

Interactive dialogue 5 Building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions

I. INTRODUCTION

Effective, accountable and inclusive institutions are essential to achieving the SDGs. Thus the new 2030 Agenda recognizes the need to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies that provide equal access to justice and that are based on respect for human rights (including the right to development), on effective rule of law and good governance at all levels and on transparent, effective and accountable institutions.¹ Institutions –formal and informal – determine how decisions are made, how resources are allocated, how well markets function, how natural resources are governed, how conflicts are managed and how violence and crime are prevented and addressed.

Effective, accountable and inclusive institutions that provide access to justice are based on effective rule of law, respond to the needs of people and provide timely, appropriate and equitable access to services. They foster equality and trust among communities, businesses and people by securing their participation and engagement and tackling corruption, and they create a culture of integrity in service delivery. The legitimacy of institutions, systems, and processes is determined by a range of factors, including respect for human rights and fair and non-discriminatory processes and equal opportunities, where no one is excluded or discriminated against on the grounds race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, disability or other status.

The importance of effective, well-functioning institutions to the future agenda has been widely recognized: honest and responsive governments and protection from crime and violence rank consistently among the top priorities across all groups in all regions of the world. For children across all regions, in conflict and non-conflict-affected countries, protection from violence was ranked as their second highest development priority, immediately after education.

II. STOCKTAKING

Harnessing MDGs implementation experience: Lessons learned from MDG implementation showed the importance of incorporating human rights, the rule of law and personal security to ensure progress towards development goals. Effective and inclusive governance and robust institutional capacity are instrumental in achieving this. A growing body of research also suggests that institutions and the quality of governance are critical factors in driving development and promoting equality. The importance of effective institutions is perhaps clearest in countries that are rich in natural resources, but have not been able to reduce significantly the poverty rate.

Combatting violence, inequality and poverty: Whilst the world in general has become more prosperous and more peaceful in recent decades, inequality is growing in many countries and there remain significant pockets of extreme poverty and of extreme violence. Varied forms of violence, a complex multi-dimensional set of drivers and more non-state actors, using new technologies and social media and with transnational connections, are changing the nature of violent conflicts. A few very violent conflicts have erupted in recent years, contributing to 60 million forcibly displaced persons worldwide at the end of 2014. This is the highest number of displaced persons since 1945. Conflict-induced displacement poses particular challenges for institutions to deliver essential services, justice and transformative outcomes.

About 90% of violent deaths in the world, however, occur in non-conflict situations – 437,000 persons were victims of intentional homicides, including 43,600 women who were killed by their intimate partner or a member of their family and almost 95,000 children and adolescents.

Advancing gender equality: Due to a lack of fully inclusive and responsive institutions, barriers to participation persist. To date, only 16% of parliamentary speakers are women and women represent 18% of all government ministers in the world, an increase of only 4 percentage points since 2005. On the other hand, the global proportion of women in parliaments has nearly doubled since then to 22%.

Securing legal identity: Legal identity is critical in enhancing equal access to services and full participation in society. With a birth certificate, children and adults can have better access to justice, social services, secure ownership and inheritance, and protections to which they are entitled. To date, nearly 635 million people worldwide have not been registered at birth, including 230 million children under the age of five, a further 1.8 billion adults do not have identity credentials. At least 10 million persons are stateless and the question of their legal identity needs to be resolved.

Championing transparent government: Laws giving individuals a legal right to access information are now in place in over 100 countries globally. This right is a key part of the overall global trend towards more transparent and open government, including protection of whistleblowers, open data and asset declarations. Most new adopters are in Africa, Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Middle East.

Prioritizing local governance capacity: Institutions have become more accessible through devolution to local governments, which have become more autonomous in many countries. In turn, this has generated higher expectations of local government, including with regard to inclusive political processes, service delivery, environmental practices and systems of resource exploitation, and peaceful resolution of community tensions and conflicts. Whilst local government responsibilities are growing, the share of funds available is often inadequate: local budgets are an average of 25% of public expenditures in the EU, but less than 5% in many developing countries. The Ebola outbreak in West Africa highlighted how the absence of a country-wide network of strong local government institutions hampers rapid and integrated responses to public health emergencies..

III. PROPOSALS FOR ADDRESSING ISSUES IN NEW AGENDA

To ensure integrated implementation of the sustainable development agenda and to achieve the transformative vision of the post-2015 development agenda, institutions need to:

Collaborate on implementation of policies coherently across the economic, social and environmental spheres – this is particularly important for Goal 16, given its links to all other aspects of the SDG framework. Policy coherence is becoming an important prerequisite for balanced, inclusive and equitable growth.

