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Report

Expert Group Meeting on "Towards a Regional Monitoring Framework for Enhancing Institutional Effectiveness, Advancing Inclusiveness Ending Violence, and Strengthening Anti-Corruption"
Amman, 12-13 December 2019

Summary

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Regional Hub for Arab States organized a Regional Expert Group Meeting "Towards a Regional Monitoring Framework for Enhancing Institutional Effectiveness, Advancing Inclusiveness, Ending Violence and Strengthening Anti-Corruption" on 12 and 13 December 2019. Participants included practitioners from academia, think tanks and decision-makers in addition to staff from the United Nations system. The meeting discussed the importance of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 in the Arab regional context and highlighted governance trends that would require a more nuanced approach at the indicator and/or target levels. Given the strong focus of SDG 16 on public institutions and the role of public policies in advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, it is a transformational goal and key to ensuring that the Agenda can be accomplished within a participatory framework of accountability. The consultations also addressed the numerous technical challenges in measuring SDG 16, in addition to the contextual and implementation issues around the sources and collection of data, perception of trust towards official statistics and the varying levels of statistical capacities.

The importance of national ownership was underscored among the principles of SDG monitoring, with the aim of being an inclusive and country-led process. Decisions on national indicators are to be driven by national priorities while being aligned with global targets and indicators. SDGs should be integrated into national development programmes and national monitoring and evaluation systems, utilizing existing platforms and processes, while learning from existing regional and global databases and efforts. At the national level, the SDGs should be integrated into policymaking, policy implementation of national development or sectoral plans and monitoring cycles to ensure proper measurement and public accountability in the progress towards achieving Agenda 2030.

There was consensus that to progress towards SDG 16 attainment there is a need for a common understanding of the agreed-upon monitoring methodologies, concepts, targets and indicators. Such a common understanding must reflect the variety of actors, at the governmental level and the different concerned actors (namely public institutions and agencies, civil society organizations, academia and the multilateral system). The exchange of lessons learned among Arab States was deemed critical to build trust among concerned stakeholders involved in the advancement of SDG 16. It was recommended to start by documenting and capitalizing on the Tunisian experience of building a systematized mechanism to solicit citizens' perceptions on service delivery, accountability and sense of security, among other dimensions, and then to invite selected countries to replicate the experience.

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Introduction

1.   Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 is 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". SDG 16 is both an end in itself and a crucial means towards delivering sustainable development in the region and globally. Given the strong focus of SDG 16 on public institutions and the role of public policies in advancing the 2030 Agenda, it is a transformational goal and key to ensuring that the Agenda can be accomplished within a participatory framework of accountability. It moves from the traditional approach of ending and reducing the incidence of conflict and violence to one that focuses on the drivers of peace, inclusive development and social cohesion. As a result, reducing all forms of violence and related death rates (target 16.1), reducing corruption (target 16.5) and ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels (target 16.7) are critical key targets for achieving the 2030 Agenda.

2.   Yet, the multidisciplinary nature of SDG 16 may be a double-edged sword for the advancement of the 2030 Agenda and its monitoring framework. On the one hand, it addresses a key set of actors (governments, public institutions and quasi-governmental institutions) that have a crucial role in designing public policies, distributing resources and developing the legal frameworks that support the successful implementation of the Agenda. On the other hand, the success of this goal depends on the willingness of those core actors to open the space of decision-making and policy formulation towards civil society, including academia and think tanks, and to develop together a conceptual and operational framework that rests on a normative and a contextual understanding of the ultimate targets in a specific country. This process would entail an analysis of structural, technical and other challenges and factors that slow down or obstruct the implementation of SDG 16 and identify the entry points that can reverse this negative trend. There are also external challenges resulting from the spillover of conflict or climate change as well as other pressure points at play that in one manner or another weaken peace and development. Given the complexity but importance of this goal, it is important to initiate a discussion around assessing and measuring reform efforts and the process of implementation of SDG 16.

