A post-SDG Summit governance primer: interlinking the institutional, peace and justice dimensions of SDG16 (2016–2019)

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ABSTRACT

As the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development enters its fifth year of implementation, it is opportune to ask how governance is understood and implemented around the world. In fact, one can go further to probe the extent to which governments are cognizant of the principles undergirding effective governance. This paper examines the ways in which governance has been operationalized by countries, major groups and other stakeholders since the first round of Voluntary National Reviews at the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) of 2016. It does this based on the qualitative overview of the Synthesis reports of Voluntary National Reviews (2016–2019), and the quantitative analysis of three SDG databases: Voluntary National Reviews, SDG Good Practices and the SDG Acceleration Actions. It starts with a literature review of the multidimensional concept of governance. The three databases are then scoped through a series of keywords associated with the SDG16 governance targets. It finds that although SDG 16 is catalytic to progress on all other SDGs, its governance dimension does not receive due focus. The article concludes with several action areas to mainstream the governance dimension of SDG16 in sustainable development.

JEL Classification: G38, O19, Q01, P48, D73, H41, H83, J18, J68, J78, L38, Z18

Keywords: Sustainable development, Sustainable Development Goals, SDGs, development, SDG 16, public policy, governance, institutions, peace, justice, rule of law, triple nexus, nexus

Sustainable Development Goals: 16

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I   Introduction

Historically, the notion of governance goes back to Confucius' teachings on wise government and the need to act with an eye to social harmony (Koller 2006). It derives from the Greek verb κυβερνάω [*kubernáo*], which means to steer. Semantically, it was used by Plato, in his Republic, which associated good governance with ensuring just and happy lives for citizens (Kamtekar 2001). Conceptually, governance is both about normative values such as civic virtues and public trust and about legal and institutional frameworks, regime type and quality. It also envelops strategies of growth and equity, innovative engagement modalities and transformational leadership.[1]

In academia, one can find as broad definitions of governance as "regulating who gets what, when and how" (Maogoto 2009:380) and "collaborative efforts, policy entrepreneurship and participatory initiatives" (Duit and Gulay 2008:329). At the other end of the spectrum are narrower definitions like "mechanisms for steering social systems toward their goals" or "the sum of ways that individuals and institutions in public and private spheres manage their affairs" (Knio 2010). More instrumentalist descriptions also exist, such as "the method of public sector management, including financial accountability" and "internal and external control mechanisms" (Thirkel-White 2003: 107, Hout 2010: 8).

In policy circles, governance emerges initially as a development management term. Introduced by the World Bank in a 1989 study called "Sub-Saharan Africa: from Crisis to Sustainable Growth," governance was first defined as "the exercise of political power to manage a nation's affairs," and "good governance," as "public services that are efficient, a judicial system that is reliable, and an administration that is accountable to the public" (World Bank 1989, xii). A subsequent 1992 World Bank report on "Governance and Development" described it as "the way power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development." In 1997, the Bank's World Development Report expanded this definition to cover citizen participation and state-society relations (Doornbos 2004).

United Nations[2] linked good governance to an environment conducive to the enjoyment of human rights and "growth and sustainable human development" (UNCHR 2000/64). The United Nations Declaration of the High-level Meeting on the Rule of Law reaffirmed the principle of good governance and referred to it as "effective, just, non-discriminatory and equitable delivery of public services pertaining to the rule of law, including criminal, civil and administrative justice, commercial dispute settlement and legal aid" (A/RES/67/1, para.12).

Clearly, governance is amorphous. Conceptually, it is hard to delineate. It can mean anything from utilitarian policy-making and cost-cutting to moral and human rights-based rule. Politically, it is contentious. Inclusion of peace, security and governance elements in the 2030 Agenda as a stand-alone goal was controversial, to say the least of it (Saferworld 2014:1; Pereira 2014). Methodologically, it is difficult

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[1] Aristotle, defined good governance as "a state ruled by an ethical and just governor." Philosophers like Thomas Aquinas, Machiavelli, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Edmund Burke and others examined the concept of governance, all with the common goal to approximate the mundane with the moral, the legal with the normative, and the state with society. For more, see Neu (1971).

[2] United Nations activities in support of governance are implemented through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF), the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), the Department of Political Affairs (DPA) and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), among others. For more, see https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/thematic-areas/governance/good-governance/.

to measure (Botero et al. 2016)[3]. Out of the five-governance related SDG16 targets at the national level[4] (please see Box I on page 4), only two have indicators that are categorized as Tier I; i.e., with adequate data and proper methodology of measurement[5].

Policymakers and students of governance and development can thus benefit from a practical understanding of governance as it is operationalized and implemented by governments and other stakeholders. With this premise, the following analysis examines the concept of governance as described in the applied discipline of public administration. This analysis is then followed by a systematic scoping exercise of the term across three UN DESA SDG databases: *Voluntary National Reviews (2016-2020), SDG Good Practices* and the *SDG Acceleration Actions.*

II Understanding of governance in the public administration field

In public administration, governance is often defined as the art of governing, i.e., directing, guiding, regulating individuals, organizations and nations. It encompasses ordered rules of the government, its exercise of authority, patterns of decision-making and collective action together with its partners (Robichau 2011: 116). When characterized as efficient, effective, transparent, accountable, participatory and inclusive (Cheema 2005; Smith 2007), governance is deemed to be "good" or "humane" (Haq 1999). Many have argued that "good" governance can be achieved and sustained only if and where human and institutional capacities are strong (Saldanha 2006, Hope 2009).

A quick glance at peer-reviewed policy journals published in the last three years shows that three types of understanding have dominated. At the normative level, governance is moralistic. It is associated with universal and inalienable human rights. At a strategic-policy level, governance is associated with policies and acts of political, economic, social and civil rights and institutions. At an operational level, governance is about delivering basic services with quality and efficiency.

From a normative perspective, governance can be framed as an international ethical norm or global moral responsibility to promote peace, justice and strong institutions for all (Ivanovic et al. 2018). In this understanding, effective governance and institutions, as part of SDG16 and beyond, provide Member States and other stakeholders with a standard framework for appropriate behaviour (Gözen 2014: 36). It should therefore come as no surprise that 18 out of the 23 global indicators of SDG16 are directly relevant to human rights and 12 of them are enshrined within the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)[6].

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[3]   Out of the 23 indicators of SDG16, seventeen are Tier II or Tier III with no or limited data on them or without a proper methodology of measurement (UN Stats 2019; SDG16 Data Initiative 2017:3; IEP 2017: 6). SDG16.5.2 on corruption and bribery, SDG16.6.1 on effective, accountable and transparent institutions, and SDG 16.8.1 on global governance appear to be the only three Tier I level SDG16 indicators related to governance.

[4]   SDG 16.5 on reducing corruption and bribery; 16.6 on effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels; 16.7 on responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels; 16.10 on public access to information and fundamental freedoms; and 16.b on non-discriminatory laws.

