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# SDG 16 on Governance and its measurement: Africa in the Lead

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## SDG 16 on Governance and its measurement: Africa in the Lead<sup>1</sup>

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#### Abstract

This article provides some elements for reflection on an apparent paradox. On the one hand, Africa appears to be the continent most riddled by problems related to governance and conflict; on the other hand, it is at the forefront in both promoting the issue of governance at the international level and in implementing its statistical measurement, an observation that has gone largely unnoticed until now. Will Africa manage to maintain its lead following the adoption by all countries of Sustainable Development Goal 16 on governance, peace and security, to which the continent contributed greatly?

**Keywords:** *Governance, Peace, Security, SDGs, Statistical surveys, Political economy, Africa.*

**JEL Code :** C18, C81, C83, F5, O10, O55

#### Résumé

Cet article se propose d'apporter des éléments de réflexion sur un apparent paradoxe : alors que l'Afrique apparaît comme le continent où les questions de gouvernance et de conflits sont les plus problématiques, c'est également celui qui se montre le plus en pointe, à la fois dans la promotion de cette thématique au niveau international et dans la mise en œuvre de sa mesure statistique, un constat passé largement inaperçu jusqu'ici. Cette avance pourra-t-elle se maintenir avec l'adoption par tous les pays de l'Objectif de Développement Durable 16 sur la gouvernance, la paix et la sécurité, auquel le continent a largement contribué ?

**Mots clefs :** *Gouvernance, Paix, Sécurité, Objectif du Développement Durable, Enquête statistique, Economie politique, Afrique.*

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## Introduction

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) adopted in 2000 by the United Nations did not manage to incorporate the topic of governance. Given the polysemous nature of the concept, its inclusion was halted by two main obstacles: opposition from developing countries who feared that the inclusion of human rights would result in interference in their political systems and sovereignty; and a restrictive conception of development centred on fighting poverty.<sup>2</sup> The fact that one of the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations in 2015 is focused on governance (SDG 16)<sup>3</sup> is as such a sign of major progress, particularly since the SDGs are universal and concern all countries worldwide whereas the MDGs related only to developing countries. The inclusion of SDG 16 within the Sustainable Development Goals was the result of a tough battle and came only in the wake of bitter negotiations. The terms ultimately selected to define the Goal and the choice of targets and indicators are far from neutral.<sup>4</sup> Their wording and choice set clear boundaries within the very broad field and multiple dimensions of governance – some of which are politically sensitive – and they shape the scope of this SDG.

The goal of this article is to analyse the impact of SDG 16 from the perspective of development policy, as well as in terms of its measurement and monitoring both of which require innovation in terms of statistical methodologies. The article is focused on Africa, which plays a pivotal role on both of these fronts. Even more than with the other SDGs, the issue of measuring governance was presented as a real challenge, so much so that the difficulty in quantifying it was often used as an argument by opponents to the adoption of a SDG on this topic. And yet the argument is specious. For one, as economist and Nobel Prize winner Amartya Sen wisely stated, *“the French Revolution introduced the concepts of liberty, equality and fraternity. No one is going to oppose the revolution on the pretext that they cannot be measured.”*<sup>5</sup> Moreover, impressive progress has been made over the past two decades in terms of measuring governance (Herrera et al., 2007), particularly in Africa (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, 2006 and 2015). In examining the negotiation process surrounding SDG 16 and the associated indicators, we point up the difficulties and concerns of different actors in coming to terms with understanding the topic of governance. Examining the process that led to the adoption of the Goal offers insight to better understand why it was ultimately less ambitious than initially imagined (notably in terms of democracy) and why the chosen targets are sometimes vague, disparate and somewhat inefficient. Our research aims to shed light on an apparent paradox: while Africa appears to be the continent most affected by the issues of governance and conflict, it is also the most advanced in terms of both promoting this topic at the international level and implementing its statistical measurement, an observation that has gone largely unnoticed until now. We will see that this is due to a conjunction of favourable factors. Firstly,

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<sup>2</sup>There is indeed a remarkable lag between the stated goals in the Millennium Declaration – which was adopted by all States simultaneously – and the content of the MDGs regarding human rights, which are not at all addressed in the MDGs whereas the Declaration had an entire section devoted to the topic, as well as to reducing conflict.

<sup>3</sup>Goal 16 (referred to as SDG 16) also focuses on peace and security, but our analysis here is more specifically interested in the topic of governance.

<sup>4</sup>The wording of SDG 16, as well as its targets and indicators, are presented in Table 1.

<sup>5</sup>Speech given by Amartya Sen during a side event organized in the context of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015 in New York.

the topic of governance gradually imposed itself and gained recognition for its role in development processes, especially in Africa. At the national level, the relatively lax nature of institutional frameworks in many African countries (due to State weakness) allows leaders to agree to commitments on governance without much second thought, since they do not necessarily feel obligated to fulfil them. Moreover, the same institutional weaknesses provide greater leeway for actors who do wish to take concrete measures to monitor governance. At the international scale, the commitment of African countries to the topic of governance is part of a pan-African approach, while also addressing a desire to follow the international development agenda, a source of legitimacy for States and therefore their leaders. Combined with the rebalancing of forces which has provided Africa with more weight in international negotiations, these tendencies have put Africa in the lead when it comes to promoting governance.

