
- **Executive Summary & Annexes** - CSO shadow reports should have an Executive Summary at the beginning, highlighting the main issues raised and the report's most important conclusions and recommendations. The Executive Summary should not be longer than 2 pages. It is better to include the most important information in the body of the report, while supporting information and materials should be included as annexes to the report.
- **Dissemination** - Make sure the final report can be uploaded and disseminated online - shadow reports from civil society should be published as stand-alone, downloadable documents that can be easily shared and disseminated online.

## (C) REALISING THE TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL OF AGENDA 2030

Although many people refer to Agenda 2030 as "the SDGs" there is more to it than just the 17 goals and 169 targets. The Agenda 2030 also includes a Declaration and Preamble which set out key principles which reflect its transformative potential.

**These principles include:**

**Universality** - the agenda applies to all countries - not just some.

**Integration** - the importance of adopting an integrated approach to different policy areas and coming out of “policy silos”.

**Inter-linkages** - recognising the important inter-linkages between different policy areas.

**Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development** - ensuring that different goals and policy areas are approached in a way that makes sure that progress in one goal area does not serve to undermine progress in other goal areas.

**Leave No One Behind** - paying particular attention to fully involving vulnerable and marginalised groups.

**Respecting Planetary Boundaries** - recognising the natural limits of our ecosystems, natural resources and the global atmosphere.

**Inter-generational Justice** - protecting the interests of future as well as present generations.

It is very important that CSO shadow reports monitor the extent to which these principles have been respected in practice by governments in their implementation of the Agenda 2030 at a national level. The development of suitable indicators and innovative methodologies to measure the implementation of these principles is a challenge currently faced by civil society.

## (D) EXAMPLES OF CSO SHADOW REPORTS:

There is no standard template for a CSO shadow report. There are many different options for the structure and content of CSO shadow reports which attempt to monitor national implementation of Agenda 2030. As the agenda was adopted in late 2015, CSOs are continuing to innovate and experiment with how best to design their shadow reports.

See some examples below:

### (i) Diverse civil society reports

1. Bangladesh Civil Society Report [here](#)
2. Chile (In Spanish only) <http://proyectoasocia2030.cl/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Informe-Luz-Asocia2030-finalow.pdf>

3. Finland: [https://www.kepa.fi/sites/kepa.fi/tiedostot/julkaisut/KEPA\\_Finland-and-the-2030Agenda\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.kepa.fi/sites/kepa.fi/tiedostot/julkaisut/KEPA_Finland-and-the-2030Agenda_FINAL.pdf)
4. India Civil Society Report [here](#)
5. Japan: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/OBxbtK2dVB113NkM5cFdpMjNTTEk/view>
6. Nepal Civil Society Report [here](#)
7. Peru (in Spanish only) <http://ifp-fip.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Informe.-Estudio-Linea-Base-sobre-la-imp-lementaci%C3%B3n-de-la-Agenda-2030-vf-1.pdf>

### (ii) Action for Sustainable Development resources:

Action for Sustainable Development (A4SD) is a global civil society platform that engages with the Sustainable Development Agenda. Its members come together to inspire and commit to actions that empower all peoples, especially those who have been marginalised; and to collectively tackle the root causes of inequality, injustice, poverty, environmental degradation and climate change. It wants a world where social and environmental development justice is assured and all people are able to live in a prosperous, healthy and peaceful environment. This platform aims to raise awareness, build a community, hold governments accountable and share knowledge on the new agenda.

