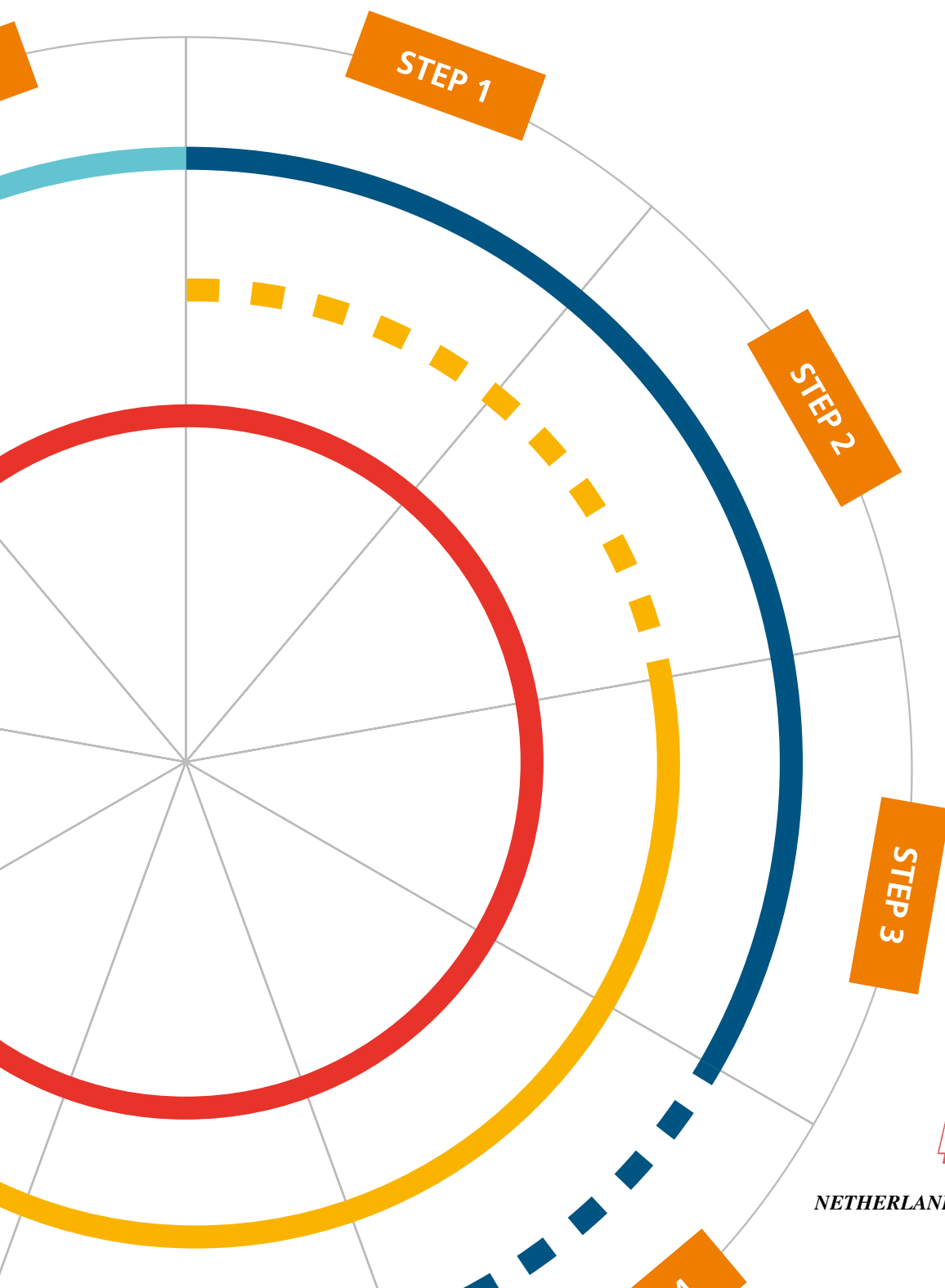


The Human Rights Alternative Reporting Cycle

Practical tips and tricks to strengthen the quality
and impact of your human rights alternative
reporting to the United Nations



NETHERLANDS HELSINKI COMMITTEE

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*The Human Rights Alternative Reporting Cycle
has been developed by the Netherlands Helsinki Committee*

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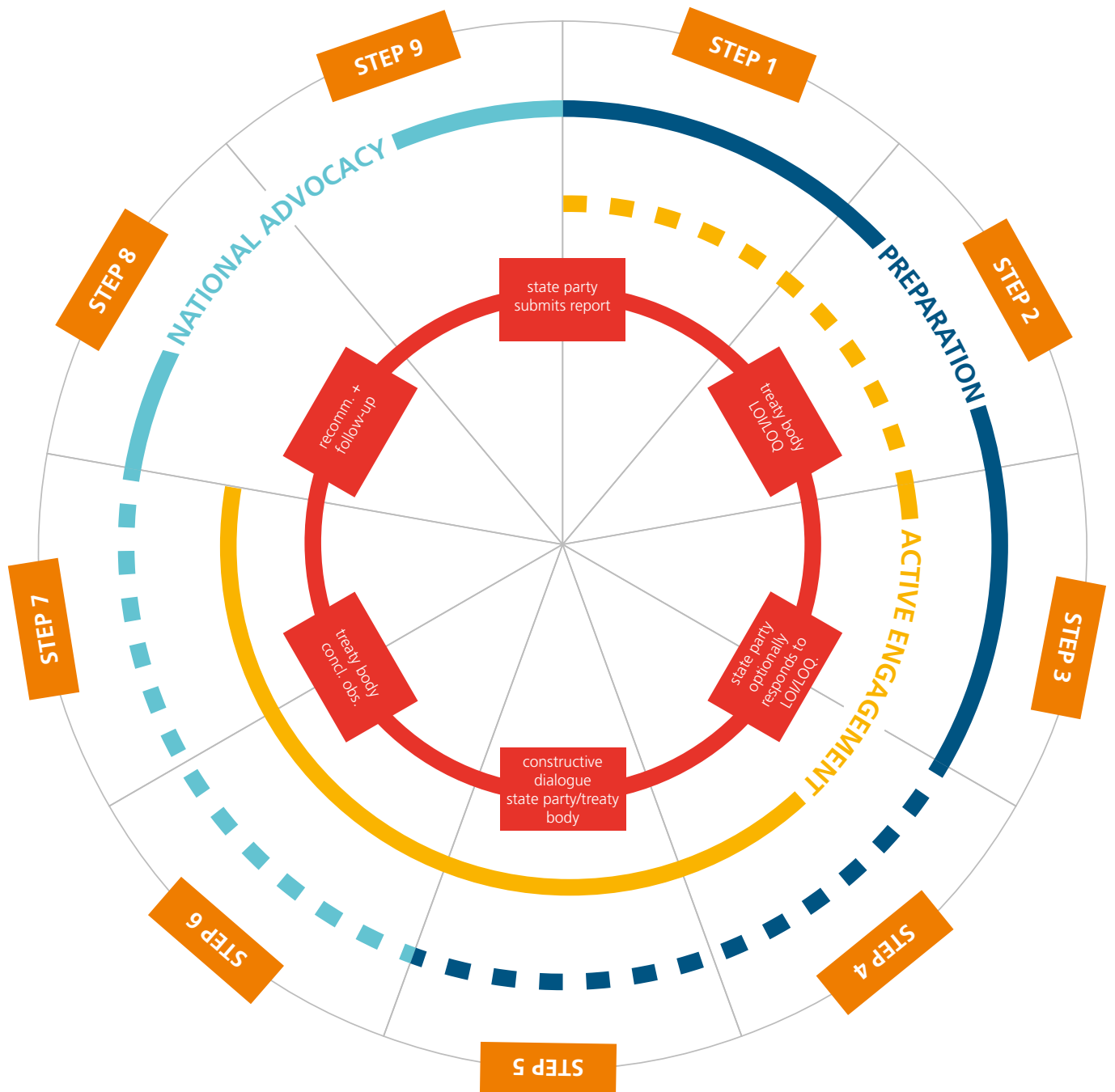


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This manual is written in the context of the project: 'Countering discrimination of women and children and promoting their rights by changing social and economic policies in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan'.

The project focuses on advocacy for rights-based policy making. One element of the advocacy strategy in both countries was advocacy through the United Nations system. Besides support from various experts and coaching, the partners were trained in the development process and use of shadow reports (or alternative reports) to UN treaty bodies. That training, held in October 2013 in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, was the basis for this manual. It was conducted mainly by Loeky Drogen and partly by NHC manager Jan de Vries (the authors of this manual). The participants to the training highly appreciated the practical take on the reporting process and the overview of the process in clear and concrete steps. This was symbolised in the training by literally building a wall with posters of steps and coloured cards indicating different types of tips, tricks and challenges.

The overall management of the project was done by Netherlands Helsinki Committee with the support of local partners. In Kyrgyzstan the project is managed by the Child Rights Defender's League. Other partners from Kyrgyzstan are: Childhood Institute, Promotion Alternatives and Advocacy Network for Children. In Tajikistan the project is managed by Public Foundation Nota Bene. Other partners from Tajikistan are: Foundation Your Choice, Child Rights Centre and Human Rights Centre.

These organisations provided the inspiration and essential input for this manual.

The project is funded through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands in the context of their Human Rights Fund. We thank them for their financial support to this project and this manual.

The manual has been designed by Ilze van Roover and Saskia Wilbrink at Piraña graphic design from the Netherlands. Especially with such a manual design it is crucial to focus the reader's attention on

that what s/he really wants to know and needs to know. We thank Ilze and Saskia for their pro-active attitude during the design process and the great result.

In terms of content we want to thank those who read the manual and provided us with the necessary feedback to make it more readable and understandable. As noted above the partners from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have been involved, but other people gave their expertise and input to the manual as well, including Sille Jansen, Sebastiaan van der Zwaan and Tim van der Maarel.

Loeky and Jan both have been involved in various shadow reporting processes and understand therefore the importance of keeping an overview of the process and the potential impact of small tips and tricks on the outcome of the advocacy process. In the case of Loeky and Jan, as well as with the partners in the project, it has very much been about a learning by doing process. This is reflected as much as possible in the manual.

The manual is not complete and it can not be. We do invite you to send your feedback and suggestions for other tips and tricks to:

Jan de Vries, *Deputy Director NHC*
Loeky Drogen, *Consultant Human Rights*

1 About the Human Rights Alternative Reporting Cycle

1.1 Background

There is always a moment at the end of a training when the room needs to be cleaned. Posters are taken down, cards are removed from walls and so on. At the end of a training on 'shadow reporting' in Bishkek with participants from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, a whole wall was plastered with columns and rows of post-its and card of different colours. The columns were steps in the process of advocating with shadow reports, while the rows indicated different issues to think of (communication, content, management, challenges etc...).

SHADOW REPORT OR ALTERNATIVE REPORT

In this manual, we use both the terms shadow report and alternative report. Both terms refer to the same thing. The term shadow report is commonly used by Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs), while the official term used by the United Nations (UN) is alternative report. Both mean the report(s) produced by NGOs as an alternative and additional source of information for UN treaty bodies to the State report.

As trainers, we, Loeky Droesen and Jan de Vries, felt it was a shame to tear down the collected expertise. And all the participants were busy copying the contents and making photos. Participants, all of them, indicated they knew about shadow reporting and knew about bits and pieces of the information on the wall, but had never seen such a complete overview. This presentation had opened their eyes, as well as our eyes. We then decided it would be extremely useful to explore the possibility of replicating the wall in the form of a small booklet.

While exploring the opportunities to make the information on the wall in Bishkek available to others (especially to Russian speaking organisations such as the Kyrgyz and Tajik organisations involved in the NHC project), we looked into other similar guides and manuals on human rights reporting. We concluded that though many guides on the UN advocacy process have some elements of what is presented in this manual, none focuses on the practical tips and tricks as this manual does. Many manuals are also quite technical in nature and rather long. This is why we decided to start

writing this manual that has become: **The Human Rights Alternative Reporting Cycle**.

1.2 Introduction

The manual focuses on the United Nations treaty body reporting process from a Non Governmental Organisation (NGO) perspective. The manual breaks down the process of writing a shadow report in smaller steps. Each step comes with specific issues NGOs should think about and tips and tricks NGOs could (or should) follow. The advice is mostly extremely practical, but in our experience can make a substantial difference in the quality of the work being done. The manual can be used to plan, monitor and evaluate the reporting process. It can also be seen simply as a pocket book you can take along to check whether there are still things you can do during a specific stage of the reporting process. The overall objective of the Human Rights Alternative Reporting Cycle is to give NGOs an overview of essential steps and questions to consider when undertaking an alternative reporting process and to provide practical tips and tricks.

The manual starts with two introductory chapters on human rights obligations and gives a general introduction to the United Nations (UN) treaty body system. It is not the objective of the manual to present a complete picture of the UN treaty body system. However, it is crucial to get some overview to understand the rest of the information provided in the manual. A small overview, as provided here, can also serve as a reminder for those who are already a bit more experienced in using the UN treaty body system. These introductory chapters therefore do not take into account the particularities of each of the treaty bodies and the special procedures. Each of the human rights treaty bodies has a website where rules and procedures are explained and many additional resources are available. We present a number of these resources in the text and in the bibliography.

The main part of the Human Rights Alternative Reporting Cycle presents the 9 steps that an alternative reporting process is divided into. Each step presents the questions to consider and discuss in that phase of the alternative reporting process, and tips and tricks you can use.

The Human Rights Alternative Reporting Cycle also contains 4 practical exercises (See p. 74 to p. 94). These exercises provide users with a format to map their stakeholders; to create a timeline to plan and monitor the reporting process; to make an alternative reporting communication plan; and to develop key messages.

The Human Rights Alternative Reporting Cycle should be very useful to organisations who are considering to engage with the United Nations human rights system (and in particular the treaty bodies) or have already decided to do so. It is also useful for organisations with more experience in the UN human rights system as it builds on the collective experience of people and organisations who have engaged with the human rights reporting system before.

As noted above the manual does not claim to be exhaustive, also not on the practical tips and tricks. This would be practically impossible. In order to keep this guide updated we do invite you to send your feedback and, especially your own tips and tricks to us (see the contact information in the colophon). Since the Human Rights Alternative Reporting Cycle is available only in electronic soft-copy, it will be possible to update the guide from time to time. Something we will actively seek to do. Some readers may feel the need to get support in using the Human Rights Alternative Reporting Cycle. The writers can be contacted to provide additional guidance and/or workshops.

2 Introducing human rights and the human rights obligations

2.1 Purpose

This chapter will explain the basic concept of human rights and what obligations they create for States. The chapter will also explain how the implementation of the obligations by the States are monitored. State obligations are at the heart of the human rights reporting cycle and the content of the alternative report. This chapter gives context to the manual for those people and organisations who are not yet familiar with human rights and the human rights reporting system at the United Nations.

2.2 What are human rights?

Human rights are the rights possessed by all human beings, because they are human beings. Human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent. This means that every human being is entitled to human rights, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, citizenship, disability or other status. Human rights are, amongst others, laid down in human rights treaties or conventions. These are international legal agreements between States. These treaties and conventions are the subject of reporting, both by States and NGOs.

HOW IS A HUMAN RIGHTS TREATY CREATED

- A draft text is prepared. This is often done by civil servants or diplomats, but increasingly civil society is getting involved in the drafting of the text. They may provide a full draft or lobby to improve a draft that is being discussed.
- The draft text is agreed upon among the States involved in its development.
- The text of the treaty is **signed** by the States. Please note that signing of a human rights treaty does not mean the treaty is legally binding for the State. Though they are also not allowed at that point to act against the objectives and spirit of the treaty.
- The treaty has to go through the so-called **ratification** process first. This is a national procedure designed to commit a State to the content of a human rights treaty. The formal procedure for ratification varies according to the national legislative requirements of the State. Ratification usually involves consultation with parliament (and can include adaptation and/or

re-drafting of national legislation) in a country and will take some time.

- A State can also join a human rights treaty by **accession**. Accession is an act by which a State signifies its agreement to be legally bound by a particular treaty. It has the same effect as ratification, but does not require the act of signing the treaty. The formal procedure for accession varies according to the national legislative requirements of the State.
- **Entry into force:** Each human rights treaty will describe how many ratifications are needed for the treaty itself to enter into force. Once the required number of ratifications is reached the treaty enters into force and becomes legally binding on those States who have ratified the treaty.
- **Changing or adding to the original treaty:** A treaty can be changed or added to, after it entered into force, by the drafting of a (additional) **protocol** to a treaty. State parties to the original treaty have to ratify or access to the protocol in order to be bound by it.
- **Ratifying or accessing to a human rights treaty creates legally binding obligations** on the State.
- In principle a State should ratify the treaty text as it is. However, there is also a possibility to make reservations. When making a **reservation**, a State may ratify the treaty, but make an exception for a specific article. By making the reservation, a State indicates it does not wish to be bound by the selected article(s). Making a reservation should not affect the whole purpose of the treaty (though unfortunately it often does). Other states can make an objection to these reservations.
- Sometimes there is an explicit demand in a treaty upon the State to accept a certain clause in an article upon ratification (or later) by writing. If the State does not do so explicitly the clause is considered non-binding for the State.

2.3 International human rights treaties

Since the end of World War II, the international community has been building up a human rights framework by drafting, adopting and ratifying a number of international human rights treaties,

both at the regional and at the international level. Each of these human rights treaties finds their origin in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights adopted in 1948. This Declaration cannot be ratified. It is a constitutive document of the United Nations and automatically binding upon all states.

The main international human rights treaties were drafted and adopted through the United Nations. There are nine international human rights treaties and ten human rights treaty bodies (committees) that monitor implementation of these treaties. These are listed below:

ICCPR, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

(Signed 16 December 1966, entry into force 23 March 1976)
Human Rights Committee
Number of treaty body members: 18

ICESCR, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

(Signed 16 December 1966, entry into force 3 January 1976)
Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
Number of treaty body members: 18

CERD, Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination

(Signed 21 December 1965, entry into force 4 January 1969)
Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
Number of treaty body members: 18

CEDAW, Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women

(Signed 18 December 1979, entry into force 3 September 1981)
Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
Number of treaty body members: 23

CAT, Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading treatment or punishment

(Signed 10 December 1984, entry into force 26 June 1987)
Committee against Torture (CAT)
Number of treaty body members: 10

Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment,

(Signed 18 December 2002, entry into force on 22 June 2006)
Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture (SPT)
Number of treaty body members: 25

CRC, Convention on the Rights of the Child

(Signed 20 November 1989, entry into force 2 September 1990)
Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC)
Number of treaty body members: 18

ICRMW, International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of their families

(Signed 18 December 1990, entry into force 1 July 2003)
Committee on Migrant Workers (CMW)
Number of treaty body members: 14

CRPD, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

(Signed 13 December 2006, entry into force 3 May 2008)
Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)
Number of treaty body members: 18

CED, International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance

(Signed 20 December 2006, entry into force 23 December 2010)
Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED)
Number of treaty body members: 10

Apart from the international United Nations treaties, some regions in the world have chosen to draft regional human rights treaties. This manual will not discuss regional human rights treaties.

2.4 Human rights obligations of the State

A human rights treaty is a legally binding obligation between the States that have ratified the treaty. States have a legal obligation to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights laid down in the treaties they have signed and ratified for all persons within their jurisdiction.

Respect: The obligation to respect means that the State should not breach or undermine directly or indirectly the enjoyment of any rights.

Protect: The obligation to protect requires the State to protect individuals and groups against human rights abuses and to take measures to prevent human rights violations. This includes measures to prevent third parties (for example, other individuals, groups, companies etc...) from violating the rights.

Fulfil: The obligation to fulfil requires the State to adopt appropriate measures to guarantee the full enjoyment of all human rights.

2.5 Due diligence

A challenge in addressing the obligation of a State in relation to a human rights violation may occur when the State itself does not commit the violation. However, human rights law knows the concept of the due diligence obligation, which holds States responsible for violations of human rights by private persons if the State has failed to adequately protect the victims. "The State has the legal duty to take reasonable steps to prevent the human rights violation and use the means at its disposal to carry out a serious investigation of violations committed within its jurisdiction, to identify those responsible, impose the appropriate punishment and ensure the victim adequate compensation." (Quoted from Velasquez Rodriguez case of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights)

2.6 Core obligations

Not all States have the same level of development or prosperity. So in addition to the duty to respect, protect and fulfil, States must follow two core obligations while implementing human rights; the obligation of progressive realization and the obligation of non-retrogression.

The obligation of progressive realization (moving forward) means that governments have to continue to take actions to improve the human rights situation in their country.

The obligation of non-retrogression (not moving backwards) means that governments are not allowed to remain passive in a situation where the human rights situation is deteriorating, nor can they take measures that reduce the enjoyments of rights.

If a government does take measures that limit the enjoyment of human rights, it would have to make a very strong case, that it had no other options, due to e.g. a serious crisis. And the government would have to demonstrate that it has done all it can to at least protect the most vulnerable groups.

2.7 Does local culture or tradition impact the legal obligation of the State?

Some people will argue that international human rights standards should always be adapted to the local context and culture and that traditions and culture cannot be expected to change. While one must be respectful of the local culture, tradition or religion, culture should not be reduced to a closed set of beliefs and practices. As the United Nations Secretary stated "Culture can (and should) be viewed as a shifting set of discourses, power relations and social, economic and political processes, rather than as a fixed set of beliefs and practices".

When the government or others use the argument of local tradition, culture or religion in order not to act or stop human rights abuses, one has to be aware that these types of arguments are often used to limit human rights. Extra vigilance is required when the arguments are not voiced by those whose rights are actually affected.

2.8 Who monitors if States fulfil their human rights obligations?

To ensure that States parties to the human rights treaties fulfil their human rights obligations a variety of monitoring mechanisms were created. These mechanisms are outlined below.

National courts

Human beings living in a state that has signed

and ratified human rights treaties can bring a case concerning human rights violations to the national courts. There are two main ways in which the national legal systems view the relation between the national legal system and international law including human rights treaties: the **monist** and the **dualist** approach.

The **monist** approach views the national legal system and the international legal system as a unity and international law does not need to be translated into national law. International law, including human rights, can be directly applied by a national judge and can be directly invoked by citizens. In most monist systems the international law supersedes national law if it is not in line with international law.

The **dualist** approach views the national legal system and the international legal system as distinct and require the translation of an international treaty, including human rights, into the national legal system. (Also known as the act of domestication). Until the moment a state has domesticated the treaty a national judge may not directly apply it and a citizen cannot directly invoke it. However, the State remains bound by its obligations.

Every State can choose which approach is used in its national legal system. The choice often finds its roots in the legal history of a country. The judgments of the national courts are legally binding. And they provide additional information on, and further explain, the obligations of the State parties under the treaty.

Human rights courts

The regional human rights treaties, such as the European, Inter-American system and the African system, have established Human Rights courts. After going through all the national legal steps (the so-called local remedies), a case regarding possible violation of human rights obligations by the State can be judged by a Human Rights Court. The judgments of these courts are legally binding. And they provide additional information on, and further explain, the obligations of the State parties under the treaty.

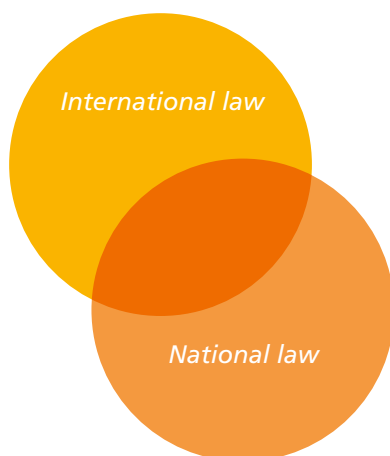
United Nations Charter bodies

There are different human rights monitoring mechanisms at the United Nations. For the purpose of this guide we highlight the monitoring role of the human rights treaty bodies.

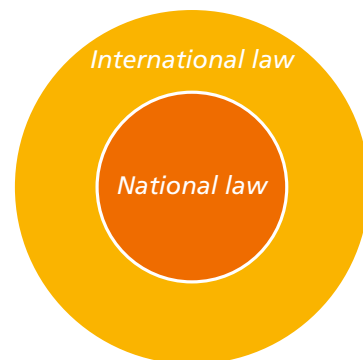
However, there are two other monitoring bodies that can be relevant. The first is the **Human Rights Council** (an intergovernmental body of the United Nations). The Human Rights Council has the mandate to discuss all human rights issues and situations that require its attention throughout the year. The Human Rights Council is also the body responsible for the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism which serves to assess the overall human rights situation in all of the 193 United Nations Member States.

The second monitoring mechanism, **The United Nations Special Procedures** is the name given to the human rights mechanisms created by the Human Rights Council to address either specific country situations or thematic issues. The special

DUALIST SYSTEM



MONIST SYSTEM



procedures are sometimes the only mechanism that will alert the international community to certain human rights issues, as they can address situations in all parts of the world without the requirement for countries to have ratified a human rights instrument.



RESOURCES

For more information on the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/AboutCouncil.aspx>

Treaty monitoring bodies

Each of the nine international human rights treaties has a treaty monitoring body or supervisory committee. Their purpose is to ensure that the States who signed and ratified the treaties actually implement them in practice. (For more details, see also the list of treaties and treaty monitoring bodies on [page 11](#))

There are four main procedures for bringing complaints about violations of the provisions of a specific human rights treaty before the treaty bodies:

- **State reporting and alternative shadow reporting:** States that are party to a treaty, State parties, are obliged, usually every four years, to report to the treaty body or the committee. This system is known as the Reporting mechanism. The treaty monitoring body will assess if the State complies with its obligations, and will issue recommendations to the State on what it should improve. These recommendations are known as the Concluding Observations. Civil Society and NGOs play an important role in the reporting process. They can submit reports to the treaty bodies to add to the information provided by their State. These are called alternative or shadow reports.

For more information on the State reporting mechanism and shadow reporting [see chapter 3](#).

- **Individual Communications:** Individual complaints are complaints by one individual about a human rights violation to a treaty monitoring body. Individual complaints are not possible for all the human rights treaties.

For a State to be legally bound by the individual complaint mechanism, it usually has to sign and ratify an additional Protocol to the treaty. Or the State has to explicitly accept a clause in the treaty to accept the individual complaint procedure.

The treaty body will assess if the human rights of the individual under the treaty were violated, and write down its conclusions in a view. The views are not legally binding on the State, but they carry significant political weight, are strong interpretations of the norms and States generally implement the views given by a treaty body.