Our observations are based on direct participation (as observers) and indirect participation in the official negotiation meetings (some of which were filmed) in view of adopting the SDGs and the indicators associated with them. A series of interviews was conducted with official delegate representatives at these meetings. To begin, the first section will describe the negotiation process that led to the adoption of SDG 16 by examining the interaction between key players from the perspective of the political economy. The second section will present the indicators chosen to monitor SDG 16 and provide a critical analysis of the process used to define these indicators, a process led by national statistical offices (NSOs) with no real expertise in this area. Throughout the text, we will point out the driving role of Africa, not only regarding negotiations around SDG 16, but also in the process of defining and measuring the monitoring indicators for SDG 16, in which African countries are one step ahead of the game.

## **I.- A historical breakthrough: the adoption of SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions**

The issue of governance was long considered to be outside the realm of mainstream economics and public policy, but it has gradually made its way to the core of the discipline over the past twenty years and more broadly found its place on the agenda of the international development community where it is now a central issue. The emphasis placed on the notion of governance has at times raised doubt over the paradigm it sometimes appears to promote, particularly when used to challenge the role of the State (Abrahamsen, 2000; Chevallier, 2003). Nevertheless, despite the critical distance necessary regarding how the notion is used, its focus on the quality of institutions and on the issues of participation and accountability in development policies have inspired change. And the adoption of a SDG on this topic truly consecrated this shift.

### **A difficult birth**

In 2013, a High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons was assembled by the United Nations Secretary General to draft the first proposals regarding the SDGs. The group proposed two goals on the topic of governance: the first related to good governance and the quality of institutions, with strong references to democratic values and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the second dealt with the topics of peace and security, based on the claim that “there is no peace without development” (UN, 2013). Combining the issues of peace and security with that of governance proper was a relative novelty, although it had already been done in the Millennium Declaration (UN, 2000). This addition reflected the rise of conflict (notably internal) and terrorism in some parts of the world.

In the context of the Open Working Group (see Box 1), which drafted a provisory list of SDGs (later approved entirely by the group of negotiators), developing countries expressed their opposition to adopting these goals from the outset. These countries – united within the Group of 77 –<sup>6</sup> had already successfully opposed the introduction of the two concepts during the drafting of the MDGs. Despite their more open attitude from the start of the process, African countries initially toed the Group line. Developed countries on the other hand (led by the European Union, for whom governance is one of the main goals of official development assistance [ODA]), were eager for one (or more) SDG on governance. The two blocks remained opposed throughout the entire process, but the Group of 77 gradually splintered, with African countries officially adopting a shared position on the SDGs that notably supported the creation of a goal on peace and security (African Union, 2014a).<sup>7</sup> In the end, SDG 16 was adopted in the final minutes of the last session of the Open Working Group thanks to two major details.

The countries most reticent to this SDG (China, India and Russia) found themselves increasingly isolated, to the point that they had to comply with the majority, notably following the change in position of African countries.<sup>8</sup> The latter ultimately supported this goal and were thus able to tip the scale in its favour (Brazil was also quite favourable).

African countries as such truly made this goal their own, which also let them express their commitment to this area and exert relative clout in an international forum. This support was coherent with the interest in governance shown across the continent, as showcased by the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance adopted in 2007, as well as the inclusion of governance in the broadest sense in the main objectives of Agenda 2063 of the African Union (African Union, 2014b).<sup>9</sup>

Of course, the interest expressed by some African leaders in the topic of governance as found in documents and speeches within international circles is sometimes nothing more than a smokescreen to divert attention from the weak institutions in their countries. These leaders may seek stature, legitimacy or support from the continental or international level that they do not have at the national level (Jackson and Rosberg, 1982). Ultimately, however, whether the texts are initially motivated by a desire on behalf of leaders to curate their external image or are the product of a veritable desire to influence governance, they affect their potential scope only minimally.

This commitment to the topic of governance is part of a process that was first continental, in which African institutions played a key role (Legler and Tiekou, 2010), before being taken up at the scale of each African country.<sup>10</sup> As we shall see below, this continental commitment has translated concretely into

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<sup>6</sup>The Group of 77 (which is actually comprised of 134 member countries) is a coalition of developing countries created in 1964 (its name is based on the fact that it was originally comprised of 77 countries) to weigh on international negotiations, notably at the UN.

<sup>7</sup>The shared African position was nevertheless limited to supporting the adoption of a goal related to peace and security, in a less ambitious form than the goal set in the context of Agenda 2063 and which SDG 16 ultimately adopted.

