SESSION 2

BUILDING PEACEFUL, JUST AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES

BACKGROUND

Thirty-three countries in Africa are currently classified as Least Developed Countries (LDCs). Overall African LDCs and Haiti have made steady progress over the past decade in implementing commitments under the Istanbul Programme of Action (IPoA) for LDCs. African LDCs achieved steady, albeit modest, average real GDP growth of 3.9 percent in the period from 2017 to 2020; slightly above the global average of 3.4 percent and Africa's average of 3.5 percent.

According to UCPD/PRIO database, there were at least 19 countries with active armed conflicts in Africa in 2019, 15 of which are LDCs[1]. National governments and local level stakeholders in Africa have the primary agency in sustaining peace on the continent. Building resilient national capacities that can help counter structural inequalities, exclusion, and other drivers that undermine social cohesion should be at the front and center of priorities of LDCs in Africa. If such drivers are neglected, they may over time lead to violent conflict and risk undermining the sustainable development goals. As underscored by the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus, adopted in February 2019, the prioritization should follow "prevention always, development wherever possible, humanitarian action when necessary". Similarly, the African Union's Silencing the Guns initiative, adopted in 2013, acknowledges this interrelation and the multiplicity of factors that define an interrelationship between socio-economic development and conflicts and call its Member States to address socio-economic challenges to prevent conflicts and sustain peace.

The Sustainable Development Goals Center for Africa (SDGC/A) and the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) jointly undertake the reporting on the performance of African states on the SDGs through the publication of the Africa SDG Index and Dashboards Report. The majority of African countries are on track towards achieving SDG 13 (climate action), and many countries are making moderate advancement towards SDG 2 (zero hunger) and SDG 15 (life on land). However, there has been limited progress across the continent towards creating peaceful and inclusive development, access to justice, and effective institutions, as reflected in the stagnation towards SDG 16 in two-thirds of member states.

[1] Uppsala Conflict Data Program (2020). Available at https://ucdp.uu.se/#/.

In African LDCs and Haiti, the impact of institutional models stemming from the colonial past and external/transnational factors (including economic stressors) have led to a diversity of institutional models and practices across the continent creating challenges in promoting homogeneous policies for institutional inclusiveness.

However, a common aim for all countries is to ensure just and inclusive institutions that address the vulnerabilities of their societies. Limited access to public services, including access to justice, and, in some cases, the absence of such services has direct impact on the perception that populations have of their institutions and, consequently, on the capacity of public institutions to promote social cohesion and stability. Institutional weakness and perceived unfairness may lead to the weakening of social contract and state legitimacy if the population's trust in the capacity of their institutions to address problems in a fair and inclusive way is diminished.

In this regard, it is worth noting how the choice of public policies could affect peace and stability. For instance, decisions on intra and inter sectoral allocations of public spending and the distribution of the tax burden—when governments levy taxes—impact public service delivery and net incomes, hence providing an opportunity to address inequalities and other triggers and catalysts of conflicts.

The COVID-19 pandemic, whose socio-economic impact was felt the most acutely by marginalised segments of society, has put additional pressure on the states' capacity to deliver services to their citizens in a manner perceived equal, further eroding citizens" trust in institutions, transparency and social cohesion. Similarly, a growing number of African LDCs also face fiscal pressures due to increased spending on public health measures, deteriorating security situations and the reliance on security response to instabilities. Amid increased security and defense spending, efforts to attend to social development needs become more challenging.

Both the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the African Union Agenda 2063 emphasize the critical role of peace, security and stability to sustainable development. Peace, security, development, human rights and humanitarian efforts are complementary and need to reinforce one another so as to respond to volatile situations in Africa and around the world. To propose a concrete and implementable roadmap to address this interrelation, the African Union's flagship project, Silencing the Guns, promotes conflict prevention along the interlinkages among political, economic, social, environmental and legal sectors. The need to prioritise international support to and partnerships with conflict affected African LDCs, particularly in addressing socio-economic and institutional vulnerabilities, remains a critical step in achieving peaceful, just and inclusive societies.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of the session is to explore how peace and security are impacting development in African LDCs and how inclusive institutional practices and equal access to public goods and services can support countries to prevent instabilities and sustain peace in line with Goal 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Guiding questions:

Government representative:

1. Based on experience in your country, what are some of the ways conflict, instability, and humanitarian emergencies can impact achievement towards the sustainable development goals?

2. In your country, has the government's lack of capacity to deliver public services to the population in an equal, just, and efficient manner been a driver of conflict or social unrest? If so, what are the policy measures that have been implemented to promote inclusive institutions and equitable public service delivery?

3. How do you balance the short-term demand for fiscal resources in response to public health (e.g., COVID-19) and humanitarian emergencies (e.g., arising from armed conflicts and protests), and the long-term need to invest in key socioeconomic sectors (e.g., infrastructure, health, education, energy, job creation) that help promote inclusive and sustainable growth?

UN system:

4. What are the best practices from African countries, and LDCs in particular, to build adequate and inclusive institutions that are inducive to public service delivery as well as conflict prevention?

5. How can the UN and other development partners provide adequate and more effective support to LDCs for institutional building as a mechanism for conflict prevention and peacebuilding?

Academia/Researchers:

6. What is the research evidence on how inclusive institutional practices and equitable public service delivery can play a role in preventing conflicts and instabilities in the Africa region, especially in fragile and least developed settings?

7. What are the best practices from LDCs in addressing the peace and security, institutional building, and sustainable development nexus?

Youth representative:

8. How are the youth in African countries affected by conflict/insecurity and the absence of inclusive service delivery? How can governments better leverage the role of the youth population in building inclusive institutions and sustainable peace?