INTRODUCTION

This research aims to create a deeper understanding of the role civil society organisations (CSOs) can play, and what responsibility they might have, for the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This will be done by using a case study examining how CSOs in Sweden work with and understand SDG 10 (reduce inequality within and among countries). Since The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a holistic framework, SDG 10 must be understood in connection to all the SDGs. Thus, this research aims to address the broader discussion on accountability for the SDGs. I propose that there is a gain in examining and discussing the issue of accountability for the SDGs from a human rights perspective.

Purpose and research question

The purpose of this case study is to explore how the role(s) and responsibility of CSOs within the 2030 Agenda can be understood from a human rights perspective. In order to do so, I will examine the following research questions:

- What role can civil society organisations (CSOs) play and what responsibility do they have for the realisation of the sustainable development goals (SDGs)?
  - How do CSOs in Sweden work with and understand SDG 10?
  - What role(s) do CSOs in Sweden take upon themselves in the realisation of SDG 10 in particular and the SDGs in general?
  - How do Swedish CSOs understand their responsibility in regards to SDG 10 in particular and the SDGs in general?

RESEARCH FIELD

Human rights and the development discourse

The idea of adding a human rights perspective to this research originates in the relationship between the human rights discourse and the development discourse. The two discourses have long been running in parallel tracks, unable to find a way to speak to each other. Human rights have slowly been integrated in the development sector. However, the way in which it has been integrated so far has not been without criticism. A deeper interaction between the two sectors

---

2 Uvin, Peter (2007) 'From the Right to Development to the Rights-Based Approach: How 'Human Rights' Entered
has been described as having the potential for transforming both fields and making a leap in the work against poverty and inequality. The 2030 Agenda claims to be transformative, setting a new comprehensive agenda for sustainable development, resolving to protect human rights and reaffirming the commitment to international law.

Accountability for the SDGs

The human rights discourse includes obligations; the human rights language loses its power if one disregards the question of accountability. By committing to the Agenda heads of state have political-institutional and moral obligations for the realisation of the SDGs. However, they are merely held accountable through a voluntary-based review system. Despite its reference to human rights, the Agenda leaves little role for human rights obligations and make no reference to international law institutions when discussing how the SDGs are to be followed-up. The Agenda also refers to holding businesses, civil society and individuals responsible for its realisation. As it fails to specify who is doing what, the question of accountability for the SDGs is vague and unclear. Clarifying the role(s) of the different agents is therefore important.

Civil society organisations’ role(s) and responsibility

CSOs played an important role consulting in the work leading up to the SDGs and have been vital for the outcome of the 2030 Agenda. Moreover, CSOs are given ambitious but inexplicit roles in the realisation of the SDGs; they are acknowledged as important actors, seen as a major stakeholder and part of a new ‘global partnership’. At the same time, CSOs are also seen as responsible for holding other agents accountable to their commitments to the SDGs.

In a Swedish context, the government has an extended collaboration with civil society. For example: representatives from CSOs were part of the official Swedish delegation to international SDG negotiations. The government has given the Swedish ‘Agenda 2030-delegation’ the task to

---

work in close relation to civil society and CSOs are also seen by Swedish officials as an important actor to hold the government accountable.\textsuperscript{11}

**SDG 10**

Inequality is a central concern in the 2030 Agenda. SDG 10 shows that the global development sector has taken a step away from the Millennium Development Goals’ focus on ending poverty towards focusing on reducing inequality.\textsuperscript{12} However, MacNaughton argues that many of the ten targets are means for poverty reduction rather than benchmarks for reducing inequalities. The targets lack specification, clear measurements that determine when the targets are to be met, and the indicators tend to focus on economic growth rather than on equality.\textsuperscript{13} How does this effect CSOs ability to work toward reaching the goal? Using SDG 10 as a case is interesting as SDG 10 paves the way for the realisation of other SDGs, since no target can be understood as achieved until it has been met for all segments of the population.\textsuperscript{14} Since SDG 10 is more aspirational and vague than other SDGs, there is a need for further discussion on how goal 10 is to be conceptualised.\textsuperscript{15}

**METHODOLOGY**

*Research design*

As a methodological approach to this research I will use a case study, looking into how CSOs in Sweden work with and understand SDG 10 and their responsibilities and roles in relation to the SDGs. Stake argues that case study is best used when researchers aim to add to ‘existing experience and humanistic understanding’.\textsuperscript{16} The case will include a small number of CSOs and look in-depth into their work. The selection of the CSOs will be based on a number of criteria\textsuperscript{17} and drawn from my existing networks. A case study can, or rather should, include a number of