1. *Methodological challenges*

3.   There are numerous methodological issues and technical challenges related to the capacity of measuring the global indicators falling under SDG 16, due to contextual and implementation issues around sources of official data, data collection and the statistical capacity of national data actors. This is a world of "data revolution" where "new technologies are leading to an exponential increase in the volume and types of data available, creating unprecedented possibilities for informing and transforming society...".[1]

4.   The global indicator framework provides guidance for countries to comply with a standardized way of measuring progress of the SDGs. These global indicators have been agreed by all countries with the expectation that they will report on them in a systematic manner. In addition to the established and internationally agreed global indicator framework, secondary sources coming from other entities of the United Nations system or international organizations as well as what are considered unofficial but reputable sources (academia, non-governmental organizations, etc.) will, in many cases, be critical to measuring SDG 16 in a meaningful and comparable way. The level of relevance, accuracy and credibility of these alternative data sources vary in the level of capturing the technical gaps and conceptual consensus towards improving institutional effectiveness, mitigating corruption and ending violence. There are also varieties in the manner in which they cover issues that are equally relevant to the Arab countries but not yet part of the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG) global monitoring framework. Still, the 2030 Agenda encourages countries and regions to explore new indicators that might assist to monitor national or regional specificities.

5.   The nature of the global monitoring framework is to large extent statistically ambitious and forward-looking, listing indicators that lack internationally established methodology or standards are not yet available

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[1] A World that Counts, Independent Expert Advisory Group on a Data Revolution for Sustainable Development (IEAG), November 2014, available at https://www.undatarevolution.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/A-World-That-Counts.pdf.

but are being developed and tested (Tier 3 indicators) to help countries adopt mechanisms for producing globally comparable data in critical areas of governance.

6.   In the case of SDG 16, all indicators have now been classified as Tier 2,[2] with six[3] indicators upgraded from Tier 3 to Tier 2 in March 2019, and the indicator under 16.4 on illicit financial flows reclassified to Tier 2 in October 2019. The existence of agreed methodological approaches for measuring progress on SDG 16 provides an excellent opportunity for countries to accelerate the process of monitoring progress of peace, justice and inclusion at a national level in order to ensure global comparability. However, issues remain in relation to the lack of sufficient official data and statistical capacity at the national level to properly measure SDG 16 in a comparable way across countries. For the Arab region, the question is not only whether there is sufficient official data or whether data can be made available in the near future, but also whether the specified targets and the proposed global indicators reflect the dynamics and relate to the relevant factors, obstacles and entry points or accelerators that would move the Arab countries into more peaceful, just and strong societies and more inclusive and accountable institutions at all levels (national, subnational, etc.). Moreover, the "data revolution" question also relates to who has the mandate to collect the relevant data, and who would ensure that the collected data are perceived as trustworthy, opening the door for a discussion on the future of the national statistical system and access to information.

7.   Despite the methodological advancements in line with the reclassification of all indicators to Tier 2, the multidimensional framework of SDG 16 (violence, inclusiveness, accountability, etc.) creates further challenges for measurement. The conceptual magnitude of the targets cannot be adequately proxied for measurement purposes by the indicators agreed upon by the official IAE.

2. *Contextual challenges*

8.   SDG 16 indicators do not monitor all the known key factors necessary for sustainable peace and development. In addition, in conflict and post-conflict settings some targets cannot be practically measured by national statistics offices and other public institutions[4] on their own, due to various factors such as restricted access to certain areas and weak capacity of data actors, to mention a few. For example, SDG indicator 16.6.2 on the quality and satisfaction of public services or 16.9.1 on providing legal identity for all are proving challenging in settings affected by violence or suffering from the spillover effects of conflict. In addition to being a politically complex issue, the pervasiveness of corruption and the impact of anti-corruption reforms are also technically challenging to monitor. There is a need to assess in a technical discussion how the government can capitalize its national machineries, including the development of partnerships with civil society, academia and the private sector to provide data for the measurement of such indicators.

9.   Because of the factors mentioned above, statistical capacity in these domains will take time to build and it is likely that data will not be available in the short term, but with further efforts to strengthen the capacity of national statistics offices and other public institutions or even semi-governmental ones, the availability of official statistics will increase in the long term. However, maintaining statistical capacity in countries in conflict will continue to be extremely challenging given the disruption in the national statistical system and the need to rebuild the trust in public institutions.

10.   The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Regional Hub for Arab States, organized the Regional Expert Group Meeting **"Towards a Regional Monitoring Framework for Enhancing Institutional Effectiveness,**

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[2] Indicator is conceptually clear, has an internationally established methodology and standards are available, but data are not regularly produced by countries (United Nations Statistics Division, Tier Classification for Global SDG Indicators, Available at https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/Tier%20Classification%20of%20SDG%20Indicators_11%20May%202018_web.pdf).

