Analyzing the Role of Ombuds Institutions in Achieving SDG 16

The relationship between SSG/R and SDG 16 has recently caught the attention of scholarly and policy communities. Scholars have sought to explore the conceptual links between the two, whilst policy advisors have looked into ways to operationalize SDG 16 in the context of peacebuilding and democratic consolidation. For scholars, the critical question has been to examine the fabric of this relationship. Oya Dursun-Özkanca (2021) sees human security as the most potent framework for understanding the nexus between SSG/R and SDG 16. She argues that 'human security's emphasis on reforming security and justice sectors and on accountability, oversight, and participative approach and local ownership can facilitate the accomplishment of SDG 16's primary objective of establishing peace, justice, and strong and inclusive institutions' (Dursun-Özkanca 2021: 66).

This chapter builds on these discussions, by concentrating on accountability, oversight, and local ownership. It starts with an overview of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, before concentrating on SDG 16. It then introduces the role of ombuds institutions as security sector actors and development actors, respectively. To be able to better understand and critically assess the role of ombuds institutions in realizing SDG 16, this chapter moves on to develop a methodological framework. The aim is to determine whether and how ombuds institutions could contribute to the achievement of each of the 12 SDG 16 targets. Given the comprehensive nature and complexity of those targets and indicators, this chapter presents the framework conceptualized by linking the principles of SSG, key roles of ombuds institutions/NHRIs in achieving SDGs, and the SDG 16 targets.

Sustainable Development Goal 16

The SDGs, the centerpiece of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, were adopted by the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015. The 2030 Agenda builds upon the expiring MDGs: eight targets that guided global action on the reduction of extreme

poverty in its multiple dimensions from 2000 to 2015. Whilst the SDGs maintain the thematic work on poverty eradication targeted by the MDGs, they reflect a comprehensive perspective on international development and sustaining human life on this planet.

World leaders have recognized that:

> Eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development. All countries and all stakeholders, acting in collaborative partnership, will implement this plan. We are resolved to free the human race from the tyranny of poverty and want and to heal and secure our planet (2030 Agenda).

They have pledged 'that no one will be left behind' and promised to 'take the bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path.'

Contrary to the MDGs which only applied to developing countries, the SDGs apply universally to all UN Member States and are considerably more comprehensive and ambitious than the MDGs. The road to having SDGs applicable to all Member States, irrespective of their level of development, was extremely difficult to negotiate. As argued by Caballero (2019: 138), 'the proposition that a truly universal agenda was needed brought to the surface assumptions that were implicit in development assistance – that development was only actionable by so-called developing countries and that the responsibilities of the more developed countries were only to provide limited finance and-often patriarchic-assistance.' It was the creation of the Open Working Group (OWG) that made the ultimate adoption of the universal agenda possible, because this format allowed for inclusive and transparent discussions, without being restricted by the formal rules of the UN General Assembly if it operated as an 'open-ended' working group. It created a unique space for effective, active participation not just by all countries, but by all major stakeholders, and also enabled the Group to be highly technocratic, with the participation of both invited experts as well as those that delegations soon began to bring in from their own capitals (Caballero 2019: 138).

The 2030 Agenda contains 17 global goals (Table 5) and 169 targets, with a total of 248 indicators. The development of targets and indicators was also a long and tiresome process. While operating in the OWG brought a surprisingly high level of presence and influence of science and technical experts in formulating SDGs, as a tradeoff, the process of defining indicators – which would normally have been technical – became much politicized. Hence, it was through the very complex process of several rounds of consultations between national statistician experts, government representatives, UN agencies, and civil society organizations (CSOs) that the indicators were ultimately formulated.