[5]   These two indicators are SDG16.5.2 on corruption and bribery and SDG16.6.1 on effective, accountable and transparent institutions.

[6]   For instance, SDG16.b on promoting and enforcing non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development makes verbatim reference to international human rights in its indicator. Targets like access to justice (16.3) relates to the right to effective remedy (ICCPR Art 23) among others; inclusive and participatory decision-making in public institutions expresses the right to public life (ICCPR Art25); public access to information and protection of fundamental freedoms (16.10) involves the right to life, freedom from arbitrary detention and torture, and freedom of expression and information (ICCPR Arts 6,7,9 and 19).

From a strategic perspective, good governance revolves around institution-building and policy-making. How effective, inclusive and accountable institutions transpire, and how the relevant procedures and mechanisms govern their daily functions relate to governance. Strategic focus is also on averting risk, preventing conflict and making sure that developmental gains are not jeopardized by poor governance such as illicit dealings, crime and corruption[7]. Recently, several international financial institutions (IFIs) have adopted governance indicators to assess their member states. Some examples are World Bank's International Development Assistance and its Eighteenth Replenishment (IDA 18); and the International Monetary Fund's Enhanced Framework on Governance (2018).

From an operational perspective, good governance is about quality basic services. SDG 16.6 on effective, accountable and transparent institutions; and 16.7 on inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making put emphasis on services as do some other SDG targets classified under SDG16+, e.g., SDG1.4 on equal rights to economic resources, basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property (IEP 2019). Pathfinders for SDG16+ and SDG16+Forum[8] have recently taken initiatives to recognize the role of service delivery, particularly by civil society organizations, to operationalize good governance. World Bank and ICNPL's Association, Resources, Voice Information, and Negotiation (ARVIN) framework and the International Association for Public Participation's Spectrum of Public Participation are some examples of citizen and civil society engagement to help operationalize good governance.

Normative, strategic and operational layers of governance are interdependent. For instance, a human rights-based approach is intrinsically related to socioeconomic and other rights, which are materialized in concrete strategies and policies, which in turn, are implemented through public service delivery on the ground. That said, it is difficult to establish empirical linkages among SDG16 targets and between SDG16 and other SDGs even though governance connections are conceptually salient (Hope 2019: 68).

Operationalizing governance linkages empirically requires using all relevant data. National Human Rights Institutions, for instance, collect a wealth of data related to measuring, monitoring and tracking of SDG16 targets, including their governance dimensions (A/RES/70/163). They can play multiple roles in ensuring that no one is left behind by also playing an oversight role over SDG implementation (Global Alliance 2019). Civil society organisations and networks, such as the Transparency, Accountability and Participation (TAP) Network[9] and SDG16 Data Initiative undertake efforts to complement the official indicator framework for monitoring SDG16 implementation.

III Operationalizing governance

Effective rule of law and good governance are present in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (para.9 and 35) as is global economic governance (para.44 and 63). Among the SDGs, only SDG16.8 makes an explicit reference to governance (to global governance, more specifically)[10]. Governance is often associated with the institutional aspects of SDG16, which are encapsulated in five SDG16 targets (Box I).

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[7] SDG16.4, 16.5 and 16.a, although not associated with any human rights treaties, display linkages to the Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (CTOC) (Arts 6,7,8 and 9).

[8] Pathfinders for SDG16+ are a group of United Nations Member States, international organisations, global partnerships, and other partners working to accelerate the delivery of the SDG targets. It is led by Brazil, Sierra Leone and Switzerland and co-convened by New York University's Centre on International Cooperation (CIC). SDG16+Forum is the platform to share best practices.

[9] TAP Network has a Goal 16 Advocacy Toolkit. Available at https://tapnetwork2030.org/goal-16-advocacy-toolkit/

[10] SDG16.8 reads: Broaden and strengthen the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance.

Box 1
Institutional principles encapsulated in SDG16 targets (World Public Sector Report 2019):

- 16.5: Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms
- 16.6: Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels
- 16.7: Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels
- 16.10: Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements
- 16.b: Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development

Source: United Nations World Public Sector Report 2019. Executive Summary.

Previous analysis has shown that these governance targets of SDG16, although relatively fewer compared to other targets of SDG16 and SDG16+, are getting increasing attention by Member States as measured by their Voluntary National Reviews from 2016 to 2018 (Figure 1). Moreover, on average, coverage of the governance targets of SDG16 (except for 16.b) is slightly higher (54.02%) than that of the rest of the SDG16 targets (42.92%) (Figure II).

The following analysis focuses on the applications of the governance dimension of SDG16. It seeks to gauge countries' commitment to governance as part of their SDG16 implementation. It does this through the systematic analysis of: (i) 157 VNR Key statements (2016-2019, inclusive)[11]; (ii) 509 SDG Good practices descriptive abstracts (2018-2019)[12]; and (iii) 126 SDG Acceleration actions (2019)[13]. As such, the focus is not so much on SDG16 interactions with other SDGs or to measure progress in the implementation of SDG 16 and its targets against the global/ national indicator framework[14]. The analysis does, however, assess the linkages of SDG16 governance targets with the rest of the SDG16 targets, i.e., those with focus on peace and justice.

From qualitative perspectives, a rapid overview of the four VNR Synthesis Reports produced by UN DESA (2016-2019) reaffirms the importance of SDG16 in accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda as a whole. The Reports also put emphasis on the need to address SDG16 holistically with all its targets. More specifically, and as we approach the present day, they underline the need to strengthen institutional mechanisms to gather SDG 16-related data at national and subnational levels. The Synthesis Reports also state the importance of governance structures, models and processes for sustainable development and how governance institutions and decision-making processes should adopt a human rights-based approach to development in order to achieve SDG16 and SDG16+. (UN DESA 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019).

From quantitative perspectives, the following analysis scrutinizes the VNR submissions by the Member States directly as well as two other complementary UN DESA databases on SDG implementation, respectively on Good Practices and Accelerated Actions. 'Governance', 'SDG16' and 'institutions' are the three keywords

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11   Only Key Statements/Messages are analysed; not the full text of reports.

12   Only the Titles and Abstracts, and not the entire descriptive narratives, were analysed.

13   *Idem.*

14   The latter two focus areas are brought into analysis only as needed and at the strategic and operational levels. The limited focus adopted in this paper stems from the explicitly chosen objective of assessing the governance dimension and targets of SDG16.

