

Bridging the data gap to monitor progress in advancing SDG16 at the time of COVID-19

Speech by Malene Almeida, Praia City Group on Governance Statistic

Thank you, Mr. Tommasoli. It's a pleasure for me to be part of such a distinguished panel. The Praia Group on Governance Statistics (the Praia Group), the first and only African city group, was formally established by the United Nations Statistical Commission in March 2015 for a five year term, to "contribute to establishing international standards and methods for the compilation of statistics on the major dimensions of governance." The establishment came out of international recognition that governance statistics are a critical area of statistics that lacks the maturity as other statistics and is underinvested in most parts of the world.

As part of its mandate the Group was charged with developing a Handbook on Governance Statistics for National Statistical Offices. The Handbook which covers "the conceptualization, measurement methodology and dissemination of governance statistics" was endorsed by the UNSC in March 2020.

The Handbook is divided in two main parts. The first part addresses cross-cutting issues applicable to all or most dimensions of governance statistics proposed by the Praia Group. This part provides an overarching framework with common analytical underpinnings, informed by international human rights norms and principles that are applicable to all the dimensions.

The second part of the Handbook provides guidance on eight dimensions of governance, namely: non-discrimination and equality; participation; openness; access to and quality of justice; responsiveness; absence of corruption; trust; and safety and security. For each dimension the Handbook provides a conceptualization of the dimension, a discussion of its relevance, a presentation of data and best practices that currently exist, recommended key indicators (including but not limited to indicators for the SDGs) and a suggested way forward to achieve international statistical standards in the context of the dimension. In brief:

- Non-discrimination and equality address any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference or other differential treatment based on grounds such as color, sex, language, religion, national or social origin, disability or other status that has the intention or effect of nullifying or impairing human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- Participation focuses on the ways in which individuals take part in the conduct of political and public affairs, including by: registering to vote, voting or standing as a candidate in elections; being members of legislative, executive and judicial bodies at all levels of government; accessing positions in the public service; and engaging, individually or as members of political parties and NGOs, in political activities.
- Openness refers to the extent to which public institutions provide access to information and are transparent in their decision- and policy-making processes; it covers access to information, open government provisions, freedom of expression and media pluralism;

- Access to and quality of justice is about the ability of people to defend and enforce their rights and obtain just resolution of justiciable problems, if necessary, through impartial formal or informal institutions of justice and with appropriate legal support;
- Responsiveness focuses on whether people have a say in what government does, and whether they are satisfied with the government's performance;
- Absence of corruption refers to intolerance to corruption, the levels and patterns of observable corrupt practices, and the State response to corruption;
- Trust addresses people's trust in institutions such as the parliament, the national government and the justice system, as well as trust in other people; and
- Safety and security focus on levels and patterns of crime, perceptions of safety, measurement of casualties directly provoked by armed operations, and the quality of law enforcement and criminal justice institutions.

As its mandate ended in March 2020, the Praia Group requested the UN Statistical Commission another five-year period to continue the work in development. To this end, the Group will continue its work according to the terms of reference, focusing on: to disseminate and promote uptake in the use of the Praia handbook on governance statistics, including the supporting capacity-building and training; (f) To supplement the handbook with the development of methodological and practical guidelines for the improved gathering and compilation of governance statistics at all levels, covering issues of concept definition, data sources and the harmonization of governance indicators and drawing on internationally agreed governance and human rights standards.

However, as many countries is facing challenges in producing statistics with COVID-19 lockdowns disrupting traditional, field-based approaches to data collection that rely on face-to-face interviews and forcing several NSOs to limit their statistical production to a few foundational areas, the production of governance statistics may not have been prioritized up until now. However, as NSOs slowly adjust their operations and explore the use of remote data collection methodologies or methods that leverage alternative sources of data, such as administrative records or 'big data' sources, governance data needs are starting to feature more prominently.

To this end, the Praia Group will produce a document called '**COVID-19 Briefs**' which will extract guidance from the Handbook (and adding new guidance as necessary) that is most relevant to produce governance statistics in time of COVID-19 or similar (health) crises.