

19th Session of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration

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Agenda Item 8: Promoting peaceful and inclusive societies and providing access to justice for all

Building Institutions for Peaceful and Inclusive Societies

Introduction

SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) aims at peaceful and inclusive societies, access to justice for all, effective and accountable institutions at all levels. Usually, women and girls, people in rural areas, indigenous peoples, ethnic and linguistic minorities, people with disabilities, migrants etc are marginalised across countries. People are left behind when they lack opportunities, choices and capabilities to participate or benefit from human development. This may be due to absolute deprivation – minimal standards of security, income, public services and infrastructure; or a situation of relative disadvantage, where people face exclusion, discrimination and/or experience deep-rooted inequalities.

Interlinkages

Rising inequalities are not only an impediment to growth and human development but also a breach of shared norms, values and people's intrinsic sense of fairness that SDGs advocate. The progress on peace, justice and inclusion targets affects outcomes in other SDGs and often interlinkages are both ways. SDG16 influences education outcomes (SDG 4) by ensuring safe environments and education in turn is critical to ensure and sustain a culture of peace and justice in a society. The interlinkages support the Agenda 2030 claim that there can be no sustainable development without peace, and no peace without sustainable development. SDG 16 as a goal is both an outcome and an enabler of sustainable development.

The advancement of SDG 16 is a universal challenge, which requires action at multiple levels. In many countries, the capacity needs and gaps represent a critical barrier to meaningful SDG 16 implementation and follow-up. The gaps pertain to weak institutions and service delivery, trust deficits and lack of partnerships across sectors and lack of effective linkages between formal and informal processes and institutions. The issues such as social cohesion, illicit financial flows, corruption and many forms of discrimination remain grave challenges.

Competing Interests: Spin-offs and trade-offs

The confluence of economic, social and environmental trends such as demographic shifts, growing inequalities, evolution of the digital economy, rapid urbanization and climate change are reshaping the governance landscape at all levels. The SDG Agenda 2030 is an extensive document in terms of linking the progress of development to human dignity. Governance is integral to achieving the SDGs. The national economies have to take decisions and initiate actions using innovative

mechanisms and involving relevant stakeholders such as the governments, businesses, non-governmental organisations, civil society organisations and researchers. There must be coordination among them at different levels, from transnational corporations- National Governments - local to produce effective outcomes.

There are many spin-offs among the SDGs, where addressing one goal helps address others at the same time. For example, addressing climate change will have co-benefits for energy, security, health, biodiversity and oceans. On the contrary, the SDGs also involve trade-offs. The fossil fuel companies and their workers who will be affected in the short term will perceive themselves as 'losers' if they are forced to change, though the society as a whole will be a 'winner' in the long term by avoiding the risks and impacts of climate change. The trade-offs in terms of goals can be a major governance challenge, especially where responsibility is dispersed and there are conflicting interests of different stakeholders.

Challenges in Measuring Progress

Many countries face a grave problem of database and developing indicators to measure outcomes. For example, in India, though the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation has worked on the development of indicators, it is difficult to assess 'quality of education' and 'safe drinking water'. The water from hand-pumps and tube-wells is considered as safe as piped water supply. As per this consideration and official data, approximately 86 per cent of the Indians have access to safe water but the number of waterborne diseases and deaths due to diarrhoea indicates otherwise. The data and the indicators mostly deal with a compilation of data on poverty, health, agriculture, human development and environment but do not indicate how sustainability is mapped. Policies need to be made to factor in realities to rank suitably on the SDG indicators.

Measuring progress is very important to understand the extent of the achievement of SDGs. Non-availability of data with respect to sub-national levels, periodicity issues and incomplete coverage of administrative data makes it a challenge to measure progress. SDGs need an integrated approach for accomplishing the social, environmental and economic targets.

Strong Networks

The SDGs are integrated, indivisible and need effective governance with strong social networks to translate into a framework, focused on 'People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnerships'. For example, a country's ability to combat hunger is directly connected to its agricultural system, its strategy for rural development, economic and income growth, management of natural resources, level of infrastructure, natural disaster mitigation plans, and the health of its population, requiring that many actors work together across and outside of government. Lack of action on one component can compromise the collective success. The link between any given policy or programme and the achievement of an SDG cannot be always captured in a linear straight forward cause and effect relationship. The achievement of SDGs is essentially contextual, subject to various internal and external factors that stakeholders cannot always control or influence.

Strengthening Institutions

It is necessary to ensure that institutions are equipped with sufficient expertise, resources and tools to direct actions towards peaceful, just and inclusive societies. This includes capacity building of public sector workforce, leadership development, performance management, effective financial management, revenue administration as well as investment in digital government.

The data revolution necessitates data collection systems that are low cost, reliable and accurate with timely data available to policy makers. The data disaggregated should focus on the local level and be crowd-based to capture statistics about the most poor, vulnerable and marginalized citizens of society. Governance practices should be based on knowledge generated from formal, peer reviewed research that is conceptually sound, contextually sensitive, quantitatively driven and trustworthy.

The governance structures need to be adjusted to reflect interrelationships for capitalizing on positive synergies and reducing or eliminating negative outcomes. It is a fact that high levels of economic growth have lifted great numbers of people out of poverty. However, to sustain the growth needed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and enhance resilience, it is imperative to adopt a growth trajectory that is more equitable, resource-efficient and environmental friendly. This reinforces appropriate investments by countries in strong 'social safety net policies' to tackle vulnerabilities and strengthen SDGs.

Indian Experience

The Government of India under the leadership of the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi is committed to inclusive development. Social justice and equality are the cornerstones of New India or *Naya Bharat*. The rise of the last man is the directional theme of the political thought and policy for New India 2022-2042. This commitment is reflected in government's work to electrify rural households, ensure that girls go to school and stay in school, provide sanitation and housing for all, equip young people with skills to compete in the global labour market, enable access to finance and financial services etc.

The focus is also on *Atmanirbhar Bharat* (self-reliant India) emphasizing reforms in land, labour, liquidity and laws. The government is putting considerable financial resources on strengthening Public Distribution System (allowing national portability of ration cards to ensure inclusion), emphasis on ease of doing business through institutional finance (liquidity) to promote entrepreneurship and as a part of institutional strengthening and addressing migrant labour issues has committed resources for improving municipal finances. *Atmanirbhar Bharat* signals a confident India to join global supply chain and global value chain. Besides, India has also made impressive strides on the use of data for effective policymaking, and monitoring progress of schemes against SDG targets. These interventions have a direct and resounding effect on the achievement of the SDGs. They serve as examples for other developing countries grappling with similar challenges.

Conclusion

The pandemic Covid-19 calls for a rethinking on SDGs as it is the immediate priority for the SDG campaign. The global, regional, national, and local level policy responses to the outbreak must

be designed with a gender lens, and pay special attention to indigenous communities, the homeless, refugees, internally displaced persons and those living in extreme poverty and people with disabilities. Leaving no one behind is a recurring and overarching objective of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs. SDGs cannot be achieved without unlocking the potential of all people to solve problems, contribute to their communities and adapt creatively to new realities. The achievement of SDGs requires action at policy, institutional and micro (locality/ village/ ward) levels. This requires partnerships and integration at multiple levels. It is the collective responsibility of all to work towards a world that is peaceful, a system that is just and development that is sustainable.