Figure I
Coverage of SDG16 Targets overtime (VNRs, 2016–2018)
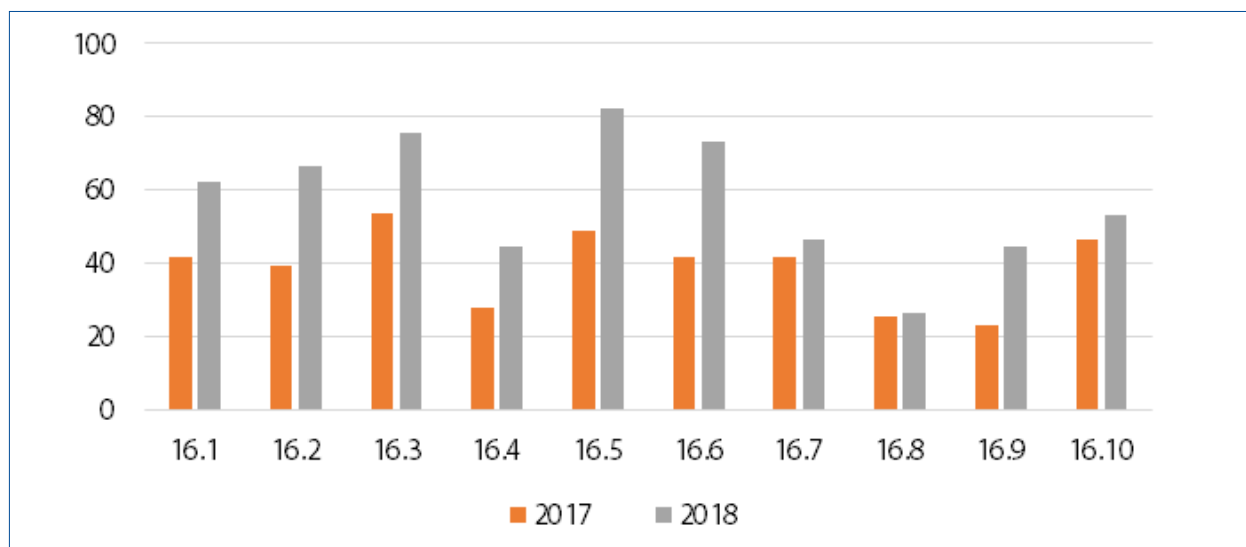
Source: Author's elaboration based on White & Case Analysis of Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) 2018 database.

Figure II
Coverage of SDG16 governance targets versus the rest of SDG16 targets (VNRs, 2016–2018)
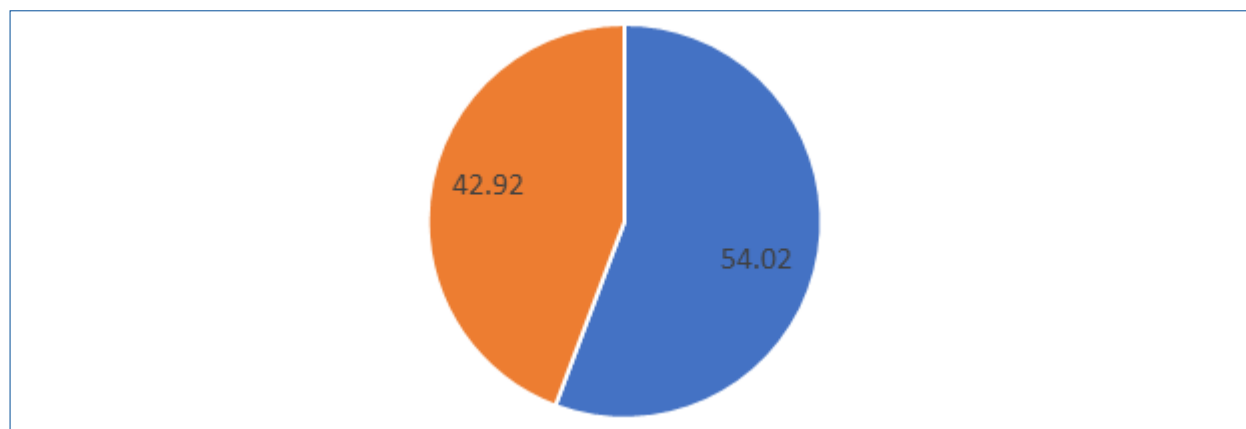
Source: Author's elaboration based on White & Case Analysis of Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) 2018 database.
Note: Blue refers to governance targets of SDG16; orange to the rest.

searched systematically throughout these three UN DESA databases. Other SDG16 key words (justice, rule of law, peace, security[15]) are also counted to get a fuller perspective of SDG16 operationalization and possible correlations with its governance dimension. Finally, the eleven keywords, associated with the eleven ECOSOC-endorsed Principle of effective governance for sustainable development, are also examined.

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15 'Safety' is searched together with 'security,' and counts are coalesced.

III.1 Normative level: Focus on governance in the VNR Database (2016–2019)

An overview of the 157 key statements by 141 Member States who have presented their Voluntary National Reviews between 2016 and 2019[16] shows that 'governance' and 'SDG16' seldom make a visible appearance. 90 Key Statements do not make any references to governance and 34 only mention it once. Countries mention SDG16 even less. 132 Key Statements do not mention SDG16, and 18 do so only once. 11 of these 18 Key Statements come from the High-level Political Forum of 2019, which included SDG16 as a specific goal under review[17]. These findings support previous results that despite several institutional structures and reform processes introducing legislation, policies and programmes on SDG16, strategic approaches that cover the broader thematic aspects and (intra)linkages of SDG16 are rare (Partners for Review 2019).

From regional perspectives, Western Europe and Others Group (WEOG) is the region from which most VNRs originate. WEOG is followed by Africa. The VNR Key statements that include top counts of governance and SDG16 follow similar regional patterns. Countries whose VNR Key Statements include the highest counts of 'governance' term are Namibia (2018) and Samoa (2016) with 7 and 6 references, respectively. They are followed by Belize (2017), India (2017) and Montenegro (2016), with four references each. Countries whose Key Statements make most mention of 'SDG16' are Sierra Leone (2019 and 2016) and the Czech Republic (2017) with 5 and 4 mentions each (Table I).

Table I
Highest counts of key terms per year, VNR Key Statements (2016–2019)

Years	Key terms	The two highest counts	VNR Key Statements	Regions
2016	SDG16	{4,5}	Sierra Leone	Africa
2017			Czech Republic	Eastern Europe
2019			Sierra Leone	Africa
2016	Governance	{6,7}	Samoa	Asia-Pacific
2018			Namibia	Africa
2016	Peace	{5, 7}	Norway	Western Europe and Others
2017			Portugal	Western Europe and Others
2018			Sudan	Africa
2019			Timor Leste	Asia-Pacific
	Institution	{8, 11}	Madagascar	Africa
2016			Venezuela	Latin America and the Caribbean
2016	Justice	{3,4}	Norway	Western Europe and Others
2017			Qatar	Asia-Pacific
2019			Guatemala	Latin America and the Caribbean
			Sierra Leone	Africa
			Timor-Leste	Asia-Pacific
2016	Rule of law	{2, 3}	Norway	Western Europe and Others
2019			Liechtenstein	Western Europe and Others
2017	Security/Safety	{8, 10}	Tajikistan	Asia-Pacific
			Qatar	Asia-Pacific

Source: Author's analysis. Colours denote different regions.

