



Task Force 5
2030 Agenda and Development Cooperation

Policy brief

SDG16: AN ENABLER FOR ACCELERATED IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2030 AGENDA AMID COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

It is important that G20 leaders lend their powerful voices to acknowledge that fragility and violence, and the failure to invest in democracy, good governance and the rule of law endanger the realization of the entire 2030 Agenda and the recovery from COVID-19.

In this policy brief, DCAF, ECES, IDLO and ISPI will look at how the G20 can contribute to the realization of the SDG16 targets, as a gateway for the entire 2030 Agenda, by setting up an inclusive Global SDG16 Forum and related Global SDG16 Fund to close the SDG16 gap and accelerate peace, justice and sustainable development for all.



CHALLENGE

In the study “Pathways for Peace”, the World Bank and the UN reconfirmed that violence and conflict are the biggest obstacles for achieving sustainable development and implementing the 2030 Agenda. Violent conflict impedes the ability of countries to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as, for example, reducing poverty and hunger; improving public health, education and sanitation; developing sustainable industry and growth; and protecting the environment. Progress in implementing the Agenda, particularly in developing countries, is lagging behind the pace needed to deliver the Goals by 2030, and COVID-19 has further exposed and expanded social and economic inequalities. These inequalities put huge stress on realizing peaceful and just societies with strong and accountable institutions; they will increase real or perceived grievances in society which, in turn, will lead to increased fragility and potentially to violent conflicts.

Good governance, the rule of law, democracy and elections are crucial enablers of peace and security, human rights and sustainable development. Indeed, the 2030 Agenda specifically acknowledges this link, stating in its Preamble that “democracy, good governance and the rule of law as well as an enabling environment at national and international levels, are essential for sustainable development” (United Nations General Assembly, n.d.).

Achieving these goals is thus crucial to the entire 2030 Agenda, particularly keeping in mind the intrinsic link between peace and security and sustainable development. The United Nations and the World Bank have confirmed that 80% of the poorest people on the planet live in conditions of violence and conflict. Another study found approximately two-thirds of the world’s population have unmet justice needs, while global elections continue to score as “ambiguous” – that is, showing a certain degree of competition and participation but also significant irregularities, with the lowest values registered in conflict-torn countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East (Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project, n.d.). Further examples across the world have shown that a lack of good governance, rule of law and democracy, as well as failures by security providers to uphold these values, have all been a casualty of COVID-19. Racial and ethnic minorities, women and girls, and other vulnerable or marginalized populations have been particularly affected.

This situation has been exacerbated by the documented decreases in investment over recent years in democracy, good governance and rule of law, and more broadly, building the peaceful and inclusive societies and strong institutions envisaged in SDG16.



PROPOSAL

IMPLICATIONS FOR 2030 AGENDA

Concrete support for developing countries in implementing SDG16 is one of the best investments that can be made to promote peace and democracy, deliver justice and to achieve the entire 2030 Agenda. In particular, the good governance objectives envisaged in SDG16, including promoting the rule of law described in SDG Target 16.3, effective, transparent and accountable institutions described in Target 16.6, and responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making described in Target 16.7, are essential to drive progress towards all other goals, and reflect the values that are shared, prioritized and advanced by the G20. Enhanced rule of law, transparency, accountability, participation and representation of national and local security and justice institutions will strengthen economic prosperity, reduce inequalities and provide more equitable access to social services, not least greater access to the preventive and curative health services which are of such importance in halting and recovering from pandemics such as COVID-19.

