

CONCEPT NOTE

Workshop 6:

Government
Innovation for Social
Inclusion of
vulnerable groups



**Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals
through Effective Delivery of Services,
Innovative Transformation &
Accountable Institutions**



Introduction

The 2019 United Nations Public Service Forum will take place in Baku, Republic of Azerbaijan from 24-26 June 2019, under the theme 'Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals through effective Delivery of Services, Innovative Transformation and Accountable Institutions'. The Forum will be comprised of a series of workshops where various elements related to the overall theme will be explored in more details.

This workshop will focus on the role of government innovation in promoting social inclusion of vulnerable groups.

Objective

The objective of this workshop is to facilitate discussions on how to develop appropriate frameworks and build capacities to promote government innovation for social inclusion of vulnerable groups, with emphasis on public service delivery.

Focus

This workshop will focus on policies and strategies, innovative practices and lessons learned on how to promote government innovation for the social inclusion of vulnerable groups. Special attention will be given to innovations in delivering inclusive public services that create an enabling ecosystem for better engagement of vulnerable groups. It will also provide an opportunity to share strategies for capacity development. The workshop will focus on five inter-related dimensions of government innovation for social inclusion, namely;

- i) identifying vulnerable groups;
- ii) improving access to public service delivery;
- iii) enhancing engagement of vulnerable groups in decision-making and public service delivery;
- iv) promoting social inclusion of persons with disabilities and older persons through public service delivery, and;
- v) developing capacities to promote an enabling ecosystem for social inclusion of vulnerable groups.

Identifying vulnerable groups

Ensuring no one is left behind is the overarching principle of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As highlighted by the UN Secretary-General António Guterres, leaving no one behind means "listening to the views and guidance of people living in poverty and acting together with them". In every country, vulnerable groups – typically youth, women, older persons, migrants, indigenous peoples,



persons with disabilities and minorities – confront barriers that prevent them from fully participating in their nation’s political, economic, and social life. These groups are excluded through several practices that discriminate people based on gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, or disability status. Such practices can rob them of dignity, security, and the opportunity to lead a better life.

These vulnerabilities range from lack of resilience in the face of natural disasters to the inability to cope with external financial shocks. If not addressed, they prevent the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Vulnerability is difficult to define in all its complexities. However, though specific definitions may slightly differ, they share the common understanding that exposure to shocks is not a natural phenomenon: it is a product of any number of interlinked historical, social, cultural, environmental, political, and economic conditions. To conceptualize vulnerability through a broad view of what it entails rather than a strict set of prescriptions may prove more valuable as a flexible standard of determining who is vulnerable, as well as how and why they are vulnerable¹.

One of the pre-requisites to accessing public services is ensuring that people living in vulnerable situations have legal identity. The 2030 Agenda, in its Goal 16, calls on member states to provide legal identity for all, including birth registration. Without legal identification, people are denied their rights, access to services and benefits. Ensuring that public administration reaches out to the most vulnerable populations to register their legal identity is essential for inclusive development and more just societies.

Improving access to public service delivery

The 2030 Agenda calls for “a just, equitable, tolerant, open and socially inclusive world in which the needs of the most vulnerable are met”. Most of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are linked to the delivery of inclusive and equitable public services, particularly at the local level. Vulnerable groups, who experience multiple dimensions of vulnerability and are limited by their social condition and position in society, can benefit from innovative public service delivery that is targeted to meet their complex needs².

To ensure the protection of vulnerable groups’ basic human rights, public service delivery must become more innovative, inclusive, and participatory (i.e. co-created and co-designed). Universal access to quality education at all levels, to health care and social protection, safe drinking water, affordable, reliable and sustainable energy and to labour opportunities is essential to lift people out of poverty and address the needs of the most vulnerable segments of the population. Access in general terms can be defined “as the match between societal commitment and institutional capacity to deliver rights and services and people’s capacity to benefit from those rights and services” (De Jong & Rizvi, 2008)³.

¹ Stuart and Samman (2017), Defining ‘Leaving No One Behind,’ available at <https://www.odi.org/publications/10956-defining-leave-no-one-behind>.

² OECD (2015), Integrating Social Services for Vulnerable Groups: Bridging Sectors for Better Service Delivery, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264233775-en>.

³ The State of Access: Success and Failure of Democracies to Create Equal Opportunities (2008)



ICT and digital government can improve access to public service delivery and lower risks of social exclusion provided that the right pre-conditions are in place, including access to the Internet, digital skills, among others. Governments should exercise caution about possible adverse consequences of the disruptive changes engendered by new technologies to ensure that the inequalities that exist between and within countries do not further widen because of uneven access to the Internet and to new technologies, such as big data analytics and Artificial Intelligence (AI).