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[16] 14 Member states (Azerbaijan—2017, 2019; Benin—2017, 2018; Chile—2017, 2019; Colombia—2016, 2018; Egypt—2016, 2018; Guatemala—2017, 2019; Indonesia—2017, 2019; Mexico—2016, 2018; Qatar—2017, 2018; have presented twice. One Member state (Togo—2016, 2017, 2018) has presented thrice.

[17] Others were SDG4 on education, SDG8 on decent work and economic growth, SDG10 on decreasing inequalities, SDG 13 on climate action, and SDG 17 on financing for development and partnerships.

An analysis of the keyword "institution" instantly yields higher results. 83 Key Statements use the word twice or more. This is likely to be due to the more generic use of the term. Institution (11 counts max.) is also the most repeated keyword in Member States' Key Statements followed by security/safety (10 counts max.). 2016 is the HLPF year when key terms were used most frequently overall.

A comparative perspective on 'rule of law' and 'justice' shows that countries' Key Statements do not necessarily put more emphasis on one or the other. 139 statements either omit mentioning 'justice' or do so only once. The comparable number for 'rule of law' is 154. 'Justice' fairs slightly better compared to "rule of law," with 17 Key statements mentioning the former twice or more compared with only two Key Statements doing so for the latter. Countries whose VNR Key statements put the most stress on justice are Qatar (2017) and Sierra Leone (2019) with 4 mentions each, followed by Guatemala (2019), Norway (2016) and Timor-Leste (2019), with 3 mentions each. Those who use "rule of law" most frequently in their Key Statements are Liechtenstein (2019) with 3 counts, and Norway (2016) with 2 counts.

Bringing the 'peace' and 'security' terms into analysis does not change the general findings. Only 24 and 26 VNR statements refer to these terms 2 or more times, this leaving 133 and 131 Member States omitting them or mentioning them once only. Key Statements that include the highest counts of 'peace' (7 mentions) and 'security' (10 mentions) are Norway (2016), Portugal (2017) and Timor-Leste (2019) for peace, and Tajikistan (2019) for security.

The content analysis of VNR Key Statements shows that both developed and developing countries stress governance, peace or justice depending on their individual needs and contexts. This is in contrast to previous research finding that SDG16 focus is highest in high-income countries and lowest in low-income countries (Bertelsmann Stiftung and SDSN 2019).[18] These findings point to the need to undertake more in-depth analysis of governance, peace and justice dimensions of SDG16.

This quantitative analysis also reveals that there does not appear to be a strong correlation between word counts. To put it differently, countries that make references to any given key term in their VNR Key Statements do not tend to use them in tandem. The highest correlation is found between "peace" and "justice" and "peace" and "rule of law". Very low correlation is observed between "governance" and "peace," between "governance" and "justice", and between "SDG16" and "security" (Table II).

Table II
Correlating the use of key words in VNR Key statements (2106–2019)

	governance	SDG16	peace	institution	Justice	rule of law	security
governance	1.00						
SDG16	0.18	1.00					
peace	0.07	0.21	1.00				
institution	0.18	0.05	0.17	1.00			
justice	0.10	0.33	**0.43**	0.29	1.00		
rule of law	0.15	0.19	**0.42**	0.03	0.27	1.00	
security	0.18	0.04	0.10	0.23	0.28	0.14	1.00

Source: Author's analysis. Bold font denotes highest values.

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18   Ten highest SDG16 scoring countries are Iceland, Denmark, New Zealand, Austria, Ireland, Japan, Luxembourg, Singapore and Canada (in descending order). Ten lowest SDG 16 scoring countries are Democratic Republic of Congo, Chad, Yemen, Venezuela, Angola, Nigeria, Mauritania, Liberia, Zambia and Haiti (in ascending order.).

Governance-associated *sub-key terms* are examined across the Key Statements of VNR countries[19]. These terms are the ones associated with the eleven Principles of effective governance endorsed by the Economic and Social Council in July 2018. They are: (i) Competency, (ii) Sound Policy, (iii) Cooperation under the main title of (A) Effectiveness; (iv) Integrity, (v) Transparency and (vi) Oversight under the rubric of (B) Accountability; and (vii) Leave no one behind, (viii) Non-discrimination, (ix) Participation, (x) Subsidiarity, (xi) Intergenerational equity under the banner of (C) Inclusiveness.

This complementary analysis reveals that there is high variance in the usage of these governance-related terms, counts ranging from zero (sound policymaking and subsidiarity) to 16 (cooperation) per Key Statement. Among the *effectiveness, accountability* and *inclusiveness* pillars, *accountability* is found least frequently as assessed by the lowest number of key terms associated with the principles that fall under this category (97 counts). *Effectiveness* (219 counts) receives more attention and i*nclusiveness* is stressed the most (459 counts). *Cooperation* (204 counts), *inclusion* (190 counts) and *participation* (184 counts) were the top three terms found across all submissions. *Subsidiarity* was not detected, and *sound policymaking* was detected once only.

III.2   Strategic level: Focus on governance in SDG Good practices database (2018–2019)

Three years into the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), UN DESA has launched a call for submissions of good practices, success stories and lessons learned on SDGs by all stakeholders. At the time of writing, 509 cases were received from a variety of entities including Governments, UN entities, international and regional organizations, Major Groups and other Stakeholders.

From regional perspectives, Latin America and the Caribbean was the region which originated the most submissions with 33 percent of all cases in the database. Asia and the Pacific submitted about 30 percent of all initiatives, and Western Europe and Others Group (WEOG) sent 25 percent of all good practices. Only about 12 percent of the submission came from Africa. Global initiatives were less than one percent.

The case making the most use of all key terms shown in Table I above was Finland's *Helsinki participation model, making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable*[20] (76 counts). Brazil's *ViraSer Program - Shared responsibility in waste management*[21] (48 counts), *Colombia's Public Policy of Transparency, Integrity and No-Tolerance to Corruption in Bogota*[22] (46 counts), *Guinea's Plan2Inclusivize Sport for Inclusion Training Programme*[23] (43 counts) and *Israel's Ensuring Accessible and Inclusive Services for People with Disabilities* (41 counts) followed suit.

Approximately 34 percent of submissions came from the government, including national and local levels. 40 percent of governmental submissions came from the local level. 32 percent of all submissions originated from the civil society including philanthropy, international non-profits, networks, trade unions and faith-based organizations. 16 percent of the good practices were private sector initiatives; 12 percent included UN system as the lead, and 6 percent originated from universities and research institutes.

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[19] In this part of the analysis, only the Key Statements in English were examined, this yielding a total of 135 Key Statements. The Key Statements not available in English were not reviewed.