GOOD GOVERNANCE TO BUILD BACK BETTER

As the world builds back from the COVID-19 pandemic, resources, especially for international development cooperation, will be scarcer. Thus, it is imperative that the financial resources available are implemented in the most efficient manner, and that traditional donors keep their sights focused on those in developing countries who will be worst affected by COVID-19 (Manservisi, 2020). By promoting values such as democracy, good governance and the rule of law, G20 members can assist those in developing countries in strengthening economic prosperity, reducing inequalities, and providing more equitable access to social services, and thus ensure that the world “builds back better” from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Democracy

Although it has facilitated global democratic backsliding, the COVID-19 pandemic has also opened new spaces for governments to address the structural participatory and representational issues that had contributed to the decline in the quality of global democracy for years, including in electoral processes. During the pandemic, electoral exclusion and mistrust, in particular, have added a layer of complexity to the successful relaunch of global democracies. The pandemic, in fact, has built upon the major frailties of democratic processes, mainly affecting the democratic rights of minority and fragile groups. At the same time, emergency-driven extraordinary governmental powers have allowed ruling state actors to restrict democratic rights and facilitated the mishandling of and interference in electoral processes, especially among hybrid and authoritarian regimes in post-conflict countries and transitional democracies. Devising a post-COVID-19 strategy that specifically targets these issues will contribute to building more peaceful, just and inclusive societies, as envisioned by SDG16.



In this context, it is important to develop strategies that take into account electoral political economy analyses¹ that assess the interaction of political and economic processes in society, the distribution of power and wealth between different groups and individuals, as well as the processes that create, sustain and transform those relationships over time.² These efforts should aim at ensuring comprehensive and sustainable electoral processes and removing barriers to inclusion and democratic participation of vulnerable people, through the implementation of long-term capacity development processes, distance learning, peer reviews and south-south and broader cooperation.³

In order to provide electoral support and specialized electoral advice to underrepresented groups, new tools will be needed, particularly ICT technologies, innovative tools for voter registration, civic education and the transmission of results and polling arrangements. Anti-hate speech and public campaigns to sensitize local communities against news manipulation, misinformation, improper use of social media and discrimination of marginalized social identities should be at the core of trust-building processes. In addition, risk mitigation actions should be put in place to prevent electoral conflict and potential violence. In this respect, coordination among international actors should establish conditions for holding credible elections and accepting democratic principles. If public health concerns require a postponement of elections, public authorities must adopt an inclusive approach, based on the engagement of all electoral stakeholders, and encourage temporary power-sharing agreements.

It is important to underline that the most crucial aspect of supporting an electoral process is the effective handling of the very complex and delicate set of interactions among a wide range of stakeholders. The focus of electoral assistance should thus remain on supporting local fora, such as panels of influential persons, or confidence and capacity-building dialogue initiatives, and early warning efforts and crisis management/mediation processes. These policy options will be essential to ensure inclusiveness and the meaningful participation of vulnerable groups as the world builds back from the COVID-19 pandemic. In turn, this will foster the democratic enabling environment for sustainable development to flourish, as advocated in the 2030 Agenda.

Good governance

Good governance is a key enabler for wider societal progress. Transparency ensures that information is freely available and accessible to those who will be affected by decisions and their implementation. A transparent security and justice sector also prevents corruption, as any misuse of financial or other resources will be accessible to the public, which will in turn increase the public's trust that the government is utilizing resources appropriately.

Accountability complements transparency and provides the public with the means to take action with the information made accessible through transparency (DCAF-ISSAT, n.d.). In security and justice provision, accountability protects the public from abuse and empowers people to seek redress and hold providers accountable. Accountability helps to build the confidence and legitimacy needed to overcome societal mistrust in countries that have suffered violence.



In addition, effectiveness ensures that service providers fulfil their roles and responsibilities, and do so efficiently. In security and justice provision, effectiveness ensures that these providers actually deliver on their security and justice duties. When coupled with transparency and accountability, these provisions provide strong foundations for the effective and fair delivery of services. Everyone, regardless of wealth, race, gender, beliefs, age or other differences should be given equal access to government services, including security and justice provisions.