[3] The six indicators that were upgraded from Tier 3 to Tier 2 are: 16.1.2;16.6.2; 16.7.1b; 16.7.1c; 16.7.2; 16.b.1.

[4] The global indicator framework also lists ministries and public institutions as potential data providers.

Advancing Inclusiveness, Ending Violence, and Strengthening Anti-Corruption" on 12-13 December 2019. The meeting sought to initiate a collaborative technical process with Arab member States to review existing data sources and indicators on SDG targets 16.1, 16.5, 16.6 and 16.7. and to discuss governance trends that are equally relevant to Arab States and important to monitor but that are not reflected in the global indicator framework. These indicators are geared towards ensuring inclusive representation, enhancing institutional effectiveness and mitigating corruption and ending violence. The meeting is a first among a series of meetings designed to articulate a relevant and technically feasible monitoring framework that will support Member States' attainment of the 2030 Development Agenda, especially the dimensions of fighting corruption, institutional effectiveness and representative decision making of Goal 16.

I. Discussion

11.   Inclusive, transparent, accountable and effective governance remains central to the implementation of the 2030 Development Agenda and SDG 16 provides the framework to generate more meaningful action in this arena. It is regarded as the enabling goal for the realization of the 2030 Agenda with governance indicators as tools to advance the connection. It was noted that governance in the Arab States region is not homogeneous and that it is important to differentiate between structural, process and outcome indicators.

12.   SDG 16+ is a term that highlights that there are targets in other SDGs, such as Goals 1, 4, 5, 8, 10, 11 and 17, that also contribute to peace, justice and inclusion. The infrastructure for peaceful, just and inclusive societies are particularly relevant to the Arab region. These concepts need to be mainstreamed within the public administrations and monitoring mechanisms established to measure progress on these targets.

A.   Case studies – examples from the region

13.   Some of the challenges to the advancement of SDG 16 at the national level were deficits in periodic monitoring; inclusive and participatory consultations; policy development and implementation capacities; high-level political ownership; and the availability of national indicator sources. Lessons learned from five countries in implementing procedures taken at national level to implement SDG 16 were discussed among participants. Discussions included procedures as well as indicators developed to monitor SDG 16 attainment and the national institutions working for its implementation. In general, countries revealed a cooperative environment and mutual will among local and national government entities to achieve SDG 16.

14.   **Tunisia**, as part of a project financed by UNDP and Tunisian government, undertook a survey on people's perception on peace, liberty and local governance, with a sample size of 4,800 households aged 18 and above, covering seven regions. Efforts in Tunisia also focused on contextualizing targets within SDG 16, comprised of nine targets and 89 indicators with three interconnected pillars: rule of law, institutions and society. The number of indicators was reduced to 34 through a participatory process based on the global indicators related to Goal 16.

15.   **Iraq** was making important efforts at the technical and administrative level to measure progress, and opportunities remained to improve at the national level. These included stronger participation and engagement of civil society, in addition to strengthening mechanisms and indicators to evaluate performance of different governorates, which would inevitably enhance transparency and accountability. Among the challenges identified was the inadequate allocation of financial and human resources to implement and follow up on monitoring mechanisms, including the prevention of corruption. Action taken by Iraqi authorities included the localization of SDG 16 targets in the 2018-2022 National Plan; a national bill on anti-corruption drafted and passed by Parliament; national indicators to monitor SDG 16 were developed; and bi-annual reports that monitor efforts towards target attainment were being regularly submitted to the Minister of Planning.

16.   In **Jordan**, the SDGs were integrated into its National Development Plan. Within the framework of the 2017 first Voluntary National Review (VNR), a road map was developed with 46 action points to address the opportunities of improvement for the achievement of the SDGs. In 2017, for the first time a national team on

human rights was formed to follow up on governmental efforts to achieve SDG 16. The national team was led by the National Centre for Human Rights. In addition, the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MoPIC) intends to draft a report on the challenges and achievements of national institutions since the issuance of Agenda 2030. A progress report on SDG 16 was also being prepared. The Ministry of Education will publish a report that reviews the different SDG targets. It will develop a tool to plan for ways forward for the attainment of the targets and to which stakeholders could contribute.

