

Good Governance and Accountability in the Sustainable Development Agenda

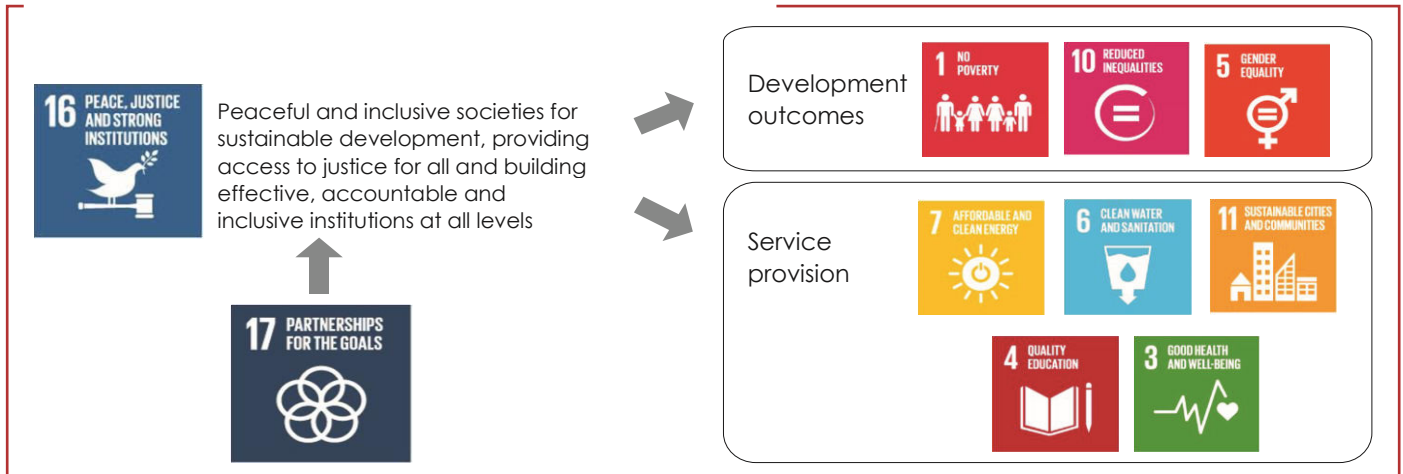
A vision for Good Governance & Accountability

Decades of experience with development efforts have highlighted the need for a base of good governance to deliver on development. While there is no single definition of the term, there is some degree of consensus that good governance relates to effective governance institutions and systems that are **responsive to public needs** to deliver essential services and promote inclusive growth; inclusive political processes that allow for citizens participation in governance decisions; **transparency** and access to information relevant to the purpose of that governance; and **freedom from violence**, fear and crime, and **peaceful** and **secure** societies that provide the stability needed for development investments to be sustained. Women are crucial partners in all these processes. Hence, good governance enables the achievement of a range of critical development objectives.



Accountability is a key theme underpinning many aspects of governance. Sustainable development requires that public officials account for action taken in the public's name and with public resources.¹ The truest test of 'good governance' is the degree to which it delivers on the promise of human rights: civil, cultural, economic, political and social and environmental rights. The question that links sustainable development, good governance and accountability is whether the institutions of governance effectively guarantee the right to health, adequate housing, sufficient food, quality education, fair justice, personal security and environmental health.

¹ Governance for Sustainable Development: Integrating Governance in the Post-2015 Development Framework UNDP (2014)

Box 1: Interconnections between Governance and other SDGs

The Sustainable Development Agenda is based on the recognition and protection of human rights, and promotes a vision of development that leaves no one behind with due concern to planetary boundaries. This marks a shift from the Millennium Development Goals which focused on the national picture, towards the quality of life of all the people to be a central part of decision making. In particular, **Goal 16 focuses on governance issues that promote peaceful and inclusive societies, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions.**² The targets under this goal focus on violence and the rule of law, corruption and access to justice. In all the sustainable development goals however, there is a clear link to governance as they require effective, responsive and accountable state institutions to deliver services, and openness and transparency in public access to information and participation in decision making, to develop on key development outcomes (Box 1).

Sri Lanka: the Vision and Current Realities

While the country boasts of over 50 years of democratic institutions and an extensive and educated bureaucracy, multiple issues remain regarding corruption, discrimination and accountability.

