

HLPF talking points – Sarah Cliffe

Note for translator - since I am the last in the panel I will amend remarks to refer to what other panelists have talked about, so this needs to be checked against delivery.

Thank you very much to ECOSOC Vice President Kelapile, to Jan Beagle and to my fellow panelists to whom I have listened with interest.

I would like to relate directly to the question on the interlinkages between health, peace, justice and exclusion and partnerships. I have four main points, three vicious cycles and a virtuous cycle:

Vicious cycle # 1: inequality, exclusion and COVID19.

Inequality and exclusion have had a deep impact on our inability to contain the pandemic, demonstrating the links between goals 3 and 10. This has occurred through two main dynamics. Firstly, within countries, we have new research that shows that more unequal societies had significantly higher infection rates than more equal and inclusive societies – each percentage point of increase in the Gini, the main inequality measure, over time produces one third more uncontained infections. This occurs through five main mechanisms. Unequal societies have:

- lower trust in doctors and medical personnel;
- lower tax rates and weaker health systems as a result;
- crowded housing conditions in cities that spread contagion;
- lower savings for the poor and weaker social protection that forces people to seek income outside the home, breaking lockdown provisions;
- patterns of systemic and structural discrimination against racial and ethnic minorities that have excluded people from testing, vaccination and treatment that could have helped containment.

Vicious circle # 2: corruption, capture, inequality and exclusion and access to justice

The second vicious circle refers to the relationship between inequality, corruption and capture, access to justice and trust (goals 10 and 16). Inequality [increases corruption and capture](#) by increasing the influence of elites over political, legislative, judicial and administrative decision-making, and by biasing the function of the justice system towards defending property and privilege rather than a people centered-approach. It is estimated that two thirds of the world's population do not have meaningful access to justice, while goal 16 calls for “equal access to justice for all”. Corruption and capture in turn produces [ineffective public spending and biased state regulation that results in more unequal distribution of human and financial assets, weaker and less inclusive growth and services.](#)

[Corruption](#) and its negative effects also correlates with distrust between citizens and in the state: [a recent OECD study](#) shows high level corruption is amongst the most important

determinants of trust in government, followed by perceptions of institutional performance. An interesting and under-tapped stream of research for policy purposes indicates that both inequality and corruption are more salient than heterogeneity of societies (whether societies have one or many ethnic, religious or racial groups) in driving trust.

Vicious cycle # 3: inequality and exclusion, peace and violence reduction.

The evidence is very clear on the links on these points between goals 10 and 16. What academics call vertical inequality – inequality between classes on socio-economic grounds – has a clear relationship to criminal violence, including on homicide rates. What academics call horizontal equality, between groups such as ethnic, racial or religious identities, has a clear relationship to civil conflict and unrest, and there is growing evidence that general inequality also plays a role in this regard. So to achieve the ambitious goals for peace in the SDGs, we also need to address inequality and exclusion.

The virtuous circle: linking goal 17 on partnerships with goals 3, 10 and 16.

The available evidence that we have at our disposal is that trust increases when both government and civil society are involved in addressing challenges such as pandemics, and more broadly in addressing access to justice, violence reduction and inequality and exclusion. The answer to these challenges cannot be found in government alone, or in civil society alone, but in the complementary action of the two, focusing on results for people. In the justice sector, for example, this means that cooperation is required between formal and informal justice actors, to ensure that people's justice problems can be resolved and grievances addressed. We also need to broaden our partnerships to other actors – the private sector, credit rating agencies, remittance agencies amongst others. This is one of the new frontiers that has been created by the SDGs, in two senses. First, we can look at partnerships that address the hitherto untapped relationship between equitable and inclusive development, access to justice and peace. Second, we can look at the relationship of unequal societies with our inability to address crucial global challenges such as COVID19 and future pandemics – and climate change, which while not the focus of this panel is also intimately linked.