UNDP input to the EGM
28 May 2021

COVID-19 has led to a decline in human development for the first time in three decades and the poorest and most marginalized populations are bearing the brunt of development declines and being the hardest hit by the pandemic – especially in crisis settings. Below are some key messages:

- First, we need to **adopt a 'systems-approach'** to addressing the multi-dimensional nature of development challenges, particularly in fragile contexts. In practice, this means our work must be informed by robust analysis of risk and understanding of the root causes of systemic inequalities.
  - We see that the pandemic has compounded vulnerabilities and exposed asymmetries and weaknesses in social, political and economic systems.
  - Social cohesion is being stretched thin during the pandemic as riots, political violence increased substantially. Food insecurity is on the rise, as is displacement. These are often interlinked challenges, which must be addressed in a holistic fashion.
  - Mismanagement and corruption, for example, which impedes delivery of services can also be a driver of instability and protest, especially when trust in public institutions are at a low.
  - To address some of these challenges, adopting an integrated approach, in partnership with local authorities, peacebuilders, civil society and justice actors, is necessary - not only to ensure that services continue to be delivered, but also to build community resilience and prevent conflict.
- Second, **inclusion and meaningful participation**, which lie at the heart of SDG 16, cannot be forgotten during times of crisis, let alone the current pandemic. Inclusive governance processes are a precondition to achieving equitable outcomes.
  - Understanding the **gendered implications** of the crisis is fundamental to making sure half the population is not left behind. The recently launched *COVID-19 Gender Response Tracker,* for example, shows significant gaps in women's participation in decision-making related to COVID-19 policies.
  - In addition, supporting, **young people as positive agents of change** is critical.
- Third, a **new social contract based on human rights** and equal opportunities for all is needed for the recovery. We remain concerned, however, that emergency regulations put in place during COVID-19 may lead to longer-term restrictions on human rights and civic space and undermine the rule of law. This is a particular concern in crisis contexts, where COVID-19 has shone a harsh light on already existing structural inequalities and intersectional discrimination in societies, protests during the pandemic surpassed heights set in 2019. Concerns related to privacy, freedoms of expression, corruption and police brutality have spilled onto the streets and, in some cases, turned violent.
- Fourth, **addressing the rise of information pollution** across the globe is fundamental to preventing the spread of misinformation related to COVID-19 but also as a means of preventing polarization and intolerance. In fragile and crisis contexts in particular, misinformation and disinformation can result in loss of livelihoods, lead to insecurity and, at worst, result in lost lives.
- Fifth, the pandemic has further emphasized the need for data and evidence-based policy making. SDG 16 is an area where there is a **significant data gap**. In a crisis such as this one, data on satisfaction with public services such as health or education, for example, can be critical to develop more nuanced policies. Significant investment is needed in improving the availability of high quality,

reliable and timely data, and disaggregated data, to better understand who is being left behind. UNDP is working with UNODC and OHCHR to currently support piloting the SDG 16 Survey which measures governance, discrimination, access to justice, violence, corruption and human trafficking.

- Finally, while the pandemic's impacts are being felt in all environments <u>– its destructive potential is most evident in crisis-affected contexts</u>, which tend to be more vulnerable to shocks from the crisis and less able to address its fallout. Even before the shock of COVID-19, most fragile contexts were not on track to meet most SDGs. In many contexts we now see significant reversals.

SDG 16 Interlinkages - How does Progress on SDG 16 affect progress on other SDGs?

'SDG 16 interlinkages' are here referred to as a situation when *Peace, Justice and Inclusion enable or hinder progress on the other goals or when other goals enable or hinder progress on Peace, Justice and Inclusion* – the focus of the present initiative being on the former. Below are some preliminary findings of research with the *Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) and German Institute for Development Policy (DIE).*

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

- Current **data scarcity** on SDG 16 indicators make the *statistical analysis* of SDG 16 interlinkages challenging and require the use of proxies. This **should improve** significantly as countries start using the newly developed methodologies to collect data on SDG 16 indicators.

- Despite this fact, it is possible to identify SDG 16 indicators **across countries** that have particularly strong statistical connections with other SDGs. In our study, these are: 16.b.1 on Discrimination, 16.10.2 on Access to Information, 16.5.2 on Absence of Bribery and 16.9.1 on Birth Registrations. While such correlations do not equal causality, they are a useful starting point for analysis which could yield policy guidance.

- Further, where **country** data exists, it is possible to deepen the statistical analysis by identifying SDG 16 indicators that improve or deteriorate together with other SDG indicators over time. While, again, results do not imply causality, they make it possible to investigate previous policy interventions in a specific country that can provide useful information for future policy making.

- Where the power of statistical analysis ends, the **review of relevant literature can provide additional information,** including on causality. Our *scoping literature review* is looking at effects of certain aspects of SDG 16 (Accountability, Transparency and Participation & Inclusion) on certain aspects of SDGs 1 and 10 (Social Protection, Poverty Reduction and Equal Opportunity). It finds that, for example, an increase in inclusion and participation has strong effects on social protection, through the access to basic services. We are still analysing these pathways in more detail and will share those at the HLPF.

- These preliminary results are **relevant from both a political and a practical perspective**: While it is often claimed that the effects of governance on socio-economic-environmental outcomes are hard to prove, our results show that there are indeed ways to measure such effects and we can find initial scientific evidence of them, across and within countries. This is also good news for national decision-makers who, with increasing data, will be able to demand and use such evidence to inform or reform policies.