Give primacy to human rights including equality and non-discrimination, delivered through institutions based on the rule of law. The right to free, active and meaningful participation for all in the governance institutions tasked to deliver on the agenda must be ensured from policy development to monitoring, implementation and evaluation. Special measures are needed to ensure that the voices of the most vulnerable and marginalized, women and children, both girls and boys, and young people are included and that no one is left behind.

Base reform processes on inclusive political dialogue through which grievances, inequities and the performance of institutions are discussed and policies are agreed. Institutional reforms can provide a new momentum for the participation of all relevant stakeholders in decision-making at all levels, including civil society, women, children and youth, the private sector, academia, as well as marginalized groups (see target 10.2 on inclusion of all).

Make parliaments an integral part of national efforts to implement the 2030 agenda, to ensure that the sustainable development goals are reflected in national policies, regulations and enabling legislation. The oversight function of legislatures is important in order to ensure adequate, efficient and transparent allocation of resources in national and local budgets for the full implementation of the SDGs.

Seek timely access to reliable information in usable formats for public participation in decision-making. Information and communication technologies and the Internet are important in this regard, and for institutions to communicate effectively within and among themselves. Freedoms of expression and association, and the protection of journalists, and free, independent and pluralistic media play critical roles in increasing accountability. For monitoring and accountability, better collaboration is needed between the producers and managers of information and statisticians from government on the one hand, and civil society, academia and the international community on the other.

Remain agile and responsive to dramatic changes in social, economic and political dynamics. A population of 8.4 billion by 2030 will include more young people than ever before with the potential of a demographic dividend; however, 1.2 billion young people in the world today are often left out of political processes and public institutions. Institutions will need to be more adaptable and “future conscious” – able to play a stewardship role in protecting and fulfilling the rights of current and future generations. As societies become more diverse and as people become more aware of their rights to participate and to shape public policy, the capacity of institutions to manage diversity and promote social cohesion, tolerance and respect, will be a key condition for creating stable, peaceful and inclusive societies.

Target access to effective, fair, responsive, independent, transparent and accountable justice institutions and enhanced rule of law. Access to justice can be enhanced by institutional reform that addresses efficiency and integrity and eliminates discrimination and bias (targets 5.1, 10.3 and 16b). For example, women’s participation in the provision of justice and security services promotes inclusive access. The delivery of justice must respond to the needs of the vulnerable and excluded. Moreover, all legal systems of the world must be in full conformity with international human rights principles and standards. Fair, non-discriminatory judiciary and law enforcement systems are central to promoting access to justice and the rule of law.

Recognize that development challenges can no longer be addressed in isolation and in a piecemeal fashion. Many of today’s challenges, such as violence, crime and political crises, have cross-border aspects, including through forced displacement, illicit financial and arms flows and human trafficking. Hence they require global and regional responses and collaboration among diverse institutions and stakeholders. At national and local levels they require inclusive approaches to tackle the causes of violence through collaboration among institutions, governments and communities.

Counter the pervasive impact that violence, in all its forms and manifestations, has on children's health, development and well-being and their ability to thrive. Violence weakens social cohesion and goes hand in hand with deprivation, poor school performance and risk-taking behaviours. The vision and goals of the 2030 agenda cannot be achieved unless children are protected and living free from want and fear with institutions and services in place to prevent and respond to all forms of violence, abuse, exploitation, trafficking and torture (link to targets 5.2, 8.7 and 16.2).

Maintain action on preventing corruption and its corrosive effect on confidence in institutions. Countries capable of controlling corruption are able to use their human, financial and natural resources more efficiently and equitably with fewer losses and distortions. They are able to attract higher levels of foreign and domestic investment and, on average, grow more rapidly. Ensure that economic institutions focus on increasing participation in the economy of women, young people and disadvantaged groups, such as older persons, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, minorities, migrants and persons in situations of conflict and displacement, through capacity building efforts as well as non-discrimination. This pertains to strengthening domestic financial institutions to expand access to affordable financial services for all, and protecting labour rights of all workers, including migrants (link to targets 8.8 and 8.10 respectively).

The new 2030 Agenda calls for improved governance at all levels and recommits countries to broadening and strengthening the voice and participation of developing countries in international economic decision-making, norm-setting and global economic governance.²

Questions for discussion:

- What practical measures can be adopted to enhance universal access to justice and to ensure the equitable delivery of universal public services?
- What measures can ensure that institutions are accessible and responsive to people in vulnerable situations?
- How can effective and inclusive institutions foster multi-stakeholder coalitions among the government, civil society, the private sector and people to enhance development outcomes?
- What measures can be taken to build and/or improve the effectiveness and accountability of institutions and to ensure active participation in policy-making, implementation and monitoring, including through access to information, and encourage greater openness in the functioning of all institutions?

¹ Transforming our World : The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, para 35.

² Transforming our World : The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, para 44.