[20] Please see https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnership/?p=31757

[21] Please see https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnership/?p=30238

[22] Please see https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnership/?p=30298

[23] Please see https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnership/?p=30837

SDG16 was mentioned in 144 cases, i.e., roughly 28.4 percent of all submissions. Compared to the focus on the rest of the SDGs, this is at the lower ends. Only SDG 4 on *inclusive and equitable quality education*, SDG7 on *affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy*, SDG9 on *industry, innovation and infrastructure*, SDG10 on *inequalities* and SDG15 on the *sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems* were covered less extensively than SDG16.

SDG16 was most frequently paired with SDG17 on *financing for development and partnerships*, and SDG5 on *gender equality and women's empowerment*. The SDGs that were least frequently paired with SDG16 were SDG14 on the *sustainable use of oceans, seas and marine resources* and SDG7 on *affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy* (Figure III and IV).

In terms of 'governance' focus, an analysis of the titles of all cases revealed that key terms of 'governance', 'peace' and 'security,' 'justice,' and 'rule of law' rarely appeared. 'Governance' was found in the titles of two initiatives, one from Turkey on *Municipal Governance Scorecards*[24], and one from Costa Rica, on *Multi-stakeholder Governance for SDG implementation*[25]. Six cases included institution in their titles covering as varied topics as Supreme Audit Institutes (Brazil), education on agricultural practices (India, Brazil and the Czech Republic) and housing (Mexico)[26].

In terms of the rest of the SDG16-related keywords, 'peace' figured in the titles of two initiatives, one from Brazil on agricultural research and innovation,[27] and one on sport for peace from Darfur, Sudan[28]. 'Justice' and 'rule of law' did not appear in any title. There were five cases with a security focus appearing in their titles.

Figure III and IV
SDG16 focus and pairings in Good Practices Database
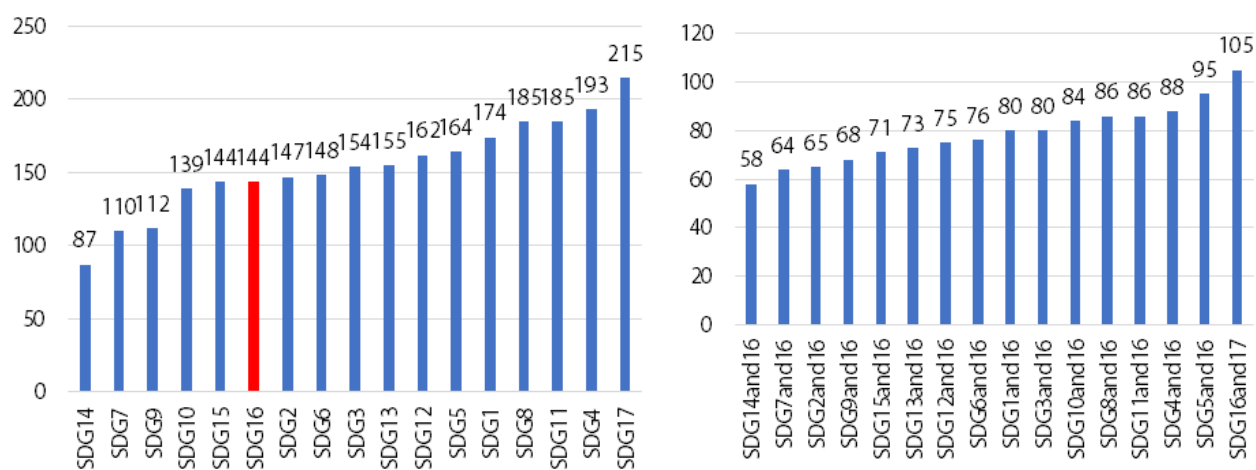
Source: Author's analysis.

24   Please see https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnership/?p=30076

25   Please see https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnership/?p=29556

26   See https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnership/?p=30795; https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partner-ship/?p=30648; https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnership/?p=29632,https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/part-nership/?p=30591; https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnership/?p=30334; and https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnership/?p=30334

27   Please see https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnership/?p=29632

28   Please see https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnership/?p=28387

They focused on food security[29] (Japan and Cameroon), roadside safety (India), workplace safety (United Arab Emirates)[30] and marine safety (Bahrain)[31].

This analysis also delved deeper into the fundamental terms associated with the Principles of effective governance endorsed by the Economic and Social Council in July 2018. Analysis showed that there is high variance in the usage of these governance-related terms, counts ranging from a minimum of zero to a maximum of 76. The median number of governance-related sub-key terms found was 4, meaning that half of the 509 cases examined mentioned the governance-related key terms 4 times or less. 80 submissions did not mention any of the eleven key terms. Average number of words used was 5.8. Among the *effectiveness, accountability* and *inclusiveness* pillars, *accountability* (265 counts) received the least attention assessed by the lowest number of key terms associated with the principles that fall under this category. *Inclusiveness* category noted the most counts (1922 counts). *Participation, cooperation* and *transparency* were the top three terms found across all submissions. *Subsidiarity* was not detected, and *sound policymaking* was detected only once (Figure V).

Figure V
Governance-associated terms: Eleven principles of effective governance for sustainable development
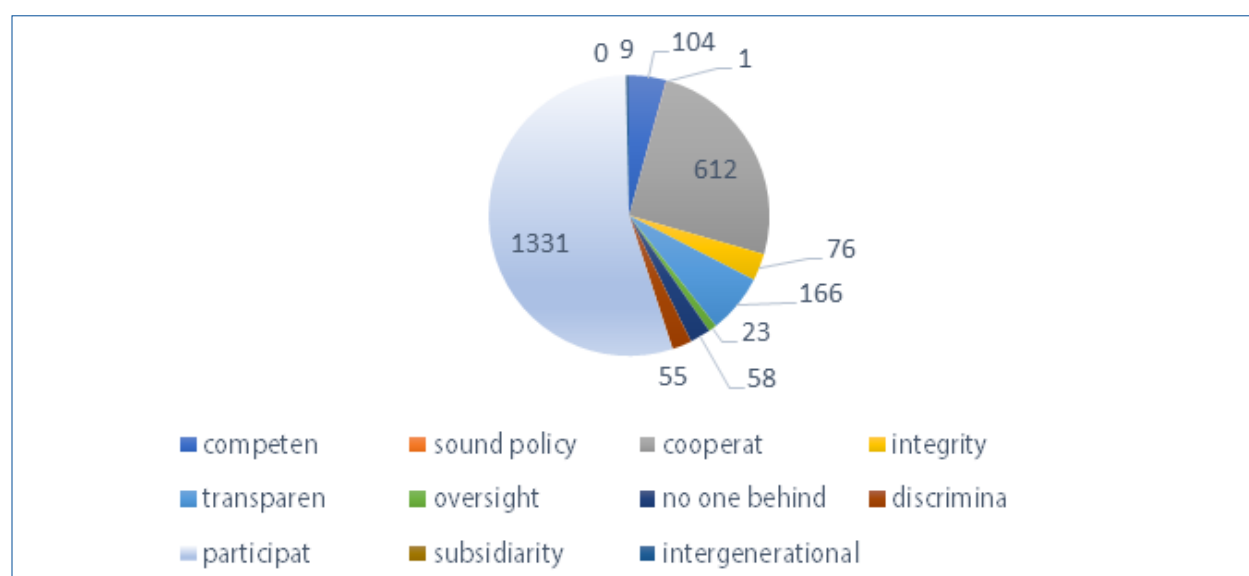
Source: Author's analysis. The legend shows the actual key words searched taking into account variations of the word depending on sentence structure. The eleven principles are in the order shown above: competency, sound policy-making, cooperation, integrity, transparency, oversight, leave no one behind, non-discrimination, participation, subsidiarity and intergenerational equity.