Laws

Laws, policies and practices do not always respect these principles of good governance and fail to deliver equal access to all persons. A security and justice sector that functions in an atmosphere of impunity, without respect for principles of democratic oversight, the rule of law and human rights, cannot provide credible protection for individuals and communities (DCAF, 2015). Under such circumstances, security and justice institutions become prone to corruption and human rights abuses that endanger the population and sustainable development. Because of discrimination, security institutions fail to provide basic security for some parts of the population, for example, women or certain ethnic or religious groups. In such cases, standards of public law and order corrode and become an increasing drain on economic performance. Dysfunctions caused by poor security and justice provision can breed political instability, economic weakness, unchecked harassment or abuse against specific groups or communities, a lack of basic security at the individual and community level, high levels of crime and even violent conflict.

Thus it was imperative before COVID-19 and remains so as we build back better from COVID-19 to firmly embed the principles of good governance in all reform efforts. Transparency and accountability, and effectiveness are mutually reinforcing principles. To avoid misuse of the trillions of dollars spent building back from COVID-19, strong transparency and accountability mechanisms must be incorporated into government spending initiatives. In addition, laws that empower institutions to carry out their work effectively must be crafted, and when these laws, policies and/or institutions inevitably falter, these deficiencies will be quickly identified through the transparency components and rectified by the accountability mechanisms, ensuring more effective and efficient government provisions, and increasing trust from the public.

The rule of law

The rule of law offers a concrete pathway to peace, good governance, human rights, democracy and sustainable development; the link between these concepts is incontrovertible.

The rule of law is a principle of governance in which all persons and entities, including the state itself, are accountable to the law. It implies promoting enabling legal frameworks, strengthening governmental capacities to enforce commercial and economic laws, negotiating and implementing investment agreements and resolving disputes and supporting the economic empowerment of the most vulnerable. This work is particularly relevant and pressing in the context of the economic crisis unleashed by COVID-19, especially in least developed and developing countries.



There is an urgent need for continued adherence to the rule of law, amid a trend of rising authoritarianism and diminishing civic space, coupled with the tremendous damage in terms of human suffering wrought by COVID-19, particularly for those already living in conditions of inequality, insecurity and injustice. At a time where health issues are a global priority, the promotion of rule of law approaches can ensure greater access to health services, supporting pandemic preparedness, and strengthening capacity to prevent and manage non-communicable diseases. The crisis can also be an opportunity to confront gaping inequalities; to strengthen the constitutional and legal architecture of government institutions; and to reaffirm states' commitment to peaceful, just and inclusive societies, based on human rights and the rule of law.

The promotion of a people-centred justice and the rule of law, mitigating the impact of the crisis on justice systems and justice seekers, with a specific focus on women and girls and marginalized groups, responds to the critical need to support and invest in a culture of justice to protect the rights and dignity of people everywhere.

IMPLICATIONS FOR G20

As the G20 has acknowledged, its “comparative advantage lies in its convening power and its collective ability to adopt and support initiatives at the highest global level, including those that involve macroeconomic framework, and to create the global enabling environment” (G20, 2016). Investments by the G20 into SDG16 will go a long way to create the “global enabling environment” that democracy, good governance and the rule of law foster for sustainable development to occur. This has been frequently acknowledged by the G20, most notably in its *Action Plan on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. The proposal is a natural continuation of the principles described in the *Action Plan*, which seeks to promote “effective governance and accountable institutions which are essential to the eradication of poverty and hunger, promotion of sustainable development and achieving the SDGs in an integrated manner” (G20, 2016).

GLOBAL SDG16 FUND AND FORUM

In order to foster an environment of effective governance and accountable institutions, we would propose the establishment of a **global SDG16 Forum** tasked with identifying and catalysing concrete actions to help build effective and accountable governance institutions. Drawing on the G20's unique convening capacity to bring together the full inclusive range of actors – national governments; international and regional inter-governmental organizations; civil society, academia; philanthropic entities; and the private sector – the Forum would include representatives of governments, CSOs, businesses and experts of G20 states involved in governance and sustainable development.

