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New World Frontiers is a publishing house that focuses on sustainable development around the intergovernmental process. It publishes papers and books that advance the global understanding of how sustainable development can bring about change.

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Foreword

"Our world is in peril — and paralyzed" … "global governance is stuck in time"….."Let us be determined to heal divisions and forge peace. Determined to realize the Sustainable Development Goals and leave no one behind. Determined to reform multilateralism for the 21st century and come together for the common good."

António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, address to the General Assembly, 19 September 2023

Oche Agbo, Meriem El Hilali, Sungjun Kim, Yvonne Mewengkang Andreea Mocanu, Ulrich Nicklas, David Banisar, Felix Dodds, Irena Zubcevic and Tanner Glenn

The Friends of Governance for Sustainable Development (The Friends Group) was originally established in 2010 to help Member States prepare for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20).

They were re-established during the Open Working Group for the Post-2015 Agenda in 2014. The Friends Group is coordinated by the governments of Germany, Morocco, Indonesia, Nigeria, Romania, and the Republic of Korea, the secretariat being provided by the Rob and Melani Walton Sustainability Solutions Service (RMWSSS) at Arizona State University and Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future. The Friends Group has tried to create an informal space for Member States to discuss governance-related issues.

The Friends Group has continued to host workshops on governance related issues on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the Paris Climate Agreement.

We recognise that the 2030 Agenda represents one of the most important sets of Global Goals that the international community has committed to. It is an unprecedented effort that embodies universal aspirations for achieving a more just, equitable, peaceful and sustainable future. It is an excellent example of successful multilateralism, supported by the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and as a major action plan to help deliver the Paris Climate Agreement.

This ambitious and unique exercise represents a paradigm shift in policymaking for sustainable development. It gives a roadmap by which the UN, governments and stakeholders can work together to address the most pressing global challenges. In this context, the rule of law, as well as effective, robust, participatory and accountable institutions are of the utmost importance to achieve the 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) and their 169 targets.

This is the eighth book by the Friends of the Governance for Sustainable Development. The chapters in this book are based on some of the presentations made at the workshop 'SDG 16 and its Interlinkages with other SDGs - Challenges and Opportunities.'

SDG 16 stands as a cornerstone in this integrated framework, at a time when "structural injustices, inequalities and emerging human rights challenges are putting peaceful and inclusive societies

further out of reach" (2023, SDG Report).

In the lead-up to High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) 2024, where SDG 16 will be reviewed for the penultimate time before 2030, it will be key to galvanize Member States and the international community into accelerated action on peace, justice and inclusion. The workshop had three objectives:

1. To emphasize the integral role of SDG 16 in the broader 2030 Agenda, highlighting interlinkages with other SDGs and its synergy with SDG 13 on Climate Action, which will also be reviewed at the 2024 HLPF.
2. To exchange successful strategies and policies that accelerate progress on SDG16 and have the potential to advance other interconnected SDGs.
3. To understand progress and challenges in achieving SDG 16, including looking at available data on SDG 16 indicators.

The workshop was organized in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme and hosted by the Permanent Mission of Romania to the United Nations in New York, focusing on providing an open space for Member States to discuss issues that they would be addressing later this year or next. Having the chance to hear what experts think is useful for their consideration.

We expect the present publication to be a useful input for the ongoing discussions about the institutional architecture for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In 2024, the Friends Group will continue to be a place for discussions of the institutional architecture for the 2030 Agenda's implementation, the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the Paris Climate Agreement and their follow-up and review.

We know that sustainable development will only become a reality if we have the enabling environment for it to happen. Good governance will be pivotal for implementing, reviewing and improving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We hope that this publication contributes to addressing the challenges we will be facing over the coming years to 2030.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

A4SD	Action for Sustainable Development
AAAA	Addis Ababa Action Agenda
APRM	African Peer Review Mechanism
AU	African Union
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CBDR	Common but Differentiated Responsibilities
CGD	Citizen-Generated Data
CIVICUS	World Alliance for Citizen Participation
CoD	Community of Democracies
CR	Country review
CSA	Country self-assessment
CSD	Commission on Sustainable Development
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
DCF	Development Cooperation Forum
EEAC	Environmental and Sustainable Development Advisory Councils
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FfD	Financing for Development
GSDR	Global Sustainable Development Report
HLPF	High Level Political Forum
IACSD	Interagency Committee on Sustainable Development
IDEA	Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
IAEG-SDG	Inter-agency Expert Group on SDG Indicators
IFI	International Financial Institutions
IFSD	Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development
IMF	International Money Fund
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
JPol	Johannesburg Plan of Implementation
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
LDC	Least Developed Country
MDB	Multi-Lateral Development Banks
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MDG-EIAG	Millennium Development Goals Expert Inter-Agency Group
MOI	Means of Implementation
MSP	Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships
NCSD	National Councils for Sustainable Development
NPEAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NPoAs	National Plans of Action
NSDS	National Sustainable Development Strategies
NSO	National Statistical Offices
ODA	Official Development Assistance
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

OI	Open Institute Kenya
OWG	Open Working Group
PMO	Prime Minister's Office
PrepCom	Preparatory Committee
PRI	United Nations Principles for Responsible Investment
PPP	Public Private Partnerships
QCPR	Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review
RNE	German Council for Sustainable Development
RTI	Right to Information
SAICM	Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management
SAP	Strategy and Action Plan
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SDplanNet	Sustainable Development Planning Network
SF	Stakeholder Forum
SHaSA	Strategy for the Harmonization of Statistics
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Resource-Based, With Time Based Deliverables
SSI	Sustainable Stock Exchanges
TAI	The Access Initiative
UN	United Nations
UNCAS	United Nations Convention Against Corruption
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UN ECLAC	United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDPI	United Nations Department of Public Information
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEA	United Nations Environment Assembly
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNESCO-IPDC	UNESCO International Programme for Development Communication
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNEP-FI	United Nations Environment Programme Finance Initiative
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WB	World Bank
WHO	World Health Organization
WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development
WTO	World Trade Organization

Jamil Ahmad is Director of Intergovernmental Affairs in the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) New York Office. He joined UNEP in 2008 as the Secretary for the Governing bodies in Nairobi. Prior to that he was a senior diplomat in the Foreign Service of Pakistan. He was lead negotiator of the Group of 77 & China for Climate Change under Pakistan's chairmanship in 2007 culminating at COP13 to UNFCCC in Bali in 2007.

Julia Kercher is the Team Leader of Research and Innovation at the UNDP Global Policy Centre for Governance. Her presentation focuses on "Connections that matter" – understanding SDG16 interlinkages. She was very involved in the birth of the 2030 Agenda, providing substantive and strategic advice to Member States during the drafting and negotiation process, and co-coordinating the global consultation that led to the Sustainable Development Goals.

David Le Blanc is the Chief of the Institutions for Sustainable Development Goals Branch at the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA). From 2006 to 2017, he was in the Division for Sustainable Development at UN-DESA. While there, he worked in support of the Commission on Sustainable Development, the Rio+20 conference, and the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

Mariana Neves is Governance Statistics Specialist at the UNDP Oslo Governance Centre. She previously worked for the National Statistics Office of Cabo Verde, where she coordinated Governance, Peace, and Security Statistics at the national, regional, and global levels. She represented her country in the negotiations and design of the Global Indicator Framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and targets for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Daniel Zavala Porras is Minister Counsellor at the Permanent Mission of Costa Rica to the United Nations. He has been at the mission since 2019 and prior to that Human Rights Officer in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship.

John Romano is Director of the Transparency, Accountability & Participation (TAP) Network. Prior to this, he was a Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future UN representative and worked as a Global Policy Fellow for the Natural Resources Defence Council.

Jan Gustav Strandenaes is Senior Adviser on Governance at Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future. Jan Gustav was one of the NGO Coordinators for the Commission on Sustainable Development from 2002-2012. More recently, he was appointed by the German Government to a peer group assessing its National Sustainability Strategy. Chaired by former PM of New Zealand and UNDP ED Helen Clark, our report was handed to Chancellor Merkel.

Preface

There are few other single Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that must be fully integrated into all the other Goals than SDG 16. Promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, delivering justice for all and building inclusive institutions is the *sine qua non* catalyst to indelibly accelerate the delivery of all the other Goals.

Promoting "peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development" is not new, it was reflected in the Rio Declaration in 1992 in Principle 26:

> *"Peace, development and environmental protection are interdependent and indivisible."*

In an insecure world SDG 16 is critical and the institutions that we build should as it says, "provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels."

We have crossed the halfway mark for delivering the Sustainable Development Goals and we are far off course on delivering them successfully, in a manner to arrest the poly-crises societies confront – from climate to energy to health and well-being and beyond. 2024 will experience the largest number of national elections that the world has ever seen. It will be up to these new governments to dramatic scale and accelerate efforts in their countries to deliver the SDGs and the Paris Climate Agreement.

Arizona State University is the highest ranked U.S. institution in 11 of the 17 SDGs. One of the University's main vehicles to rapidly scale sustainability solutions is the Rob & Melani Walton Sustainability Solutions Service. We are proud to strategically collaborate with Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future, the secretariat for the Friends of Governance for Sustainable Development, as well as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) over the last year.

The secretariat has hosted important workshops and produced two freely available books to drive thinking and action to scale sustainability solutions in capitals and beyond. We believe this second text on SDG 16 will help member states and stakeholders in their preparation for the 2024 High Level Political Forum and their continued work on SDG 16.

Prof. Dr. Michael Dorsey

Director & Chair, *Rob & Melani Walton Sustainability Solutions Service*

Chapter 1

Progress and Challenges in Achieving Sustainable Development Goal 16 During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond

Mariana Neves, Governance Statistics Specialist, UNDP Global Policy Centre for Governance

Measuring Global Progress Report on the Sustainable Development Goal 16 indicators – key findings

The "Global Progress Report on Sustainable Development Goal 16 Indicators: A Wake-up Call for Action on Peace, Justice and Inclusion" is a comprehensive report jointly produced by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). The report covers a wide range of topics related to the progress and challenges in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16), which aims to promote peaceful and inclusive societies, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels.

The report on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 indicators emphasizes the slow progress and challenges faced in promoting peaceful, just, and inclusive societies. It highlights the importance of data availability for informing policymaking and addressing the gaps in data availability, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and its socioeconomic impact. It also acknowledges the interconnectedness between addressing goal 16 and achieving the other SDGs, emphasizing the impact of violence, corruption, and lack of access to justice on poverty, inequality, and economic growth.

The report covers a wide range of indicators such as the representativeness of public institutions, satisfaction with public services, access to justice, bribery experiences, illicit financial flows, discrimination, and the independence of human rights institutions. It discusses the prevalence of corporal punishment for children, human trafficking, sexual violence, disparities in crime reporting rates between genders, unsentenced detainees in global prison populations, and the impact of setbacks in access to justice on economic development, emphasizing the urgent need for transformative action to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

Key findings on peaceful, just, and inclusive institutions include the following:

- **Violence is on the rise**: Intentional homicides peaked in 2021 and armed conflicts claimed the lives of nearly 17,000 civilians, marking a 53 per cent increase from the previous year.
- **Increase in child trafficking**: The percentage of detected child victims has risen from 28 per cent in 2014 to 35 per cent in 2021.
- **Access to justice remains limited**: Less than half the population report crimes to authorities and the number of detainees continues to grow, with a rising share of unsentenced detainees.

- **Corruption affects individuals and businesses**: Corruption is prevalent, with a higher prevalence in low- and middle-income countries.
- **Gender inequality**: Women remain underrepresented in senior decision-making roles, facing glass ceilings in public service and the judiciary.
- **Increased risks for human rights defenders and journalists**: Killings and enforced disappearances of defenders and journalists rose significantly in 2022.
- **Widespread discrimination**: One in six people has experienced discrimination in the last year, with women, persons with disabilities, and racial minorities disproportionately affected.

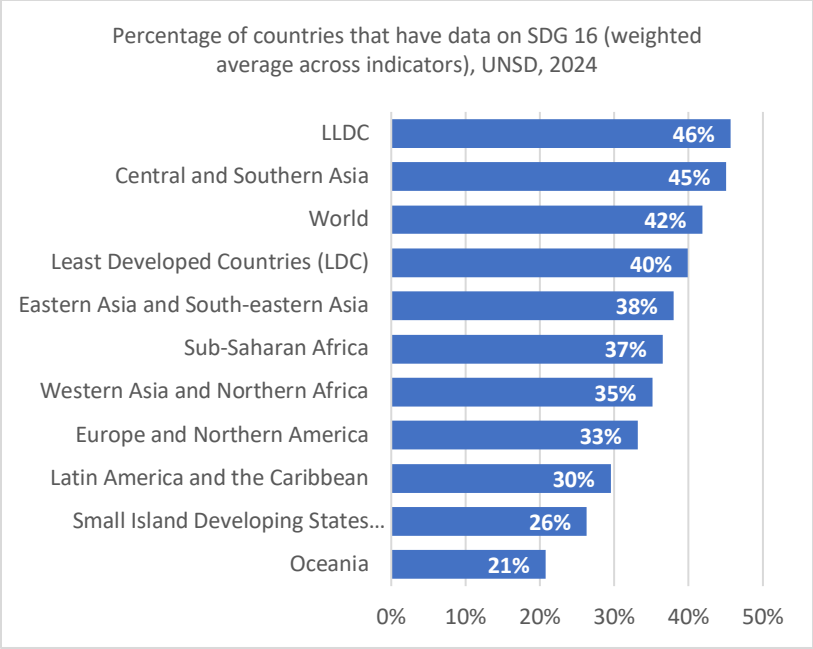
Despite these very concerning findings, it should also be highlighted that there has been progress on SDG 16, namely, improvement in public access to information, with more countries adopting access laws. The number of independent national human rights institutions is also increasing. It is also positive that data availability is steadily increasing.

The key policy implications of the report include the need to strengthen protective regulations, policies, and accountability mechanisms for human rights defenders, professionals who ensure public access to information, and those who face discrimination. There is also a need for comprehensive policy measures and accountability mechanisms to promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws worldwide, including better data collection on population groups that experience discrimination based on grounds prohibited by international human rights laws. Additionally, efforts should be made to broaden and strengthen developing countries' voices and participation in international economic decision-making, norm-setting, and global economic governance, and to invest in civil registration, vital statistics, and identity management systems.

In conclusion, the report emphasizes the urgency of accelerating transformative action to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It emphasizes the essential role of high-quality, timely, and disaggregated data on goal 16 in informing evidence-based choices and policy decisions. The report provides a comprehensive assessment of the progress, setbacks, and challenges in achieving the SDG 16 indicators, making a strong case for urgent action to address the identified issues and drive progress toward peaceful, just, and inclusive societies.

Governance as a new domain of official statistics – a turning point

The global progress report on Sustainable Development Goal 16 indicators is clear evidence that comparable and harmonized evidence on Sustainable Development Goal 16 is increasing. Considerable progress has been achieved since 2015, when the Global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provided a comprehensive framework but had a considerable number of Tier III indicators in the goal related to peaceful, just, and inclusive institutions. The 8th version[1] of the framework includes methodologies for all **SDG 16.** In 2023, it was also recognized by the statistical community through the United Nations Statistical Commission, which approved a new Classification of Statistical Activities that presented major developments, including the creation of Governance statistics *(…) aligned with the Handbook on Governance Statistics developed by the Praia Group and endorsed by the UN Statistical Commission in March 2020. The statistical areas in this domain follow the general structure agreed upon by the Praia Group.* A second significant change was the recognition of human rights as a crosscutting domain that *covers statistical activities on indicators and frameworks to monitor human rights (e.g., Human Rights-Based Approach to Data, Protocol of San Salvador indicators).*



The recognition is the result of global efforts, but all actors are working on SDG 16 to develop standards and to measure the indicators to inform the decision-making at global, regional, and national levels. A considerable number of standards and operations have been developed thanks to the statistical community comprised of a diverse range of actors, including national statistical systems, civil organizations, academia and international organizations. Some notable standards include the Handbook on Governance Statistics by the Praia Group[2], the SDG 16 Survey Initiative by UNDP, UNODC and OHCHR, the International Classification of Crimes for Statistical Purposes (ICCS) by UNODC, the Manual on Corruption Surveys by UNDP and UNODC, the Human Rights-Based Approach to Data by OHCHR, and

[1] A/RES/71/313, E/CN.3/2018/2, E/CN.3/2019/2, E/CN.3/2020/2, E/CN.3/2021/2, E/CN.3/2022/2, E/CN.3/2023/2 and E/CN.3/2024/4.

[2] The Praia Group on Governance Statistics (the Praia Group), the first and only city group led by an African country, was created in March 2015 at the forty-sixth session of the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC), out of the international recognition that governance statistics are a critical area of statistics that lack the maturity of other statistics and are underinvested in most parts of the world. The Praia Group was created to "contribute to establishing international standards and methods for the compilation of statistics on the major dimensions of governance".

several others[3]. All these are result of cooperation and consultation with several actors towards creating a common understanding of complex concepts that are not easily translatable to measuring standards.

The recognition of the new field, more than just classifying operations, serves as evidence of international consensus on the pressing need to produce statistics on non-discrimination and equality, participation, openness, access to and quality of justice, responsiveness, absence of corrupt, trust, safety and security. As of early 2024, the two first domains were being further developed by the Praia Group on Governance Statistics, which is expected to present the international standards to the United Nations Statistical Commission. Concurrently the statistical community continues to invest in accelerating the measuring of SDG 16 indicators that constitute the bare minimum required to make informed decision making on SDG 16, while the broader phenomena are being developed.

Because governance statistics are at an inflection point, and more high-quality and nationally sensitive standards are urgent, it's also pressing to identify some key accelerating factors to increase data coverage as well as the integration of statistics in decision-making, namely:

- Recognize that governance is a key part of development and cannot be resolved in one single agenda. However, we can create sound foundations during this agenda, including measuring progress.
- Partnerships are essential to bringing evidence to policymakers, and this should be considered at the data production and analysis levels so the evidence produced can be informative to a diverse audience.
- High-quality statistics require predictable and continuous investment so they can respond to demands. Although costly, poor data is more costly if it misrepresents reality and misleads decision-makers.

[3] For more information on the existing standards, please consult the Regional Training on Measuring SDG 16 hosted in the SDG 16 Hub.

Chapter 2

Non-Official Data for SDG Monitoring and Accountability

John Romano, Elena Marmo – TAP Network Secretariat

If the global community is to meet the ambition of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it is essential that the SDGs themselves are matched by an equally comprehensive and inclusive monitoring and accountability framework. While National Statistical Offices (NSOs) are the primary bodies responsible for monitoring SDG progress, data being produced by other actors can also play a crucial role in providing a robust and accurate picture of progress at all levels. Therefore, the Transparency, Accountability & Participation (TAP) Network urges the IAEG-SDG and NSOs to recognise the importance of 'non-official' data sources to effective monitoring and accountability.