III.3   Operational level: Focus on governance in SDG Acceleration actions database (2019)

Before, during and after the SDG Summit of 24-25 September 2019, UNDESA's SDG Acceleration Actions call sought to collect country and other stakeholder initiatives contributing to a speeded-up implementation of the 2030 Agenda. They consisted of new or enhanced policies, programmes or projects related to the

29   See https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnership/?p=30372; https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnership/?p=29686

30   Please see https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnership/?p=29886

31   Please see https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnership/?p=30924

achievement of one or more of the 17 SDGs addressing the interlinked nature of the 2030 Agenda. One of the conditions to qualify was the SMART Criteria – Specific, Measurable, Achievable Resource based and Time-based deliverables. 126 actions were received by the end of October 2019.

One could be inclined to think that local initiatives would dominate at the action-level. One counterintuitive finding of this layer of analysis was that a considerable chunk of the Accelerated Actions, i.e., about 29 percent of them, were multi-country and/or cross-regional initiatives (Figure VI). They included wide-ranging initiatives such as *Creating a data-driven, incentivised dynamic for justice* by the private sector organization OpenTrial[32], which covered all developing countries as well as smaller projects such as Rotary's *EndPlasticSoup initiative*[33], which covered Colombia, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Kenya and Nigeria.

Figure VI
Where SDG Acceleration Actions are implemented
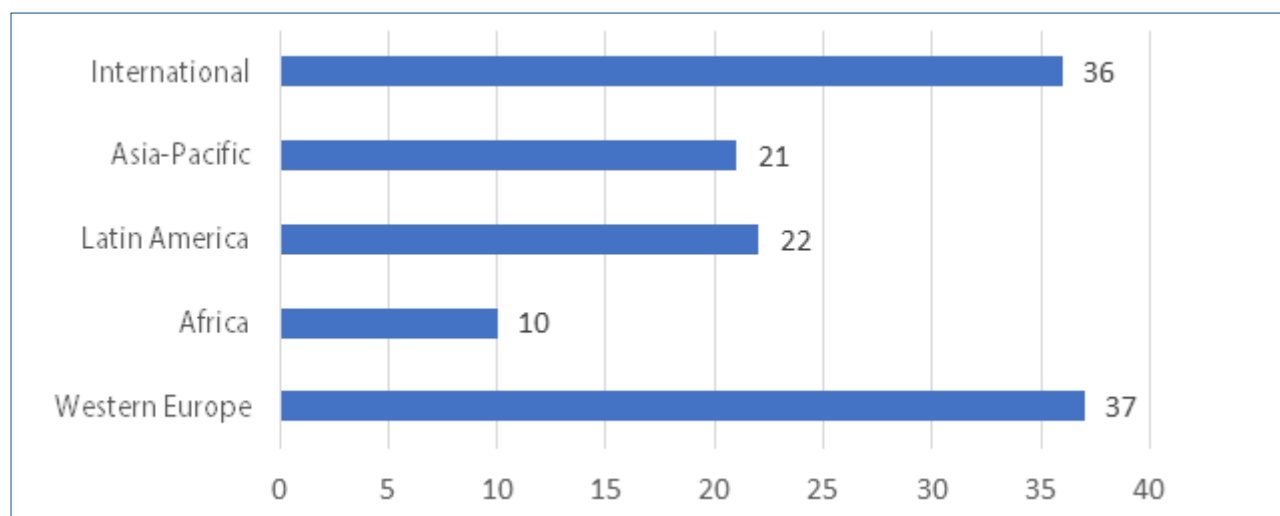
Source: Author's analysis.

In terms of the type of organization submitting the SDG Accelerated Actions, approximately 43 percent of submissions came from the government, including at national (90 percent) and local levels (10 percent). 25 percent of submissions came from civil society followed by the UN system with 13 percent of submissions and the private sector (9 percent) and multi-stakeholder partnerships (8 percent), the latter involving the UN system, governments and their partners, private sector and international or regional civil society organisations. Only 3 percent of submissions were found to originate from academia.

Unlike the findings of the two previous databases at normative and strategic levels, SDG Accelerated Actions were found to make extensive references to SDG16. SDG16 is the second most prevalent SDG after SDG 17 on financing for development and partnerships. 17 out of the total of 126 Accelerated actions focused solely on SDG16 with one case drilling down into the specific SDG16 targets--SDG16.7 on *responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels*. 11 cases of Accelerated Actions covered all SDGs, including SDG16.

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32   Please see https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnership/?p=33274

33   Please see https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnership/?p=32997

One implication of this finding of high stress on SDG16 in the SDG Accelerated Actions Database could be that governance and SDG16 are being taken up at the field level by the practitioners much more so than at higher levels of governance. It could also be that the proximity in time of the launching of the Accelerated Actions database shows that with time governance and SDG16 are being more and more addressed by governance actors on the ground (Figure VII).

The analysis of the SDG Accelerated Actions database also found that SDG16 was most frequently paired with SDG17 on *financing for development and partnerships* followed by SDG5 on *gender equality and women's empowerment* and SDG8 on *economic growth and decent work*. The SDG that is least frequently paired with SDG16 is SDG7 on *sustainable energy* and SDG14 on the *sustainable use of oceans, seas and marine resources*. These findings bode well with the previous findings related to the SDG Good Practices database (Figure VIII).