- **State to State complaints:** One State party may complain about alleged violations of the treaty by another State party. NB States do not use this option often, as complaining to a human rights treaty body about another State is likely to disturb the friendly relations between the States.
- **Inquiry:** The CAT, CRPD, CED, ICESCR, CRC and CEDAW committees may, on their own initiative, initiate an inquiry if they have received reliable information that there have been serious and systematic violations of the treaty by a State party. E.g. the CEDAW committee held an inquiry into the abduction, rape and murder of women in Ciudad Juarez area of Chihuahua, Mexico.
- **Treaty monitoring body explain legal obligations further** Furthermore, the treaty bodies publish General comments or recommendations. In a General comment or recommendation the treaty body will give State parties recommendations on the implementation of a treaty and elaborates on the interpretation of the content of the human rights protected by the treaty. (E.g. CEDAW general recommendation nr. 19 Violence against women, from 1992.)



RESOURCES

The texts of the international human rights treaties and more information can be found on the website of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, OHCHR; <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/Pages/HumanRightsBodies.aspx>

3 The human rights reporting process

3.1 Purpose

In this chapter we go more in-depth into the treaty body monitoring system introduced in the previous chapter. We describe the origins of State and alternative reporting in the United Nations system. We outline the different stages in the process of State reporting and give background information on the formation and working methods of the treaty bodies. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a first overview of the reporting process that also guides the shadow reporting process.

3.2 State reporting

In order for the human rights treaties to be more than a piece of paper, a system for monitoring the implementation of the human rights had to be created. As we saw in Chapter 2, to each human rights treaty, a treaty body was added and monitoring mechanisms were put in place.

One of the most important monitoring mechanisms added to the human rights treaties is the so-called State reporting mechanism. The duty to report to the treaty body can be found in each human rights treaty. In the box below, we present as an example; article 9 of the Convention for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) which describes the duty to report.

ARTICLE 9

1. States Parties undertake to submit to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, for consideration by the Committee, a report on the legislative, judicial, administrative or other measures which they have adopted and which give effect to the provisions of this Convention:

- within one year after the entry into force of the Convention for the State concerned; and
- thereafter every two years and whenever the Committee so requests. The Committee may request further information from the States Parties.

With this basic mandate to receive State reports and give recommendations, the treaty bodies have over time developed practices and procedures that have proved effective in scrutinizing how far States have met their obligations under the human rights treaties to which they are party. The State reports

must set out the legal, administrative and judicial measures taken by the State to give effect to the treaty provisions, and should also mention any factors or difficulties that have been encountered in implementing the rights.

3.3 The purpose of State reporting: stock taking

States parties are encouraged to see the process of preparing their reports for the treaty bodies, not only as the fulfilment of an international obligation, but also as an opportunity to take stock of the state of human rights protection within their jurisdiction for the purpose of policy planning and implementation. The report preparation process offers an occasion for each State party to:

- Conduct a comprehensive review of the measures it has taken to harmonise national law and policy with the provisions of the relevant international human rights treaties to which it is a party;
- Monitor progress made in promoting the enjoyment of the rights set forth in the treaties in the context of the promotion of human rights in general;
- Identify problems and shortcomings in its approach to the implementation of the treaties
- Assess future needs and goals for more effective implementation of the treaties;
- Plan and develop appropriate policies to achieve these goals.

Seen in this way, the reporting system should be an important tool for a State in assessing what has been achieved, and what more needs to be done, to promote and protect human rights in the country.

3.4 NGO alternative reporting

Ideally the State reporting process should, at the national level, also encourage and facilitate popular participation and public scrutiny of government policies and programmes, and constructive engagement with civil society with the aim of advancing the enjoyment by all of the rights protected by the relevant convention. Some States do incorporate comments and criticism from NGOs in their reports. Other states submit their reports to parliamentary scrutiny before it is finally submitted to the Secretary General of the United Nations for consideration by the relevant treaty body.

However, in practice State reports to the human rights treaty bodies were, and are, frequently incomplete and tend to minimise problems and maximise accomplishments. Moreover, in many States there is little or no NGO consultation. The State reports are often prepared by a small team of civil servants without public engagement.

Recognising this, the treaty bodies realised over time that their assessment of the situation in a country would be strengthened by information from third sources. Therefore, in addition to the State party's report, the treaty bodies may receive information on a country's human rights situation from other sources, including UN agencies, other intergovernmental organisations, nongovernmental organisations (both international and national), national human rights institutes, academic institutions and the press.

The independent information provided by NGOs became known as "shadow" reports or "alternative" reports (as the UN calls them). NGOs were allowed to submit their own materials to complete the record. Currently, alternative reporting is an established and valued addition to the State reporting system.

Because human rights treaties are primarily enforced through the State reporting system, it is imperative that NGOs understand and use the reporting mechanism to maintain government accountability both to its own residents and to the international community. In the steps of Human Rights Alternative Reporting Cycle, we outline in detail during which stages of the state reporting process, civil society can be engaged and involved.

3.5 The treaty bodies; the members

To become a member of a human rights treaty body, you have to be elected by the United Nations State parties. State parties to a human rights treaty can nominate persons from among their nationals for membership of the treaty's monitoring body.

In electing the members of the treaty bodies, the Member States have to fulfil the following criteria:

- The members of a treaty body have to be nationals of States that are party to the human rights instrument in question;

- The members of a treaty body should be of high moral standing and are recognized to have competence in the field of human rights.

Once they are elected, the members of the treaty body serve in their personal capacity and do not take formal instructions from their governments in considering the State party reports or any of the other work of the Committee.

3.6 Treaty bodies: the practice

Being elected as a member and expert on one of the human rights treaty body is obviously a great honour and a big responsibility. In order to have a better understanding of the challenges faced by each of the experts on a human rights treaty body, it is good to know a bit more about their working conditions.

The experts are not paid a salary for the work they do. At best, they receive compensation for the costs they make as an expert on the treaty body. Serving on a treaty body is therefore a challenge for someone who does not have other sources of income.

The experts work on a part time basis. Each treaty body meets between 2 to 4 times a year for periods up to maximum a month. During those weeks the schedule of the treaty bodies is very packed. To take an example, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights is meeting from the first of June till the 19th of June 2015 and in that session they will review the state reports from Chile, Ireland, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Thailand, Uganda and Venezuela. The committee members are faced with the challenge to work through all of the information provided by the State in its report and the alternative report(s). They also face the challenge of understanding the nuances of laws and policies from the broad variety of countries.

The support staff available to each treaty body is very minimal. Often the staff person available works for more than one treaty body, so the experts have to mostly rely on themselves to get the work done.

As an NGO submitting an alternative report, it is important to be realistic about the limited time, resources and manpower available to the treaty bodies. The better you can present the information

to the treaty body in an efficient and clear way, the more likely it is that your information is useful to the treaty body experts.



RESOURCES

To find out more details on the expert members of particular treaty body, you can go to the website of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/Pages/HumanRightsBodies.aspx> Under the heading committee, sub heading membership on each treaty body page you can find the names and additional information on all of the members of that particular treaty body.

3.7 Language and the treaty bodies: official language and working languages

The United Nations has 6 official languages: Arabic (A), Chinese (C), English (E), French (F), Russian (R) and Spanish (S). The treaty bodies have all adopted the six languages as their official languages.

However, as working in all of the 6 official languages is too challenging for the treaty bodies, many of committees have chosen to work with a more limited number of languages, the so called working languages. The documents of the treaty bodies that have chosen a number of working languages are generally only translated into the working languages, unless the treaty body expressly decides that a document should be made available in all official languages.

Also it is good to know that alternative reports will only be considered when written in one of the working languages. And deliberations of the Committees are done in the working languages as well. Please note that this means translation will only be provided in the working languages at the formal committee meetings. More information on the use of working languages can be found in step 5 and step 7.



RESOURCES

To find out more details on the working languages of a particular treaty body, you can go to the website of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/Pages/HumanRightsBodies.aspx>

3.8 Stages of State reporting to a United Nations treaty body

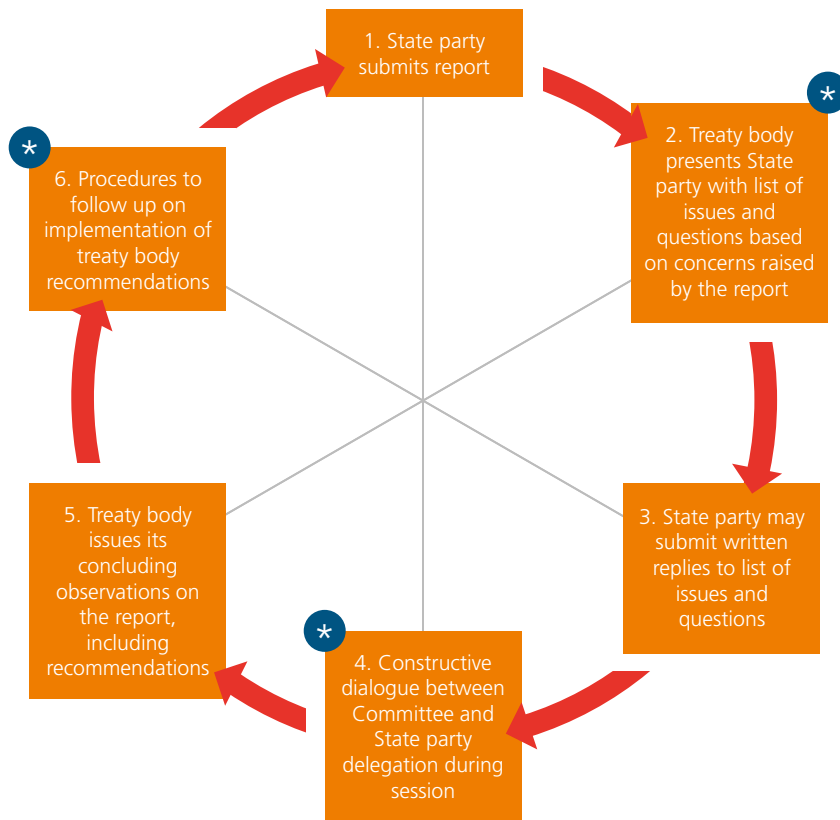
The process that is followed by each of the United Nations treaty bodies, when assessing a State report, has several stages. In the model on page 18 these general stages are represented in a circle. There may be slight variations in the practices of the treaty bodies but the stages visualised and described are followed by all of the treaty bodies. These stages informed the development of the steps in the Human Rights Alternative Reporting Cycle.

3.9 State party submits the State report to the treaty body

A State report to a treaty body must be submitted to the Secretary-General in one of the six official languages of the United Nations. It is then processed by the treaty body secretariat, and translated into the treaty bodies working languages. As there are no required formats for the content or presentation of the State reports, there are considerable variations in the form in which reports are presented. Many reports are very extensive and long. Because of the restricted time and resources available to the treaty bodies, questions have been raised whether page limits can and should be imposed.

Once processed, the report is scheduled for consideration by the treaty body at one of its regular sessions. In practice there may be some delay before a report can be considered, as some treaty bodies face a backlog of reports awaiting consideration. Most of the treaty bodies try to give priority to initial reports or to reports from States that have not reported for a long time.

THE STATE REPORTING CYCLE UNDER THE HUMAN RIGHTS TREATIES



* Opportunity for input from UN system, NHRIs & NGOs

3.10 Treaty body presents State party with list of issues and questions.

In preparation of the session at which it will formally consider the State report, the treaty body draws up a list of issues and questions which is submitted to the State party. This list of issues and questions is drafted prior to the session at which the report will be considered. Depending on the treaty body, lists of issues are drafted either in a pre-sessional working group convened immediately before or after a regular session or during the plenary session. Most treaty bodies appoint one of their members to act as **country rapporteur** to take a lead in drafting the list of issues for a specific country.

The preparation of the list of issues and questions is a valuable stage of the process for NGO

engagement, ([See also step 5](#)) Most committees allocate specific plenary time to hearing submissions from UN agencies and most also receive NGOs.

Depending on when the information is submitted, issues raised by these organisations may be incorporated in the list of issues or inform the questions posed by treaty body members when meeting the State delegation.

The list of issues provides an opportunity for the treaty body to request from the State party any additional information on points it feels have been omitted in the report or which members consider necessary for the treaty body to assess the state of implementation of the treaty in the country

concerned. The list of issues also allows the treaty body to begin the process of questioning the State party in more detail on specific issues raised by the report which are of particular concern to members.

Many States parties find the list of issues a useful guide to the line of questioning they are likely to face when their report is formally considered. This allows the State party delegation to prepare itself and makes the dialogue between the treaty body and the State party more constructive, informed and concrete.

3.11 State party may submit written replies to list of issues and questions

Sometimes the State party will submit its responses to the list of issues and questions in written form. The written responses form a supplement to the State report, and are especially important where there has been a long delay between the date the original State report was submitted and the date the treaty body is able to take up the report.

3.12 Constructive dialogue between treaty body and State party delegation during the session

All treaty bodies have developed the practice of inviting States parties to send a delegation to attend the session at which the treaty body is considering the State report. This allows them to respond to members' questions and provide additional information on their efforts to implement the provisions of the relevant treaty. States are not obliged to send a delegation to attend the session, although they are strongly encouraged to do so. Some treaty bodies may proceed with consideration of a State party's report in the absence of a delegation; others require a delegation to be present.

The session is not adversarial in nature and the committee does not pass judgment on the state party. Rather the aim is to engage in a constructive dialogue in order to assist the government in its efforts to implement the treaty as fully and effectively as possible. The notion of constructive dialogue reflects the fact that the treaty bodies are not judicial bodies, but were created to monitor the implementation of the treaties and provide encouragement and advice to States.

Most treaty bodies will earmark a brief speaking slot for the national human rights institute, NHRI,

and NGOs present during the constructive dialogue. Time permitting, the country rapporteur and other members of the treaty body may be available for more informal consultation, e.g. during the lunch break. For more information on the possibilities for NGO engagement during this stage of the process, [See also step 7.](#)

3.13 Treaty body issues its Concluding Observations on the State report, including recommendations

The examination of all the information culminates in the adoption by the treaty body of "Concluding Observations" (called "concluding comments" by some treaty bodies). The Concluding Observations are intended to give the reporting State practical advice and encouragement on further steps to implement the rights contained in the treaty. In their Concluding Observations, the treaty bodies acknowledge the positive steps taken by the State, but also identify areas where more needs to be done to give full effect to treaty provisions. The treaty bodies seek to make their recommendations as concrete and practicable as possible.

States are asked to publicize the Concluding Observations within the country so as to inform public debate on how to move forward with human rights implementation. The State is recommended to make the Concluding Observations available in the relevant national language(s). NGOs can and should play an important role in sharing the content of the Concluding Observations. They are instrumental in the continued advocating and monitoring to ensure the suggested improvements will be carried out. [See also step 8.](#)

3.14 Procedures to follow up on implementation of treaty bodies recommendations

With the adoption of the Concluding Observations by the treaty body the formal consideration of the report is concluded; but the process does not end there. A point can never be reached at which it can be declared that the provisions of a treaty have been implemented absolutely. Thus, the process of implementation of the rights contained in the treaties requires continuous effort on the part of States. After the submission of the State report, States are required to submit further reports to the treaty bodies at regular intervals.

An important element of any State report will be reporting back to the committee on the steps taken by the State party to implement the treaty bodies' recommendations in the Concluding Observations on the previous report. This brings the reporting cycle back to its starting point.

Unfortunately, treaty bodies have no means of enforcing their recommendations. Nevertheless, most States take the reporting process seriously, and the treaty bodies have proved successful in raising concerns relating to the implementation of the treaties in many States.

In order to assist States in implementing their recommendations, the treaty bodies have begun to introduce procedures to ensure effective follow-up to their Concluding Observations. Some treaty bodies request, in their Concluding Observations, that States report back to the country or follow-up rapporteur within an agreed timeframe on the measures taken in response to specific recommendations or "priority concerns". The rapporteur then reports back to the treaty body on the steps taken. Some members of treaty bodies have undertaken visits to countries, at the invitation of the State party or NGOs, to engage on follow up of the report and implementation of Concluding Observations.

3.15 Review procedure

The obligation to report, like the other obligations arising from ratification of the treaties, is an international legal obligation, freely entered into by the State. The treaty bodies will keep encouraging States to report in a timely manner. States may seek technical assistance from OHCHR where they face particular difficulties. In the case of States that have failed to report over a long period and have not responded to the treaty bodies' requests to report, the treaty bodies have adopted the procedure of considering the situation in the country in the absence of a report. This is sometimes referred to as the "review procedure". According to the review procedure, the relevant treaty body may proceed with examination of the state of implementation of the relevant treaty by the State party even though no State report has been received. The Committee may formulate a list of issues and questions for the State party, which is invited to send a delegation to attend the session. Information may

be received from UN partners and nongovernmental organisations and, on the basis of this information and the dialogue with the State party, the treaty body will issue its Concluding Observations including recommendations. The review may proceed even if the State party declines to send a delegation to the session. The review procedure is used only in exceptional cases; in many cases, notification by the treaty body that it intends to consider the situation in a country in the absence of a report is sufficient to persuade the State party to produce a report within a short delay.

4. The Human Rights Alternative Reporting Cycle: Introducing the 9 steps

4.1 Introduction

In the first chapters of the Human Rights Alternative Reporting Cycle, we introduced the basic information about human rights and the reporting system. We are now moving into the practical part of the Human Rights Alternative Reporting Cycle. In this chapter, we will discuss the main goal of participating in human rights reporting work. We explore whether participating in an alternative reporting cycle is the right choice for you. And we introduce the nine steps of the Human Rights Alternative Reporting Cycle.

4.2 Main goal of human rights reporting: affecting change

The human rights reporting system was put in place to monitor the proper implementation of the human rights treaty by the State (See also chapter 3). By reviewing the implementation of the rights in the treaty in the State report, and discussing the implementation with the treaty body, the State is encouraged to keep progressively implementing the treaty rights. The human rights reporting system thus helps structure the implementation process of the State.

As we have seen in chapter 3, a practice has grown in which NGOs can engage in the State reporting system. Mostly this is done to add to the information provided by the State. In general, the information provided by NGOs is more critical about the situation on the ground, than the State report. The NGOs alternative reports provide much needed additional information for the UN Committee as input for constructive dialogue with the State party.

The main goal of the human rights reporting cycle is to ensure human rights are upheld in the country under investigation. The main goal of your engagement with the human rights reporting mechanism is to work towards the improvement of the human rights situation in your country. Your main end goal for engaging with the United Nations reporting system should be to affect change in your country.

4.3 Who should use the Human Rights Alternative Reporting Cycle

The Human Rights Alternative Reporting Cycle is based on the human rights reporting system for

States and focuses on the process of alternative reporting by NGOs. It was developed as a practical manual for all people and groups who are considering or already working on shadow reporting and the leaders and the coordinators of a shadow reporting process.

Obviously, the Human Rights Alternative Reporting Cycle can also be read by people who are interested in learning more about the practical side of doing an alternative reporting cycle.

4.4 Engaging with alternative human rights reporting: the benefits and challenges

If you or your organisation are considering to participate in a shadow reporting process, you have to seriously explore the benefits and challenges of participating in the alternative reporting work. The information provided below should help you to assess if you and your organisation should engage in the alternative reporting work. To put it bluntly: Should you bother to engage with the alternative reporting process?

The benefits

- Working on an alternative report will help build human rights skills and knowledge in the organisation and the persons involved;
- The information collected and documentation will strengthen your knowledge on the human rights situation on the ground;
- The information collected and documentation will provide added value to your national advocacy;
- You will have credible information to highlight human rights abuses in your country;
- You will inform the international community of the human rights issues in your country;
- The human rights alternative reporting process is an opportunity to strengthen or build new networks within your own country;
- The human rights alternative reporting process is an opportunity to open a dialogue with the government about the implementation of human rights and to work towards human rights improvement;
- The reporting work offers an opportunity to engage with communities on human rights violations. If consultations are being held in order to feed information into the process or if research is conducted for this purpose the

process can help raise awareness on human rights and what they entail among communities;

- Beyond communities the shadow reporting process can help and raise awareness on international human rights obligations with the general public directly or through the media. Working with the media is also a benefit beyond raising awareness on human rights as it may also benefit the profile of the organisation working on the shadow report;
- The alternative report will inform member States about the situation on the ground which may lead to recommendations on the rights violations highlighted in your report;
- Your alternative report will also serve to give the Committee suggestions on which concrete recommendations for improvement to make to the State;
- The Concluding Observations given by the Committee will provide added value to your national advocacy.

The challenges

- Engaging in the alternative reporting work takes up a lot of time and resources that cannot be spent on other work;
- Engaging in the alternative reporting work may divert you from working on your organisation's core mandate;
- Engaging in the alternative reporting work may make it a challenge to stay connected with your community;
- Engaging in the alternative reporting work may draw you into the United Nations bubble and draw away your attention from the national work;
- Engaging in the alternative reporting work can raise expectations of immediate change. It is important to remember that the alternative reporting work is only a small part of all of the work that is needed to affect change.

Engaging in this process can and will affect relationships with all your key stakeholders. Also, alternative reporting can be considered an 'outside' strategy. This means it is an strategy that is intrinsically confrontational towards the State. Using an 'outside' strategy can be very useful if you have no other ways of sufficiently influencing the State. (You basically use pressure from the 'outside'

to create or increase pressure). The more other options you have, the more you should consider the potential impact of using such an 'outside' strategy, in particular on your position to influence the State nationally. Is using an 'outside' strategy the best choice to make in your context?

Engaging in the alternative reporting process can bring a lot of benefits as we have outlined above but it should not be entered into lightly. We strongly encourage organisations and networks to consider the benefits and challenges before starting the process.

We want to stress again the importance of only engaging in the alternative reporting work if it fits in with the mandate and topics you regularly work on. It should also be a conscious decision that fits within a larger strategy of your organisation or network.

Your organisation or network should have identified human rights concerns and violations before engaging with the human rights reporting process. Ideally your alternative reporting work just adds a new method to your existing work on these topics.

The end goal of your engagement should be to find new information and new ways in which to work on improving the situation on the ground. Your end goal should be the improvement of the situation of the affected groups. Ideally working on the alternative reporting will become an integrated part of your work and a continuous process.

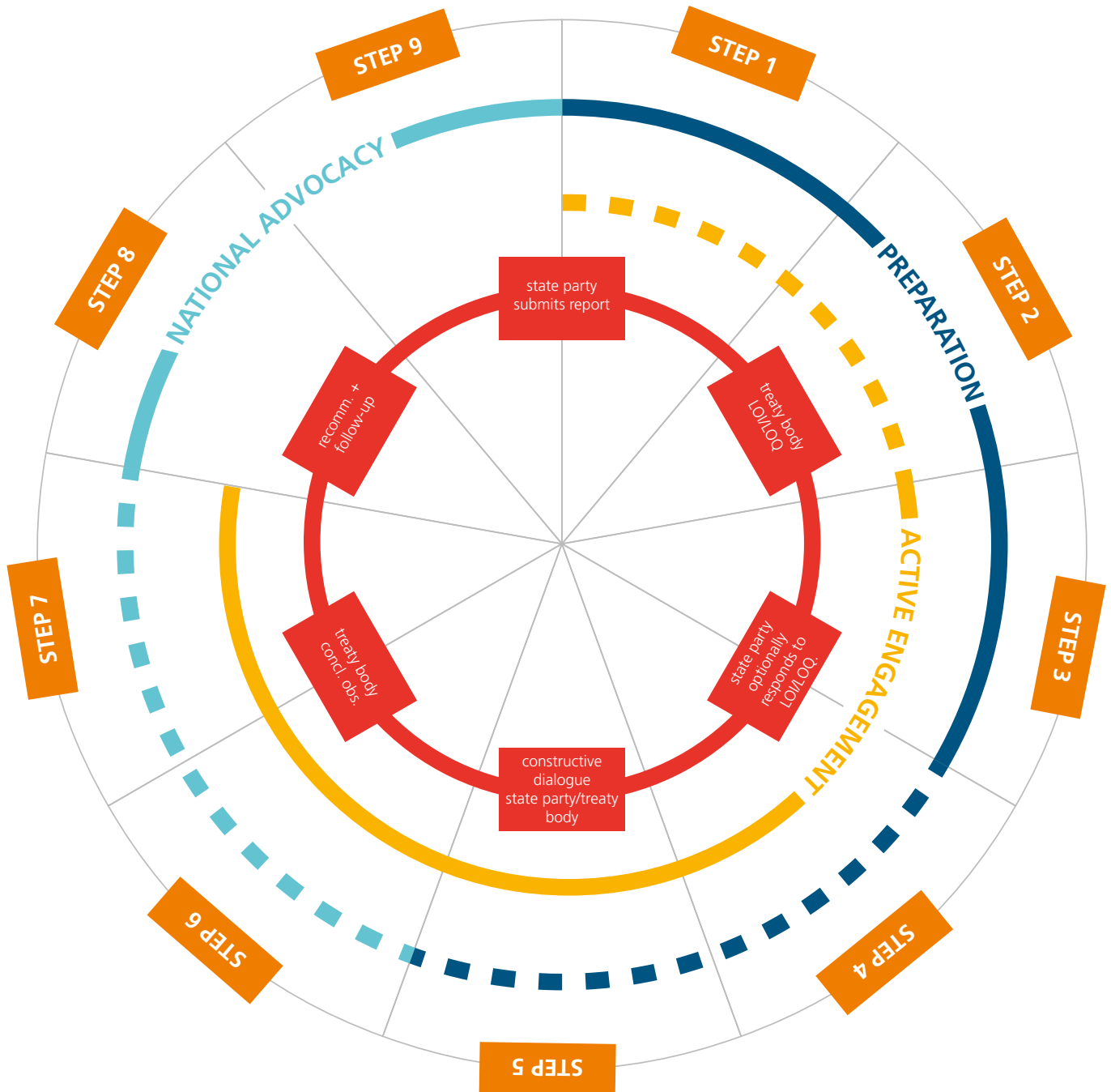
4.5 You decided to work on a human right alternative report

You and your organisation or network have made the initial decision to work on an alternative human rights report. When you start the work of doing an human rights alternative report, we strongly encourage you to read through the steps outlined in this Human Rights Alternative Reporting Cycle. Reading through the steps will give you a full understanding of the work entailed in engaging in an alternative reporting process.

It will enable you to determine if your organisation or network is ready and able to engage with the alternative human rights reporting work.

THE HUMAN RIGHTS ALTERNATIVE REPORTING CYCLE

You can click on each step to directly access the content of the step



4.6 The Human Rights Alternative Reporting Cycle

On page 23 and below we present you with the Human Rights Alternative Reporting Cycle. Each of the steps describes a step in the process of engaging with the alternative reporting work. The work is divided in three main phases; a preparation phase, the active engagement phase and the national advocacy phase. Each of these phases is subdivided in different steps. In each of the steps, you will find practical information on what you should be doing in this step of the alternative reporting work.

Please note that you can click on each of the steps to read the information.