As a broad international coalition of civil society organisation s (CSOs) working together to advance SDG16+ to promote peace, justice, and inclusive societies, and to help enhance accountability for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and SDGs, the TAP Network intimately understands the crucial role of CSOs in advancing the 2030 Agenda. Both in terms of catalysing action on the goals themselves and in monitoring their progress, the TAP Network mobilises hundreds of civil society organizations operating in every region of the world. TAP's work also reinforces the assertion that SDG16+ and accountability for the 2030 are inextricably linked, and that efforts to deliver on the SDGs require participatory and inclusive institutions that are accountable to the very people that the 2030 Agenda pledges will "leave no one behind."

With this in mind, the inclusion and participation of civil society does not stop at policy development and implementation. It is equally important that civil society organizations are included in the monitoring of progress, particularly given their acute awareness of realities "on the ground". A shift to including data generated by CSOs can generate a more accurate snapshot of progress (or lack thereof) at national and local levels.

The Role of Civil Society in the 2030 Agenda

Civil society has long been recognised as a partner in the development agenda. In the over 75 years since the UN was formed with the goals of promoting peace, development, and human rights, these roles have grown and evolved. As the UN Charter begins with 'We the Peoples of the United Nations', it is only fit that groups representing the interests of people worldwide are able to play a role in shaping the policies that impact them, while holding governments accountable to their commitments.

At the 1945 founding conference of the UN in San Francisco, 50 Member States adopted the UN Charter. While no official mandate for civil society participation in the conference existed before the UN Charter itself, records indicate that civil society actors were present within select

Member State delegations. Approximately 1,500 civil society representatives were accounted for, while the remaining 5,000 attendees came from government delegations, the press, and the secretariat.[1] As far back as the 1968 UN Tehran Human Rights Conference, governments called for ensuring "the informed participation of all citizens in the decision-making process affecting national development". The 1972 Stockholm Conference, which introduced the concept of sustainable development, called for governments and the UN to "provide equal possibilities for everybody, both by training and by ensuring access to relevant means and information, to influence their own environment by themselves". Agenda 21, following the 1992 Rio Conference, provided the structure for civil society to be widely engaged in the development process. The UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio (Rio+20) included civil society in the development of the SDGs and developed the Major Group and Other Stakeholders (MgoS) mechanism to facilitate civil society engagement with the 2030 Agenda at national, regional, and international levels. This mechanism, built upon the 1992 Rio Summit's 'Major Groups' mechanism, includes 21 different MGoS constituencies.[2]

Civil society plays a key role in the success of Agenda 2030 and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda as both a partner to governments and as observers and advocates holding the governments to account under the SDGs. CSOs work across all levels of the SDGs from local to national to international. Some act as direct implementers of projects providing essential services such as health care and education. Others act as monitors, identifying deforestation, or environmental hazards, or tracking expenditures. Local organisations represent the interest of their communities in crucial areas such as land and developments. Human rights groups train communities on their rights and represent individuals and communities harmed by governments actions or inactions and advocate for fair treatment. Many organisations of all sizes collect information and data on implementation and make that information available, providing an alternative view to government reporting. Civil society's role is especially important in the absence of government leadership in meeting many of the SDG targets.[3]

However, civil society faces many challenges in fully being able to effectively engage. Many governments do not see civil society as a full partner. Engagement is often tokenistic, with CSO "consulted" by government bodies, but without any real input in processes such as many Voluntary National Reviews. Most concerning has been the attacks on CSOs, especially those involved in environmental disputes, with hundreds of environmental and land defenders murdered every year and many more physically monitored, harassed and attacked with impunity,

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[1] Jolly, Richard, et al. (2019). *UN Ideas That Changed the World*, Indiana University Press, 2009. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/pace/detail.action?docID=455784.

[2] UN DESA. (2021). *Major Groups and Other Stakeholders: A Review and Evaluation of the Engagement in the 2020 and 2021 Sessions of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) and Areas to Strengthen Participation in 2022.* https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/29458MGoS_ReviewEvaluation_of_Engagement_2020202 1_HLPF.pdf

[3] SDG Accountability Handbook, p. 62- 63: the UN General Assembly has adopted a resolution that "recommends that national statistical systems explore ways to integrate new data sources into their systems to satisfy new data needs of the 2030 Agenda."

or legally pressured by governments and private bodies (SLAPPed), facing frivolous lawsuits designed to prevent them from protesting unjust actions and denial of their rights. These attacks highlight the importance of SDG16, with its targets on protecting fundamental rights, public participation and access to justice, and the necessity of implementing it fully.

What is "Non-Official Data"?

Non-official data comes from a range of sources outside of National Statistical Offices—including for example, the UN, other multilateral institutions, civil society organisations, research institutions, academia, the private sector and citizens themselves. It ranges from global surveys (e.g Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer and the Open Budget Survey) and indices (e.g. UNDP's Multidimensional Poverty Index) to personal, qualitative data generated by some of the world's most marginalised people at the local level (e.g. citizen-generated data project Map Kibera). It also includes data translated from publicly available (open) data sets to track a specific phenomenon/issue (e.g. Publish What You Fund's Aid Transparency Index and the SDG16 Data Initiative) and information collated through expert assessments (e.g. CIVICUS' annual State of Civil Society Report). All of these data sources play a critical role in measuring progress against the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda.

Box 1.1 - #SDG16Now Halfway to 2030 Report

In 2023, the TAP Network, along with its partners, published the flagship report of the #SDG16Now Campaign--a global civil society campaign to support accelerated action towards SDG16+ around peaceful, just and inclusive societies. The report, titled "Halfway to 2030 Report on SDG16+" provides a snapshot on progress towards fostering peaceful, just and inclusive societies at the critical halfway point to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.[4] Stocktaking efforts such as this, led by CSOs, are critical to outlining current challenges and gaps in implementation, to identify areas where further action and commitments are needed from governments and the international community.

The report, which reflects the analysis of hundreds of civil society, UN, and government stakeholders from across the world, substantiates these concerns that progress towards SDG16+ has been slow and uneven, and in many cases backsliding. Around 60 per cent of respondents from our global-constituent survey felt there was backsliding or little progress on SDG16+, both internationally and domestically. A majority felt that governments engaged with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) at (Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), but much less so outside of that process. The biggest challenges were funding, accountability and transparency, lack of data and lack of inclusivity with regards to marginalised communities.

All of these problems highlight the need for civil society to play a larger role in promoting SDG16. Civil society already plays a crucial role in SDG16 implementation; many of the best sources of information on progress of SDG16 are produced by civil

[4] #SDG16Now Campaign. (2023). *Halfway to 2030 Report on SDG16+*. https://sdg16now.org/report/

society and academic institutions, with citizen-generated data being especially important to show impact at the local level. Spotlight reporting highlights the gaps in the official reporting and should be more formally incorporated within official processes. Positively, more countries appear to be expanding out, formally including civil society and others in their reviews, even if somewhat superficially at present. At the same time, limits on civic space and growing authoritarianism are making it harder for civil society to operate effectively.

What the 2030 Agenda Says About "Non-Official Data"

While the 2030 Agenda contains positive language about creating an inclusive framework for action on sustainable development at all levels, there is insufficient appreciation of the vital role that non-official data can play in measuring and monitoring the SDGs. The 2030 Agenda does state that the SDG follow-up and review process will be rigorous, based on evidence, timely, reliable and disaggregated by different groups in society - all of which non-official data can make a crucial contribution to making a reality. Indeed, the 2030 Agenda states that, while the global review should be "*primarily based on national official data sources",* it will also *"promote transparent and accountable scaling-up of appropriate public-private cooperation to exploit the contribution to be made by a wide range of data, including earth observation and geo-spatial information, while ensuring national ownership in supporting and tracking progress.*" As such, there is a strong foundation for partnership between official and non-official data producers outlined by the 2030 Agenda.

The value of "Non-Official Data"

There is a compelling case for the creation of a pluralistic ecosystem of data production which includes the use of Non-Official Data. Not only can the inclusion of Non-Official Data support reporting and tracking progress on the SDGs, but it can also foster a greater culture of civil society inclusion and civic ownership of the SDGs while strengthening capacity of civil society and National Statistical Offices alike.

Filling Data Gaps and Capacity

A lack of accessible data or lack of diversity of data sources (i.e. from civil society or other non-official sources) presents a significant challenge to accountability for the SDGs.[5] Nonofficial data – including citizen-generated data – can complement official sources of data in filling in

[5] SDG16 Data Initiative (2023). *A "Bold New Agenda" is falling short: the perils and promises of SDG16.* https://www.sdg16.org/

gaps and offer a more complex and accurate picture of progress at all levels, especially when the quality, availability, or impartiality of official data is insufficient.[6]

It can ensure that people's perspectives and experiences – including of communities or population groups that may be overlooked by official data collection practices – are documented and taken into account in SDG processes. Beyond this, it can help take the burden off NSOs whilst ensuring that we're comprehensively measuring progress towards the SDGs, at all levels. In some cases, Non-Official Data has been collected for longer than NSOs have been tracking the SDGs, thus providing a better long-term picture of progress and change. Additionally, Non-Official Data offer wider insights than the specific targets. As such, especially where there is a large gap between the SDG targets and their indicators, Non-Official Data can provide a more holistic view, with deeper understanding.

Fulfilling commitments to multi-stakeholder partnerships: The Major Group and Other Stakeholders (MgoS) mechanism to facilitate civil society engagement with the 2030 Agenda at national, regional, and international levels provides a mandate and precedent for governments to engage other stakeholders across the 2030 Agenda. As the private sector is increasingly seen as a development partner and source of innovative financing for the SDGs, UN agencies and civil society groups are being called up for help to implement them. This multistakeholder spirit has not yet permeated the discourse surrounding measurement and monitoring.

Driving Innovation and building capacity: Given the lack of available data across many SDG indicators and targets, collaboration with CSOs can help to breed innovation in data collection methods and approaches. Innovation will be richest when it involves a diverse range of actors working together as part of an open and dynamic ecosystem of data production. Collaborative working between NSOs and non-official data producers can also help build one another's capacities, skills and shared practices, especially if secondments and fellowships are utilised.

Broad ownership and of data and accuracy: Country ownership is about much more than state ownership; Pluralistic data production will also mean data ownership across society. The use of non-official data from different sources can also help to build trust and credibility among citizens regarding the accuracy of official monitoring and reporting on SDG progress. Where official data on the SDGs is generated in a participatory manner, it can empower citizens and support a people-centered approach to accountability by ensuring that citizens themselves are engaged in reporting. In some contexts, non-official data can also help verify or contest official reporting from NSOs to help ensure impartiality and consistency of data, particularly in cases where these processes become politicised. This will play a key role in ensuring legitimacy of our collective data, and painting a truly accurate picture of progress towards the SDGs.

Accountability: Policymakers not only need data to make decisions, but civil society, opposition politicians, activists and the media need it to hold them to account. Non-official data offers a crucial check and balance that can help ensure that official data portrays the genuine reality within society. Especially when it comes to issues like justice, the rule of law or human rights, should official bodies be given the sole responsibility for monitoring state performance? Use of a

[6] SDG Accountability Handbook (2020). p. 62-63. https://www.sdgaccountability.org/report/

balanced range of sources could be important to build public trust and credibility in the SDGs and how they are being monitored.

Challenges and Opportunities to Tackle in Partnership

Despite the large amount and often high quality of non-official data, it is usually sector-specific and generated through a wide range of uncoordinated initiatives. Only a relatively small number of large international organizations and initiatives are currently able to effectively aggregate data generated in different local contexts. While the disaggregated nature of the data presents a wealth of knowledge at local and population-specific levels, utilising and aggregating the rich data generated by a diverse range of actors is a big challenge given the significant variance in focus, format and quality.

An inclusive follow-up and review process which includes clear mechanisms for governments and civil society stakeholders to work together in partnership would help increase the coherence, coordination and utility of this data for SDG monitoring. And if non-official data producers follow the same methodological standards as NSOs – and are open to similar levels of scrutiny – then there is every reason to view their data as equally valid. This requires capacity strengthening for CSOs as well, to align data focus and format.

As some governments still need convincing that civil society and citizen-generated data initiatives can provide data that is both useable and credible, it will likely be necessary to concretely demonstrate the value and viability of collaboratively using this data in practice. Many efforts at the global level have been undertaken in this regard. The aforementioned *Halfway to 2030 Report on SDG16+* and the SDG16 Data Initiative's annual reports both aim to highlight the value and potential of Non-Official Data sources, while also working to aggregate and synthesise data.

Beyond collection at the national level, if the indicators proposed for the IAEG-SDGs are to adequately measure progress against all SDG targets, non-official data must be leveraged for reporting processes at all levels. The ideal SDG monitoring system would therefore draw on multiple sources of data in a complementary way, leveraging the comparative advantages of each data type. NSOs and other data providers must work together in this regard.

There are many pathways forward for NSOs to work with CSOs in Non-Official Data source inclusion. Some recommendations include:

- NSOs need to engage with marginalized groups and youth for comprehensive data collection, ensuring representation of those often overlooked.
- Collaboration among various stakeholders including civil society, NSOs, NHRIs, academia, and the private sector is crucial for effective data collection.
- An increase of financial support and resources to empower CSOs and grassroots initiatives for data collection, analysis, and processing is essential.

- National Human Rights Institutions should utilize their mandate to facilitate participatory data collection methods to monitor SDGs.
- National legislative bodies and parliamentarians should create supplementary indicators to align the 2030 Agenda with local contexts, partnering with stakeholders and statistical bureaus for framework development.
- Enhancing basic data literacy by simplifying data for the public and intermediaries like media, social media users, and civil society groups, especially targeting youth, is vital.

Chapter 3

Positive Peace: A Key to Sustain Costa Rican Success Model

Daniel Zavala Porras, Minister Counselor of the Costa Rica Mission to the United Nations[1]

"Si vis pacem, para pacem"

A. Introduction

In terms of political stability, social cohesiveness, and economic advancement, Costa Rica is widely regarded as a model nation. Respect for the rule of law and peace, which the Supreme Court of Justice has declared to be a fundamental right, has made this little developing nation one of the most stable liberal democracies, besides a popular travel destination because of its stunning natural resources.

Despite these successes, a mix of internal flaws and external factors poses a threat to Costa Rica's capacity to maintain its current national trajectory.

The importance of investing in peace, upholding justice and the rule of law, and developing frameworks for inclusive, participatory, and enabling governance are all discussed in this paper as key drivers of sustainable development using the example of Costa Rica.

The paper begins by outlining the key components of Costa Rica's route to sustainable development and then addresses the difficulties the nation is currently facing. We emphasize the value of prevention within the SDG16+ framework in order to contain violence in all its forms by addressing its root causes and deal with social discontent to renew the social contract and sustain peace.

B. Investing in peace: the missing piece of sustainable development

The 2030 Agenda' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were negotiated in what is regarded as the "most consultative process in the history of the United Nations."[2] This helps to explain why the final product is a comprehensive, ambitious, and universal document. When comparing the

[1] Daniel Zavala Porras is a Career diplomat of the Costa Rican Foreign Service.

[2] Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights - OHCHR. (2015, July 27). Open letter by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights - Human Rights and the final draft of outcome document for the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Retrieved from https://www.sdg16hub.org/system/files/2018-05/Open%20Letter%20of%20UNHCHR%20for%20Human%20Rights.pdf

SDGs to the previous Millenium Development Goals (MDGs), one of the main differences was the realization that the MDGs did not address issues like access to justice, peace and conflict prevention, or good governance.

The creation of SDG 16 was fraught amongst political sensitivities regarding suitable terminology, the meaning of terms like democracy and good governance in each context, and lengthy discussions about the goal's ambiguity. Accordingly, difficulties in measuring and monitoring progress occurred during this process.[3] Nevertheless, reflecting on the MDGs made questions of governance and the development-security nexus apparent as crucial components for understanding the disparate advancement of these goals in numerous nations.

According to Brinkerhoff, democratic governance blends elements of a system of government where citizens have the authority to govern themselves with procedures and regulations which *"permit the incorporation of the views of a range of societal groups in the formulation of policies (policy pluralism), and the equitable delivery of public services; they also redefine the role for the state (less direct service provision, creation and maintenance of a "level playing field" for economic activity, and empowerment of nonstate actors). Finally, democratic governance recognizes and respects human rights and the rule of law.*"[4]

The Sustainable Development Goal 16, the "Peace Goal", outlined for the first time a global and consensus-building understanding of the essential role of "building effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels, promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, [providing] access to justice for all and [building] effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels"[5]. Since it places politics' role at the center of progress, this goal's scope transcends normative and technical considerations, to allow institutions and society to organize and provide for the realization of all human rights, peace, and democracy.

Goal 16 aims to significantly reduce violence and conflict-related deaths worldwide (15.1), protect human rights and fundamental freedoms (16.10), ensure that everyone has equal access to justice and the rule of law (16.3), increase accountability and transparency at all levels (16.6), and broaden and deepen meaningful public participation in decision-making (16.7). It has been acknowledged that SDG16 will propel the achievement of the other 16 goals.

Thus, it should not be surprising that human rights are intimately related to 18 of its 23 global indicators.[6] Moreover, 36 targets were identified in the 2030 Agenda as strongly related to the

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[3] Cling, J., Razafindrakoto, M., & Roubaud, F. (2018). *SDG 16 on governance and its measurement: Africa in the lead*. Working Papers DT/2018/02. DIAL (Développement, Institutions et Mondialisation).

[4] Brinkerhoff, D. W. (2000). "*Democratic Governance and Sectoral Policy Reform: Tracing Linkages and Exploring Synergies*". World Development, 28(4), 602.

[5] United Nations General Assembly. (2015). *Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (A/RES/70/1). https://undocs.org/A/RES/70/1.

[6] Khoo, Yin Hooi. (2021). Unlocking the paradox between SDG16 and democratic governance in Malaysia. In A. Mahadi & N. Zhafri (Eds.), *Making SDGs matter: Leaving no one behind* (pp. 178). Kuala Lumpur: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia.

values of justice, inclusion, and peace, of which only a third were addressed by Goal 16. The SDG16+ framework was created with consideration for how interwoven and indivisible it is with other SDGs, as we will see in the parts that follow as we look at Costa Rica's circumstances.[7]

The Goal's connection to peace and security in both conflict and non-conflict environments is a crucial component. In fact, it is commonly known that increased levels of violence and conflict have negative effects on economic development. These effects include impairing the macroeconomic environment and having an adverse effect on life expectancy, poverty, access to education, among other things. IEP estimates that in 2017, the cost of violence to the world economy was close to US$14.8 trillion (PPP), or 12.4% of the world's gross domestic product[8]. It is estimated that over 80% of the world's extremely poor will reside in nations plagued by violence and conflict by 2030.[9]

While the number and intensity of violent disputes have decreased since 1946[10], other forms of violence are increasing. Homicides linked to organized crime killed nearly as many people between 2015 and 2021 as armed conflicts. According to UNODC figures, the global burden of homicide in 2022 was twice as large as the weight of conflict deaths[11]. Nowadays, criminality is as lethal as military warfare.

A fast-changing global backdrop creates threats that cross national borders and add to the complexity of more protracted warfare involving non-state groups as well as regional and international entities[12]. For example, Latin America and the Caribbean have the world's highest rates of homicide and violent crime, albeit not experiencing any inter-state conflict, but with urban gang violence and drug-related crime becoming commonplace.