<sup>8</sup>African countries had significant clout: of the thirty countries and groups of member countries in the open working group, seven were African: 1. Algeria/Egypt/Morocco/Tunisia; 2. Ghana; 3. Benin; 4. Kenya; 5. Tanzania; 6. Congo; 7. Zambia/Zimbabwe. Moreover, a Kenyan (Macharia Kamau) was “co-chair” of the Open Working Group and then of the SDG Group of Negotiators, in both of which he played an influential role.

<sup>9</sup>Among the seven points on this agenda, there are two well-placed “aspirations” on this topic: aspiration #3 (“An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law”) and #4 (“A peaceful and secure Africa”).

<sup>10</sup>In comparing the role of multilateral regional bodies in promoting democracy in the Americas and Africa, Legler and Tiekou (2010) show how the process essentially conducted by experts for the African Union (rather than by

policy assessment operations – including the implementation of tools for measuring and monitoring that can hold decision-makers to accountability.<sup>11</sup>

### **Box 1 – How the SDGs and indicators were defined**

The process of preparing the SDGs, which took over from the MDGs in 2015, learned from the drafting of its predecessor. It took an opposite approach actually, with a clear desire for broad participation and transparency from the outset, like in the context of official negotiations. In brief, the main steps in officialising the SDGs can be divided into four main stages.

1. Creation, based on a UN initiative, of a High-Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda chaired by the Indonesian and Liberian Presidents and the British Prime Minister, which submitted its report in 2013 (UN, 2013). The report recommended twelve main development goals, the tenth of which related to good governance and effective institutions and the eleventh to stable and peaceful societies. Based on the difficulties encountered monitoring the MDGs and the predictable problems to come monitoring the SDGs, it also called for a “data revolution”, a term that went on to gain great success.

2. Creation of an Open Working Group, formed on a voluntary basis (the United States, for example, opted not to participate), although it respected a certain geographical mix. The Group was responsible for laying the foundation for negotiators and submitted its report in the summer of 2014. Next came the creation of a group of negotiators (in which all UN members could participate), which submitted its report in the summer of 2015; then came the report of the UN Secretary General (UN, 2014). Lastly, negotiations confirmed the list of seventeen sustainable development goals proposed by the Open Working Group (including SDG 16, entitled “Peace, justice and strong institutions”).

3. Creation in 2015 of an Inter-Agency Expert Group (IAEG-SDG) in charge of establishing the list of associated indicators, composed exclusively of statistical offices (and observers), which submitted its report in March 2016 (UN, 2016).

4. Lastly, adoption by the General Assembly of the United Nations in September 2015 of the seventeen SDGs, which marked a thematic and geographical expansion – all countries worldwide were concerned, not only developing countries. This was a shift away from the multidimensional approach to poverty found in the MDGs towards a universal approach in terms of human rights defined in the broadest sense– economic, social, political and environmental.

Each of these stages resulted in a largescale consultation with States, public debates, online reports and coverage of debates, etc. The participation of countries from the South and their increased role in the process addressed an underlying goal to rebalance forces in terms of governance at the international level (Ordóñez, 2014). The *My World* online survey launched by the United Nations in 2013 (UNDP, 2013), which resulted in the participation of over 9 million citizens from around the world in December 2016<sup>12</sup> is further proof of the desire for an inclusive process.

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States or their leaders, as is the case with the Organization of American States) allows different actors, including civil society, to play their role with more leeway for action.

<sup>11</sup>In addition to the statistical monitoring systems presented in this article, there are other regional evaluation initiatives for governance that comply with SDG 16, such as the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), which has a more qualitative approach (Bolaji-Adio, 2015).

<sup>12</sup><http://data.myworld2015.org/>.

The price to pay for the adoption of SDG 16 was nevertheless the dilution of its content. Given that the topic is deemed sensitive (by both international institutions and countries), it was easier to address it and include it in specific fields that did not require use of the term “governance”. This option was clearly stated in a United Nations report following a discussion workshop on introducing governance into the SDGs (Kanie et al., 2014). Two goals were first pooled together, greatly reducing the peace and security aspect. The associated targets – which, like for all the SDGs, identify the expected outcomes – were then established, often in a vague and somewhat inefficient manner in order to reach a consensus. For example, the target proposed by the High-Level Panel – “*Ensure that people enjoy freedom of speech, association, peaceful protest and access to independent media and information*” – became target 16.10: “*ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements*” This rephrasing is much vaguer and less ambitious.

In total, and in accordance with the title of SDG 16, the targets relate to both issues of peace and conflict, the rule of law (justice and criminality), as well as the quality of national and international institutions. All three topics are obviously closely connected, but we may ask whether the aim of pooling together questions related to governance and security was done not only to dilute the content of the topics but also to limit the scope of the former. The tendency to prioritize security at the international level could move to the back-burner aspirations for democratic governance (Fisher and Anderson, 2015).