Preparation phase

[Step 1 Identification](#)

[Step 2 Making a plan of action](#)

[Step 3 Researching and collecting your information](#)

Active engagement phase

[Step 3 Researching and collecting your information](#)

[Step 4 Analysis of your research and writing your report](#)

[Step 5 Engaging in the list of issues and questions stage](#)

[Step 6 Finalising your alternative report and submission](#)

[Step 7 Engaging during the constructive dialogue](#)

National advocacy phase

[Step 8 Concluding Observations and advocacy](#)

[Step 9 Evaluation and continued advocacy](#)

4.7 How to work with the steps

In the steps we present all of the questions that we think an alternative reporting team should consider while working on that specific step of the alternative reporting cycle. We present a best case scenario that should be considered in this step. Each step is structured in the same way.

The structure of a step:

- The introduction of the main aim of the step;
- Questions to consider during this stage of the alternative reporting work;
- Tips on the relevant communication to undertake during the step.

In addition to the steps, the Human Rights Alternative Reporting Cycle, provides users with four practical exercises that will assist the alternative reporting team in carrying out the alternative reporting work. You can find the exercise at the end of the Human Rights Alternative Reporting Cycle or you can click on the relevant exercise here.

[Exercise one: Mapping your stakeholders](#)

[Exercise two: Using a timeline to plan and monitor](#)

[Exercise three: Making a shadow reporting communication plan](#)

[Exercise four: Formulating your key message](#)

We will refer you to the relevant exercise in the steps.

4.8 How to use the Human Rights Alternative Reporting Cycle

Be flexible

The Human Rights Alternative Reporting Cycle was developed to make the life of the potential user as easy as possible, and using the cycle should not become a burden. You may find that some of the steps or questions do not fit your particular situation. Do not feel afraid to use the Cycle in a flexible way. If it makes sense to skip parts or questions, feel free to do so.

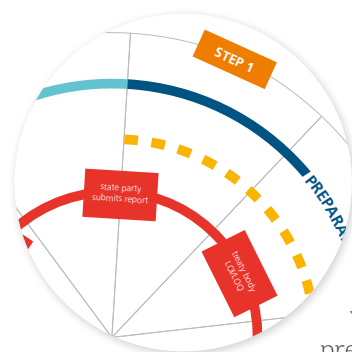
Also, the Cycle is a guide that helps you consider the most relevant aspects of the alternative reporting cycle. Sometimes in practice these steps might overlap or you may have to go back and forth between steps (especially if you choose to expand the network of actors involved in the process).

Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation

Timing is of essence in any advocacy initiative. You need to deliver your message in whatever form at the right time to the right person. Being late in most cases affects your advocacy negatively. In the case of UN advocacy with shadow reports, not knowing the relevant moment to present information, might even lead to irrelevance of your message. The Human Rights Alternative Reporting Cycle should therefore also be considered as planning tool that helps you plan the activities and to outline when you need to deliver certain products. The Cycle is at the very least, a planning tool and guide for you to gather crucial data for your advocacy.

You can also use the Human Rights Alternative Reporting Cycle as an evaluation and monitoring tool, whereby you can monitor where you are in the reporting process and what remains to be done. You can also assess whether you missed issues and steps and note how you could avoid this for future learning.

5. The Human Rights Alternative Reporting Cycle: 9 Steps



STEP 1 - IDENTIFICATION

1.1 Introduction

This is the first step to take in the preparation phase of your alternative reporting. In this step we assume that you have made a preliminary decision to engage with the alternative reporting process and you are able, with a small group, to start planning the alternative reporting work.

In this step, we will present you with the points to consider in order to select the relevant human rights treaty and to create your alternative reporting team. You will be asked to consider all of the points that help you create an effective alternative reporting team. You will need to consider the skills and knowledge needed for the team and consider the available resources and time.

Please note that creating the alternative reporting team and considering all of the points mentioned in step one, will require a serious time investment. You can expect to spend several days in total to work on all the issues mentioned in this step.

1.2 Identifying the relevant human rights treaty

A first consideration in starting the human rights shadow reporting process is to identify which of the nine human rights treaties ([see also chapter 2, page 11](#)) you will be focussing on. The choice of the relevant human rights treaty will impact the amount of work and the variety of knowledge needed in the team. Before building an alternative reporting team, you must have an initial answer to the questions presented below.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AND DISCUSS:

What are the main topics and human rights violations, we want to improve?

Which of the human rights treaties is most relevant to our selected topics and human rights violations?

Why have we chosen to focus on this human

rights treaty? Does working on this topic fit in with the goals of our organisation or network?

Can we focus on all of the human rights covered by this treaty or will we focus only on some specific issues?

Has our State ratified this treaty and if so, has it made any reservations to parts of the treaty? (See also, Chapter 2, page 10). Please note that if your State has not ratified a treaty, you can not engage with the reporting system under that treaty

When is the next state report and shadow report due? What is the upcoming deadline.



RESOURCES

This information can be found on the [website](#) of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). Under the heading meetings and deadline of each treaty body page you can find the relevant dates.



RESULT:

The relevant human rights treaty has been selected

1.3 Looking back at previous experiences

The participation in human rights alternative reporting processes has become more and more common. It is likely that a shadow report or shadow reports by other organisations from your country have been submitted to the selected treaty body before. It is even possible that your organisation or your group of organisations were involved.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AND DISCUSS:

Have we as an organisation or group of organisations been involved in a shadow reporting cycle to this human rights treaty before?

If yes, have we done an evaluation of the previous shadow reporting cycle process? Do we know what the best practices and lessons learnt from the previous experience were and what the main mistakes were. For more information on evaluating a shadow reporting cycle, please also look at [step 9](#).

If yes, do we have the financial information and budget of the previous alternative reporting process available to help us plan our budget? (See also below. Page 30)

If no, do we know if any organisation or organisations from our country have submitted a shadow report to this treaty body before? Are these organisations part of our current group discussing the building of a shadow reporting team?

1.4 What shadow reporting team model works for us?

In order to decide on the shadow reporting team, you must first consider some issues and questions about the number of alternative reports being submitted from one country and the alternative reporting model that works for you.

What is the better option: one or more shadow reports from one country?

In practice, one can see an emerging trend of several or even many different alternative reports being submitted by different NGOs or groups of NGOs from one country. We want you to consider the pro and con's for submitting a number of different reports to the treaty body.

When we consider the limited time and resources available to the treaty bodies (See also chapter 3) and the limited time and resources generally available to NGOs, it seems to make more sense to strive to submit one shadow report to the treaty body in which all of civil society collaborates.

It is important to consider that if civil society from a country speaks with one voice in suggesting certain human rights issues are ready for improvement, this may be more convincing to the State and the treaty body. It can therefore be recommended to attempt to submit one joint alternative report.

However, there are situations which may make it hard to submit a joint shadow report. In some countries there are organisations called "NGOs" that are basically a mouth piece for the government or regime. You may not be willing or able to collaborate with such "NGOs" and choose to write a separate shadow report.

There may also be other reasons, such as an unpleasant personal history, which block local NGOs from successfully collaborating on one joint shadow report. If this is the case, at least make sure to inform the other shadow report writers on your work and make sure to collaborate in your engagement with the treaty body. It is very counterproductive if the treaty body is confronted with divisions in the civil society visions and presentations.

Obviously your impact at the national level and at the international level, is strengthened by showing the engagement and support of a wide number of organisations in the shadow reporting process.

Alternative reporting team models

There are a lot of different models which have been used by people and organisations working on alternative reports. Hereby we present the different models.

- An organisation may choose to work on an alternative report alone because it has specific knowledge and expertise on a topic, as that topic is within the core activities of the organisation or because the core business of the organisation is engaging with the United Nations reporting mechanisms;
- Organisations working on the same topic may form a reporting network or coalition around their theme and submit a shadow report about this theme, not covering all of the human rights protected by the treaty;
- Organisations may have built a trusted network of partners in previous alternative reporting cycles and choose to continue this fruitful collaboration;
- National organisations work to have an inclusive coalition or network of all relevant organisations in the country to work on a joint alternative report;
- In all of the examples given above the alternative reporting team may open up the finalised report for signature by a much wider group of organisations and people.

NB please note that all of the models described above are based on actual examples of groups who have worked on alternative reporting. Which model works for your team depends on the context

you are working in. Ideally your team will be as inclusive as possible in the alternative reporting work so the voice of civil society will be united and not divided at the United Nations.

WORKING IN A COALITION PRO'S AND CON'S

Below we present you with a quick overview of the positive reasons for working in a coalition of organisations on a shadow report

- More people and organisations collaborating makes it possible to do more research, outreach and advocacy;
- A network or coalition is often able to have more resources available for the alternative reporting work;
- A network or coalition often has a wider network of connections with relevant stakeholders;
- Working together will create networks that will be useful for future work in country;
- Presenting a joint position, a joint report and a joint advocacy message for change will increase the chances for real impact;
- It will give you a unique position in advocacy at the level of the relevant Committee and dictate what alternative information they get from the country (informally and formally).

And we also present the **challenges** of working in a coalition

- Creating a new coalition or network may take up quite a lot of your time and energy;
- It may be harder to have trust around sharing financial resources and credit for the work;
- Depending on their background and vision the coalition or network partners may not always agree on the analysis of the material;
- Making choices about what information goes in the report and what does not, may become more challenging, especially where information is considered unreliable or contradictory;
- Coming to an agreement on the advocacy strategy may take more time, especially if different types of organisations are involved.

NB all of the points above have been collected from experiences in the field with different groups working on alternative reports. Tips on how to avoid potential problems can be found in a.o. [step 2, making a plan of action](#).



RESULT:

The alternative reporting team model has been identified

1.5 The shadow reporting team; skills and knowledge

Once a preferred model for the alternative reporting process has been selected, the members of the alternative reporting team have to be identified. This will be the group that will kick start the alternative reporting work. Please note that as the team goes through the different steps, team members may be added or leave the team according to the needs of the process and team.

A strong shadow reporting team will need to include people with a variety of backgrounds and a mix of skills and knowledge to carry out work in the Human Rights Alternative Reporting Cycle.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AND DISCUSS:

Does your team include people with the relevant skills and knowledge on?

- Human rights, specifically the human rights protected in the human rights treaty you are working on;
- Research, ideally the team has people who can do field research and policy related research;
- Writing skills, especially report writing, writing for communication purposes and editing ([see also Exercise 3: Making a shadow reporting communication plan](#));
- Lobby and advocacy, both at the national and international level;
- Facilitation and management of a team process;
- Budgeting, finances and logistics, such as planning travel;
- Public speaking in the working language of the treaty body (See also chapter 3.6);
- The people and groups affected by the human rights abuses under consideration;
- Ideally your alternative reporting team has a fair gender balance and a diverse representation.

Are you ensuring the participation of the group(s) affected?

A shadow reporting cycle should include the active

participation of the communities or groups affected by the human rights issues under discussion. They are the key stakeholders and they should be involved from the beginning.

Your team can get a fuller understanding of the people and groups affected by the human rights abuses by engaging in a stakeholders mapping (See below and [Exercise 1, Mapping your stakeholders](#))

If your team is not composed of members of the affected communities or groups, think about how you are going to include them in your team, and how you are going to actively engage them in the whole process and your advocacy to bring about change.

Sometimes it might seem difficult or impossible to include members of (all) the affected group in your team. In that case think of other ways to include them and ensure that their voices are represented in the process. (See also [Exercise 3: Making a shadow reporting communication plan](#))

What to do if we do not have all the required skills and knowledge?

Of course in an ideal world, your shadow reporting team will include all of the skills and knowledge outlined above. Try to identify if the missing skill set or knowledge is essential for the creation of a good quality alternative report. (For instance, if the team does not have any members with knowledge on human rights, that would create a challenge in writing a quality report)

If it is possible to add people to the team to include more of the knowledge and skills needed, we encourage you to do so. However, remember that the listing above is a best case scenario.

Have you assessed any potential risks to your team's safety?

Depending on your countries' situation, there may be risks involved in engaging in human rights reporting. Perhaps it is physically risky to go out in the field to do research due to a civil war situation or because of a particularly repressive regime.

Please discuss as a team if there are security risks involved in working on an alternative report. If there are risks involved, can you identify support or security measures you can put in place? Can the team rely on outside support to reduce the risks identified?

Please also consider your communication and digital security, while discussing security issues. ([See also Exercise 3: Making a shadow reporting communication plan](#))

Alternative reporting work is a learning process

Always remember, we are presenting a best case scenario. We do not mean you cannot successfully engage with a shadow reporting cycle if you do not have all of the skills, knowledge and resources in place. Engaging in a shadow reporting process, should also be seen as a learning process for all involved in which the knowledge and skills presented above can be learnt and strengthened. And you can always add new people to the team during the cycle.



RESULT:

The initial shadow reporting team is established and can start working on the next steps.

1.6 The shadow reporting team: mapping the available and needed resources

Many groups and organisations engage in the shadow reporting process with limited resources. To increase the effectiveness of the team, we encourage you to explore the opportunities to get the work on the shadow report funded.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AND DISCUSS:

How do we plan to collect our information?

When thinking about the required resources, it is good to consider the way in which the team plans to collect the information for the report. There are different ways of collecting information. Some information for your shadow report, you will be able to find in laws, policies, official reports or documents. (by your own government, human rights treaty bodies, (inter)national NGOs or academic research). To gather additional information you

may wish to conduct interviews or organise (focus-group) meetings. You will probably want to conduct several individual or collective interviews or meetings with various stakeholders as well as directly affected groups. The way in which you ideally plan to collect your information will have an impact on the resources and budget needed to do the work. For more on the collecting of the relevant information, see [step 3](#).



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AND DISCUSS:

What does our best case scenario budget look like?

Here the alternative reporting team explores, what in an ideal world would be the overall budget required to do the work effectively and efficiently.

CHECKLIST FOR BUDGET ITEMS

While drafting the budget, it may be helpful to have a look at this checklist of budget items

- Gross staff costs; costs related to salary;
- Costs related to data collection, such as meetings with affected groups/individuals;
- Consumer goods; costs such as paper, photocopies, cartridges;
- Small equipment for the office;
- Costs related to the organisation of network meetings;
- Costs of meetings, focus groups, seminars, trainings. These are costs direct related to stay and meals for participants activities;
- Travel costs national;
- Travel costs international (to United Nations);
- Interpreters: (NB crucial at the United Nations if your English is not good enough.);
- Translators;
- Publications;
- Auditing;
- Monitoring and Evaluation;
- Administrative costs;
- Costs for lobby and advocacy (press conference, campaign costs, etc.);
- Cost for communication, including communication security.

Once you have made a budget, you have to determine whether you have sufficient financial resources in place to successfully carry out a shadow report.



RESULT:

Financial resources needed for the alternative reporting team have been identified.

DONOR INFLUENCE OVER ALTERNATIVE REPORTING

Recently one can see a trend among some donors to actively approach NGOs and to suggest that they engage in alternative reporting at the United Nations. We have heard of countries where the same donor supported alternative reporting projects with several different organisations in one country, without these organisations collaborating. In other countries, several different donors supported different alternative reporting projects.

While we fully believe in the good intentions of the donors in making funding available for alternative human rights reporting, it is in the long run not productive to the end goal of working to affect real change on the ground, to have a wide number of separate alternative reporting processes going on at the same time.

It is the responsibility of both the donors and the NGOs to discuss this point among themselves and to strive for supporting collaborative alternative reporting processes. It is the responsibility of the NGOs to explore what other organisations may be working on an alternative report as well and seek effective collaboration and/or division of work.

In some countries, the State sponsors the shadow reporting work. It is up to the team to determine if that is a viable option in your country. We would recommend that you do not accept money from the State, unless you are sure that accepting the money will in no way affect your independence during the shadow reporting process.

Finding financial support

If you do not have sufficient resources in place to proceed, you may need to raise funds. NGOs often have a good knowledge of the possible donors available for the topics they work on. Possible donors may be United Nations organisations based in your country.

If you are looking for funding to engage in a shadow reporting cycle, especially the first time, it is perfectly acceptable to have **capacity enhancement** and **networking objectives** as part of the

funding application. You do not have to restrict yourself to advocacy objectives. You should make all the mentioned objectives explicit in your request for support.

If you are planning to submit a funding application to a (potential) donor, you may find the information in [step 2](#) helpful in writing the project proposal.

The team may also consider if attracting funding through crowd funding is an option in their country.

Working with available resources

You may not have time or have not succeeded in finding additional resources to do the shadow reporting work. This does not necessarily mean that you cannot engage in the shadow reporting work. Many shadow reports around the world are prepared with little or no additional resources. Working with limited resources will obviously impact on the amount of work the team can take on. But working with resources available within organisations and with volunteer time, does not mean you cannot do a good shadow report. You do have to make sure you plan well and work in a smart way. There will be tips and tricks in the following steps for those who have limited resources, for example what to do if you cannot travel to Geneva to advocate for the outcomes of your report.



RESULT:
Funding opportunities have been identified

1.7 Mapping your stakeholders

Stakeholders are those people or organisations who feel their interests can be or, are affected by the issue(s) addressed in the human rights reporting cycle. Each human rights reporting cycle will come with its own set of stakeholders.

It is important for the alternative reporting team to have a good idea on who the relevant stakeholders are in an early stage of the reporting process. In that way the team can engage with the stakeholders during different steps in the reporting cycle and maximise the potential impact of the reporting cycle.

In order to get more clarity on who the relevant stakeholders are we strongly suggest you take the time to do a thorough stakeholders analysis at this stage. To find out more about stakeholders and how to do a stakeholders analysis, please look at the [Exercise 1: Mapping your stakeholders](#)



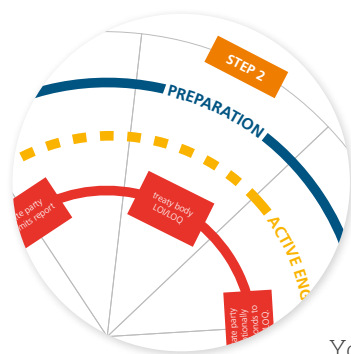
RESULT:
A thorough stakeholders mapping has been made, and the information on the stakeholders is available to the team

1.8 What to do if you are not ready to proceed with a full shadow reporting cycle?

It is of course possible, that after working on the points in this step, you have come to the conclusion that you are not ready to engage with the upcoming reporting cycle, due to constraints on time and resources.

If you choose not to proceed with the shadow reporting process, there are still a few things you can do:

- Read the last Concluding Observations of the relevant treaty body and consider how you can use these in your own work (if you have not done so before)
- Support others who are engaging in the alternative reporting process in a constructive way. You could, for example, still play a role in communication and dissemination. This can be a way to still engage in the process in a more limited way.
- You can provide relevant information to international bodies in your country. Typically the OHCHR office in your country will organise consultation meetings ahead of certain processes (for example the UPR process). You can provide information there. In any case international institutions, such as UNICEF, ILO, UNDP, OHCHR are required to provide information also during the process. Even if there is no pro-active consultation of civil society, you can still provide relevant information to the relevant institutions.
- Support national advocacy after the Concluding Observations are published ([See also step 9](#))



STEP 2 - MAKING A PLAN OF ACTION

2.1 Introduction

The second step in the preparation phase of your shadow reporting work is presented here.

You will be confronted with the issues and questions to consider when you make a plan of action for the shadow reporting process.

In this step, we assume that the basic decision on which organisations will take the lead on the shadow reporting process have been taken and an alternative reporting team is in place (See also step one). In step two, we look at questions of decision making, planning, exploring your network and making a communication plan.

The points suggested below should be carried out time and resources permitting. They present a best case scenario on how to tackle the planning of a shadow reporting process. Obviously if the organisation(s) have been involved in shadow reporting before, some of these points may be in place already. The team discussing these points must always feel free to adapt another approach if that is better suited in their context.

However, we encourage you to spend sufficient time at the beginning of the shadow reporting process to plan your work, so you can avoid running into issues while the shadow reporting work has already started.

NETWORK CHALLENGES

Networking skills are crucial when you undertake the alternative reporting process with a group of organisations. A crucial skill in terms of networking is the potential to manage different interests within a group of organisations. In order to do this successfully it is crucial the coordinator of the process has the authority to form and lead the group and is a trusted individual. The coordinator must be able to balance the different interests, undertake expectation management, make sure the process is done in a timely manner, qualitatively high, without fallout from members of the network. This is a difficult task, but if it is not done well from the

start, the process will take very long, the product can be qualitatively poor and the advocacy may be poor. It is important to understand, from the beginning, how network dynamics work. This will avoid many problems along the road.

2.2 Making a plan of action: schedule a workshop

Please note that the discussion and the work to be done in this step, will most likely require a time investment of several days. As a team, you could consider planning a workshop of 2 or 3 days to work on these points, or to schedule a number of meetings to work on each of the points. In the points below, we have outlined a number of activities and questions to answer that should help the team to make a clear plan of action and to manage expectations to avoid confusion in the future.

2.3 Discussing the decision making in the shadow reporting team

The shadow reporting process will be made more efficient if the shadow reporting team and their organisations can agree on clear decision making rules from the start of the process.

Ideally the shadow report members will be able to agree on the work and make decisions based on group consensus. However, it is likely that you will not always be able to reach agreement by consensus. We therefore encourage you to make some ground rules on decision making from the start. It is helpful to agree at the start what steps should be taken in case of disagreement. Once the team has discussed the points below, a simple MOU, memorandum of understanding, should be drafted.

Please note that if a large number of organisations or groups are, or are willing to be, in the shadow reporting process, creating decision making processes may be more complex. Setting clear rules then from the outset is all the more crucial. As working with a strong base in the national community strengthens your potential for impact, we encourage the team to be inclusive in your approach. Having more groups and people on board may require a bit more investment of time at the beginning of the process in terms of creating clear decision making rules, but it is a worthwhile investment.

TRUST AND FLEXIBILITY

Creating decision making rules, is helpful for the shadow reporting process to go smoothly, but it is even more essential that the people in the process build up trust among themselves and the organisations involved. Moreover a shadow reporting process will require of the participants that they are willing to be flexible. So we advise you to make some basic decision making ground rules, but to avoid creating a decision making procedure that blocks flexibility.

Please note that if the shadow reporting work is funded by a donor, some of the issues raised below may have been decided on already in the project proposal. In that case you can reaffirm the decisions made in the proposal.

NB While developing the decision making rules, the available resources are obviously a factor to take into consideration.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AND DISCUSS:

Who will take the responsibility for coordinating the shadow reporting process?

Going through a shadow reporting process is a complex process. It will be helpful for the team, if there are one or two persons who take the lead in coordinating the shadow reporting process. The team should discuss and write down in a few bullet points what is expected of the person taking on the coordinating role. A coordinator ideally has experience in managing a team and facilitating a multi layered process.

As stated above the available resources, are an important element in this discussion. E.g. you cannot expect a person to be available in the role as coordinator full time if there is no funding in place.

Who is going to be the main spokesperson for the shadow reporting cycle?

The team should discuss if the coordinator will also take on the role of being the main spokesperson for the shadow reporting cycle, or if another spokesperson or spokespersons will be identified. Please note that there may be a difference in who would

be the best spokes person at the national level and at the international level.

For a spokesperson at the national level, it may be helpful if the person selected already has a certain recognition, especially in the media and within government circles.

For a spokesperson at the international level, it is important that the person can communicate with ease in the working language of the treaty body and, especially the working language of the national rapporteur, See also chapter 3.6.

The spokesperson(s) should be part of the core group (See below). It is important that the spokespersons are aware of all the details of the alternative reporting work to really build on the additional knowledge and skills gained from the process.

In practice, one may often find that the director of an organisation involved in the shadow reporting process takes on the role of spokesperson, but not in all cases this is person informed enough to do a good job. Please be brave enough to discuss this frankly in the alternative reporting team.

Who is responsible for financial decisions and monitoring the finances?

The answer to this question is linked to the question whether the shadow reporting process is funded. In case of funding, there will most likely be one organisation who is the main recipient of the funding. That organisation will have the primary financial obligation and is responsible to monitor funding for the donor. Obviously having control and responsibility of the funding, puts an organisation in a special position in the shadow reporting team. It is a well established fact, that this issue may create tension in a shadow reporting team over time. We can recommend discussing the finances clearly at the start of the process, so expectations are clear.

If there is no project funding, the team must identify what resources (time and other required resources, [See also budget items on page 30](#)) are available and who will take the lead in monitoring these resources.

Who will be part of the core group of the shadow report process?

Two core group models are presented

We are presenting two possible models below on how a team or core group for the shadow reporting work can function. Obviously each team can come up with a model that works for them. The models below are suggestions based on models that have been used by teams working on shadow reports in practice.

Model one

In model one, the shadow reporting process will be driven by a small core group. The core group should be a group of individuals who take responsibility for the day to-day activities of the shadow reporting work together with the coordinator(s). The core group should ideally consist of members who have a.o. human rights, research, lobby and advocacy and communication knowledge and skills. (See also step 1 on the needed skills and knowledge).

Depending on the number of people working on a shadow report, the members of this core team will represent their organisations and the other people working on the shadow report. For example, if there are several people involved in developing and carrying out the communication around the shadow reporting work, the core group should have at least one of these people on board.

Model two

All of the organisations and persons working on the shadow report meet regularly under the guidance of the coordinator(s) to discuss progress on planned activities and to plan the next phase forward.

The team in both models will ideally also reflect a representation of the affected groups and a fair gender balance.

What roles and responsibilities will every team member have?

Once a model and the team members have been chosen, please discuss and write up briefly the roles and responsibilities of each team member.

During the discussion on roles and responsibilities, it is worthwhile to also map the **expectations** of the team members.

- What do the team members expect of each other?
- Do we want to agree on some internal reporting and monitoring rules, e.g. team members are requested to keep track of the amount of time (the number of hours) spend on the project?
- How do we decide to address each other if team members are not fulfilling their roles and responsibilities according to the agreements made?
- How do we manage the workload or stress of the work? Can we think of ways to address this? (This point becomes especially important if the team working on the shadow report is primarily working on a volunteer basis. If people have to do the shadow report work on top of their daily jobs, pressure may grow. Are there ways to avoid the workload to overwhelm the team. E.g. limiting the areas of research, see point below as well)



RESULT

The agreements made on the points discussed are written down and are to be incorporated into a Memorandum Of Understanding.

2.4 Managing the relationship between the organisations and the team members



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AND DISCUSS:

How will the shadow reporting team inform and keep their own organisation and leadership informed on the decision making process?

In most shadow reporting processes the people doing the majority of the work are staff of the different organisations forming the shadow reporting network. It is important that the team informs and updates the leadership and other staff of their own organisations on the shadow reporting process. The shadow reporting team has

to ensure that they have the continued support of their own organisations. It is especially important that the leadership of the organisations agree on the decision making process laid down in the MOU to avoid discussion later in the process.