Violence has become the primary impediment to reaching the SDGs.[13] However, the underlying causes are the continuation of exclusionary and inequitable systems. Indeed, research has shown that perceptions of injustice and cross-group inequities are among the most powerful motivators for violence[14]. A group may become mobilized to violence for a variety of reasons, including feelings, collective memories, dissatisfaction with unfulfilled expectations, and a narrative that incites violence, which occurs when an enraged group blames others or the state for its perceived economic, political, or social marginalization[15].

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[7] Center on International Cooperation. (2019). *Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies The Roadmap For Peaceful, Just And Inclusive Societies – A Call to Action to Change our World*. New York.
[8] Institute for Economics & Peace. (2019). *SDG16+ Progress Report: 2019 A Comprehensive Global Audit of Progress on Available SDG 16 Indicators* (p. 6).
[9] Global Alliance for Reporting on Progress on Peace, Justice and Inclusive Societies (2019), "*Enabling the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda Through SDG 16+: Anchoring Peace, Justice and Inclusion*" (p. 37).
[10] https://ourworldindata.org/war-and-peace.
[11] UNODC. (2023). *Global Study on Homicide.*
[12] United Nations & World Bank (2018) *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
[13] Global Alliance, 2019, p. 37,
[14] United Nations & World Bank, 2018.
[15] Ibid.

These realities call into question the notion that simply promoting growth and alleviating poverty will lead to peace. Data demonstrate that every country, industrialized or developing, is today at risk of violence and social unrest as governments and societies grapple with chronic disparities and divisions. Emerging research supports the shift away from traditional macroeconomic and siloed thinking and calls for more efforts to focus on reducing the occurrence and escalation of violence.

Peace is more than just the absence of violence, and development does not happen in a vacuum; it requires a favorable environment that serves the needs of the people, as well as systems in place to address and eliminate complaints and resolve lingering issues without resorting to violence. The best way to keep societies from falling into crisis, including but not limited to conflict, is to build resilience through long-term investments in access to justice, inclusive institutions, and risk-informed strategies that prevent the social fabric from breaking down.

In this sense, we adopt the concept of Positive Peace[16], which, from a political standpoint, emphasizes the importance of actively providing the essential conditions for peaceful conflict resolution. Positive Peace is the motto for implementing the SDG16+ framework in a way that encompasses development, human rights and violence prevention. The associated targets and indicators address a wide range of democratic governance issues, including reducing violence and corruption, strengthening institutions at all levels, promoting the rule of law, upholding human rights, protecting social justice, and educating for a culture of peace and nonviolence.

In the following parts, we will look at the case of Costa Rica, its trajectory, current issues, and the efforts taken by the government to address them, before articulating solutions within the Positive Peace framework.

Since wars originate in men's brains, how do we develop peace in their minds?

C. Costa Rica: A model nation under pressure?

Costa Rica has built its reputation as a success story, a country of peace that has maintained stable democratic governance since 1949. Respect for peace, recognized as a fundamental right by the Supreme Court of Justice[17], has helped this small country to be listed among the most consolidated liberal democracies.[18] More than 70 years ago, Costa Rica emerged from a civil war as one of the

[16] Institute for Economics & Peace, 2019, p. 30

[17] Ruling 2013-9122 of 11:00 a.m. on July 5, 2013, through which the Chamber considered the existence of a true fundamental right to peace, both in its positive aspect (building peace), and in its negative aspect (maintain peace).

[18] Nord, Marina, Martin Lundstedt, Fabio Angiolillo, Cecilia Borella, Lisa Gastaldi, Ana Good God, Natalia Natsika y Staffan I. Lindberg. (2024). *Informe sobre la democracia 2024: La democracia gana y pierde en las urnas*. Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile: Instituto de Ciencia Política / Varieties of Democracy Institute (V-Dem Institute).

few countries to disband its military and redirect national resources to education, health, social welfare and the environment.

Furthermore, Costa Rica has strived for the continuous consolidation of its political and legal systems, including through the support and promotion of a dynamic civil society, and the creation of an independent and autonomous Electoral Supreme Court, which has supervised the holding of free and transparent elections and ensured 18 peaceful and continuous transitions of power since 1953, as well as the provision of participatory and free judicial and administrative mechanisms for access to the remedies and redress associated with justice.

Costa Rica has established practices in foreign affairs to mirror its national policies, particularly the 1997 law on peaceful conflict resolution, which establishes every person's entitlement to an adequate education for peace. Costa Rica has been the host country of the University for Peace since 1980. The country has long promoted dialogue, mediation, and peacebuilding in international disputes. Costa Rica's international relations policy is guided by the 1983 Declaration of Perpetual, Active, and Unarmed Neutrality, which seeks to promote peace, justice, solidarity, and collaboration with all nations.

To comprehend Costa Rica’s current position and tradition, it is important to consider what distinguished this Central American country from other countries in the region. Indeed, the army’s abolishment in 1948 was the culmination of a lengthy process of long decline and loss of protagonist military, in a country where cohesion was valued more highly than coercion.[19]

Voting rights evolved as an important weapon for political legitimacy in the twentieth century, and they became the preferred method for conflict settlement. The violation of electoral competition norms served as a pretext and justification for the 1948 Civil War, Costa Rica's most deadly military conflict in history. And, in the second part of the century, Costa Rica saw a significant expansion of its welfare policies in education and health, as well as in other public amenities such as electricity and clean drinking water. These policies clearly contributed to the legitimacy and consolidation of the State's presence and political rule throughout the territory, but they also served to address the needs and desires of the population.

State investments that responded to the population's interests, in addition to the equitable distribution of economic benefits across different sectors of society, created a sense of common destiny between the ruling and lower classes, which was supported by a political culture that

[19] Vogt, M. (2019). Historic account of Costa Rican development: The creation of an identity. In M. Vogt (Ed.), *Variance in Approach Toward A ‘Sustainable’ Coffee Industry in Costa Rica: Perspectives from Within; Lessons and Insights* (pp. 13-32). Ubiquity Press

permeated almost every aspect of life.[20] The State was recognized as a legitimate entity capable of resolving issues and promoting peaceful cooperation within society.

Costa Rica now has a literacy rate of 98 percent among people aged 15 and up, as well as universal primary education. 99.98 percent of its electricity is generated from renewable sources, demonstrating the country's acknowledged leadership in environmental conservation. More recently, it has developed agreements to protect the oceans, which account for around 30% of its area.[21]

The country recovered relatively quickly from the economic consequences of pandemic policies, growing 4.6% in 2022 and 5.1% in 2023, one of the highest rates among OECD countries. The country has also achieved gender equality in education and 47.4% political participation for women, among other indicators that demonstrate progress toward the SDGs, such as a strong governance structure that the country is anticipated to report on in its third Voluntary National Report in July 2024.

Despite these qualities, Costa Rica's political stability and social fabric face considerable challenges. Poverty rates have remained stable since the turn of the century[22], and there has been a significant decline in public safety and peaceful relations, not only across segments of society but also within Costa Rican homes. According to data analysis, victims and perpetrators are increasingly identified as young people who lack access to adequate opportunities, excellent education, and jobs, as well as the ability to meet basic necessities.[23]

Costa Rica has seen income disparity expand to unprecedented levels in its history, and today, the country stands out among the countries with more inequality in the distribution of wealth on the continent and among OECD countries.[24] To meet debt obligations, successive governments have had to implement fiscal balance and spending containment measures, which are beginning to jeopardize the country's compliance with constitutional and legal commitments to social policy.[25]

Inequalities are linked to failure to maintain a cohesive and democratic society, as increasing pay disparity is associated with decreasing citizen engagement in election processes. And citizen electoral engagement is crucial in every democracy. If huge sectors of the electorate do not vote, the political mandate of elected officials erodes, undermining not just their legitimacy in implementing public policy, but also the bonds that keep voters trusting their institutions.

[20] Ibid.
[21] Naciones Unidas, (2023). *Reporte de avance 2023. Marco de cooperación de las Naciones Unidas para el desarrollo sostenible 2023-2027: Cerrando brechas para una Costa Rica sostenible e inclusiva.*
[22] Consejo Nacional de Rectores. (2023). *Informe Estado de la Nación*; San José, C.R. no. 29-2023.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.

Finally, Costa Rica is not isolated from the rest of the region. In recent years, transnational drug cartels have penetrated Latin America's borders, increasing crime, death, and insecurity. Almost every poll in the country suggests that Costa Ricans' top concerns are insecurity and criminality.

According to University of Costa Rica research for September 2023, 27.8 percent of the population agrees with that assertion.[26] And, according to official data, the intentional homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants was 11.66 from 2015 to 2019, exceeding by nearly two average units the threshold of 10 intentional homicides per 100,000 people, which the World Health Organization considers a critical point for an epidemic.[27] Human trafficking, particularly sexual and illicit organ trafficking, has an impact on Costa Rica's human security paradigm. Costa Rica's challenge is to maintain robust public security while slowing the increase in homicide rates.

These chronic and rising difficulties represent major dangers to social cohesiveness, the social agreement between state institutions and their citizens, and public trust in the political system's ability and efficacy to meet people's expectations. Citizen unrest, the spread of false news, and socioeconomic inequalities, on the other hand, provide the ideal breeding ground for a decline in popular support for the system, its values, and institutions, as well as rising levels of social, political, and economic tension, which can eventually lead to democratic setbacks.

The international environment in which democracy operates has become more complex since the turn of the century. The limitations of democracy are not unique to Costa Rica. Around the world, the foundations of this political model are crumbling. Democracy is under serious assault, even in the most industrialized nations. However, as surveys have demonstrated in various nations, people continue to believe in the capacity of democracy to deliver for the people.[28]

The question is thus not whether "you can eat democracy" or not[29], but whether existing institutions and governance models can enable people to claim their rights, share equitably the benefits of growth and economic progress, and address basic needs while receiving fair and non-discriminatory treatment. Reduced inequality and exclusion benefit all members of society, not just the most vulnerable—more equal countries have better sustained growth rates and performance on health and education goals.

All SDG16+ principles, such as human rights, justice, the rule of law, and good governance, are fundamental components of sustainable development because they are regarded as necessary for establishing an environment for any government to fulfill the goals of the 2030 Agenda.

[26] Ibid.
[27] https://ods.cr/es/tendencia-cumplimiento-objetivo-16
[28] Open Society Foundations. (2021). *Open Society Barometer. Can democracy deliver?* https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/publications/open-society-barometer-can-democracy-deliver
[29] Ibid.

According to the Positive Peace maxim, reconciliation and dialogue strategies are required by societies other than those that are actively engaged in conflict. Every society must ensure ongoing and active interventions in the areas of consensus building, political settlements, and conflict prevention. Not only is it shown that prevention is less expensive than dealing with the consequences of violence, but investing in peace also helps to build the cohesion of our society for current and future generations.

D. Translating Positive peace into action

Costa Rica, a long-standing liberal democracy, and similar examples in other locations raise questions about the types of societies we have fostered and the types of societies we want.

The challenge ahead of us necessitates a special emphasis on SDG16+ and its thundering demand to build peaceful, just, and inclusive societies. Today, more than ever, this ambition, its goals, and their numerous implications for the overall sustainable development agenda must serve as the foundation and framework for the revival of democratic institutions, the delivery of a positive story, and cohesiveness. Today, we have more knowledge and resources than ever before to address the core causes of violence.

The implementation of the Positive Framework we suggest takes "vertical incorporation" into account, with organizations with a clear mission and efficient means for answering popular requests. Similarly, "horizontal incorporation" is required to recreate the feeling of community and destiny that can bind societies together. This policy clearly necessitates a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, in which everyone contributes equitably and the cost is not borne disproportionately by those who can least afford it.

Regardless of the issues it encounters, Costa Rica works hard to overcome them through good practices that help to accomplish SDG16+ and the Positive Peace Framework.

First, for more than a decade, the National Commission for the Improvement of the Administration of Justice of the Judiciary Branch has implemented an initiative to promote the administration of justice in conjunction with citizen participation, with the goal of improving access to and application of justice by involving communities. The National Service of Judicial Facilitators recruits volunteers from local communities to serve as information replicators, educating and guiding neighbors on how to assert their rights when they are violated.

This vast group of about 500 volunteers works in rural communities under vulnerable conditions. The figure of the facilitator contributes to the protection of the right to justice by serving as a

communication bridge and multiplier of information about judicial procedures and services that are free and widely available in communities. This program has helped thousands of individuals.[30]

Second, in 2019, Costa Rica passed two amendments to the Law on Weapons and Explosives that addressed a gap in the use of weapons, such as illegal carrying and incorporating a gender perspective into their management. Law 9682 increased penalties for illegal weapon carrying, prohibited the acquisition of ammunition other than that of a legally registered weapon, and prohibited long and short automatic weapons that can fire multiple projectiles with a single action of the trigger or have been modified to do so.

Law 9692, on the other hand, requires authorities to intervene in domestic violence cases, either ex officio or when requested by victims or third parties, and to seize weapons and objects used to intimidate or attack, as well as any other weapons in the aggressor's possession or registered in his name.

Third, in March 2024, Costa Rica became the first Latin American country to develop a National Strategy against Hate Speech and Discrimination in partnership with the United Nations.[31] The Strategy outlines areas of action for the government and its institutions to address hate speech, as well as a structure for collaborative action with specified deliverables. Its goal is clearly preventive, and its axes are the recognition, guarantee, and respect of human rights; education, culture of peace; access to research and effective data usage; and the assurance of justice and non-impunity.

This is a necessary response to the proliferation of these types of discourses, exponentiated by social media, which according to different studies are directly linked with disinformation and polarization. It constitutes a direct threat to democracy to the extent that it contaminates the public information space and does not allow the deliberation process of citizens.[32]

Finally, while states are obliged and obligated to respond to these difficulties, civic space is a critical component of any policy or strategy put in place. According to UNDP, the "dynamics of legitimacy must be built through open decision processes, renewed agreements, and effective results, changing the way in which citizens experience their relationship with the state"[33], pointing out to the need to enhance and actively promote citizen participation in the decisions that affect their lives.

Civic space is declining in many places throughout the world. Civil society organizations claim an increasing number of instances in which legislative and political impediments suppress and damage civil society. Furthermore, violations of the safety of people who acquire and report

[30] https://facilitadores.poder-judicial.go.cr/index.php/que-es-el-snfj
[31] https://www.ungeneva.org/es/news-media/news/2023/09/85629/en-alianza-con-la-onu-costa-rica-disenara-la-primera-estrategia-de
[32] López López, P. C., Mila Maldonado, A., & Ribeiro, V. (2023). La desinformación en las democracias de América Latina y de la península ibérica: De las redes sociales a la inteligencia artificial (2015-2022).
[33] PNUD (2021), *Informe América Latina y el Caribe: Gobernanza efectiva más allá de la recuperación.*

information to the public, particularly journalists, media workers, and human rights campaigners, jeopardize the preservation of free speech.

Responsive, inclusive, participative, and representative decision-making can help public institutions gain legitimacy and implement policies that serve the needs and rights of all people. Establishing institutions that prioritize effectiveness as a management guide, participation as a method of organization, and accountability as a permanent obligation of governance is the cornerstone for building new models of democracy. But democracy will only be strengthened with more democracy.

E. Conclusion

Violence and instability in all its forms are on the rise around the world, while trust and solidarity between and within countries have reached an all-time low as inequities continue to rise.

At a time when violence appears to be the default mode of conflict resolution, the Costa Rican case, with its strengths and flaws, serves as a good laboratory for the need for social contracts that are tailored to current and emerging challenges, through transparent and accountable economic and social institutions; clear investments in preventive services, education, and employment opportunities that are inclusive of all, without discrimination.

The inclusion of peace, justice, equality, and inclusion in the 2030 Agenda was a groundbreaking achievement, not to be neglected. SDG16+ and Positive Peace frameworks offer actionable approaches to, and solutions for, progress not only on these fields, but across the SDGs. We cannot reduce poverty, address the impacts of climate change, or achieve gender equality without these elements.

We have the data and solutions to attain these goals. What we need is political will and commitment to heal society and turmoil by effectively and proactively addressing their issues. There is no one-size-fits-all solution, but governments and other actors are indisputably compelled to address the foundations of power in societies, particularly those recovering from crises and facing fundamental concerns of legitimacy and accountability.

In other words, the measures within this framework aim to address both trust issues, political stability, and overall institutional effectiveness. It does serve the objective of establishing the groundwork for a new social contract. Only through such efforts will we be able to restore confidence among states and reconstruct the social contract between people and the national and international institutions tasked with serving them.

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Chapter 4

SDG 16 Interlinkages: How does progress on SDG 16 (or lack thereof) affect the achievement of other SDGs?

Julia Kercher, Team Lead Governance research and Innovation, UNDP Global Policy Centre for Governance[1]

This chapter provides an introduction to UNDP's work on interlinkages of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16, specifically its interplay with SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and SDG 14 (Life Below Water).

Background: Why did we embark on this SDG research?

In adopting the 2030 Agenda (UNGA, 2015), countries acknowledged the integrated nature and indivisibility of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs are characterized by complex interlinkages across economic, social and environmental targets. Understanding these interactions is critical to ensure successful implementation, especially to foster policy coherence, maximize synergies and minimize trade-offs between the goals and targets. Since the adoption of the SDGs, a broad range of studies have developed and applied different methods to evaluate interlinkages between the SDGs.

While SDG 16 in particular is often described as an instrumental or 'cross-cutting' goal that can act as an enabler in achieving other goals, studies on SDG interlinkages have, somewhat paradoxically, either excluded or provided limited coverage of SDG 16. Against this background, UNDP's Global Policy Centre for Governance (formerly, the Oslo Governance Centre) and the German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS, formerly the German Development Institute) decided to contribute to filling this knowledge gap and developed an **approach to reviewing existing research on the effect that progress on SDG 16 (or lack thereof) has on other SDGs**.

An initial study focused on the interlinkages between SDG 16 and SDG 1 and 10. A second report addressed the connection between SDG 16 and SDG 14, and a third report on effects of SDG 16 progress on SDG 13 (climate change) will be launched at the UN High Level Political Forum (HLPF) in July 2024 where both goals are under thematic review.

Methodology: How did we go about it?

The UNDP/IDOS research team chose to use the methodology of a systematic literature review, a method that allows both capturing large amounts of information and choosing a manageable focus. While many other assessments of interlinkages between the SDGs rely on the evaluation

[1] With many thanks to Atle Sunde for his support in writing this chapter.

of SDG target-to-target interlinkages, a novelty of the UNDP/IDOS approach is the clustering of issues, namely those covered by SDG 16 ('entry clusters') and those covered by the other goals ('impact clusters'). This choice was made to manage the spread of related issues across several targets (e.g. different aspects of integrity and corruption are reflected across several SDG 16 targets) and to make results easier to visualize and grasp. In the first two studies, prioritized SDG 16 issues were clustered under three principles that represent qualities of governance institutions – accountability, transparency and inclusion. The rationale for clustering issues on the impact side was developed with experts in those fields. For each cluster, query terms were identified to allow for a web of science query.