17.   **Egypt** has taken several measures to implement SDG 16, including the implementation of new coordination mechanisms between ministries; updating judicial procedures and traditional institutional databases to manage information that serves to advance the fight against corruption, in addition to training staff in corruption prevention and raising civil servants awareness in that regard through the invitation of external experts. Some of the measures to fight corruption included the launching of a portal of electronic services for Egyptian banks for tax related matters that enforces a high transparency level. Furthermore, the Ministry of Finance monitors national strategies in coordination with stakeholders. It advances its human capital through training its staff and sending them to participate in courses abroad. It raises awareness of the effects of corruption on the nation through media campaigns, and citizens are encouraged to report corruption through a hotline. Egypt is also enforcing the anti-corruption law and is issuing a law that regulates labour and provides information to achieve transparency and integrity. Through the National Statistics Survey, Egypt is monitoring indicators related to: Homicide crimes; percentage of children from the age of 17 and above that suffered from abuse and killing, in addition to monitoring the number of cases of homicide and abduction.

18.   In **Palestine**, a team was established for each goal to enhance the implementation of the SDGs. National team on the implementation of SDG works through universities, public and private sector. Following the initialization of the team, which was supported by UNDP, it was divided into three sub-teams: The first was dedicated to efforts for ending corruption and transparency; the second team was dedicated to justice while the third team was dedicated for administration.

B. Global examples – monitoring SDG 16

19.   The Praia City Group on Governance Statistics, which has as its mandate to "contribute to establishing international standards and methods for the compilation of statistics on the major dimensions of governance", has been charged to develop a "Handbook on Governance Statistics"[5] for national statistical offices, which will cover the conceptualization, measurement methodology and dissemination of governance statistics. The Handbook outlines existing standards, emerging good practices and provides guidance on how to measure many aspects of SDG 16 based on eight dimensions: Non-discrimination and Equality, Participation, Openness, Access to and Quality of Justice, Responsiveness, Absence of Corruption, Trust and Safety and Security.

20.   Further efforts should be made to develop country-specific governance indicators, particularly in line with the following three dimensions:

   (a) Procedures taken at the national level to implement SDG 16;
   (b) Indicators developed to monitor the implementation;
   (c) National institutions working on the implementation of SDG 16.

21.   The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) presented its methodology and discussed the challenges and opportunities of monitoring violence. The 2019 data indicated that most events in the Middle East were explosions and remote violence events.

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[5] Please see link to resource: http://ine.cv/praiagroup/handbook/handbook_governance_statistics.pdf.

22.   The methodology involves three key components:

(a) **Inclusion:** accurate representations of political violence, with broad and comprehensive inclusion criteria with flexibility to allow for understanding different country contexts;

(b) **Oversight:** dataset is monitored by a rigorous review process crucial to ensuring that data and numbers are accurate;

(c) **Sourcing:** reliable and accurate sources were used, while accounting for potential biases. Each country has a unique sourcing profile with media, reports and social media sources, of which local sources are highly prioritized.

23.   To prevent biases, **ACLED** uses researchers, who collect daily data sets, to validate its data. Nevertheless, objective facts were difficult to determine in many contexts. The definition of protests (minimum numbers) was discussed. The number of protesters required to constitute a protest was specified at three. This differed from riots, which require interaction with another actor or property. An event with only demonstrations would be labelled a protest.

24.   The Institute for Economics and Peace presented the Global Peace Index as an example of another monitoring tool for violence or conflicts. The Global peace index ranks 163 countries, according to their relative state of peace. It uses 23 indicators, which are then weighed on a scale. There were three main categories of indicators: ongoing domestic and international conflict, societal safety and security and militarization. In 2019, 86 countries became more peaceful while 76 deteriorated. Peacefulness has declined year on year for the last eight years. The Middle East score has deteriorated over this time. The Positive Peace framework has been established, which stipulates the optimum environment for human beings to flourish. This includes income per capita, resilience, higher GDP growth and other aspects. Participants viewed the categorizing the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region as the most violent as problematic. Several conflicts in the region were driven by geopolitics, and the fact that one of the indicators was "good neighbourly relations" captures the cross-border analyses of events.

