HOW CAN GOVERNMENTS STRENGTHEN PUBLIC TRUST AND THEIR RELATIONSHIPS WITH SOCIETY?

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 How do positive relationships matter for effective, accountable, transparent and inclusive institutions and the achievement of the 2030 Agenda?

Public administration, from the national to the local level, provides essential services that support the functioning of society. Operating with relative continuity across changing Governments, its work is fundamental to the achievement of all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), from developing and maintaining infrastructure to delivering energy and clean water. In particular, it is captured by SDG target 16.6, which calls upon Governments to "develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels".

While public institutions exist to serve the public, they also rely on other social actors to fulfil their roles and to thrive (see box 1.1). Their relationships with other parts of society are mutually supportive. Crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic highlight the salience of these relationships, which are both affected by crises and influence responses to them. After the pandemic struck, collaboration and coordination between Governments and other actors, including private companies and non-governmental organizations, often facilitated key

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Box 1.1 Key social actors and elements of their roles

Governments are themselves social actors. Their obligations derive from national laws and constitutions and international commitments. Governments are broadly expected to protect national security, observe and enforce the rule of law, and protect and uphold human rights. They are looked to for accurate information on both their own operations and other matters of public interest. Governments are responsible for, among other things, the delivery of high-quality and inclusive public services—such as education, health care and social protection—that largely underpin the development of human capabilities. People have an innate general sense of fairness Governments are expected to share, and there are justice-driven principles that they are expected to uphold. Governments have a duty, through these and other means, to enable opportunities for people to realize their potential and to share in prosperity.

While all public institutions, from legislative bodies to supreme audit institutions, serve crucial roles, the main focus of the present publication is on public administration, which primarily provides goods and services to individuals, businesses and other actors that fund it. Taxation is a key means of interaction with public administration. Revenues collected from direct and indirect taxes should benefit all social actors. All individuals and other actors are expected to comply with the law and to uphold their duty of care to one another. To varying degrees, they are also expected to participate in society, which may entail, for instance, volunteering in one's community, voting, or monitoring the work of different levels of government and demanding accountability when it falls short.

Civil society encompasses a broad assortment of actors, including non-governmental organizations, cooperative organizations, community groups, labour unions, and academic, scientific and research institutions. They play a range of roles that can complement, support or fill gaps in the work of government or that seek to change it in some way. They advance their aims through various means. For instance, they may engage in advocacy and lobbying, striving to uphold or in some cases restrict rights, or they may work to improve livelihoods in ways that are socially just. They are often involved in monitoring government in areas ranging from spending to policing, endeavouring to hold the Government to account for its policies and actions. A number of them are engaged in generating knowledge, expertise and innovation. Civil society organizations also provide goods and services for the public, including marginalized individuals and groups; in some cases, particularly in conflict and humanitarian contexts, they may end up assuming responsibility for critical functions that Governments are unable to perform.

The private sector is an important source of jobs and income, economic growth, goods and services, innovation, and funding for public interest initiatives. Questions arose during the pandemic period about the role of the private sector, in particular about what corporations owe Governments and society in exchange for the provision of basic infrastructure and other assets they use.[a]

Another key social actor is the media, which should provide information to the public, provoke inquiry and debate, and help hold Governments (and others exercising power) accountable through monitoring and transparent reporting. Donors and intergovernmental organizations are also important actors, as they can provide policy and technical guidance and tools, supply funding, or establish and monitor normative standards. The roles of social actors are not static, as all have the capacity to evolve and innovate.

Source: (a) United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "Report of the inception meeting for the World Public Sector Report 2023", from the expert group meeting held in New York on 9 and 10 August 2022.

aspects of the response to the crisis, including the development, approval, and distribution of vaccines and the provision of essential goods and services during quarantine or lockdown periods. At the same time, many countries experienced new or exacerbated social and political divisiveness due to factors such as the spread of false information and growing inequalities, which contributed to missed opportunities to address the crisis and advance sustainable development. Strengthening relationships between Governments and society requires a commitment from all actors, but Governments need to lay the groundwork and strive to earn trust.

1.1.2 Assessing Governments' relationships with other actors

Assessing the quality of Governments' relationships with different actors is an inherently subjective and imprecise exercise. Such relationships may be evaluated using indicators such as the level of trust in government, the degree of democracy, or the extent of interaction, including people's participation in government processes (see box 1.2). Views on social cohesion or the opportunities available to actors may also factor into this assessment. The present chapter examines a selection of key factors that influence these relationships.

The matter of trust warrants particular attention. Trust in public institutions is widely recognized as a key indicator of how well people think government is performing and responding to their needs and how they interact with government, yet trust is also important for achieving effective governance; in effect, it both contributes to and results from good governance. Trust in public institutions is also influenced by broader social, economic and political trends beyond the actual performance of a current Government or leader, such as shifts in global energy prices or major advances in science or technology.[1] Trust in government is especially crucial during crises, when public compliance with policy measures is necessary to minimize risks to public safety. Behaviour during the early part of the COVID-19 pandemic period reinforced previous research indicating that where trust in government is higher, so is compliance with public rules and guidelines relating to healthy behaviours such as handwashing and social distancing.[2] Higher trust in government was also associated with reduced rates of infection and increased vaccine uptake. While much research addresses public trust in government, trust on the part of government in citizens and other social actors is also critical to strong relationships.

A 2022 report that assessed a large global data set of country surveys on trust in central or federal government found that, among democracies, trust appears to have increased in recent years following a period of overall decline from 1995 onward and particularly after the global financial and economic crisis of 2007/08.[3] In democracies, average trust or confidence in

government rose several percentage points between 2020 and 2022 and has largely held at approximately 42-43 per cent–a level that slightly exceeds that of 2015. The report posits that trust may have increased as a direct result of the pandemic, given that government action constituted the only means of implementing and enforcing the rules needed to effectively reduce the spread of the virus. There may have been a sustained "rally 'round the flag" effect, whereby societies increase support for public institutions or political leaders around major shared challenges. Despite this apparent rise, trust remains nearly 10 percentage points below 1995 levels in democratic countries. This illustrates that trust is not rebuilt quickly, and that even partial gains may be fragile.[4]

The relationships Governments have with other social actors are inextricably linked to the fundamental notion of a social contract, described by the United Nations Secretary-General as "the understanding within a society of how people solve shared problems, manage risks and pool resources to deliver public goods, as well as how their collective institutions and norms operate".[5] It concerns what is expected from or owed by all social actors, including public administration (be it unwritten or reflected in one or multiple documents). In 2021, the Secretary-General observed that "there is a growing disconnect between people and the institutions that serve them, with many feeling left behind and no longer confident that the system is working for them".[6] This lack of confidence undermines solidarity and cohesion–an effect particularly susceptible to crises. As the pandemic took hold, fear, uncertainty and disruption contributed to a deeper questioning of duties to one another, society and nature. This disquiet has been compounded by other crises, including climate-related disasters and the war in Ukraine. Yet crises are when a social contract is most vital. Renewed social contracts, with trust constituting a foundational element, are therefore crucial if societies are to meet today's compounding challenges, respond to those that are likely to arise, and still achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. In adopting the 2030 Agenda, Governments explicitly committed to working with all parts of society in realizing sustainable development.

1.1.3 The socioeconomic landscape of relationships between government and society

Many trends predating the pandemic had already eroded relationships between Governments and other social actors. Several have been made worse by the crisis or have assumed greater importance because of it.

Most critically, the pandemic put an end to 25 years of steady progress in reducing poverty.[7] In 2020, it erased more than four years of improvement, and little ground has been regained since. It significantly exacerbated hunger and food insecurity, efforts against which even before the pandemic were

Box 1.2 Tools used to assess relationships between Governments and other social actors[a]

Various tools can be utilized to shed light on one or more aspects or determinants of the relationships between Governments and other actors and provide an approximate indication of their quality or strength. The illustrative samples presented below are designed to measure trust in government, democracy, good governance and well-being. They also measure certain aspects of (and gaps in) those areas, including satisfaction with public services, the availability of civic space, the application of the rule of law, and levels of corruption (whether real or perceived). The tools range from perception surveys to indices that aggregate indicators from a range of data sets.

Regional surveys of public opinion such as the Afrobarometer, Arab Barometer, Asian Barometer, Central Asia Barometer, Latinobarometro and Eurobarometer include slightly different variations of questions about trust, asking respondents to indicate how much trust or confidence they have in government (typically on a scale from zero to three).[b] The World Values Survey and the Gallup World Poll also enquire about trust in government.[c] The Edelman Trust Barometer measures annual trust in government and the credibility of the Government, media, businesses and non-governmental organizations.[d]

In 2021, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) conducted a survey of government and public institutions on building trust to reinforce democracy, eliciting responses from 22 OECD countries.[e] The OECD also produces the Better Life Index, an interactive composite index of well-being that includes an indicator on civic engagement;[f] it covers all OECD countries as well as four partner countries.

The Chandler Good Government Index measures the capabilities and effectiveness of Governments. In 2022, the Index was based on data from 104 countries.[g] Assessments are in place for public service delivery at the national and local levels. In the Philippines, the Citizen Satisfaction Index system measures how satisfied constituents are with local government service delivery as well as with public sector performance in general.[h]

The World Justice Project developed the WJP Rule of Law Index, which was used to evaluate 140 countries and jurisdictions across the world in 2022.[i] The Index measures eight factors, including the extent to which those who govern are bound by the law, the powers of government and its officials in relation to accountability under the law, the status of human rights, and non-governmental checks on government powers.

The Corruption Perceptions Index created by Transparency International ranks 180 countries and territories by perceived levels of corruption in the public sector.[j]

The Democracy Index compiled by the Economist Intelligence Unit offers a snapshot of the state of democracy in 165 independent States and two territories.[k] The Index assesses indicators in a number of categories, including the electoral process and pluralism, the functioning of government, political participation, the political culture, and civil liberties. The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance uses its Global State of Democracy Indices to measure democratic trends at the country, regional and global levels.[l] The Indices are based on 116 indicators, and data is collected for 173 countries. Democracy is also measured through the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project and the *Freedom in the World* reports by Freedom House.[m]

There are distinct assessments of civic space as well. The CIVICUS Monitor—a research collaboration between global civil society alliance CIVICUS and more than 20 partner organizations from around the world—measures the extent of protection of the fundamental civic freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly.[n] At present, the Monitor draws on multiple sources of data and information covering 197 countries and territories.

Sources: (a) Written by Jessie Kalepa, Junior Professional Officer, DPIDG, UN DESA; (b) Relevant details may be obtained from the websites for Afrobarometer (https://www.afrobarometer.org/), Arab Barometer (https://www.arabbarometer.org/), Asian Barometer (https://www.asianbarometer.org/), Central Asia Barometer (https://www.ca-barometer.org/en), Latinobarometro (https://www.latinobarometro.org/lat.jsp), and Eurobarometer (https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/screen/home); (c) see the World Values Survey (https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs.jsp) and Gallup (https://www.gallup.com/home.aspx; (d) see the Edelman Trust Barometer (https://www.edelman.com/trust/trust-barometer); (e) OECD, *Building Trust to Reinforce Democracy: Main Findings from the 2021 OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions*, Building Trust in Public Institutions (Paris, OECD Publishing, 2022), available at https://doi.org/10.1787/b407f99c-en; (f) OECD, Better Life Index, available at https://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/; (g) Chandler Institute of Governance, *Chandler Good Government Index 2022* (Singapore, 2022), available at https://chandlergovernmentindex.com/wp-content/uploads/CGGI-2022-Report.pdf; (h) Philippines, Citizen Satisfaction Index System, available at https://csis.dilg.gov.ph/; (i) World Justice Project, WJP Rule of Law Index, available at https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/; (j) Transparency International, Corruption Perceptions Index, available at https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022; (k) Economist Intelligence Unit, "Democracy Index 2022: frontline democracy and the battle for Ukraine", available at https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2022/; (l) International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, *Global State of Democracy 2022: Forging Social Contracts in a Time of Discontent*, Global State of Democracy Initiative, available at https://idea.int/democracytracker/gsod-report-2022; (m) see Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem), available at https://v-dem.net/; see also Freedom House, *Freedom in the World*, available at https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world; (n) CIVICUS Monitor, available at https://monitor.civicus.org/.

affected by factors such as climate change effects, conflict and economic shocks. Persistent inequality had also been at play and in many cases may have been exacerbated.[8] Educational gaps that have accrued among children and youth, especially those adversely affecting low-income households, may put intergenerational mobility further out of reach. When people do not feel that their circumstances can improve or that their children will have more opportunities than they have had, their faith in government may erode.

While the pandemic disproportionately harmed lower-income countries, economic and food insecurity and hunger also affected wealthier countries; however, the latter were better equipped to expand and complement already existing social protection programmes which provided support for those in need. In 2020, just 46.9 per cent of the global population was effectively covered by at least one social protection cash benefit.[9] The absence or weakness of many protections and worsening gaps in well-being may have left many people, especially the most vulnerable, feeling unsupported by and disconnected from government. At the same time, the pandemic triggered an "unprecedented yet uneven global social protection response",[10] demonstrating the scale and speed of change Governments could effect, at least for the short term.

Despite the importance of social protection underscored by the pandemic, many countries have been shifting to austerity mode. Governments are grappling with growing deficits and debt brought on by the costs of managing the pandemic and its socioeconomic effects, by reduced tax revenues, and by the effects of intersecting crises (such as those related to food and fuel). An analysis of expenditure projections carried out by the International Monetary Fund in 2022 indicates that most Governments started to cut public spending in 2021 and that more are expected to do so through 2025—with an average contraction that is larger than that from previous periods of austerity.[11] By 2023, austerity is likely to have affected 6.7 billion people. Many of the measures being considered or implemented—including those intended to raise revenue in the short term, such as increasing fees for public services—further disadvantage those who are already most disadvantaged.

Several other options are available to Governments to increase their fiscal space, including tackling illicit financial flows and implementing tax reforms rooted in the principle of fairness. osta Rica has raised its top income rate by 10 percentage points, and Bolivia has instituted wealth and solidarity taxes that apply to its wealthiest citizens.[12] Spain will improve the fairness and sustainability of its pension system by increasing contributions mainly from the highest earners and their employers.[13] The issue of fair taxation, including at the international level, is explored in depth in the contribution by Jeffrey Owens and Ruth Wamuyu later in this chapter.

Against this backdrop, the remainder of the chapter examines another set of relevant trends and opportunities relating to governance, the accuracy of information, and democratic values, traditions and institutions. While briefly describing those trends, the chapter also explores opportunities to address them by looking at successful or promising institutional or policy changes made since the pandemic that can be leveraged to help public administration be more responsive and accountable to multiple stakeholders in order to build trust and strengthen relationships—and thereby restore and accelerate progress towards the SDGs.

1.2 Governance deficits and opportunities

To varying degrees, Governments around the world rose to the challenge of addressing the COVID-19 pandemic in some ways and failed in others. For the most part, the governance gaps that undermined better responses were challenges with which Governments had long struggled—with the pandemic placing them under a harsher light and introducing much higher stakes. The extreme hardship and urgency characterizing this period shook the foundations of society but also gave rise to innovation, including in public administration.

1.2.1 Delivering responsive and inclusive services

The pandemic disrupted the functioning of government, including the provision of basic services, which is how public administration primarily interacts with individuals and other stakeholders and is therefore a key entry point for influencing relationships (see chapter 3).[14] The delivery of accessible, affordable, high-quality, inclusive and responsive public services to all is a persistent challenge for all Governments, but during the recent health crisis, institutions had to rapidly adapt and devise new ways to meet evolving needs on the ground.