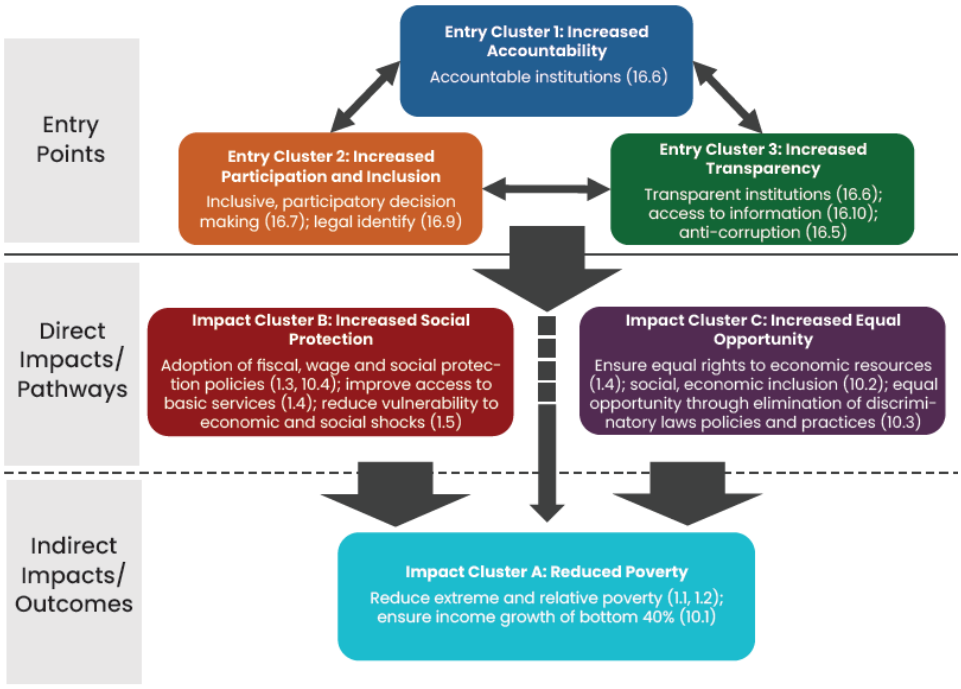


Figure 1: SDG 16 entry and SDG 1 and 10 impact clusters

Source: UNDP / IDOS (2022), Connections that Matter: How the Quality of Governance Institutions may be the Booster Shot we need to reduce Poverty and Inequality

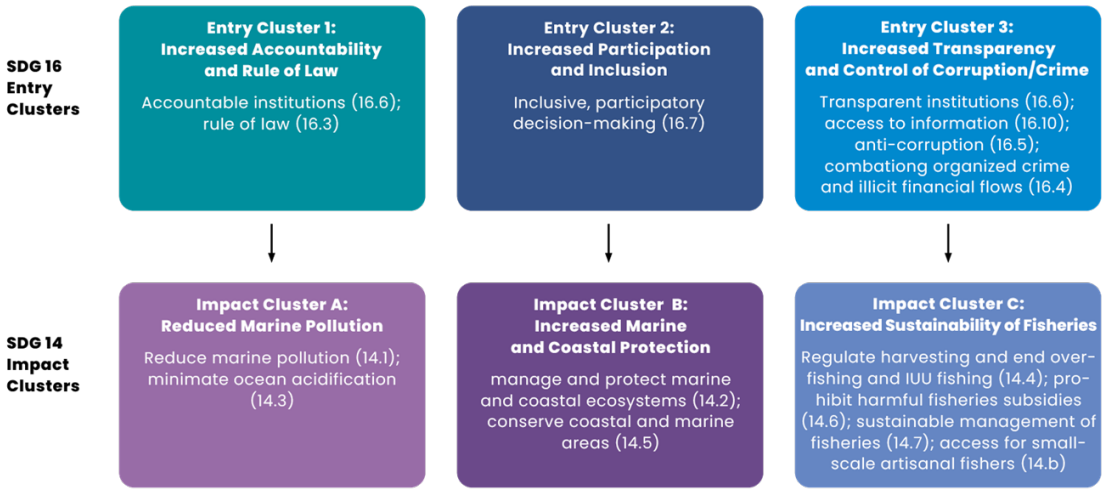


Figure 2: SDG 16 entry and SDG 14 impact clusters

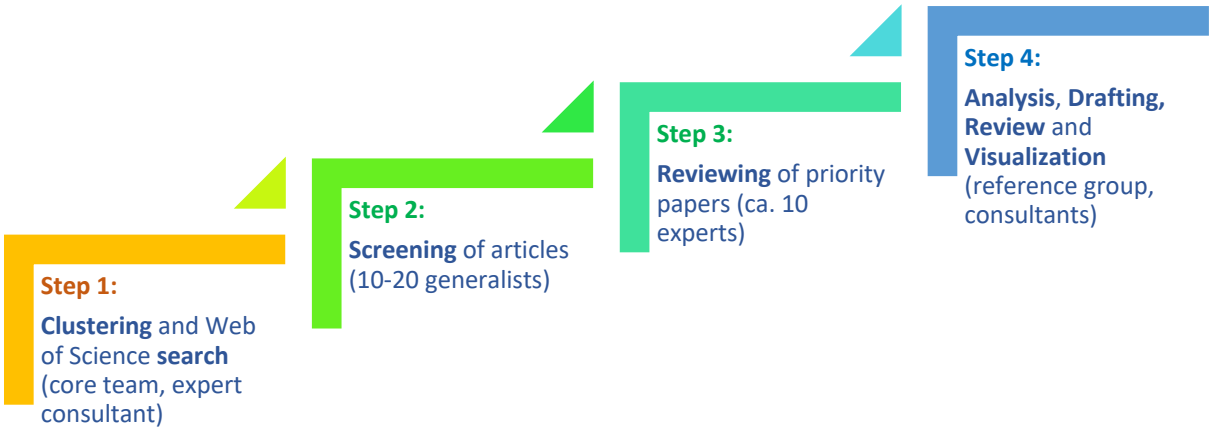
Source: UNDP / IDOS (2023), Connections That Matter: How does the quality of governance institutions help protect our Ocean?

Following this approach, for each study, the research team identified and screened 300-500 scholarly articles published since 2015, the year when the SDGs were adopted. Out of those, between 60 and 80 quantitative and qualitative studies were assessed as most relevant and were evaluated in depth by a team of expert researchers using evaluation to classify interlinkages from an entry cluster to an impact cluster as either positive (synergy/enabling), negative (trade-off/constraining), neutral (no impact) or inconclusive (mixed impact or unclear).

The papers reviewed covered between one and over 150 countries from all regions.

To provide methodological feedback and interpret the results, the research team convened a Reference Group for each study with experts from academia, civil society and the UN.

In summary, the research process includes four main steps and takes a minimum of six months.



Source: Author's own elaboration

Discussion: What did we find?

Overall, our findings indicate that **investing in SDG 16 can indeed enhance the effectiveness of interventions aimed at achieving SDGs 1, 10, and 14**.

In the study on SDG 16 effects on SDG 1 and 10, as the alluvial diagram below shows, enabling interlinkages were identified between all three entry and impact clusters, though the evidence was strongest for enabling effects of "Increased Transparency" and "Increased Participation and Inclusion" on "Reduced Poverty". The majority of these were associated with the enabling effects of increased accountability, anti-corruption and increased participation.

The diagram shows enabling interlinkages between the three entry clusters (left) and the impact subcategories and three impact clusters (right). The width of the flows (and numbers inserted) represent the number of positive/enabling interlinkages.

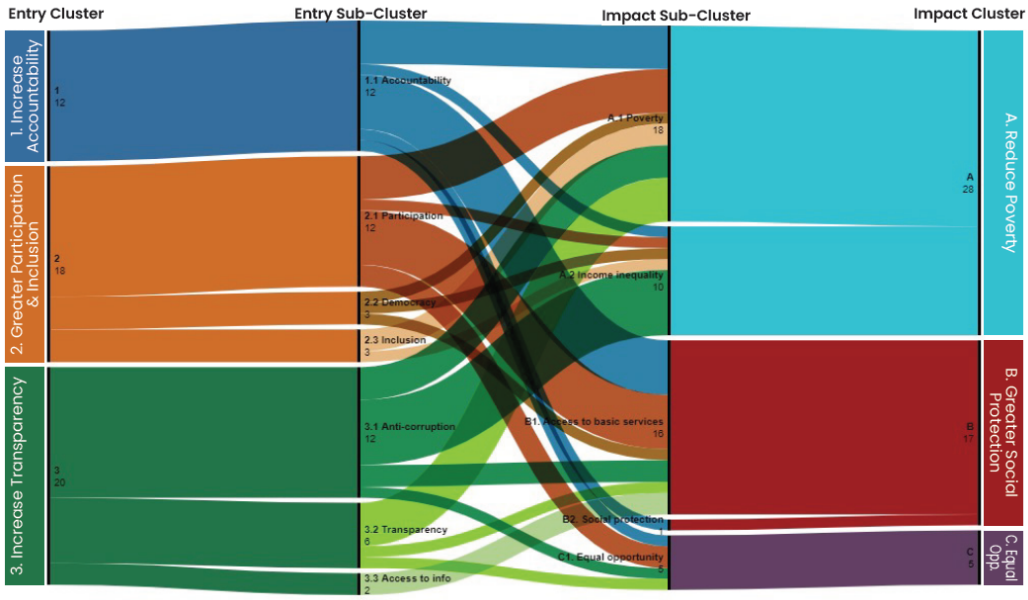


Figure 3: Interlinkages between SDG 16 and SDG 1 and 10

Source: UNDP / IDOS (2022), Connections that Matter: How the Quality of Governance Institutions may be the Booster Shot we need to reduce Poverty and Inequality

To illustrate, with regard to the connection between increased accountability and reduced poverty (indicated by the dark blue flow from the top left to the light blue part on the right), one paper showed how accountable institutions can amplify the positive impact of GDP growth in reducing poverty. Another study demonstrated that a strong social capital resulting from active civic engagement and participation can be associated with lower COVID-19 mortality rates.

One (rare) example of a negative interlinkage was a paper showing that, contrary to other studies' findings on accountability's enabling effects, increasing judicial accountability leads to higher income and consumption inequality. The study implies that having a high-quality judiciary safeguards the consumption shares of the economic elite, effectively fossilising an unequal distribution of consumption in society. It is worth noting, however, that cross-national studies, including data from up to 130 countries, have testified to the positive effects of accountability, making it a global observation.

In the study on SDG 16 effects on SDG 14, evidence was strongest for the enabling effects of 'Increased Participation and Inclusion' on impact clusters 'Increased Marine and Coastal Protection' and 'Increased Sustainability of Fisheries.'

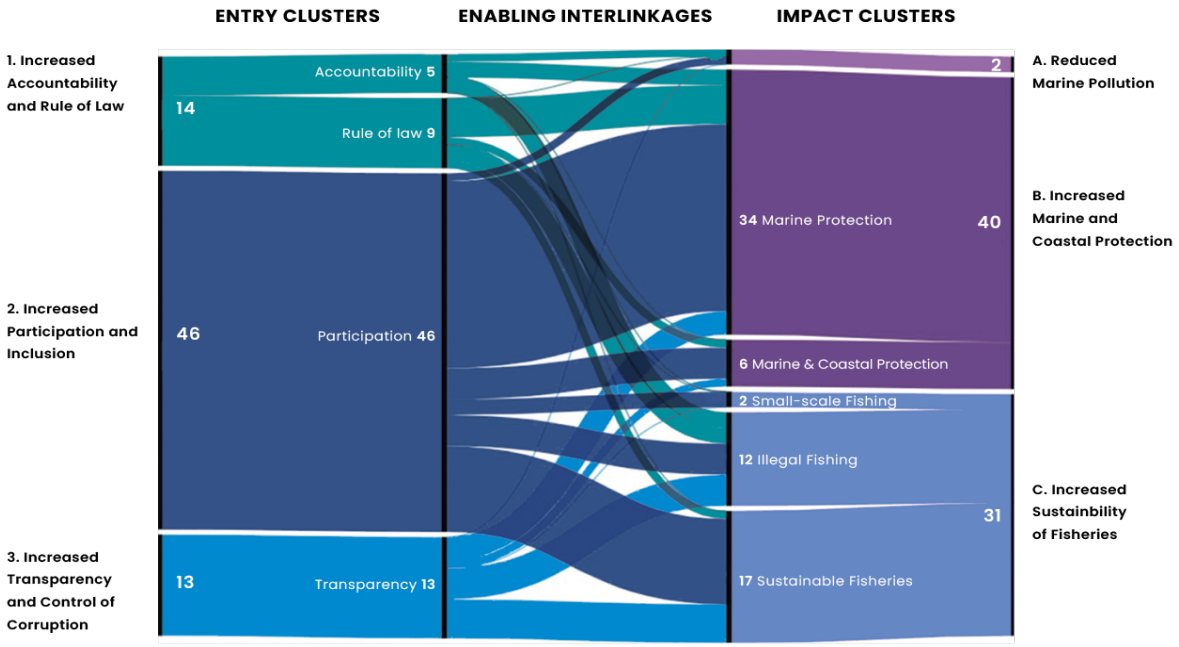
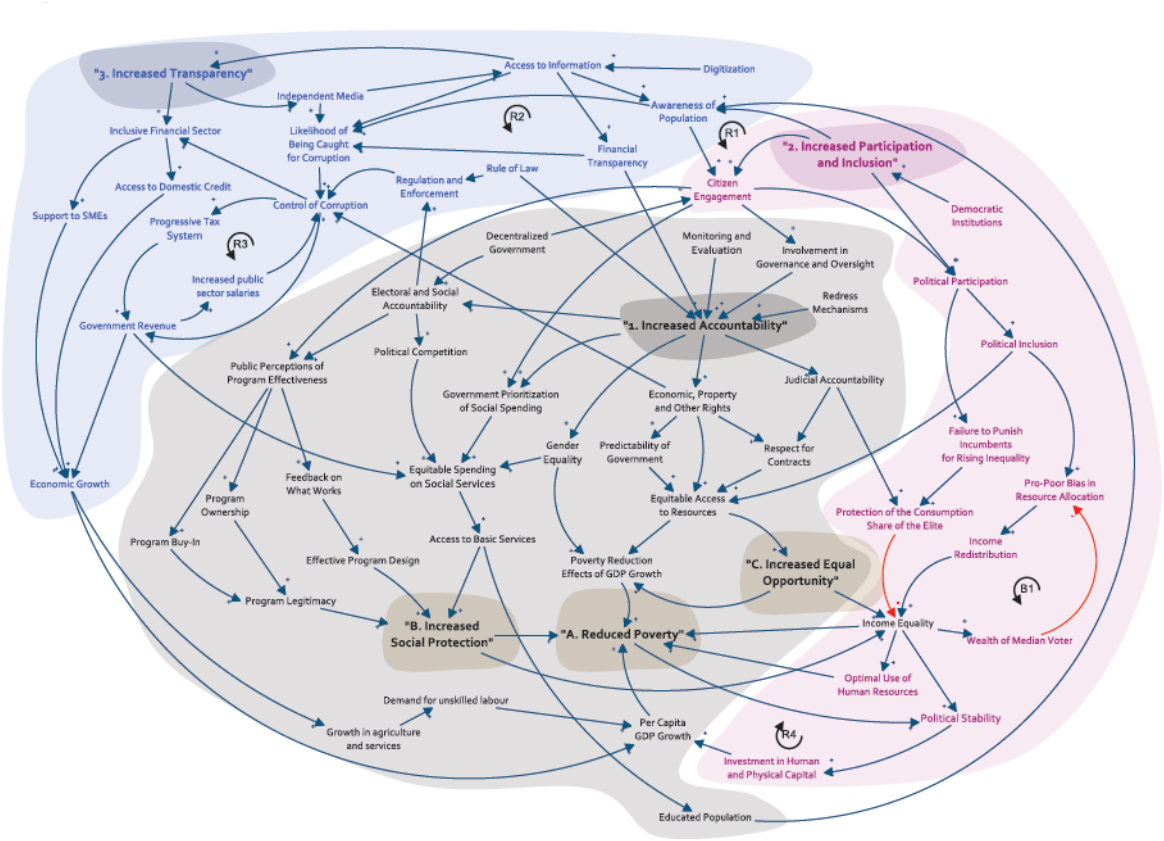


Figure 4: Interlinkages between SDG 16 and SDG 14

Source: UNDP / IDOS (2023), Connections That Matter: How does the quality of governance institutions help protect our Ocean?

To illustrate, there is strong evidence that participation can yield numerous benefits for marine protection (see dark blue flow from middle left to purple on top right): Not only does inclusive stakeholder engagement increase knowledge, it also builds trust, ownership, and cooperation. This seems to lead to greater acceptance and legitimacy of marine protection efforts, making them more effective overall. In turn, protection efforts that ignore local identities and expertise, disregard community interests, and limit access to resources can fuel conflict and resistance to illicit activity. This ultimately undermines positive outcomes for both ecosystems and societies.

It is also important to understand the key mechanisms and **pathways** for the enabling (or constraining) effects identified in the literature and potential policy recommendations for leverage-enabling effects. Although many articles reviewed for both studies provided evidence of these effects or assumed these beneficial effects based on prior empirical studies, explanations of the causal relationships and pathways that produce these effects were not always explored or discussed. As such, it was challenging to unpack these relationships and gain a clear and complete understanding of causality. Nevertheless, some of the articles examined provided useful insights into the causal relationships and pathways that deliver enabling (or constraining) effects from SDG 16 clusters through to the respective impact clusters. The studies visualize these in the form of a **systems map** or **'causal diagram'** as the one shown below on SDG 16 illustrates effects on SDGs 1 and 10.



[GREY = INCREASED ACCOUNTABILITY; PINK = INCREASED PARTICIPATION AND INCLUSION; BLUE = INCREASED TRANS-PARENCY]

Figure 5: Causal diagram illustrating mediating factors of effects and network of dynamics.

Source: UNDP / IDOS (2022), Connections that Matter: How the Quality of Governance Institutions may be the Booster Shot we need to reduce Poverty and Inequality

The map illustrates that the impact of specific effects is often mediated by various other factors, resulting in a complex network of dynamics. To illustrate this, the research team utilised a systems mapping technique that highlights some of the cause-and-effect relationships identified in the reviewed papers. Although the resulting diagram is complex, it is unlikely to encompass all the intricate dynamics. Nonetheless, the diagram offers an initial insight into the crucial dynamics and paths, including self-reinforcing feedback loops that can pinpoint intervention opportunities. An example of a feedback loop is shown and discussed below.