We propose the establishment in parallel of a **global SDG16 Fund** dedicated to supporting the implementation of innovative and impactful measures that serve to strengthen the institutional foundation on which to build peaceful, just, and inclusive societies, and to expand the catalytic role of SDG16 in promoting conditions for sustainable development.



Both the Forum and the Fund should be conceived and operate so as to contribute coherence and mutual reinforcement in the work of the different Engagement Groups operating within the framework of the G20.

The G20 has in recent years established a whole range of Engagement Groups to inform and advance G20 programmes. Since 2010, the number of Engagement Groups has grown considerably, and the scope and participation in each Group has increased.⁴ While there are often commonalities among recommendations, there is still too much information to distil and concretely feed into the limited time at the G20. In 2020 each G20 Engagement Group shared innovations from its members, which provided as many as 376 specific recommendations to the Saudi Arabian Presidency. Ultimately, however, few of these recommendations fed directly into the G20 Leaders' Declaration.

As a main part of its function, the global SDG16 Forum would deliberately seek to promote synergies in the work of the Groups and to imbue a common purpose among them around the shared objectives of good governance and the rule of law underlying SDG16, and of advancing its catalytic role for the realization of the 2030 Agenda.

The establishment of a global SDG16 Fund would similarly help advance coherence and effectiveness within the network of Engagement Groups. Just as the Engagement Groups currently feed policy recommendations into the G20, so the global SDG16 Fund would evolve concrete ways to realize the commitment of previous G20 leaders' declarations. The Fund would act as an incubator for innovative ideas and experiences to promote an environment of good governance and the rule of law that can serve to advance concretely the mandates of the different Groups and the realization of G20 leaders' declarations.

G20 members would pledge an initial endowment of at least \$500m to the Fund. Annual disbursements could initially begin at \$100m and would increase as the Fund builds operational capacity. In addition, the G20 Presidency would designate Engagement Group leads each year to provide policy orientation to the Fund, aligning priorities to the theme of the G20 in any given year and functioning in a manner similar to that of a Board of Directors, with each Director representing the interests and purposes of their respective Engagement Group. A small permanent secretariat would be established to ensure continuity from year to year and assist Engagement Group leads in the management of the Fund. The location of the secretariat would be determined by the G20 members. However, if this policy brief were to be taken up by the G20 in 2021, Rome would be a logical site for the secretariat's headquarters. Such a secretariat would fit well with the numerous other international organizations working in the same sector in Rome.



NOTES

¹ ECES Electoral Political Economy Analysis (EPEA) helps to understand what drives political behaviour, how it shapes particular policies and programmes, with special focus on:

- The interests and incentives facing different groups in society and how these generate specific policy outcomes that may encourage or hinder development.
- The role that formal institutions and informal social, political, and cultural norms play in shaping human interaction and political and economic competition.
- The impact of values and ideas, including political ideologies, religion and cultural beliefs, on political behaviour and public policy. <https://www.eces.eu/en/posts/the-electoral-political-economy-analysis>.

² In the context of democratic processes, a wide range of stakeholders should be involved and engaged, including electoral assistance providers; independent election management bodies; government institutions (including security and intelligence services); election observers; civil society organizations; civic educators; religious networks and associations; and international agencies.

³ Distance learning methodologies such as the Innov-Elections concept have been developed by ECES in order to cope with the challenges posed by COVID-19 pandemic to the electoral assistance sector. In this framework, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation funded the Innov-Elections project, a capacity-building scheme that provides an effective response via innovative tools in 11 selected pilot African countries and in collaboration with the African regional and sub-regional organizations and secretariats of networks of Electoral Management Bodies <https://www.eces.eu/en/innovelections>.

⁴ There are at present eight Engagement Groups and: Business 20 (B20), Think 20 (T20), Women 20 (W20), Youth 20 (Y20), Labour 20 (L20), Urban 20 (U20), Civil 20 (C20), and Science 20 (S20). They draw on a wide range of actors and each represents a significant multi-stakeholder initiative.



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