How can the work be integrated in the work of the organisations involved?

Obviously the answer to the question above depends on the type of funding or resources available. If the shadow reporting work is funded, a project plan will be or should be in place. If there is no separate funding the organisations involved will have to identify how to integrate the work into the existing programs and from which budgets, resources can be made available.

KEEPING AN EYE ON THE END GOAL: CHANGE ON THE GROUND

A key issue we already touched upon before and will continue to do so throughout the process (a separate step is devoted to it: step 9), is the fact the shadow report should not be an end in itself. The Human Rights Alternative Reporting Cycle clearly presents the shadow report as a means to an end and therefore part of a larger advocacy strategy. In that strategy the shadow report can be one of many products or the main one. It should always be integrated in the organisation's work. It is a conscious decision to undertake the shadow reporting process, as part of a larger strategy, either alone, or as part of the larger network. It should never be a one-off process simply to be present in Geneva and have a report published on the OHCHR website.

Can we proceed with the shadow reporting process if one of the organisations or team members steps out of the process?

In practice, we have often seen that organisations, or team members have to drop out of a shadow reporting process, e.g. due to lack of time. While discussing the issues above, consider what would happen if one of the organisations or team members leaves the process. Have you created a decision making process and a team structure that is flexible enough to adapt to changes in the team?

How will the team decide on which issues and human rights violations we will focus on in the shadow report?

For the discussion of these points, [please see step 3](#).

How will we decide if we do not agree on the analysis of the research or the position to take as a shadow reporting team on an issue?

For the discussion of these points, [please see step 3](#)

Once all of the issues above have been discussed, we encourage you to draft an MOU, a memorandum of understanding, to be signed by all of the organisations.



RESULT:

A memorandum of understanding is agreed on by all parties involved.

2.5 Make a timeline for the shadow reporting cycle

In order to get a clear idea of the all work that needs to be done as part of the shadow reporting cycle, we advise the team to make a detailed timeline for the shadow reporting cycle.

Creating a timeline will help to plan and monitor your work during the alternative reporting cycle. Using a timeline makes it possible for the team to visualise the whole alternative reporting cycle and the relevant moments in time. A timeline can also be used to monitor and evaluate your work.



TIP:

To find out more about planning a timeline workshop and on how to make a timeline, with the team see [Exercise 2 : Using a timeline to plan and monitor](#)



RESULT:

A specific alternative reporting timeline is developed.

2.6 Make a shadow reporting communication plan

There are a great variety of ways in which people can communicate these days. If you engage with alternative reporting, you will have to communicate at two levels;

- communication to stay in touch as an alternative reporting team and
- communication to inform and update the broader community.

Communication, especially communication directed to the broader community, is time consuming. This exercise should assist the alternative reporting team to make decisions on what are the most effective and efficient ways to communicate with the main stakeholders and network partners during the alternative reporting process. Making a communication plan at the beginning of the alternative reporting process, should help the team to make the communication more unified.



TIP:

To find out more about making a communication plan, see the [Exercise 3: Making a shadow reporting communication plan](#)

Please note that at the end of most of the steps, there is a separate heading devoted to the communication recommended in that step in the Human Rights Alternative Reporting Cycle. It may be helpful to have a look at the recommended communication activities mentioned in each step when starting to work on the shadow reporting communication plan.



RESULT:

A clear shadow reporting communication plan is in place both for internal communication and external communication.



ADVOCACY AND COMMUNICATION ISSUES TO CONSIDER IN STEP 2

After the alternative reporting team has been established and an MOU has been agreed on, the team should also communicate about the work being planned with the broader community. The team has analysed and decided what would be the most useful communication tools to use.

What advocacy and communication issues should the team work on in this step:

- The team has to communicate the plan of action with the shadow reporting organisations and the donor(s) to keep them updated on the

process;

- The team must make sure to collect the relevant contact information for the people and groups identified as relevant stakeholders in the stakeholders mapping;
- The team should communicate with the affected groups and especially the people that you plan to collect information from about the planned alternative reporting. They should be informed about the shadow reporting process and kept updated if there is relevant information to share. This is best done in coordination with organisations that already have access to these groups and these groups trust (mostly grass-roots organisations);
- The team should consider communication with the broader community about the planned alternative reporting work;
- The team should consider how to communicate about the planned activities with the relevant government stakeholders. It is advised to inform them of the plans, unless there are security risks;
- The team should consider the possibility of engaging with journalists and the media in order to explain the planned work and the human rights issues concerned.

In conclusion

At the end of this step, the participating team members and their organisations must have a clear vision of the timeline of the shadow reporting cycle and what that means in terms of deadlines and the time to carry out the needed activities. The team has reached agreement on how to safely communicate as a team and has made agreements on decision making in the team. The team knows its network and has explored how to engage with the network partners. And last but not least the team has made decisions on its communication strategy and has made a decision on who within the team will take the lead on the communication.



STEP 3 - RESEARCHING AND COLLECTING YOUR INFORMATION

3.1 Introduction

In step three 'researching and collecting your information', we present the last part of the preparation phase of your shadow reporting work and we are moving into the active engagement phase of the work.

In this step we present the points to consider when starting with the collection of information needed to write the shadow report. The step outlines the importance of reviewing the human rights status of your country in relation to your treaty and themes. We will present possible sources of information and research methods to consider. The step also outlines some general human rights and research principles to consider and implement while doing human rights research.

3.2 Reviewing the human rights status of your country in relation to your treaty and themes

In practice, many human rights alternative reporting teams neglect to review the work that has been done before the current reporting cycle. Teams often directly move into doing the research without a proper review of what has been discussed in previous reviews. We highly recommend that the shadow reporting team starts by reviewing the current state of affairs before establishing their research priorities and focus.

If the team does not feel it has sufficient knowledge on the content of the human rights treaty, they may wish to invite an expert or some experts to build the capacity of the team at this stage. The team may consider reaching out to experts from universities or specialized NGOs.

AN EXAMPLE TO SHOW THE NEED TO DO A THOROUGH REVIEW

This example shows why a thorough review will help you in prioritizing your research focus. Lets imagine, a country in which a new team starts working on a shadow report because they are very concerned with the bad treatment

of prisoners in their prisons and they want to address these (potential) human rights violations with the treaty body for Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading treatment or punishment, CAT.

They decide to launch into a very extensive field research, talking to many prisoners about the abuse they suffered. After spending many months on collecting the information, they review the Concluding Observations of the previous reporting cycle, only to find out that the CAT committee has already condemned the treatment of prisoners in the strongest words.

All of their extensive field research gives additional proof of the abuse but will not contribute much added value of the new Concluding Observations. If there was no improvement of the situation, the CAT committee can only stress again that the State is obligated to improve the treatment of prisoners. The team would have been more effective and impactful if it had known about the Concluding Observations and focussed on the implementation of the previous Concluding Observations and perhaps collecting information on what is holding back the implementation. In our example, the team realized later on that in the previous reporting cycle no attention and information had been provided about the treatment of prisoners in the police stations in the country. Another place where abuses are common. Looking back the team could have maximized their impact by focusing the field research on the topic that had not been covered before.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AND DISCUSS:

Review the human rights treaty with team

It is essential that the shadow reporting team is familiar with the human rights protected by the human rights treaty, you are working on. In practice, some shadow reporting teams start working on a human rights alternative report without an understanding of the rights the treaty protects. This can lead to reports that focus on issues not clearly covered by the human rights treaty. So make sure the team takes sufficient time at the start of the research stage of the process, to (re)visit the rights protected by the treaty. The team may wish to consider to invite an legal expert to walk them through the treaty if they are themselves not human rights and/or legal experts.



RESOURCES

The text of the human rights treaty can be found on the [website of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights \(OHCHR\)](#) under the heading [basic documents on each treaty body page](#).

Reviewing the Concluding Observations

Before deciding on their own research priorities, the team should also review the last Concluding Observations (for more information on the Concluding Observations, [See also chapter 3.13](#)) of the human rights treaty body. The team must be aware of the recommendations given to the country by the treaty body for improvement after the last reporting cycle concluded.

These recommendations are an important resource for the shadow reporting team. It tells the team

- Which recommendations were given to the State during the last reporting cycle;
- What were the priority areas for improvement according to the treaty body;
- What human rights abuses were not covered in the previous reporting cycle.

The team must take note that it is always recommended that your shadow report contains information on if and how your government has given follow up to the previous Concluding Observations. The team should plan to do specific research into the implementation of the previous Concluding Observations. In principle, the State report should also start with a reflection on how Concluding Observations from the previous review were implemented.



RESOURCES

The previous Concluding Observations can be found on the [website of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights \(OHCHR\)](#) under the heading [work of the committee, sub heading Concluding Observations on each treaty body page](#).

Review the Concluding Observations of the other United Nations treaty bodies

In order to get a deeper understanding of the human rights issues that have been discussed by

your government with the United Nations treaty bodies, we recommend to have a look at the most recent Concluding Observations of the other treaty bodies as well. This will give you a more rounded picture of the human rights issues that have been discussed and the recommendations that have been given.

Another method to explore relevant human rights issues, is to have a look at the recent Concluding Observations from countries similar to your own country. These Concluding Observations may address issues that are relevant in your own country but that have not been addressed in previous Concluding Observations to your country.

Reviewing the individual complaints

The team should also review if there have been any individual complaints and issued views from your country (for more information on individual complaints, [See also chapter 2.8, pagina 14](#)) of the human rights treaty body). Reviewing the individual complaints and the issued views will give you a deeper understanding of the human rights obligations of your State.



RESOURCES

The views can be found on the [website of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights \(OHCHR\)](#) under the heading [work of the committee, sub heading complaint procedure; jurisprudence on each treaty body page](#).

Reviewing the (previous) State report

When the team starts the work on the shadow report, the new State report (See also chapter 3) may be finished or a work in progress. If the newest State report is not available it is a good idea to review the last State report to the treaty body. While reviewing the State report, you will have to analyse what are the main priorities from the perspective of the shadow reporting team mentioned in the State report. But perhaps even more importantly is to analyse which relevant human rights issues and abuses, the State does not address in its report. The identified gaps may very well be issues that you want to prioritize in your shadow report.



RESOURCES

The text of the last State report can be found on the [website of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights \(OHCHR\)](#) under the heading work of the committee, State parties reports on each treaty body page.

Review the previous shadow report(s)

Your shadow reporting work should be informed by the previous shadow report(s). Make sure to review these reports before setting your priorities of the new report.



RESOURCES

The text of the previous shadow reports can be found on the [website of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights \(OHCHR\)](#) under the heading Sessions: Look for the last session on your country and find the reports of the civil society organisations, on each treaty body page.

Coordinating with other shadow reports

As noted in step 1, it is best to have as little different shadow reports from one country as possible. However, there will almost certainly be more than one shadow report, whether from organisations within the country or from international organisations (for example, Amnesty International often submits a shadow report). It is good to be aware of this and get information about the content of these shadow reports. You can anticipate this. If possible you can even coordinate efforts, making sure that the issues covered in the shadow report of other organisations are not also covered in your report. Obviously this involves trust-building.

There will also be organisations that will focus on topics from a specific perspective that may not be your perspective and even contradict what you are saying. Traditionally, a topic on which this happens is sexual and reproductive health for women, or issues regarding sexual exploitation and prostitution. Within civil society views on this greatly vary from (religious)-conservative to more liberal and progressive. It is good to know (also for the rest of the process) whether others will submit shadow reports that might contradict your points.

This last point is also true for government financed

“civil society” who support the State. These NGOs will paint a rosier picture of the situation, support government and discredit you. Try to find out if these “NGOs” will be submitting an alternative report. This will be important to know here, but also in the rest of the process (it will impact on your advocacy, as well as on your communication with a broader audience).



RESULT:

A thorough review of relevant resources has taken place and the main conclusions written out for future reference.

3.3 Setting your research priorities



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AND DISCUSS:

Has the shadow reporting team agreed on how to discuss and determine the priorities of the shadow report?

The team members and the organisations involved in writing the shadow report may not always agree on what are the most relevant issues and what should be the priorities of the shadow report. The best way to reach agreement is through reaching consensus on the priorities.

But at this stage the team should review the decision making process that has been established, see step 2. If no procedure has been established, this is the proper time to discuss a decision making process that works for the team.

Determining your research priority topics

Once the team has a clear knowledge of the human right treaty and the main human rights issues attached, and knowledge of previous reports and reviews it must determine its own research priorities.

The choice of the research priorities should be informed by:

- Priority areas or gaps in the State report;
- Priority areas from the previous shadow reporting cycle and the Concluding Observations;
- Priority areas in the work of the organisations involved in the shadow reporting cycle. Giving

priority to the areas in which you already work, will give you a better understanding and access to learn more about the relevant issues. Ideally the shadow reporting work is part of the overall priorities of the organisations involved, so the research will feed into other areas of your work;

- Priorities related to the political and legal opportunities for improvement in the country;
- The level of the human rights violations, the most serious human rights violations should be given priority;
- The available time and resources.

A shadow reporting team may have the tendency to want to be all inclusive and to deal with all the human rights covered by the human rights treaty. Being able to identify your own priorities at this stage, will help to focus the research and will likely increase the quality of the shadow report. Setting the priorities should also ensure that the workload for the shadow reporting team is manageable.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF HUMAN RIGHTS RESEARCH AND REPORTING

While doing research aimed to improve the human rights in your country, you must make sure not to violate important human rights principles yourself while collection the information. These principles are: 'do no harm', 'consent' and 'participation'.

'DO NO HARM':

You must ask yourself if there are any security, psychological, emotional, social, economic or other risks that you might impose on the people participating in the data collection. You have to anticipate these risks and make sure you do no harm to the people you work with or collect information from.

'CONSENT':

you have to make sure that the people participating in the data collection give their informed consent. They must know who you are, what the purpose of the data collection is, and they must be able to choose to have their information be dealt with confidentially and, if requested, anonymously.

'PARTICIPATION':

You have to make sure that the people who are participating in the data collection remain informed on the use of the information you collected. You should share your findings with the research participants and involve them in the lobbying and advocacy when appropriate.



RESULT:

Most relevant human rights violations and research priorities have been identified.

3.4 Planning how to collect your information



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AND DISCUSS:

How will we collect our information?

Now that the priority areas have been established, the team will have to plan the way in which the information will be collected.

There are different ways of collecting information. Below we present the main methods available to collect information.

Desk research

Desk research is one of the most important sources of collecting information for your shadow report. Relevant sources included:

- The current State report and previous State reports
- Concluding Observations
- Shadow report(s) from previous cycle
- National laws
- National policies, including local policies
- National statistics
- Government reports and documents, including the national human rights institute
- Academic research
- Legal cases; Key court decisions
- Information from media
- Research from United Nations treaty bodies and United Nations special procedures (See also chapter 2)
- Research from human rights organisations
- Contracts with service providers
- Trade and other financial agreements



TIP:

Doing research that has an immediate practical relevance is often interesting to students. Why not find out if a student or group of students would be available to assist and do research for you. In all cases, when you enlist outside support, be clear what their role will be, at what point you want to involve them and what you expect from them and what they can expect from you.

Field research

There are many ways in which information can be collected from the field, from people facing the human rights challenges in practice. It is advisable to make sure that the team explores the information available through an initial desk research first, so you avoid duplicating research and information that is already available.

Any field research being done, should ideally be done to gain a deeper understanding of the human rights situation on the ground. Field research is also a good method to investigate if certain human rights issues have a different impact on different groups, (based on e.g. their gender, nationality, ethnicity, legal status, location (urban or rural; area of the country)

Methods to do field research include:

- Focus group meetings, with affected groups and/or stakeholders
- Collective or individual interviews
- Online surveys (e.g. Using the tool called [Survey monkey](#))

Your ability to carry out field research will be influenced by the knowledge and skills of the team and the available resources and budget.

The capacity to undertake field research is an important criteria also for determining your team. You may find at this stage you miss this capacity and you need to expand your team.

Typically national human rights organisations that predominantly undertake advocacy on national, regional and international level, lack the capacity to truly engage people on the ground and create a level of trust sufficiently high to gather information from them on often very sensitive topics. This is where networking with grass roots organisations is crucial. These organisations often lack the capacity to undertake advocacy on national, regional and international level, but are best placed to collect crucial information from people to undertake any advocacy at all. They often have a relationship of trust built on a longer relation of service delivery. Typically these organisations will not directly see themselves as human rights organisations. These will be organisations working with specific groups of people, professions (teachers, workers etc...),

development organisations, legal aid, paralegals, lawyers, clergy etc...

Pro's and con's of the different research methods

The advantages of desk research

- You can rely on in-depth information collected and analysed by others, provided you select credible resources;
- Desk research is less costly than field research;
- Desk research is safe in situations where field work can bring security risks.

The disadvantages of desk research

- The other researchers may have a blind spot for extra vulnerable groups or often overlooked groups, that you may be aware of as a result of your work in the communities;
- The shadow reporting team may become overwhelmed by the amount of information available, so you have to be able to be selective in which sources you want to look at.

The advantages of field research

- You have the opportunity to discover new information or facts of the practice on the ground that has not been discovered before;
- You are engaging with the affected groups and people and able to discover their challenges and to ask for the improvements they prioritize;
- The people involved in the field research may become your allies in the advocacy for change, provided the team set up proper ways to remain in touch and to communicate about the shadow reporting progress;
- Engaging the affected communities is a more rights-based approach;

The disadvantages of field research

- Field research is more costly than desk research
- Field research may be unsafe in situations where there are security risks;
- Doing good quality field research requires a high level of skills of the team;
- Analysing field research outcomes requires a high level of skills of the team.

3.5 Making a research plan



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AND DISCUSS:

Make an agreement on the research plan

The team must now develop a plan on how to carry out the research. The team must determine, which are the relevant documents to explore during the desk research phase and which are the field research methods to be used to collect the relevant information about the priority issues.

The team must decide on research periods and deadlines. We recommend that the agreed research periods and deadlines are added to the alternative reporting timeline that was created in step 2. ([See also exercise 2](#))

Revisit team roles and responsibilities on doing the research

Once the team has identified the research priorities and made a plan on how to carry out the research, it is a good moment to review the roles and responsibilities of the team members. Make sure to set deadlines for different parts of the research and create clarity on which team member is responsible for which part of the research.



RESULT

The team has a research plan in place which establishes the research priorities, the research methods, the timeline and deadlines and the responsibility of the team members.

TIPS TO MEET RESEARCH CHALLENGES

Focus

When you are doing your research, you will find a lot more information than you strictly need. Collecting information is time-consuming, so keep asking yourself the question: is this data relevant to the focus and priorities of our shadow report.

Be selective

Often a shadow reporting team will have a tendency to include every issue or topic, they come across in their shadow report research. It is important to be selective in the points you wish to present, and to stick to the priorities identified.

Flexibility

Remember that gathering information is not a linear process. Sometimes you will have to go back and talk to the same people again, collect additional information or go back to documents you have already studied. You may have to adapt your research plan or focus during the research phase. If necessary, the team should be able to adapt the work and research plan.

No information is also information

During the research process, you will discover that it is sometimes very hard to find the right information. Governments might not publish certain data, or have no data collection mechanism in place. Government may refuse to give you access to information, despite repeated requests to be provided with the information.

If no information is available or provided, this finding should be part of your analysis. You can follow this rule of thumb: no information is also information. It informs you on how much value a government puts on providing correct and public information on how it is meeting its human rights obligations.

Collecting data

Where possible, collect quantitative and qualitative data to support your arguments. Please be aware, though, that quantity alone does not determine whether human rights are being violated. If discrimination takes place, this is a violation of human rights, regardless of the number of people being discriminated against. Of course the team must assess if a single violation is relevant enough to become part of the information provided in the shadow report.

Recording data

It is recommended that you carefully record all the sources of information you use from the beginning. Back-tracking to rediscover the source of your information is very time-consuming. Moreover, showing the sources of your information in your report or in your lobbying and advocacy messages can strengthen your credibility.

Language of your data

You will have to present your shadow report in one of the working languages of the treaty body (See also chapter 3.6). Make sure you have people on the team who can translate the information collected into the working language of the treaty body.

Credibility of your data

Though doing shadow reporting research is not an academic exercise, information credibility is crucial. Your data will be more credible if it comes from a reliable source.

If possible try and triangulate information. This means using different sources and methods to check data. You want to find out if the different sources give you the same information. If the different sources do not give you the same information, the team must be careful in how to present this information.

Conflicting information

You may find that people or sources give you conflicting information or different interpretations of the facts. It may be strategic, in some cases, to refer to the conflicting information and/or conflicting interpretation of facts. It shows you are aware of the conflict, and enables you to explain what information is most convincing to you and why.

Doing research is challenging

Doing research can be very challenging, so make sure that, as a team, you take time to reflect and regroup when things seem difficult. You will be proud of your end result. And doing the research should be seen as capacity building as well. The persons involved and the organisations, they work with, will increase their knowledge and understanding of the issues researched and on human rights. It will also expand your network and this, in the long run, will strengthen your advocacy, also beyond the shadow reporting process.

Collection of information should be a non-stop process

Once organisations have been involved in shadow reporting, the collection of information should become a non-stop process, regardless of report timing and deadline. After all, the end goal is to monitor and push for implementation of human rights in your own country and this push for change should be an ongoing process.

A DILEMMA: SHOULD YOU ENGAGE WITH THE STATE REPORTING PROCESS

In some countries, the State involves NGOs in the collecting of information for presentation in the State report. In some cases, the State and NGOs even jointly write the State report to the treaty body. Whether or not organisations decide to participate in the creation of the State report is a strategic choice and very dependent on the local context.

Engaging with the government during the process of the writing of the State report may be an opportunity for constructive debate and dialogue on the issues. It may create a good platform to start discussions around improving the situation on the ground. NGOs must make their own determination if these benefits exist in their own country.

One specific challenge we have heard about in practice, is that donors may hire experts to help write the State human rights report and in some cases these same experts are hired to work on the shadow report. Obviously this raises questions about the independence of these experts, but more importantly this way of working takes away an important element of the reporting system. There is no process of true review by the State of its own obligations under the human rights treaty, nor a truly independent review by civil society voices. Using experts to do all of the reporting work takes away the main goal of the reporting system, a true stock taking of the state of implementation of human rights. We recommend that you discuss this point with donors if they recommend hiring experts to do all the report writing work.

NGOs must be vigilant to make sure they are not co-opted in the process of creating the State report. They must retain the possibility to give critical feedback to the State report, even if they engage in steps leading up to the State report.

Throughout the shadow reporting process, the organisations involved must try to monitor the progress of the State report. The launch of the State report is an important moment in the shadow reporting cycle. It must be analysed to feed into the shadow reporting work (see above) and it is an important moment to communicate with the bigger community about the reporting process.

Finding expert support

For each of the United Nations human rights treaties, there are one or more (international) NGOs with a wealth of experience and expertise in the shadow reporting process for one particular treaty or topic. These organisations often provide support and training for other NGOs to increase the quality of the alternative reporting work. The writers of this Human Rights Alternative Reporting Cycle can also be contacted to provide additional training, see contact information in the colophon.



RESOURCES

The [website of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights \(OHCHR\)](#) provides a lot of useful information for each of the treaty bodies. Under the heading external links of each treaty body page you can find links to the websites of organisations that have a lot of expertise in working on the human rights covered by this human rights convention.

We advise you to explore the information on these websites to discover if the organisations mentioned provide support in the writing of shadow reports or support on the ground at the United Nations.



ADVOCACY AND COMMUNICATION ISSUES TO CONSIDER IN STEP 3

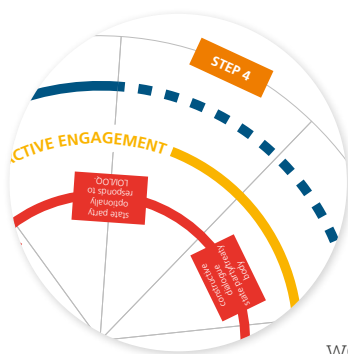
During the research phase of the shadow reporting cycle, the team should also communicate about the work being done with the broader community. In step 2, the team analysed and decided what would be the most useful communication tools to use.

What advocacy and communication issues should the team work on in this step?

- The team has to consider, if this is the appropriate time to engage with government stakeholders and in which way;
- The team has to communicate with the shadow reporting organisations, their supporters and the donor(s) to keep them updated on the process;
- The team must research if the treaty body has selected a country or national rapporteur for the State reporting cycle (see [chapter 3.10](#)) and contact this rapporteur to announce their intention to submit a shadow report;
- The team must make sure to collect the relevant contact information for the people and groups identified as relevant stakeholders in the stakeholders mapping;
- The team must consider developing communication messages to explain the alternative reporting system for a broader community. (e.g. Youtube or other creative communication methods);
- The team must consider if they have relevant news to share with the broader community including the Media.

Important moments to communicate about in this step include:

- The start of the shadow reporting process;
- The publication the State report;
- The selection of the country or national rapporteur;
- The deadline of the shadow report.



STEP 4 - ANALYSIS OF YOUR RESEARCH AND WRITING YOUR REPORT

4.1 Introduction

In step four 'analysis of your research and writing your report', we are ending the preparation phase of the alternative reporting work and moving into the active engagement phase of the work.

In this step, we discuss how the shadow reporting team can analyse the information collected during the research phase and write the final shadow report, including drafting its own recommendations to the treaty body and an executive summary.

Now that much of the information has been collected and the research carried out the team must start to analyse its findings.

4.2 Review the research priorities and select your main areas of concern



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AND DISCUSS:

During the research process a lot of information has been collected by the research team on the research priorities that have been identified. Having collected the information, the team should now review the research priorities.

Are the research priorities also the main areas of concern that the team want to present in its alternative report? Perhaps issues that seemed of grave concern before starting the research, do not seem as important upon review. And perhaps new violations have been uncovered during the research that should be added to the main areas of concern to be presented in the shadow report.

The team must now bring together all of the information from the research and analyse it. The purpose of the analysis is to decide what information will be presented in the shadow report.

The main points to consider when analysing the collected information is:

- What are the most serious human rights violations;
- What are the most urgent and relevant issues from the perspective of the shadow reporting team;
- What issues are you considered expert on (credibility issue) and are within your mandate as organisation(s) or network. Each organisation within the coalition will need to make a self assessment of this;
- How many points do we want to present to the treaty body. Please remember the need to be concise and strategic in the choices you make. It is better to make a strong case for needed improvement on the most serious violations then to attempt to cover each violation big or small;
- How credible is the information and data we have. If information is not credible, you have to be careful in presenting it in your shadow report, as it may undermine the credibility of your entire report;
- If a donor has suggested or imposed issues to be covered or thematic areas, the team will have to consider including these in the report.