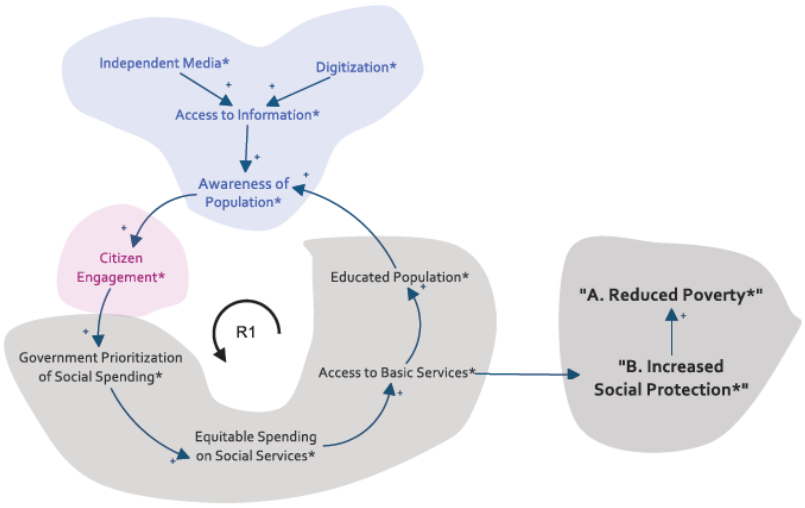


Figure 6: Feedback Loop on "Raising Awarneness"

Source: UNDP / IDOS (2022), Connections that Matter: How the Quality of Governance Institutions may be the Booster Shot we need to reduce Poverty and Inequality

This feedback loop illustrates that independent media and digitisation can provide valuable information to the public, leading to increased awareness and citizen engagement. This engagement can prompt the government to prioritise social spending, improving access to essential services like education. This positive cycle not only helps to alleviate poverty and inequality but also reinforces public awareness. The **lesson** here is that interventions directed at one of the different entry points in this feedback loop, such as improving access to information through the support of independent media or digitisation, can accelerate the reduction of poverty and inequalities.

Are there caveats?

It is important to remember that findings of both studies are aggregate results that do not indicate universally valid causalities. As mentioned above, some papers did not even go into specific causal pathways. More importantly, even for the studies that did examine causal pathways for positive effects, it cannot be stressed enough that these relations are **highly context dependent** and may not be directly transferrable to other countries. So, while they provide aggregate insights, findings cannot be used as policy blueprints.

The study on effects of SDG 16 on SDG 14 was also a **reminder to consider absence of evidence with caution**: For example, the review found a much larger number of articles that identified the enabling effects of increased participation and inclusion than of accountability and rule of law and transparency and control of corruption and crime and some topics, such as marine pollution, received little attention in the identified sample of literature. Instead of considering this as evidence of weak interlinkages on these issues, it may be simply a reflection

of research effort - that is, particular topics having received greater attention from the research community than others. In other words, not finding literature on certain topics or regions can have different reasons: It can indeed mean that there is less evidence (in this case: fewer interlinkages) to be found. But it can also mean that less research has been conducted on those interlinkages for other reasons, such as lack of **incentives** (e.g. due to a lack of funding or political interest in certain topics). It can even mean that research exists but has not received the same attention, for example if it is written in a language that is not globally published (**language bias**) or comes from institutions whose work is less readily accepted by high-profile journals (**research privilege**) or if researchers lack other means to promote their work widely. Some of the SDG targets themselves try to address these issues, for example 14.a on increasing scientific knowledge and developing research capacity. In short, a systematic literature review can only find what is out there, not what is not there or why. This does not make the findings or the methodology wrong. It simply illustrates how important it is to avoid falling for the '**streetlight effect'**—by looking at results from a birds-eye perspective and by critically examining the context, systems, and methods of our research.

Conclusion: What are policy implications?

Both studies include some policy implications that are specific to the focus of the respective studies. Moreover, the first study offers are three overall take-aways:

The 'Why'

Investing in SDG 16 makes interventions on other goals more effective: Trends on SDG 16 are regressive across regions. In some countries, this trend has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Qualities of governance institutions such as accountability, inclusive participation and transparency are sometimes being portrayed as less relevant, or even as obstacles, that would stand in the way of a swift pandemic response and recovery. Against this background, this paper allows policy makers to draw on empirical evidence to argue why, to the contrary, investing in accountability, participation and transparency makes interventions on other goals more effective. This "booster" or "leverage" argument is highly relevant at a time of dwindling resources.

The 'How'

Policymakers can and should draw on existing tools to identify SDG 16 interlinkages: Our studies show that SDG 16 can be considered an enabler and accelerator to achieve progress on other goals. The exact causal links vary between countries and require further investigation. The studies offer a methodology on how to identify enabling SDG 16 interlinkages in specific contexts: A systematic literature review can be used to analyse a large body of academic or other literature, and our clustering approach allows focus on SDG targets and issues that are considered particularly relevant in a given context. When conducted during the early stages of policy or programme development, the results of such analysis can help policymakers prioritize

or refocus, adjust budgets, and mobilize the funding needed to implement related policies and programmes.

The 'Who'

To leverage SDG 16 interlinkages, we need to connect knowledge across institutions and sectors: Our findings underline that SDG 16 deserves special attention, not just as a goal in itself but also to facilitate the achievement of other SDGs. This means that governance issues need to be considered by those who develop sectoral and cross-sectoral strategies to achieve all SDGs. To do so, governance specialists and experts from other disciplines need to work together, across mandates and institutional boundaries. This can happen through coordination mechanisms between different government departments, through multidisciplinary research, or through close collaboration between government, researchers and civil society stakeholders. While collaboration makes theoretical sense to most actors, connecting knowledge across institutions and sectors often remains a practical challenge, as it is not planned for or rewarded. It is therefore critical to ensure time, space and incentives for knowledge exchange and learning, e.g. as a standard step in the policy-making process.

Chapter 5
Governance challenges shared by the SDGs and the Summit of the Future – With a focus on SDG 16

Jan Gustav Strandenaes, Senior Adviser on Governance, Stakeholder Forum

WE ARE NOT FIGHTING WINDMILLS

There are no good plans or programmes of action without incorporating human rights, peace, justice and a strong and functional institutional framework based on good governance. This insight applies to all SDGs but is synthesised by SDG 16.

When we can imagine and dream about something, we can define it, when we can define it, we can declare it, when we declare it, we see it. People began imagining rights for the individual in the 17th Century, the deputies in the French Revolution began to define them, and eventually the logic of rights, justice, peace and progress grew from obscurity and were defined and slowly realised. This is the legacy of SDG 16 and the tenor of the 2030 Agenda.

Since the foundation of the UN in 1945, work at the UN has repeatedly conceptualised and developed, defined, deepened and redefined rights-based approaches, justice, equality, human rights and its body of laws and principles and now of late, the protection of the environment. Responding to new knowledge and political realities, it has kept adding and developing new conventions and declarations to add to a growing repository of documents on these issues. All the same, several member states have time and again violated these principles. Others have been lukewarm in applying and implementing them. The majority of member states have protested egregious transgressions – at least verbally. If we do not speak out strongly against egregious transgressions – or any transgression for that matter - we become complicit in turning a blind eye to them. But we keep repeating the basic principles enshrined in UN documents to the protection of people, principles that should not be broken. We speak out in forums where criticism can and will be heard. And in speaking out and repeating such principles, and expanding and deepening our knowledge, we signal that we will keep working for the fulfilment of these issues and principles. We will not be silenced. We will work with hope and despite all setbacks, be ambitious in our work.

We are not fighting windmills with these efforts. There is a long and consistent line of ambitious and honest work from the founding of the UN in1945, through the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, through work which was solidified by the agreement and adoption of the Covenants in 1966, the Rio principles in 1992 and the agreement to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in 2015[1]. That is also why the UN General Assembly has initiated another opportunity to further this work with the Summit of the Future, to be held in September of 2024.

[1] A-Res 70/1 - Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

THE PAST AND PRESENT, LINKED THORUGH SDG 16

Emblazoned with the Dove of Peace, the abbreviated title of SDG 16 informs us that this SDG is about Peace, Justice and strong institutions. All three elements have suffered setbacks during the last few years. In a sense, SDG 16 is about the core issues of the UN itself – human rights and humanitarian affairs, building peace and security and now also implementing sustainable development, and all through multilateral institutions.

SDG 16 links the present to history. The efforts to outlaw war and build peace precede the foundation of the UN by several decades. They date back to the first and second International Hague Conferences of 1899 and 1907 respectively. Beyond their immediate effect, which was negligible, they laid the groundwork for a new international system based on law. They were also universal, the second more than the first, in their attempts to involve all peoples. The Kellog-Briand Pact, or the Paris Pact, was signed into force in 1929 as one of the first legal efforts by sovereign states to outlaw war. The UN Charter of 1945 is among the most important documents urging nations to build and strengthen peace. A much-forgotten resolution by the UN General Assembly, resolution A/RES/29/3314 defines aggressive war. Its principles were adopted in December 1974. Largely forgotten or ignored since then, it has recently taken on a new life as a source for discussion of the definition of the individual crime of aggression within the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court. This strongly concerns SDG 16 and the Pact for the Future.

Global peace is in a precarious state since the uncalled for, brutal and sustained Russian war of aggression against its neighbour Ukraine. The upheaval and gruesome war in the Middle East is another horrible example of what takes place today. The war in Sudan a third example where thousands of innocent people are killed, millions displaced. More than 30 wars are being waged today[2]. Ninety per cent of war-time casualties are civilians – children not the least. Socio-economic, political, cultural and environmental conflicts create humanitarian disasters everywhere. By the end of 2021, conflicts caused acute food insecurity for 140 million people in more than 20 countries.[3] Progress on all SDGs is rendered naught in these circumstances.

Justice and democracy seem not to fare any better than peace. The global average democracy score, a survey taken by UNESCO and the Economist Intelligence Unit, fell to its lowest level since the index began in 2006. The 2022 UNESCO report on "World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development" sounded strongly the alarm on the worrying decline of press freedom around the world: data and original analysis confirms that 85 percent of the world's population experienced a decline in press freedom in their country over the past five years.[4]

The 17 SDGs have been organised to deal with several deep-rooted conflicts and challenges which have played key roles in making global efforts to create a better world a challenge. SDG 1

[2] The Geneva Academy refers to more than one hundred armed conflicts: https://geneva-academy.ch/galleries/today-s-armed-conflicts

[3] https://www.un.org/en/un75/new-era-conflict-and-violence see also the analysis in: https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/rwss/docs/2001/15%20Armed%20Conflict.pdf

[4] https://www.unesco.org/reports/world-media-trends/2021/en

and 2 at one end of the SDG spectrum identify the traditional developmental struggle to end poverty and hunger and SDG 16 and 17 at the other end of the SDG spectrum identify the struggle to protect the rights of individuals through peace, progress and stability in societies developed through partnerships. Between these, the SDGs address issues that are of equal importance to integrated development, infrastructure, climate, energy, gender equality, sustainable cities and the environment.

THE IMPLICIT CHALLENGES OF SDG 16

SDG 16 is also representative of a historical conflict in the quest for rights-based issues, played out in a global struggle through centuries. Governance is about strong and efficient institutions, from local bodies to central governments working for, presumably, the interests of the country strengthening its sovereignty. In contrast, human rights and related laws are about protecting the rights, interests and freedom of the individual, often in conflict with national sovereignty. It is imperative to understand the dynamics of this conflict, because it is present in many countries' political conflicts. It feeds misunderstandings about globalisations, and wrongly understood and presented it gives conservative politicians opportunistic arguments to further their cause. Having been most pronounced in the French Revolution in the 1790s, the conflict has continued to play vital roles through centuries of struggles for Human Rights. It is also at the heart of the violent conflicts that dominate geopolitics today played out between totalitarian states against nations based on democracy.

This conflict of interest also cuts across the SDGs and the entire 2030 Agenda. We see it expressed in each of the SDGs with their targets and indicators. All SDGs have a human-centric focus. The entire 2030 Agenda document, beginning with its ambitious Chapeau, is imbued with a strong moral and ethical ethos. Nearly every SDG contains a reference to the rights of people. With the human rights focus on the principle that the individual comes before the state, the struggle to provide adequate food for all, health for all, education for all, and being able to live in an environmentally sound society without poverty, implementing the SDGs becomes a right and not a charity. The tenet of the 2030 agenda and the SDGs is to find ways to solve these conflicts in peaceful ways. Collaboration through partnerships is suggested as a way when systemic challenges are identified, as stated in targets in SDG 17. As earlier observed, there is a logic to the organisation of the SDGs by framing their implementation by the predominantly developmental targets fighting poverty and hunger, SDG 1 and 2 at one end, and strong democratic and rights-based institutions securing the freedom of the individual through peaceful means and partnerships through SDG 16 and 17 at the other end.

WHAT IS SDG 16 ALL ABOUT?

SDG 16' title covers a lot of ground and is complicated to fathom: "Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels." Adding targets and indicators and

bearing in mind that the SDGs are to be implemented, will illustrate the complexity of this SDG. On one hand, its content reveals an ambitious effort to include and build on most of the agreed language from the UN's vast repository of human rights, international law and good governance. On the other hand, its content is also imbued with strong references to the moral obligations we have when building peace and just societies, obligations we have agreed to by formally signing on to the vast number of human rights issues expressed through the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the Covenants and a host of other rights-based conventions and agreements.

To be fully conversant with the challenges SDG 16 represent, we need to be reminded of its details. The first two targets of SDG 16, address the unnecessary fatalities arising from equally unnecessary violent conflicts. There is a clear focus on children, youth and girls in particular, exposed to all sorts of violence including sexual. The third target address the foundation of rights issues when it states: "Promote the rule of law everywhere." Targets four and five are about reducing and fighting illicit arms-trade, illicit financial flows and crime in all forms, including corruption and bribery. Targets six and seven address elements of what is referred to as 'good governance' – making sure institutions are accountable and transparent and allow for participation and representative decision-making.

Target eight is addressed to UN member states by emphasising that developing nations shall have wider, perhaps preferential access to global institutions dealing with governance and that these nations will have a larger share of the voting rights in these institutions. Target nine turns back to the individual, by stating the necessity of ensuring that every person shall have a legal identity. This is imperative. Without a legal identity, a person is formally stateless and will face unnecessary difficulties.

Target ten in an interesting way harks back to Principle 10 of the Rio Principles[5] by emphasising the right to information and the protection of fundamental freedoms: "Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements." One indicator. 10.1, for this target has proved to be extremely prescient: "Number of verified cases of killing, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention and torture of journalists, associated media personnel, trade unionists and human rights advocates in the previous 12 months." Indicator 10.2 challenges us to work for and keep tabs on countries that ratify laws that protect the rights of their citizens.

While targets 16a and b return again to strengthening institutions to effectively fight terrorism and crime and address discriminatory laws, the indicator for 16a has an interesting addition: It talks about the "existence of independent national human rights institutions in compliance with the Paris Principles." [6] There are three so-called "Paris Principles": pluralism, independence and effectiveness.[7]

[5] A/Conf/151/26/Rev.1 Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3 – 14 June 1992

[6] Endorsed by the UN General Assembly in 1993 (Resolution A/RES/48/134

[7] https://ganhri.org/history-of-ganhri-and-nhris//

Following a UN workshop in Paris in 1991, National Human Rights Institutions (NHRI) were established to monitor how nations were upholding and protecting citizens' rights under the UN Human Rights criteria. One hundred and ten such institutions in as many countries have been established, however not all are compliant with the Paris Principles. The existence of a Paris Principles compliant NHRI is also an indicator under the SDG 16 to measure a State's progress in implementing the Agenda 2030.

SDG 16 – A GUARANTOR FOR MULTILATERAL SUCCESS

Without institutions we will not be able to work together as a global community united in our efforts to create a world of well-being with justice, peace and a sustained nature. The multilateral system is challenged today, spurned by politicians and ridiculed by so-called experts. Functional institutions are imperative to the multilateral system. This is implicitly in every SDG, as is the principle of universality.

When the UN was founded, the principle of universality was an integrated element of the Charter, and a principle which has been repeated and strengthened time and again since 1945. The principle of universality constitutes the very basis of human rights, as expressed in its title – the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Such a universal declaration "not only places the dignity of the human person above the writ of any individual state, thereby truncating state sovereignty in important respects, but also gives notice that the struggle for human rights entails vigilance by non-governmental organisations too. Being universal, human rights are everybody's business."[8]

We can all see progress through the multilateral system in areas that were unthinkable a few years ago. Without institutions no SDG will be successfully implemented. And it has been precisely multilateral, intergovernmental multistakeholder institutional collaboration that has given us so many victories.

The successful eradication of smallpox, which through centuries has killed hundreds of thousands of people, required universal cooperation through multilateral and multistakeholder institutions. It was coordinated, supported and implemented through the UN World Health Organisation, the WHO. The universal ban to use lead in fuel, which has damaged health for thousands, in particular children is another perhaps a small but significant victory and the result of the UN Environment Programme, UNEP's work.

Preparing for the 2019 High Level Political Forum, HLPF, when SDG 16 was to be reported on, The Task Force on Justice – an initiative of the Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies – had prepared a substantial report on Justice in relation to SDG 16. The report was simply named 'Justice for All'.[9] The report speaks of a justice gap. Among the findings were: '5.1 billion people – two-thirds of the world's population – lack meaningful access to justice and 4.5 billion people are excluded from the opportunities the law provides. While people in all

[8] "Rene Cassin and Human Rights", Jay Winter and Antoine Prost, Cambridge University Press, 2013, p 250
[9] https://www.sdg16.plus/resources/justice-for-all-report-from-the-task-force-on-justice-overview/

countries are affected, the burden of this injustice is not randomly distributed among people. The justice gap is both a reflection of structural inequalities and a contributor to these inequalities.' The Pathfinders with a host of other organisations working for similar issues, have made use of the opportunities provided by the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, and worked consistently, also with the support of Member States, to strengthen and support rights and justice for all, elements integral to SDG 16.

Also, in 2019, the Human Rights Council agreed to an additional resolution on Human Rights and Transitional Justice.[10] Transitional Justice is a process responding to massive human rights violations through judicial redress and promoting political reforms in a region or a country - including other measures - in order to prevent the recurrence of human rights abuse. The resolution emphasises that Transitional Justice is pivotal to implementing SDG 16, and key to establishing peace and justice.[11] The 2030 Agenda has alerted people to crisis issues and countries do react, albeit slowly. And the focus of SDG 16 has inspired more work than meets the untrained eye. In 2022 the UN General Assembly finally recognised the right to a clean and sustainable environment as a human right.

The Stockholm Declaration agreed to in 1972 when UNEP was founded, has among its principles access to good education and to proper information on environmental issues. Principle 10 of the Rio 1992 Principles builds on this initiative and has become a backbone for independent, unabridged access to information and participation. Resolution 67/290 which gives mandates to the High-Level Political Forum, has incorporated these principles in its operative paragraphs. And paragraph 15 of 67/290 is one of the clearest paragraphs found in UN documents ensuring the rights of civil society and major groups to participate in decision-making processes. The paragraph also states the right to access of information. And as noted, this is repeated in SDG 16.

SDG 16 has brought the debate and discussions on good governance to the forefront of global cooperation. SDG 16 speaks strongly of the need for institutional governance, which is often forgotten. Only with solid institutional governance can civil society be included as a driving, creative and constructive force.

New issues must be incorporated, and only open, transparent, accountable and participatory systems allow for that. The UN system has been an example of this. When founded in 1945, neither the environment nor sustainable development were integral elements of its work. They are today. When the 2030 Agenda was negotiated and finally agreed to, the complexity and challenges of artificial intelligence was not an issue. Today it is. And today Artificial Intelligence, AI, must be dealt with, or it will challenge our systems of justice and democracy in ways we may not like. SDG 16 is constructed in a way that this may be done.