Fukuda-Parr distinguishes between the governance effects and the knowledge effects of global goals. In terms of governance, the broad policy purpose of global goals is to put issues on the agenda and to increase attention and support for areas that are important for development but have thus far been neglected (Fukuda-Parr 2014: 119). Goals are intended to promote changes in policy and implementation at the national level by creating incentives (Fukuda-Parr 2014: 120). In this regard, global monitoring has been used for performance evaluation, as an accountability framework, and as a basis for advocacy (Fukuda-Parr 2014: 122–123). In addition to the governance effects, the knowledge effects must be considered. Target setting – and the indicators associated with targets – have the potential to influence how norms themselves are defined and understood and how the narrative around their implementation is shaped (Fukuda-Parr 2014: 120). Merry (2011: S92) has argued that 'indicators produce readily understandable and convenient forms of knowledge about the world that shape the way policymakers and the general public understand the world.' The formulation and framing of the targets, indicators, and their

Table 5: The 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

Sustainable Development Goals
Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere.
Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.
Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.
Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.
Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.
Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.
Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.
Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.
Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.
Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries.
Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.
Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.
Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.
Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.
Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.
Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels.
Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

disaggregation have a significant influence on what data governments and development partners will gather over the next 15 years or more and 'what matters' in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Agenda (CESR 2016: 33).

SDG 16 stresses the need for strong institutions that are built on respect for human rights, effective rule of law, and good governance at all levels (DCAF 2021). It is arguably one of the most ambitious goals in the 2030 Agenda because it is not simply a goal by itself but also an enabler for the achievement of other goals. However, many SDG 16 targets are rather vague, and limited guidance exists on how to measure and achieve them, especially in fragile contexts (DCAF 2021).

Under the Sustainable Development Goal 16, the United Nations have defined 10 targets to be achieved by 2030, shown in Table 6.

Besides these 10 'regular' targets, SDG 16 includes two targets described as 'means of implementation' (MoI), raising the total number of targets to 12, shown in Table 7.

The UN defines the notion of 'means of implementation' as 'the interdependent mix of financial resources, technology development and transfer, capacity-building, inclusive and equitable globalization and trade, regional integration, as well as the creation of a national enabling environment required to implement the new sustainable development agenda, particularly in developing countries' (TST n.d.). The MoI targets were introduced late in the process of negotiation of the SDGs and provided a way to accommodate some of the concerns of Member States regarding how the SDGs were to be achieved (Bartram et al. 2018).

Table 6: The 10 main SDG 16 targets.

No.	Target
16.1	Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere.
16.2	End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children.
16.3	Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all.
16.4	By 2030, significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organised crime.
16.5	Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms.
16.6	Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels.
16.7	Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.
16.8	Broaden and strengthen the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance.
16.9	By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration.
16.10	Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements.

Table 7: The two SDG 16 'means of implementation' targets.

No.	'Means of implementation' target
16.A	Strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, for building capacity at all levels, in particular in developing countries, to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime.
16.B	Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development.

Many of these targets directly relate to the security sector. This particularly applies to targets 16.1, 16.2, and 16.4, aiming at reducing all forms of violence, ending abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and torture; reducing illicit financial and arms flows, strengthening the recovery and return of stolen assets; and combating all forms of organized crime, respectively.

Several SDG 16 targets promote good governance and may be directly applied to good security sector governance as well. Targets 16.3, 16.6, and 16.7 all aim to promote, develop, and ensure the principles of good governance, by emphasizing the need for effective, accountable, transparent, responsive, inclusive, and participatory institutions and decision-making. Finally, some of the targets, such as 16.2, 16.5, and 16.8, focus on protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as suppressing corruption.

To operationalize and contextualize this goal, a growing number of countries produce their own versions of Goal 16 (UNDP 2017). Laberge and Touihri (2019: 154) have convincingly shown that 'by translating the abstract concepts contained in global SDG 16 targets into the language of issues that are currently being contested in a given country, such exercises can overcome some of the distortions or "slippage in ambition" that have plagued indicator selection processes at global level and can incentivize action by policymakers.' They have used the Tunisian case to demonstrate how national SDG 16 indicators, when jointly defined by state and non-state actors and publicly monitored and disseminated, can emerge as a powerful 'currency' for governments to earn and retain public trust, and for society to hold it to account (Laberge and Touihri 2019: 154).

Furthermore, the Tunisians have put explicit emphasis on the promotion and protection of human rights, and a dedicated national indicator measuring people's perception of the extent to which fundamental rights and freedoms are respected in the country (Laberge and Touihri 2019: 154).

The National Human Rights Commission of Mongolia (NHRCM) has been actively engaged in a multi-stakeholder initiative aimed at developing national SDG indicators, promoting the message that 90 percent of the SDG targets reflect human rights obligations (DIHR 2020: 8). When the SDGs are promoted as human rights instruments, ombuds institutions may play a much bigger role, including by acting as information-provider, as in Georgia, where the indicator selection process relies on administrative data produced by, *inter alia*, the Office of the Public Defender (UNDP 2017: 14).