Agility in public administration, including in its partnership arrangements, is essential. In Ireland, the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme provides funding for poverty and social exclusion to be addressed through local engagement and partnerships among disadvantaged persons, community organizations and public institutions.[15] When the pandemic arose, the Programme implementers, multisectoral Local Development Companies, had the flexibility to devise innovative ways to support local communities and build their resilience. The Programme shifted its focus to respond to food insecurity, mental health challenges and digital exclusion, with different Companies responding to specific local needs; for example, some worked to enhance food security by delivering food parcels and meals to disadvantaged families and older persons, while others supported local food production and the sale of fresh produce.

Representation within public institutions is another factor influencing public service provision. Public administration that reflects the public is better able to serve it; this has particular resonance at decision-making levels.[16] Women, despite making up 46 per cent of the public administration workforce on average, hold just 31 per cent of top leadership positions and 30 per cent of senior manager positions.[17] Even in areas of public administration where they constitute the majority, women occupy a minority of decision-making positions. Across regions, their representation generally decreases as seniority increases. During the pandemic, particularly early on, public administration responded much like other workplaces. Changes such as the shift to remote and hybrid work and the greater attention to work-life balance in many cases proved vital to the retention of women workers. These and other changes have sparked new thinking about means of promoting gender-equal representation and inclusion, which may be key to tapping their unrealized gains for public administration to deliver more inclusive, responsive and resilient public services. This issue is explored in more detail in the contribution by Müge Finkel and Melanie Hughes in this chapter.

1.2.2 Transparency in operations and accountability for commitments

People's trust in public institutions relies on transparency and accountability—including during crises, when these principles are hardest to uphold. Effective management of the pandemic required keeping the public apprised of the roles and actions of government bodies and providing access to reliable information, including facts about the virus and public policies adopted to respond to the health emergency, as well as the assumptions and scenarios on which pandemic-related decisions were based.[18] Amidst multiple crises and threats to sustainable development, it is essential for Governments to seize opportunities to enhance transparency and communicate with society more effectively.

The *World Public Sector Report 2021* highlighted various communication strategies and mechanisms adopted by Governments at the start of the pandemic,[19] including the provision of information about COVID-19 on national web portals and mobile apps and through social media platforms, official briefings, and outreach to community leaders. Many information channels were developed through multi-stakeholder collaboration. Some Governments also ensured that the right to information was upheld, and many made efforts to adapt and enhance access to information for disadvantaged social groups. For instance, the Government of Mexico developed accessible communication guides for persons with disabilities.[20] Examples of risk communication and its role in strengthening Governments' relationships with other actors are shared in the contribution by Torsha Dasgupta, Mirza Shadan and Kaushik Bose.

Transparency is also crucial for accountability. Non-State actors need to trust that Governments act in good faith and uphold their commitments. This requires that all stakeholders have the ability to monitor and evaluate the performance and actions of Governments and hold them to account. The pandemic put strain on accountability systems in various respects, though in many countries, accountability institutions such as supreme audit institutions and access-to-information and privacy oversight bodies have been monitoring and disseminating information about the impact of policies and regulations adopted to address the crisis. Reports from legislatures and supreme audit institutions evaluating the performance of Governments in responding to the pandemic offer important lessons for enhancing the preparedness and resilience of Governments for future crises. It is important that Governments act on the recommendations of these reports.[21]

Corruption severely undermines trust in government and is most harmful in emergency situations. In addition to the cost to taxpayers, corruption weakens institutional capacity and resilience. Amidst the massive and rapid increase in spending to respond to the pandemic, opportunities for corruption increased. The risk of corruption was heightened by the prevalence of pandemic-related government decrees and orders, overreliance on cash-based measures, the limited role and involvement of many national anti-corruption authorities during states of emergency, inadequate transparency, and the limited engagement of non-State actors.[22] Governments faced difficult trade-offs in delivering the urgent, large-scale responses needed while also endeavouring to uphold principles of good governance—a dynamic countries increasingly need to be prepared for amidst compounding crises and uncertainty.[23] In spite of such challenges, a number of countries managed to reduce the risks of corruption. In some countries, civil society organizations were involved in the committees responsible for monitoring the implementation of pandemic relief measures. In the Maldives, the Anti-Corruption Commission published and monitored the implementation of guidelines on integrity and on preventing and reducing fraud and corruption risks during the pandemic. Benin and Pakistan created information systems to complement their financial management information systems in order to improve the monitoring of pandemic funds.[24] Such measures support good governance, improve the reputation of government, and have the potential to foster stakeholder engagement and collaboration.

Prior to the onset of the pandemic, trust in Governments was already strained by their failure to respect and protect the full spectrum of human rights enshrined in national and international human rights law. In particular, legal frameworks and regulatory reforms have struggled to keep pace with digital technology developments and their implication for people's rights. Generally developed by companies, digital technologies are increasingly being used by virtually all social actors, including those in the public sector, for an ever-expanding range of purposes. In many ways—by facilitating

legal identity and the delivery of social protection services, for example—they support the SDGs and help enable the fulfilment of some rights. At the same time, there is evidence that they are used either intentionally or unintentionally by different actors in ways that put other rights at risk, including the rights to privacy, information, freedom of expression and non-discrimination. For instance, frequent data breaches expose individuals' private information, data sets can be faulty and biased, and the use of artificial intelligence in a range of contexts in public administration to inform or make decisions that affect people's lives may be discriminatory. Some States use digital technology to surveil or target individuals and groups, for example, in the name of identifying fraud in systems of social protection and assistance (an issue which at times receives disproportionate attention, yet the magnitude of which is often overstated),[25] or for political purposes such as the unjust quelling of dissent or censorship of information.[26] These intrusions into individuals' lives and violations of rights undermine public trust and sound relationships between Governments and constituents and other actors. This takes place in the context of complex and rapidly evolving relationships between Governments and technology companies.

As explored further in the subsection below, the pandemic rapidly accelerated the shift to digital governance, enhancing efficiency but also increasing violations of and risks to human rights. Governments made wide use of contact tracing applications to collect location data and other identifying information, along with other technologies, in an effort to manage the virus as quickly as possible. Governments also expanded social protection schemes, some of which required the use of digital tools and the sharing of personal information on the part of individuals. There is a critical need for proper safeguards and oversight—especially within public administration, given its strong influence and impact on people's lives. A number of Governments have taken steps to develop or strengthen relevant measures or mechanisms, with some assigning priority to expanding data rights protections. By mid-April 2020, privacy enforcement authorities in 12 OECD countries, including Canada, France and Slovakia, had published general guidance for data controllers and processors on the application of their privacy and data protection laws during the pandemic.[27] At the global level, a process is under way to develop the United Nations Global Digital Compact, the aims of which include "providing people with options as to how their data is used [and the] application of human rights online".[28] Digital technology regulation in the public sector is explored further in the contribution by Valeria Betancourt.

1.2.3 The expansion of digital government

In the first few months of the pandemic, numerous digital initiatives were developed within the public sector to establish digital policies and partnerships, facilitate information sharing,

and support activities and the delivery of services relating to health (such as telehealth, contact tracing and virus tracking), social assistance, public participation, and business and education (including working and learning from home).[29] To address poverty during the pandemic, the Government of Togo engaged in a multi-stakeholder partnership to utilize artificial intelligence enabled by mobile data and satellite imagery to ensure the swift and efficient distribution of social protection payments via mobile phone to 600,000 residents in urban areas.[30] Notwithstanding the potential risks identified earlier, the shift of government information and services online has enabled greater transparency and accountability and has afforded many individuals, organizations and businesses increased convenience, greater access to information and services, and substantial time savings in communicating with the Government. The shift has been positive in terms of supporting service continuity and improving interactions. Still, there is wide variation in e-government development among regions and countries, and while vulnerable social groups have benefited from progress, digital divides remain significant and may increasingly contribute to other socioeconomic inequalities. Currently, 2.7 billion people—or around one third of the global population—are still offline, among whom women, people living in poverty, older persons and other disadvantaged and marginalized groups are disproportionately represented.[31] For instance, 69 per cent of men use the Internet, whereas the corresponding figure for women is 63 per cent, and while 75 per cent of youth (aged 15 to 24 years) use the Internet, 65 per cent of the rest of the population do so.[32] Where one lives also matters; only 26 per cent of people use the Internet in low-income countries compared to 92 per cent of people in high-income countries, with usage rising steadily by country income group, and there remains a large and persistent urban-rural gap.

Some sectors experienced rapid shifts online, in particular education and to some degree health (see chapter 3). In many places, digital transformation also occurred in the justice sector, which is pivotal in government relationships with people. A recent report estimated that about 1.5 billion people have a criminal, civil or administrative justice problem they cannot resolve.[33] The use of digital technologies in judicial services has the potential to both accelerate progress towards "equal access to justice for all" and enhance the effectiveness and inclusiveness of judicial institutions, in line with SDG 16. At the same time, there are challenges and risks. Some Governments are taking steps to develop e-justice systems in ways that respond to these challenges, such as by incorporating assessments of key hindrances to effectiveness and inclusion in their design. The development of e-justice systems since the pandemic is examined in the contribution of Sarah McCoubrey in this chapter.

1.3 Opportunities to reverse adverse trends in the post-pandemic period

1.3.1 Supporting democratic values, traditions and institutions

In the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Governments envisage a world "in which democracy, good governance and the rule of law, as well as an enabling environment at the national and international levels, are essential for sustainable development".[34] These ideals are mutually reinforcing. The belief among citizens that Governments will listen to them and take actions that reflect their opinions and input can strengthen civic engagement and trust, which are essential for inclusive, responsive and accountable governance.[35]

By all major accounts, the world has become less democratic in recent years.[36] Movement away from democracy has been outpacing movement towards it.[37] Even belief in the importance of democracy is declining, while views of autocratic leadership have become more favourable. Norms and standards—including tolerance of opposition, the fairness of electoral processes, and systems of checks and balances—are increasingly in question.[38] Safe spaces and resources for opposition parties are diminishing, thereby sustaining elite capture.

The overall decline in indicators of democracy from 2015 onward accelerated after the onset of the pandemic.[39] One important reason behind the pandemic's adverse impact on democracy was the institution by Governments of emergency measures aimed at reducing the spread of the virus. Restrictions such as social distancing requirements affected the rights of citizens, in particular the right to assemble, as well as the functioning of government oversight institutions.[40] In 2022, after many Governments lifted such restrictions, the gains accrued to democracy in the form of restored freedoms were still outweighed by other developments, such as violent conflict and polarization.[41] Social and political polarization has been undermining many countries' democratic systems and their ability to respond to crises and challenges. The consequences have been dire, as political polarization has been linked to higher COVID-19-related mortality.[42] Polarization is fuelled by distrust and fuels further distrust.[43] It may be driven by economic anxieties, unfavourable views of government, class divides, disinformation and uncertainty.[44] Populism and ethnonationalism are related to polarization and exclusion and in many cases have contributed to democratic decline through the erosion of checks and balances and of minority protections.[45] Over the first 1.5 years of the pandemic, however, support for populism appeared to have declined globally, and in most democracies political polarization also seemed to have weakened.[46]

Some countries have managed to restore losses in measures of democracy, in part due to the cessation of pandemic measures. In Chile, progress in strengthening democracy in 2022 was additionally related to lower levels of political polarization.[47] This has been linked to movement by the President towards the political centre following a process of constitutional reform that produced a proposal which would have significantly expanded rights, but which voters ultimately rejected. For instance, the President overhauled his Cabinet to broaden the Government's coalition and supported a second process to draft a new constitution, which may have had a moderating effect.[48] In 2023, the country embarked on that process, which has a different institutional design that includes a 12-point set of principles and the formation of new bodies that will participate in the drafting and review of the new constitution. In general, addressing polarization is fraught with challenges, and efforts to change the social contract take time.

1.3.2 Preserving and broadening civic space

Citizen engagement and trust in government can be mutually reinforcing.[49] An essential element of democracy, civic space encompasses the environment that enables people and groups to participate and exercise their civic freedoms and constitutes part of social contracts.[50] Formal and informal channels that allow people to contribute to policymaking and decision-making processes, including accessing information, engaging in dialogue, and sharing views, are key to supporting civic space.[51] Governments condition the degree to which civic space is open or closed, and regulations affecting civil society organizations have tended to be enacted and enforced to suit the current aims of the Government.[52] Around the world, civic space has been on a steady decline, widening the gap between Governments and civil society. Given the contribution of civil society to advancing the SDGs, this can have adverse consequences for realizing the Goals.[53]

The COVID-19 pandemic was pivotal in altering both the context of and risks to civic space. When the pandemic struck, many countries issued emergency declarations and adopted other measures affecting expression, assembly and privacy.[54] While many measures were important to protect public health, some lacked provisions for sustaining the important contributions of civil society or were used to take advantage of the crisis to stifle dissent and limit civic freedoms. A number of countries imposed COVID-19 restrictions that did not include exemptions for civil society organizations to provide essential services, limited access to information about the virus, banned gatherings (with no exemption for socially distanced peaceful protest), and shifted power to the executive branch such that systems of checks and balances were weakened.[55] The CIVICUS Monitor, which tracks the state of freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression around the

world, found that between 2019 and 2021, the proportion of the world's population living in countries rated as closed, repressed or obstructed rose from 83 to 88.5 per cent.[56] Activists and journalists in particular were subject to detainment, intimidation and harassment, attacks, and surveillance. Certain groups–including women, environmental rights groups, labour rights groups, the LGBTQI+ community, young people, and Indigenous rights defenders–were disproportionately affected. The stifling of voice leads to frustration and alienation, especially among youth. The pandemic highlighted and in certain respects may have exacerbated many of the challenges undermining good governance and social justice–such as declining government accountability, increasing inequality and discrimination, and the weakening of workers' rights–that public engagement often seeks to address. It is thus not surprising that the pandemic also served as an impetus for enhanced interest in civic engagement.

In spite of the challenges, civil society continued to operate within and sometimes beyond the boundaries set, endeavouring to navigate the pandemic as well as measures to address it, as exemplified in box 1.3.[57] In fact, after a brief lull, the number of anti-Government protests around the world surged.[58] In many countries, stakeholders engaged in strategic litigation to address the adverse effects of disproportionate pandemic-related restrictions on human rights.[59] Civic space largely moved online, though digital divides certainly hampered

such movement. Electronic forms of expression, journalism and organizing expanded. In Argentina, the organization Directorio Legislativo created an online map of crisis-related regulations instituted across Latin America and the Caribbean and initiated a social media campaign focused on protecting democracy.[60] In Lebanon, digital rights organizations reviewed how the Government used digital technology to address the pandemic and provided detailed feedback to the Ministry of Public Health.[61] Young people around the globe volunteered to organize information campaigns on COVID-19 safety measures and shared pandemic coping strategies, experiences and ideas online.[62]

Some Governments have taken legal, policy and other measures to protect and expand civic space, including by ensuring the regular review and limitation of emergency powers. In Austria, special regulations issued by the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection required parliamentary approval within a period of 10 days to four weeks in order to be extended.[63] Countries have also taken action to uphold and guarantee freedom of expression and media freedoms, uphold and enhance protections for journalists and activists, facilitate civic organizing and assembly, expand civic education, partner with civil society, and foster digital literacy and engagement. Such measures are explored in depth in the contribution by Elly Page and Alexandra DeBlock.