25.   International Security and Development Center focuses on SDG 16 to determine a country's security level. This methodology uses national data and statistics to provide insight into a country's level of conflict. The importance of specific microdata in this regard was noted. Participants also took note of the Data Gap Analysis, which is used to measure whether Goal 16 is being measured well. It provides technical analysis of national data availability. It assesses data gaps at the indicator level. It maps existing data sources, data producers and approaches for data generation, leading to the identification of data gaps. This requires engaging with all key stakeholders and mapping data sources and data producers within the country context. It uses a scoring system to identify and characterize data availability.

26.   Addressing corruption is not only limited to the investigation and prosecution of related offences. It includes a wide range of specific measures that are outlined in the UN Convention against Corruption, but also go well beyond that to encompass efforts that tackle drivers and enhance controls within institutions, and beyond, at the level of enabling environment including the political, economic and social spheres. This approach is reflected, to a large extent, in SDG 16, particularly targets 16.4, 16.5, 16.6 and 16.10. In the Arab region there has been an advancement in combating corruption in terms of adopting national strategies, introducing legislative amendments and setting up better specialized bodies. However, effective implementation remains a challenge. The international mechanism for the review of UNCAC implementation offers an important source of data, but it is not enough. Recently, additional corruption-related data collecting and sharing efforts are beginning to take shape at the country level. In Palestine, a set of indicators to track corruption were developed. Also, a civil forum on good governance and integrity is being established. AMAN, the Palestinian Coalition for Accountability and Integrity, produces a regular report that looks at the flows of finance and the right to access information. This data is based on statistical and non-statistical data and does not rely only on government data. AMAN produces annual reports to track progress in achieving SDG 16. The reports are also based on household surveys that measure Palestinian households' satisfaction with combating corruption.

27.   Participants emphasized that the right to access information should go hand in hand with the right to knowledge and freedom of expression. This right was related to governance and was one of the main pillars of transparency. Transparency was the key to combating corruption, as it allows people to form an objective idea of the government's policies. When governments only distribute data when requested, or do not share data at all, transparency is undermined.

28.   Finally, the primacy of national ownership was underscored as particularly important among the principles of SDG monitoring. Decisions on national indicators should be driven by national priorities while being aligned with global targets and indicators. SDGs should be integrated into national development programmes and national monitoring and evaluation systems, utilizing existing platforms and processes. At the national level, the SDGs should be integrated into policymaking, implementation and monitoring cycles.

II. Recommendations

29.   To wrap up the discussions, the final session of the expert group meeting focused on harnessing recommendations for what ESCWA and UNDP could do to support governments in their efforts to design monitoring frameworks. Overall, feedback from the participants was positive and most of the suggestions encouraged expanding the United Nations work on monitoring SDG 16 and expanding the SDG 16+ approach, based on the needs identified during the meeting. The recommendations reflected different levels and areas of focus for the way forward:

1. *General recommendations*

30.   SDG 16 is perceived as the key to achieve all SDGs and there is a growing need to acknowledge importance of this goal in facilitating and achieving agenda 2030, in addition to the role of strong public institutions in that regard.

(a) National statistics offices (NSOs) and their partners must facilitate and work to upgrade of statistical capacities to measure the indicators. To be effective in this endeavour, engaging new actors and exploring new data sources is necessary. Acknowledging the central role of NSOs as coordinators and harmonizers of the national statistical system, strengthening the collaboration between NSOs and other entities, both inside and outside government, is necessary. This includes the better integration of often underutilized administrative data systems across government institutions and the exploration of unofficial data sources to complement more traditional ones;

(b) Improvement and expansion of existing administrative data systems combined with partnerships to produce surveys or apply new technologies is also a cost-effective response to make the cost of statistical upgrading less burdensome. Enhancing partnerships and improved cooperation between state agencies and unofficial data providers is therefore essential;

(c) Data must be produced with common standards and methods. Accounting rules are necessary in the region. If this does not happen direct comparison is not possible. Standardization is particularly important for monitoring governance and corruption indicators, given the challenging contextual factors such as culturally different notions of governance or the particularities of a country's political system. Participants noted that there are no reasons why such statistics cannot adhere to the same standards employed by other disciplines such as economics or social or environmental statistics;

(d) From the demand side, access to information was identified as vital to exercise social accountability and to generate demand and increase use of existing data as well as to push governments to provide it in a user-friendly manner to address this situation, a cross-cutting intervention that starts with legislation on the right to access information and that includes efforts in diverse policies such as education to create awareness on the SDGs concepts in schools and universities is necessary. The final goal of such policies must be to advance citizens' capacity to build strong institutions through increased accountability and transparency;

(e) In conflict-affected countries, improved statistical capacity implies better identification of vulnerabilities and the nature of reconstruction challenges. In this way, they allow for better design of humanitarian responses as well as better evidence for recovery interventions. Challenges in conflict-affected settings reinforce the need of stronger cooperation between governmental and non-governmental sources of data.