The examples of Mongolia and Georgia demonstrate that ombuds institutions' comprehensive mandate and the position in the overall governance structure of the state make them well suited to contribute to the realization of many SDG 16 targets. Before discussing this in more detail in the following chapters, ombuds' wider role as a security sector and development actor is explored.

Ombuds institutions as security sector actors

The SSR concept has gone through numerous transformations since its emergence among the donor and academic communities in the 1990s. It has evolved into a holistic and inclusive approach to the consolidation of democratic governance of the security sector (Glušac 2018b: 61). The actorness of ombuds institutions in SSR comes naturally, given that SSR is people-centered, locally owned, and based on democratic norms, human rights principles, and the rule of law (OECD 2007), aimed at 'the efficient and effective provision of state and human security within a framework of democratic governance' (Hänggi 2004: 3).

The widely adopted holistic approach to SSR distinguishes four groups of SSR actors (Figure 1) (Ball 1998; Edmunds 2002; Ejdus 2012: 64).
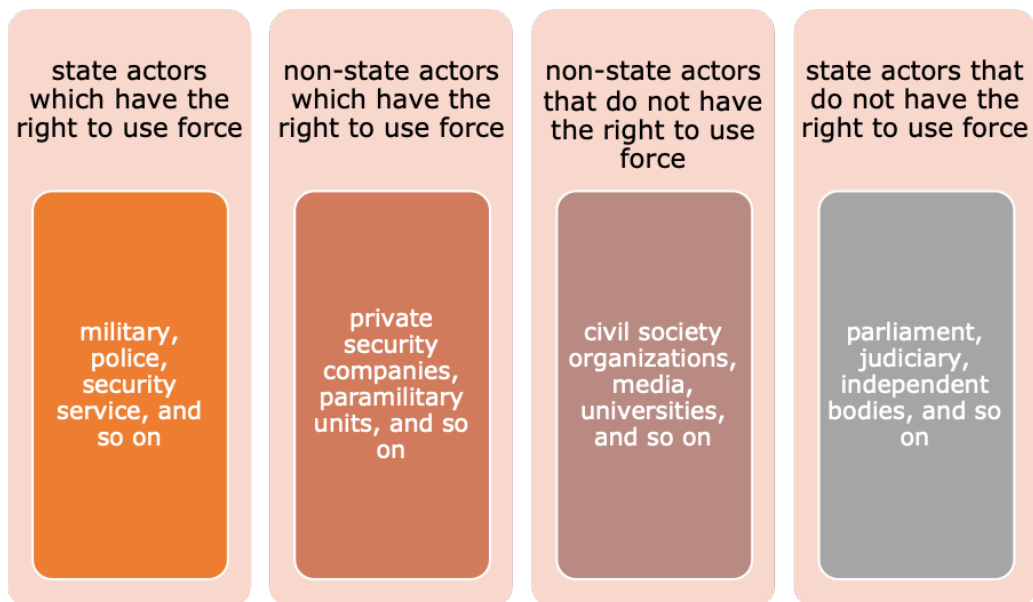

state actors which have the right to use force	non-state actors which have the right to use force	non-state actors that do not have the right to use force	state actors that do not have the right to use force
military, police, security service, and so on	private security companies, paramilitary units, and so on	civil society organizations, media, universities, and so on	parliament, judiciary, independent bodies, and so on

Figure 1: Four groups of SSR actors (Ejdus 2012: 64).

Ombuds institutions occupy a special position among state actors that do not have the right to use force (IPU & DCAF 2003: 89). This is due to their comprehensive mandate, investigative powers, and access to documents and premises of public authorities, including security institutions. Despite such understanding, empirical evidence on the activities of ombuds institutions in SSR is, with a few exceptions (Born & Wills 2012; Kinzelbach & Cole 2007), notably scarce. This applies even more when it comes to the case studies on oversight of the intelligence/security services (Glušac 2018b: 61). Scholarly literature on ombuds institutions and other forms of NHRIs also provides little information on their role in the oversight of the security sector. Even the most elaborate research on NHRIs has dealt with this topic only laterally (Cardenas 2014; Goodman & Pegram 2012; Wouters & Meuwissen 2013). The most promising strand of literature related to ombuds institutions in the context of the security sector has been the one focusing on the armed forces (Buckland & McDermott 2012; DCAF 2017; McDermott 2021).