Box 1.3 The fight for Indigenous rights during the pandemic in Brazil[a]

Inequality and discrimination are barriers to civic participation, yet disadvantaged groups have a disproportionate stake in healthy civic space that facilitates advocacy for their rights and for issues important to them. In Brazil, civil society actors called attention to the inadequate health care received by Indigenous Peoples early in the pandemic.[b] They called for changes in policy at the Special Secretariat of Indigenous Health, which had halted service to Indigenous Peoples in urban areas and which, they asserted, had implemented inadequate COVID-19 procedures and protocols that did not adhere to World Health Organization guidelines and recommendations.[c] According to research carried out by Cultural Survival, the "test and return home for domestic isolation" protocol in particular increased the likelihood of community exposure to the disease, as domestic isolation was impossible in most Indigenous communities, where living conditions and sanitation were conducive to the spread of infection and where ill-equipped family members were left to care for infected individuals without personal protective equipment.

Articulação dos Povos Indígenas do Brasil, the largest umbrella organization representing Indigenous Peoples in the country, filed a historic lawsuit against the Government in the Supreme Federal Court after months of inaction on the protection of Indigenous health. At that time, the death rate from the virus among Indigenous Peoples (9.6 per cent) was more than double that among the general population (4 per cent).[d] The August 2020 decision in the case recognized the legitimacy of Indigenous Peoples representing themselves and "granted immediate effect" with regard to the following measures: "planning with the participation of communities; actions to contain invaders in reserves; the creation of sanitary barriers in the case of Indigenous People in isolation or those recently contacted; access by all Indigenous people to the Indigenous Health Subsystem; and the elaboration of a plan to confront and monitor Covid-19".[e]

Sources: (a) Written by Kiana Schwab, an intern working with DPIDG, UN DESA; (b) Civic space in Brazil is designated as "obstructed" by the CIVICUS Monitor (as at March 2023); see https://monitor.civicus.org/; (c) Cultural Survival, "Open Letter to Jair Bolsonaro: Brazil is failing to protect the health of indigenous peoples during the #COVID19", 10 June 2020, available at https://www.culturalsurvival.org/news/open-letter-jair-bolsonaro-brazil-failing-protect-health-indigenous-peoples-during-covid19; (d) Edson Krenak Naknanuk, "Indigenous peoples vs. Brazil: Supreme Court unanimously rules Bolsonaro is violating indigenous rights to health during pandemic", Cultural Survival, 17 August 2020, available at https://www.culturalsurvival.org/news/indigenous-peoples-vs-brazil-supreme-court-unanimously-rules-bolsonaro-violating-indigenous; (e) ibid.

Some Governments engaged in concerted outreach efforts to create opportunities for civic actors to participate in discussions and decision-making surrounding pandemic responses.[64] They enabled and enhanced public participation in policymaking and put in place feedback channels through, for instance, virtual consultations, dialogues and surveys, and utilized online feedback platforms, crowdsourcing, open calls, and challenges to address pandemic-related problems. In Brazil, for example, the Senate deliberated legislative responses to the pandemic put forth by citizens through the e-Citizenship Portal.[65] In some countries, civil society representatives were included in presidential task forces and government committees.[66]

Many Governments recognized the particular importance of youth engagement in policies and programmes related to the pandemic and to sustainable development more broadly. A number of Governments administered questionnaires and conducted surveys with young people on their experiences during the pandemic to guide youth policies and interventions, organized virtual hackathons, held virtual consultations with young leaders and youth organizations, and collaborated with young people on various initiatives.[67] Examples of meaningful youth engagement are explored further in the contribution by James Sloam.

1.3.3 Combating disinformation and misinformation[68]

The spread of misinformation and disinformation has accelerated in recent years and is linked to social and political polarization, armed conflicts, and mistrust in public elections. Once the pandemic struck, the world experienced an infodemic—"too much information including false or misleading information in digital and physical environments during a disease outbreak".[69] The spread of false information in this context was highly visible given the shared experience of the crisis across countries and the acceleration of online communication. The volume and reach of false information and its impacts seriously undermined government responses to the pandemic, making it more difficult to reach people with the accurate information needed to protect public health and convince the public to comply with regulations.

Assorted instruments, tools and approaches are needed to address disinformation and misinformation, drawing on lessons from the past as well as from innovation. Governments must regulate their own practices and fulfil their duty to guard against human rights abuses by third parties.[70] They need to have clear legislative and regulatory frameworks in place that prevent infringements of rights and civic freedoms. Regulatory approaches that focus on transparency hold particular promise for tackling disinformation.[71] Whether digital platforms can and should be held legally responsible for their content is still a matter of debate; however, some Governments are employing regulatory tools that require such platforms to become more

transparent in their operations so that more independent audits can be conducted of companies' services and operations. The Digital Services Act adopted by the European Union in 2022 requires, inter alia, that digital platforms become more transparent (especially with regard to the nature and use of recommendation algorithms) and that larger platforms provide researchers access to data.[72]

Another part of the European Union framework is the Code of Practice on Disinformation, which sets out principles and commitments for online platforms and the advertising sector to address disinformation.[73] Signatories pledge to take a range of actions, including to help demonetize disinformation, to label political advertising more clearly, to empower users and researchers, and to share information about manipulative and malicious behaviours utilized to spread disinformation on platforms and regularly update and implement policies to respond to them.

All actors can contribute to combating disinformation and misinformation. During the pandemic, Translators without Borders, a global community of language volunteers, helped get accurate information to people in languages and formats they understood through the use of chatbots, translations and pandemic glossaries; the organization also engaged in language data collection and mapping to help guide COVID-19 communications at the global level.[74] One particularly effective tool for preventing the spread of inaccurate information is media literacy.[75] In Finland, which ranks highest in resilience to misinformation among European countries in the most recent Media Literacy Index,[76] media literacy is part of the national core curriculum and starts in preschool.[77] One study found that more than half of the people surveyed across countries worry about their ability to distinguish real news from fake news online.[78]

Responses to disinformation and misinformation should be proactive, transparent and accessible. Fact checks have been shown to be effective for countering misinformation across country contexts, and their effects last for some time.[79] Fact checkers encountering misinformation should respond promptly, providing a clear explanation of what is false and why, and ensure that the updated factual information is made accessible and visible to those most likely to be misinformed.[80] They should also seek or require corrections. Fact-checking organizations such as Africa Check and Chequeado do critical work in this regard. Pre-empting disinformation is another strategy. The Government of Spain has informed the public of "scientific advances and possible hoaxes and rumours that may arise" based on advice from experts.[81] The Governments of most OECD countries have also debunked prominent misinformation; dedicated crisis or disinformation units lead such efforts in Austria, Belgium and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Box 1.4 A framework for the United Nations Code of Conduct for Information Integrity on Digital Platforms

In an effort to promote integrity in the realm of public information, the Secretary-General of the United Nations proposed in his landmark report, *Our Common Agenda*, that a global code of conduct be explored with States, media outlets and regulatory bodies, facilitated by the United Nations.[a] He then set out the framework for the United Nations Code of Conduct for Information Integrity on Digital Platforms around nine principles, including respect for human rights, user empowerment, and enhanced trust and safety.[b] The framework puts forth recommendations for various stakeholders from which the Code of Conduct may draw; among these are the following:[c]

- All stakeholders should "refrain from using, supporting, or amplifying disinformation and hate speech for any purpose" and should form broad coalitions on information integrity to help "bridge the gap between local organizations and technology companies operating at a global scale."

- Member States should adopt "regulatory measures to protect the fundamental rights of users of digital platforms, including enforcement mechanisms, with full transparency as to the requirements placed on technology companies", and should "guarantee a free, viable, independent and plural media landscape with strong protections for journalists and independent media".

- Digital platforms should ensure transparency and "safety and privacy by design in all products … alongside consistent application of policies across countries and languages". They should "invest in human and artificial intelligence content moderation systems in all languages used in countries of operation" and ensure that content reporting mechanisms have "an accelerated response rate, especially in conflict settings".

Sources: (a) United Nations, *Our Common Agenda*, report of the Secretary-General (Sales No. E.21.I.8), available at https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/assets/pdf/Common_Agenda_Report_English.pdf; (b) United Nations, "Our Common Agenda policy brief 8: information integrity on digital platforms", June 2023, available at https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/our-common-agenda-policy-brief-information-integrity-en.pdf; (c) ibid.

Accountability for disinformation is crucial. The Federal Court of Accounts, the supreme audit institution in Brazil, investigated whether public resources were being used in advertising campaigns associated with fake news.[82] One of the outcomes of its work is a requirement that the Ministry of Communications direct all arms of federal administration to include in contracts into which they enter clauses that encourage the identification and prevent the placement of advertisements in digital media associated with fake news.

While Governments should lead efforts to provide accurate information to society and counter false information, greater effectiveness and legitimacy is often achieved in this area when carried out through partnerships. For instance, the electoral authority of Argentina signed a memorandum of cooperation with Facebook committing to amplifying official electoral information and reducing the visibility of false information.[83] Examples of relevant partnerships in Africa are provided in the contribution by Naledi Mashishi.

1.4 Reflections

The pandemic served as a reminder that tackling major challenges and achieving major goals require contributions from all stakeholders. Governments alone cannot reshape their relationships with other social actors. However, as a crucial first step, they need to create an enabling environment for strengthened relationships. For instance, they can promote public transparency, engagement, respect for rights, and the exercise of voice. Critically, they can also demonstrate trust in other actors even as they seek greater trust.

The persistent and emerging issues examined in the chapter that influence trust in public administration and the strength of government relationships with society—pertaining to governance, democracy and information integrity—are clearly interrelated. Efforts to address these issues must be equal to the challenges they represent, with care taken not to lose sight of their dynamic connections. A sound, comprehensive approach is needed to rebuild and strengthen social contracts in countries around the world so that societies will be better positioned to achieve greater trust, stronger relationships and more cohesion—which can in turn make them more resilient to crises and accelerate progress towards the SDGs. The expert contributions comprising the remainder of this chapter provide inspiration for realizing these aims.

A summary of the key recommendations from the expert contributions is presented later in Table 1A.

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Towards a Fair Fiscal Contract? What Do the Private Sector and High-Net-Worth Individuals "Owe" Society?

Jeffrey Owens and Ruth Wamuyu[1]

Three consecutive crises–the 2007/08 financial crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the war in Ukraine–have interrupted the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), most notably disrupting three decades of progress in the steady eradication of poverty and leading to an increase in the number of people living in poverty for the first time in a generation.[2] In actual fact, these crises only impeded progress in SDG implementation that was already slow and exposed the fragility of the advances made. A review of the targets notes that approximately half are "moderately or severely off track and over 30 per cent have either seen no movement or regressed below the 2015 baseline".[3] Consequently, there is growing concern that without urgent action, countries will not be able to meet the SDGs by 2030.

At the same time, Governments are under pressure to do more with less, and the cost of servicing public debt absorbs a higher proportion of revenues than ever before. This is compounded by high inflation rates in both developed and developing countries; though rates have eased gradually in 2023, they are expected to remain above central bank targets, which has led to interest rate hikes and exposed further debt vulnerabilities, especially in developing countries.[4] Citizens are increasingly concerned that the costs and benefits of globalization are not being fairly shared, evidenced by the growing inequities in the distribution of income and wealth. Real wages are falling, and household expenditure budgets are under strain. All of this has intensified existing populist ideologies and led to a greater political focus on whether different segments of society are paying their fair share of taxes, which in turn has prompted the emergence of new international initiatives to tax multinational enterprises (MNEs) and a reassessment of the way Governments go about taxing high-net-worth individuals (HNWIs).

In the wake of the pandemic, media scrutiny has reinforced pressures to quell growing income inequalities. The pandemic created approximately one billionaire every 30 hours as energy, pharmaceutical and technology companies responded to the crisis.[5] Media coverage during this period led to growing support for the introduction of policies to bridge the wealth gap, including increases in taxation in some countries.[6] Among Governments and international organizations, the taxation of MNEs and HNWIs is now seen not only as a way to increase revenue in a strained economic environment, but also as a means to reduce wealth and income inequalities. While many of the issues discussed apply to both developed and developing economies, the solutions available to most developing countries are limited by the capacity constraints in their tax administrations and the political environment.

Why is fairness important?

Modern tax systems rely on the vast majority of taxpayers voluntarily complying with the rules. Attitudes towards compliance depend on a range of factors. Are Governments providing citizens with the services they need in an efficient and uncorrupt manner? Are taxpayers' perceptions of the fairness of the distribution of the tax burden positive, or do they feel that the rich and larger MNEs are avoiding their fiscal obligations? Is the tax administration free of corruption and ensuring that the treatment of all taxpayers is consistent and transparent? Attitudes to compliance are also shaped by the effectiveness of tax controls and auditing systems and the ability of the tax administration to identify non-compliance and to prosecute those engaged in tax evasion and aggressive tax planning. Put another way, what is the likelihood of getting caught? This is the backdrop against which Governments are reviewing their approaches to taxing MNEs and high-net-worth individuals and to mobilizing their domestic resources, which are mainly made up of tax revenues.

Taxation of multinational enterprises

MNEs have the capacity and opportunity to adopt tax planning strategies that take advantage of mismatches and gaps in international tax rules to "artificially shift profits to low or no-tax locations where they have little or no economic activity" in order to reduce their tax liability.[7] This risk is heightened in the wake of digitalization, which proactively facilitates and expands opportunities for tax avoidance/evasion, as the assets and activities of digital firms are highly mobile. Profit-shifting is estimated to cost countries $100 billion to $240 billion in revenue losses annually.[8] More importantly, it undermines the fairness and integrity of the tax system and negatively impacts tax morale as MNEs that have such tax planning strategies gain a competitive advantage over domestic companies. Countries have also seen decreases in corporate tax rates; for instance, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries saw headline tax rates decline from 32.3 per cent in 2000 to 23.1 per cent in 2022, while countries in Africa saw a decline from 34.2 per cent in 2000 to 25.8 per cent in 2022.[9] Globalization gives MNEs the ability to seek out

locations that minimize production costs and maximize profits, and to the extent that tax is seen as a cost, countries have been engaged in a race to the bottom through reductions in the corporate tax rate and incentives intended to lower the effective tax rate–further reducing the revenue collected.

A number of global initiatives have been adopted to respond to these challenges. Following the 2007/08 financial crisis, the OECD base erosion and profit shifting (BEPS) project was launched by the Group of 20 (G20) to limit opportunities for profit shifting by addressing the mismatches in international tax rules. The OECD/G20 Inclusive Framework on BEPS includes 15 action plans that provide recommendations and guidance for Governments to tackle tax avoidance. This initiative represents one of the earliest concerted efforts undertaken to ensure that profits are taxed where economic activities take place and where value is created. Although it is too soon to measure the actual success of the BEPS recommendations, there has been a shift in attitude on the part of the MNEs, which now recognize the reputation risks attached to aggressive tax practices.

In 2021, a new two-pillar plan (BEPS II) was incorporated within the OECD/G20 Inclusive Framework to keep pace with the emerging challenges deriving from the development of the digital economy.[10] Pillar I involves the reallocation of taxing rights to market jurisdictions for taxable entities with or without a physical presence, and Pillar II aims to curb tax competition by introducing a global minimum effective tax rate of 15 per cent on income from large MNEs within their respective market jurisdictions. The minimum tax is implemented through the adoption of two main rules at the domestic level: (a) the Income Inclusion Rule (IIR) requires an ultimate parent entity to pay a top-up tax in its resident State on its share of the income of any low-taxed constituent entity[11] in which it has an ownership interest; and (b) the Undertaxed Payment Rule (UTPR) acts as a backstop to the IIR, providing an adjustment mechanism that takes care of any remaining top-up tax on the profits of a constituent entity that is not captured under the IIR.