2. *Technical cooperation recommendations*

(a) There was significant emphasis on ESCWA and UNDP efforts to deepen their engagement with the governments and civil society in the region on this topic, and in the context of intensifying awareness of good governance and inclusive institution-building;

(b) The recommendation was made for both institutions to organize thematic workshops on the SDG16+ framework to address dimensions of peaceful societies, just societies and inclusive societies. This thematic focus might allow for meetings with a focused level of expertise on the topic to generate actionable policy recommendations on each dimension. Other innovative forms of interactive dialogue for countries of the region, such as online platforms and open forums, were also considered worth exploring;

(c) It was suggested identifying lessons learned and good practices from ESCWA and UNDP's experience working with the governments of the region to inform further advisory services. This could eventually evolve to generate a bank of good practices and experts from countries that have gone through developing indicators and or monitoring frameworks, so that they can work together to help other countries in the region.

3. *Recommendations on building a SDG 16+ Indicator Framework for the Arab region*

31. Building an SDG 16+ indicator framework must rest on three pillars:

(a) Scoping – specifying what is being monitored, by cross-checking with SDG 16 global targets and indicators;

(b) Assessing – establishing a consultation group, agreeing on the priority indicators, producing data and supplementary indicators;

(c) Selecting – targeting global indicators, selecting structural, process and outcome indicators as well as selecting the quantitative and qualitative indicators; the indicators to capture those "left behind", in addition to utilizing exiting data and developing nationalized indicator metadata;

(d) In terms of generating momentum and political will for the SDG 16 targets, it was underscored that civil servants need to be aware of the concepts, targets and national strategies in order to achieve them. It is not enough to keep these issues within the circle of high-level decision-makers or politicians. There is furthermore an increasing need to invite the private sector, along with other United Nations agencies and the public sector, to exchange experiences and share lessons learned to achieve SDG 16, through building harmony between private, public and civil society sectors;

(e) To overcome the challenges related to achieving SDG 16 in the Arab region, there was a call to learn from the experiences and success stories of different countries, specifically those initiatives that focus on capacity-building of the public sector. The exchange of lessons learned among Arab States was deemed critical to build trust among concerned stakeholders involved in the advancement of SDG 16, namely governments, civil society organizations, academic institutions and concerned multilateral organizations.

4. *Recommendations on institutional effectiveness and corruption*

(a) With regard to enhancing institutional transparency, accountability and effectiveness in the Arab region, ESCWA and UDP were called upon to assist its member States in identifying challenges within public institutions and agencies. In addition, the conceptual aspects of the SDGs should be known to all within the civil service. Within the SDG 16 framework, there should be more effort and investment in enhancing integrity of the public sector to tackle the lack of transparency and risks of corruption at the institutional level and at the enabling environment level or what some participants referred to as the macro-level;

(b) It was suggested that a tool for strategic planning for governments that is dedicated to improving welfare to citizens be developed. Citizens should be provided different instruments and documents for planning with a concentration on governance from a bottom-up approach;

(c) It is imperative to consider a new level of context and pre-conditions related to different indicators. As soon as decision-makers begin to (deeply) understand the key points of indicators, they could better assist with the implementation of targets. There is a need to develop a framework for indicators through broader and more inclusive participation of more actors by having indicators that are relevant and factual, with better ability to measure and monitor outcomes and progress;

(d) There is need for competency-based decision-making, enhancing capacity and resources with key performance indicators to measure transparency and anti-corruption. In this sense, it was recommended that in order to strengthen the capacity of public institutions, transparent job descriptions based on competencies and merits, as well as performance evaluation systems, must become the standard operating procedure to advance the public sector and attain the SDGs;

(e) Monitoring tends to drive implementation, implying that setting up proper monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems and approaches should not be seen as a one-off exercise but key to the whole SDG implementation. Being effective in advancing SDG 16 requires mobilization from other institutions, a closer examination of government's relationship with civil societies and grassroots movements, in addition to more accurate and improved tools for M&E. National efforts to measure SDG 16 should be enhanced through establishing national teams to measure progress towards achieving it. This process should be participatory, involving youth and the private sector in implementing those SDGs that affect them the most;

(f) National anti-corruption strategies, which are increasingly being adopted by Arab countries as policy instruments to coordinate and enhance the effectiveness of anti-corruption reforms offer strong a avenue for the promotion of data collection and sharing. Supporting them to develop suitable M&E frameworks that are synchronized with SDG 16 targets and indicators will have immense added value.