Such a generally neglected status of ombuds institutions in the literature can be attributed to the rather modest successes of ombuds institutions and/or failure to advertise success stories (Glušac 2018b: 60). Indeed, comparative experiences have shown that ombuds institutions do not often exploit the possibility to effectively oversee the security sector to a full extent (Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights 2015). This is surprising, because, as argued by Janković (2006), these institutions are well-placed to: (1) make a substantial contribution to the effective protection of the human rights and freedoms of the citizens affected by the activities of security services; (2) reinforce and complete the framework for democratic civilian oversight; and (3) strengthen the democratic foundations underlying the operations of the services, thereby improving their work and consequently increasing the public's trust in them.

The United Nations sees independent oversight of the security sector as essential to ensuring accountability and strengthening confidence in its governance. In its publication on security sector reform, the UN (2012: 98) stated:

> A system of independent oversight should be created to provide clear and transparent channels for substantive dialogue and cooperation between oversight institutions and statutory security sector actors. Independent bodies with specialized mandates (i.e., national human rights institutions) perform vital roles in the governance of the security sector.

In the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights' account of the role of European ombuds institutions in security sector oversight, it is noted that most do not play a significant role with regard to the oversight of security and intelligence services: 'In many countries, the possibility exists for an ombudsman to investigate complaints about the security services but they rarely do so in practice' (Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights 2015: 51). It is useful to add that in some countries, security and intelligence services are exempt from the ombuds' oversight. According to Kucsko-Stadlmayer (2008: 49–89), that applies in Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Greece, Israel, Malta, and Slovakia. In these countries, separate specialized bodies have been established to exclusively oversee the security and intelligence services. It should be noted that a number of countries have specialized ombuds institutions, which focus exclusively on armed forces. That is the case, for instance, in Germany, Austria, Norway, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the United Kingdom, South Africa, and Canada.

In the case of NHRIs more generally, the Paris Principles do not mention the security sector specifically. Nevertheless, in its authoritative interpretation of the Paris Principles, SCA stated that the mandate of NHRIs should be interpreted in a broad, liberal, and purposive manner and that it should, *inter alia*, authorize a full investigation into all alleged human rights violations, including by military, police, and security officers (GANHRI SCA 2018). The SCA noted that the scope of the mandate of an NHRI may be restricted for national security reasons. However, it reiterated that 'while this limitation is not inherently contrary to the Paris Principles, it should not be unreasonably or arbitrarily applied and should only be exercised under due process' (G.O. 2.6.

GANHRI SCA 2018). Through its General Observations of the Paris Principles, the SCA has also covered the issue of operating in the situation of a coup d'état or a state of emergency. The SCA underlined:

> It is expected that an NHRI will conduct itself with a heightened level of vigilance and independence, and in strict accordance with its mandate. NHRIs are expected to promote and ensure respect for human rights, democratic principles and the strengthening of the rule of law in all circumstances and without exception. In situations of conflict or a state of emergency, this may include monitoring, documenting, issuing public statements and releasing regular and detailed reports through the media in a timely manner to address urgent human rights violations (G.O. 2.5. GANHRI SCA 2018).

Another relevant document on the security actorness of ombuds institutions and other NHRIs is the Kyiv Declaration from 2015, which lays down a number of potential roles they could have in conflict and post-conflict situations, including, *inter alia*, taking measures to identify early signs of possible conflict and steps to prevent conflict, including through addressing the violations of human rights; promoting a dialogue between and with conflicting parties aiming to ensure the promotion, protection, and respect of human rights; and taking steps to ensure human rights are placed at the center of negotiations between the conflicting parties, including in peace agreements, and monitor their implementation (ENNHRI 2015).

It is not easy to effectively oversee the security sector. A number of preconditions have to be met. Born and Geisler Mesevage (2012: 322) have laid down three – the ability to access relevant information, question intelligence/security officials, and issue findings and recommendations on the basis of what it learns. Still, ombuds institutions fulfil these three preconditions. These are also all recognized by the key standards for NHRIs, including by the Paris Principles (Glušac 2018b: 65).