It is too early to determine whether this new framework is fit for purpose and whether it will achieve the desired results. The greatest beneficiaries from Pillar I may be the larger market jurisdictions, which will receive a larger portion of the profits, while the impact on smaller market jurisdictions is expected to be minimal. Under Pillar II, developed countries may be the main beneficiaries, as a large number of ultimate parent entities are located in these countries, which are responsible for charging the top-up tax under the IIR. To mitigate potential revenue loss, developing countries have the option to introduce a qualified domestic minimum top-up tax, though this may create new challenges for administrations that already have limited capacity. In addition, the new framework may introduce constraints on countries' ability to design their corporate income tax systems in ways that are best adapted to their economies, particularly when it comes to the use of incentives and a requirement to eliminate digital services taxes.

Beyond tackling digitalization and tax competition issues, increasing compliance among MNEs is important. New technologies afford opportunities for tax administrations to improve the collection, management and sharing of data and to increase overall efficiency. Clearer tax laws, more efficient tax administration, and robust dispute resolution settlement mechanisms would enhance tax certainty, which would encourage voluntary compliance among MNEs. In recent years, a number of countries have set up cooperative compliance programmes that are intended to provide greater predictability and certainty for MNEs.

Taxation of high-net-worth individuals

In spite of the significant progress made in strengthening tax transparency and the exchange of information between countries, there remain gaps and loopholes that allow HNWIs to employ offshore and onshore tax planning strategies to minimize their tax payments. It is estimated that offshore wealth as a share of gross domestic product (GDP) ranges between 5 and 40 per cent depending on the region under review.[12] The countries of the Middle East and North Africa are at the higher level, with estimates of 40 per cent, while estimates for Southern Asia are closer to 5 per cent.[13]

Countries continue to experience difficulties in getting access to information on who owns and controls offshore vehicles such as holding companies or trusts. This is why there is a growing political consensus that Governments should reassess the use of net wealth taxes, inheritance and gift taxes, taxes on capital gains, and excise taxes on luxury products and services.

Organizations as diverse as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and Oxfam have called upon countries to introduce annual net wealth taxes (NWT). Oxfam estimates that an annual graduated tax on the rich could raise approximately $2.5 trillion a year, which could be used to help countries recover from the economic crisis and as a tool to address wealth inequalities.[14] NWT, combined with more effective inheritance, gift and capital gains taxation, could make a substantial contribution to revenue mobilization and–of equal importance–could influence perceptions of tax fairness and build greater trust in government.

At this point, it is worth asking why so few countries use NWT. Part of the answer is that they fear this would lead to an exit of HNWIs to low-tax jurisdictions. Another explanation is that such taxes have traditionally been difficult to administer and, in practice, have not always yielded much revenue. However, in today's more transparent environment–where tax administrations have unprecedented access to information,

especially on assets held offshore—it is far more difficult to hide wealth. In addition, new technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning and blockchain offer administrations new ways to collect, store and use data to track assets. These two developments provide a more conducive environment for operationalizing NWT and other taxes on capital and property. In addition, they enable up-to-date asset valuation (outdated valuations constitute a common problem with such taxes).

Within this new context, the IMF and the World Bank recently advocated a rethinking of wealth taxes as a way to finance the cost of the pandemic and to finance assistance programmes for low-income households, which have seen their real incomes decline because of price increases in energy and other basic goods and services.[15] Argentina introduced a one-time levy on citizens with assets over $2.5 million dubbed the "millionaire's tax" to pay for medical supplies and relief measures during the pandemic.[16] In Colombia, a bill was recently approved that establishes a permanent annual "equity tax" charged to individuals with a net worth above approximately $600,000.[17]

Taking the debate forward

Governments have the power to change perceptions of the fairness of the tax system, which in turn can strengthen their relationship with the public. In an age of tax transparency and with the technologies now available, Governments can broaden the tax base by reviewing and revising the way they go about taxing MNEs and HNWIs. This debate has to extend beyond personal and corporate income taxes. It has to encompass value-added and goods and services taxes as well as other taxes on consumption, with particular attention given to luxury products. Governments need to review the way they tax wealth and capital, especially immovable property. More resources must be provided for tax administrations to strengthen tax compliance through better enforcement and the improvement and expansion of taxpayer services. New technologies such as AI, machine learning and blockchain can play a key role here, but this must be accompanied by a review of taxpayers' rights in the digital age.

Building a political consensus for change is vital. One of the best investments Governments can make—especially in developing countries—is enhancing the capacity of tax administrations to enforce the tax rules fairly. This would include, among other things, the training of tax administration staff and legislative reform to allow the sharing of information and the digitalization of tax administration. More generally, Governments need to promote a "win-win" approach to taxation, especially in their relationship with MNEs, moving away from the zero-sum "you lose, I win" mentality. This is the rationale behind cooperative compliance programmes.[18] Stronger, assertive action is needed to counter all forms of illicit financial flows, which not only undermine the revenue base but also erode confidence in the Government.

Throughout this process, the United Nations represents the only truly inclusive forum and can play a leading role in developing standards that work for developing and emerging economies, intensifying capacity-building programmes, and providing a collaborative space where Governments, business communities, academics and civil society can come together to design a tax system which promotes fairness and contributes to the achievement of the SDGs.

Endnotes

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Gender Equality in Public Administration:
A New Normal for Governments Three Years into the Pandemic

Müge Finkel and Melanie Hughes[1]

Women's full and effective participation in public administration is the bedrock of the whole-of-government approach to gender equality. Accumulating global evidence suggests gender equality in public administration enhances government functioning, the responsiveness and effectiveness of service delivery, and trust in public institutions, strengthening the relationship between Governments and the publics they represent and serve.[2] Recognizing the importance of gender equality across all levels and sectors of public administration, countries committed to realizing this goal within the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to measuring progress towards its achievement as articulated in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicator 16.7.1. However, by 2020, only one third of the world's countries were at or near gender parity at decision-making levels in public administration; on average, women comprised 46 per cent of public administration employees but only 31 per cent of the top leaders and 30 per cent of the senior managers.[3]

As has occurred during other major crises, the pandemic revealed and even exacerbated pre-existing gender inequalities. For instance, the pandemic drew attention to the dearth of women in public health leadership. Women make up 70 per cent of the health-care workforce and were disproportionately represented on the front lines of early COVID-19 response, but in public health administration women account for only 34 per cent of the decision makers.[4] Watchdog groups suggest that the pandemic may have worsened gender disparities in public health leadership,[5] despite the widely publicized successes attributed to women national leaders in mitigating the spread of COVID-19 and saving lives.[6]

Periods of crisis destabilize existing institutional structures and create new leadership possibilities. During the recent pandemic, however, Governments often missed opportunities to promote women. One example is the failure to include women equitably on COVID-19 task forces (executive branch institutions designed to lead government pandemic responses). In 2021, men made up 76 per cent of COVID-19 task force members and held 78 per cent of the leadership positions.[7] Although the commitment to gender equality was sidelined in many countries, there were some notable exceptions; Saint Lucia, for example, formed a task force with equal numbers of women and men in membership and leadership capacities.[8]

Times of crisis also create windows of opportunity for policy change.[9] To sustain operations during the pandemic, Governments implemented new or modified workplace policies for public employees. Countries such as the United States of America expanded existing telework programmes, while others, such as the Philippines, Portugal, and Spain, adopted flexible work policies for public employees for the first time. The Philippines began allowing both remote work and flexible schedules, including the option of a four-day workweek.[10] Given women's disproportionate share of care work and household labour, such policies were instrumental in keeping women in the workforce during the pandemic, and they continue to be seen as useful policies for promoting work-life balance and institutional inclusiveness.

Adjusting to a "new normal" and refocusing on gender equality in public administration globally will require simultaneous efforts on three fronts: remembering lessons learned prior to the pandemic and re-energizing efforts to adopt and implement good practices; consolidating positive changes made during the pandemic; and taking bold action to regain momentum to achieve SDGs 5 and 16 by 2030.

On the first front, the following three areas assigned priority in pre-pandemic efforts should constitute key components of future policies and practices so that gender equality commitments can be met:

- *Data and transparency*. Immediate attention needs to be directed towards SDG indicator 16.7.1b, which aims to measure representation with regard to age, sex, disability status, and population group in positions of public institutions, including the public service, and to assess the correspondence between such representation and the proportions of those groups in society as a whole. Reporting on this indicator has the potential to expand gender-disaggregated data availability, target public administration sectors and levels that require additional attention, and improve cross-country learning. Sharing and integrating relevant data in a transparent and accessible job placement platform can increase government accountability. The Civil Service Diversity and Inclusion Dashboard in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Sistema de Alta Dirección Pública (SADP) in Chile exemplify how quality public administration employment data can be integrated into transparent hiring and promotion practices to promote a diverse and inclusive public service.[11]

- *Training and mentorship*. Providing women with training and mentoring is important not only for upgrading skills and building capacities, but also for improving

the visibility of employees eligible for promotion and creating opportunities for networking.[12] Going forward, new leadership and managerial training programmes should prioritize women civil servants and other marginalized population groups. Effective examples of career development initiatives targeting women include the State Leads Equally (*Staten leder jämt*) programme in Sweden[13] and the Women in the Lead–Leadership, Engagement, Advancement and Development (W-LEAD) programme in Ireland.[14]

- *Targets and quotas*. Governments have adopted leadership-focused quotas, targets and temporary special measures to address the underrepresentation of women at senior levels of public administration. While their design must be carefully considered and their impact assessed, a number of examples can help guide forward-looking discussions, including the affirmative action plans targeting the promotion of women in the public sector and the gender binding targets included in the Federal Equal Treatment Act in Austria; the 2013 Sauvadet Law in France, which introduced a progressive 40 per cent quota for all nominations to top civil service positions; the Quota Law (Law 581 of 2000) in Colombia, which mandates a minimum of 30 per cent women in decision-making positions; and the 2019 "parity in everything" reform in Mexico, which establishes gender parity in all government sectors.

On the second front, positive changes adopted during the pandemic need to be carefully studied and intentionally integrated into future gender equality commitments in public administration. The gendered implications of flexible work arrangements, especially those involving telework exclusively, need to be first on the list.[15] As these arrangements are incorporated into the lives of public employees, they stand to have the most positive impact if gender equality concerns are intentionally integrated and mainstreamed through the development of the necessary infrastructure and the provision of training, information technology access, mechanisms for the evaluation of telework for promotion and retention purposes, and health and safety guidelines for home offices. Adaptability is important, as a flexible system that includes variable work hours or a hybrid system that combines telework with office work may be preferred to full-time telework.

Governments can promote gender equity in a telework environment by encouraging men to assume an equal share of unpaid care and domestic responsibilities, including "by means of targeted employee engagement and creative initiatives, such as role-modelling of good practices by male managers, social-media campaigns, internal blogs or photos, videos, etc.".[16] One example of positive role modelling comes from Japan; in the past, few men took advantage of their available paternity leave, but participation rose from 14 to 40 per cent in the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare after former minister Yasuhisa Shiozaki publicly identified himself as a man who took part in caring for his children.[17]

In order to ensure that the benefits of virtual and hybrid work environments can be accessed by everyone equally, public institutions need to invest in managerial training to intentionally cultivate a leadership approach characterized by greater gender awareness and equity and more balanced representation.[18] Efforts such as those undertaken in Spain, where human resource managers and other key administrators are offered an advanced 25-hour gender equality training course–can strengthen managerial buy-in to gender equality.[19]

With the growing social and economic pressures surrounding the COVID-19 crisis, mental health emerged as an urgent priority in many settings–including the public sector. Latvia and the Netherlands, for example, began offering mental health services in response to the increased emotional burden placed on public servants during the pandemic.[20] This heightened focus on the mental well-being of public administration employees should be made a permanent feature of government employment. Mental health support, while increasing the appeal of public employment for all, could be especially beneficial for women employees, who have reported higher levels of stress linked to managing their work-life balance within the context of flexible work arrangements. Targeted action in areas such as these contribute to gender equality in the long term.

On the third front, bold action must be taken to get countries back on track to meet sustainable development objectives. To restore the momentum needed to reach SDGs 5 and 16 by 2030, decision makers must put gender equality at the centre of present and future recovery efforts. The COVID-19 pandemic served to re-emphasize the reality that even in sectors where women constitute the majority of workers and serve on the front lines, they are not included equally in policy development and decision-making. Moving forward, it is crucial that women be fully integrated into permanent bodies of crisis response and management across all sectors.

Endnotes

1   Müge Finkel and Melanie Hughes serve as Co-Directors of the Gender Inequality Research Lab (GIRL). Dr. Finkel is the Director of the Ford Institute for Human Security and Assistant Professor of International Development at the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs at the University of Pittsburgh. Dr. Hughes is a Professor of Sociology at the University of Pittsburgh.

2   For a review, see Müge K. Finkel, Melanie M. Hughes and Joanna Hill, *Gender Equality in Public Administration* (United Nations Development Programme and University of Pittsburgh, 2021), pp. 45-47, available at https://www.undp.org/publications/global-report-gender-equality-public-administration.

3   Ibid., p. 7.

4   Ibid., p. 15.

5   Roopa Dhatt, "Women in Global Health: 2023 policy priorities", Women in Global Health, 18 January 2023, available at https://womeningh.org/aiming-high-in-2023-and-not-compromising-on-gender-equity-in-health/.

6   Paola Profeta, "Gender equality and public policy during COVID-19", *CESifo Economic Studies*, vol. 66, No. 4 (2020), p. 371.

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16 International Labour Organization, *Teleworking during the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond: A Practical Guide* (Geneva, International Labour Office, July 2020), p. 19, available at https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---travail/documents/instructionalmaterial/wcms_751232.pdf.

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18 Hierarchical forms of leadership that have been effective in physical workspaces have been found to be less effective in some virtual work environments. In these contexts, relationship-oriented leadership approaches are increasingly recommended to managers. See Hanna de Vries, Lars Tummers and Victor Bekkers, "The benefits of teleworking in the public sector: reality or rhetoric?", *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, vol. 39, No. 4 (2019), pp. 570-593, available at https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0734371X18760124.

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Communication with Social Actors on the COVID-19 Pandemic: Implications for Future Crises

Torsha Dasgupta, Mirza Shadan and Kaushik Bose[1]

The COVID-19 pandemic, the climate crisis, tumultuous geopolitical affairs, and widening inequities are reshaping public policies, diplomatic postures, and the global economy. Even the public is experiencing disenchantment, and their trust in established institutions shows signs of erosion. Now more than ever, Governments and public institutions need to re-evaluate their relationships with other social actors to coalesce action to achieve the Goals embodied in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The time is ripe to strengthen the social contract that underpins a social dynamic that is both intricate and delicate.

To navigate these uncharted waters, Governments need to focus on regaining and sustaining public trust in order to strengthen and preserve the legitimacy of public institutions. A key driver of that trust is communication that reflects a high degree of intentionality. The pandemic ushered in innovations in how information is shared; there is now a stronger emphasis on transparent, inclusive and purposeful communication.

Employing effective communication strategies becomes vitally important during prolonged crises, which can be characterized by urgency and unpredictability, a high degree of newsworthiness, and the capacity to change certain aspects of human behaviour. Typically, all of these descriptors apply to disease outbreaks of epidemic or pandemic potential. First, such outbreaks are, by nature, urgent and require rapid decision-making, treatment and prevention response, and prompt follow-through by health professionals and the general population. However, this is made difficult by the second characteristic of outbreaks: they are highly unpredictable. As witnessed during the recent pandemic, there can be sudden surges in cases due to (even minor) lapses in infection control, mutations in the pathogen, or increased exposure through shifts in travel patterns or contact protocols. Third, outbreaks such as COVID-19 are alarming and create significant anxiety within the public sphere. This anxiety can prompt people to behave in highly irrational and even dangerous ways, including rioting. Outbreaks have the potential to cause considerable social disruption and substantial economic losses, possibly out of proportion to the actual risk. Fourth, as illustrated here, outbreaks cause serious upheavals in society, making them highly newsworthy. Excessive media attention can potentially exacerbate public anxiety and fear, especially if official information is absent or inadequate. Last, given that pathogens are infectious, human behaviour is a key factor in determining the severity of an outbreak. Thus, any information circulated among the public acquires the status of a control intervention.