Beyond the topics themselves, words are important – and some are more sensitive than others. Thus, the term “democracy” is not explicitly stated in the SDG 16 targets following opposition from several countries (China, Cuba, etc.), although several targets nonetheless address it directly, like the one on public access to information and the protection of fundamental freedoms (16.10; see above).

Despite its shortcomings, SDG 16 covers different major aspects of governance, although its actual implementation will require strong political will above all. Ultimately, despite (or thanks to) the ambiguity of the terminology adopted, its potential scope is extremely broad (Edwards and Romero, 2014).

### **The consecration of governance in development policy: the adoption of SDG 16**

To understand the process that led to the consecration of governance, whose political culmination was embodied in the adoption of SDG 16 in September 2015, it is worthwhile to recall the gradual rise of this concept as it found its way into both the development strategies advocated by the international institutions and the academic world.

In terms of development policy, a two-pronged process began in the mid-1990s. On the one hand, at the instigation of the World Bank (1997), “institutional” conditionality became central to multilateral – and often bilateral (notably with the United States) – official development assistance (ODA), based on the logic that it was inefficient to invest ODA in poorly governed countries. On the other hand, it was necessary to rethink the approach to ODA in the context of “fragile” or “failed” States and in post-conflict situations.

Moreover, peace and security were considered as both a necessary condition for economic development and governance, as well as one of its components *per se* (World Bank, 2011). All the international institutions embraced this goal and Africa clearly took the lead in this area: the African Union offers an illustration with the emblematic example of its Peace and Security Council – as well as the Nepad peer-review mechanism, Agenda 2063 mentioned above, etc.

It is no small irony to note that at the turn of the millennium, it was the World Bank that was ultimately one of the first institutions to place governance at the core of its agenda, with its key words

participation, appropriation, accountability, empowerment and voice, even though its statutes forbid it from being “political” (Cling et al., 2003).

In terms of research, notably in economics, the key role of institutions and governance in development processes shifted gradually from the outskirts of the scientific realm where debate was heated, to a consolidated state of the art and shared framework upon which everyone agrees.<sup>13</sup> For developed countries, the report of the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission (2009) underscored the multidimensional nature of well-being, to which it recommended adding governance and security, a position largely supported and since pursued by the OECD, notably via its vast international “How’s Life?” programme (OECD, 2011).

The availability of new statistical sources was an additional element that enabled the inclusion of these topics in research and development policies. In terms of measurement, the World Bank’s (now annual) Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) database has become the hegemonic reference (Kaufman et al., 2010), despite being the focus of much criticism (Thomas, 2009; Langbein, Knack, 2010). The World Bank simultaneously developed another database, the Country Policy and Institutional Assessment (CPIA), produced internally, which is partially accessible and helps award funds to developing countries based on the principle of selectivity in assistance (more funding to countries that are better governed, since aid will be more effective). It is nevertheless worth noting that the use of these databases is problematic since they are based mainly on the work of experts and their reliability is therefore uncertain, particularly for the poorest countries (Arndt and Oman, 2006; Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, 2010).

The inclusion of governance runs the risk of remaining rhetorical (perhaps even more so than for the other SDGs) if the production of indicators related to the goal is not the focus of strong mobilization from the international community. This is particularly true given that the issue of monitoring SDG 16 is even more sensitive than for most of the other SDGs for which accepted indicators have long existed. Edwards and Romero (2014) argue that considering governance in development strategies is of course more a political issue than a technical one.

And yet, in the case of the SDGs in general (like with the MDGs previously) and more specifically for SDG 16, we cannot overlook the issue of their measurement given how connected it is to the definition of these goals that fully participate in a process of “governance by numbers” (Supiot, 2014; Egil, 2015).

## **II.- A considerable challenge in all countries: monitoring SDG 16**

Definition of the MDG indicators was conducted entirely by an *ad hoc* committee comprised of officials from the United Nations secretariat and its specialized agencies. This “top down” approach was coherent with the approach taken to define the MDG goals and targets.<sup>14</sup> This approach led to a list of

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<sup>13</sup>To name only a few, see for example Acemoglu and Robinson (2005 and 2012); North et al. (2009 and 2012); and for Africa more specifically, Noman et al. (2012). Further, regarding peace and security, even if some studies argue that post-conflict reconstruction phases can make institutions more solid (Cramer, 2009), most research has empirically shown the negative impact of conflicts on development and notably the existence of “conflict traps” (World Bank, 2011).

<sup>14</sup>Preparation for the MDGs, adopted by the United Nations in 2000 and which covered the period 1990-2015, followed a process piloted by the United Nations secretariat from start to finish. A list of seven international development goals proposed by the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) was rounded out with an eighth goal (“Develop a global partnership for development”), devoted to implementing the preceding goals (Cling



indicators that did not always account for the problems of developing countries. More specifically, African countries often did not have the capacity to calculate the indicators (Cling et al., 2003). To avoid similar pitfalls, a “bottom up” approach was embraced this time to define the monitoring indicators for the SDGs. Leadership was delegated to countries and their national statistical offices (NSOs), although the lack of expertise of such offices in the field of SDG 16 limited the quality of their contribution.