Key internal preconditions for successful oversight are expert knowledge and institutional credibility (Glušac 2018b: 65–66). If ombudspersons do not have expert knowledge of security-related issues, experts should be employed to allow substantive activities to be included in their oversight. Carver (2012: 201) correctly observed that 'the security sector provides a particularly striking example of the difficulties of enforcing accountability.' It is thus necessary that an ombuds institution builds credibility, because, as suggested by Neave (2014: 31), their work is not derived from binding, coercive, or determinative powers, but from the rigor, objectivity, and independence with which they conduct their activities. Ombuds institutions are seen through the lenses of their mandate-holders. Hence, 'the role of individual leadership should not be overlooked, since many NHRIs—like any organization—thrive under the independent-mindedness or perseverance of particular commissioners or, alternatively, flounder in the face of passive leadership' (Cardenas 2014: 449). The success of ombuds institutions therefore 'depends overwhelmingly on the strength of their mandate-holder(s) and their ability to position themselves as an objective, rigorous and credible authority' (Glušac 2018b: 65–66). In other words, the effectiveness of an ombuds institution depends on the personal independence and impartiality of its leader and staff (DCAF 2017: 2).

Ombuds institutions as development/SDG actors

Scholarly literature has not devoted much attention to ombuds institutions as development actors. However, the adoption of the MDGs and particularly the SDGs has motivated the policy and practitioners' community to explore the potential of ombuds institutions to contribute to their realization. Through their fora, ombuds institutions have also initiated discussions and started to compare notes on what they can do (and how) to promote and contribute to the SDGs.

Several discussion papers, guidelines, and overviews of good practices have been published by GANHRI and its partners. This literature describes ombuds institutions in the context of the

SDGs in various terms, such as 'accelerators, guarantors and indicators of sustainable development' (DIHR & GANHRI 2019), 'credible data providers' (DIHR & GANHRI 2019), and 'bridges between stakeholders and promote transparent, participatory, and inclusive national processes of implementation and monitoring' (Mérida Declaration 2015: para. 15). How do these different roles play out in practice, and through which types of activities?

The most elaborated answer to these questions was given in the 2015 Mérida Declaration on the Role of National Human Rights Institutions in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by GANHRI. The Mérida Declaration provides for the comprehensive set of functions and activities that ombuds institutions and other NHRIs can undertake in order to contribute to a human-rights-based approach to the 2030 Agenda and the realization of the SDGs (Table 8).

Table 8: The Mérida Declaration: NHRIs' functions and activities in the context of SDGs.

Function	Activity
Providing advice to national and local governments, rights-holders and other actors through	assessing the impact of laws, policies, programmes, national development plans, administrative practices and budgets on the realization of all human rights for all.
Developing and strengthening partnerships for implementation through	promoting transparent and inclusive processes for participation and consultation with rights-holders and civil society, such as the development of national and sub-national strategies to achieve the SDGs, including reaching out to those who are furthest behind.
Engaging with duty-bearers, rights-holders and other key actors by	raising awareness and building trust and promoting dialogue and concerted efforts for a human rights-based approach to implementation and monitoring of the Agenda, and safeguarding space for engagement of rightsholders and civil society.
Assisting in the shaping of global national indicators and sound data collection systems to ensure the protection and promotion of human rights in the measurement of the Agenda by	seeking collaboration with national statistical offices, where appropriate, and other relevant national institutions, and by building on existing international and regional human rights mechanisms.
Monitoring progress in the implementation of the Agenda at the local, national, regional and international levels, to disclose inequality and discrimination in this regard through	innovative approaches to data-collection and partnerships with rights-holders, vulnerable and marginalized groups for participatory and inclusive monitoring, and by identifying obstacles as well as actions for accelerated progress.
Engaging with, and holding governments to account for poor or uneven progress in the implementation of the Agenda by	taking implementation progress and obstacles into consideration when reporting to parliaments, the general public and national, regional and international mechanisms.
Protecting the rights of citizens by	responding to, conducting inquiries into, and investigating allegations of rights violations in the context of development and SDG implementation, including in relation to discrimination and inequality that can erode the trust between the State and the people.
Facilitating access to justice, redress and remedy for those who experience abuse and violation of their rights in the process of development by	receiving and processing complaints (where NHRIs have such functions).

