

# 8 HOW ENVIRONMENTAL CSOs CAN USE THE SDGs

**The preamble of the 2030 agenda declaration states that ‘we are determined to protect the planet from degradation... so that it can support the needs of present and future generations’. This is motivated by the recognition of the growing environmental deterioration and the realisation that in order to guarantee a sustainable future, humanity has to take its environmental boundaries into account.**

Countries are expected and encouraged to integrate the environmental with the economic and social dimensions. In doing so they should actively work together with civil society organizations (CSOs) and other stakeholders. In the first three years since the beginning of the agenda, 111 Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) of the advance in the implementation of the SDGs were presented at the High Level Political Forum (HLPF). Another 51 are due to be presented in 2019. This response reveals that the 2030 agenda is gaining importance in the national and international spheres.

At least 50% out of the 169 targets that make up the 17 SDGs are environmental. This shows a high level of commitment. However, the question is what the opportunities and obligations of the CSOs working in the environmental sector are.

At this moment, environmental organizations are underrepresented in the 2030 Agenda context. This is probably related to the fact that the SDGs follow the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), where the focus was on development rather than on environment. Besides this, many environmental organizations believe the SDGs are less strong than other already agreed international environmental agreements and do not see their added-value in their work.

However, momentum is building for the SDGs and there is a global commitment towards their achievement. This represents a big deal of opportunities for environmental organizations as they could align their specific goals and work with the SDGs and make suggestions that are aligned with the government’s obligation to meet SDGs and associated targets. Aligning with the SDGs could add international legitimacy to their claims. No matter which environmental issue they are dealing with, there is likely to be a target and/or an indicator that they can refer to when formulating demands to policymakers or presenting projects. The SDGs are a useful global agenda to address a multitude of local and topical issues.

Furthermore, it gives environmental organizations the opportunity to look for synergies and collaboration with organizations working in the development sector and leave the silo working style behind. An expert panel explains how the two sectors can work together and suggest [12 ways environment and development sectors can collaborate to meet the SDGs](#) in an article in The Guardian. They highlight that environment and development should think as one sector, develop trust and use the SDGs as a checklist among others.

It is important to remember that the agenda was adopted as a non-binding UN resolution and unless organizations advocate for it,

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it won't go far. Furthermore, environmental organizations need to work to ensure that the environment does not remain of secondary concern for the international community.

The environmental sector needs to analyse the SDGs not only in light of their relation and potential synergies with their activities, projects, campaigns, but also with previous multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs). It is relevant to define how the implementation of the SDGs and of the MEAs can be mutually supportive processes. Many organisations have undertaken comprehensive exercises to identify the linkages between the SDGs and MEAs. One such document is the [Draft on implementing the environment dimension of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development](#), prepared for the UN Environment Management Group. The document concludes that Member States' strong commitments to achieve the SDGs can help mainstream the environmental objectives in the areas for which they were established. MEAs can also benefit from the political momentum and the limelight on the

importance of the sustainable management of the planet's natural resource for inclusive sustainable growth and people's well-being.

## Why are 2018 and 2019 key SDG years for environmental organizations?

The review of the progress on each of the 17 SDGs (and the potential to influence the 2030 agenda) is spread out over three years. The peak year for the environmental movement is 2019. The topic in 2018 was Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies. This included a review of SDGs 6, 7, 11, 12, 15 and 17. All of them are environmental goals. The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2018, containing the in depth analysis of this SDGs can be found [here](#).

In 2019 The theme will be Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality. The goals to be reviewed in depth are: SDGs 4, 8, 10, 13, 16 and 17. More information on Thematic SDG Reviews can be found [here](#).

## RESOURCES

[SDG toolkit: Inspire Me](#)

[SDG toolkit: Get Started](#)

[Sustainable Development 2015: Advocacy Toolkit](#)

[Sustainable Development Strategies - From Design to Monitoring: Civil Society's Role](#)

[UN Environmental Management Group: Nexus Dialogue series](#)

[UN Environment Management Group: Delivering on the environmental dimensions of the 2030 Agenda](#)

[Capacity4dev.eu: An Integrated Environmental Approach to the SDGs](#)

[UN Environment](#)