The inter-agency expert group (IAEG-SDG) in charge of establishing the SDG indicators was formed in the first quarter of 2015. It included the NSOs of 28 countries, based on a quota system per continent. Specialized United Nations agencies were also designated as observers in the context of this group. It is worth noting that the balanced representation by continent resulted in a representation of developed countries smaller than that of developing countries (7 out of 28, including Russia). A provisional list of SDG indicators was disseminated in March 2016 and adopted by the United Nations statistical commission following a particularly quick consultation process that lasted less than a year.<sup>15</sup>

A provisional list containing a total of 229 indicators (counting only once those used to monitor several targets) was adopted for the 169 SDG targets; without excluding double references, the total number of indicators is 241, or roughly 1.5 indicator per target on average. This is a basic list that may be (or is intended to be) enhanced at the continental, regional and national level. Indeed, alongside the principle of aligning international choices, appropriation and internalization were also encouraged in order to come up with a specific list of indicators that considers the unique national context in each country (Persson et al., 2016).

### **The steep learning curve for statisticians regarding governance**

Even before the SDGs were formally adopted during the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015, the statistical division of the organization recommended a list of preliminary indicators in February 2015, presented as a compilation of proposals drafted by the specialized agencies and bodies of the United Nations.

In the case of SDG 16, UNDP oversaw the inter-agency task force. The list of recommended indicators included almost all the proposals made by the Virtual expert network created by UNDP on the topic (2015).<sup>16</sup> Of the twenty-three indicators proposed by the virtual network, twenty appeared identically or with virtually no changes in the list of indicators selected for SDG 16 (see Table 1). Three of the indicators proposed by the virtual network were removed (the first was later added back onto the final list, slightly adapted): indicator 16.1.2.b – “*percentage of the population that feels safe walking in the street at night in its place of residence*”; 16.7.2 – “*participation rate in national elections*”; and 16.7.3 – “*existence of parliamentary sessions open to the public in the context of the budgetary cycle*”. Given the desire from the outset to limit the total number of indicators, with a maximum of two per target for each of the 169 targets, the removal of these indicators was justified by the fact they appeared less relevant than others or that they would be difficult to measure. A first challenge arose during the consultation on these indicators. This was related to the fact that members of the IAEG-SDG, appointed

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et al., 2003). A list of twenty targets was then associated with the goals, and the Millennium Declaration (UN, 2000) officialised these goals and targets.

<sup>15</sup>As we write this article (December 2016), the list adopted is still provisory, but there will not likely be many changes. The final list, adopted in September 2017 at the General Assembly of the UN, contains 232 unique indicators (244 counting all occurrences, some of them being common to various SDGs).

<sup>16</sup>The virtual network for the development of indicators for SDG 16 formed by UNDP brought together experts on governance, development practitioners, statisticians, members of United Nations agencies and NGO representatives with the aim of drafting a list of indicators to measure governance in the context of the SDGs.

by the NSOs of the countries selected to be part of the group, had no specific expertise on the topics related to SDG 16, unlike the other SDGs. At best, the opinions expressed by members echoed their Foreign Affairs ministries, which generally did not have any statistical experience. Discussion over which indicator to adopt for monitoring target 16.5 on corruption as such highlighted a profound ignorance of the concepts, notably with frequent confusion among participants between grand and petty corruption.<sup>17</sup> Many participants also lacked knowledge about the experience of monitoring the different indicators associated with SDG 16.<sup>18</sup> The different positions expressed were often based on unfounded personal opinion rather than on veritable analysis.

**Table 1: SDG 16, Targets and Indicators**

<b>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.</b>	
<b>Targets</b>	<b>Indicators</b>
<b>16.1</b> Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere	<p><b>16.1.1</b> Number of homicide victims per 100 000 inhabitants, by gender and age.</p> <p><b>16.1.2</b> Number of deaths related to conflicts per 100 000 inhabitants (by gender, age and cause).</p> <p><b>16.1.3</b> Percentage of the population victim to physical, psychological or sexual violence over the past 12 months.</p> <p><b>16.1.4</b> Percentage of the population feeling safe walking alone around the area they live.</p>
<b>16.2</b> End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture of children.	<p><b>16.2.1</b> Percentage of children aged 1 to 17 who have experienced corporal punishment or psychological abuse from a caregiver over the past month.</p> <p><b>16.2.2</b> Number of victims of human trafficking per 100 000 inhabitants, by gender, age and type of exploitation.</p> <p><b>16.2.3</b> Percentage of young women and men aged 18 to 29 who were victims of sexual violence before age 18.</p>
<b>16.3</b> Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels, and ensure equal access to justice for all.	<p><b>16.3.1</b> Percentage of victims of violence over the past 12 months who reported the facts to the relevant authorities or sought other officially recognized means of mediation.</p> <p><b>16.3.2</b> Percentage of the prison population awaiting sentencing.</p>
<b>16.4</b> By 2030 significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen recovery and return of stolen assets, and combat all forms of organized crime.	<p><b>16.4.1</b> Total value of incoming and outgoing illicit financial flows (in USD).</p> <p><b>16.4.2</b> Percentage of seized light and small calibre weapons that are registered and traceable in</p>