\textsuperscript{12} MacNaughton, Gillian (2017) ‘Vertical inequalities: are the SDGs and human rights up to the challenges?’, *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 21:8, p. 1056.
\textsuperscript{14} Pogge and Sengupta, 2015, p.60.
\textsuperscript{17} Three main criteria for selection of the organisations included in the case study: 1) the CSOs work shall be based on a foundation of human rights 2) the organisation shall work with the issue of inequality within Sweden or/and among countries and 3) they shall have committed themselves to work with Agenda 2030.
data-gathering techniques; therefore, I aim to use semi-structured interviews, participatory observations and in-depth text analysis.\textsuperscript{18}

The case

In this study I believe it will be of value to conduct semi-structured interviews, especially in regards to understanding the role(s) and responsibilities the organisations take upon themselves.\textsuperscript{19} From my experiences of conducting interviews I hope to have learned from my mistakes becoming a stronger and more humble researcher. Humble towards the time consuming work of conducting interviews and the generosity of the interviewees.

Participatory observations will be used to better understand how the organisations talks about the SDGs and how the role(s) they have taken upon themselves is expressed in their daily work.\textsuperscript{20} I anticipate that the organisations and I will share knowledge and experiences, I therefore see myself as participating in their work. In addition to this, I will also analyse relevant texts that the organisations have produced to get a richer picture of their work.

Contextualising

To be able to analyse my case, I need to understand the role(s) and responsibilities given to CSOs within the 2030 Agenda. Thus, I will conduct a text analysis to get a fuller picture of how the role of civil society is described within the Agenda and other relevant documents connected to it. The analysis and the selection of documents will be based on my main research question.

Ethics

There are a number of ethical considerations in this research. I will follow the current guidelines in regards to, for example, the question of integrity and informed consent, the safekeeping of material and the treatment of personal data.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{20} Bailey, 2007, p.79-84.
\textsuperscript{21} Vetenskapsrådet (2017) \textit{God forskningssed}
THEORY

CSOs’ role in accountability
To understand the responsibilities that CSOs have for the SDGs, I suggest that Young’s social connection model can be of help. Young argues that agents connected to structural injustice have political responsibility for these injustices. The kind of action an agent should take is determined by the agent’s position in the structure producing the injustice.\textsuperscript{22, 23}

Further, I wish to discuss an interesting tension existing in CSOs relationship to accountability. Ocampo and Gómez-Arteaga emphasise that social accountability plays an important role for the realisation of the SDGs.\textsuperscript{24} O’Donnell’s view of social accountability is exercised by, for example, CSOs when they put public pressure on governments, so called ‘naming and shaming’.\textsuperscript{25} This role of CSOs is interesting to set in relation to their responsibilities as an agent in the Global Partnership for the Agenda. Bexell and Jönsson highlight this tension in a Swedish context and raise the question; ‘Can civil society organisations maintain their important critical watchdog role after having provided direct input to government positions?’\textsuperscript{26} By using Young’s social connection model together with social accountability I will further examine this tension.

A human rights perspective
To add a human rights perspective to the question, and to understand what agents are held accountable for what and to whom, I will turn to Pogge, who brings to light the discussion of duty-bearers and right-holders. Pogge argues that we need to have an institutional understanding of human rights and to understand the institution as the duty-bearer.\textsuperscript{27} Individuals’ and governments’ responsibility is to work for an institutional order that secures everyone’s human rights.\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{23} I will also look into Miller’s more structured criteria determine who has responsibilities. Even if Miller focuses on nations, I believe his connection theory of remedial responsibilities offers tools to better understand what agents that have the responsibility of a certain situation. Miller, David (2001), ‘Distributing Responsibilities’, The Journal of Political Philosophy: Volume 9, number 4. pp. 453–471.
\textsuperscript{25} O’Donnell talks about national accountability in three levels; vertical, horizontal and social. Vertical accountability looks at principals and agents, such as voters and government, most importantly exercised in elections. Horizontal accountability is for example independent institutions that examine them in power. Social accountability is exercised when public actors such as media or CSOs are putting public pressure on governments creating social stigma.
\textsuperscript{26} Bexell and Jönsson, 2016, p.21.
\textsuperscript{27} Pogge, 2008, p.70.
\textsuperscript{28} Pogge, 2008, p.70-72.
Adding a human rights perspective also means turning back to the discussion of the interaction between the human rights discourse and the development discourse. To further apprehend CSOs role(s) in the Agenda I need to draw from this discussion and understand how the human rights discourse has been utilised and understood by CSOs.


30 Word count: 1498.
LITERATURE LIST


