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SOMALIA: EVALUATION IN A CRISIS CONTEXT: MEASURING SDG 16 IN FRAGILE ENVIRONMENTS



PRABIN KHADKA
ADVISER, UNDP SOMALIA

ROSE FORAN
TECHNICAL SPECIALIST SDG 16, UNDP SOMALIA

Somalia is a fragile State, recovering from decades of lawlessness that had detrimental effects on its security, institutions and development as a nation. As a member of the g7+, a collaborative network of 20 fragile and post-conflict countries, Somalia is committed to its New Deal Principles, of which “inclusive politics to be fostered to reconcile and resolve conflicts”, “security to be established for all the people” and “access to justice” are fundamental pillars of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions). The Somali Government is currently undergoing a consultative process to finalize the 2020-2024 National Development Plan, throughout which SDG 16 is highlighted as a key commitment. However, for these plans to be effective, a good understanding of the situation is essential.

Somalia unfortunately not only suffers from a limited data landscape, but also weak institutional capacities related to data, which limits its ability to undertake evidence-based policy decisions and monitor the targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Shortcomings in data capacity, especially timely and reliable data, lead to the risk of development intervention outcomes being based only on anecdotal evidence. Reliable and quality data are essential for project interventions to be effective but obtaining data in violent and conflict zones is extremely challenging. Moreover, data collection is unsurprisingly not a priority in such situations. A positive and concrete first step to supporting Governments in fragile settings in measuring intervention outcomes can be to measure them against SDG 16.

The measurement of SDG 16 in fragile contexts allows data collection to address the myriad challenges, not only because of the sensitive nature of the data required, but also because many SDG 16 indicators require qualitative and quantitative data for holistic measurement, as well as data from unofficial sources, such as human rights data. What this means is first ensuring that outcomes – both within projects that support the Somali Government and within the Somali National Development Plan – are meaningfully linked to SDG 16 indicators, and second that those outcomes are being measured through data collection to show impact being achieved on the community level. What makes this endeavour difficult, particularly in a context like Somalia, is that

available data should correctly capture incidents in order to parse their contributions to outcomes, something that is in and of itself extremely challenging in this setting.

In conflict-affected contexts, we first look to make use of existing observational data sets, both cross-sectional and longitudinal. These data sets will allow direct behaviours to be measured (i.e., in the context of target 3, rule of law, reports of victimization to police, or referrals to alternative dispute resolution centres) and provide the most convincing evidence of the efficacy of a given initiative. Complementary data sets containing information that is more widely available in conflict-affected countries, such as violent events (conflict-related deaths, terrorist attacks, etc.), are also useful in examining the effectiveness of interventions, and contribute to outcome and impact-level measurement. However, quality administrative data sets in active or post-conflict settings hardly exist and where they do, they are rarely consistent. Therefore, to evaluate peace and security outcomes, additional measures are needed beyond the number of violent incidents or reports of victimization of sexual and gender-based violence or other offences.

Measuring behaviours directly is challenging in fragile contexts and may not always produce an accurate characterization of the reality on the ground. Furthermore, conflict-affected countries are especially challenging environments for data collection around sensitive topics such as terrorism, sexual and gender-based violence or the implementation of programmes that are controversial or sensitive (such as programmes to support rule-of-law institutions in countries with extremist or insurgent factions). Finding proxies by using surveys to capture the indicators that illustrate whether people are on a pathway towards desired outcomes, therefore, could help demonstrate whether improvements to peace and security have been achieved. One way that researchers have approached this problem is by building on the traditional household surveys, only focusing on the core indicators but taking the household aggregate so that respondents do not have to spend more than 20-30 minutes answering questions. Instead of targeting a large sample in a particular location, this method relies more on the number of clusters covered so that the household aggregate represents the chosen cluster aggregate, which in turn can be interpreted as the proxy result of the indicator chosen.

Relying on surveys to generate proxies of administrative data still does not mitigate risks related to directly measuring attitudes on such subjects, thus potentially leading to unreliable data. Surveys in fragile contexts could also put both enumerators and respondents at risk. Additionally, in conflict-affected communities, citizens, when participating in surveys related to sensitive topics, constantly incur threats by non-State armed groups, stigmatization and social ostracism. Therefore, in a fragile context like Somalia, with conflict-sensitive subjects, “proxies of proxies” are needed, through sensitive-question methodologies or, in the case of programme-related evaluation, using indirect measurement strategies. Social scientists are currently testing a range of approaches to studying sensitive attitudes, which can be useful for project impact

evaluations and data-collection efforts in fragile contexts. This “proxies of proxies” approach relies on the use of experimental survey methods. Endorsement experiments, list experiment and randomized response are the most commonly used techniques developed to mitigate sensitivity bias.

By showing that data collection is possible in some of the world’s most challenging circumstances, this proposal effectively eliminates the notion that data cannot be collected in certain difficult circumstances. In doing so, the proposal aims to shift the focus in from “there is no data” to “how can we collect data in fragile contexts.” Bettering the way intervention projects affect citizens’ livelihoods in fragile contexts requires an understanding of people’s perceptions towards the implemented projects. However, honest views about project activities are risky since the beneficiaries might fear that their honest views are likely to cost them potential future projects. For these reasons, the innovations from the SDG 16 measurement strategy in Somalia are relevant beyond SDG 16, especially in fragile situations. The approaches used, such as to ask sensitive questions, for example, could be used to strengthen data collection for other new SDG indicators related to, among others, climate change and renewable energy. More generally, the innovations in measurement that we aim to test in Somalia allow us to be more imaginative in introducing robust methods to test SDG indicators across fragile contexts.