UN HLPF SIDE EVENT: CIVIL SOCIETY'S ROLE IN PROMOTING PEACEFUL, JUST AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES

During the 2021 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), DCAF and the Costa Rican Permanent Mission to the UN hosted a virtual side event to highlight the important role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in implementing SDG16, and in holding their governments accountable for their commitments to SDG16 and the wider 2030 Agenda. Members of CSOs from three countries (Mexico, South Africa, and the Philippines) showcased how they have directly contributed to SDG16 and promoted more peaceful, just and inclusive societies. The recordings of the webinar in English and Spanish can be found on DCAF's YouTube channel.

Opening Remarks:

- ❖ **Ambassador Rodrigo Carazo**, Permanent Representative of Costa Rica to the United Nations
- ❖ **Ambassador Thomas Guerber**, Director of DCAF
- ❖ **Lex Gerts**, Deputy Director of the Department for Stabilization and Humanitarian Aid, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands

Speakers:

- ❖ **Louise Edwards**, Director of Programmes and Research, African Policing Civilian Oversight Forum (APCOF), South Africa
- ❖ **Teresita Quintos Deles**, Founding Trustee of INCITEgov, The Philippines
- ❖ **Danae Peña**, Co-Programs Director, Centro de Colaboración Cívica (CCC), Mexico, representing GPPAC-North America
- ❖ **Alexandra Preperier**, Research Assistant, DCAF

Moderator:

- ❖ **William McDermott**, Project Coordinator, DCAF

About the HLPF:

The High-Level Political Forum is the global hub for the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda. Held annually, it brings together government representatives, international organizations, civil society, and private sector actors, thus representing an important platform to provide political leadership and to share lessons learnt, best practices and guidance for the realization of the SDGs. The focus of this year's HLPF was on the "sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic".

Linkages of SDG16 and other SDGs

The 2030 Agenda offers an enormous transformative potential. Intrinsic to this agenda is the recognition of security as a crucial enabler for peace and development – with SDG16 highlighting that good governance principles are imperative for the achievement of its own targets but also for other goals, such as Goals 5, 11 and 13.

SDG13 on Climate Action

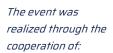Danae Peña highlighted the potential of the Escazú Agreement to link efforts of good governance with SDG13 on climate change. The regional agreement concerning the access to information, public participation, and justice in environmental matters in Latin America and the Caribbean came into force in April 2021. Compliance with the agreement can advance states on several SDG16 targets, such as inclusive decision-making (16.7), reduced corruption (16.5), better access to information (16.10) and the overall ability of environmental defenders to protest without repercussions and violence (16.1). Danae Peña emphasized that 2020 was one of the most difficult years for environmental defenders. Intensified action on the linkage between SDG13 and SDG16 is vital to ensure that people feel safe enough to stand up for their rights and interests.

SDG5 on Gender Equality

As the UNSCR1325 demonstrates, issues of peace and security are also inherently linked to SDG5 on Gender Equality. Teresita Quintos Deles shared some good practices from her many years of experience regarding the inclusion of women in peace processes and security governance. Referring to the Bangsamoro peace process, she highlighted the importance of having women in key positions, for example as chief peace negotiator and legal counsel. She also outlined the benefits of providing *women, peace and security* trainings to members of the armed forces and to create safe spaces for women in uniform. Furthermore, she argued that female soldiers should join interagency bodies with their civilian counterparts and actively seek interaction with civil society. All these measures at the interface of SDG5 and SDG16 can significantly improve security sector governance and reform (SSG/R) and have become even more important during the COVID-19 pandemic, as she highlighted in a recent contribution to a book calling for a feminist response and recovery plan.

SDG11 on Sustainable Cities and Communities

Civilian protest in urban areas and the subsequent deployment of military forces has been visible in many countries, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Obstacles to safe cities are diverse. Rapid urbanization and informal settlements can lead to the failure of traditional policing methods. Louise Edwards emphasized that if we do not address factors driving insecurity in urban areas, we will fail to achieve multiple targets of SDG16, for instance, on reduced violence (16.1) and access to justice (16.3). Policies need to take account of the multi-sectoral dimensions of urban safety and address gaps in health care (SDG3), education (SDG4) and other areas to reduce inequality (SDG10).

Study on Voluntary National Reviews:

Each year at the HLPF, around 40-50 states present their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). These are integral to the follow-up and review framework of the 2030 Agenda. During the webinar, DCAF launched a study that entails a systematic content analysis of 152 VNRs submitted between 2016–2019, undertaken with the aim to better understand whether existing reports refer to SSG/R. The publication and main findings can be found here.

CSO's activities to achieve SDG16

Ambassador Rodrigo Carazo emphasized that civil society is an indispensable stakeholder in the creation of a social contract and for the realization of the 2030 Agenda. There are a variety of ways in which civil society contributes to implementation of the SDGs and hold governments accountable to their commitments.

Indicator Development

CSOs can assist governmental institutions in the development of national and local SDG indicators. Louise Edwards, referring to APCOF's work with Statistics South Africa, stressed that the involvement of expertise from civil society can ensure that measurements of SDG16 reflect the needs of communities instead of generic indicators. Furthermore, this measuring and monitoring by civil society can be the basis to lobby for political action. CSOs may also enhance the inclusivity of these processes by creating (online) tools to increase the number and variety of CSOs and other stakeholders contributing to the monitoring process.

Drafting of Civil Society Reports

While states represent their VNRs at the HLPF, civil society can also turn the spotlight on specific issues by writing their reports. Based on her own experience, Danae Peña advised other CSOs to "just try". For the report on Mexico's efforts to implement SDG13, her organization CCC surveyed a variety of academics, civil society actors, and private sector stakeholders. Such reports benefit from diverse voices with multi-sectoral backgrounds and should integrate a gender focus. She pointed out that such a dialogue is important to improve the progress on the 2030 Agenda to collectively achieve its goals. Teresita Quintos Deles further noted the need for fair reporting to find a receptive audience. In order to increase the outreach of such reports, CSOs should put effort in making them accessible to a wider audience by making them easily understandable, by including infographics, and by sharing them through social media.

Capacity Building

The meaningful engagement of civil society is often grounded in substantive knowledge and capacity in the area. Teresita Quintos Deles recounted her efforts to initiate study groups for civil society actors in order to push for women's participation in the field of security sector oversight. She also highlighted that military educational institutions offer an entry point for advocacy efforts of CSOs to promote peaceful, just and inclusive societies.

Network Creation

All three speakers emphasized the importance of networking and collaborating with other CSOs to advance their causes and avoid the duplication of efforts. CSOs should also seek allies in other oversight bodies, such as legislators, ombuds institutions and local governments. As local participation can be severely affected by the digital divide, Teresita Quintos Deles shared a good practice, which involves the creation small watch parties of INCITEgov's town hall meetings among neighbors.

Further Information:

This webinar is part of DCAF's SDG16 project, which aims to position SSG/R as a policy tool at the national and international levels for the realization of SDG 16. It focusses on the three main oversight actors, namely parliaments, civil society actors and independent oversight institutions. It develops SDG16-specific guidance that supports the work of SSG/R in the context of the 2030 Agenda. This project is funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

More information can be found on www.dcaf.ch/SDG16 .