



SDG16+ STORYTELLING INITIATIVE

CIVIL SOCIETY DRIVING CHANGE FOR SDG16+



Alliance for
Peacebuilding



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2030 Agenda

KEY TAKEAWAYS: SDG16+ STORYTELLING INITIATIVE

In 2025, the Alliance for Peacebuilding (AfP), the Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (CSPPS), Forus International, and the Transparency, Accountability and Participation (TAP) Network launched the SDG16+ Storytelling Initiative to strengthen local civil society's capacity for storytelling as a tool to advance peacebuilding, justice, and the implementation of SDG16+ (peaceful, just, and inclusive societies). This brief captures insights from three webinar workshops the initiative hosted throughout the year:

Initiative Launch
Webinar

Joint Narratives &
Interlinkages

Storytelling in
Restricted
Environments

Why does storytelling matter?

Across the workshops, speakers emphasized that stories are essential to making SDG16+ and peace feel concrete and understandable. Speakers noted that facts and statistics rarely change people's minds, but **stories are vehicles that can deliver such information to change ways of thinking, especially for complex topics relevant to SDG16+, such as peace, conflict, and justice.** Further, stories can offer **qualitative data that support the evidence base for the issues enshrined in SDG16+.** Storytelling can simplify complicated ideas to cure "information overload" and be tailored to different social and political contexts for diverse audiences, while also sparking innovation by sharing lessons learned across them.

Four Core Challenges to Storytelling

LACK OF DEDICATED FUNDING

Many organizations **lack dedicated funding and resources to elevate storytelling** within or about their work. Storytelling is rarely an explicitly and intentionally funded component of SG16+-related projects. Local actors typically do not have the staff, resources, and digital infrastructure to elevate their storytelling.

Yet, donor metrics that define success for storytelling efforts typically draw on engagement such as reach, clicks, and views, which privilege scale and visibility over depth and care. These expectations pressure organizations to produce sensational or even risky content to meet donor targets.

CHALLENGES FOR WOMEN & GIRLS

Digital environments present particular challenges for women and girls telling their story of SDG16+ work, especially due to **technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV): the use of digital media to commit, assist, or worsen violence based on gender.**

Women and girls, especially women peacebuilders and human rights defenders, are frequently victims of doxxing, image-based abuse, and digital harassment. This phenomenon not only undermines the capacity of women and women-led organizations to carry out successful storytelling but also brings about a chilling effect on civic space, governance, and peace and stability.

RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENTS

Organizations working on SDG16+ issues often operate within restrictive environments where they exist under surveillance and censorship and must carefully filter what they say or post publicly to avoid harm. And local peacebuilders, human rights defenders, and other civic actors often do not have access to adequate legal resources to protect themselves when targeted.

"TRANSLATING" SDG16+

Many organizations **struggle to "translate" the language of SDG16+ for outside sectors and audiences.** Technical jargon can make SDG16+ seem confusing and irrelevant to other sectors, such as health, while also alienating everyday audiences who could lay the foundation for a broad-based movement that supports and generates political will for SDG16+.

BEST PRACTICES FOR STORYTELLERS, WHETHER A LOCAL ACTOR, AN INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION, OR SOME OTHER STAKEHOLDER

LOCALLY-LED

When amplifying a local actor's story, or telling that story on behalf of a local actor, **utilize participatory and locally-led storytelling methods** to ensure communities shape how their stories are framed, shared, and used.

Avoid giving local organizations—as the “storyowners”—more work, and actively think through how amplifying local SDG16+ stories benefits the local actors.

The initiative's workshops surfaced a set of best practices and recommendations to ensure effective, inclusive, and targeted storytelling that advances SDG16+, with implications for international organizations, local actors, donors, and policymakers.

SAFETY FIRST

Take precautions to **avoid taking advantage of marginalized voices**, including thorough consideration for safety and risk assessment.