Shifts in communication: pandemic-era innovations

Over the course of the pandemic, Governments designed risk communication strategies aimed at facilitating and expediting the dissemination of accurate information to everyone virtually everywhere. Tailoring these strategies to the needs of the population helped combat fearmongering, decrease elevated public stress levels, and counter false information. While all countries suffered significant socioeconomic fallout from the pandemic, some experienced early success in controlling the spread of COVID-19 by adopting the types of innovative approaches explored below.[2]

- *State-society synergy*. In Taiwan, Province of China, the Government collaborated extensively with civil society to effectively address COVID-19-triggered uncertainties. Almost from the start, the Government opted to communicate openly, transparently and regularly with the public about dynamic developments. A number of unique strategies were employed to connect with the public; a dog was fielded as the COVID-19 public communications ambassador to increase engagement on social media posts containing public health messages, and the Government engaged civic hackers and professional comedians to help quell misinformation, embracing "humor over rumor".[3]

- *Social marketing and technology innovations*. The Government of the Republic of Korea received high praise for its efficient risk communication techniques, which included the use of social media, text messages, and other technology-based approaches to quickly disseminate information on the pandemic and to offer updates on the most recent developments. The Government utilized these digital tools intelligently to improve crisis communication, organize massive public health initiatives and supply chains, and promote the widespread adoption of preventive measures, including social seclusion and mask use, in collaboration with broadcast and social media entities.

- *Driving scientific communications*. At a time when information about the virus and its risks was scarce, the Government of India enlisted the support of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) to empower the scientific community to take informed action. In addition to stewarding research, ICMR communicated evidence to the general public in real time, participating in high-level daily press briefings,

publishing and disseminating guidelines on testing and face masks, providing consistent communication on social media channels, and increasingly engaging with at-risk communities to emphasize the importance of healthy behaviours. This open communication was instrumental in building the confidence of the population in public health measures—especially masking, testing and vaccination.

- *Localized communications and help from the arts community*. Senegal refined and localized its communication strategies to drive transparent and consistent public messaging. The Government analysed granular data to identify public consumption patterns relating to various channels of communication, including radio, newspapers, and television, and used the findings to guide the dissemination of information at the community level. This approach enabled public health officials to deliver the right information at the right time to the right population to derive the greatest impact.[4] The country's artists also played a role in amplifying the Government's health messages. Graffiti artists created visually compelling murals showing the use of sanitizers, face masks and hand etiquette to reach educationally deprived populations within the country.[5]

The approaches highlighted above reflect the different considerations that influence the success of communication strategies. Among the key factors driving this success are compelling and concise messaging, the selection of appropriate channels of delivery, the expertise of spokespersons, the ability to identify and meet the needs of the audience (and to understand their limitations), strategic timing, constructive interplay between actors (both within and outside the public sector), trust in the Government, the active involvement of the scientific community, a culture of innovation, and strong political motivation. Where such factors are given consideration, Governments are better able to pursue a coordinated approach to public communications—one that is rooted in the local context and honours transparency and harmonization among different actors. It is recognized that withholding, underplaying or concealing vital information from the public contributes to the longevity of global health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

On the ground, countless good Samaritans, aid agencies, non-profit entities and religious institutions pooled their accumulated high trust capital to drive social good during the pandemic. Examples abound of non-governmental actors communicating risks attached to COVID-19 to vulnerable communities. Liaisons between local government and religious leaders had a multiplier effect in elevating the risk readiness of communities. In Sri Lanka, the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement facilitated a whole-of-society response to the pandemic.[6] In other cases, social actors played key roles in health protection without direct collaboration with the Government. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, faith-based organizations across denominations sensitized and mobilized communities to adopt public health measures. Religious leaders integrated anti-COVID-19 messages into their services and encouraged their faith communities to adopt measures decreed by the national Government.[7]

Future-proofing communications: actions to take

The innovations highlighted above illustrate the need for Governments to be smarter and sharper in the way they develop and implement public communications strategies. Experience from past health emergencies, including the 2003 SARS outbreak, the 2009 H1N1 pandemic, the 2014 Ebola outbreak, and the 2019 COVID-19 pandemic, has shown that the failure to provide accurate and timely information can have a devastating impact—even on the most well-resourced countries. Misinformation and rumours mushroom in disordered information environments, further burdening fragile health-care systems. Some of the key lessons learned from past outbreaks are elaborated below, as they can help Governments identify and address potential shortfalls that impede effective communication.

- *Consistent messaging across key stakeholders is critical*. In times of crisis, owing to the involvement of multiple authorities, messages run the risk of becoming unclear and even contradictory due to conflicting institutional perspectives and priorities. Mixed with heightened public emotions during crises, inconsistent messaging often results in panic and hinders adherence to crisis mitigation measures. Ideally, though circumstances may differ depending on the nature of the crisis, one authority should assume the lead early on and exercise convening powers. The Government of Australia addressed the extraordinary circumstances by forming a national cabinet made up of the Prime Minister and all state and territory first ministers to coordinate the response to COVID-19 in the country.[8] This aided in streamlining internal communications across different departments, levels (national, subnational and local government), and other stakeholders (including technical bodies and experts) and ensured that the key messages were clear, concise and consistent.

- *Reliable spokespersons positively shape outcomes*. A person or institution that possesses the requisite knowledge, recognizes the gravity of the situation, provides accurate information, is articulate and transparent, and takes accountability can be considered an exemplary crisis communicator. In demanding times,

heads of State must address the public consistently and empathetically to generate public trust in emergency response and increase compliance. In New Zealand, former Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern proved the efficacy of this approach by building a strong rapport with her people. Technical experts can help demystify the science behind the crisis for audiences, as demonstrated by the work of Dr. Maria Van Kerkhove, COVID-19 Health Operations and Technical Lead for the World Health Organization.

- *Utilizing a combination of traditional and modern media tools in developing and implementing risk communication strategies is essential*. Institutions that fail to evaluate their information dissemination strategies and adapt to emerging realities find it hard to gauge or achieve success in their communication campaigns. Given the rapidly changing nature of information consumption, the integration of new media tools is becoming increasingly important in information delivery. However, newer media must supplement and not replace traditional channels of communication. Governments need to craft comprehensive information dissemination strategies that incorporate the use of differentiated channels to reach diverse audiences (including older persons, youth and Indigenous Peoples). It is important to strengthen the capacity of technical experts in using social and digital media to ensure the effective real-time dispatch of critical information. Investing the necessary resources in improving traditional channels, especially those offering information in local languages, is equally essential to ensure that no one is left behind.

- *Communications preparedness needs to start ahead of a crisis*. Communication activities become unsustainable in the absence of a solid foundational infrastructure. Governments must lay the groundwork for suitable communication mechanisms well in advance. When a crisis hits, communication systems and protocols must already be in place to allow for immediate activation. At an institutional level, investments are needed to develop resources that work not only for crisis management but also for crisis aversion. First, dedicated knowledge resources must be created and routinely updated to train personnel on risk and crisis communications. Second, monitoring tools must be built to identify, track and bust rumours; Mercy Corps in Puerto Rico set an example by launching an innovative and cost-effective rumour tracker tool with the support of community leaders.[9] Third, institutions must proactively conduct outreach to their audience, especially vulnerable and marginalized communities, using multiple channels. Lastly, systems that enable public access to government decisions and rationales (especially those impacting freedoms) must be reactivated, well publicized, and protected through regular oversight.

The COVID-19 experience offered a sobering lesson on the importance of building and maintaining a strong relationship between the Government and society. As the globe straddles the halfway mark of the 2030 Agenda, there is a renewed urgency to resume the pursuit of critical developmental aspirations and recover lost progress. For progress to be made, there needs to be open and transparent dialogue between societal actors and an environment that supports and sustains the conversation. Governments must focus on the silver lining—which may appear somewhat blurred at present—and strive for the resilience and agility that will allow the public sector to deal effectively with future crises. Hopefully, strong and successful communication will contribute to building a safer, healthier and more inclusive world.

Endnotes

1 Torsha Dasgupta is a Senior Associate, Mirza Shadan a Director, and Kaushik Bose a Vice-President at Global Health Strategies.

2 While particular approaches may have worked in certain geographical areas or among specific communities, there is no one-size-fits-all approach. As the success of communication strategies depends heavily on the local context, it is advisable to customize approaches according to the sociodemographic profile of the targeted population(s).

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7 Sadiki Kangamina and others, "Conflict, epidemic and faith communities: church-state relations during the fight against Covid-19 in north-eastern DR Congo", *Conflict and Health*, vol. 16, article No. 56 (9 November 2022), available at https://doi.org/10.1186/s13031-022-00488-4.

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Regulating the Use of Digital Technology by Public Administration to Protect and Strengthen Human Rights

Valeria Betancourt[1]

The COVID-19 pandemic made established and emerging structural challenges related to inequality, discrimination, exclusion and violence more palpable and highlighted tensions around the continuum between the exercise of human rights online and offline.

Governmental initiatives to combat the pandemic were deployed worldwide after the emergency was officially announced. Most were characterized by the accelerated use of digital technologies and mobile communications to detect and report COVID-19 cases, monitor the spread of the virus, investigate its behaviour, organize vaccination processes and track their status, and collect information to inform decision-making.

Research undertaken during the pandemic suggested that neither developed nor developing countries were immune to new threats to freedoms and rights, and that there was a need to address the risks and potential benefits of digital technologies collectively with fresh vigour and adherence to international human rights law, acknowledging that the crisis–and the associated rights violations and exacerbation of structural deprivations–was disproportionately affecting marginalized, oppressed and vulnerable groups. Some government responses illustrated the potential of digital technologies to advance rights and to serve as a basis both for mitigating the medium- and long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and for catalysing positive approaches in the handling of future crises.

This contribution builds on analytical research led by the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) and published in the 2021-2022 edition of the Global Information Society Watch report, which explored digital futures for a post-pandemic world.

Key risks and challenges

Research undertaken by specialized civil society organizations working at the intersection of digital technologies and human rights shows that a range of rights protected by instruments endorsed by States around the world were affected by measures adopted by Governments during the pandemic.[2] In general, new or tighter restrictions on people's rights derived from the following: prevailing digital exclusion; a lack of clarity and transparency around the objectives, limits and principles on which digital technology-based responses were designed and implemented; the absence of clear and comprehensive regulatory, technical and governance frameworks and robust institutions for personal data handling and protection; and gaps in the establishment of enforcement and oversight mechanisms aimed at limiting abuses of power, including by Governments wanting to control who had access to the Internet and how it was used, and by companies whose business models remained rooted in the surveillance and exploitation of people and their data. The major challenges, threats and risks that were observed are explored below.

Digital exclusion

The lack of meaningful Internet access for marginalized communities and groups remains a key concern. The many dimensions of digital exclusion revealed by the pandemic, including the gender digital divide,[3] showed the interdependence between access to digital technologies, particularly the Internet, and the enjoyment of a wide range of human rights. People without a stable and affordable Internet connection were unable to work (in jobs that could be performed remotely) or to access education, life-saving information or government services, including health care. Amidst a lack of affordable Internet access and relevant digital skills, e-government initiatives created layered exclusions for marginalized groups, especially in Africa and Latin America. In the realm of education, for instance, the digital divide combined with pandemic restrictions produced a learning divide, with long-term socioeconomic consequences. The pandemic illustrated how fundamental meaningful Internet access and digital skills are to sustainable development and human rights.

Freedom of expression

Freedom of expression online came under threat during the pandemic as new and existing legislation and regulations were used to limit and criminalize legitimate expression in the name of combating hate speech and the spread of false information. In some cases, regulations contained provisions that targeted criticism of government efforts to contain the virus or that compelled technology companies to remove content or block access to content and users. Intentional disruptions to Internet access and digital communications in different parts of the world interfered with people's freedom of expression[4] and access to essential information and services.[5] Control over media reporting on the pandemic, arrests of journalists, and shutdowns of media entities critical of the Government

further curtailed free expression online. The monitoring of social media and the harassment of users by Governments and government supporters resulted in censorship (including self-censorship) and the spread of hate speech.

Public interest technologies, surveillance, privacy and data protection

The solutions adopted by Governments during the pandemic required the collection of enormous amounts of personal and sensitive data and the subsequent analysis and sharing of such data[6] in contexts without proper privacy safeguards, clear privacy regulations, or mechanisms for enforcement and oversight. Public interest technologies[7] such as contact tracing apps and vaccine passports, in tandem with expanded health regulations to monitor people's mobility and behaviour, were used to strengthen State surveillance mechanisms and the ability to profile individuals. Lack of transparency in the development of these technologies enabled a failure to uphold the principles of necessity, proportionality and legality. This had an impact on people's informational self-determination,[8] restricting their ability to exert control over the use of their personal data. There were cases in which the right to access information was conditioned on the provision of certain personal data, and because of their indivisibility and interdependence, the rights to freedom of movement, association and peaceful assembly, as well as the right to work, were also affected.[9]

The protection of human rights online: opportunities, responses and promising measures

The increased visibility of the vulnerabilities and risks associated with the acceleration of digital transformation during the pandemic created an opportunity to put human rights at the centre of the configuration of the world's digital future.

The Internet and other digital technologies are an essential part of crisis response and an emerging source of resilience, but they are not sufficient on their own; holistic strategies are also needed to address structural inequalities, strengthen democracy, and reinforce the safeguarding and enjoyment of human rights. The Internet needs to be protected as a global public resource, and human rights must be upheld both online and offline in any short-, medium- and long-term crisis response measures, taking into account that people are affected in different ways both during and in the aftermath of the crisis.

Context-based responses are needed, but equally important are global responses based on true multilayer, multidisciplinary, multi-stakeholder collaboration guided by principles of inclusion, transparency and accountability. Internet governance, as a central element of broader global digital governance and global digital cooperation ecosystems, is part of those

necessary responses oriented towards ensuring compliance with international human rights law and the preservation of the public core of the Internet at all levels. Processes such as the development of the Global Digital Compact[10] and the World Summit on the Information Society +20 review[11] offer valuable opportunities to place human rights at the centre of the development, deployment, utilization and regulation of the Internet and other digital technologies.

Some of the contextual responses by Governments illustrate rights-respecting approaches taken during the pandemic and serve as models for handling future crises. In Brazil, for example, the Supreme Court affirmed that the protection of personal data represented a fundamental constitutional right. The Supreme Court's action prevented telecommunications companies from implementing a presidential order to share the personal data of users, resulting in a formal amendment that "effectively included the fundamental right to data protection in the Constitution". Decisions such as these link individual rights to collective rights,[12] social well-being and human dignity.[13]

Despite decades of communications infrastructure deployment, the growth of mobile phone penetration has slowed over the past decade, showing that the predominant strategies employed to extend affordable connectivity have a limit. With this loss of momentum and the need to address digital exclusion to mitigate the effects of the pandemic, it is crucial to support the realization of people's right to meaningfully shape and use the Internet and other digital technologies to meet their specific needs and realities through approaches that complement those provided by Governments and corporations. Alternative approaches may include small-scale local initiatives or community-owned communication networks built, operated and used by communities in a participatory and open manner to respond to the information and communication needs of unconnected or poorly connected groups. Two examples illustrate positive efforts in that regard: the Communications Authority of Kenya adopted a licensing and shared radio spectrum framework for community networks following public consultation and a process for the development of the framework that was undertaken in partnership with multiple stakeholders;[14] and in Argentina, significant steps were taken to enable small operators to provide telecommunications services and Internet connectivity with support from the country's Universal Service Fund, one of the mandates of which is to support community networks in unconnected or underserved communities in both rural and urban areas.[15]

A development-oriented digital future can only be enabled where offline and online environments respect rights.