DONOR DRIVEN PRIORITY AREAS

While having sufficient financing in place to carry out the alternative reporting work is positive, it comes with some specific challenges. Having donor funding, especially if the donor clearly identified priority areas or themes, leave you open to criticisms, questions about your report's credibility and may raise legitimacy issues. Especially in countries where foreign involvement is used to discredit NGOs, working on a topic you are not familiar with, because a donor wants you to, is dangerous. It may play a part in undermining NGOs room to work and to affect change. By being in charge of your own agenda and priorities, you are less vulnerable to the charge of being just a foreign mouthpiece. As a NGO, you should be willing to discuss these issues with your donor. Your focus should be to affect change on the ground, not to follow a donor agenda if it does not match your own strategy and agenda. You must make sure to stress your independent goals and vision in your communication with the broader community to preempt the attacks on your credibility.

Selecting the topics to present in your report can be a challenging part of the alternative reporting process, especially if the organisations and people involved have a different level of understanding and knowledge on the shadow reporting process. Please remember that the treaty body does not have unlimited resources. They have to do the processing of the State and your alternative report within a limited time and with limited resources (See also, chapter 3.6) The more concise and clear a shadow report is, the more impact it is likely to have.

How will we decide if we do not agree on the analysis of the research or what position to take as a shadow reporting team?

In this step of the alternative reporting cycle, you may encounter differences of opinion on what should and what should not be included in the report. At this stage, the team should be familiar with the decision making process that has been established at the start of the reporting process, (See also step 2.3). If no procedure has been established, perhaps this is the proper time to discuss a process that works for the team.



TIP: INCLUDE THE AFFECTED COMMUNITIES IN SELECTING THE MAIN AREAS OF CONCERN

To make the shadow reporting process more inclusive and participatory, the team can consider to organising a public meeting for civil society and affected groups in this step. The team can present the main human rights issues that have been researched to update the broader community. The meeting can also be used to get a broader feedback on the most relevant human rights issues to present to the treaty body.

The team can make a list of the issues researched and ask the people at the meeting to vote for e.g. the three most relevant issues in their opinion. This will give the team more insight into what the broader community feels are the most urgent human rights issues. Those are the issues they most want to see improvement on.

Do we want engagement with the government at this stage of the process?

The shadow reporting team must (re)consider at this stage of the process, if you want to engage with the government. This decision depends on the local context. If engagement increases the chance of discussion about creating human rights improvements, engagement should be considered. In that case, this step of the process can already provide an advocacy opportunity. However, you must consider the risks this may entail, such as security concerns or attacks to your credibility.

Have we selected credible and accurate information?

It is essential that the information in the shadow report is credible and accurate. Your report will lose credibility if information presented is based on rumours or unverified data. Information is credible if the report can show that there are several sources for the information presented.

You may have found contradictory information on some issues. If you have contradictory information, you have to think long and hard if you even want to present these issues in your shadow report. If the decision is made to present this contradictory information, make sure you present both sides of the coin, to present both sides of the information collected.



RESULT

The team has identified the main areas of concern to be presented in the shadow report.

4.3 Writing the report



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AND DISCUSS:

Make a decision on the language(s) of publication at the National level

The team has to make a decision on the language(s) in which the report will be presented at the national level. If there are several local languages, ideally the report would be available in all local languages. If that is not possible, the team should attempt to make parts of the report available in the local languages (and make sure you budgeted for this. See step 1).

Translate the shadow report in the working language of the treaty body

The shadow report must be presented in one of the working languages of the treaty body (See also chapter 3.6). It is essential that the report is either written in the working language selected and translated back to the national language, or that it is translated from the national language by an expert translator. Shadow reports often contain legal and policy language and this requires expert translation

Who will do the writing and editing?

The team must make a decision on who should write the final shadow report. To ensure consistency in content, language and style, it is advisable to have one or a very small team of writers. This can be the team coordinator or a designated writer. The writer collects all the information and is responsible for putting it in a uniform format.

It may be wise to have a separate editor for the shadow report, both for the national language report and the working language report.

Be aware that, if you have several writers, there are clear agreements on who writes which part of the report. One person should keep track of final drafts and how these are filed. You can also work in collaborative online workspaces allowing you to write together in one document at the same time.

Do we have clear deadlines in place?

Writing, editing, and translating an alternative report is time consuming work. The team must clearly establish deadlines for the different stages of finalizing the report. If the deadlines have not yet been agreed on, they must be agreed on now. Please make sure the deadlines are added to the shadow reporting timeline, (See also [step 2](#) and [exercise 2](#))



RESULT

The team will have reached agreement on the process of writing, editing and translating the report, including deadlines.

4.4 The content of an alternative report

The basic elements of a table of content of the shadow report

A shadow report should be as concise as possible. The treaty bodies are trying to limit the number of pages of both the State report and the alternative reports as much as possible.

Ideally, a shadow report should contain the following elements:

- Executive summary (3 pages max), with main conclusions and recommendations;
- Table of contents;
- Introduction (including a brief explanation on the research methodology);
- Main part of the report (following the human rights articles of the treaty);
- Bibliography.



RESOURCES

The [website](#) of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) provides a lot of useful information for each of the treaty bodies.

Please check the information given by the treaty body you are submitting to, on guidelines for the maximum number of pages. If this information is not provided, please enquired if a maximum number of pages is preferred.

Below we will have a closer look at each of the parts that make up a shadow report.

The executive summary

The executive summary is the most important part of your report. In it you present the most important human rights violations, and present recommendations for improvement. Please note that this summary and your recommendations will be important information to the treaty body members. In fact, for some of the members, this will be the only thing they read from your whole report (The rapporteur responsible for your country will likely read the whole report).

Presenting your recommendations

In your executive summary, you should present your recommendations for improvement of the human rights violations. These recommendations should be clearly written and as specific as possible.

The recommendations must read as a to do list for the government. It is helpful if you repeat these recommendations literally in the main text of the report where you describe the human rights violations. Make the recommendations stand out visually in the main text by using e.g. a different letter and or a bold letter.

If your recommendations are based on solid research facts and information about human rights violations in your country and they are written in a clear way, the treaty body (the Committee) may choose to adopt your recommendation as one of the Concluding Observations. So it is important to spend time on developing strong and clear recommendations.



TIP: WRITING CLEAR RECOMMENDATIONS

To write clear recommendations, study the previously issued Concluding Observations of the human rights treaty body, including Concluding Observations given to other countries. They will give you examples of how to write a good recommendations. The more useful and well written your recommendations are, the more chance you have that the treaty body will adopt them in their Concluding Observations.

Introduction of the shadow report

In the introduction you can introduce briefly the organisations involved in the shadow report, and more importantly give a bit of background information on the research methodology, such as desk research and the types of field research. This will enhance the credibility of the report and counter any potential criticism.

Main part of the shadow report

In the main part of the shadow report, we can advise you to follow the chronology of the articles of the human rights treaty. This makes it instantly clear to the reader which protected human rights you feel are being violated and will makes it easier for the treaty body members to follow the structure of your report.

If you can, you should make a link or reference to the relevant part of the State report, especially if your information contradicts or gives additional

information on a point presented by the State.

If the State has not addressed an issue in its report, identify why civil society does address the issue. On these points and others, it can be helpful if you formulate questions that the treaty body can put to the government to get more information.

Do not forget to mention issues on which your State made improvements. We sometimes forget to acknowledge improvements that have been made. It creates a more positive exchange with the government and the treaty body, if civil society is seen to be not only critical but also pleased with improvement that takes place.

In your shadow report, you should also integrate and refer back to the previous Concluding Observations and give information on if these have been implemented by the State.

Please remember that the treaty body members are not from your country, if you are using country specific terms or are referring to country specific issues, explain them briefly or provide a definition in the text.

The bibliography of the shadow report

It is important that it is clear in the shadow report, which sources have been used. Footnotes or end notes can be used in each chapter and you may decide to add a bibliography for added transparency on the sources.



RESULT

A draft alternative report is written

4.5 Finalising the report

Collect feedback on the draft shadow report

Once the draft shadow report has been drafted, be sure to acknowledge the hard work of the writers of the report. It is then wise to have a team of proof readers. Of course the shadow reporting team should be involved but it may be very helpful to invite some proof readers who have not been closely involved in the research and drafting stage. A fresh pair of eyes may provide helpful feedback. They are more likely to ask questions on points that seem clear to the writers and the team as you are deeply knowledgeable on the content. They

are also more likely to identify passages that may not be relevant. Taking out information in order to make your really important points even clearer is very difficult for those involved in the whole process, since everything seems important! A fresh pair eyes can help the text to become more clear and transparent.

WHEN SHOULD THE TEAM FINALIZE THE REPORT?

Research the rules and deadline of your treaty body. As a shadow reporting team, you have to find out if your treaty body rules allow you to make a choice on when to submit the shadow report. Are you allowed to submit it after the session at which the discussion on the list of issues and questions takes place or not (pre-session)?

Obviously the team has to submit the alternative report before the deadline set by the treaty body, but there is another issue to consider. If you are allowed to submit after the list of issues and questions phase, there are two moments in time at which it might be smart to have a finalised alternative report ready; before the list of issues and questions stage at the treaty body or afterwards. (See also [chapter 3](#) and [steps 5](#) and [6](#))

Finalising the alternative report before the list of issues and questions stage

Advantages:

- The alternative reporting team will have finalised all of its research and analysis and can now focus on the dialogue with the treaty body
- The recommendations have been developed and can be shared with the treaty body for inclusion in the preparation of the list of issues and questions
- The treaty body has access to the full report in its preparation of the list of issues and questions
- You can still submit an additional report, or update to your alternative report after the list of issues and questions stage has finished. You can even make a separate document in which you yourself give answers to the list of issues and questions.

Finalising the alternative report after the list of issues and questions stage

Advantages:

- The alternative report is more up to date as there tends to be quite some time between the stage of the list of issues and questions and the stage of the constructive

dialogue. An up to date report does not run the risk of reporting on issues which may no longer be relevant

- The alternative reporting team can incorporate its own response to the points raised in the list of issues and questions in the final report. The list of issues and questions provides insight into the issues the treaty body considers the most relevant issues
- The alternative reporting team can respond to the answers given by the State in its response to the list of issues and questions

The answer on what will be the best time to finalise your report will depend in part on considerations of practical concern; e.g. does the team have the time, staff and resources to finish the report in time for the list of issues and questions phase. Secondly, it depends on the preference of the team.

Make sure you know the deadline and format for submitting the report

It is essential at this stage that the team knows the deadline for submitting the shadow report to the treaty body and all of the requirements, such as how many copies must be made available to the treaty body, for more details [see also step 6](#).



RESOURCES

The relevant information on the submission of your report can be found on the [website](#) of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) or by contacting the treaty body secretariat



RESULT

The team is able to submit a concise alternative report, containing clear recommendations within the deadline set by the treaty body.



ADVOCACY AND COMMUNICATION ISSUES TO CONSIDER IN STEP 4

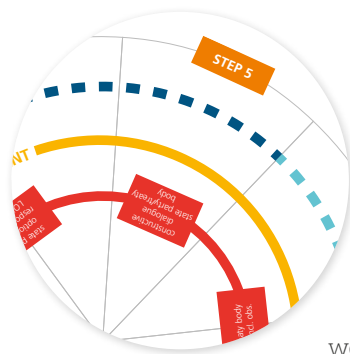
During the analysis and writing phase of the shadow reporting cycle, the team must also communicate about the work with the broader community. In step 2, the team analysed and decided what would be the most useful communication tools to use.

What advocacy and communication issues should the team work on in this step:

- The team should communicate and perhaps have a meeting, with the affected groups and especially the people that it collected information from, throughout this step. They should be informed about the shadow reporting process, the alternative report and the developed recommendations and be kept updated if there is relevant information to share.
- The team has to communicate with the shadow reporting organisations, their supporters and the donor(s) to keep them updated on the process.
- The team has to make sure, at minimum, the executive summary and the recommendations are available in the local languages and work on making them widely available.
- The team has to consider, if this is the appropriate time to engage with government stakeholders or other relevant stakeholders and in which way.
- The team should collect all of the contact information of the government officials and other relevant stakeholders who should receive a copy of the shadow report.
- The team has to prepare communication messages about the alternative report, highlighting the main areas of concern and the recommendations
- The team has to plan maximum outreach of their main messages in the alternative report
- The team has to reach out to the media to get them interested in publishing about the shadow report, once it is finalised
- The team must research if the treaty body has selected a country or national rapporteur for the State reporting cycle (see chapter 3.9) and contact this rapporteur to announce their intention to submit a shadow report.

Important moments to communicate about include

- The publication the State report;
- The deadline for the submission of the report to the treaty body;
- The publication and submission of the alternative report;
- The timeline of writing the report and important deadlines;
- The date of the pre-session working group for the List of Issues.



STEP 5 - ENGAGING IN THE LIST OF ISSUES AND QUESTIONS STAGE

5.1 Introduction

In step five 'engaging in the list of issues and questions stage', we are in the active engagement stage of the alternative reporting cycle.

We will outline the engagement, the alternative reporting team can have with the preparation of the list of questions and issues by the treaty body. For more information on the list of questions and issues, [See also chapter 3.11](#)

The goal of the list of issues and questions is for the treaty body to be able to collect additional information from the State in preparation of the constructive dialogue with the State. The treaty body bases the list of questions and issues on its own analysis of the State report, and any additional information available. The preparation of the list of issues and questions is a valuable stage for NGO engagement.

5.2 How to engage with the list of issues and questions



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AND DISCUSS

Has your shadow report been submitted?

The shadow reporting team must make a decision on whether its shadow report is submitted before this stage in the reporting cycle or afterwards, [see also the box on page 49](#). If the shadow report has been submitted, it will be an important source of information for the treaty body in the preparation of the list of questions and issues.

However, you are encouraged to also submit your own additional suggestions for the list of questions and issues, see below.

Please note that if you have submitted your shadow report at this stage of the reporting cycle you can still submit additional or updated information during the constructive dialogue phase, [see also step 7](#).

Additional engagement in the list of questions and issues

The shadow reporting team should see this step in the process as an opportunity to engage with the national rapporteur and the treaty body.

The team must make sure it has read and analysed the State report thoroughly at the start of this step. The team then has to decide, based on its own analysis of the State report, on which issues it would like additional information to be requested from the State or on which parts of the State report, clarification would be helpful. In your analysis focus on the issues that are of most serious concern. Keep in mind that your overall goal is to achieve improvements in the human rights situation in your country.



TIP: BUILD A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE NATIONAL RAPPORTEUR

The national rapporteur is a key person for your advocacy. The national rapporteur is selected by the Committee (the treaty body). He or she is the main person working on your countries' report(s) for the Committee. As noted, the Committee and its members have limited time and resources to do their work. This means they have to divide their time and resources efficiently. The national rapporteur will be the main interlocutor with the State, as well as with you, on your report. He or she will be the main person collecting points for questions and issues. This means he or she is crucial to your advocacy efforts. Identify this person early on and gear advocacy efforts specifically towards this person.

Be aware of two things:

- Firstly, the rest of the Committee members are still involved in the process and obviously allowed to input also. They will mainly do so on issues or topics they are already familiar with or have strong feelings towards. It is very important to research the treaty body members and understand their topics of interest, preferences and backgrounds. See also [page 52](#) and [54-55](#)
- Secondly, the national rapporteur can change between the list of issues and questions (pre-session) and the discussion of the report (session). So you must make sure to research who is the national rapporteur in each of these steps.

As discussed before the treaty bodies, have limited time and resources, so if the shadow reporting team can draft concrete and specific questions and issues, this will help the treaty body in drafting its final list of questions and issues. Please make sure that your draft list of questions and issues is presented in one document. It can be helpful to study previous lists of questions and issues as a good learning tool to drafting the questions.

The document in which the team suggests questions and issues, has to be submitted to the treaty body in one of the working languages of the treaty body. The team must also make sure to submit the information before the deadline and in the required format.



RESOURCES

The relevant information on the deadlines and working language can be found on the [website of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights \(OHCHR\)](#) or by contacting the treaty body secretariat



RESULT

The alternative reporting team analyzes the main issues it would like additional information from the State on and presents the treaty body with concrete potential questions for the list of issues and questions

5.3 Attending the plenary meeting at the United Nations

Most treaty bodies allocate specific plenary time to hearing submissions from UN agencies and most also receive NGOs during its preparation of the list of questions and issues. If possible, it is highly recommended that the team attends this plenary meeting as it provides the opportunity to engage at an early stage with the national rapporteur and the treaty body, both during the formal meetings and in more informal settings. You can gather information about the possibilities for this at the secretariat of the relevant Committee.

Can the alternative reporting team attend the list of issues and questions meeting at the United Nations?

Whether the team is able to attend the list of issues and questions meeting at the United Nations will

depend on issues, such as if funding is available. We highly recommend that the team is present during this phase of the reporting cycle, as valuable input can be given during this stage. However, please remember that even if you are not able to attend, the team should engage with this process by preparing and submitting its suggestions for questions to add to the list of issues and questions, see also above.

If you are attending the meeting, consider the following points in preparation



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AND DISCUSS:

Identify the expertise of the treaty body members

Treaty body members cannot be experts in all areas covered by their human rights treaty. Generally you will see that treaty body members have specific topics that they are especially interested in. It is a good idea for the team to find out which treaty body member is interested in which topic. That enables you to address that treaty body member directly with relevant information on their topics of interest.

Who are the best qualified team members?

For the shadow reporting team, it is very important to think about who in the team are the best qualified to attend the meeting. (If the resources are available, it is better to attend the meeting with a minimum of two people). It is very helpful if the team members can fluently speak the working languages of the treaty body.

Especially for the informal meetings with the treaty body members, speaking the same language is very useful. Often this language is English.

At least one of the team members must be confident in public speaking in a rather imposing environment and the team members must have an excellent understanding and knowledge of the whole shadow report content. You may be asked questions on any part of your work.

Finding support

Sometimes, there are international NGOs available who offer support or training specifically around

the procedures the list of questions and issues. It can be a good idea to research which groups offer these services for your treaty body. [See also resources, page 44](#)

If you are not able to attend yourself

Even if you are unable to attend yourself you can still consider contacting organisations based in Geneva to present your suggestion for the list of questions and issues or relay any additional questions from the Committee back to you. This is less effective than when you attend yourself, but it can be considered if there are no other options.

5.4 Attending the session at the United Nations: practical issues



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AND DISCUSS:

Travel and visa

Please note that the United Nations does not offer assistance in making travel arrangements. The shadow reporting team has to make its own arrangements relating to travel and accommodation as well as visas to enter Switzerland. OHCHR does not provide assistance in this regard and is not in a position to provide letters to the Swiss authorities. Applying for visas may be a time consuming process, so make sure to start the process on time. You may be able to get support from your national delegation at the United Nations.



RESOURCES

Additional information on the practical issues regarding your visit may be found on the following websites:

Welcome desk for NGOs in Geneva
www.welcomedesk.org/en/practical-information

International service for human rights
www.ishr.ch/news/treaty-bodies

Accreditation to the United Nations

In order to be able to enter the United Nations buildings, participants must have so called United Nations ground passes. To obtain ground passes, you have to go through the process of

accreditation. The process of accreditation is started online and finished when arriving at the United Nations

Please note that the process of accreditation must be started on time, make sure to research the relevant timeline. Please be aware that once the online accreditation process is completed, you must physically go and get your ground passes at the United Nations. Depending on the United Nations schedule, this can be a time consuming process. We recommend you get your ground passes at least one day before your meeting at the United Nations



RESOURCES

For the relevant details on getting accreditation for your treaty body, please visit www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CED/Pages/Accreditation.aspx

Engage with your countries' delegation

As it is your end goal to push for improvement on the issues you are concerned with, it may be a good idea to engage with your countries delegation before your travel to the United Nations and/or when you arrive at the United Nations. It is useful to inquire who will be representing the State at the meeting. (Often the countries diplomatic representative at the United Nations will be representing the country at this session). Have an open dialogue with the government delegation, without giving up your ability to give critical feedback and to speak about the improvements you hope to see in your country. You can see this engagement with the countries' delegation as another opportunity to advocate for change.



RESULT

The alternative reporting team has planned its travel, accommodation and visa and accreditation application in a timely manner

5.5 Attending the session



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AND DISCUSS:

Be prepared

The formal procedure at an United Nations

meeting is very strict. As a team, you must make sure you know exactly what to expect ahead of time. One of the ways to become more familiar with the procedure is to attend a session dedicated to another country if possible, before you attend your own meeting.

You must make sure to study the procedures of the treaty body before you go to the United Nations and to follow instructions of the treaty body strictly.

You should have made sure your document with suggested questions and issues has been submitted to the meeting on the appropriate deadline. Generally, you will be able to share documentation with the treaty body members at the meetings as well. So make sure you come prepared. It is good to bring copies of your document for all of the treaty body members.

And if there is any additional information that you urgently want to share with the treaty body members, you can bring printed copies of that information as well and hand it to the members. While it is always good to offer the treaty body members information, please make the information brief and relevant.

Speaking at the meeting

At the formal session there will be a brief time slot for the National Human Rights Institute and civil society to speak. Generally, each will have no more 10 to 15 minutes speaking time. The speaking time is strictly monitored. Do not expect to be able to speak any more than the time slot available.

It is important to be in touch with your countries' National Human Rights Institute and to find out if they will be attending the meeting. If they are, try to have a meeting, before you travel to the United Nations, to discuss the topics they want to raise in the meeting. It is advisable to try and be as strategic as possible and make sure you are not both speaking about the same points. It is more helpful to the treaty body members if each speaker shares new information or makes a new point.

In principle any NGO may request to speak at the meeting. It is essential that you find out whether any other NGOs have requested to speak. If that is

the case you will have to share the total speaking time with them, meaning you will have a very brief time slot.

If you find out other NGOs have requested to speak, you should try to engage with them and to find out what they wish to address. There are, for instance, some international NGOs who wish to make a single point at each of the United Nations meetings. You may be able to ask them to not speak or to negotiate a few more minutes for your intervention. Remember they do not have to agree to do this. If possible try to get the first speaking slot, so you are not surprised by a speaker who does not stick to the allotted speaking time.

You have to make sure you have all the points you want to make in your speech, available in a printed copy so you can share it with all the treaty body members. Please note that it is almost impossible to make photocopies in the United Nations building, so you must make sure you have the copies prepared.

For more information, [See also step 7](#)

AN EXPERIENCE FROM PRACTICE

During one of the meetings of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, CEDAW, the representatives of the Dutch shadow reporting network (representing 40+ Dutch civil society organisations) were surprised to find that a speaker had asked to speak to the CEDAW committee. This speaker represented an international organisation that took the position that legalised sex work is a crime against women and she used her speaking time to express, that the fact that the Netherlands had legalised sex work, was a violation of CEDAW.

This position was a surprise to the representatives of Dutch civil society and also contrary to the position of Dutch civil society who feel that legalized sex work under the right conditions is acceptable. The Dutch team now had to spend time mentioning this point in their speaking slot, and also went on and quickly prepared an additional fact sheet to outline the position of the Dutch shadow reporting network

Planning informal engagement with the treaty body members

Many of the treaty bodies and national rapporteurs are interested in having the possibility to informally speak with civil society. Often the treaty body will pencil in time in their work schedule to speak with civil society during the lunch break or in a debriefing session. Please make sure you find out if such time slots have been allocated. These sessions are also called informal sessions. They are not open to the public, but are 'behind closed doors'.

But even if no time slot is allocated, you can invite the treaty body members to join you for an informal lunch or meeting. Please be aware that the treaty body members schedule is very busy so you should make these informal meetings useful for the members. If an informal meeting is happening, make sure to stress the points that are of most relevance to your team, but do not bore the members by repeating the same information over and over again. Please remember that the treaty body members are trying to identify which questions they want to ask the State in the list of issues and questions and your input should assist them in identifying relevant questions and issues.

The informal meetings should be a place where the members can ask you questions. So be prepared to be able to answer questions about all aspects of the State report, your shadow report and any other documents you have submitted.

Meeting with the national rapporteur

As the national rapporteur is the treaty body member who takes the lead on the whole analysis of the information from your country, it is advisable to be in touch with this person before the meeting and to try to have a face to face meeting as well. The national rapporteur is usually interested in finding out any additional information that you can provide. And to hear any suggestions, you may have on questions to include in the list of questions and issues. You can meet with the national rapporteur in an informal setting, inviting him or her to lunch or a coffee.



RESULT

The alternative reporting team has made maximum use of all the options, both formal and informal to share its views on the questions it feels should be included in the list of issues and questions

After the meeting: publication of list of questions and issues

Usually soon after the meeting at the United Nations, the treaty body will publish the list of questions and issues. This list is addressed to the State and the State has to decide how it wants to respond to the list.



ADVOCACY AND COMMUNICATION ISSUES TO CONSIDER IN STEP 4

During the analysis and writing phase of the shadow reporting cycle, the team must also communicate about the work with the broader community. In step 2, the team analysed and decided what would be the most useful communication tools to use.

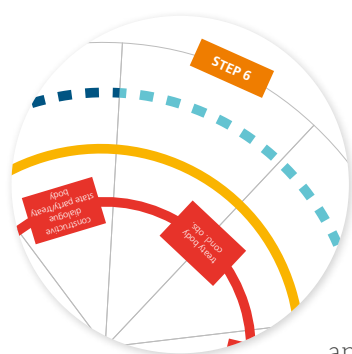
What advocacy and communication issues should the team work on in this step:

- In some cases the meeting of the treaty body is broadcasted live online. The team must make sure this information is shared with all the relevant stakeholders, using all of the selected communication tools.
- It may be a good idea to organise a joint viewing of the broadcast of the meeting in the country, so people can feel more connected to the process. Please remember the meeting will be in the working languages of the treaty body.
- Before the meeting at the United Nations and after the publication of the list of questions and issues, the team must make a press release, perhaps have a press conference and undertake any other relevant actions, to get media attention for the content of the meeting.
- The team has to communicate with the shadow reporting organisations and make sure they all participate in a communication campaign about the main points of the meeting and the list of questions and issues. To ensure the easy participation, it is helpful if the shadow reporting team presents organisations with the messages to share. E.g by giving the organisations ten tweets or messages that can be copy-pasted by the organisations and their supporters. The more visible these messages are, the better.

- The team should communicate with the affected groups and especially the people that you collected information from, throughout this step. They should be informed about the main points of the meeting and be invited to help share this information as described above.
- The team must continue to make the information in the shadow report more accessible to the general public by making fact sheets, pamphlets or other creative ways to share the information. (Drawing, street drama). A broad public awareness campaign can be started.