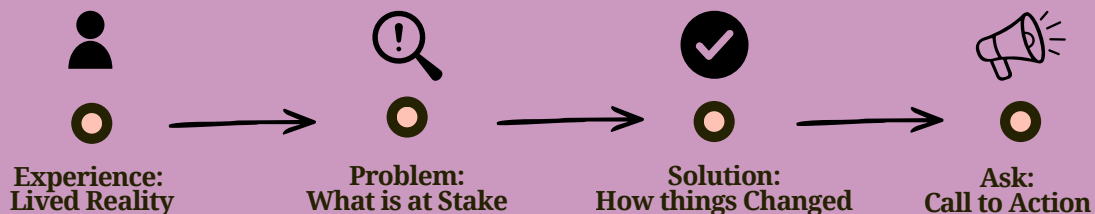
Any actor or organization that amplifies local SDG16+ stories must be sure that the “owners” of those stories fully understand potential risks, get explicit authorization from local actors to share stories, and be ready to take down content quickly if needed. Being **sensitive and deliberate with the wording of issues** that could mean different things in different contexts must be considered, while being careful not to put local actors in danger (such as in environments where civic space is restricted).

ROLE OF NETWORKS

Leverage civil society networks that can be especially helpful in amplifying stories and protecting storytellers and owners. Collective storytelling through global civil society networks increases visibility, legitimacy, and safety, especially in shrinking civic spaces.

NARRATIVE ARC FOR STORYTELLING

Effective stories utilize a clear narrative arc that leads to action:



TAILORED FRAMING

Compelling storytelling **tailors language, tone, framing, format, and emphasis for different audiences** (such as impacted communities, donors, policymakers, UN actors, and the private sector), while maintaining the integrity of the lived experience.

For example, for community audiences, rely on visuals and simple phrasing written in the local language. For donors and policymakers, use more technical terminology and translation.

With this, **storytelling can call in different audiences to spur collective action** that advances SDG16+ objectives.

CONSENT & RELATIONSHIPS

Pay close attention to relationships between the storyteller, owner, and receiver. Tellers must ensure they have consent from the owner to tell the story and **respect privacy, safety, and the story's integrity**. Storytellers must avoid re-traumatizing receivers with content by using trauma-informed, gender-sensitive approaches that center agency.

Owner



The Owner is whose story happened. It does not have to be the teller.

Teller



The teller is the person who tells the story (an organization or individual)

Receiver



The receiver is the recipient or the intended audience.

BEST PRACTICES & RECOMMENDATIONS

For policymakers:

- **Uphold and promote storytelling as a recognized data source** by enshrining it in laws and policy frameworks relevant to SDG16+.
 - Integrate lessons and data provided through storytelling into the implementation of laws and policies, especially as a means of **bolstering quantitative data and creating a self-sustaining narrative** that creates widespread support for SDG16+.
- **Institutionalize rigorous data protection policies** in programs and funding provided to ensure the safety of local actors, especially those facing disproportionate risks such as women peacebuilders, human rights defenders, and journalists.
- **Recognize the valuable qualitative data in stories within policy frameworks.** Across issues in the SDG16+ nexus, such as peacebuilding, justice, human rights, and accountable institutions, gathering quantitative data can be incredibly difficult. The stories of lived experiences offer insights that data alone cannot capture or measure.

For donors:

- **Provide dedicated resources for storytelling and communications** efforts, including for communications staff, resources, and tools, so that stories can advance organizations' advocacy, fundraising, and program objectives.
- **Strategically invest in storytelling** by linking it with program objectives, activities, and outcomes.
- Support and invest in **building storytelling and information ecosystems**, including investing in local writers, journalists, translators, and creatives, particularly women and women-led organizations.
- Avoid quantitative storytelling metrics and instead **acknowledge the inherent value of stories for learning.**

“DO YOU HAVE A
STORY TO TELL ABOUT
YOUR WORK?”

Scan the QR code, [click here](#) or contact colleagues at TAP, CSPPS, AfP, or Forus to share your story for a forthcoming compendium!