<sup>17</sup>According to the usual distinction, grand corruption takes place at the highest echelons of the State or large corporations (for the attribution of government contracts, for example), whereas petty corruption affects households in their everyday interactions with the public service or authorities in general (police, legal system, etc.).

<sup>18</sup>Observation of the debates during the meeting of the group in Bangkok (October 2015) where the quasi-definitive list of indicators was established is quite telling in this respect. All of the debates were filmed and are available at the following website: <http://unstats.un.org/sdgs/meetings/iaeg-sdgs-meeting-02>. The discussion on the indicators for SDG 16 took place at the end of the meeting and was over quickly (within an hour).

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<p><b>16.5</b> Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all its forms.</p>	<p>accordance with international legal norms and instruments.</p> <p><b>16.5.1</b> Percentage of people had at least one contact with a public official and who paid a bribe to a public official, or were asked for a bribe by those public officials, during the previous 12 months</p> <p><b>16.5.2</b> Percentage of companies who have dealt at least once with a public agent to whom they paid a bribe or who asked for a bribe over the past 12 months.</p>
<p><b>16.6</b> Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels.</p>	<p><b>16.6.1</b> Primary public spending as a proportion of the initially approved budget, by sector (or by budgetary code or similar criterion).</p> <p><b>16.6.2</b> Percentage of the population satisfied with their last experience of public services.</p>
<p><b>16.7</b> Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.</p>	<p><b>16.7.1</b> Distribution of positions (by gender, age, type of disability and population group) in public institutions (legislative bodies, public service and legal bodies at the local and national level), compared to the national average.</p> <p><b>16.7.2</b> Percentage of the population who believe decision-making is inclusive and responsive, by sex, age and population group.</p>
<p><b>16.8</b> Broaden and strengthen the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance.</p>	<p><b>16.8.1</b> Percentage of participation and voting rights for developing countries in international organizations.</p>
<p><b>16.9</b> By 2030 provide legal identity for all including free birth registrations.</p>	<p><b>16.9.1</b> Percentage of children under age 5 whose birth was registered with a civil authority, by age.</p>
<p><b>16.10</b> Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements.</p>	<p><b>16.10.1</b> Number of known cases of murder, kidnapping, forced disappearance, arbitrary detention and acts of torture committed on journalists, persons working in the media, labour unionists and human rights activists over the past twelve months.</p> <p><b>16.10.2</b> Number of countries that have adopted and implemented constitutional, regulatory and political measures to guarantee public access to information.</p>
<p><b>16.a</b> Strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, for building capacities at all levels, in particular in developing countries, for preventing violence and combating terrorism and crime.</p>	<p><b>16.a.1</b> Existence of independent national human rights institutions, in compliance with the Paris Principles.</p>
<p><b>16.b</b> Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development.</p>	<p><b>16.b.1</b> Percentage of the population reporting having personally felt discriminated against or harassed in the previous 12 months on the basis of a ground of discrimination prohibited under international human rights law.</p>

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**Note:** The highlighted indicators are those drawn from household surveys on governance (excluding crime and violence indicators drawn from victimization surveys), whose results for African countries are presented in Box 2.

### **The group of African countries, central to the negotiations**

The group of African countries was the only group to play an active role in the debates, with globally coherent proposals, generally in favour of using indicators drawn from household surveys when they exist and it is possible. It was thanks to this group, generally supported by France, which participated in coordinating the IAEG-SDG, that indicators 16.1.4 (“fear of walking in the street”) and 16.5.1 (“corruption”) were notably adopted. Indicator 16.6.2 (“appreciation of the quality of the public service”) was conversely quite consensual, including among the developed countries in the group.

It became obvious during the debates that the positions of African countries were based on their experience using household surveys in the context of the GPS-SHaSA programme. The Governance, Peace and Security (GPS) survey programme was launched under the impetus of the Economic Affairs department of the African Union Commission, with institutional and financial support from UNDP, and scientific support from researchers at IRD, the French National Research Institute for Sustainable Development (the authors). The programme was launched in 2012 (Razafindrakoto and Roubaud, 2015) with the involvement of some twenty African countries and had already yielded positive results at the time of negotiations (see Box 3). The programme is focused on governance and is part of a broader framework for the harmonization of statistics in Africa launched in 2010 based on a South African initiative.<sup>19</sup>

Developed countries were generally much more reticent regarding the use of these surveys, mainly due to lack of experience in this area and based on pre-conceived ideas about NSO involvement in these topics, even though this type of approach offers some real advantages (see Box 2). France was a notable exception within this group of countries thanks to an informal network including INSEE, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and researchers specialized on the topic, in which the authors of this article were involved.<sup>20</sup>

Some NSOs were clearly following political instructions on SDG 16. Three countries (China, Cuba and Russia) – also those most opposed from the outset to the adoption of SDG 16 – were the most reticent regarding indicators to measure the existence of NGOs that monitor human rights at the national level or indicators drawn from household surveys. Other member countries – and developed countries in particular – participated in a rather dispersed fashion.