Recommendations

On alignment with established human rights standards to strengthen rights online

- Adopt a human rights-based approach as the standard for the design and use of digital technologies in accordance with the standards of international human rights bodies and instruments.

- Undertake human rights impact assessments of digital technology-related policies, acknowledging the local contexts and realities of vulnerable and marginalized groups within society.

- Create robust frameworks for multi-stakeholder decision-making and oversight that support the development of innovative technological responses to future crises and the shaping of a free, open and secure digital future.

On digital inclusion

- Reform policy and regulatory environments so that they are favourable to the development of complementary models for the provision of connectivity, including community networks and small and medium-sized cooperative service providers or operators.

- Ensure the participation of communities in policymaking concerning access to digital technologies and digital inclusion.

On privacy and data protection

- Define data governance frameworks and strengthen oversight and accountability mechanisms to increase scrutiny and transparency.

- Adopt comprehensive legal and regulatory frameworks that preserve privacy and regulate State-sponsored surveillance in line with the principles of necessity and proportionality.

On freedom of expression

- Repeal laws that unnecessarily and disproportionately limit online freedom of expression.

- Refrain from disrupting Internet access.

Endnotes

1   Valeria Betancourt works with the Association for Progressive Communications as Communications and Information Policy Programme Manager.

2   Association for Progressive Communications and Swedish International Cooperation Agency, *Global Information Society Watch 2021–2022: Digital Futures for a Post–Pandemic World*, Alan Finlay, ed. (APC, 2022), available at https://www.giswatch.org/2021-2022-digital-futures-post-pandemic-world.

3   A more comprehensive characterization of the digital divide includes multiple determinants, such as race, age, education, class and geographic location, all of which have an impact on the differences in access between men and women and people of different sexualities and genders and between women in different economic, social and cultural circumstances.

4   For an overview of global Internet shutdowns in 2021 and 2022, see Access Now, "Internet shutdowns in 2021: the return of digital authoritarianism", 28 April 2022 (updated 17 March 2023), available at https://www.accessnow.org/internet-shutdowns-2021; and Access Now, "Weapons of control, shields of impunity: Internet shutdowns in 2022", 28 February 2023 (updated 24 May 2023), available at https://www.accessnow.org/internet-shutdowns-2022.

5   Human Rights Watch, "End Internet shutdowns to manage COVID-19", 31 March 2020, available at https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/03/31/end-internet-shutdowns-manage-covid-19.

6   Jamila Venturini, "Between urgency and surveillance: an analysis on the use of technologies during the COVID-19 pandemic in Latin America", article II, *Internet Sectoral Overview*, No. 4, year 13 (December 2021), p. 12, available at https://cetic.br/media/docs/publicacoes/6/20211217114412/iso-year-xiii-n-4-privacy.pdf.

7   Framing these digital technologies as "public interest technologies" offers a useful framework for the holistic evaluation of the impact of their deployment by Governments in terms of both benefits and harms; see Paola Ricaurte Quijano and Jacobo Nájera, "Getting ready for the next pandemic: public interest technologies in Latin America", in *Global Information Society Watch 2021–2022: Digital Futures for a Post–Pandemic World*, Alan Finlay, ed. (APC, 2022), available at https://www.giswatch.org/regional-report/latin-america-0.\.

8   Informational self-determination is the right of individuals to choose without interference the circumstances in which information about themselves is exposed and the extent of that exposure.

9   Jamila Venturini and others, *Informe Observatorio Covid-19 del Consorcio Al Sur: Un Análisis Crítico de las Tecnologías Desplegadas en América Latina Contra la Pandemia* (Consorcio Al Sur, June 2021).

10 United Nations, Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology, Global Digital Compact page, available at https://www.un.org/techenvoy/global-digital-compact.

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12 There are human rights generally recognized as exercisable by collectives (or groups of individuals) and not reducible to the individual, including the right to self-determination and the right to development.

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14 Kathleen Diga and others, "Advocacy for community-led connectivity access in the global South", in *Global Information Society Watch 2021–2022: Digital Futures for a Post–Pandemic World*, Alan Finlay, ed. (APC, 2022), available at https://www.giswatch.org/en/digital-rights-internet-advocacy-meaningful-access/advocacy-community-led-connectivity-access.

15 More details on the Argentina initiative are available on the APC blog at https://www.apc.org/en/blog/seeding-change-community-networks-flowering-argentina-during-challenging-times and https://www.apc.org/en/blog?destination=blog%3Fpage%3D15&page=1.

The Appetite for E-Justice is a Chance to Advance Sustainable Development Goals and Entrench Rights Protection

Sarah McCoubrey[1]

Accelerated, rights-centred digital transformation offers a window to strengthen trust in justice institutions and deliver more equitable, development-focused legal services; however, the window may be narrow. Action needs to be taken quickly.

While education, health care, financial services, media and commerce have all experienced a transformation in recent decades, justice systems have continued to rely on in-person appearances, physical record-keeping and analog processes. COVID-19 lockdowns provided the disruption that this slow-to-adapt sector needed, setting in motion digital transformation in the justice system.

The trust between Governments and the people they serve relies on effective, transparent and accountable dispute resolution. Justice system responses to the COVID-19 lockdowns strengthened that trust in some cases—and broke it in others. Courts and legal services shut down across the globe in 2020. Some adapted quickly, resuming operations using digital solutions to maintain the administration of justice, while others are still struggling to return to previous operations, facing extensive backlogs and many unmet legal needs.

The lockdowns revealed the vulnerability of justice systems heavily dependent on paper and in-person filing and appearances. The lack of interoperability between courts, police, lawyers, prosecutors and judges constituted a critical barrier rather than simply an inconvenience. Judges, lawyers, and human rights advocates faced steep learning curves as they scrambled to move their services online.

The global pandemic also revealed the extent to which a healthy, efficient and reliable justice system is critical for the day-to-day well-being of society. Fair and effective dispute resolution protects jobs, prevents unreasonable evictions, and provides emergency benefits and access to critical services, including health care. During the pandemic, people who were already vulnerable to rights infringements—whether because of their status as refugees, undocumented workers or prisoners or because of the increased reliance on complex data collection and surveillance—looked to justice mechanisms for protection. In some countries, the courthouse doors remained closed.

Viewed optimistically, the crisis-driven adaptation that has taken place over the past few years has effectively provided a test case for new ways of delivering justice services and has forced people and institutions to experiment with new technologies. As public institutions shift from temporary service modifications to sustained modes of operating, there are new opportunities

> *System vulnerability + disruption + attitudinal change = justice sector appetite and urgency for change*

for digital transformation. Governments and citizens have a new appreciation of how a trusted, effective justice system underpins progress on many of the Sustainable Development Goals (including SDGs 1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 10, 11 and 16). The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted established patterns, creating the conditions for rights-centred, rule-of-law-focused e-justice adoption. This is the opportunity for digital transformation of justice. The subsections below highlight critical starting points, providing a closer look at the emergence and evolution of digital justice services.

Appearing virtually

The use of video appearances to bridge periods of lockdown during the pandemic proved to be a viable, though not perfect, alternative to in-court appearances. As courts have reopened and people have eagerly returned to familiar ways of operating, institutions have had to assess the efficacy of temporary fixes and retain practices that incorporate the advantages of remote appearances. The possibility of testifying by video dramatically increases access to justice in rural and remote regions, making it possible for people in underserved areas to access higher courts or specialized lawyers and experts. Vulnerable witnesses, including children, women experiencing violence, or witnesses under protection, can opt to testify from safe locations without the cost, difficulty, fear or intimidation associated with coming to the courthouse. These gains must not be lost in favour of the convenience of the court or the lawyers.

Updating archaic legislation

Rules and legislation relating to technology, types of evidence, prisoner transport, records storage and many other seemingly mundane aspects of the administration of formal justice systems

have long been seen as barriers to technology-facilitated justice services. Some of these barriers to modern operations are found in centuries-old legislation or rules. During the pandemic, many countries made quick, temporary changes to allow electronic signatures, virtual appearances, electronic filings, or judge-alone trials.[2] These legislative changes allowed courts to try out new technologies, refine their approaches and bring greater experience to discussions about permanent changes to court operations. Not only can these experiments be retained, but they can also serve as the basis for broader justice sector innovations such as mobile courts.[3]

Working together

The pandemic lockdowns also revealed the siloed nature of the justice sector, with each institution maintaining separate records on incompatible systems. This approach to the handling of sector data wastes time and is susceptible to human error, loss or damage. More importantly, the lack of accessible data about people's legal issues and use of services prevents justice systems from truly understanding public needs or identifying opportunities to improve the system. Without integrated data systems, it is difficult to provide evidence-based legal training, make data-driven hiring or scheduling decisions, or focus improvements where they will have the greatest positive impact for the public. Building interoperability across institutions—the police, prosecutors, defence counsel, courts, prisons, financial institutions, family counsellors, workplace investigators, civil registries and social services—creates a people-centred approach to justice services in terms of both access and privacy. By addressing the gaps and dependencies revealed in the past few years, Governments have the opportunity to strengthen public trust in the justice system.

Wary but not risk-averse

Converting from analog to digital systems or integrating justice data with those of other public services involves potentially serious risks, but these can be managed. In addition to the privacy and data security concerns that come with any digital tool, e-justice initiatives require extra vigilance to ensure that case data are fully segregated from government data, with strict prohibitions against government access. In criminal cases, when citizens challenge government decisions or fight for a right or benefit, they argue against the Government in the courtroom. Public trust in the courts will erode if political and bureaucratic actors are able to access the details of court files. The independence of the judicial system is key to maintaining public trust.

The increasingly significant role of artificial intelligence (AI) in digital operations presents a difficult challenge for the justice system. AI evolves by learning from the data it is fed.

When those data sets include past decisions of judges and government officials, the AI embeds the bias of those historical decisions into its algorithms—but the resulting decisions have the appearance of digital neutrality. Not only must the data foundation of legal AI be scrutinized for bias, but judges will increasingly be expected to adjudicate on cases where public services rely on AI. The role of judges as experts in protecting rights and detecting bias is critical to public trust in digital tools.

Addressing the risks that come with digitalization is critical to ensure not only that privacy rights are protected, but also that those experiencing literacy, geographic, economic or demographic barriers are not excluded. Ensuring that digitalization aims to leave no one behind will mitigate against the harms of the digital divide and improves access to justice for those who need it most.

Future-proofing

E-justice is primarily focused on modernizing the justice system and bringing it up to speed with other public services, but e-justice also represents a strategy for future resilience. Adopting robust digital tools, designed around the lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic, will help make justice systems resilient to future disruptions. Against the backdrop of increasingly frequent climate events, political and civil conflicts, and future public health emergencies, continuity of justice services will be required regardless of physical, geographical or logistical challenges. Maintaining access to independent, stable and trusted dispute resolution mechanisms in such periods of uncertainty will minimize political instability and support civic well-being in times of crisis. This is already evident in Ukraine, where e-justice systems developed in 2018/19 to provide access to courts for people living in regions occupied by the Russian Federation were quickly expanded during COVID-19 lockdowns to extend access to dispute resolution across the country. Now, during the war, these e-justice tools are helping maintain the rule of law and security of records as individuals displaced by the conflict struggle to prove eligibility for benefits or ownership of property.[4] The e-justice initiatives adopted in Ukraine have already been tested twice, demonstrating the system's relevance and resilience.

In Myanmar, where political turmoil has created opportunities for land grabbing and made it difficult to prove property rights,[5] apps are being used to map existing and historical claims to property to create a reliable, publicly accessible record. Used now to help mediate neighbour disputes through informal justice mechanisms, this digital tool may be used as an evidentiary record in future for more formal determinations of property and political rights.

Digital technology is being used by the justice sector in Morocco to address discrete challenges. A new app is being

developed to facilitate the timely payment of child and spousal support to women after the courts recognized that they were not collecting the payments owed to them. Women may be able to use the app to provide proof of economic stability when registering a small business or applying for a loan. This is part of a larger initiative to support the digital transformation of the country's justice system that includes a digital strategy and new communication technologies and tools that allow instant access to justice services.[6]

Caribbean countries are designing comprehensive electronic case management systems that integrate data collection and data sharing protocols across institutions and are building regional information technology expertise to address current backlogs and delays in criminal cases.[7] Paper-based courts that were already experiencing delays closed during pandemic lockdowns. Police investigations that relied on witness statements rather than forensic or digital evidence collection slowed. Lawyers could not access court or office files. Legislative and infrastructure constraints precluded virtual court hearings in some countries. The delays in case processing resulted in overcrowding in prisons as people waited even longer for their trials. Having experienced the negative impact of analog systems on access to justice and operational effectiveness, those working across the justice system articulated the need for change. This transformation will facilitate ongoing and future improvement of the legal system while addressing current backlogs and delays in criminal cases.

Each of the e-justice initiatives highlighted above addresses a current development goal, prioritizes the protection of human rights, and increases the relevance and public accountability of legal services while also building future capacity for transformation.

People-centred e-justice

Building or rebuilding public trust in the administration of justice requires thinking about how people experience conflict, the consequences of legal disputes in their lives, and the outcomes that matter most to their health, safety, security and well-being.

E-justice is sometimes viewed as simply moving existing justice processes online. Instead, it can be harnessed as a transformative tool. Rather than focusing on how to modernize the tasks of judges and lawyers, it is time to ask what people expect from their justice systems. The current appetite for change represents an opportunity to design digital tools to transform outdated legal processes by focusing on rights-respecting priorities that build public trust.

This is an unexpected, though welcome, moment where the glacial pace of justice system modernization is accelerating, and there is an openness to cross-institutional cooperation to prioritize development goals and human rights protections. The transformative potential of this moment will be lost if e-justice is treated as an infrastructure upgrade. Consistent, transparent justice is critical to maintaining a stable legal foundation for economic and physical well-being. Increased public expectations of fairness and enforceability of administrative and civil justice decisions requires justice systems not just to modernize but to transform themselves through the integration of people-centred digital tools.

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Civic Space and the COVID-19 Pandemic

Elly Page and Alexandra DeBlock[1]

Around the world, Governments responded to the COVID-19 pandemic in ways that constrained civic space, exacerbating existing obstacles and creating new challenges for civil society. Adopting emergency and other exceptional legal measures, Governments granted themselves new powers and restricted civic freedoms, including the freedom of association, assembly and expression.

Many Governments prohibited public protests and demonstrations or significantly limited attendance at such gatherings. Some imposed new restrictions on speech that was critical of the State, with such limitations often framed as targeting disinformation or "fake news" about the pandemic. Some impeded the flow of information in other ways, including by criminalizing commentary from journalists, health-care workers, human rights defenders and others on the State's pandemic response. Worldwide, Governments adopted new powers to surveil the public in the name of tracking contagion and deployed surveillance technology and systems in ways that significantly interfered with the right to privacy. Frequently, Governments designed, adopted and implemented these measures without providing opportunities for civil society consultation or participation.