A4SD has developed a template with questions to guide CSO preparing shadow reports ahead of HLPF See link: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1yozPeFSbbuEEF4uBxyTVxonrLxi-4GH6lxLcL3aHx5o/edit>

See examples of CSO responses to the A4SD guiding questions. These can be found on the website of A4SD: <https://action4sd.org>

Individual Civil Society Country Reports and Reflections for the 2016 and 2017 High Level Political Forum can be found here: <https://action4sd.org/tools-resources> (reports from 2018 will also be uploaded soon)

### (iii) A TAP Network resource:

The Transparency, Accountability & Participation (TAP) Network is a broad network of CSOs that works to ensure that open, inclusive, accountable, effective governance and peaceful societies are at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and

that civil society is recognized and mobilized as an indispensable partner in the design, implementation of and accountability for sustainable development policies, at all levels. The TAP Network engages some of the foremost expert organizations on the issues around Goal 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals to “promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.”

See below the TAP network’s Proposed Outline for Structure of CSO Shadow Reports (Goal 16). This is one of the most complete resources available regarding shadow reports. These guidelines can be slightly modified so that they apply to all 17 SDGs: [http://tapnetwork2030.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/TAPPaperonSDG16Reporting\\_ThirdDraft\\_Print.pdf](http://tapnetwork2030.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/TAPPaperonSDG16Reporting_ThirdDraft_Print.pdf)

## **(E) KEY STEPS TO FOLLOW WHEN PREPARING AND PRODUCING A SHADOW REPORT**

1. Form a Core Co-ordination Team
  2. Identify, conduct outreach to, and secure potential partners
  3. Identify and pursue fundraising opportunities to resource the development, publication and dissemination of the shadow report
  4. Agree the roles, responsibilities and expectations of each partner
  5. Agree the aims, scope and structure of the shadow report
  6. Develop a Work Plan with clear stages of preparation of the report, actions, timelines and persons responsible
  7. Gather the information for the report. Keep track of the sources of information. Focus on qualitative as well as quantitative data
  8. Set up a report-writing team and draft the report
  9. Develop a “Conclusions & Recommendations” section and an Executive Summary in the final stages of report writing
  10. Ask key stakeholders or other people to review and comment on the draft report
  11. Ask partners and allies to approve and “sign on” to the final draft of the report
  12. Get Approval/endorsement by wide number of national CSO’s. Once the report is finalised, circulate it widely among all types of CSOs and get their signatures/endorsement
  13. Consider issuing the report in the name of a CSO SDG coalition/alliance. In this way individual CSOs will limit the risk of being directly identified with a report that may be perceived as being critical of the performance of government in certain areas
  14. Consider sharing the report with your government in advance – depending on your CSO’s relationship with Government, you may want to consider sharing the report with it in advance of the UN HLPF. It may be possible to negotiate with government concerning issues to do with follow-up mechanisms for SDG monitoring post HLPF
  15. Develop communications and advocacy plans linked to the shadow report when it is ready to be publicly shared
  16. Make sure the CSO shadow report is available online and that it can be disseminated electronically
  17. Organise an official launch of the report and invite government ministers and civil servants to respond to its findings
  18. Use the report as an organizing opportunity in the community after it is completed, such as planning a “local hearing”
  19. Use the CSO report as a baseline for the monitoring and implementation of SDGs in your country for the future, as part of an ongoing and continuous process
- \*To learn more about the Voluntary National Reviews processes, download the IFP’s briefing note on “All you need to know about the VNR process!”
- \*To see if your NGO is Ready to Monitor and Implement the SDGs, download the Checklist for CSOs engaged in SDG implementation at a national level developed by the IFP. Both documents are available at: <http://ifp-fip.org/en/sections/resources>

## WE'RE REBRANDING

The International Forum for National NGO Platforms, widely known as IFP-FIP, is undergoing a rebranding exercise and will be called Forus starting in September 2018. The new name and branding aims to better reflect the purpose and ambition of the network and its members. The new strapline “Connect Support Influence” describe the key aims and activities of the network.



Becomes





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-  IFP - International Forum of National NGO Platforms

The International Forum of National NGO Platforms (IFP) is a member-led network of 64 national NGO platforms and 6 regional coalitions from all continents representing over 22,000 NGOs active locally and internationally on development, human rights and environmental issues.

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