In the case of SDG 16 which interests us here, twenty-three indicators were ultimately selected in the list of indicators adopted in March 2016 (see Table 1). All the indicators from the preliminary list proposed by the group a year earlier were retained, although four were re-written with varying amounts of changes that generally made them clearer. The field of indicator 16.2.3 on violence inflicted on young women before the age of majority was restricted to sexual violence. Regarding indicator 16.3.1, it evolved from the rather vague concept of being the “victim of a dispute” to being a “victim of violence” and the act of alerting the relevant authorities was added whereas the initial wording was limited to having access to an adequate means of mediation. Regarding indicator 16.6.2 on satisfaction with the

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<sup>19</sup>In 2010, the African Union Commission, in association with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and the African Development Bank, and under the impetus of the director of the South African NSO suggested the implementation of a Strategy for the Harmonization of Statistics in Africa (SHaSA). The goal of SHaSA is to provide a harmonized framework through which to support and coordinate the production of good quality statistics, help reinforce Africa’s statistical capacities, and promote a culture of statistics with regard to decision-making in the field of public policy. Thirteen technical working groups were created to address all the thematic fields covered by public statistics. Importantly, the first working group was devoted to GPS statistics.

<sup>20</sup>France has long been interested in the topic of governance, notably regarding international cooperation. It was as such the only developed country (with Hungary) represented at the inaugural meeting of the expert group (city group) for monitoring governance within the United Nations Statistics Division held in Praia in June 2014.

public service, it was specified that the question was based on the most recent experience with the public service (rather than on the quality of service in general). Lastly, indicator 16.10.2 (initially 16.10.1) was radically altered and broadened since it evolved from the transparency of the State budget to public access to information in general.

### **Box 2 – Why are indicators drawn from household surveys important for SDG 16?**

We will list four main arguments presented during the debates in an open letter sent in 2015 to the IAEG-SDG by several NGOs, think tanks and research centres, gathered at the initiative of Mark Orkin, the former director of the South African NSO, with which the authors were involved.

A first, normative reason is tied to the fact that household surveys express and convey the “voice” of the population. And that is precisely what SDG 16 targets: improving public participation in decision-making to make institutions more accountable to citizens. Thus, indicators must reflect public opinion based on household surveys and not only be based on administrative statistics or the opinions of national and international experts.

The second reason is more theoretical. It involves the focus on results in surveys, which is precisely in line with the SDG approach from the outset (UN, 2013). While administrative sources are often focused on monitoring capacities, we agree with the statement by the NGO Saferworld according to whom, “*outcomes for people are best captured using experiential or perception surveys*” (Saferworld, 2015).

The third reason is methodological and relates to the feasibility of measuring governance in household surveys. The Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress directed by Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi (2009) recommended the measurement of well-being, including good governance and political participation. In the aftermath of this report, the OECD published its guidelines on measuring well-being, including the measurement of civic engagement and confidence. These guidelines underscore that “one important distinction between measures of subjective well-being and many of the measures typically included in official statistics is that subjective well-being measures will almost invariably need to be collected through sample surveys” (OECD, 2013).

The fourth reason was tied to the fact that these indicators from household surveys can be very carefully monitored, as seen with African countries in the context of the GPS-SHaSA programme. In the same way that sample surveys played an essential role in measuring many MDG indicators, many well-established international programmes now use sample surveys to measure the experience and perceptions of the population for certain aspects pertaining to peace, justice and governance. These efforts help governments and civil society set goals and better respond to the priorities expressed by the population (UNDP, 2015).

Finally, one last reason was tied to the fact that indicators drawn from household surveys can be adjusted to the targets selected for SDG 16, which is less the case with indicators drawn from administrative sources. Ultimately, wise use of indicators drawn from household surveys can allow citizens “from below” to express their points of view, which would create another type of “governance by numbers”.<sup>21</sup>

So, what conclusions can we draw from this process? Ultimately, was a “mountain made from a molehill” after the enormous international mobilization in the context of the inter-agency group?

Firstly, it is worth recalling that our analysis is focused only on SDG 16, whereas the inter-agency workgroup covered all the SDGs. The main focus of this mobilization was to ensure an appropriation by the international community of public statistics in the SDGs and monitoring indicators, as well as a learning process in new fields largely uncharted by most participants, including governance in particular.

