Transparent, inclusive, and responsive public service delivery

Summary of 4th e-Discussion on SDG 16 Trends and Emerging Issues in the Context of COVID-19

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Background

The need for investment in effective, accountable, and responsive governance to facilitate more equitable access to health, education, social protection and other public services has been highlighted by the pandemic. A particular focus has been placed on the role of local government investing in inclusive and accountable systems that benefit all.

Public service delivery and responsiveness:
- Apart from a few early warnings, there was no prenotification of the consequences of the pandemic, leaving authorities to respond using just existing resources; this exacerbated the gap between well- and poorly-equipped countries.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing public service delivery challenges caused by **weak state capacity**, **corruption**, and **bureaucracy**. Therefore, there is **need to address systemic issues.**
- The pandemic has also increased the opportunities for corruption, especially in countries with weak governance institutions, which has hindered people's access to critical public services and the equitable allocation of funds to rebuild economies and protect those most vulnerable

- Lack of transparency in the handling of the pandemic has contributed not only to general misinformation, but also to distrust in public institutions and vaccine skepticism
- In **Nigeria**, the amount allocated to social interventions covers only a small fraction of the national social register, and there are **delays, lack of transparency and corruption** in provisions distribution, contributing to an **erosion of public trust.** This calls for **quality and timely data** to assess vulnerable populations and effectively deliver public services. Also, there are pockets of efficiency in a largely unresponsive public sector, e.g., access to education and pandemic containment. However, with **delays** and **corruption,** the full potential of the public service delivery was not realized.
- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the **inter-connectivity and complexity** of various factors within the public service delivery mechanism have become more apparent.
- The pandemic has **increased distrust** with government agencies able to access a greater amount of citizens' information, and there are widespread concerns on how this information is being used.
- In Kenya, interactive radio shows were used as spaces to mediate public discussion between citizens and authorities and aimed at strengthening citizen engagement in the monitoring of healthcare service delivery during the pandemic.

Recommendations:
- Integrate anti-corruption measures in service delivery and other sectors
- Leverage digital tools to promote transparency and open data, to proactively provide timely, transparent and consistent information, and to strengthen social accountability and civic participation.
- Empower anti-corruption champions and agents of change
- Vaccine provision must involve: transparency and fairness; integrity of public officials and citizens; social infrastructure for equitable access and distribution; open data of vaccine distribution; accountability; access to information and combat to fake news; zero tolerance to corruption.
- Inclusive and responsive service delivery systems require **long term commitment and budgeting/investment**
- **Digital technologies** can be used to enhance communication flow and collaboration between public institutions and citizens
- Inclusive and responsive system must **address concerns related to data privacy abuse** and **lack of transparency** on how information gathered is being used.
- Need to **eliminate obsolete practices** in public institutions that slow down the ability of these agencies to respond and make reforms based on feedback from civil society.