As the table demonstrates, these SDG functions proposed by the Mérida Declaration derive from the general mandate and functions of ombuds institutions.

Ombuds institutions are local actors, who often works closely with representatives of international community (international organizations, donors, diplomatic corps, etc.) present on the ground. Furthermore, they have the opportunity to communicate through various avenues with global and regional human rights bodies, well beyond the control of the executive branch. Given such a unique position, ombuds institutions stand as a double intermediary actor, primarily between citizens and the state, and then between the state and international human rights mechanisms (Glušac 2018b: 59). As an intermediary, they contribute to the domestication of international norms and standards. To that end, they are an important factor in making sure that such a process is locally owned.

Factoring in local ownership

Local ownership is a central concept for both SSG/R and development. It is widely regarded as the bedrock and main precondition for successful SSR (Gordon 2014). The concept of local ownership has its roots in the development circles that emphasized the importance of 'empowering local communities and encouraging local participation' in peacebuilding and democracy promotion (Dursun-Özkanca & Vandemoortele 2012: 150). 'The language of ownership' was first used in OECD-DAC's Development Partnerships in the New Global Context document in May 1995 (Chesterman 2007: 7). The OECD endorsed the significance of promoting local ownership in SSR missions back in 2001 (Dursun-Özkanca 2018).

Relevance of local ownership in academic circles is considered uncontested – often acquiring moral legitimacy and orthodoxy in security and development (Oosterveld & Galand 2012; Qehaja and Prezelj 2017; Shinoda 2008). However, while local ownership is part of the 'contemporary commonsense' of SSR (Donais 2009: 119), it remains unclear specifically who the locals are (Donais 2009; Krogstad 2013; Scheye & Peake 2005) and what constitutes ownership (Martin & Wilson 2008; Mobekk 2010).

Local ownership is based on the premise that 'international interventions can lead to sustainable results only if there is a sufficient degree of local input, participation, and control' (Ejdus 2017: 463). In this study, local ownership is understood as the 'extent' to which local constituencies and elected representatives of the target country exercise ownership over the processes of development and security sector reform. In terms of SSR, the principle of local ownership means that the reform of security policies, institutions, and activities in a given country are designed, managed, and implemented by domestic actors rather than external actors (Nathan 2008: 21). In other words, it is regarded as a nationally led and inclusive process in which national and local authorities and civil society are actively engaged and are able to inform decision-making throughout the SSR process, with the support and input of external actors.

As argued by Gordon, if SSR programs are not locally owned, security sector institutions, processes, and policies will likely be less able to respond to local needs; if they do not respond to local needs, efforts to increase security and the rule of law will be compromised, public trust and confidence in the state and its security institutions will be limited, and institutions and other outputs may be rejected (Gordon 2014: 127).

Being national state authorities with rich experience in applying international standards to the national (local) context, ombuds institutions can help localize SSR and SDG efforts. In the right environment, they could help build trust between international and national actors, liaising between them when the frictions occur, and making sure that all social forces are included in the process, and their needs and interests are duly considered.

Methodological framework

To be able to better understand and critically assess the role of ombuds institutions in realizing SDG 16, this sub-chapter develops a methodological framework. Given the comprehensive nature and complexity of those targets and indicators, and mindful of ombuds institutions' mandate and functions, the framework is conceptualized by linking the: (1) main principles of good (security sector) governance, and (2) mandate and functions of ombuds institutions, including those laid down in the Mérida Declaration (2015) and (3) SDG 16 targets.

In this research, the matrix is used to enlist all SDG 16 targets together with corresponding principle(s) of good governance and the indication of the mandate and functions of ombuds institutions through which they can support the realization of individual targets. The central assumption is that ombuds institutions can contribute to achieving all SDG 16 targets. However, the key argument of this study is that their main role should be to support and contribute, not to lead.