Important moments to communicate about include

- The meeting at the United Nations
- The moment of publication of the list of issues and questions
- Relevant national political moments



STEP 6 - FINALISING YOUR ALTERNATIVE REPORT AND SUBMISSION

6.1 Introduction

In step six ‘finalising your report and submission’, we are in the active engagement stage of the alternative reporting cycle. In this step, we will revisit the finalisation of your report and what points to consider when submitting your alternative report to the treaty body.

6.2 Finalising and submitting your alternative report



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AND DISCUSS:

In [step 4.2](#) and [4.3](#), you will find the relevant information to review to finalise your alternative report. Please review these points with your team, when you are getting ready to submit your report to the treaty body at the United Nations.

Hard copies or soft copies of the report?

You will have to submit a specified number of hard copies of your report to the treaty body, [see page 58](#) for more information on this point.

Depending on the local preferences and e.g. the availability of internet access, and available resources, the team must determine how many hard (printed) copies of the report will be available to distribute to the general audience and relevant stakeholders. The team must also ensure soft or electronic copies are widely distributed.

Deadline for submitting the report to the treaty body

It is essential that the shadow reporting team plans the submission of the report carefully and does not wait to submit the report on the submission deadline. The team must expect things to go wrong at the last minute and to have a submission deadline planned that is several weeks before the final submission deadline of the treaty body.

CHECKING DATES OF SUBMISSION STATE REPORT VERSUS THE DATE OF THE CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE

It is quite important to check the date of submission of the State report (or date the report should have been submitted) against the date the treaty body will deal with the report during the constructive dialogue. See also step 5. The difference between the submission date and the constructive dialogue can be years.

When this is the case it is important that the State report is supplemented with new updated and relevant data and information. As an alternative reporting team, you should try as much as possible to update your information to reflect the current information on the ground. (Include these updates in your shadow report, additional info for list of issues/questions or separate fact sheets).



RESOURCES

The relevant information on the submission of your report can be found on the website of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) or by contacting the treaty body secretariat

Do you have to submit the shadow report before the session for the discussion of list of issues and questions?

As a shadow reporting team, you have to find out if your treaty body rules allow you to make a choice on when to submit the shadow report. Are you allowed to submit it after the session at which the discussion on the list of issues and questions takes place or not. For more information on this issue, [See also step 4, page 49](#).

Requirements for submitting the alternative report to the treaty body

There may be differences in the way in which your treaty body wants you to submit your shadow report. As a team you must make sure you know the specific requirements of your treaty body. The requirements of the treaty body will explain the format in which the shadow report has to be submitted. For example the CEDAW committee requirements state that “the report should be submitted in Word format by e-mail and thereafter 26 hard copy format copies” have to be sent to the postal address given.

Requirements for submission will most likely include that the report:

- Indicate the full name of the submitting NGO;
- Indicate the name of the State party scheduled for consideration to which the information relates;
- Indicate whether or not the submission can be posted on the treaty body website for public information purposes. So if for any reason what so ever you want to submit information to the treaty body but do not want that information to be public, that is an option you can choose. This obviously is especially important in States where you will most probably be harassed or worse for submitting information on human rights (or particular rights).

Submission of hard copies is mandatory

It is important for organisations to realise that quite a high number of hard copies of the shadow report have to be send by post to the treaty body before the deadline. Due to the high number of submissions received from NGOs and other stakeholders, and its limited staff resources, OHCHR does not photocopy reports from NGOs. It is your own responsibility to ensure the hard copies reach the treaty body on time.

Support for the submission of hard copies

There are some specialised (international) NGOs who provide support to national NGOs during the shadow reporting process. They may be able to provide information sessions on what to expect during the different phases of the reporting sessions at the United Nations and may be able to help you with submitting the hard copies to the United Nations.



RESOURCES

Additional information in the practical issues regarding the submission of your alternative report

Welcome desk for NGOs in Geneva
www.welcomedesk.org/en/practical-information

International service for human rights
www.ishr.ch/news/treaty-bodies

6.2 Finalising and submitting your alternative report

Once the shadow report has been finalized, it is important to present the shadow report at the national level. The team should consider creating an official launch moment of the report. This may be a good moment to engage with relevant national stakeholders, which may include the government. It is certainly a good opportunity to have a bigger public meeting with civil society to update them on the report and to get their support in spreading the news about the shadow report. This really is crucial. As mentioned throughout the manual, it is important that the process in Geneva remains as relevant and transparent as possible for people at home. There is a real risk otherwise that the process becomes dissociated from realities on the ground. It is very difficult in a later stage to make it more relevant. Remember the alternative report as such is simply a means, to assist you in achieving improvements on the ground.

Once the shadow report is finalised, it should be shared with the government. You obviously should send copies to the relevant government officials. You may plan an official hand over to the responsible minister, or other officials. You may wish to organise a round table with government officials to discuss the content and recommendations of the report. After all, the government may wish to show its good intentions by starting to work on improving some issues before the meeting with the treaty body.

Dealing with international organisations

Depending on your countries' context, international organisations such as the local representation of the OHCHR, UNDP, UNICEF, ILO maybe closely involved with the (State) reporting cycle. They may provide separate information to the treaty body on the human rights protected by the treaty. They may also organize trainings for local NGOs on the reporting cycle.

In practice the role of the international organisations can range from being supportive to national civil society to being a bit of stumbling block. Some representatives of the international organisations feel their voice or opinion on human rights are more relevant than those of national civil society.

They may try to monopolize the dialogue with the government officials. As civil society you must ensure to handle these challenges carefully. Make sure that you engage with the international organisations early in the reporting cycle so they are aware of your work and create a good working relationship.



ADVOCACY AND COMMUNICATION ISSUES TO CONSIDER IN STEP 6

During the finalising and submission phase of the shadow reporting cycle, the team must also communicate about the work with the broader community. In step 2, the team analysed and decided what would be the most useful communication tools to use.

What advocacy and communication issues should the team work on in this step:

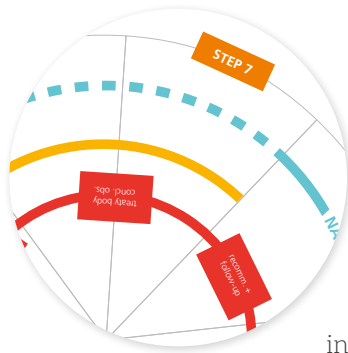
- Once the shadow report is finalised, the team must make a press release, perhaps have a press conference and undertake any other relevant actions, to get media attention for the content of the report.
- The team has to communicate with the shadow reporting organisations and other relevant supportive stakeholders. (To identify the relevant stakeholders, review the stakeholders mapping, See also exercise 1).
- The team has to make sure many people and organisations, participate in a communication campaign about the main finding and recommendations made in the shadow report. Chosen communication methods may include posting the shadow report on the organisational website(s), blog, newsletter, twitter, face book and linked in. To ensure the easy participation, it is helpful if the shadow reporting team presents organisations with the messages to share. E.g. by giving the organisations ten tweets or messages that can be copy-pasted by the organisations and their supporters. The more visible these messages are the better.
- The team should communicate with the affected groups and especially the people that you

collected information from, throughout this step. They should be informed about the shadow reports content and be invited to help share the information on the shadow report as described above.

- The team has to make sure, at minimum the executive summary and the recommendations are available in the local languages and work on making them widely available. The team can also consider making the information in the shadow report more accessible to the general public by making fact sheets, pamphlets or other creative ways to share the information. (Drawing, street drama). A broad public awareness campaign can be started or continued.
- The team has to ensure the relevant officials and other stakeholders get a copy of the shadow report. Perhaps approaching relevant government officials through social media is a useful strategy to add, so that they become more interested in the report. It may also be a good strategy to hand deliver the reports to the relevant people and to schedule some time to explain the main concerns to them. Or to invite them to a meeting on the content of the report.
- The team must be in touch with the relevant national offices of international organisations to share information on the shadow report and the main findings and recommendations of civil society.
- The team must be in touch with the country rapporteur for the country to ensure they have received a copy of the alternative report. This is a good opportunity to suggest the country rapporteur can always contact the team for any additional information.
- The team should engage with national and international media and share the main findings in the report.

Important moments to communicate about include

- The publication of the shadow report
- Relevant national political moments



STEP 7 - ENGAGING DURING THE CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE

7.1 Introduction

In step seven 'engaging during the constructive dialogue, we are in the active engagement and the national advocacy stage of the alternative reporting cycle. In this step we will discuss the main points that are relevant for the NGOs engagement during the constructive dialogue of the treaty body with the State delegation. During this stage, your shadow report is an important source of information for the treaty body. For more information on this stage of the reporting cycle, [see also chapter 3.12](#)

7.2 Has your State party submitted written replies to list of issues and questions

Sometimes the State party will submit its responses to the list of issues and questions in written form. These written responses form a supplement to the State report, and are especially important if there has been a long delay between the date of submission of the original State report and the date the treaty body is able to take up the report and start the constructive dialogue. See also the box [on page 57](#) on this issue

The shadow reporting team should analyse the response of the State to the list of questions and issues before they travel to the meeting. If you feel it is relevant you can prepare your own written response to the State response and make sure it reaches the treaty body in sufficient copies before the deadline. Please remember that the treaty body is especially interested in your suggestions for improvement in the form of recommendations and only submit additional information if it is an addition to information already provided. Also consider if the additional information will assist you in highlighting your main areas of concern. If the new information is not relevant to highlight your main areas of concern, the team may decide not to share the information with the treaty body.

7.3 Attending the constructive dialogue at the United Nations

If resources are available for team members to

attend the constructive dialogue at the United Nations we highly recommend that you attend the meeting.

During the constructive dialogue, the treaty bodies allocate specific plenary time to hearing submissions from UN agencies and most also receive NGOs. It is very important that the team attends the constructive dialogue. This is the last stage in the reporting cycle before the treaty body draws up its Concluding Observations. Your presence will give you the opportunity to share relevant information with the treaty body members.

Attending the constructive dialogue at the United Nations, practical issues

To find out more about travel and visa, [See step 5, page 53-54.](#)

Accreditation

For details on how to apply for accreditation [see step 5, page 53](#). If you already have ground passes for the United Nations makes sure that they are still valid for attending the constructive dialogue meeting.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AND DISCUSS:

Engage with your country delegation

Often countries send substantial delegations (perhaps representing several different ministries) to the constructive dialogue. You should find out who will be representing your country during the meeting.

Before the constructive dialogue starts, you have to discuss if it is a good idea to engage with your countries' delegation before your travel to the United Nations and/or when you arrive at the United Nations. In some countries, e.g. civil society and the government delegation have a round table meeting before travelling to the United Nations. This may be a good opportunity to have a discussion to advocate for change.

If you decide to engage with your government ahead of travel try, as much as possible, to influence the meeting by setting an agenda yourself, getting information about who will participate and what the objective is of the meeting. Also get notes

from the meeting (and write a report yourself in any case). You want to avoid meetings that serve as pseudo-consultation. You also want to avoid that the meeting only allows the government to know what you will be reporting on and does not give you any space to discuss your points.

Before the meeting; preparing your work

For the shadow reporting team, it is very important to think about who in the team are the best qualified to attend this meeting at the United Nations. (If the resources are available, it is better to attend the meeting with several team members).

Consider language and translation

It is very helpful if the team members can fluently speak the working languages of the treaty body (especially English). Especially for the informal meetings with the treaty body members, speaking the same language (English) is essential as no interpretation will be available. If team members do not speak the working language of the treaty body, you must arrange your own translation.

There may be interpretation available for the formal part of the meeting in all of the working languages, but this may not be of the highest quality. You can arrange your own interpreters.



TIP: BE AWARE OF THE HIGH COST OF GENEVA BASED INTERPRETERS

Be aware that interpreters in Geneva are very expensive. Syndicated interpreters ask at least 1000 euro's per day. If you need an interpreter to be present only for an informal meeting they will still charge you a whole day. It is possible to find interpreters who are cheaper and are willing to work with NGOs to agree on more acceptable prices, but do start looking for them early on. You may have to investigate if bringing your own interpreter may be the more cost effective option, as they could work with you throughout the time you spend in Geneva.

Selecting the team members

At least one of the team members must be confident in public speaking in the rather imposing environment of the United Nations and the team members must have an excellent understanding and knowledge of the whole shadow report

content. So it is helpful if you have team members who are experts on the different areas covered in your shadow report. After all, you may be asked questions on any part of the shadow report and it does not look professional if you are not able to answer the questions.



TIP: PREPARE YOUR CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE KEY MESSAGES

It can be quite a challenge for the alternative reporting team travelling to the constructive dialogue to prepare what messages to share during the different possible informal moments of engagement with the treaty body member and with the government officials. We can recommend that the team spend time in developing clear key messages before departure. For more information on key messages, [See Exercise 4: formulating your key message.](#)

Finding support

Often there are international NGOs available who offer support or training specifically around the procedures during the constructive dialogue. It can be a good idea to research which groups offer these services for your treaty body. [See also step 3.](#)



RESOURCES

The [website](#) of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) provides a lot of useful information for each of the treaty bodies. Under the heading external links of each treaty body page you can find links to the websites of organisations that have a lot of expertise in working on the human rights covered by this human rights convention.

We advise you to explore the information on these websites to discover if the organisations mentioned provide support in the writing of shadow reports or support on the ground at the United Nations.

7.4 The constructive dialogue

The formal procedure at an United Nations meeting is very strict. As a team, you must make sure you know exactly what to expect ahead of time. One of the ways to become more familiar with the procedure is to attend a session dedicated to another country if possible, before you attend your own meeting.

You must make sure to study the procedures of the treaty body before you go to the United Nations and to follow instructions of the treaty body strictly. Generally, you will be able to share additional documentation with the treaty body members during the constructive dialogue. If there is any additional information that you urgently want to share with the treaty body members, you can bring printed copies of that information as well and hand it to the members. While it is always good to offer the treaty body members information, please make the information brief and relevant.

It is a good idea to make sure you are at the meeting venue, very early. This gives you the opportunity to get used to the space, but more importantly you are able to share any additional documents, such as your speech with the treaty body members, before the meeting. You may even get the chance to informally talk to some of the treaty members. If that is the case, make sure that you have prepared some key messages you would like to share with that individual member. [See also step 5, page 54-55.](#)

Speaking during the constructive dialogue

At the meeting there will be a brief time slot for the National Human Rights Institute and civil society to speak. Generally each will have no more 10 to 15 minutes speaking time. The speaking time is strictly monitored. Do not expect to be able to speak any more than the time slot available. You can have several team members speak but you must consider if this is helpful in getting the information across. For more information on speaking at the meeting, [See step 5, page 54.](#)

Focus on the priority concerns

Many treaty bodies want to strengthen the follow up of the Concluding Observations. As the State usually does not have to report again for another four years after the constructive dialogue is concluded, the treaty body may wish to build in an interim monitoring moment. It may in the Concluding Observations appoints a follow up rapporteur who will request an update within an agreed timeframe on the measures taken in response to specific recommendations or “priority concerns”. In your speech during the constructive dialogue, you may want to highlight which areas are priority concerns in the opinion of the shadow

reporting team.

As only limited speaking time is available, be sure to focus on those points that the team feels are the most urgent human rights issues in your country. (As a team, you may wish to organise a meeting or meetings at home to get feedback from the affected groups and civil society on which points they feel are most relevant to present during the constructive dialogue).

It is obviously important to prepare the speech very well and to rehearse it before the meeting. Remember for a speech to be impactful, it is not just the content of the speech that is important but also the style of the speech, the tone of the speech and the proper body language.

You have to make sure you have all the points you want to make in your speech, are available in a printed copy so you can share it with all the treaty body members. Please note that it is almost impossible to make photocopies in the United Nations building, so you must make sure you have the copies prepared ahead of time.

In your engagement during the meeting, you should also stress as many of the recommendations that you made in your alternative report as fit in the limited speaking time. If you cannot address, all of your recommendations in the formal part of the meeting, you may have a chance to stress them during the informal engagement with the treaty body members.

Planning an informal engagement with the treaty body members

Many of the treaty bodies members are interested in having the possibility to informally speak with civil society present during the constructive dialogue.

Often the treaty body will pencil in time in their work schedule to speak with civil society during the lunch break or in a debriefing session. Please make sure you find out if such time slots have been allocated. But even if no time slot is allocated, you can invite the treaty body members to join you for an informal lunch or meeting. Please be aware that the treaty body members schedule is very busy so you should make these informal meetings useful

for the members. If an informal meeting is happening, make sure to stress the points that are of most relevance to your team, but do not bore the members by repeating the same information over and over again. The informal meetings should be a place where the members can ask you questions. So be prepared to be able to answer questions about all aspects of the State report, your shadow report and any other documents you have submitted.



TIP:

Arranging an informal lunch within the United Nations building of Palais Wilson seems simple. You can communicate with the secretariat of your treaty body about allocation of a lunch time slot and a room. The secretariat can also give you the contact details of the cafeteria. With them you can arrange the type of lunch. See also box below.

By now the team should know the topic(s) of interest of the individual treaty body members. (see also step 5, page 52) You can use this knowledge by addressing the treaty body member directly with relevant information on their topics of interest.

INFORMAL LUNCH WITH THE TREATY BODY MEMBERS, AN EXPERIENCE FROM PRACTICE

A shadow reporting team had been able to get an agreed time slot to have lunch with the treaty body members on the day of the constructive dialogue. An international NGO, that had supported them in giving training on the UN reporting system, had also supported them in arranging the lunch. This was done by ordering lunch from the cafeteria and reserving a room through the secretariat.

However, on the day of the lunch, the team arrived at the designated room and found it was locked. One of the team members then had to run around the huge United Nations complex to find a person with a key to open the room. Once the room was opened, it was very messy and no lunch had arrived. So one of the team members had to run to the restaurant of the United Nations and buy all of the last remaining sandwiches. Obviously, this set of events did not lead to a relaxing exchange with the treaty members, so the moral of the story: Check and double check if all the arrangements, you think you have made, have been made. And do this checking hours before the lunch is supposed to take place, so you still have time to act if anything is wrong.

Be prepared to create additional fact sheets on the spot

In some of the constructive dialogues, questions or concerns are raised by the treaty body members or your government, that you would like to give additional information about. Be prepared to be able respond very quickly and draft a fact sheet while at the United Nations.

If at all possible, it is helpful to bring along your own laptops, a portable printer and paper. It is nearly impossible to find a printer or copy machine, you are allowed to use in the United Nations building

Meeting with the national rapporteur

The national rapporteur is the treaty body member who takes the lead on the whole analysis of the information from your country and is responsible for drafting the Concluding Observations on behalf of the treaty body. The draft Concluding Observations are then discussed by all the treaty body members before they are finalised and shared with the world.

We hope that by this stage of the process, you have been in touch with the national rapporteur and have build a relationship with the person. It is highly recommended to be in touch with the national rapporteur before the constructive dialogue and to try to plan a face to face meeting as well.

In your shadow report, you have made concrete suggestions for recommendations to be included in the Concluding Observations. The national rapporteur may be interested in discussing the team's suggestions for recommendations or to enquire after the team's opinion on certain recommendations that the national rapporteur is considering to add to the Concluding Observations. Make sure the team members are available to meet with the national rapporteur at any time.



RESULT

The alternative reporting team has made maximum use of the constructive dialogue by engaging, both formally and informally with the treaty body experts to share its main concerns and by making suggestions for recommendations to be made in the Concluding Observations

7.5 Publication of the Concluding Observations

Usually, soon after the meeting at the United Nations, the treaty body will publish the Concluding Observations.

In order to assist States in implementing their recommendations, the treaty bodies have begun to introduce procedures to ensure effective follow-up to their Concluding Observations. Some treaty bodies request in their Concluding Observations that States report back to a follow up rapporteur within an agreed timeframe on the measures taken in response to specific recommendations or “priority concerns”. The rapporteur then reports back to the treaty body on the steps taken.

Some members of treaty bodies have undertaken visits to countries, at the invitation of the State party or NGOs, to engage on follow up of the report and implementation of Concluding Observations. [See also step 8.](#)



ADVOCACY AND COMMUNICATION ISSUES TO CONSIDER IN STEP 7

During the constructive dialogue phase of the shadow reporting cycle, the team must also communicate about the work with the broader community. In step 2, the team analysed and decided what would be the most useful communication tools to use.

What advocacy and communication issues should the team work on in this step:

- In many cases the constructive dialogue of the treaty body is broadcasted live online. The team must make sure this information is shared with all the relevant stakeholders, using all of the selected communication tools.
- It may be a good idea to organise a joint viewing of the broadcast of the constructive dialogue in the country, so people can feel more connected to the process. Please remember the meeting will be in the working languages of the treaty body.
- As this stage of the process is usually the most interesting to the media, engage with them ahead of time to find out if and how they would like to cover this event. They may ask you for specific material, such as video or photos of the

event. You may even be able to have a national journalist join the team.

- Before the meeting at the United Nations and immediately after its conclusion, the team must make a press release, perhaps have a press conference and undertake any other relevant actions, to get media attention for the content of the meeting.
- The team has to communicate with the shadow reporting organisations and supportive stakeholders and make sure they all participate in a communication campaign about the main events of the meeting. In this stage special attention should be given to social media. To ensure easy participation, it is helpful if the shadow reporting team presents organisations with the messages to share. E.g. by giving the organisations ten tweets or messages that can be copy-pasted by the organisations and their supporters. The more visible these messages are the better.
- The team should communicate with the affected groups and especially the people that you collected information from, throughout this step. They should be informed about the main points of the meeting and be invited to help share this information as described above.
- The team must try to have translations of the Concluding Observations in the national language as soon as possible and work to distribute them as widely as possible
- The team must continue to make the information in the shadow report more accessible to the general public by making fact sheets, pamphlets or other creative ways to share the information. (Drawing, street drama). A broad public awareness campaign can be started.

Important moments to communicate about in this step include

- The Constructive dialogue at the United Nations
- The publication of the Concluding Observations
- Relevant national political moments



STEP 8 - CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS AND ADVOCACY

8.1 Introduction

In step eight 'Concluding Observations and advocacy', we are in the active engagement and the national advocacy stage of the alternative reporting cycle. In this step, we will consider the publication of the Concluding Observations and the advocacy phase for implementation of the Concluding Observations that follows their publication.

8.2 The importance of working towards implementation of the Concluding Observations

It is important to remember that we have now reached the most important step of the whole alternative reporting cycle. Often by the time, an alternative reporting team reaches this step, they are tired from all the hard work and want to step back from the work. But it is essential to remember that all of the alternative reporting work serves **one main goal: to achieve change and improvement on the ground for the people whose human rights have been violated.**

If the team does not start the hard work of advocating for the implementation of the Concluding Observations, the whole reporting cycle is not much more than a paper exercise with no real impact on the ground.

8.3 The Concluding Observations are published

In the Concluding Observations the treaty body advises the State on actions to take to ensure better implementation of its human rights obligations in the country. The Concluding Observations often outline very concretely what the State should do or focus on, to make progress and improve the human rights in a country.

Once the Concluding Observations are published, a very important stage of the shadow reporting work starts. As civil society you now have to make sure that the Concluding Observations become known in the country and that the government takes actions to implement the Concluding Observations.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AND DISCUSS:

Having a debrief with the shadow reporting team

The publication of the Concluding Observations is a milestone in the shadow reporting cycle and a good opportunity to debrief each other on the constructive dialogue and its outcomes: the Concluding Observations. It will be the moment to see, which points of the shadow report were picked up by the treaty body in its feedback to the State.

To make the best use of the Concluding Observations, the team will now have to start working on the advocacy for implementation, but first use this opportunity to celebrate all the hard work and achievements in a more festive way. Generally, the shadow reporting team has done a lot of work in the last months leading up to the publication of the Concluding Observations and some time to celebrate and relax is needed.

Having a debrief with the government delegation

In some countries, e.g. civil society delegates and the government delegation have a round table meeting to debrief each other on their experiences and findings and to discuss the Concluding Observations. Having a debrief will give civil society a first sense of the willingness of the government to implement the Concluding Observations. It offers all the delegates involved in the process an opportunity to brainstorm on how to move forward with the help of the Concluding Observations. In most countries there is no official structure in place to work on the follow up of the Concluding Observations. Civil society will now have to start the process of pushing for implementation.

The Concluding Observations must be translated in the national language(s)

It is the responsibility of the State to translate the Concluding Observations in the national language(s). In practice, State may not provide a translation or the translation process may take a long time. Civil society may decide they want to take the lead on the translation to make sure the information is quickly available for the whole community. Perhaps you can get financial support from the State to make the translation(s) available.

The Concluding Observations must be shared with relevant stakeholders

The shadow reporting team can start its work on pushing for the implementation of the Concluding Observations by making sure the relevant stakeholders (See also the stakeholder mapping done at the start of the alternative reporting work) are informed about the content of the Concluding Observations. Initially this may just be in the form of educating and informing the stakeholders and perhaps starting to collect their initial feedback on the Concluding Observations.

It is important for the team to make sure that the most important stakeholders in the government are educated about the Concluding Observations. As stated before there is often no mechanism in the government to share information on the Concluding Observations and the relevant government officials may not be aware of the Concluding Observations. As civil society you can stress the point that if the government does not address the human rights issues, the same issues will come back in the next reporting round.

Important and influential stakeholder in parliament should also be educated and informed about the Concluding Observations. In many countries the Concluding Observations are tabled in parliament and you can encourage parliamentarians to question the government on their plans to make improvements in the human rights situation.

Focus on priority concerns

If the treaty body has identified priority concerns and has given the State a time frame to report back on these concerns, these are issues that civil society should pay special attention to. The fact that the State has to report back within a limited time may lead to momentum to work on the concerns and opens a window to push for change



RESULT

The relevant stakeholders are informed on the content of the Concluding Observations and aware that the Concluding Observations have to be implemented

8.4 Building your advocacy plan

While working on educating and informing the relevant stakeholders on the content on the Concluding Observations, the shadow reporting team must start the work of developing its advocacy action plan.

Making an advocacy plan, will require a thorough analysis of each of the Concluding Observations. It is likely that not all of the organisations involved in the shadow reporting process will be involved in advocacy on all the Concluding Observations. Organisations should work on advocacy on issues that are within the mandate and expertise of their organisation.

Analyse and prioritize the Concluding Observations

Initially, it is important to analyse the Concluding Observations. You have to think about which organisation or group of organisations is best placed to advocate for the implementation of which points. It is also important to look at the Concluding Observations and prioritize the urgency of follow up on some points. Urgency may be determined by the urgency of the human rights violations taking place, but urgency may also come from the opportunity to work on an issue due to the policy or legislative agenda of the government. E.g. if the Concluding Observations advise a State to improve education for disabled children and a new education law is being drafted. It is urgent to work on that issue.

Formulate your recommendations for change

Once the analysis has been carried out, you want to add to the prioritized Concluding Observations, a concrete recommendation for change in the country. This concrete recommendation, if carried out, should lead to an improvement in the human rights situation of the affected groups, and should avoid negative impacts.