While COVID-19 responses by Governments had a largely negative impact on civic space, many Governments demonstrated that it was possible to safeguard civic space while effectively countering the threats and risks surrounding the virus. The pandemic also served to reinforce the value of civil society in emergency response. Civil society played a critical role in gathering and amplifying accurate information about the spread of the virus, assessing community needs, reaching marginalized communities, and delivering essential services–even when doing so often involved the risk of contagion. The oversight role played by civil society was likewise important during the pandemic, as it worked to protect human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law against government overreach. In the subsections below, good practices are highlighted and successful approaches and initiatives adopted by both Governments and civil society to protect civic space are further explored.

Positive practices by Governments

Applying guardrails for emergency measures. According to the COVID-19 Civic Freedom Tracker,[2] 112 countries formally declared a state of emergency or other exceptional legal state that enabled the Government to restrict rights and freedoms. As required by international law and in line with good practice, some formally notified relevant treaty bodies of derogations in response to COVID-19; from January 2020 to April 2022, 24 States submitted over 110 notifications of states of emergency and related derogations.[3] Some took additional steps to ensure that their emergency measures aligned with their obligations under international law by continually assessing the measures' necessity, proportionality, legality and non-discriminatory impact. Opportunities were created for the oversight and review of emergency measures by relevant institutions, including legislatures, courts and international bodies. In Portugal, the Parliament reviewed and debated the state of emergency, extending it 15 days at a time, and eventually allowed it to lapse. Rather than using the COVID-19 emergency to expand State power, some Governments invoked grants of emergency authority that were narrowly drafted and included an expiration date.

Enabling public participation in crisis response. Engaging the public in the design, implementation and review of crisis response measures proved critical to effectiveness in the COVID-19 context. Some States successfully integrated public participation into their COVID-19 response even as they sought to move quickly. In Kenya, the Parliament invited public submissions regarding key issues relating to the pandemic and considered this input in the drafting of a pandemic response and management bill. In Belize, civil society representatives were included in the Government's COVID-19 policymaking committee and allowed to participate in parliamentary debates over COVID-19 measures.[4] In Guatemala, the Ministry of Public Health and Social Assistance partnered with Indigenous midwives to provide accurate information to rural communities and encourage vaccination.[5]

Facilitating the flow of information. During a crisis, the free flow of information is crucial to ensure that responses are evidence-based, to facilitate public understanding of the situation and cooperation with response measures, and to hold Governments accountable for measures that may infringe rights. Rather than restricting information flows during crises, Governments should take affirmative action to support public access to information through independent media outlets and online platforms. This includes the dissemination of accurate information about the status of the crisis and the steps being taken in response. They should publicize official documents describing their responsive measures, mandate proactive disclosure of official information, provide

for virtual public meetings with government representatives, and establish systems for individuals and groups to request information from public bodies. The Government of Ireland obliged officials to continue to comply with the Freedom of Information Act, publicized its National Action Plan in response to COVID-19, and created hotlines for individuals to access information. New Zealand issued guidance to agencies and the public urging greater transparency and access to official information even while the country was under a state of emergency.[6] Governments also took steps to increase the accessibility of COVID-19-related information. Japan and Austria both published information about COVID-19 measures in multiple languages.[7]

Protecting freedom of peaceful assembly. Excessive restrictions on public assembly–for example, those characterized by the lack of an expiration date or exceptions for socially-distanced peaceful protests–cut off an important channel for public expression and participation during the pandemic. By contrast, the COVID-19 restrictions on gatherings in Denmark exempted "opinion-shaping assemblies" such as demonstrations and political meetings, though the Government encouraged participants to socially distance and follow other health guidelines.[8]

Safeguarding the right to privacy. Some Governments that introduced digital surveillance tools in an effort to curb the spread of COVID-19 took steps to ensure that the privacy rights of individuals were not infringed. A COVID-19 contact tracing app in Norway, for instance, shared individuals' movement data with authorities but anonymized it first, and users received clear information about the purpose, storage and nature of the data collected. The app was also voluntary, and users could delete it and their data at any time. Governments considering similar technology based on personal data in response to future crises should prioritize privacy, transparency and public consultation and impose narrow limits on these initiatives.

The role of civil society

Civil society pushed back against COVID-19-inspired restrictions on civic space in a number of ways. Across the globe, civil society organizations played a critical monitoring and awareness-raising role. In Indonesia, a human rights foundation monitored the impact of emergency measures on rights and freedoms and carried out a public awareness campaign via social media.[9] Civil society representatives formed networks and coalitions and found new strength in numbers. A human rights lawyer in Poland established a new pro bono network to defend individuals who were targeted for engaging in anti-government protests during the pandemic after dozens of protesters demonstrating in support of a lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) activist were arrested for

violating COVID-19 restrictions.[10] In other cases, civil society leveraged direct advocacy to push back; human rights defenders in Tunisia, for example, were able to lobby the Government to remove criminal sanctions–including prison sentences of up to two years–for violations of COVID-19 movement restrictions.[11] A civil society coalition in Ecuador successfully pushed the Government to engage Indigenous communities in the design of their vaccination campaign.[12] Civil society organizations also used strategic lawsuits to challenge the validity of COVID-19 emergency measures that infringed rights and constrained civic space. In Israel, such organizations successfully challenged limits that a COVID-19 regulation placed on public demonstrations, including a requirement that an individual could only participate in a demonstration within 1,000 metres of his or her residence.[13] In Brazil, after the President suspended deadlines for responses to requests for public information, the Bar Association successfully challenged the constitutionality of the measure, arguing that it violated the right to access information and restricted the constitutional rights to information, transparency and disclosure.[14]

Policy recommendations

Stakeholders seeking to safeguard civic space in future crises should strive to ensure adherence to the following principles:

- Emergency measures should be limited in duration and should be subject to extension only upon legislative approval.

- Restrictions on assembly and movement should include reasonable exceptions.

- Governments should disseminate accurate information about emergencies and responsive measures through a variety of accessible platforms and in multiple languages.

- Governments should publicize official documents describing their responsive measures, mandate proactive disclosure of official information, establish systems for individuals and groups to request information from public bodies, and enforce existing access to information frameworks.

- Governments using digital surveillance technology based on personal data should prioritize privacy, transparency and public consultation and the imposition of narrow limits on these programmes.

- Governments should establish procedures to review emergency measures affecting civic freedoms in consultation with civil society and to relax and remove those measures as soon as they are no longer necessary.

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Youth Voice and Sustainable Public Policy: Rejuvenating Urban Democracy

James Sloam[1]

Introduction

Young people across the world have borne the brunt of successive global crises and expanding existential threats, including the 2008 financial crash and subsequent cuts in public spending, the adverse effects of climate change, and the COVID-19 pandemic. In many respects, those hardest hit have been young people living in urban areas, which are home to well over half the world's population.[2] The huge inequalities of wealth and poverty found in cities have been exacerbated by these crises and threats,[3] making progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) more problematic.

Although the immediate health threat of COVID-19 was greatest for older generations, young people were also affected by the pandemic in ways that would have both immediate and long-term repercussions. The public policy challenges surrounding young people are relatively complex and long-lasting, as strategies need to be developed to address the economic scarring, loss of education, negative effects of isolation on mental health, and other consequences of the recent health crisis.[4] If public policy is to become more future-oriented and sustainable in the long run, it must begin to focus more clearly and intentionally on the interests and voices of younger generations. The answer lies in better and more inclusive governance.

There is a long way to go to achieve the sort of participatory governance that will generate sustainable public policy. Young people across the world were losing trust in Governments even before the onset of the pandemic[5] as countries struggled to deliver for future generations while also meeting the needs of the ageing population and dealing with the increasing costs of health care.[6] The decline in trust in public institutions has accelerated since 2019, and young people feel that their voices are being ignored. In 2022, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) surveyed 151 youth organizations in 71 countries and found that only 15 per cent felt that their Governments had "considered young people's views when adopting lockdown and confinement measures", and more than half believed young people's views had not been incorporated into support schemes or infrastructure investment responses to the pandemic.[7]

There is mounting evidence that the voices of community residents of all ages–with their local knowledge and long-term, vested interest in improving their neighbourhoods–are essential for rebuilding after the pandemic and securing a sustainable future. Elinor Ostrom, a recipient of the Nobel Prize in Economics, contends that "there is no reason to believe that bureaucrats and politicians, no matter how well meaning, are better at solving problems than the people on the spot, who have the strongest incentive to get the solution right".[8] A recent OECD publication highlights the importance of "embedding the perspectives of all age groups in [post-pandemic] response and recovery measures".[9]

How might this work in practice? Are civic authorities willing to dare more democracy–to commit to more messy participatory policymaking processes–on the pathway to sustainable governance? How can they create inclusive structures to facilitate the participation of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds?

This contribution explores the ways in which young people can reshape public institutions and public policy as the world engages in a green and equitable COVID-19 recovery process that focuses on making cities better places to live. It examines the factors that drive youth participation in urban democracy and explores what cities across the world are doing to engage young people and the common lessons that can be drawn from these efforts.

The argument is that improving the quality of interactions between young people, local authorities and public services through the creation of civic spaces and the nurturing of local knowledge can generate more effective and sustainable public policy. The mechanisms through which this might be achieved include the setting up of civic spaces for deliberation and community research and the institutionalization of youth participation in policymaking.

Pathways to youth voice and engagement: from the ballot box to the town square to the Internet

Over several decades, younger generations have turned away from political party membership and other formal political mechanisms towards less institutionalized types of civic and political engagement that carry more meaning for their everyday lives. As voter turnout has declined in many democracies, youth activism around social movements and causes has proliferated. The pervasive use of new communication technologies and the growing prevalence of "digitally networked action [have] enabled a 'quickening' of youth participation" as issues that resonate with younger

generations can emerge and spread with great speed.[10] Two recent examples are the Global Climate Strike (#FridaysForFuture) and Black Lives Matter movements. While COVID-19 containment policies reduced the prevalence of mass demonstrations during the pandemic, they spurred an increase in online participation among young people, as evidenced by the rapid upsurge in the use of web and mobile app platforms by activist networks.[11]

It is important to draw attention to the promise of urban democracy. Cities offer a number of favourable venues for youth participation in local democratic processes. The close proximity of residents to one another makes community-led action more practicable in urban than in rural spaces. There is also evidence showing that young people from less-well-off backgrounds–those who suffered the greatest losses from the pandemic–are as eager as young people from more prosperous backgrounds to get involved in local democracy. In the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the Hansard Society's Audit of Political Engagement found that 46 per cent of 18- to 24-year olds wanted to be more involved in decision-making in their local areas; among youth without a college degree, the proportion was 55 per cent.[12]

Young people are continually reinventing politics through youth-led civic and political activism across continents and different planes of governance, engaging in activities ranging from local urban activism to coordinated international initiatives that can inform and influence public policy.

International programmes can play a key role in supporting and promoting the adoption of good practices at the local level. One example is the Students Reinventing Cities competition launched in 2020 by the C40 global network of mayors working together to tackle the climate crisis. It asked students to "share their vision for transforming city neighbourhoods to deliver a green and just recovery from the Covid-19 crisis" and presented the competition winners with opportunities to participate in live regeneration projects, supported by city authorities. In Bhalswa (Delhi), India, student activists successfully challenged prevailing housing and waste management practices in collaboration with the C40 and the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (a C40 member). The students' efforts resulted in the development of youth-led solutions, including a network of eight affordable housing blocks and community facilities such as clinics, shops, a childcare centre and public toilets.[13]

Rejuvenating urban democracy

The process of achieving effective engagement with young people is not always straightforward. Youth may be sceptical about engaging with political institutions for the reasons mentioned previously, and they may not feel equipped with the knowledge or civic skills to participate with older people who have more experience or power. Further, civic authorities and policymakers can often treat young people in a tokenistic manner, encouraging them to come along to meetings (and photo shoots) or participate in discussions without giving them any say in the design and implementation of policy.

Nevertheless, there are good examples of such obstacles being overcome, where city authorities have offered younger residents a chance to learn while becoming civically and politically active and having a say in the policymaking process.

In the United Kingdom, the Greater London Authority has taken the lead in promoting youth voice. The Mayor's Peer Outreach Team is a group of 30 young people recruited to offer policy input and participate in outreach projects addressing issues that affect youth in the city. Among their many activities, the Team helped review applications for funding from the £45 million Young Londoners Fund and contributed (along with other youth groups in the Authority) thoughts and ideas for the city's COVID-19 recovery plan; their input contributed directly to the content of the 2020 London Recovery plan, resulting in A New Deal for Young People that guaranteed the provision of a personal mentor and access to quality local activities for all young Londoners.[14] Young Peer Outreach Workers are regularly engaged in deliberative exercises and participatory research to develop their civic skills and knowledge and to enable meaningful participation in policy discussions and activities, including several projects to map London's Quality of Life indicators against the United Nations SDGs and explore how youth may be best served within this context; the group also investigated young people's ideas on climate change against the backdrop of the 26th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP26).[15] The graphic shown below is from the We Love the Planet event designed for and by young London residents, the environment team at the Greater London Authority, and youth activists, and organized with the present author. The Event, which took place in early 2022, was intended to provide research on young people's understandings of climate change and the political dialogue around this issue, and to provide an opportunity to develop recommendations for the Authority.

In the United States of America, Constance Flanagan and her colleagues, drawing on Ostrom's concept of the environmental commons, provide powerful evidence of the effectiveness of "community research" or "civic science" combined with access to local policymakers.[16] Community research involves training citizens (including youth) to undertake research with the dual purpose of upskilling the participants and providing local authorities with informed grass-roots ideas and solutions to address key local issues. In their work with young people from lower-income areas and of predominately ethnic minority backgrounds in south-eastern Michigan, they found that the

Picture from the We Love the Planet event, Museum of London, 14 February 2022
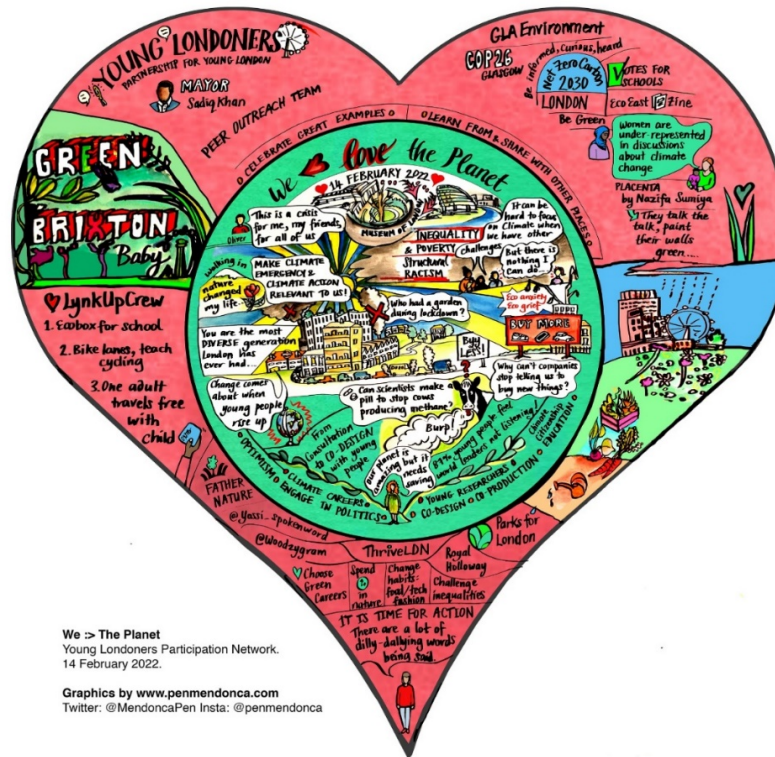
Source: Graphic by www.penmendonca.com @MendoncaPen.

research empowered young participants to raise issues such as air pollution and the supply of clean water with civic authorities and achieve real change.