Leaving no one behind is a central *credo* of the 2030 Agenda, as well as SSG/R. It is highly relevant for SDG 16. Where do people face disadvantages due to ineffective, unjust, unaccountable, or unresponsive national authorities? Who is affected by inequitable, inadequate, or unjust laws, policies, processes, or budgets? Who is less able or unable to gain influence or participate meaningfully in the decisions that impact them? These questions are at the very heart of SDG 16, which stresses the need for strong institutions that are built on respect for human rights, effective rule of law, and good governance at all levels. With its unique design and place within the overall governance structure, ombuds institutions are themselves human rights, rule of law, and good governance institutions, which may actively influence other public authorities to prioritize respecting the highest human rights standards and the principles of good governance. Furthermore, it is expected that when they encounter maladministration, the most vulnerable citizens would use remedial and accountability mechanisms less frequently than those with more privileged status, due to the lack of knowledge, trust, and resources. Designed as a free, visible, and accessible oversight mechanism, ombuds institutions are perfectly placed to help those disadvantaged and to make public administration accountable for their actions.

In line with that, this study divides the potential contribution of ombuds institutions to the realization of SDG 16 into two main categories (Table 9). The first category, entitled 'leaving no one behind,' focuses on all those who endure disadvantages or deprivations that limit their choices and opportunities relative to others in society. It thus concentrates on the targets to which ombuds institutions actively and directly contribute. These primarily relate to human rights, anti-discrimination, access to justice, reducing violence, and similar. The second category, called 'leaving no one unaccountable,' refers to those targets to whose realization ombuds institutions can contribute indirectly, through their oversight function and through making sure that competent authorities and officials are accountable for their actions.

As the table shows, both categories have six targets allocated. This division is neither surgical nor mathematical, but a useful way to organize the research. It is acknowledged that from the ombuds' perspective, activities falling under 'leaving no one behind' may relatively easily transfer to 'leaving no one unaccountable,' and a little bit harder the other way around. For instance, as it will be shown in the next chapter, ombuds institutions may actively contribute to creating the procedures that would guarantee that all citizens have a legal identity, including birth registration (Target 16.9). This target is placed under 'leaving no one behind.' However, once the proper procedure is established, ombuds institutions may act as an accountability mechanism to make sure that such a procedure is respected in practice.

Furthermore, there is a potential of positive spillover effect of the ombuds' engagement with SDG 16 target, that is, that contributions of ombuds institutions to one target may also have a positive effect on another. For instance, protection of whistleblowers (16.5) can also have positive consequences for the accountability of an institution (16.6), and access to information (16.10).

Table 9: The framework.

Target	Principle	Ombuds' mandate and functions
LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND		
16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere	rule of law	monitoring investigating mediation
16.2 End abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and all forms of violence against and torture of children	rule of law	monitoring NPM mandate public outreach and advocacy
16.8 Broaden and strengthen the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance	participation responsiveness	advising public outreach and advocacy
16.9 By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration	rule of law	individual complaint handling mediation legislative advice training
16.10 Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements	rule of law transparency	all functions
16A Strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, for building capacity at all levels, in particular in developing countries, to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime	rule of law	the existence of A-status NHRI is a key indicator
LEAVING NO ONE UNACCOUNTABLE		
16.3 Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all	rule of law	all functions
16.4 By 2030, significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organized crime	rule of law	complaint-handling anti-corruption mandate
16.5 Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms	accountability	advising education public outreach and advocacy anti-corruption mandate
16.6 Develop effective, accountable, and transparent institutions at all levels	accountability transparency effectiveness	all functions
16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making at all levels	participation responsiveness	monitoring advising public outreach and advocacy
16B Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development	participation responsiveness rule of law	legislative advice education public outreach and advocacy investigating complaint-handling

In the next two chapters, this framework is applied empirically. The chapters start with providing more details on the logic and background of 'leaving no one behind' (Chapter 4) and 'leaving no one unaccountable' (Chapter 5), respectively. The chapters then go target by target showing the potential role of ombuds institutions in achieving them. A variety of examples from comparative practice is used to illustrate (1) how ombuds institutions have contributed to achieving those individual goals, and/or (2) what they can do but are yet to start doing.

It should be noted that few ombuds institutions have formally integrated the 2030 Agenda into their work. Thus, many activities (presented in the next two chapters) through which ombuds institutions actively contribute to the realization of the SDGs are neither recognized, nor labeled, as SDG activities by these institutions, but may indeed be viewed as such from an analytical perspective.