Try to be as realistic as possible in the formulation of the recommendations. In many cases, no easy solution will be available. This does not release the government from its obligation to strive for improvement of the situation. The state has the obligation to progressively implement human rights. [See also chapter 2. Page 12](#)

These recommendations for change are the core of your advocacy messages that you are going to be pushing for.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AND DISCUSS:

Developing your advocacy messages

To further develop your main advocacy messages think about the following:

Who are the decision-makers and what arguments are most convincing to them?

To increase your chances of success, it is important to think about who has the power to take the decision to implement the desired change (You have done a stakeholder mapping earlier in the process but you may want to check if there are additional relevant stakeholders in relation to the specific advocacy point, see your stakeholder mapping). If you have not done a stakeholder mapping yet, we highly recommend you do one now, [See exercise 1, mapping your stakeholders.](#)

We also encourage you to (re)map and (re)analyse your allies and opponents, specifically in relation to your main advocacy messages, See exercise 1.8. Consider what type of arguments are the most convincing to the identified decision makers. Depending on who needs to be convinced, it may be strategic to add more legal, more economic or more political arguments, to the human rights arguments.



TIP: Please use [exercise four](#) on key messages, to help you shape your advocacy.

What kind of advocacy actions can you undertake?

After formulating your key advocacy messages, you need to decide on the actions that will help you take your message to your target audience.

You should have a brainstorm on what activities are realistic, useful and within your capacity. You have to think, in a strategic way, about how to make use of your existing experience, networks, contacts. It is wise to link your advocacy actions

based on the Concluding Observations to existing (advocacy) activities and/or to developing new activities that can help you achieve your goal. Examples of advocacy actions include:

- A press conference to share information on the Concluding Observations
- Use of the media (television, radio and print media) and internet e.g. mailing lists, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter etc.
- Workshops and seminars involving the affected groups, experts, government representatives (e.g. ministries, police), political parties etc.
- Dialogue with the government and/or other responsible actors
- National and awareness raising campaigns
- Legal actions to seek redress or prosecution of violations

What are the most strategic advocacy opportunities?

It is a good idea to make an assessment of the most strategic advocacy opportunities in a certain period. You want to make sure the government is likely to listen. This requires insight into the government agenda or the agenda of other actors you may want to approach. What deadlines are involved in changing a law or policy? Are there times in the year when the topic is already getting attention? Is there an upcoming conference, debate in parliament, elections, or a visit of a high-level official, etc. that can provide the strategic timing to present the recommendations and make demands for change?

Advocacy takes time. And when you are working on contentious issues or serious human rights violations it will take even more time. Do not expect to see immediate impact of your advocacy. Only by a coherent and joint advocacy for change will you be able to achieve your goals.



TIP: You may wish to make a timeline in which you record the relevant advocacy moments and match them with activities you want to undertake, [See also exercise 2: Using a timeline to plan and monitor.](#)



RESULT

The alternative reporting team has analysed the Concluding Observations and translated them into a coherent advocacy plan.

8.5 Additional ways to push for implementation of the Concluding Observations

The alternative reporting team must try to maximize the impact of the Concluding Observations. Below are some suggestions on how to strengthen the impact of the Concluding Observations.

Keep recording new information or research on your issues

Now that the shadow reporting team has created a system for the collection of information and for doing research, we recommend that the team set up a system to keep collecting the information on the issues, that are covered by the Concluding Observations, you have worked on. Collecting this information now will make it much easier to kick start the research phase for a next reporting cycle and can provide valuable information to use during the ongoing advocacy for implementation of the Concluding Observations and the push for change on the ground.

Plan a visit by the national rapporteur or other treaty body member

Some members of treaty bodies have undertaken visits to countries, at the invitation of the State party or NGOs, to engage in follow up of the State report and implementation of Concluding Observations. Planning such a visit could be a strategic move in your advocacy for change.

Engage with other shadow reporting cycles to other treaty bodies

As a shadow reporting team, you have collected a lot of relevant information, that may not only be relevant to the treaty body you submitted the information to. We encourage you to look at the agenda for upcoming reporting cycles to other human rights treaty bodies for your country.

Some of the information you collected may be relevant to share with those treaty bodies as well, including the Concluding Observations on these points. You can share your knowledge and information with the people making the shadow report

to the other treaty body or engage yourselves. Obviously if your State is told by different human rights treaty bodies to pay attention to a specific human rights situation, this may put more pressure on the State to act.

Monitor and record your advocacy work

It is important to monitor and record your advocacy efforts and their impact. Advocacy for change is often a lengthy process, but monitoring and recording the work, will give you the opportunity to evaluate your efforts at a later stage. [See also exercise 2: Using a timeline to plan and monitor.](#)



RESULT

The alternative reporting team and its advocacy partners and allies have in place and continue to look for ways to push for implementation of the Concluding Observations.



ADVOCACY AND COMMUNICATION ISSUES TO CONSIDER IN STEP 8

During the advocacy phase of the shadow reporting cycle, the team must also communicate about the work with the broader community. In step 2, the team analysed and decided what would be the most useful communication tools to use.

What advocacy and communication issues should the team work on in this step:

- The team has to communicate with the shadow reporting organisations and supportive allies and make sure they all participate in a communication campaign about the Concluding Observations.
- As soon as the Concluding Observations are published, they should be shared as widely as possible. In this stage, special attention should be given to social media. To ensure the easy participation, it is helpful if the shadow reporting team presents organisations with the messages to share. E.g. by giving the organisations ten tweets or messages that can be copy-pasted by the organisations and their supporters. The more visible these messages are the better.
- Once the translation of the Concluding Observations is finalized the team and the

shadow reporting organisations must repeat the communication campaign in the local language.

- The team should communicate with the affected groups and especially the people that you collected information from, throughout this step. They should be informed about the content of the Concluding Observations and asked to become involved in the planned advocacy activities.
- The team must make the Concluding Observations and advocacy messages more accessible to the general public by making fact sheets, pamphlets or other creative ways to share the information. (Drawing, street drama). A broad public awareness campaign should be started.
- The team must communicate with its donors about the Concluding Observations and the advocacy plans.
- The team must communicate with the relevant stakeholders to help push for change.

Important moments to communicate about include

- When the Concluding Observations are published
- When the Concluding Observations are translated (by you or by the Government)
- Relevant national political moments



STEP 9 - EVALUATION AND CONTINUED ADVOCACY

9.1 Introduction

In step nine 'evaluation and continued advocacy', we are in the national advocacy stage of the alternative reporting cycle and making steps towards preparation for a new reporting cycle. In this step, we encourage the shadow reporting team to evaluate the shadow reporting cycle process and to record the best practices and lessons learnt for a next shadow reporting cycle. Evaluation of the process is crucial and should be documented for similar processes in the future.

REMINDER: Evaluating the alternative reporting process is not the same as evaluating the advocacy as such. Remember the shadow reporting process is an activity within a larger advocacy strategy. As such evaluating the alternative reporting process can also help to increase effectiveness of the advocacy strategy.

If the team has created a timeline at the start of the shadow reporting process and kept track in the timeline by filling in the monitoring layer on how activities were carried out, they should now be compared and assessed against the planning, [see exercise 2.](#)

9.2 Evaluating the work



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AND DISCUSS:

Self evaluation

At the very least we encourage the network or team that worked on the shadow report to self evaluate the process as soon as possible after the publication of the Concluding Observations.

The Human Rights Alternative Reporting Cycle and the steps can be used as a guide for this self evaluation process. The team/network can go through these steps and consider the main lessons learned and best practices per step. You should record these lessons learned in a self evaluation document.

If the team has worked with a time line and recorded the planned activities, and the actual activities, that time line should provide relevant information for the self evaluation Questions that should be covered in the self evaluation include:

- How was planning of the process? Did we follow our plan of action? If not, why not? What was the effect of not following the plan of action? What issues came up during the process that were not planned for or insufficiently planned for? Could this have been avoided/better planned for?
- How did the network operate? How did it deal with (potential) conflict? How was coordination? Were roles/responsibilities clear? How was communication? What was good? What could have been better?
- Did research and collection of data go according to plan? Was it sufficiently accurate for processing? What challenges did we face in collecting data and information? How did we go about meeting those challenges? Could it have been better? Did the methods meet our expectations? Could we have used different methods?
- Was the information delivered on time and in such a way that it could be processed effectively? How was the writing process? Was it efficient and effective? Could it have been more efficient and effective? How was communication during this writing process? Did everyone feel included in the process? How did everyone appreciate the final product? What was good/not good?
- Was there sufficient coordination and communication at different opportunities to engage directly with the treaty body? Was everyone sufficiently aware of the opportunities and the limitations?
- How was preparation of the different trips to Geneva/New York? How was communication about this? How was feedback and debriefing? What lessons can we learn from the trips? What could have been more effective?

- Did the team have an effective, safe and efficient communication within the team? Did the team have an effective, efficient and impactful communication with the outside world? What can be improved?
- Please add any additional points that were relevant for the team to discuss in this self evaluation

The purpose of a self evaluation is to learn from the success and mistakes made to improve the quality of future work. Doing a self evaluation should be a positive moment of joint reflection and learning.

Self evaluate the capacity build during the alternative reporting cycle

It is also interesting to self evaluate the capacity gained by the individual team members and their organisations through their engagement in the shadow reporting work. The team can consider exploring this as a group, or you can decide to develop a questionnaire to be filled in by all of the team members. The information collected is relevant for the individual team members but also is part of the overall evaluation. If a questionnaire is used the joint outcomes should be analysed.

Questions that should be covered in the self evaluation include:

- What did I learn about the alternative reporting process I did not know before? Be very specific if possible.
- What did I learn about human rights; about the human rights system and the human rights situation in my country
- What did I learn about advocacy, specifically rights- based advocacy
- What new topics did I learn about?
- Was there sufficient support for learning: training/workshops etc?
- How did we organise learning amongst ourselves? Did we learn sufficiently from each other? If so: what? Could this have been better?
- If you had a leading or coordinating role; What

did I learn as a coordinator about leading a network?

- Can we enhance the capacities of others for next shadow reports?
- What did beneficiaries learn from us? How did we organise this learning?

BECOMING A LEARNING NETWORK OR ORGANISATION

In terms of learning, it is always very good practice to write a learning agenda with your network or within your organisation. The learning agenda includes issues you want to learn about or test during a process. When you plan for learning it makes it easier during (self) evaluation to reflect on this learning. If you do not plan for learning at all, the exercise of thinking about what you learnt becomes unfocussed and very generic.

Example: If you decided to include topics you never worked on before by including new organisations in the network working on the shadow report, this might be because you want to learn more about their areas of expertise, extend your network and potentially include this learning in the advocacy you are already undertaking. You therefore need to plan the process in such a way that you can benefit from these organisations in the way you intend.

What you then can evaluate is whether the decisions you made in planning the process to increase the potential for learning were right, whether they were implemented effectively and whether they led to learning.



RESULT

The alternative reporting team and the individual members have taken stock of the best practices developed and the lessons learnt during this Human Rights Alternative Reporting Cycle. They have written down these practices and lessons for future use.

Evaluation of stakeholders' experience (by independent expert(s))

To increase the learning for the shadow reporting team, it would be ideal if you could also have an evaluation done by independent experts which should include going out to discuss the shadow reporting process with the most relevant stakeholders and beneficiaries.

If there is no budget to have an independent evaluation, the team should consider how it can collect constructive feedback from the main stakeholders and beneficiaries. Perhaps an online survey could be considered (there are many free online survey providers), or the team could organise a few focus group meetings to collect feedback.



TIP

Budget for evaluation: it is always good practice to budget for an external evaluation. This should already be considered in the preparation steps.

Collecting feedback from the different stakeholders on the alternative reporting cycle will provide the team with rich information on the impact the work had and what was most impactful according to the stakeholders and beneficiaries. Obviously an evaluation with stakeholders will also give the team information on the less successful aspects of the process.



RESULT

The alternative reporting team have taken stock of the experiences of the stakeholders and beneficiaries during the alternative reporting cycle. They have written down these practices and lessons for future use.

9.3 Make a plan for archiving the most important documents

People and organisations that work to push for change often neglect to properly archive their own work. It is a good idea to spend time during the evaluation phase of the process to assess which documents, should be archived for future use. The people involved in this shadow reporting cycle may not be the ones working on the next reporting cycle and leaving a cleaned up and organized archive, which contains only the relevant documents is a great gift to your successors.

You may further consider making your own team manual on the shadow reporting process. You can use the current guide as a model to write such a manual/guide, but adapt it to your own context and lessons learnt. If you documented actions taken during each of the steps, as was advised in the Human Rights Alternative Reporting Cycle,

throughout the process and you include the lessons from the (self) evaluation, you will have a good framework for such an alternative reporting guide for your future reference.

9.4 Start planning for the next shadow reporting cycle

As emphasised many times throughout this guide, shadow reporting is not a goal in itself. It should be an activity in a broader advocacy strategy and serve this strategy and its goals. Planning for the next shadow reporting process should therefore be based on the assessment made of its effectiveness.

If you decide it is an effective addition to your overall advocacy for change, it would be good practice to start planning for the next reporting cycle already. The continued advocacy and monitoring of the implementation of the Concluding Observations and continuous data collection is not only the logical step after the evaluation, but also the crucial first step for the next shadow report.

It is good to note that you might not want to wait for the next reporting cycle at the same treaty body. You might want to work on a different shadow report at a different treaty body.

One of the first steps to take to engage in a next reporting cycle is to ensure that the team will have sufficient resources in the next shadow reporting phase. Plans can be made on how best to fundraise for the next shadow reporting cycle.

If the decision is made to start work on a new alternative human rights report, the team can start using the Human Rights Alternative Reporting Cycle again, starting at step one.



ADVOCACY AND COMMUNICATION ISSUES TO CONSIDER IN STEP 9

During the evaluation phase of the shadow reporting cycle, the team must also communicate about the work with the broader community. In step 2, the team analysed and decided what would be the most useful communication tools to use.

What advocacy and communication issues should the team work on in this step:

- The team should share the evaluation lessons learnt with the shadow reporting organisations and consider who else should be informed of the main findings.
- The donor(s) should be informed about the evaluation and updated on the advocacy activities and plans for the future.
- The team should communicate with the affected groups and keep them involved in the advocacy activities.
- The team continues to make the Concluding Observations and advocacy messages more accessible to the general public by making fact sheets, pamphlets or other creative ways to share the information. (Drawing, street drama). A broad public awareness campaign should be started.

Exercises

1 Exercise: Mapping your stakeholders

1.1 Purpose

In this exercise we explain the need to map all of the relevant stakeholders in the alternative reporting process at the start of the reporting cycle. We give an explanation on how to do a stakeholder mapping. And we remind you to always think of, and re-analyse, your identified relevant stakeholders during the different steps in the shadow reporting cycle.

FACILITATION TIPS: WHAT DO YOU NEED TO DO IN A STAKEHOLDERS MAPPING EXERCISE?

Undertaking a stakeholder analysis is particularly useful when you do so with a group of people (especially from different organisations as it also helps get an understanding of their broader network).

If you do a stakeholders analysis with a group, someone needs to facilitate the process (You do not need to have an external facilitator, but could be useful). If you do this yourself please keep in mind the following:

- Make sure you have adequate time available to do the exercise. You should set aside at least a few hours for doing the exercise. (3 to 4 hours).
- Make the exercise and the results visible for everyone. This means you should use flipcharts and markers. You should also write clearly, so everyone can see at a distance.
- Make the exercise flexible: this means you can move results around, remove them or add them. You do this by using big post-its (on which you can write big clear letters!) or cards that you can move around easily.
- Decide on a stakeholder and its position on or off the flipchart, one at a time. Make sure that when you decide on this everyone agrees and has the same understanding. This avoids discussions afterwards. It makes sure everyone is on the same page.
- In large groups (above 10) work in smaller groups and bring results together in a plenary.
- Make sure you have a designated note taker to collect all of outcomes of the stakeholders mapping exercise. As you will see in several of the steps, we will remind you to revisit the stakeholders identified and to consider how to engage with them in this particular

step of the alternative reporting cycle.

- Below you will find some tools that help you to carry out a stakeholder analysis. Be sure to have hand outs of these and replicate these on flipcharts.
- In terms of material this means you should always have: flipcharts, markers and post-its/cards, as well as sufficient hand-outs of the tools.

1.2 Defining Stakeholders

Stakeholders are those people or organisations who feel their interests can be or are affected by the issue(s) addressed in the human rights reporting cycle. Each human rights reporting cycle will come with its own set of stakeholders. The stakeholders will, amongst others, include the following groups and organisations.

1.3 Affected groups

The key stakeholders are the groups or communities directly affected by the human rights violations. They must be involved in the alternative reporting cycle (though their level of participation will differ depending on the context). When exploring who are the affected groups, make sure to consider if there are specific groups, who are more vulnerable to suffer the human rights violations under investigation. These could include minorities, underrepresented or stigmatized groups such as people living with HIV, migrant workers and youth. And make sure to consider if there are any groups who are often overlooked while researching the issues under investigation. Make sure the knowledge and experience of the affected group(s) is included in your analysis and research.

Keep in mind that not all communities or individuals within a community are affected in the same way or will share the same views. It is quite normal that views differ. These differences should be represented and analysed in the shadow reporting process.

Civil society

Other stakeholders may be organisations who work with the affected groups or on the issues under discussion. These can be NGOs, health workers, lawyers, media or service providers. NGOs or

other civil society organisations may play a part in implementation of laws and policies in the country under investigation. Pay particular attention to including civil society organisations that are composed of, or work closely with, and for, specific vulnerable groups.

Government

Knowing which communities or groups are affected helps you to determine which government agencies, departments or representatives you may want to contact during the shadow reporting process. Which government authorities are involved? These could include e.g. local, provincial and national authorities, the police and ministries. When thinking about the government, try to look at the relationship between the government and the problem you are focusing on. What responsibilities or interests does the government or its agencies have in relation to the problem?

Parliamentarians, politicians and political parties

Parliamentarians, politicians and political parties should be considered as stakeholders during the mapping exercise. They may know particulars of human rights issues going on in their constituency. They may feel invested in improving the situation or can be opponents to change. Moreover, they can be instrumental in the process of collecting the information for the report and to pressure the government to give follow up to the Concluding Observations.

Private sector

Private sector organisations such as businesses may be stakeholders as well. In some cases they may be perpetrators of human rights violations. In other cases they may be affected by the violations themselves.

International organisations

Depending on the situation in your country, international organisations such as the United Nations organisations, IMF or the World bank may have influence over the shaping of law, policy and practice in your country. Please consider them while thinking about the relevant stakeholders. Moreover international NGOs may play a similar role in your country and may be relevant stakeholders. Often

national representations of other countries, represented by their embassy, have an interest in the human rights issues, you are exploring.

Others

Other institutions that can be useful depending on the human rights violations under investigation are:

- Professional organisations, such as associations of judges, bar association, police associations etc;
- Other professional institutions such as the council of the judiciary, prosecutor's office, judicial training centres;
- Ombudsperson's office, commissions on specific issues such as equality commissions;
- Trade unions;
- And National Human Rights Institutions (Please note NHRIs have a separate mandate in the reporting system, See also step 5 and 7).

PLEASE NOTE

Working with the relevant stakeholder(s) at the right time is crucial to your success. Neglect them and they may actively work against you. Manage them well and they may become an active ally.

1.4 Mapping your stakeholders

Before starting the stakeholders mapping exercise, make sure that the main focus of the alternative report has been identified. The team doing the mapping exercise must know which human rights violations are the focus of the alternative report. This will help you in identifying the most relevant stakeholders.

When you start your shadow reporting work, it is very useful to identify all the relevant stakeholders at the beginning, including groups and individuals with different or opposing views from yours. This will help you to understand the relationship between the stakeholders and their interests in relation to the issues you want to address. It also provides an opportunity to think about who you want to involve in the reporting cycle. It makes it more clear, who you want to contact during the course of the reporting cycle, and what part they can or should play in the process.

1.5 Starting the mapping exercise: brainstorm

When you start the exercise, start by brainstorming individually or in small sub teams on who are the stakeholders you can think of. Write the stakeholders on a card, **one card per stakeholder**.

Remember that the more specific you are, the more useful the information is for use later on. For example you can write on a card that the ministry of justice is a stakeholder, but it is more helpful if you can identify which department(s) within the ministry are the relevant stakeholders. It is even better if you can list the names of the relevant civil servants. If you do not yet know the names of the relevant persons or department, you should note this at the end of the exercise and identify if you need to collect this detailed information at a later stage.

1.6 Making your stakeholders matrix

During the stakeholders mapping meeting, the facilitator should explain the purpose of the mapping exercise and remind the participants of the general categories of potential stakeholders involved. ([See also page 75 - 76 above](#))

When the group meets to do the stakeholders exercise, we can recommend using a stakeholders matrix as a useful instrument to map the stakeholders.

The model presented here, is based on the so-called Gardner Matrix. It can help you determine which stakeholders should be closely involved in the shadow reporting cycle and which need less attention. The model makes visible to which extent stakeholders may have an interest in and influence over the issues you are working on. Please copy this matrix on a flipover sheet.

Now take the cards on which you have described stakeholders. Please remember each card should mention only one stakeholder. Now discuss as a group, if this particular stakeholder has a high interest in the human rights under discussion in the alternative reporting cycle or a low interest.

Next discuss if this particular stakeholder has a high level of influence over the improvement or deterioration of the human rights situation or a low level of influence.

Once you have made your decision, place the card with the name of the stakeholder in the corresponding box. For each of the stakeholders on the cards, you decide where they are to be placed in the Matrix.

		INTEREST	
		LOW	HIGH
INFLUENCE	HIGH	C	D
	LOW	A	B

AN EXAMPLE: PLACING A STAKEHOLDER IN THE STAKEHOLDER MATRIX

You are doing a stakeholder mapping for a shadow reporting cycle on the implementation of CEDAW, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women in your country. On one of your cards you have written the name of your prime minister as a relevant stakeholder.

First you have to discuss, does our prime minister have an **interest** in the improvement of the human rights of women. Your conclusion maybe that your prime minister does not care much about this issue, but he or she is also not totally disinterested. If you look at the matrix, the card with the name of the prime minister will be placed in the box with the letter A and not in box B.

Next, you now have to investigate the second question, does your prime minister have a high **influence** on improving the human rights of women or a low influence. Let's assume your conclusion is that the prime minister has a high influence on the situation regarding women's rights in your country. The card moves to box C. Your prime minister has a low interest in the topic but a high influence.

1.7 Understanding your stakeholder matrix

Once you have filled in the stakeholder mapping, you can draw some conclusions in relation to the stakeholders identified.

The stakeholders listed in box A.

The stakeholders listed in box A, (low influence and low interest), require only minimal attention, effort and involvement during the alternative reporting cycle.

The stakeholders listed in box B

The stakeholders listed in box B (high interest and low influence), should be involved in the alternative reporting process and be kept well informed. They have a high interest and they may be in a position to influence stakeholders listed under C and can be allies in your lobby and advocacy efforts. Typically you will find in this group, people whose rights have been violated, rights-holders and beneficiaries.

The stakeholders listed in box C

The stakeholders listed in box C (low interest and high influence) can be powerful in affecting the desired improvements to the human rights situation. They must be informed, but the alternative reporting team must consider carefully how and when to reach out. In some cases it may be strategic to involve them during the whole alternative reporting process, in others only to engage with them during certain steps in the reporting cycle.

The stakeholders listed in box D

The stakeholders listed in box D (high interest and high influence) are the key stakeholders. They must be informed and the reporting team must always remember to inform and to involve them in the alternative reporting process during the different steps.

1.8 Exploring the stakeholders in more detail, allies and opponents

As a team, you have now identified the most relevant stakeholders in relation to the human rights violations under investigation. We recommend that you take the time to explore the most important identified stakeholders in more detail, by exploring their position in relation to the human rights violations under investigation. Are these stakeholders, your potential allies, your potential opponents or something in between.

You should explore this question for all of the stakeholders from box C and from box D, as they are stakeholders with a high influence over the topics under consideration. You can also do the exercise for the stakeholders in box B, as they have a high interest in the topic. We do not recommend doing the exercise for the stakeholders in box A as they have in a low interest and a low influence on the issues under consideration.

PLEASE NOTE

Make sure you have copied down all of the information and mapping from the previous exercise, before you start the new exercise. You want to keep the information collected in the stakeholders mapping available for future reference

Allies and opponents matrix.

Below you see the so- called allies and opponents matrix. This tool is a matrix that can be used to categorize the allies and opponents of your advocacy issue. Using this matrix, helps you to identify your main allies and opponents, and those whose neutral position make them targets for your advocacy.

DEFINING OPPONENTS AND ALLIES

Opponents: Individuals or organisations who may oppose your advocacy campaign for human rights implementation, because they may be impacted negatively by the changes advocated, because of disagreement about underlying values or merely because they may lose face.

Allies: Beneficiaries, individuals or organisations who will directly benefit or who can be persuaded to support your advocacy effort because of sympathetic concerns and similar values. They support the upholding of the human rights concerned.

ALLIES AND OPPONENTS MATRIX

ATTITUDE OF THE AUDIENCE TO YOUR POSITION	VERY PRO			MAIN ALLIES
	PRO			
	NEUTRAL			KEY INFLUENCE GROUND
	ANTI			
	VERY ANTI			MAIN OPPONENTS
		LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH
		INFLUENCE OF THE AUDIENCE ON THE ISSUE		

Please copy this matrix on a flip over sheet. Now take one of the cards on which you have described a stakeholder. (Please remember each card should mention only one stakeholder). Now discuss as a group, the attitude of this stakeholder towards and influence over the issue, you intend to advocate on.

Is this stakeholder supportive (**Pro**) or very supportive (**Very Pro**) the position of the alternative reporting team has on the topic? Is the stakeholder not interested or without an opinion on the topic, then this stakeholder fits in the box of being **Neutral**. If the stakeholder opposes (**Anti**) the teams position or is very much against your position (**Very Anti**), they fit in the corresponding box .

After deciding where the stakeholder fits in relation to your position, you revisit the issue of influence again and explore it more in depth. Does the stakeholder you are considering have a **Low** influence, a **Medium** influence or a **High** influence on the topic. Once you have made your decision, place the card with the name of the stakeholder in the corresponding box.

AN EXAMPLE: PLACING A STAKEHOLDER IN THE ALLIES AND OPPONENTS MATRIX

You are doing a stakeholder mapping for an alternative reporting cycle on Convention on the Rights of the Child in your country. On one of the cards you have written the name of your minister of education as a relevant stakeholder. You are exploring the issue of access to education for children without a residence or migration permit in your country. At the moment, certain groups of migrant children are not allowed to attend school. Your group feels this is a clear violation of the protected rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

First you have to discuss, how your minister of education stands on this issue. Is he or she supportive of the rights of migrant children to attend school? Now assume this minister is from an anti migration political party. He or she is **Very Anti**, and does not support your position. You place the card in the **Very Anti** box.