As the examples above illustrate, it is vital for civic authorities to engage with young people from poorer backgrounds and to ensure that they are not excluded from pandemic recovery plans if progress is to be made towards the Sustainable Development Goals. In all the instances above, authorities have sought to engage with local activist networks and civil society groups to provide outreach to the most disadvantaged communities. This is true for almost all successful examples of inclusive youth engagement. Recent research by the International Institute for Environment and Development has, for example, highlighted the central role civil society groups play in amplifying the voices of young people living in slum settlements in eight African cities.[17] Particular mention is made of Slum Dwellers International, which represents the interests of slum dwellers with urban authorities as well as internationally, including in forums such as COP27. During the pandemic, young people in this organization's youth affiliates documented and shared their experiences, providing a youth perspective for the development of urban recovery strategies.

Conclusion and recommendations

Young people across the world are engaged in political issues and are eager to have their voices heard. The problem is that youth activism is often disconnected from formal politics, so youth participation is less likely to have an impact and can even lead to damaging political and social conflict. This is counterproductive, given the fact that Governments may share the aims of the protestors, as in the case of climate activism. The challenge for policymakers is to harness the energy, optimism and solutions of today's youth by mainstreaming the politics of young people into formal political processes.

When young people do engage with civic authorities, there are two main barriers to effective participation. First, many politicians and officials only pay lip-service to these interactions, so many young people find the experience ineffective and unrewarding. Civic authorities need to develop training for officials for working with children and young people as partners.[18] Second, young people may lack the civic skills and knowledge to overcome power imbalances in their relationships with these officials. It is a well-established fact in political science that people belonging to high socioeconomic groups have far better democratic skills than do those from low socioeconomic groups. Civic education can help close this gap.

In the case of city and other units of local government, the following three innovations are required to achieve sustained, effective engagement:

- To rebuild trust in government, youth participation must be nurtured through initiatives that provide opportunities for deliberation, civic learning and the co-design of public policy.

- Young people's voices need to be institutionalized within civic administrations and embedded into each main policy area, including through representation in policy directorates.

- If cities are to achieve progress towards the SDGs, youth participation must be inclusive of those from poorer and other disadvantaged backgrounds. This can be achieved by reaching out to relevant civil society and youth activist groups.

The pandemic has forced policymakers to reconsider how they generate sustainable public policy, and they are increasingly coming to recognize the importance of empowering young people. However, youth participation remains patchy at best. As part of his closing remarks to the eleventh annual ECOSOC Youth Forum in April 2022, Economic and Social Council President Collen Vixen Kelapile exhorted young people to take what is theirs by right: "a seat at the table when decisions are taken that would impact your own future".[19] However, it is first necessary to persuade policymakers that it is in their own fundamental long-term interests to open new pathways to youth engagement in public policy if this goal is to be realized in the coming decades.

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Combating Misinformation as a Matter of Urgency: An African Perspective

Naledi Mashishi[1]

Misinformation constitutes a resurgent and serious threat to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, rising misinformation on social media led to mistrust in health authorities, undermined public health responses to the pandemic, and resulted in individuals engaging in risky behaviours. In the broader context of sustainable development, misinformation posed a threat to the promotion of good health and well-being (SDG 3) through the spread of harmful, inaccurate health information and to the promotion of peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16) through its role in undermining trust in public institutions.

Long before the COVID-19 pandemic, Nigeria became an early warning signal for the devastating impact misinformation could have on national health interventions. In 2003, political leaders of the Kaduna, Kano, and Zamfara states in northern Nigeria called for a mass boycott of the national polio immunization campaign. The leaders claimed that the vaccine was contaminated with HIV and cancer-causing agents and would make its recipients infertile as part of a Western plot to lower fertility rates in the Muslim world. The leaders also linked the vaccine campaign to the occupation of Iraq by the United States of America, claiming that the war was part of an attack by the United States against Muslims as a whole.[2] The false claims about the polio vaccine were linked to efforts by President Ibrahim Babangida's administration in the 1980s to slow population growth by allowing women to have no more than four children. All of this misinformation fed a powerful anti-vaccine campaign that set back the country's fight against polio, with Nigeria still battling to recover lost ground as late as 2016.

The recent pandemic brought with it large-scale misinformation campaigns similar to those seen in Nigeria. The Nigeria and COVID-19 experiences each provide clear examples of the long-term harm misinformation can cause to a country's public health and highlight the need for Governments to address this issue as a matter of urgency. However, there is a risk that overly punitive approaches to the spread of information may weaken the bonds between Governments and constituents by infringing the right to freedom of expression. How, then, do Governments strike a careful balance between facilitating the spread of accurate information and ensuring that the right to freedom of speech is protected? This contribution proposes that Governments should forgo punitive legal measures in favour of improving media literacy and access to accurate information through partnerships with local media and private organizations.

Although there is no universally accepted definition of misinformation, the term generally refers to inaccurate information. In a 2022 report, the Secretary-General of the United Nations observes that "while misinformation refers to the accidental spread of inaccurate information, disinformation is not only inaccurate, but intends to deceive and is spread in order to do serious harm".[3] This distinction is important but is not particularly relevant within the present context, given the contribution's focus on the impact of (rather than the motivations behind) the dissemination of false information, so for the sake of expediency, the term "misinformation" is used here to refer to both.

With the aid of social media platforms, the production and spread of health misinformation during the pandemic exploded into what the World Health Organization termed an infodemic—a flood of both accurate and inaccurate information whose veracity is difficult to distinguish. Research indicates that the ability of audiences to discern factual information from misinformation varies across education and age groups, with older adults being less able to recall specific details.[4] The ability of information consumers to discern fact from fiction is particularly compromised during times of crisis, when levels of uncertainty, panic and confusion are heightened. Actors who wish to spread information take advantage of the chaotic climate to provide alternative explanations based on bad science or their own special interests. The problem is compounded when misinformation is spread over and over through sharing on social media, as research has found that audiences are more likely to believe information that has been repeated.[5] Audiences are particularly drawn to content that is high in emotion and easy to understand.

How can Governments combat this problem? One positive trend in Africa has been the increase in the number of countries that have introduced laws or other mechanisms governing access to information. Among the 15 countries in Africa responding to a 2022 survey sent out by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization on legal protections governing access to information, 11 had access-to-information laws on the books, three had laws that were in the process of being elaborated, and nine reported having a dedicated oversight institution.[6] Among other things, legal safeguards such as these provide media organizations with the support they need to actively combat misinformation—including health misinformation. Community radio broadcasters in Malawi hosted round-table discussions with panels of health experts in which listeners were able to call in and ask questions about COVID-19. These efforts from

community broadcasters were carried out in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and other stakeholders, including Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, affirming the potential for effective cooperation and coordination between the media and governmental and non-governmental actors.[7]

The Central African Republic is another country that felt the devastating impact of misinformation prior to the COVID-19 pandemic when in 2014 the propagation of hate speech further polarized the Muslim and Christian communities and sparked a wave of attacks. The Government responded that same year, seeking to combat misinformation by re-establishing an official body called the High Council for Communication, which is mandated to develop and promote a free press and has the authority to introduce regulations to counter misinformation. The Government has also introduced initiatives to train journalists and bloggers on verifying information and identifying reliable sources.[8] While these initiatives show promise, they have been hampered by a lack of funding and operational capacity. This highlights the need for Governments to prioritize the allocation of resources to combat misinformation.

Because misinformation is not limited to traditional media, neither should efforts to combat it. There is potential for Governments to utilize social media, which is frequently used to disseminate misinformation, as a tool to debunk and correct false information. An example of this from the non-governmental sector is the What's Crap on WhatsApp initiative created by Africa Check and podcast company Volume in South Africa. This is a monthly podcast that utilizes the popular messaging platform WhatsApp to fight WhatsApp misinformation. Users submit viral messages they have been sent, and fact-checkers then verify the information in the messages in the form of a short WhatsApp voice note that can be easily shared on the platform. Subscribers are also regularly sent messages with links to Africa Check reports that have verified viral posts on social media.

In terms of impact, the most important action Governments can take is ensuring immediate or early access to accurate information. Research has shown that those who are introduced to accurate information are much less likely to believe misinformation later on.[9] Governments need to take a proactive, multimodal approach to public messaging, activating campaigns that utilize both traditional and new media to spread accurate information.

Another critical step Governments should take is to build the foundations for smart information consumption. One example of this can be found in South Africa. In 2020, the Western Cape government collaborated with Google Africa to launch an initiative that included an online safety curriculum to be taught to secondary school students across the province as well as associated training for 500 teachers.[10] The curriculum covers a range of activities, including teaching students how to protect their safety online and how to identify fraudulent activities such as scams and phishing attempts. There is limited information about the implementation of the programme. However, this kind of campaign underscores the potential for curricula to include teaching students media literacy skills such as identifying misinformation and fact-checking information they find online. There is a genuine need for such programmes; research shows that over 90 per cent of schoolteachers in South Africa have reported seeing learners share misinformation online,[11] and nearly 40 per cent of teachers feel they lack the necessary training to teach media literacy skills.[12] The example provided here shows that public-private partnerships can provide young people with the tools they need to become more discriminating consumers of information.

The COVID-19 infodemic and previous examples of misinformation campaigns highlight the need for Governments to take misinformation seriously. During the pandemic, misinformation undermined public health interventions and sowed distrust in health authorities. It is critical that action be taken to prevent the same thing from happening in future crises. Rather than taking punitive measures, Governments can create enabling environments in which citizens are guaranteed access to information, media institutions are supported through government-media partnerships, and innovative approaches are adopted to utilize social media as a tool to spread accurate and accessible information. Governments also need to prioritize teaching media literacy skills to children and youth still in school. Partnerships with private organizations can play a vital role in providing resources and training, especially in contexts where government resources may be limited.

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Table 1A. Expert recommendations to strengthen Governments' relationships with society

Area	Action points
Towards a fair fiscal contract? What do the private sector and high-net-worth individuals "owe" society?	• Look to global initiatives that provide recommendations and guidance to tackle tax avoidance by limiting opportunities to shift profits through mismatches in international tax rules. • Provide more resources to tax administrations to achieve better tax compliance by both better and fairer enforcement and better taxpayer services. • Leveraging growing tax transparency efforts and new technologies (such as AI, machine learning and blockchain) to improve the collection, management and sharing of data and create efficiencies. However, the use of new technologies must be accompanied by a review of taxpayers' rights in the digital age. • Increase tax certainty to encourage compliance among multinational enterprises through clearer tax laws, more efficient tax administration, robust dispute resolution settlement mechanisms, and cooperative compliance programmes. • Consider the introduction of net wealth taxes while also strengthening the effectiveness of taxation of inheritance and gifts, taxes on capital gains, and consumption taxes, particularly on luxury products and services. • Strengthen action to counter all forms of illicit financial flows.
Gender equality in public administration: a new normal for Governments three years into the pandemic	• Remember lessons learned prior to the pandemic and re-energize efforts to adopt and implement good practices, including in the following three areas: data and transparency, placing immediate focus on SDG indicator 16.7.1b; ensuring training and mentorship opportunities; and making use of targets and quotas. • Assess changes made during the pandemic, consolidate positive changes and intentionally integrate them into future gender equality commitments in public administration; in particular, consider the gendered implications of flexible work arrangements and sustain the attention placed on the mental well-being of public administration employees. • Take bold action to regain momentum to reach SDGs 5 and 16 by 2030. • Put gender equality at the centre of present and future recovery efforts and ensure that women are fully integrated into permanent bodies of crisis response and management across all sectors.

Communication with social actors on the COVID-19 pandemic: implications for future crises	• Consider the following factors in communication strategies:
	  o compelling and concise messaging and the selection of appropriate channels of delivery;
	  o the ability to identify and meet the needs of the audience (and to understand their limitations);
	  o strategic timing;
	  o constructive interplay between actors (both within and outside the public sector);
	  o the level of trust in the Government;
	  o the active involvement of the scientific community;
	  o a culture of innovation;
	  o political motivation.
	• Ensure consistent messaging across key public stakeholders.
	• Ensure the utilization of spokespersons with the requisite expertise that provide accurate information and are articulate and transparent.
	• Utilize a combination of traditional and modern media tools in developing and implementing risk communications strategies.
	• Ensure that communications preparedness starts ahead of a crisis.

Table 1A *(continued)*

Area	Action points
Regulating the use of digital technology by public administration to protect and strengthen human rights	• Adopt a human rights-based approach as the standard for the design and use of digital technologies in accordance with the standards of international human rights bodies and instruments. • Undertake human rights impact assessments of digital-technology-related policies, acknowledging the local contexts and realities of vulnerable and marginalized groups within society. • Create robust frameworks for multi-stakeholder decision-making and oversight that support the development of innovative technological responses to future crises and the shaping of a free, open and secure digital future. • Reform policy and regulatory environments so that they are favourable to the development of complementary models for the provision of connectivity, including community networks and small and medium-sized cooperative service providers or operators. • Ensure the participation of communities in policymaking concerning access to digital technologies and digital inclusion. • Define data governance frameworks and strengthen oversight and accountability mechanisms to increase scrutiny and transparency. • Adopt comprehensive legal and regulatory frameworks that preserve privacy and regulate State-sponsored surveillance in line with the principles of necessity and proportionality. • Repeal laws that unnecessarily and disproportionately limit online freedom of expression. • Refrain from disrupting Internet access.
The appetite for e-justice is a chance to advance SDGs and entrench rights protection	• Organize transformation efforts around people's experience of conflicts or injustice rather than adhering to conventional categorizations of legal disputes or current jobs within the judiciary system. • Involve judges and human rights defenders—as guardians of rights—in the design of digital solutions. • Embrace legal processes that incorporate preventive, early resolution and informal approaches to dispute resolution, integrated through e-justice tools for consistent, seamless results.
Civic space and the COVID-19 pandemic	• Ensure that emergency measures are limited in duration and are subject to extension only upon legislative approval. • Establish procedures to review emergency measures affecting civic freedoms in consultation with civil society, and relax and remove those measures as soon as they are no longer necessary. • Include reasonable exceptions for restrictions on assembly and movement. • Disseminate accurate information about emergencies and responsive measures through a variety of accessible platforms and in multiple languages. • Publicize official documents describing Governments' response measures, mandate proactive disclosure of official information, establish systems for individuals and groups to request information from public bodies, and enforce existing access to information frameworks. • In the use of digital surveillance technology based on personal data, prioritize privacy, transparency and public consultation and impose narrow limits on these programmes.

Table 1A *(continued)*

Area	Action points

Youth voice and sustainable public policy: rejuvenating urban democracy	• Avoid tokenistic engagement with youth, as many young people find the experience ineffective and unrewarding and are deterred from participation.
	
	• In order for cities and local governments to achieve sustained, effective youth engagement, ensure that:
	
	  o youth participation is nurtured through initiatives that provide opportunities for deliberation, civic learning and the co-design of public policy;
	
	  o young people's voices are institutionalized within civic administrations and embedded into each main policy area—for instance, through representation in policy directorates;
	
	  o youth participation is inclusive of those from poorer and other disadvantaged backgrounds, which requires reaching out to relevant civil society and youth activist groups.

Combating misinformation as a matter of urgency: an African perspective	• Rather than taking punitive measures, create enabling environments in which citizens are guaranteed access to information, media institutions are supported, and proactive and innovative approaches are adopted to utilize both traditional and new media to spread accurate and accessible information. • Prioritize teaching media literacy skills to children and youth still in school. • Consider engaging in partnerships with private organizations in order to enhance the provision of relevant resources and training, especially in contexts where government resources may be limited.