There are various barriers of access to public services that can prevent vulnerable groups from taking advantage of the services and benefits provided by their governments. These include lack of access to information, lack of digital literacy to access online services, lack of access to the Internet, rent seeking and corrupt practices among public servants, which impede access to services, and lack of resources among vulnerable groups to access services in ways that are convenient to them.

Even if all the above barriers are removed, vulnerable groups do not always benefit from public services due to low usage. In fact, “research on e-inclusion has moved beyond identifying whether access is available to assessing what people do with their access”. A World Bank report in 2016 on “digital dividends”, another term for “useful usage” or potential digital productivity, indicates that while global connectivity and service delivery has improved, it has not necessarily improved socio-economic outcomes due to uneven distribution, which highlights the need to bridge digital divides. Since improved socio-economic status for all people is the fundamental point of e-inclusion, this is a concerning gap which will need greater attention moving forward” (2018 UN E-Government Survey, page 42).

Enhancing engagement of vulnerable groups in decision-making and public service delivery

A paradigmatic governance shift towards inclusion of all people is necessary to meet the needs of vulnerable groups. In addition to delivering inclusive public services to vulnerable groups, the public sector must work with all stakeholders to create an enabling ecosystem, for example through open government data initiatives, to ensure the engagement of vulnerable groups in formulating policies and strategies and in implementing, monitoring and following up SDG implementation. Greater engagement calls for participatory governance and effective, accountable and inclusive institutions.

Due to the special needs of vulnerable groups, public institutions should engage vulnerable groups in co-designing and co-creating public services – transforming the passive roles of vulnerable groups to active and informed partners as co-creators in problem-solving. Moreover, co-design starts with the assumption that all stakeholders are equally important. Focusing on a user-led design process could also lead to a user-led approach in the delivery of public services⁴.

⁴ Smart Cities (2011), “Co-design in Smart Cities: A Guide for Municipalities,” available at <http://www.smartcities.info/files/Co-Design%20in%20Smart%20Cities.pdf>.



Promoting social inclusion of persons with disabilities and older persons through public service delivery

There are many innovative practices from around the world on inclusive public service delivery. The 2019 UNPSA winners in the category of “Delivering Inclusive and Equitable Services to Leave no one Behind” are a testament to the importance of recognizing and addressing the needs of vulnerable groups. Several countries have designed and implemented public services that can contribute to enhancing the quality of life for persons with disabilities and older persons.

The UN DESA Issue Brief on Ageing, Older Persons and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development identifies the importance of engaging older persons in the process of sustainable development, through their roles in local communities and more particularly in economic development, unpaid care work, political participation and social capital⁵. From the institutional perspective, this emphasizes that older persons, as well as persons with disabilities, must be considered throughout public service delivery models and various government services. Lack of access, or targeted access points to specific social services such as online portals and service centers, will increase the digital divide and lead to continued exclusion of these vulnerable groups. Therefore, governments must find better solutions to actively address the challenges of specifically older persons and persons with disabilities to ensure that no one is left behind. At the same time, older persons can greatly benefit from the use of new technologies provided the governments put in place programmes to develop their digital skills and facilitate access to the Internet.

Persons with disabilities comprise an estimated 15 percent of the world’s population and often remain marginalized and excluded from social participation and utilization of public services due to physical barriers. Persons with disabilities regularly encounter discrimination with pervasive exclusion from development and social services including employment, education, transportation and healthcare⁶. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development therefore calls for the inclusion of persons with disabilities and has opened doors for their participation and recognition as active contributing members of society who must not face any discrimination or be left out or behind⁷. The 2030 Agenda and other development efforts can only succeed if the protection and promotion of the rights of vulnerable populations such as older persons and persons with disabilities are considered. Mainstreaming disability and including persons with disabilities in policy formulation and implementation and the delivery and utilization of public services is an important step to promote social inclusion to advance the SDGs.

Developing capacities to promote an enabling ecosystem for social inclusion of vulnerable groups

⁵ Ageing, Older Persons and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

⁶ International Disability Alliance. (2018). The 2030 agenda for sustainable development. Available at <http://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/content/2030-agenda-sustainable-development-0>

⁷ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/family/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2018/05/BACKGROUND-PAPER.SDGs1611.FINAL -1.pdf>



During the 2018 High-Level Political Forum, several Voluntary National Reviews highlighted specific challenges faced by vulnerable groups, relating to access to health care, education and the labour market. Some countries provided examples of a wide range of measures and policies to curb poverty as a multidimensional phenomenon and to foster social inclusion. While many reviews outlined the challenges women and girls face in general terms, only a few focused on measures to reach the most disadvantaged or marginalized among them.

Promoting an enabling ecosystem for social inclusion of vulnerable groups includes:

- Strengthening the capacities of public institutions to produce and analyze disaggregated and reliable data about the vulnerable groups for better policy design, implementation, and monitoring.
- Strengthening institutional capacities to improve access to service delivery at all levels.
- Enhancing capacities for effective collaboration, not only between government agencies at the national and sub-national levels, but also with other stakeholders, such as the private sector, and civil society organizations.
- Building capacities for innovation in service delivery geared towards the needs of vulnerable groups.