Next you consider the influence the minister of education has on the access of migrant children without a permit to attend school. Is it the minister who decides on access to schools? As a group determine if the minister's influence is high, medium or low. Let's assume that the influence

of the minister on this issue is **High** in your country. You then place the card in the box that corresponds with the choices **high** and **very anti**.

1.9 Understanding your allies and opponents matrix

Now that you have mapped your allies and opponents matrix, you should spend some time analysing what the matrix tells you. All of the stakeholders in the boxes that have high influence and that are in the neutral, pro and anti boxes, are key stakeholders and targets to address your advocacy to. The stakeholders in these boxes make up the key influence ground. These are the stakeholders, you should try to influence to affect the change you want to achieve.

DEFINING TARGETS

Targets: Individuals or organisations that have the power to effect the policy change or change in implementation of a policy or practice that is outlined in your advocacy objective. Targets are those individuals and organisations that can ensure the implementation of the human rights under consideration.

From the matrix, you can identify which of the following five influencing strategies may be most appropriate in relation to the specific stakeholders:

- With all stakeholders that have been identified as allies (**Very pro** and **pro**), build alliances as soon as possible to have their support on the alternative reporting work and especially the advocacy for the implementation of the Concluding Observations, the implementation of the human rights under consideration.
- With stakeholders who are potential allies as they have a high influence but who currently have a low interest in the topic under consideration (the stakeholders that can be found in and around the neutral boxes). Your influencing strategy can be to work on persuading these stakeholders that your position is the right one by providing them information and directing relevant key messages to them.
- With stakeholders who have a low influence, but who are your allies as they agree with your

position (very pro and pro boxes). Your influencing strategy can be to help these stakeholders to increase their influence. For instance, by making it easier for them to make their opinion heard through an organised email, twitter or petition campaign.

- With stakeholders who have a high influence but who are your opponents (very anti and anti), your influencing strategy should be to reduce the influence of these stakeholders as much as possible.

You will need to prioritize the stakeholder groups you can target, and plan strategically according to available human and financial resources.

Your opponents are potentially doing the same thing. Be aware of this as they will identify the same key stakeholders in the neutral boxes and do all they can to make them oppose your position.

There are some issues that can come up during the analysis:

- You do not have enough information on a stakeholder. This means you can not give a specific name of a person or department, and/or allocate positive or negative features. This happens a lot. Key here is that you find out instead of assuming!
- You miss out on the opponents. Often we see that people undertaking a stakeholder analysis have a pretty optimistic and positive view on how people view their position on an issue and how important an issue is to others (it's important to us and we are right!). Ask yourself the question, if no strong opponents appear in your analysis: how come the problem has not been resolved;
- In advocacy often the rights-holders/beneficiaries are forgotten;

1.10 Contacting the stakeholders

After completing the stakeholder mappings, your group may want to consider if it is a good idea to contact stakeholders at the start or during the alternative reporting research phase, to inform them that you are writing an alternative report. The mapping should give you information that should help you identify which stakeholders to approach at which time in the process.

Discuss which stakeholders you want to contact, what is an appropriate time to do so and how you want to do this. You might want to contact some stakeholders in the very beginning and others only in a later stage of the reporting process. When meeting stakeholders for the first time, make sure you explain to them the purpose and the process writing an alternative report. Please also developing a clear key message before meeting with the relevant stakeholders. [See exercise 4](#) for an explanation on developing key messages.

1.11 Follow up

Make sure that as a group, you identify on which of the stakeholder(s) you need to collect more information such as names and contact information, but also personal information to understand what motivates the person. The more complete your stakeholder overview is the more use you can make of it during the whole alternative reporting cycle. It will also provide valuable information to consider when you are planning and carrying out your communication during the alternative reporting cycle. [See exercise 3 to explore developing your communication plan.](#)

Your stakeholders mappings should be a working documents during the shadow reporting cycle. You may realise over time that you have neglected some relevant stakeholder and you should add that organisation, group or person to the mapping at that point. You may also realise over time that your initial placement of a stakeholder in the matrix is not correct, as they are, for example more influential or more interested in the issue than you initially realized. In that case you should move this stakeholder to the appropriate box and make sure to rethink how to engage with them.



RESOURCES

Participatory Advocacy: A toolkit for VSO staff, volunteers and partners

<http://www.intrac.org/data/files/resources/674/Participatory-Advocacy-A-toolkit-for-VSO-staff-volunteers-and-partners.pdf>

Manual on Advocacy and Policy Influencing for Social Change by TACSO: http://tacso.org/doc/doc_manual_5.pdf; and its trainer guide: http://tacso.org/doc/doc_manual5guide.pdf

2 Exercise: Using a timeline to plan and monitor

2.1 Purpose

In this exercise we explain the benefits of using a timeline to plan and monitor your work during the alternative reporting cycle. Using a timeline makes it possible for the team to visualise the whole alternative reporting cycle and the relevant moments in time. A timeline can also be used to monitor and evaluate your work.

2.2 Defining the timeline method

In a timeline, you make a list of events and deadlines in chronological order. A timeline is typically a graphic design showing a long bar labelled with dates alongside itself and usually events labelled on points where they have or should happen. A timeline makes it easy to visualise how and when events and deadlines are happening. One of the advantages of a timeline is that you can visually match the events and deadlines of different actors in one overview.

FACILITATION TIPS; WHAT DO YOU NEED TO DO A TIMELINE EXERCISE?

Making a timeline is easier when you do so with a group of people, who are part of the alternative reporting team.

If you do a timeline exercise with a group, someone needs to facilitate the process (You do not need to have an external facilitator, but could be useful). If you do this yourself please keep in mind the following:

- Select a timeline method that works for the group before you start the exercise, for more information, see below 2.3 How to make a timeline.
- Make sure several hours are available to create the timeline (3-4 hours).
- The facilitator should look at the information on the layers that make up a timeline (see below 2.4 creating an alternative reporting timeline). The facilitator can then request the participants to research relevant dates for the treaty body layer and the national calendar layer before coming to the meeting.
- Make sure to have flipovers and markers available to draft an initial timeline, before the final version is put into the selected timeline method.

2.3 How to make a timeline

There are many online tools available to help you create a clear timeline for the whole alternative reporting cycle. You may wish to consider the timeline program called preceden <http://www.preceden.com/> This program allows you to create a detailed timeline in which you can add any number of relevant timeline layers you want to use. Moreover, you can add notes to each of the added elements of the timeline and make a printable version.

There are many other ways to create a usable timeline. If you search for timeline online, you can find a variety of explanations on how to create a timeline in e.g. word, excel or power point. We encourage you to find the timeline method that works for your group. [See also example on the next page 83.](#)

2.4 Creating an alternative reporting timeline

In a timeline for a alternative reporting cycle, you ideally add several layers or levels which represent different elements and actors in the shadow reporting cycle.

Treaty body layer

The first layer/level of the timeline can be named, treaty body. In that timeline layer you note all of the relevant information about your treaty body's calendar and timeline. Making this layer of the timeline will force the team to research this relevant information and use it in the planning of your own work. (see also chapter 3)

Important dates and deadlines to add to the treaty body layer include:

- deadline for submission of State party report
- deadline to submit information for the list of issues and questions
- date for the session at which the list of issues and questions is discussed
- deadline for the submission of the alternative report
- deadline for the application for accreditation at the United Nations
- date of the constructive dialogue with State party
- expected date of publication of the Concluding Observations

Shadow reporting timeline an example

DECEMBER	JANUARY 2015	FEBRUARY	MARCH	APRIL	MAY
UN treat body ● <i>deadline submission state report</i>					
National Calender ● <i>deadline finalising national state report</i>				● <i>national election</i>	
Team planning ● <i>analyse state raport</i>					
Communication ● <i>press outreach on state report</i>					
Monitoring and evaluation					

UN treaty body

Deadline submission state report
12/12/2014

National calender

Deadline finalisation national state raport
02/12/2014

National election
04/15/2015



RESOURCES

As mentioned before the [website](#) of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) provides a lot of useful information for each of the treaty bodies. Under the heading meetings and deadline of each treaty body page you can find the relevant dates.

National calendar layer

In the second layer/level of the timeline, called the national calendar, you can add all of the relevant dates and events happening in your country around the alternative reporting process, but also more broadly. For example it is wise to add dates of relevant political events, such as local or national elections. Or to add conferences or other events related to your issues that you know will be happening.

Important dates and deadlines to note in the national calendar layer include:

- period in which the State will be working on the State report;
- deadline for the submission of the State report;
- national elections;
- local elections;
- meeting of relevant parliamentary bodies
- consultation meetings on important relevant strategies/policies/legislation;
- important relevant legislation/policies/strategies considered by parliament and/or government;
- timing of visits by relevant international or regional organisations and/or human rights monitors (such as special procedures of the UN);
- meeting of international organisations consulted by the UN.

Alternative reporting team planning layer

In the third layer of the timeline, the alternative reporting team planning layer, you should add all of the planned activities and mark periods during which specific parts of the work will be done. For instance if you plan to do field research in a specific area of the country during a week that should be added to the timeline. You should add the planned team meetings, but also block out the longer periods of work e.g. three months at the beginning of the process to build a network.

In order to plan the reporting team work, it can be

helpful to go through all of the steps presented in this Human Rights Alternative Reporting Cycle, as the steps outline all of the activities which should be undertaken in a best case scenario. Going through the steps will give the team the opportunity to make choices on what activities you are able to undertake within your own time, staffing and financial boundaries.

Communication layer

The fourth layer can be used to plan your communication to the outside world. By looking at the events and dates in the previous layers, it should give you useful clues about when the crucial times are to communicate about the alternative reporting work. (See also the communication tips in each of the steps and exercise 3 on making a communication plan)

In order to plan the communication, it can be helpful to go through all of the steps presented in this Human Rights Alternative Reporting Cycle, as the steps outline which activities should be undertaken in a best case scenario. Going through the steps will give the team the opportunity to make choices on what activities you are able to undertake within your own time, staffing and financial boundaries.

Monitoring and evaluation layer

When you create the monitoring and evaluation layer to the time line, it will be empty at the beginning. When the work on the alternative reporting starts, you will use the monitoring layer to note when activities actually took place. You have to ensure that the alternative reporting team makes it a habit to look at the time line during their meetings, so they can update the timeline.

The timeline model is a good tool to monitor your work on continuous basis. As we all know, we try to plan our work in detail but things can change over time. Perhaps the UN treaty body has to change its schedule, or you planned to do a communication activity that did not happen. Please add this information to the fifth level and add notes to give an explanation on why things did not go as planned.

By keeping a record of what actually happened in your timeline, you can instantly monitor if you are

working according to plan. It enables you to create a recorded document of all the events and deadlines that took place. Monitoring yourselves in this way will enable you to make adjustments to the planning during the process but it will also enable you to evaluate the whole cycle at the end and to learn from your successes and to learn from things that perhaps did not go so well.

3 Exercise: Making a shadow reporting communication plan

3.1 Purpose

There are a great variety of ways in which people can communicate these days. If you engage with alternative reporting, you will have to communicate at two levels;

- communication to stay in touch as an alternative reporting team and
- communication to inform and update the broader community.

Communication, especially communication directed to the broader community is time consuming. This exercise should assist the alternative reporting team to make decisions on what are the most effective and efficient ways to communicate with the main stakeholders and network partners during the alternative reporting process. Making a communication plan at the beginning of the alternative reporting process, should help the team to make the communication more uniform. When working on a communication plan, a realistic assessment of the time and costs involved must be made. (See also how to make a budget on page 31) Please note that in each of the individual steps, we make suggestions on the most relevant communication activities for that step.

3.2 Creating a house style?

Does this alternative reporting team want to create a joint name, logo or house style to use when communicating with the outside world about the alternative report?

The advantage of a joint name, logo or house style is that it shows the unity of the organisations involved in the process and it creates clear communication. Of course, it is important for individual organisations to remain identifiable as a member of the shadow reporting group. We all know that NGOs have to pay attention to their individual recognition and profile.

AN EXAMPLE OF USING A HOUSE STYLE: THE DUTCH NETWORK FOR THE CEDAW ALTERNATIVE REPORT

A solution chosen by the Dutch network for the CEDAW alternative report was that a joint name and logo was used, but the names of the active member organisations were mentioned as part of each communication. An advantage of this method is that if individual organisations leave the process, you can easily adapt this in the mentioning of the organisations involved, but the overall image presented to the outside remains intact.

3.3 Communication and security issues

Is this alternative reporting team aware of the potential risks or potential lack of security attached to certain types of communication?

As NGOs working in human rights, we have to increasingly consider our personal security, but also the security of our communication. These days we are so used to all of the communication tools available that we use them without perhaps thoroughly considering our security risks. Depending on the situation in your country, we encourage you to consider security risks involved in all communication. If necessary make sure there is a clear communication security policy in place. (For example, if it is potentially dangerous for people to be seen engaging in the alternative reporting process, make sure there are rules about publishing individual's names and pictures)



RESOURCES

Tactical Tech is an international organisation dedicated to the use of information in activism. Their website provides a lot of information about internet security for activists. <https://www.tacticaltech.org/>

3.4 Communication within the shadow reporting team

There are two levels of communication to consider as a shadow reporting team; the internal communication within a team and external communication with others (general public, political targets etc...).

There are many ways in which the shadow reporting team can communicate. Here we have listed a number of them. You may have other options to

add. We encourage you to make choices on which methods will be used, early in the process. Having too many communication methods in use, often leads to miscommunication. In the grid presented on page 89, you can indicate the communication methods chosen. Please do not forget to consider the security aspects in your choice. Security issues are probably even more relevant for internal communication, as you may be discussing sensitive information.

EXAMPLES OF COMMUNICATION METHODS FOR THE ALTERNATIVE REPORTING TEAM TO CONSIDER USING

Please note that it will help the team in the long run to establish clear and agreed communication methods from the start and to limit the options used to avoid miscommunication.

- Face to face meeting
- Group meetings
- Phone/Skype/face time
- Mobile phone messaging service, e.g. SMS or Whatsapp
- Email
- Google groups
- Face book groups
- Storing joint documents in a cloud service that can be used by all team members such as dropbox.

3.5 Communication with the outside world

There are a great number of communication methods that are potentially useful during an alternative reporting process. We encourage you to consider which of these methods are most appropriate in your country and context. Here we have listed a number of them. You may have others to add.

EXAMPLES OF COMMUNICATION METHODS FOR THE ALTERNATIVE REPORTING TEAM TO CONSIDER USING TO CONNECT WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD

- An alternative reporting team website
- The website of each organisation
- An alternative reporting team newsletter
- Existing (organisational) newsletters with relevant outreach

- An alternative reporting team Twitter
- Twitter by the involved individuals, organisations and/or broader community
- Email groups
- Face book profiles and groups
- Linked in profiles and groups
- Petition; online or on paper
- Printed materials; e.g. simple explanations of alternative reporting process
- Fact sheets; for a broader audience
- Fact sheets; for the treaty body
- You tube video
- Face to face meetings with relevant stakeholders
- Round table with experts
- Round table with government
- Separate presentations or meetings for wider public.
- Use of drama and drawings to communicate.
- Video of relevant events such as screening the video of the meeting at the UN

Media outreach

- Press conference
- Press release
- Third party (news) websites
- Newspapers
- Radio
- Television

In the grid, below you can indicate what is the most effective, efficient and safest way to communicate with the groups indicated in the columns. This communication grid is an example which can be fine tuned for your team needs. Have a look at your stakeholder mapping, [see exercise one](#), as well, to capture the relevant groups.

Please consider when making decisions about the most appropriate methods of communication, how many people you are able to reach with this method and how much time it would take to collect contact information. For example, for the time investment of making a newsletter to be worth it, the team must be able to collect sufficient relevant email addresses. When planning a communication activity involving the press, consider how much time and effort it would take to get the media interested. If the alternative reporting team already has strong links with media outlets, this is a different situation then if the contacts have to be established from the start.

And remember, it is probably better to pick a limited number of communication methods to reach the broader community and to use these consistently and well, then to try to use all the possible options. Communicating about the work and the issues is an important part of the alternative reporting work and it needs to be done well to increase your impact.

3.6 Using the alternative reporting communication grid

On the next page you will find an example of an alternative reporting communication grid. We encourage you to adapt the grid to your own needs. The purpose of the grid is to enable the team to discuss the available communications methods they wish to use while communicating with different audiences. Please do not forget to think about the investment each of the listed methods requires, both in time and in costs.

By making a choice to use a limited but relevant number of communication methods, the team can streamline its communication, both within the team, as with the outside world.

After discussing as a team, please fill in the grid below. Creating a grid that captures your discussion gives each team member a quick overview of the selected communication methods. Of course, the team can revise the decisions made, if they find a communication method selected is not working well, or if the team feels they need to add an additional communication method.

For media engagement it is good to acquire specific skills needed to write good statements and press releases or to speak at a press conference. It is beyond this manual to go into further detail. However, a very good starting point is the next exercise on formulating your key message.

In conclusion, making an alternative reporting communication plan will help the team members in creating a streamlined communication, both within the team as well as with the audiences outside of the team. When working on your communication, especially with your target audience, we recommend the team identifies its key messages. ([See also exercise 4](#))



RESOURCES

A rich resource on how to use the internet for digital campaigning is the online guide “Info activism: how to guide; Strategies and tools for digital campaigning.” It provides many examples and tools to use for your campaign. <https://howto.informationactivism.org/>

	SHADOW TEAM	GOVERNEMENT	TREATY BODY	GENERAL PUBLIC
Face to face meeting				
Group meetings				
Phone/Skype/face time				
Mobile phone messaging service, e.g. SMS or Whatsapp				
Email				
Google groups				
Facebook groups				
Storing joint documents in a cloud service that can be used by all team members such as dropbox.				
An alternative reporting team website				
The website of each organisation				
An alternative reporting team newsletter				
Existing (organisational) newsletters with relevant outreach				
An alternative reporting team Twitter				
Twitter by the involved individuals, organisations and/or broader community				
Email groups				
Facebook profiles and groups				
Linked in profiles and groups				
Petition; online or on paper				
Printed materials; e.g. simple explanations of alternative reporting process				
Fact sheets; for a broader audience				
Fact sheets; for the treaty body				
You tube video				
Face to face meetings with relevant stakeholders				
Round table with experts				
Round table with government				
Separate presentations or meetings for wider public				
Use of drama and drawings to communicate.				
Video of relevant events such as screening the video of the meeting at the UN				
Press conference				
Press release				
Third party (news) websites				
Newspapers				
Radio				
Television				

4 Exercise: formulating your key message

4.1 Purpose

This exercise is designed to help you develop your main message(s) as organisation or network. Your message is the point you want to make in your advocacy. In the alternative reporting process, the key message can be defined and redefined at different stages in the process depending on the context. Having a key message is an extremely important tool in your overall advocacy strategy. It tells others why you do what you do and what you want to change.

A key message should be short and can be redefined as circumstances change and the audience of the message change.

We have found that formulating a key message is challenging. Often organisations will struggle to be brief and concrete. In an exercise, initially organisations often come up with a page full of general and generic statements with too much detailed information with too much jargon. The message is often not adapted to the audience. Having an unclear message makes it difficult for organisations to bring their point across. (And often, the organisations are themselves not quite sure what their main point is or should be in a meeting or publication).

Doing the key messaging exercise is also useful as a way to unite a network and prepare presentations for the United Nations, as well as subsequent press statements (oral and written).

4.2 How to formulate a key message

A recommended way to develop a key message is using a training or workshop approach. It should be participative and open. This means we invite you to do this exercise in smaller groups. (between 3 to 5 persons per sub team). The combined effort of the smaller groups should lead to a common key message.

FACILITATION TIPS; WHAT DO YOU NEED TO DO A KEY MESSAGE EXERCISE?

Undertaking a key message exercise increases in quality if you do it with a group of people.

If you do a key message exercise with a group, someone needs to facilitate the process (You do not need to have

an external facilitator, but could be useful). If you do this yourself please keep in mind the following:

- Make sure you have adequate time available to do the exercise. You should set aside at least a few hours for doing the exercise. (3 to 4 hours).
- Make sure each sub team has markers, post its, cards and flipcharts available
- Make sure the key message or key messages developed are shared with all of the key partners in the alternative reporting and advocacy process, so the same message is given by all

Facilitator asks a set of questions

The facilitator explains each of the discussion points listed below to the sub teams and facilitates the process of coming to one key message. The exercise is done in stages. The sub teams discuss on the questions asked and write out their main finding in a clear, concise way on a flipover.

Discussion point one:

What is your goal with the message? What do you want to achieve with the message? Once you have discussed this point in your sub team, make sure you write out your goal on a flipchart.

Example

An example of a goal to be achieved can be: "The Netherlands ratifies the Convention Against Enforced Disappearances"

Discussion point two:

Who is your audience? Who do you want to reach? Who is listening to you (who is in front of the radio/TV?; Who is in the room?; Who is online)? Who will be resistant to your goal? Who needs to be convinced?

While discussing this point, there is no need to do a complete stakeholder analysis, though if you have done one (See exercise 1), we advise you to use the information collected in the mapping of stakeholders.

You have to be precise in identifying the main target audience (for example a political party or specific civil servants) and the main additional

audience (for example: the general public or parliamentarians). Sometimes the main additional audience and the main target overlap (for example if you are attending a lobby meeting).

Example

The main target audience and the main additional audience to our goal: "The Netherlands ratifies the Convention Against Enforced Disappearances" can include:

- Main target for the goal: Minister of Justice and Minister of Foreign Affairs (through his/her civil servants);
- Main audience: civil servants and parliamentarians

GROUP DISCUSSION OF POINTS ONE AND TWO

Once the sub teams have written out their answers to discussion point one and two, the participants to the exercise can reflect on their answers together, because the answers influence the results of the next discussion points.

Discussion point three:

Formulate 5 possible objections your target group may have to the point(s) you are working on (or your potential message/position).

This exercise requires knowledge of the main targets. The objections formulated must be very specific.

Example

Objections to our goal: "The Netherlands ratifies the Convention Against Enforced Disappearances" can include:

- There is no need for such a Convention for the Netherlands since there are no disappearances here;
- There is already protection against disappearances through the ratification of the Statute of Rome;
- There are way too many conventions already, why have a specific one on an issue that is from the past (Latin America);
Etc...

Formulating objections

Write the objections your sub team formulates down on the post-its or cards. The sub teams then will come together again to discuss the objections formulated in the sub teams. By writing the objections on post-its, you can shift them around, reformulate etc. during the group discussion. Once an objection has been (re)formulated and agreed on, it has to be put up on the flip chart so everyone sees it and discusses on the basis of the same information.

As a group reflect on each other's objections and decide on 5 common objections.

Discussion point four:

Formulate answers to each objection.

Now formulate an answer to each of the objections. Write these down on post-its. Be sure the answer is a true answer to the objection. Often groups may think: we understand the objection, but are so convinced of our own analysis and solution that we do not need to take the time to specifically develop an answer to an objection of my main audience. But you can make your message much stronger by exploring the objection of your audience and think deeply about the answer, you can give to their objection.

Example:

Answers to the objections to our goal: "The Netherlands ratifies the Convention Against Enforced Disappearances" can include:

- As with each human rights Convention it seeks to protect citizens and people residing in the Netherlands against potential violations now and in the future.
- Also potential violations involving Dutch nationals are real as the Dutch are involved in military operations all over the World.
- The Rome Statute only provides limited protection in a limited number of circumstances. Also it is an international criminal law instrument giving individual responsibility, while the Convention Against Enforced Disappearances is a human rights Convention giving a much broader duty to respect, protect and fulfill

specific rights to the State

- Enforced Disappearances are among the most horrendous crimes and violations of human rights and they are increasingly committed all around the World. A country such as the Netherlands that prides itself in upholding human rights everywhere should act and ratify the Convention to show its repulsion in the face of such a heinous human rights violation.

Formulating answers to objections

The sub teams will come together again to discuss the answers formulated in the sub teams. By writing the answers on post-its, you can shift them around, reformulate etc. during the group discussion. Again reflect on the answers as a group and cluster the formulated answers.

Discussion point five:

The bridge

Using the objections and answers, you formulated to the objections, now identify and pinpoint the key words that form a bridge between the objection and the answer. Also identify major dilemmas (issues that can seemingly not be 'bridged') and recognize them and try and get information on process (how can I get from an objection to something that benefits my message?). Put a circle around the key words. Are any words missing? If so, place them on separate cards.

Example

Some key words in our goal: The Netherlands ratifies the Convention Against Enforced Disappearances" could be: "Potential", "Future", "Increase", "Guiding", "Human Rights", "Heinous", "Criminal", "Responsibility", "Protection".

Discussion point six:

Formulate your key message

By using the key words, you identified, you can now formulate your key message. Use the key words to formulate a concise key message (a few sentences maximum). The buildup of the key message can be along the lines of:

- Look... (this is what I think, believe, this is what I think is happening, this is the current situation);
- Because (this is what is being done, this is what we are doing...);
- So (that is why)

Another way to build up the key message is by answering three questions:

- What? (is going to happen, do we propose...);
- Why? (do we need this);
- How? (are we going to do this).

Example

For our goal: The Netherlands ratifies the Convention Against Enforced Disappearances" a key message could look like this:

- Look... The Netherlands should ratify the Convention Against Enforced Disappearances.
- Because... As a guiding country on human rights and international justice, the Netherlands should send a signal about its repulsion towards this particularly heinous human rights violation. This violation is increasingly used by States to oppress people everywhere and silence those who seek to protect their human rights. Current protection against enforced disappearances are insufficient as they only focus on the responsibility of individuals. This violation also could potentially affect the Netherlands and its citizens directly in the future in the face of its involvement in military operations all around the World.
- So... that is why we need better protection against enforced disappearances for all and we can begin by doing this closest to home and sending a positive signal to other states.

In conclusion, by discussing and working on your key message the group will clarify for themselves their goal, their audience and a clear and concise message that everyone in the group can work with. And remember a key message can and should be revisited and be redefined if circumstances change or the audience of the message changes.

Abbreviations

CAT	Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading treatment or punishment
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
CED	International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance
CERD	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ICRMW	International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of their families
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NB	Nota Bene, meaning pay attention to this point
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NGOs	Non Governmental Organisations
NHC	Netherlands Helsinki Committee
NHRI	National Human Rights Institute
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights
SPT	Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Rights and Emergency Relief Organisation
UPR	Universal Periodic Review

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International service for human rights

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