[10] A/HRC/RES/42/17
[11] OHCHR: Transitional justice and human rights | OHCHR

One could go on and enumerate a series of collaborative results that are positive for humanity and for each individual. Each in themselves may not loom large, but together they matter. And the sum total creates – not a perfect world - but a better world.

THE SUMMIT OF THE FUTURE, SOTF, AS PRESENTED OFFICIALLY

There was hope combined with a healthy amount of scepticism when the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres in August 2022 announced the ideas of organising a Summit of the Future. He had spoken about the upcoming SDG Summit for 2023 and when he also proposed the Summit of the Future together with the second SDG Summit in 2023, he referred to them as "twin summits." Guterres said the two high-level events share the common objective of "creating conditions for a sustainable, equitable and inclusive future." The Summit of the Future was presented as a "once-in-a-generation opportunity to reinvigorate global action, recommit to fundamental principles, and further develop the frameworks of multilateralism so they are fit for the future". A tall order.

The Summit of the Future, SotF has a hefty, thematic agenda. According to Guterres, the main elements would provide an opportunity to "refocus our efforts to meet the commitments under the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement on climate change, address threats to international peace and security, and realize human rights, international justice, and gender equality goals."[12] A key outcome from the two-day Summit in September 2024 should be a Pact for the Future. The formal mechanism to develop this is at work. Two co-chairs have been appointed, the Permanent Representative of Germany and the Permanent Representative of Namibia, and early in 2024, they presented to zero-draft for the Pact for the Future.

A PACT FOR THE FUTURE AND THE 2030 AGENDA

The draft text found in the Zero Draft for "the Pact for the Future" is not an uplifting and ambitious document. It simply reads as any other UN document – a litany of issues, with general promises of national commitments to fulfil already agreed plans and programmes. On one hand, there is nothing obviously wrong with such an approach – provided the task at hand had been writing and negotiating just an ordinary General Assembly resolution. But the "Pact for the Future" is not an ordinary document. And the Summit of the Future is not an ordinary conference. "We, the heads of State and Governments" have been charged with organising a Summit and agreeing to a document which should inspire and energise all generations in general, but youth in particular – and instil in all hope and belief in the future of the world. Therefore, this document should not just "reaffirm" (which appears 39 times in the Zero Draft) but be action oriented and bring new commitments.

One ambition of the SotF is to infuse the implementation of the 2030 Agenda with new initiatives and new energy. Another is to boost the just transition to sustainable development,

[12] All quotes from: https://sdg.iisd.org/news/twin-summits-to-pave-way-for-sustainable-equitable-inclusive-future/

secure peace and build societies on human rights. Experience from nearly a decade of implementing the 2030 Agenda could have been used to fertilise and inspire a document with the future as its main occupation. What are the relations between the rights-based issues and governance – or between the Pact for the Future and SDG 16? A stated objective of the Summit of the Future is also to strengthen the multilateral institutions. The issue of governance is imperative in this context.

All the necessary words are found in the Zero Draft in varying degrees and contextual importance. Human rights are mentioned 61 times, peace is mentioned 52 times, and SDGs are mentioned 19 times and merely sustainable development another 23 times. The environment referring to 'nature' has four references, but nature with regard to the environment has only one. Stakeholders meaning non-state stakeholders, have 5 references, civil society one, NGOs one and Major Groups one. A count like this does not represent a substantive analysis, but the frequency, or lack thereof does give an indication of its importance in the draft document.

One of the reasons why the document seems bereft of hope is that all the good concepts are inserted in the draft as if this was an ordinary, "run-of-the-mill" negotiated UN resolution. The fact that human rights are mentioned 61 times, does not make this an inspiring document promoting belief and hope in the human rights issues. The references to human rights and other issues appear mechanical, inserted into the document as a necessity and not by belief with ambitions for a better future.

SDG 16, GOVERNANCE AND THE FUTURE

Governance has 13 references in the Zero Draft document, but only one to good governance. What does this imply? The longest chapter of the Pact is the one about Peace and Security, the second longest is about "Transforming global governance". With an expressed ambition to use the Pact for the Future to inspire the implementation of the SDGs, one would expect that this chapter has strong references to SDG 16, which is about Peace, Justice and Institutions. There are none. The chapter speaks about the UN system and the need to strengthen its institutions. Whereas SDG 16 with its 12 targets covers a broad range of conceptual end value-based elements pertaining to institutional governance as well as good governance, the governance chapter of the Pact speaks about the need to upgrade the UN system in mechanistic and general terms. Key elements pertaining to good governance, such as participation, transparency, accountability, access, inclusivity, and decision-making are conspicuously absent. Throughout the Zero Draft these key words have negligent or no references, and when used its context nullifies their conceptual and value-based meaning. Paragraph 121 of the Zero Draft tries to refer to elements that are also covered in SDG 16: "We commit to facilitating more structured and inclusive engagement of non-governmental organisations … in the Economic and Social Council, ECOSOC." As there is no reference to any of the other elements of good governance and whether or not they will be incorporated, this paragraph is neither innovative nor hopeful.

Of the 148 proposed paragraphs in the Zero Draft, only two stand out with relevance to governance and hope – paragraphs 50 and 55:

"50. We recognize the interdependence of international peace and security, sustainable development and human rights. We reaffirm the need to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies that provide equal access to justice and are based on human rights, the rule of law and good governance at all levels and on transparent, effective and accountable institutions. In this regard, we recognize the importance of fostering a culture of peace, upholding the rule of law and promoting human security.

55. We agree to strengthen the protection of civilians, including in populated areas of conflict zones and enhance mechanisms to mitigate harm to civilians. We also commit to investigate alleged violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law and ensure accountability of perpetrators."

The only time that the Zero Draft shows any courage or willingness to leave no one behind, is the last sentence of paragraph 55. But the ambition to be courageous is immediately curbed. Perpetrators violating principles of good governance and human rights will only be investigated, and the investigation will only 'ensure the accountability of perpetrators.' Though weak, that phrasing is better than nothing.

NOW WHAT?

In a time when the geopolitics of the world has taken a turn to the dark corners of reality, the major expectation for a document dealing with future is to see hope and ambitions for creating a better world. In times where media and talk among people everywhere is dominated by metaphors from dystopia and imaginations and thoughts are fuelled by daily disastrous news, an uplifting and inspiring document is needed more than ever. And such a document should not shy away from describing and analysing in stark realistic language present and future challenges and difficulties. And yet – it is quite possible and doable to write a document describing the brutal reality of the world and simultaneously create a nerve in such a document which vibrates with hope and is solution oriented.

Several watershed UN documents have managed to do this – and they do so, by opening the document with a Prologue inserted before the Chapeau. Several also stand out, among these is the report from the former Secretary General, Kofi Anan, called "In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all", presented in 2005.[13] This is its opening paragraph:

"Five years into the new millennium, we have it in our power to pass on to our children a brighter inheritance than that bequeathed to any previous generation. We can halve global poverty and halt the spread of major known diseases in the next 10 years. We can reduce the prevalence of violent conflict and terrorism. We can increase respect for human dignity in every land. And we can forge a set of updated international institutions to help humanity achieve these

[13] A/59/2005/Add.1

noble goals. If we act boldly — and if we act together — we can make people everywhere more secure, more prosperous and better able to enjoy their fundamental human rights."

Though cautious we may feel forced to be, and conscious of the stark demands of reality, we owe it to ourselves and future generations to open the Pact for the Future with a strong, heartfelt and honest preambular text expressing our hopes for a better future for all living species. A strong Chapeau sets the tone of what is to be the content of the Pact for the Future. The introduction must express our ambitions, our aspirations and our hopes for a better world, including the fact that this is possible to do, if we act differently. The opening paragraph of In Larger Freedom manages to do precisely that. The Summit of the Future must have a strong, credible and optimistic message for the Future.

A FUTURE WITH HOPE AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

Now - more than ever before - implementation of good governance is important. Governance is about strengthening governing bodies, but good governance brings the protection of the individual against an authoritarian state into focus. New issues must continually be incorporated in our work, and only open, transparent, accountable and participatory systems allow for that. With the experience in working to implement the 2030 Agenda since 2015, we have a system and a process in which issues such as sustainable development and Artificial Intelligence can be successfully dealt with.

Without nature, there is no future. Without peace, there is no life. Without democracy there is no freedom. They are all in short supply these days. The brutality of war keeps showing its ugly face disrupting all progress. Behind these wars, there are despots, state leaders with authoritarian policies who use wars to secure their political positions and suppress people with thousands of innocent people killed. Good governance is a threat to these despots.

Everything the UN stands for is violated by these conflicts, its Charter, the Declaration of Human Rights, the Covenants, all declarations and agreements by the UN member states agreeing to build peace, prosperity and democracy. Everything the 2030 Agenda and SDG 16 stand for is violated. The Pact for the Future must challenge the conflicts of today which threaten to undermine and erode peace, progress and human rights. The tenet and spirit of the Summit of the Future is regressing even before it is organised if it is not bold and hopeful.

The 2030 Agenda stands on the shoulders of previous efforts and is the result of more than 75 years of global collaboration, and its accumulated knowledge allows us to see further than ever before. Only with hopeful, honest and strong commitments can we give future generations a credible pact and a belief in the future. A complete implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs based on the principles of good governance will see the end of authoritarian rule. Based on this, we could send the Summit for the Future in September just one simple question – 'What are we waiting for?'

Chapter 6

How National Governance Innovations from the COVID-19 Pandemic Can Advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Conclusion, The World Public Sector Report 2023 – United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Note: This is a reproduction of the conclusion chapter in the *The World Public Sector Report 2023* published by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA). New World Frontiers is the copyright owner for the present edition. The United Nations is the author and copyright owner of the content.

The World Public Sector Report 2023 examined the following questions: (a) How can Governments reshape the relationship with people and other actors to enhance trust and promote the behavioural changes required for more sustainable and peaceful societies? (b) How can Governments assess competing priorities and address difficult policy trade-offs that have emerged since 2020 and may emerge in the future? (c) What assets and innovations could Governments mobilize to transform the public sector and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?

This final chapter aims to synthesize key cross-cutting messages coming from the research done by the report team and the contributions of experts in the preceding chapters. Section 4.1 briefly reviews some of the changes that seem to have occurred during and after the pandemic in the expectations of people and societies regarding the objectives and practices of governance. Sections 4.2 to 4.5 summarize lessons from the body of evidence examined in the report, grouped under four headlines: increasing participation and engagement at all levels; changing the modes of operation of the public sector to allow public institutions to simultaneously deal with crises and pursue the SDGs; building the capacity of Governments and non-State actors to move the 2030 Agenda forward and manage crises; and preserving the positive changes that emerged during the pandemic in "normal" times. The chapter concludes with considerations on how the international community should think of the role of public institutions as it embarks on the second half of the 2030 Agenda implementation period. The reader is referred to the tables at the end of the first three chapters of the report for specific recommendations put forward by the experts in their contributions.

4.1 Changed expectations of people and societies with regard to the objectives and practices of governance

In many ways, the pandemic and its negative economic and social impacts acted as a revelator and accelerator of tensions building up in social contracts between people and their

Governments. It highlighted profound issues in trust between people and their institutions. In many countries, there appears to have been a significant shift in public perceptions of the goals of governance, particularly with regard to societal values, the role of the State, and inclusion and participation. The report points to several areas that require attention.

The pandemic brought immense hardship to people around the globe, with its most adverse impacts disproportionately affecting individuals and groups that were already disadvantaged. The expectation of fairness within societies is growing—which directly supports calls for renewed social contracts that will enhance people's relationships with their Governments. The present report examines a number of areas where fairness has been at the centre of discussions on how to move forward; these include the administration of justice, taxation systems, public services and, more broadly, respect for human rights both offline and online.

As inequalities continue to rise and the fiscal situation of Governments deteriorates, the legitimacy of the decisions made by Governments about difficult policy trade-offs—and more broadly about long-term societal choices—is increasingly being called into question. The current discussions surrounding austerity policies, for example, are reminiscent of those witnessed in the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2007/08— with the difference that the fiscal and policy space in many countries is much more restricted now than it was then. The set of alternatives facing Governments at present also involves apparent trade-offs between short-term imperatives and the longer-term pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals, making long-term visions and strategies aligned with the Goals all the more needed. As State-society relations are redefined, building consensus and legitimacy on the paths chosen for SDG implementation is paramount.

In many contexts, citizens are also calling for more accountability from their Governments. Accountability and transparency were challenged during the pandemic, as documented in the World Public Sector Report 2021.

The pandemic and other recent crises have served as a reminder that tackling major challenges and achieving societal goals require contributions from all stakeholders. As a precondition for public engagement, Governments need to preserve and expand civic space—the environment that enables people and groups to participate and exercise their civic freedoms and that forms part of the social contract. The steady contraction of civic space was documented even before the pandemic, which only accentuated this trend. The stifling of voice and restrictions on human rights lead to frustration and alienation, undermining the social contract and trust in government. They also preclude people's engagement in the common endeavour to realize the 2030 Agenda, a necessary ingredient for its success.

Digital technologies played a key role during the pandemic, enabling Governments and other stakeholders to continue to provide public services and in many cases transforming the ways services were delivered. For instance, the disruption caused by the lockdowns provided a strong impetus for the digitalization of justice systems in a number of countries. Another crucial role of information technologies during the pandemic was that of platforms for work and collaboration. However, the accelerated shift to digital government has also placed in stark contrast the existing digital divides both within and across countries. In addition, the digital transformation has

highlighted risks to privacy, freedom of expression, information integrity and non-discrimination, and has deepened concerns about surveillance, privacy and data protection, underlining the connection between human rights online and offline. Legal and regulatory frameworks have not kept pace with the rapid development and application of digital technologies. There is an urgent need for proper safeguards and oversight, including within public administration.

Taken together, the trends highlighted here and others that are outside the scope of this report amount to serious challenges to existing social contracts. Adopting a comprehensive approach to rebuilding and strengthening social contracts will better position societies to achieve stronger relationships and social cohesion, greater resilience to crises, and accelerated progress towards the SDGs. Governments alone cannot reshape their relationships with other social actors. However, as a crucial first step towards enhancing public trust, they need to create an enabling environment for strengthened relationships by, for example, promoting transparency, respect for human rights, public engagement, and the exercise of voice. Critically, they also need to demonstrate trust in other actors even as they seek greater trust.

Drawing from the research done for the report and the contributions of experts, the sections that follow examine innovations and changes in practices of governance and public administration that emerged during and after the pandemic in relation to these trends, and their potential to inform strategies to address them.

4.2. Increasing participation and engagement at all levels

The need for Governments to be more inclusive, participatory and responsive to people's needs and aspirations is a thread that runs through the three main chapters of the report. Examples illustrating how enhanced participation and engagement delivered societal benefits during the pandemic, and how they could enhance societal outcomes in the future, cover the full spectrum of participation, which progresses from information to consultation to involvement to collaboration and ultimately to empowerment.[1]

The dissemination of accurate information plays a critical role in fostering trust and enabling participation and engagement. Two critical issues that came to the fore during the pandemic were the rise of misinformation and disinformation and the need for appropriate communication during crises. Combating misinformation and disinformation has been pushed even higher on the international policy agenda in the wake of the events in Ukraine, and efforts to curb them are under way at various levels, including within the United Nations. Efforts to ensure the integrity of information have demonstrated the importance of media literacy and the potential of partnerships between different actors, including the media, fact-checking organizations, other civil society organizations, and Governments. Improving government communication during

[1] The IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation, developed by the International Association for Public Participation, helps define the public's role in public engagement processes, with the progressive categories reflecting increasing public impact on decisions; for more information on this scale, see https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/communications/11x17_p2_ pillars_brochure_20.pdf.

crises is also an important axis of progress for the future, where more open and inclusive processes are likely to lead to more effective outcomes.

Consultation, collaboration and empowerment are critical principles that Governments need to embrace to build the legitimacy of policy choices. For instance, engaging key stakeholders in budget choices not only helps to build support for those choices, but can also enhance fiscal outcomes and trust in public institutions. The institutionalization of open processes based on transparency, information, participation, inclusiveness and revisability does not happen spontaneously. It requires institutional reform, as well as commitment, time and resources. In vision-setting exercises and in other contexts, public institutions should take care to avoid (real or perceived) tokenism, as this can lead to disenchantment with participation and further estrangement of people from their Governments.

Collaboration between States and non-State stakeholders in the form of co-production and co-creation also offers opportunities, of which the pandemic period offered many examples. As documented in the World Public Sector Report 2021, civil society stepped up to support continuity in the delivery of public services, reach out to disadvantaged segments of society, provide legal information and aid, fight misinformation and disinformation, and engage in many other interventions. In some contexts, co-production and hybrid models of service delivery emerged as innovative solutions. Under the right conditions, partnerships between public institutions, the private sector and organized citizens can improve government responsiveness to people's needs and help societies cope with shocks. Countries should evaluate the suitability and adaptability of innovations from the pandemic period within their local contexts, ensuring that the needs of marginalized populations are prioritized in public service design. Partnerships need to be supported by adequate legal frameworks, and their success often hinges on Governments understanding the diverse determinants of the willingness of other actors to engage and providing the right incentives for engagement.

To some degree, empowerment is necessary for all types of participation and engagement. It should come first and foremost in a renewed ethos for the public sector. Directly deriving from this principle are the need to preserve civic space and the need to increase opportunities for individuals and civil society to be involved in monitoring and oversight, which is key to strengthening government accountability.

The pandemic offers important lessons for preserving civic space going forward. Some Governments applied guardrails for emergency measures, ensuring their necessity, proportionality, legality and non-discriminatory impact and involving oversight institutions in the review of these measures. Public participation was facilitated though measures such as inviting public input and feedback on pandemic-related challenges and policies and including civil society representatives in policymaking committees and parliamentary debates. Protecting freedom of peaceful assembly and safeguarding the right to privacy were important considerations for some Governments. Civil society played a vital role in monitoring and raising awareness of rights violations, forming networks and coalitions, advocating for the removal of criminal sanctions, engaging Indigenous communities, and challenging emergency measures through strategic lawsuits.

4.3 Changing the modes of operation of the public sector to allow public institutions to simultaneously deal with crises and pursue the SDGs

The pandemic and its aftermath have prompted discussions on the need to rethink the modes of operation of the public sector. In the face of the disruptions that occurred in the functioning of public institutions and organizations, in policy choices, and in public service provision, there is a sense that public institutions need to be able to simultaneously anticipate and deal with crises and remain focused on longer-term goals, including the SDGs. This implies a need for better coordination and collaboration across sectors in Government, as well as for rethinking the way public services are delivered, focusing on people, users and beneficiaries rather than on bureaucratic structures and processes.