Structure

This workshop will be composed of five sessions. At the closing of each session, the rapporteur will present key messages.

Session 1: Identifying vulnerable groups

This session will examine how institutions at all levels of government can work together to identify and address the special needs of vulnerable groups. It will look at the innovative approaches to identify vulnerable groups, especially people living in poverty. This session will also analyze how to use innovative tools, such as OpenStreetMap, to more effectively anticipate, prepare for, and respond to risks and disasters, as well as to more quickly identify the people who are most adversely affected by risks and disasters. This session will examine the importance of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) which forms the basis for ID management to ensure that everyone is accounted for. It will look at the challenges and negative impacts on vulnerable groups of delays in obtaining digital IDs coupled with the lack of digital literacy and inaccessibility to public services.

Guiding questions:

1. How can government institutions work together to prioritize the needs of vulnerable groups in national development strategies and plans to implement the SDGs?



2. How can governments at the national level better collaborate with local authorities in identifying vulnerable groups?
3. What are the challenges of implementing the CRVS and the ID management system?
4. How can governments better make use of digital ID or e-ID for delivering public services to vulnerable groups? What are the lessons learned from countries that have implemented digital ID or e-ID systems?
5. What are the good practices in identifying vulnerable groups, e.g. particularly people living in poverty?

Session 2: Improving access to public service delivery

This session will focus on how to innovate public service delivery to better reach vulnerable groups. It will examine how to improve access to services and increase usage by vulnerable groups through online platforms for essential services such as e-health and e-education services and multi-channel service delivery.

Guiding questions:

1. How can access to service delivery of vulnerable groups be improved?
2. How can usage of e-services by vulnerable groups be enhanced and how can it be measured?
3. How can frontier technologies, such as blockchain, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), big data and data analytics improve public service delivery to vulnerable groups?

Session 3: Enhancing engagement of vulnerable groups in decision-making and public service delivery

This session will look at tools for facilitating the participation and empowerment of traditionally-excluded groups from the public sphere, which is a fundamental human right, especially by bridging the digital divide and increasing digital literacy. This session will also explore how governments can innovate to create an enabling ecosystem to engage vulnerable groups.

Guiding questions:

1. How can public institutions transform governance to ensure the inclusion of vulnerable groups?



2. Who are the major stakeholders, e.g. the parliament, the supreme audit institutions, the private sector, civil society organizations, and faith-based organizations, in the enabling ecosystem to engage vulnerable groups? And what role do these stakeholders play in engaging vulnerable groups?
3. What institutional frameworks and mechanisms can facilitate inclusion of vulnerable groups in policy-making processes?
4. How can governments engage vulnerable groups in co-creating and co-designing public services?
5. How can governments increase digital literacy among vulnerable groups to ensure higher levels of e-participation?
6. What evidence do we have on benefits and impacts of engagement of vulnerable groups?
7. What good practices exist in building an enabling ecosystem to engage vulnerable groups?

Session 4: Promoting social inclusion of persons with disabilities and older persons through public service delivery

This session will consider how government innovation can improve the situation of persons with disabilities and older persons. It will examine innovative practices of inclusive public service delivery and highlight key enabling strategies and approaches to better address the needs of vulnerable groups.

Guiding questions:

1. What can public institutions do to better ensure inclusion of persons with disabilities and older persons? What are some key services which should be better targeted?
2. How can older persons and persons with disabilities be more effectively engaged in co-designing and utilizing available services, and what are some examples of good practices?
3. What are the most vital services for older persons and persons with disabilities? How can those services be prioritized and better supported throughout public service delivery?

Session 5: Developing capacities to promote an enabling ecosystem for social inclusion of vulnerable groups



This session will provide an opportunity for participants to highlight their challenges in building capacities to promote an enabling environment for social inclusion of vulnerable groups. It will also provide a platform to discuss opportunities and key recommendations.

Guiding questions:

1. How can public institutions strengthen their capacities to produce and analyze disaggregated and reliable data about the vulnerable groups for better policy design, implementation, and monitoring
2. How can public institutions bolster their capacities to improve access of vulnerable groups to service delivery at all levels?
3. How can government capacities be enhanced in engaging with vulnerable groups and better responding to their needs? How can they engage with other stakeholders?
4. How can public institutions strengthen capacities for innovation in service delivery geared towards the needs of vulnerable groups?

Organizational details

- This workshop is organized by UN DESA.
- Participants are expected to come from the Asia and Pacific region as well as Africa, and include central and local government officials, policymakers, public governance experts, practitioners, civil society leaders, academics, and media.
- The workshop will be conducted in English.

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