5. *Recommendations related to the substantive direction*

(a) Stakeholders need clarity on how ESCWA and UNDP's work complement each other and potential gaps in current engagement with countries of the region;

(b) The general problem in collecting data and centralizing data so that it serves national indicators. It is acknowledged by ESCWA and there are capacity-building programmes in place in the framework of the regional statistical commission mechanism and country-level and global-level support designed and implemented by UNDP. Support in technical assistance from Member States could be redefined to find areas for strengthening in collect data on SDG16+ more effectively.

III. Organization of work

A. Venue and date

32.   The expert group meeting "Towards a Regional Monitoring Framework for Enhancing Institutional Effectiveness, Advancing Inclusiveness, Ending Violence, and Strengthening Anti-Corruption", was held in Amman, on 12-13 December 2019.

B. Opening

33.   Mr. Tarik Alami, Director, Division for Emerging and Conflict Related Issues at ESCWA, welcomed the participants to the meeting, noting that while there were regions of the world today that enjoy sustainable peace, security and prosperity, the stark fact that a large part of humanity lived in a vicious cycle of conflict and violence cannot be ignored. Mr. Alami added that insecurity, weak institutions and the absence of the rule of law and good governance have produced social hatreds and long grievances that could extend for generations and turn into political narratives based on injustice and marginalization. He pointed out that such a state of affairs led world leaders to agree on the 2030 Agenda. Within that context, the SDG 16 was particularly noteworthy since it aimed to consolidate the structures of peaceful and inclusive societies as well as provide access to justice for all without exception. Substantially reducing all forms of violence and death rates (16.1), reducing corruption (16.5), developing effective institutions (16.6) and ensuring decision-making that was responsive to needs, inclusive of all, participatory and representative at all levels (16.7), have become the main goals of the 2030 Agenda, which – Mr. Alami highlighted – presented the pathway to peace and prosperity in the Arab region. He concluded that the two days of the meeting were dedicated to discussing available methodologies and data that focus on supporting the advancement of SDG 16 in the region, in addition to exchange lessons learned and best practices among ESCWA member States that serve to facilitate the goal's attainment.

34.   UNDP opening remarks were made by Susanne Dam Hansen, Deputy Director, Amman Regional Hub at UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States, who stressed the centrality of Goal 16 was as "an enabling goal to achieve many other goals such as SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 10 (reduced inequalities), SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities), SDG 13 (climate change) and SDG 17 (partnerships)". Ms. Dam Hansen added that the interconnectedness of this goal is especially relevant to the Arab region, a region where if armed conflicts are not resolved and demographic projections of faster population growth in crisis countries are realized, 40 per cent of the people in Arab countries will live in crisis and conflict in 2030, according to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. She also stressed that in some countries, development gains have been reversed not only as a result of war and conflict, but also as a result of weak and/or non-responsive institutions and unaccountable governance. Ms. Dam Hansen also talked about the leading role that the UNDP has been playing whereby the UNDP Oslo Governance Centre has been steering the intellectual and methodological work to advance SDG 16 measurement and monitoring, with UNDP acting as the global custodian for four of the global indicators under 16.6 and 16.7, and co-custodian for one global indicator under 16.3. In August 2019, together with the member of the Inter-agency Expert Group (IAEG), UNDP succeeded in upgrading almost all indicators, leaving only one indicator on illicit flows under Tier III.

C. Participants

35.   Participants were technical experts and resource persons from the public sector, academia, civil society and multilateral organizations that are engaged in enhancing institutional effectiveness, inclusiveness, transparency and accountability. The meeting benefited from the participation of civil servants involved in administrative reform as well as national taskforces to enhance access to information, adopt electoral reform measures and the fight against corruption. The technical discussion drew on existing works by ESCWA, UNDP and other United Nations agencies as well as global, regional and national expertise pertaining to the subject matter.

Annex[*]

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