Figure VII and VIII
SDG16 focus and pairings in SDG Accelerated actions database
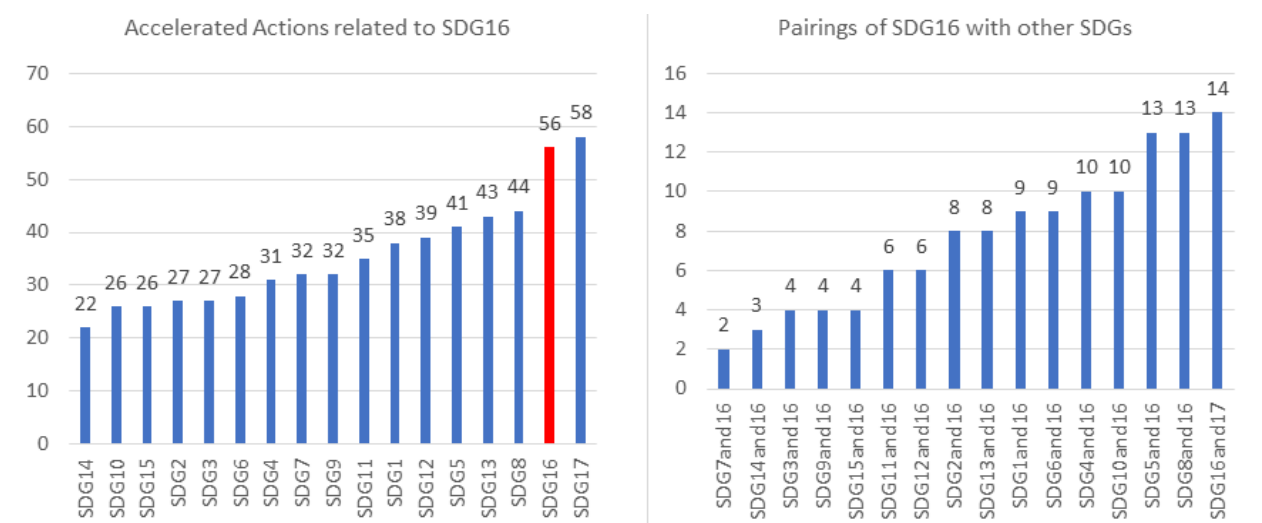
Source: Author's analysis.

Despite a strong SDG16 focus overall, a specific 'governance' focus was scant among the SDG Accelerated Actions. In this regard, findings are similar to those of the VNR Database and Good Practices Database. 'Governance' (15 counts) was the term mentioned least frequently after 'security' (10 counts). The initiative with the highest count of governance (5) is the *Global Hub on the Governance for the SDGs* by OECD, covering all SDGs[34]. It is a helpdesk and an online knowledge platform for national experts and practitioners to interact and learn from each other on the different aspects and challenges of governance for integrated SDG implementation.

Institutions were referred to 24 times across the 126 cases, and mostly as a generic term--not in the sense of public governance. The initiative with most references to public institutions (3) concentrated on SDG16 on *peace, justice and strong institutions and SDG5 on gender equality and women's empowerment*. Led by International Legal Assistance Consortium (ILAC) together with its partners of International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute, Administrative Tribunal of Tunisia, Tunisian Lawyers Training Institute, the

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34   Please see https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnership/?p=34170

initiative seeks to ensure improved access to justice and to train legal professionals in rights-based approaches to development in Tunisia and North Africa.

One interesting finding was the relative abundance of the term "justice" with 65 counts, which might reflect the higher focus of access to justice on the ground as opposed to at higher policy or normative levels. The initiative with the highest count of "justice" keyword was the previously mentioned *Creating a data-driven, incentivised dynamic for justice* by a social-purpose private sector enterprise called OpenTrial and based in the United Kingdom. It aims to strengthen due process and trial monitoring by professional trial monitors through a smartphone app, which facilitates the review of criminal procedures and enhances compliance. The application does this through pattern analysis, digital case management, machine learning and predictive analytics. The initiative covers all developing countries.

Analysis of the SDG Acceleration Actions, like that of the SDG Good Practices Database, revealed that there does not appear to be a strong correlation among the keywords associated with the governance, peace and justice dimensions of SDG16. To put it differently, Accelerated Actions that make references to any given key term in their descriptive abstracts do not use them in tandem with the other(s). 'Justice' and 'institutions,' and 'peace' and 'institutions' seem to be the two most frequently juxtaposed combinations. Surprisingly, the high focus on justice is not accompanied by one on 'rule of law'. With only 17 counts, the focus on rule of law trails that of 'peace' (18 counts).

One counterintuitive finding of the analysis of the SDG Acceleration Actions database is that 'governance' was found to be negatively correlated with 'security' and 'rule of law'. The implies that level of focus of governance increases when that on security or rule of law decreases (Table III). One could further investigate these results to understand possible reasons and implications, particularly with respect to linkages between development and peace and security.

Drilling down into the principles of governance, one finds that among the *effectiveness, accountability* and *inclusiveness* pillars, *effectiveness* (27 counts) received the least attention assessed by the lowest number of key term counts in this category. *Inclusiveness* (55 counts) category received the highest counts. Once again, *participation, cooperation* and *transparency* were the top three counts across all submissions. *Subsidiarity* was not detected and *sound policy-making* was done so only once. These results are like the previous findings based on the first two databases. The low focus detected on "leaving no one behind" is surprising at this operational level (Figure IX). It could be that as a term, it is most widely appropriated at the strategic and normative levels.

Table III
Correlating the use of key words in SDG Acceleration Actions

	governance	peace	security	rule of law	justice	institution
governance	1.00					
peace	0.05	1.00				
security	-0.04	0.12	1.00			
rule of law	-0.02	0.01	0.06	1.00		
justice	0.01	0.25	0.07	0.14	1.00	
institution	0.20	0.12	0.01	0.20	0.30	1.00

Source: Author's analysis. Red denotes negative correlation. Grey denotes highest value.

Figure IX
Governance related sub-key terms search
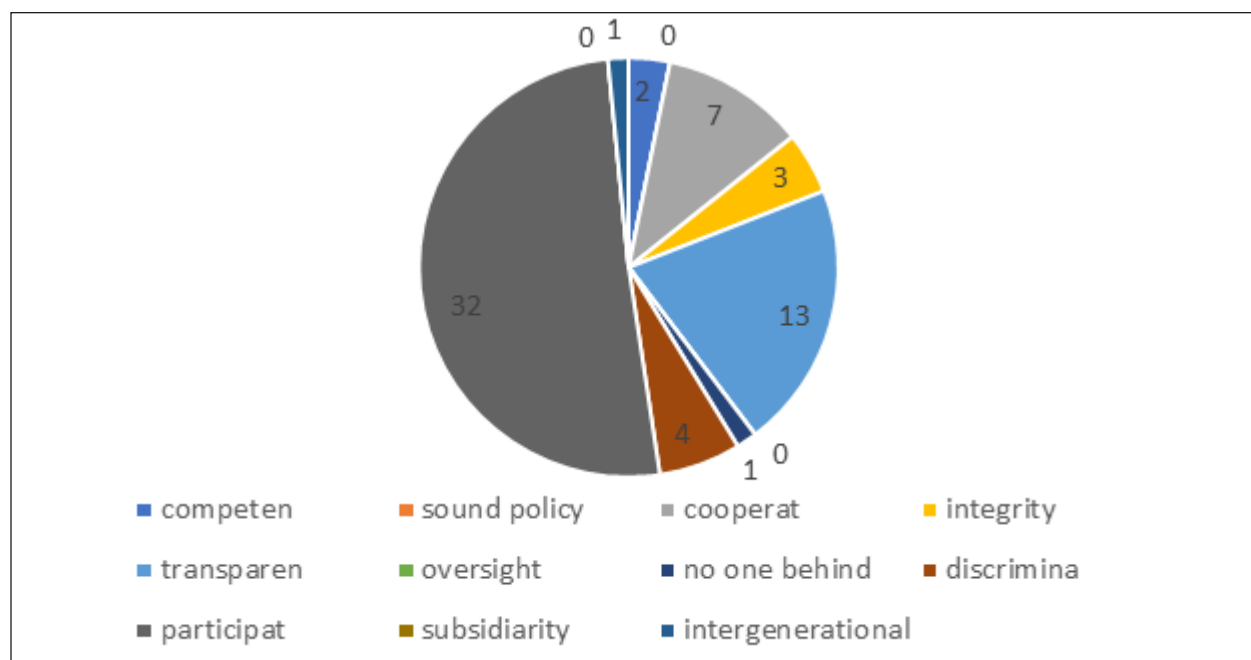
Source: Author's analysis. The legend shows the actual key words searched taking into account variations of the word depending on sentence structure. The eleven principles are in the order shown above: competency, sound policy-making, cooperation, integrity, transparency, oversight, leave no one behind, non-discrimination, participation, subsidiarity and intergenerational equity.