Inclusive
Responsive to the needs of people
Transparency
Participation
Stable
Accountability
Freedom from violence

² Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels - sustainable development knowledge platform (2014)



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SDG TARGET	CURRENT REALITY
<p>Effective, responsive and accountable state institutions</p> <p>1.3 Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable</p>	<p>While poverty has declined to around 6% of the population, about the same number of households remain clustered just above the poverty line, at risk of falling back into poverty. In addition, other vulnerable groups include the elderly, the disabled, female headed households and victims of natural disasters. Despite the multitude of programmes implemented by various arms of the government several weaknesses remain, such as low coverage, poor targeting, and inadequacy of benefits.³ The interventions also do not integrate with each other for a holistic plan.</p>
<p>1b. Create sound policy frameworks at the national, regional and international levels, based on pro-poor and gender-sensitive development strategies, to support accelerated investment in poverty eradication actions</p>	<p>While most policies are purported to be pro-poor and gender sensitive, the degree to which they actually are is debatable. The poor largely feel disenfranchised by the political system and do not engage with it. However, certain vulnerable groups – such as women for example, lobby for their rights with the help and backing of activist and civil society groups.</p>
<p>Openness and transparency</p> <p>16.10 Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements</p>	<p>The Right to Information (RTI) Act was finally passed in Sri Lanka in August 2016 after much deliberation and delays. A Right to Information Commission has been set up to monitor the performance of public officials. Proper financing is needed to ensure that the act can be implemented adequately.</p>
<p>Addressing Corruption</p> <p>16.5 Substantially reduce bribery and corruption in all their forms</p>	<p>Despite a multitude of institutions, both old and newly created, to address bribery and corruption in the country, there is high perception of corruption in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka is ranked 83, together with Benin, China, Colombia and Liberia, on a Corruption Perception Index produced by Transparency International in 2015.⁴</p>
<p>Justice and the Rule of Law</p> <p>16.9 By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration</p>	<p>Processes for registering births and providing national identity cards are relatively effective in the country. However, despite targeted efforts to address the issue, some people in the estate sector still do not possess a valid identity card.</p>
<p>5.1 End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere</p>	<p>Women are discriminated by various customary laws and social attitudes which prevent them from exercising their right to work, right to own, manage, use and dispose of land and property, rights to run for office etc. Wage gaps exist and are worst in the informal sector where men get as much as</p>

³ State of the Economy - IPS (2015)

⁴ Corruption perception index 2015 – Transparency International (2015)



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	40% more and in the private sector where men get paid 20% more than women. ⁵
Participation in decision-making 16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels	A violent and aggressive political culture undermines the development of inclusive decision making processes, from the national parliament down to the local government institutions. This prevents the participation especially of women.
5.5 Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life	The Sri Lankan Parliament has never had more than 6% of female representatives. ⁶ Gender biases and stereotyping among the political parties, and the populace, as well as a lack of support from party leadership acts against greater female participation in politics.
Curbing violence 16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere	The end of the war in 2009 has marked an end to the degree of violence prevailing during the past 30 years. However other forms of violence remain both in the public and private spheres, including gang violence and violence against women and girls. In 2015 there were over 40,000 recorded cases of grave crimes (to the police) with over 10,000 including kidnapping arson, grievous bodily harm, homicide, rape/ cruelty against women and children. ⁷
5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation	Violence against women is widespread and increasing in Sri Lanka and range from rape, sexual harassment, domestic violence, incest, child abuse, and assault, obscenity against women, perverted acts, forced prostitution and pornography. A recent study reports 1194 cases of rape in 2012; 2600 sexual harassment cases in 2011; and 94,000 cases of domestic violence in 2012. ⁸
Monitoring and Accountability 17.18 By 2020, enhance capacity-building support to developing countries, to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts.	Poverty data produced by the Department of Census and Statistics, is not routinely disaggregated by age, race, ethnicity, migratory status or disability, while geographic location is disaggregated only to the district level.

There is much that remains to be done to promote good governance and accountability in Sri Lanka. This can be considered a valued end in itself. A key transformation required to achieving the SDGs is political will, accountable, transparent, responsive and collaborative institutions, and efficient service delivery. It requires an ethical obligation to improve performance and be accountable for one's actions. Business as usual in the area of governance will cripple the achievement of the SDGs and its objectives to leave no one behind.

(Conceptualized in collaboration with the Centre for Poverty Analysis, Sri Lanka)

⁵ To work or not to work? Factors holding women back from market work in Sri Lanka - Ramani Gunetilleke (2013)

⁶ Sri Lankan Women in Politics – Chapa Perera (2015)

⁷ Grave Crimes Abstract 2015 - Sri Lanka Police

⁸ Report by the Leader of the Opposition's Commission on the prevention of Violence against women and girl child (2014)