Making public administration more inclusive

Representation within public institutions influences their relationships with society. A public administration that is a reflection of the public it serves is better able to meet societal needs and gain public trust. In particular, gender equality in public administration remains an unfinished agenda. Adjusting to a "new normal" and refocusing on gender equality in public administration will require simultaneous action on several fronts. This includes remembering lessons learned prior to the pandemic and reenergizing efforts to adopt and implement proven good practices in the areas of data, transparency, training and mentorship, as well as special measures such as targets and quotas. It is also important to assess the gender implications of changes made during the pandemic in the areas of remote work, hybrid work, attention to work-life balance and mental health and to consolidate and integrate positive changes into future gender equality commitments in public administration. Decision makers must put gender equality at the centre of future crisis recovery efforts and ensure that women are fully integrated into—and are given opportunities to lead—permanent bodies tasked with crisis response and management. These efforts should be part of broader actions by Governments to regain momentum so that Goals 5 and 16 can be achieved by 2030 and should inform other efforts to make public administration more inclusive of all segments of society.

Changing mindsets in public administration

Placing people at the centre of public administration's actions will require changes in the mindsets of public servants, which are necessary to support changes in processes. This was perceived from the very beginning of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda but is now clearer. As public institutions shift from working on the basis of ad hoc, temporary changes put in place during the pandemic to sustained modes of operating, there is an opportunity to think about transforming public administration in a holistic way. For instance, in the justice sector, it is important to organize transformation efforts around people's experience of conflicts or injustice; to involve judges and human rights defenders in the design of solutions; and to embrace legal processes that enable early resolution and create informal approaches to dispute resolution.

Better navigating the trade-offs that arise in SDG implementation

To better navigate the trade-offs that arise in SDG implementation, Governments need to progress on several fronts. Sustainable development challenges cannot be tackled through technocratic solutions. They require compromise on competing policy considerations based on the values and principles reflected in the 2030 Agenda. There is a need to build legitimacy and consensus around policy choices to promote a virtuous circle of trust, policy adherence and effectiveness. Conducting systematic assessments of SDG synergies and trade-offs can help policymakers identify innovative policy solutions and address systemic bottlenecks that undermine the effectiveness of public services in specific contexts. Policy trade-offs should be addressed in an equitable and transparent manner, and the evidence base used to determine priorities and choices should be openly and transparently communicated. At minimum, the distributional impacts of policy priorities and choices should be communicated by Governments in a transparent way.

SDG prioritization should be transparent, supported by science, and informed by assessments of risks and SDG interactions that take into account their dynamic and contextual nature. There is a need to make science systems in support of SDG implementation more inclusive, equitable and socially relevant by involving a wider range of voices, institutions, sources of knowledge, and approaches to knowledge generation and learning. Systems modelling, scenario analysis, strategic foresight and other tools can support more integrated priority- setting and policymaking and help policymakers navigate the challenges of achieving the SDGs and address technological and environmental transitions. The United Nations' work on integrated national financing frameworks (INFFs) provides practical guidance for countries to enhance policy coherence in various SDG sectors. Government capacity was a key determining factor of the effectiveness of countries' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the future, development cooperation could play a key role in building such capacities—for example, in national health systems, social protection systems, or crisis response systems. INFFs could serve as a tool to align such international support with national priorities and needs.

Budgets and public financial management are central and powerful tools for the prioritization of policy choices and resource allocation for the SDGs. Budget information helps weigh policy choices. Strengthening public financial management systems is critical for improving the efficiency and equity of public expenditure and for the integrated implementation of the SDGs. This includes monitoring the efficiency of budget execution and ensuring that Governments spend according to their approved budgets. Understanding the impacts of public spending on sustainable development outcomes is crucial to effective SDG implementation. Budget tagging, by linking financial resources in budgets to development goals and targets, enables targeted resource allocation and provides a basis for linking public finance decisions to development outcomes. This approach allows Governments to track and measure the impact of public spending, which can potentially lead to improved societal outcomes. It enables civil society and stakeholders to contribute to budget development, supports monitoring and evaluation, and lends itself to prospective analysis and international comparisons.

Commissioning independent assessments (including through external audits), improving monitoring, and enhancing the quality and availability of data and information are critical for leveraging the potential of these entry points for systemic SDG implementation.

Incorporating risk management in the regular processes of public administration

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of risk management but also revealed weaknesses in risk anticipation and preparedness. Effective risk management can better support systemic SDG implementation by enhancing the integration of risk considerations into SDG coordination and steering structures, investing in risk anticipation capacities, promoting stronger interagency cooperation, and reducing the gap between risk anticipation and actual preparedness. Integrating risk management into the existing priority- setting architecture, such as centres of government, requires addressing gaps in risk management systems and overcoming constraints in priority-setting processes. International cooperation can help Governments advance the role of risk management by, inter alia, setting policy priorities, sharing good practices, closing the impact gap, and facilitating coordination across levels of government.

Fostering innovation in public administration

The pandemic period witnessed occurrences of increased collaboration among public servants and other stakeholders and an accelerated pace of innovation. Innovations and changes that had positive impacts on the effectiveness, responsiveness and accountability of public institutions, for instance, in terms of digital readiness, public procurement, co- production, and staff mobility, should ideally be preserved and consolidated and should inspire further change. This requires proper institutionalization of initially ad hoc initiatives—that is, translating them into the processes and standard operating procedures of public institutions. This has been a long-standing challenge in most countries. With a longer time frame in mind, equipping public institutions with the capacity to anticipate future challenges and manage crises while still performing their regular functions requires a systemic approach based on innovation ecosystems that promote dynamic linkages among multiple organizations, stakeholders and sectors. Very few countries have been able to achieve this.

Managing digital transformation

As mentioned previously, the accelerated shift to digital government since 2020 has provided new opportunities and benefits but has also heightened risks and generated new challenges. Governments have the chance to leverage digital transformation in a way that puts human rights, inclusion and the imperative to leave no one behind at the centre. After promoting “digital only” approaches to digital government, many countries are now moving to approaches that recognize the need for integrated, hybrid models of service delivery that can offer a seamless experience to all users, particularly those in underserved areas. Governments should adopt “inclusion-by-

design" strategies and consider targeted, localized and contextual approaches, as not all excluded groups are confronted with the same barriers.

The rapid acceleration of digitalization has heightened the urgency of regulating digital services and the use of digital technology. Relevant policies should allow innovation to flourish while also protecting the rights of users and ensuring that digital services are secure and equitable, taking into consideration the effect of the growing digital divide on the most vulnerable. Such policies are needed, for example, to safeguard women from the increased online violence they have experienced since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Adjusting the relationships between levels of government

Collaboration and coordination among different levels of government are crucial for crisis management and response. The pandemic exposed the challenges of fragmentation and highlighted the need to enhance multilevel governance approaches. The changes in the relationships among different levels of government observed during the pandemic can inspire a reconsideration of institutional arrangements along critical dimensions such as the degree of autonomy of different levels of government to act on specific subjects, the allocation of resources in support of the SDGs, collaborative arrangements, and coordination mechanisms, including crisis management mechanisms.

4.4 Building the capacity of Governments and non-State actors to move the 2030 Agenda forward and manage crises

The previous sections highlight various areas where there is potential for Governments to make progress in restoring legitimacy and trust, advancing participation and engagement, making public administration more effective, accountable and responsive, and improving the delivery of public services. Moving forward on these fronts will require enhanced capacity, not only within Governments and public institutions, but also among other actors. The present section illustrates some insights from the report in this regard.

Enhancing the capacity of Governments to plan and prioritize

There are many opportunities for Governments and public institutions to enhance their capacity to plan and prioritize. It is important to train staff in public institutions on how to use available tools to assess trade-offs and synergies, including aspects such as how to produce actionable advice for policymakers. For example, strategic foresight and scenario analysis can be integrated into civil service training and into the curricula of schools of public administration to educate the next generation of public officials and civil servants. Artificial intelligence and computational models can support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda by analysing the linkages between government expenditure and development outcomes. Capacity-building is also needed in public financial management in a broader sense, including in specific areas such as budget tagging.

Fostering the capacity for innovation in public administration

Much is still being discovered about how to promote innovation in public institutions from a systemic perspective and about the abilities, techniques and assets needed to do it successfully. Common narratives about innovation in the public sector emphasize the need for an enabling environment with appropriate regulation and infrastructure, as well as innovation-oriented organizational cultures, mindsets, capabilities and tools. They also emphasize that public servants need to be properly equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to promote innovation, particularly in areas such as technology, strategic anticipation, crisis management, adaptability, resilience, and change management. However, the pandemic illustrated that other factors, such as agency and intrinsic motivation among staff and their willingness to meaningfully engage with other actors, also play a crucial role.

During the pandemic, public institutions had to come up with innovative training methods. In South Africa, for instance, health workforce training needed to be provided on online platforms. Governments can further such transformations as an affordable or complementary alternative to in-person training, while also ensuring inclusive access to capacity development opportunities.

Building the capacity of non-State actors

Even though the present report focuses on public institutions, examples from the pandemic period highlight the continued relevance of building the capacities of other stakeholders. This is consistent with the call for increased engagement and participation, which is at the core of this report. For instance, in order to fully participate in and benefit from vision-building initiatives, stakeholders need to be trained on both the underlying substantive issues and the use of relevant tools—lest participation become tokenistic. At a basic level, education on the SDGs is critical for their achievement, and initiatives at the school and university levels can contribute to operationalizing sustainable development. Increasing the digital literacy and media literacy of the general public—starting early, ideally within schools—is an example of the kind of foundational capacity development that should accompany and support broader capacity-building efforts undertaken by Governments.

Sharing experiences and practices

The exchange of experiences and practices across countries can help address the knowledge gap on what has worked and what should be avoided in the future. Transnational professional or civil-society-led networks are valuable resources for supporting the integrated implementation of the SDGs. They can contribute to capacity-building and collaboration at the individual, organizational, and enabling environment levels. Global and regional networks can also promote the dissemination and uptake of analytical tools and models to support policy coherence and integration and encourage their practical use.

4.5 Moving from crisis to normal: preserving and leveraging the positive changes and innovations that emerged during the pandemic

The pandemic and other recent crises have prompted institutional changes that have had positive impacts on SDG progress, showing how crises can also be windows of opportunity. Yet in many areas, there is a risk of policies and institutional changes with a positive impact being abandoned once crises are over as part of the drive to "move back to normal"—especially if their impacts are not carefully assessed. For instance, some of the new workplace policies for public employees had positive impacts on gender equality, but these impacts may not have been recognized by managers or decision makers or may not be considered important as they prioritize a return to the status quo ante. Similarly, while more effective ways for different levels of government to collaborate were experimented with during the pandemic, they may lose traction and be abandoned as the end of the emergency compels all actors to fall back to prescribed or traditional ways of working. This underscores the importance of evaluation to assess the performance of institutional innovations, enable course corrections, and focus efforts on effective practices in public administration.

The same applies to situations where rapid, positive change was achieved largely through collective mobilization, collaboration stemming from a renewed sense of common purpose, and the intrinsic motivation of individuals. This reflects key differences between normal times and crises. In non-emergency conditions, public servants may not be allowed to experiment with or learn from unsuccessful attempts at innovation or to understand how to manage the risks associated with failure. They may also lack the optimism, influence and motivation necessary to explore new ways of delivering public services and capitalizing on data and tools that can foster innovation. All this can drastically change during crises. During the pandemic, public sector managers and staff often departed from general preconceptions and did not wait for all the traditionally recognized enabling elements to be in place to innovate.

The question thus arises of how to preserve positive changes so that they continue to benefit society in normal times. As reflected in the examples included in the report, fostering transformation and innovation requires intentional actions at different levels—actions that involve individuals (including staff of public entities and their partners), organizations, and institutions, up to the enabling environment. As emphasized above, the capacity of public institutions to institutionalize change in a durable way, translating it into changes in standard operating procedures of public administration, is crucial, as is the ability of public organizations to deal with uncertainty and risk. So are the mindsets and attitudes of public servants and those with whom they interact. Going forward, creating a renewed sense of purpose within public institutions and public administration—one that is shared with stakeholders and put at the service of a genuine commitment to participation and engagement—will be necessary.

4.6 Looking forward: Can the lessons from the pandemic inform institutional change to better support the realization of the SDGs?

Looking forward, what are the lessons from the pandemic period in terms of how institutions at the national level could be transformed to support the achievement of the SDGs and make societies more resilient to crises? The role played by Governments in COVID-19 responses has reinforced the legitimacy and centrality of the State as a societal actor—a 180-degree turn away from the minimalist conceptions of the role of the State that had dominated the mainstream economic discourse since the mid-1980s. At the same time, the current social, economic and environmental challenges are immense, and the level of trust between public institutions and those they serve is low. This conjunction offers a clear opportunity to rethink how public institutions work for people and how they can best support progress on the 2030 Agenda. Such conversations should be held at the national level but also at the international level when appropriate, given the commonality and interdependence of challenges across countries in many areas. The lessons from the pandemic could also help Governments manage other emergencies, such as the climate emergency, which require long-term transformations in policies and drastic policy choices, as well as putting rights and justice considerations at the centre of policy decisions.

Broadly speaking, institutions at all levels need to become more inclusive and responsive. This encompasses empowering different segments of society, including women and youth, to meaningfully contribute to the creation of shared visions and strategies for sustainable development, including participating in key policy choices. There must be a sustained and integrated focus on human rights, including those of future generations, with more attention given to how changes in institutional design and rapid technological progress may impact them, both in times of crises and in "normal" times.

To support faster progress on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, institutions need to be better equipped—starting with adequate funding and human resources. Key areas for consideration include the capacity of the public sector to identify and manage synergies and trade-offs among the SDGs, to better integrate uncertainty and risk into key processes, to manage digital transformation, to better use budget and public financial management in support of informed policy choices, and to foster and institutionalize innovation both in the internal processes of public organizations and at the interface with people in service delivery. The changes required are not limited to those of a technical nature; they include changes in the mindsets of public servants and the norms of public institutions and specific organizations to genuinely value the empowerment of other actors, engage in co-production and effectively manage participation; to put gender equality and human rights at the centre of policy and institutional design; and to elevate the principle of leaving no one behind as a central tenet of public service.

The examples featured in the report provide glimpses of fast and sometimes radical change (in the health and justice sectors, for instance), but they also offer insights into persistent obstacles and challenges that often precluded more than incremental changes during the pandemic (in areas such as the preservation of civic space, the engagement of non-State actors in

policymaking, and the fight against misinformation and disinformation). While a comprehensive assessment across sectors was not the objective of this report, the general picture is not that of a broad, systemic transformation of public institutions that could help facilitate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Many of the challenges highlighted in this report are therefore likely to remain relevant in the coming years. More research could be devoted to systematically taking stock of which sectors, policy areas and types of institutions have experienced more drastic or disruptive changes, and to assessing the potential for those changes to positively impact progress on all the SDGs. Such assessments should be carried out at the national level, as circumstances and contexts vary widely across countries, and also at the international level, as rapid changes in some sectors—such as new mechanisms for cooperation during health emergencies or new ways of addressing misinformation and disinformation—may impact international relations.

Some of the positive changes that emerged during the pandemic period may not be sustained going forward as policies and processes get pulled back to pre-pandemic "default" positions. The intrinsic motivation of public servants, civil society and individuals may in some cases have been the determining factor behind many of the positive changes driven by the pandemic. Whether and how such motivation can be sustained post-pandemic should now be of key concern to Governments.

Many of the issues examined in this report are currently being addressed within the United Nations, some through intergovernmental processes set in motion as a follow-up to the Secretary-General's report, Our Common Agenda. A number of the expert contributions in this report highlight the high expectations attached to United Nations-led processes aimed at addressing these issues, including the SDG Summit, the Global Digital Compact, the Declaration on Future Generations, and the Summit of the Future. This is a great opportunity for the United Nations, as it testifies to the commitment of non-State actors to contribute to these processes and enrich them, and more broadly to the faith that is still placed in the multilateral system. It is also a reminder of the importance of securing meaningful outcomes to these processes.

Chapter 7

SDG 16 and its Interlinkages with other SDGs – Challenges and Opportunities

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Having surpassed the half-way mark to 2030, the target year for reaching the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), progress on the economic, social and environmental fronts of sustainable development is lagging behind. With SDG indicators stagnating across the board, much work remains to be done, both in shepherding concrete conclusions and creating the enabling environment needed to do so. This article posits that a renewed focus must be given to the SDGs of a crosscutting character and with the scope to facilitate the success of their companions. In particular, SDG16– to promote peaceful, just and inclusive societies – can serve as the foundation for further success in sustainable development while facilitating the implementation of discrete goals, from protecting life on land to eliminating hunger. This article delves into the ample opportunities for SDG 16 to supercharge the 2030 agenda, considers the challenges to its far-reaching implementation, and looks to its role in building the future we want.

The United Nations High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development serves today as a beacon of hope for the future. Mandated in 2012 by the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), entitled "The Future We Want", the international community has since taken great strides toward the frontier of a sustainable reality, bringing the future we want ever more into focus. Yet, in doing so, we have shone a glaring light on the terrible beauty of our times. In understanding more clearly what we strive for and how to get there, we have illuminated the gaps in equality, health, wealth and adaptive capacity that hinder our march towards a better world.

As consecutive fora have shown, our sustainability scorecard looks far from promising. Already beyond halfway to 2030, the endpoint of the 15-year plan set out to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), implementation of the goals has slowed, and in some areas, stagnated, with the lack of progress engendered by multiple factors which are not the subject of this paper. Today a mere 15% of SDGs are on track, with only 18% of SDG indicators set to reach their targets by 2030. Of the select few indicators on target, most relate to basic health outcomes, including neonatal and under-5 mortality, in addition to the access to basic services and infrastructure – these targets include mobile use, interest use, and bank account access for adults. Otherwise, 67% of indicators have seen limited or no progress, while 15% have, for various reasons, capitulated and reversed progress. Lest we forget, losing this race is no laughing matter; should we pass the finish line with the goals trailing behind us, much could be lost. We risk hurtling further toward a warmer planet, exacerbating socio-economic inequalities, diving deeper into political divisions, and stoking the fires of conflict.

It is in this troubling context that the international community must identify an alternative to our traditional, 'business-as-usual' scenario. The HLPF's unique potential for cross-pollination of

ideas may just hold the solution. The HLPF is the main platform of the United Nations on sustainable development across its three principal realms: economic, social and environmental. The Forum meets annually under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council (ECOCOC) to deliberate on the implementation of Agenda 2030 and examine a selected set of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in depth. Normatively, it has a central role in the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the global level, with outcomes typically solidifying as inter-governmentally negotiated political documents, international consensus on the march forward with the scale of progress varying from inches to enormous strides towards sustainable development and unravelling global quandaries.

This year, the five Goals that will come under the HLPF's review are Goal 1 (zero poverty), Goal 2 (zero hunger), Goal 13 (climate action), Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) and Goal 17 (partnerships for the Goals). While the forum serves as a thorough taking of stock for each of the SDGs, a core portion of the Forum is dedicated to the interlinkages between the goals on the table. Indeed, the theme for this year's HLPF is 'Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises: the effective delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions". Multifaceted problems require multifaceted solutions, and such solutions rarely reside within strict siloes of Goals 1,2,3 and so on. We are better served by examining these intersections and asking daring questions, breaking new ground beyond thematic barriers: how can clean cooking enhance both food and energy security? How does educating girls serve to bolster their health? What role does agricultural plastic play in marine pollution? In learning from our mistakes, we find that these questions are increasingly worth asking.