IV   Conclusions

SDGs going into their fifth year of implementation, the maxim that sustainable development cannot be achieved devoid of strong institutions and good governance is all the more relevant (Lebada 2017). SDG 16 is indeed the powerhouse from which all other SDGs flow; the golden thread running through the implementation of all 17 SDGs (IDLO 2017).

Advances in SDG16 and SDG16+ implementation and its governance dimension are many. SDG16 was one of the specific Goals examined in HLPF 2019 and governance has become a new domain in official statistics. Efforts are also ongoing to support Member States in developing a National Mechanism for Reporting and Follow-up (NMRFs) on their human rights obligations related to SDG16 and the entire 2030 Agenda (Global Alliance and the Danish Institute for Human Rights 2019).

SDG16 implementation, however, remains uneven across regions and countries (Hope 2019) The governance aspect of SDG16 is particularly a peripheral, at least globally speaking. Governance aspects of SDG16 are still among the least covered in General Assembly and ECOSOC agendas (UN 2016: 2, 58-63), for instance. The content analysis of the three UN DESA Databases (*VNR Database, 2016-2019; SDG Good Practices, 2018-2019; SDG Acceleration Action, 2019s*) undertaken in this paper has also laid bare that governance is yet to become explicit focus areas at normative, strategic and operational levels of implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The analysis has shown that the VNR Key Statements, symbolizing the highest normative layer of governance, seldom make references to either SDG16 or governance. This is not unexpected particularly when one takes into account the fact that countries tend to give little critical information in their VNRs on governance

due to the sensitive nature of the issue area, which is complicated by the difficulties associated with measuring SDG16 indicators (Bhargava et al. 2019: 7).

Policy-oriented SDG Good Practices database also mentions SDG16 and governance infrequently when compared to the rest of the SDGs and SDG16 keywords. One optimistic finding is that SDG16 surges as a relatively significant focus area at the operational level: 44.45 percent of the 126 SDG Accelerated Actions examined included SDG16 as a focus area. In terms of a specific focus on governance, however, the scoping of this database also yields low counts.

One important finding of the analysis regarding SDG16—other SDGs interlinkages is that SDG16 is associated mostly with SDG17 on *financing for development and partnerships*, SDG5 on *gender* and SDG8 on *growth and employment* at both strategic and operational levels. It is least frequently associated with SDG7 on *affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all* and SDG14 on *the sustainable use of oceans, seas and marine resources*. This finding can be useful to many, and particularly the Small Island Developing States, in the regional and global ramping up of efforts to further support the SAMOA Pathway and the agenda of the upcoming 2020 UN Ocean Conference.

Another important finding of the analysis regarding governance-peace-justice dimensions of SDG16 is that they are rarely used in tandem. Governance infrequently appears together with 'peace' and 'security' or 'justice' and 'rule of law' in Member States' VNR Key Statements and cases submitted to Good Practices and Accelerated Actions Databases. Both findings are worrisome when one thinks of the holistic nature of SDG16 and the indivisible nature of the 2030 Agenda propelled by good governance and SDG16. On the other hand, the preponderance of SDG16-related activities at the operational level is promising as is the high stress put on justice-related projects on the ground.

From more granular perspectives, 'participation', 'cooperation,' and 'transparency' surge as the three governance-related terms most cited across cases in both the SDG Good Practices Database and the SDG Acceleration Actions Database. Accountability seems to trail inclusiveness. Subsidiarity and sound policymaking, however, lag behind. The unexpected finding of the low appearance of a "leave no one behind" perspective at the action-level also warrants further scrutiny.

From a stakeholder perspective, both the governmental and non-governmental sector comprising private sector and civil society seem to be equally prolific in submitting Good Practices and Accelerated Actions for SDG implementation. Submissions on the part of academia and global initiatives covering several regions seem to be areas where further improvements can be made.

Finally, the content analysis of the three UN DESA databases of VNRs, Good Practices and Accelerated Actions of SDGs has not found the usual dichotomy between the developed and developing world often associated with high and low achievement of SDG16 implementation[35]. The finding that countries from all stages of development and governance backgrounds put focus on the various dimensions of SDG16 is promising. Czech Republic and Samoa can put as much focus on governance as can Portugal and Sudan on peace (See Table 1 on page 8 on the findings of the content analysis of these countries' Key VNR Statements).

Some action areas based on these findings could include:

    i.   bringing in SDG16 and governance into development practice with a more explicit focus at normative, strategic and operational levels;

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[35] One example of such analysis is SDG index scoring by Bertelsmann Stiftung and SDSN 2019. For more information, refer to footnote 18 of this paper.

ii. focusing on SDG16's linkages to sector-focused SDGs, particularly to SDG7 on affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all, and to SDG14 on the sustainable use of oceans, seas and marine resources—two SDGs with the least detected linkages to SDG16;

iii. examining specific effective governance principles apart from *participation, collaboration* and *transparency*, which seem to be prevalent across all three UN DESA Database submissions, and with focus on others such as *sound policymaking, intergenerational equity* and *subsidiarity*;

iv. making a conscious effort to interlink 'governance,' 'peace' and 'security', giving visibility to SDG implementation modalities where "effective governance" and "sustainable peace" are connected so that the understanding of the Triple Nexus can be enhanced (CIC/NYU 2019).

As the theme for the ECOSOC 2019–2020 cycle and HLPF 2020 is "Transformative pathways to realize the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development", the findings of this paper and the above suggested action areas can be useful on many grounds. The information distilled from the UN DESA SDG databases at normative, strategic and operational levels can provide important benchmarks for governance actors engaged in SDG16 implementation, increasing the catalytic power of the Goal to realize the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a whole. It can also provide perspectives on the peace, justice and institutional components of SDG16 to hopefully expand to the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding links in institution-building and policymaking, particularly in the context of the global crisis of COVID19 that we are facing as one world.

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