The Interlinked Nature of Agenda 2030

The 2030 Agenda itself states that the SDGs are integrated, indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social, and environmental). The interlinkages and integrated nature of the SDGs are of crucial importance in ensuring that the purpose of the new Agenda is realized. Accordingly, the integrated and interlinked nature of the SDGs needs to inform and guide their mainstreaming into national planning frameworks, in the form of national development plans or sustainable development strategies. The transformational vision of the 2030 Agenda depends on such an integrated approach, which involves identifying possible synergies and trade-offs between SDGs and their associated targets, as well as developing context-specific integrated approaches to ensure effective implementation.

The integrated nature of the 2030 Agenda and the interlinkages between and among the SDGs makes clear that progress in one area will influence other areas. On the other hand, failure to implement one SDG will have an adverse impact on other SDGs. For instance, SDG 16 sits at the far end of the list, but its role and potential is pivotal to achieving all other SDGs, from ending poverty and hunger to transitioning to clean energy; from ensuring access to clean water to addressing climate change and protecting and restoring biodiversity. It is *precisely* in SDG 16's

crosscutting and whole-of-society approach that we find hope woven into 2030 Agenda at large. We need SDG 16 not only to achieve its own ends, but for the success of the SDGs altogether.

This article posits that a more cross-sectoral and collaborative approach to SDG implementation is not only beneficial to, but *necessary* for, the success of the 2030 Agenda and the maintenance of a rules-based international order at large. SDG16 in particular presents the perfect catalyst for simultaneous and exponential successes across the Sustainable Development spectrum as detailed below, ranging from fortifying the respect for and protection of human rights to environmental justice and all its concomitant benefits, including clean water, safe food, land rights, and a healthy environment.

SDG 16

Peace, justice and strong institutions; such are SDG 16's lofty aspirations. Goal 16 concerns itself with promoting societies that are peaceful and inclusive; societies in which citizens are free and equal, empowered and emboldened to exercise their democratic rights; societies in which justice is blind for all, impartial and objective to their circumstances; societies in which institutions are effective, accountable and inclusive at all levels, and in which all can live free from fear of violence, regardless of who they are.

Peace is, of course, a fundamental precondition for economic and social development. Without peace there can be no stability. Conflict hinders progress and economic growth. SDG 16 can provide the social, cultural and economic substrate from which societies can develop their locally adapted building blocks for the future, from securing necessary climate and development finance through transparent financial flows through to fair, equitable and reliable enforcement of laws.

Regrettably, SDG16 is a case in point of the SDG status quo; a goal essential to the realization of a rules-based international order that has been derailed alarmingly, with high levels of armed violence and sexual violence erupting from global conflicts and the arm of the law shrinking in its reach. Where the rule of law is absent, a country's development can suffer, with ripple effects across the region. Goal 16's power lies in its alignment with the broader human rights framework, by promoting and encouraging societies of all sizes to respect and uphold the rights of individuals and groups, with respect to their privacy, access to information, and freedom of expression.

Rule of Law as a Pillar of Multilateralism

At its core, SDG 16 aims to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels. The rule of law, a prerequisite for such a society, is a central plank of multilateralism. It is essential for the realization of sustainable development in decision-making at all levels, by striving to balance environmental, social, and economic considerations, in a way that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

As such, SDG16 is seen as an enabler and precondition for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda as a whole, including SDG 13 on climate action. Achieving SDG 16 supports the implementation of all multilateral environmental agreements, including the Paris Climate Agreement.

UNEP, together with its partners, is positioning environmental law as one of the beacons in the fight against the triple planetary crisis. It plays a pivotal role in shaping norms, policies, and institutions, as evidenced by the insights gleaned from the latest UNEP Environmental Rule of Law Report. The report is a collection and analysis of data from 193 UN Member States regarding their laws, institutions, civic engagement, rights, and justice, and tracks progress over time. The data shows that we have come a long way since the Stockholm Declaration on the Human Environment, but we still have a long way to go to address environmental crises which show little signs of abating, despite virtually all countries now having laws, policies, and regulations, as well as institutions, to protect the environment.

Let's then dive into the environmental perspective of rule of law. Environmental rule of law focuses on strengthening environmental law, governance and decision-making. It forms the bedrock sustaining human life and society; it integrates critical environmental needs with the elements and principles of broader rule of law, thus creating a foundation for environmental governance that protects rights and enforces fundamental obligations. Critically, it seeks to address the implementation gap between environmental laws in theory and in practice. The many intersections of environmental law with human rights, social and climate justice are crucial for providing a solid basis for peace, just and inclusive institutions tasked with discharging mandates related to taking climate action. Robust institutions and effective governance are prerequisites for realizing environmental human rights, including the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment as recognized by the UN General Assembly in 2022, which will be addressed later in this article.

UNEP Environmental Rule of Law Report 2023

The most recent report by UNEP, taking a bird's-eye view of environmental rule of law, drew several conclusions pointing to its indivisibility from, and significant influence upon, sustainable development as a whole. The first such report since 2019, the publication provides a comprehensive assessment of the developments in this realm, contextualized by the turbulent years of COVID-19, the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, increased climate chaos and economic backsliding. The report duly analyses data collected from UNEP's universal membership of 193 Member States regarding their progress in addressing the triple planetary crisis, including through their laws, institutions, health of rights, justice, and civic engagement, while highlighting the most prevalent and emerging aspects of environmental rule of law.

The report's conclusions shine a light on the environmental rule of law as an emerging concept over the past 5 years, but equally point to trends worth investigating as we approach 2030. The report highlights six main conclusions and provides four forward-looking policy recommendations. The cross-cutting conclusions are as follows: that the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic upon environmental rule of law across the globe was significant, both in positive and negative ways; environmental rights are increasingly recognized to a greater degree; specialized

environmental enforcement has gained traction, with particular attention being paid to the development and capacity building of specialized institutions; gains are being made for gender within environmental rule of law, with many women coming to the fore as champions in this realm; environmental rule of law is undergoing a technological revolution; and finally, climate change has become a driver for action to advance environmental law, in addition to being the dominant context for environmental discussions.

This report additionally makes four recommendations going forward; to track and standardize indicators for environmental rule of law, to develop guidance on environmental rule of law in emergencies and in post-disaster settings, to integrate a social angle, with a particular view to social justice, into environmental institutions, and to establish an interface between technology and policies.

Since the publication of the First Global Report on Environmental Rule of Law in 2019, environmental rule of law has both advanced and been challenged. Climate change and addressing historical social inequities have dominated political and social discourse in many countries, shaping recent developments in the environmental rule of law. The COVID-19 pandemic created new challenges in implementing and enforcing environmental laws. However, it also spurred technological developments and the uptake of new technologies.

All in all, the report concludes that understanding and improving environmental rule of law is crucial for addressing the unprecedented challenges that our planet and societies face. In addition to environmental benefits, environmental rule of law provides economic and social benefits by enhancing the protection of nature, public health and economically valuable natural resources. It also supports and inspires the creation and implementation of ecosystem restoration measures. The consistent, fair and effective implementation of environmental laws strengthens the perceived legitimacy of government action and builds public confidence in institutions. Healthy institutions, particularly through a credible justice system, can contribute to greater security, reduce conflicts, and promote peace.

Climate Litigation

Indeed, a responsive and healthy legal order can be an instrument for climate action in and of itself. Climate change is the subject of increased public recognition and concern, including with a rise in civic engagement, as well as a wave of policymaking and litigation. Because of this, climate change has been both a context for and driver of environmental rule of law. Since 2019, several countries around the world have adopted new climate laws and regulations, and at least 34 countries have declared climate emergencies. More countries have now committed to net-zero emissions and included climate responsibilities in their constitutions. The urgent need for responsible climate action is set against the background of a flurry of net zero policies and initiatives from governments, non-governmental organizations, and industry, and the increasing risk of costly legal liabilities for businesses and governments, given the expanding frontiers of climate litigation. The responsibility to act has never been greater, nor has the window of opportunity ever been wider.

The strength of our institutions also lies in their ability to handle emerging matters efficiently. The UNEP Environmental Rule of Law Report explores trends related to environmental and climate justice, including the increasing recourse to courts on climate and environmental issues. Climate litigation has increased significantly in recent years. According to UNEP's findings, as of December 2022, there have been 2,180 climate-related cases filed in 65 jurisdictions. This means the total number of climate change cases has more than doubled from 884 in 2017 to 2,180 in 2022. Climate-related court decisions have also been directly and indirectly influencing legislative and regulatory developments, therefore positively influencing the advancement of environmental rule of law.

In addition, three advisory opinions are currently ongoing, or have just been concluded, in international and regional courts and tribunals on the impacts of climate change, including in relation to human rights: the International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion on Obligations of States in respect to climate change; the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea Advisory Opinion on Climate Change and International Law; and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights Advisory Opinion on the climate emergency and human rights. This demonstrates a changing approach to climate accountability and a new role for the courts. Courts are being called to action because other branches of government are seen as falling short to act and increasingly the private sector is also being held accountable. Rights-based litigation as well as the public trust doctrine, where natural resources are held in trust for the use, enjoyment, and benefit of the entire population, including future generations, are being increasingly used to motivate stronger government action on climate change.

For instance, the request for an advisory opinion by the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea can show precisely the relevance of SDG16 to matters of environmental rule of law. The request highlights the need for mainstreaming environmental concerns into international legal frameworks more substantively and emphasizes that climate change poses significant threats to marine ecosystems and coastal communities, necessitating urgent action under existing international legal frameworks, in addition to the expansion and redevelopment of these frameworks. The request aims to clarify states' obligations to prevent harm to the marine environment, mitigate climate change impacts, and cooperate in addressing shared challenges. Significantly, the imperative for coordinated global efforts to combat climate change and protect marine environments within the framework of international law is a key takeaway and a clear advertisement for the centrality of SDG16 in environmental rule of law. The opinion concluded in May 2024 essentially establishes that states party to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) must reduce Greenhouse Gas emissions from all sources through all measures necessary. It also notes expressly that climate change represents an existential threat, and raises human rights concerns.

On the global scale, the request for an advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the obligations of states concerning climate change aimed at shedding light on the states' duty to prevent activities within their jurisdiction that could cause significant harm to other states due to climate change. The principles of prevention, precaution, and cooperation in addressing transboundary impacts of climate change are at the core of the request, as is the importance of

collective action, including international cooperation and negotiation, to mitigate and adapt to climate change effectively. It brought attention to the need for a common but differentiated responsibility of nations to take meaningful action to address climate change within the framework of international law. The fact that this request came from UN General Assembly resolution 77/276 spearheaded by a Small Island Developing State – Vanuatu – and with a groundbreaking support by youth shows its significance to present and future generations.

Finally, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights request for advisory opinion offers an interesting insight into SDG16 on a more regional level, with more local applications. It aims to address the intersection of the climate emergency and human rights, making clear that climate change poses significant threats to the enjoyment of human rights, particularly for vulnerable and marginalized communities. The request looks into clarifying states' obligations to take proactive measures to mitigate and adapt to climate change while respecting and protecting human rights. The principles of intergenerational equity, environmental sustainability, and the rights of Indigenous Peoples in addressing the climate crisis are central throughout the consideration of this request. At its core are robust legal frameworks and policies that prioritize human rights in climate action efforts.

The Climate Crisis is a Human Rights Crisis

An important dimension of rule of law is the promotion, protection, and respect of all human rights, in particular the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment. The right to a healthy environment has been in development for several decades, including having a foothold in the 1972 Stockholm Declaration. It is now recognized as a human right by the General Assembly through resolution 76/300. This has had a strong impact in and on environmental rule of law, as it leads to stronger environmental governance, with emerging laws, policies and court cases invoking the right to a healthy environment.

The right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment encompasses a safe and stable climate, as its widespread impacts affect the enjoyment of all human rights and affects first groups and people in vulnerable situations, who are also those who have contributed least to the problem. Procedurally, it includes the right to information, public participation, and access to justice – three elements that themselves are at the core of rule of law. The push towards achieving SDG 16 and the growth in climate litigation are mutually reinforcing.

The right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment exhibits exactly the necessary omnipresence of SDG16 in our progress towards a better planet for all. All people possess the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. As human rights and the environment are interdependent, a clean, healthy and sustainable environment is necessary for the full enjoyment of a wide range of human rights, such as the rights to life, health, food, water and sanitation and development, among others. At the same time, the enjoyment of all human rights, including the rights to information, participation and access to justice, is of great importance to the protection of the environment.

The connection between human rights and climate action emerges often in relation to the concept of just transition. Many national climate plans or nationally-determined contributions (NDCs) have mentioned the need to ensure a just transition, which, while often associated with energy and labour issues, is also an emerging concept which highlights the importance of rights-based approaches.

The Rights of Nature

The growing synergy between SDG16 and environmental rule of law in the context of a rights-based approach is exemplified in the emerging Rights of Nature (RoN) movement. According to the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), the Rights of Nature "is a legal instrument that enables nature, wholly or partly, i.e., ecosystems or species, to have inherent rights and legally should have the same protection as people and corporations; that ecosystems and species have legal rights to exist, thrive and regenerate. It enables the defense of the environment in court – not only for the benefit of people, but for the sake of nature itself."

This school of thought is informed by two main theories: firstly, that the same ethics of that justify human rights, also justify nature's rights; that human rights emanate from the very existence of humanity, and thus, the rights of nature arise from their very existence. Secondly, there remains a utilitarian argument that humans' own survival depends on healthy ecosystems, and by protecting nature's rights, humans can advance their own self-interest, in line with their human rights and the SDGs at large.

The RoN movement is comprised of civil society organizations, local communities, Indigenous Peoples, governments and members of the scientific community, committed to advocating, accelerating, and escalating the global adoption of rights of nature and its implementation into legal systems. RoN follows an eco-centric model, while most current environmental protection measures embody an anthropocentric paradigm, whereby land and nature are legally categorized as property, a commodity, or as a 'resource' to be owned and used.

This legal and jurisprudential theory and movement is enjoying renewed interest in a number of Latin American countries, but also in Spain, New Zealand, India, and elsewhere, describes inherent rights associated with the natural world in all its component parts. The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, concluded in December 2022, also recognizes the rights of nature as an integral part of a successful implementation of the Framework.

Environmental Rule of Law as an Evolving Concept

As is evidenced in by these examples, Environmental Rule of Law itself still enjoys a great level of expansion and development. This presents a unique opportunity to take a multi-stakeholder approach into its norms, in line with SDG16. The role of a broad array of actors needs also to be recognized and strengthened to ensure the effective application of environmental rule of law and

the upholding of human rights. Lawyers, litigators, and academics can advance environmental rule of law by pushing changes in environmental governance and by building up and strengthening the environmental discourse. Their role is vital to ensure the protection of groups in vulnerable situations, including Environmental Human Rights Defenders. They are essential to developing environmental rule of law and other related emerging concepts and increasingly mainstream environmental considerations in the curricula for schools and universities.

Of course, one of the main behind-the-scenes but very important actors of SDG16 are judiciaries. Judges are essential to environmental rule of law, as they are the guardians of human rights and the environmental rule of law. They ensure the implementation and enforcement of environmental law and support the achievement of the SDGs. They can also be innovators in upholding environmental, climate and human rights law and principles, creating precedent. They can ultimately act as stewards in their national frameworks.

And finally let's not forget any other stakeholders that push for the environmental agenda on the basis of a robust environmental rule of law. Children and youth have been at the forefront of the rise of civic engagement and climate and environmental litigation, with numerous court cases around the world being requested by these two groups. They are essential for the call for greater environmental action and the closing of the implementation gap.

Challenges to Attaining SDG16

In addition to the numerous global challenges that have forced the stagnation and backsliding of many SDG indicators, a variety of factors pose challenges to the successful implementation of SDG16, in particular with regard to environmental rule of law. In many instances, weak legal frameworks without provision for environmental standards can hinder efforts to protect the environment, mitigate and adapt to climate change, and regulate degradation. Some countries lack comprehensive environmental legislation, and in some cases, existing laws may be outdated or insufficient to address contemporary environmental challenges. Even when robust environmental laws do exist, enforcement can be lax due to limited resources, corruption, or lack of political will. Additionally, compliance with environmental regulations by businesses and individuals may be low, particularly in regions where economic interests may conflict with environmental protection.

Further issues emanate from the transboundary nature of many environmental problems. Marine pollution, from direct sources feeding into coastal and marine environments, to run off pollution groundwater aquifers, can transcend local, national and regional jurisdiction, requiring cooperation among multiple governmental, industrial and local stakeholders for a chance at success. Disputes over shared resources such as rivers, lakes, oceans and contested territories can further entrench obstacles to harmonious cross-border cooperation on environmental rule of law.

Limited resources can hinder the ability of governments to monitor and enforce compliance with environmental laws. Insufficient funding, staffing shortages, and inadequate technological infrastructure can impede efforts to uphold the rule of law in environmental matters.

Addressing climate change requires coordinated global action and adaptation strategies. However, the complexity of climate science, uncertainties regarding future impacts, and the long-term nature of climate-related policies can complicate the development and enforcement of effective legal frameworks to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to changing environmental conditions.

Further challenges outlined in UNEP's recent work on environmental rule of law include expanding conceptions of gender; environmental rule of law in areas beyond national jurisdiction, including the oceans, the poles and space; challenges of emerging technology against the backdrop of a rapid technical revolution; enforcing and monitoring environmental rule of law in fragile and conflict-affected settings; and environmental rule of law and civil disobedience.

Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach, including strengthening legal frameworks, enhancing enforcement mechanisms, promoting international cooperation, and increasing public awareness and participation in environmental governance. Ultimately, ensuring the rule of law in environmental matters is essential for achieving sustainable development and protecting the planet for present and future generations. Strengthening SDG16 across all indicators can provide the nuance needed to harness this new wave of environmental rule of law and reap the crosscutting benefits.

The Road Ahead

Having surpassed the halfway mark to 2030, and with the SDGs stagnating, much work remains to be done, both in shepherding concrete conclusions and creating the enabling environment needed to do so. Delegates would do well to remember the growing call to break down thematic siloes in approaching this work, as evidenced by the 2030 Agenda's inherent intersectional character. SDG16 continues be an excellent option for strengthening the discrete goals of peaceful and just societies backed up by strong institutions, in addition to enabling the fulfilment of SDGs across the spectrum, in particular, environmental rule of law as a precondition to sustainable development.

This article has examined the unique opportunity of the upcoming HLPF to harness SDG16 alongside its counterparts to engender meaningful progress; examined the indivisibility of SDG16 and environmental rule of law, and human rights and environmental rights through tracking the development of the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment and the Rights of Nature movement. Finally various challenges and opportunities for SDG16 were touched on, clarifying the hopeful position of SDG16: currently under-utilized but with excellent potential to seize the moment for change. And seize the moment we must; after all, getting SDG 16 right can make the difference between all or nothing: reaching all of the goals or none of them, and a fair future for all or none. If we are to truly achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda, we can only do so by leaving no one behind.