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<sup>21</sup>In reference to the critique by Supiot (2015) of “governance by numbers”.

Moreover, the fact that in the end the role of the group for SDG 16 mostly involved rewriting a few of the indicators proposed by UNDP based on recommendations from the “Virtual network” is surely testament to the high-quality work of this network, although it is also worth recalling that this was in part due to the limited expertise and/or experience of experts in this field. Lastly, the inter-agency group also divided the 229 indicators into three tiers based on their degree of harmonization and the extent of international experience in the field, thus laying the groundwork for the drafting of new indicators by NSOs.<sup>22</sup>

### Concerns over the use of household surveys

In the case of SDG 16 which interests us here, twenty-three indicators were selected, corresponding to a total of ten targets, to which two targets were added concerning the implementation of policies (see Table 1).

SDG 16 was thus third in terms of the number of associated indicators, behind SDG 17, whose objective is to “Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development”, and SDG 3 on health. The large number of indicators reflects the relative importance of this goal and its multiple facets. But it also reflects the difficulties encountered by the group of experts in reaching a consensus on the list of indicators to adopt and, to a certain extent, the actual problems that exist for measuring certain targets given the vague nature of their wording.

The indicators are drawn from two types of sources: roughly half are from administrative sources (12); and the other half are from household surveys (11). Much of the debate over the definition of indicators revolved around the choice between these two types of sources. Indeed, in countries in the North, administrative sources are more thorough and of better quality; whereas the opposite is true in most developing countries, where administrative sources tend to be of mediocre quality and contain notable shortcomings. There are as such no vital statistics (data on births, deaths) in most African countries, despite these being a basic administrative source (Moultrie, 2016).

Among the indicators based on household surveys, so-called “victimization” surveys related to physical violence (victims of sexual violence, corporal punishment amongst children, etc.) did not appear to pose a problem.

Five other indicators are based on *ad hoc* experience and perception surveys: “percentage of the population feeling safe walking around the area they live” (16.1.4); “persons who had at least one contact with a public official and who paid a bribe to a public official, or were asked for a bribe by those public officials, in the previous 12 months” (16.5.1); “percentage of the population satisfied with their last experience of public services” (16.6.2); “percentage of the population that feels that decision-making is inclusive and responsive, by sex, age, and population group” (16.7.2); “percentage of the population reporting having personally felt discriminated against or harassed in the previous 12 months on the basis of a ground of discrimination prohibited under international human rights law” (16.b.1).

These last indicators were the most debated, in a general context of scepticism from the NSO members of the group regarding the use of household surveys.<sup>23</sup> The first two of these indicators were indeed

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<sup>22</sup>The three tiers are as follows: a) indicators for which an established method of calculation exists and the data are already widely available (tier 1); b) indicators for which a means of calculation exists but for which the data are not readily available (tier II); and c) indicators for which no means of calculation has yet been agreed upon at the international level (tier III).

<sup>23</sup>We could indeed question the difference in how the expert group handled victimization surveys (largely accepted) and other experience and perception-based surveys, which elicited much more reticence. This

classified in tier II (“data not easily available”) and the three others were classified in tier III (“no calculation method currently exists at the international level”). This concern was largely unjustified if we look at the experience of African countries in the context of the GPS-SHaSA programme (Box 3), but also based on the arguments already outlined above which support the use of household surveys for monitoring SDG 16.

**Box 3 - GPS-SHaSA surveys in Africa:  
examples of what is possible at the national level for monitoring SDG 16**

This box presents the African experience of monitoring governance indicators based on household surveys. Illustrating this experience is particularly useful given that the possibility of monitoring several SDG 16 indicators was challenged by the group of experts in charge of defining the indicators. Obtained in the context of an international programme to measure governance, peace and security in Africa (GPS-SHaSA), the results presented provide an overview that illustrates their relevance.<sup>24</sup>

Table 2 presents the results obtained in eight of the ten African countries that conducted surveys from 2013 to 2015 for six indicators chosen from the list of SDG 16 indicators. It is worth recalling that the GPS-SHaSA surveys, which focus on a much broader field, were conducted prior to the definition of these indicators and will be adapted in the future to take into account the monitoring of SDG 16. The ability to concretely compare questions with the appropriate data offers good insight into the situation in each country.

In evaluating the level of insecurity based on data on actual experience (indicator 16.1.3), Uganda, Cameroon and Burundi stand out for their high rates: respectively 30%, 29% and 24% of the population was victim to an attack or theft within the past year (see Table 2). Logically, Uganda is also a country where the percentage of the population that feels that “walking alone does not present a risk” (16.1.4) is relatively low. But experience and perceptions of violence may differ in some cases, as the cases of Benin and Burundi illustrate. These discrepancies are not a sign of inconsistency and may have different causes (including the history of violence in each country or the role of the media, which may play down or conversely fire up public perceptions). In the same field, the percentage of victims who reported their attack to authorities (16.3.1) varied from one country to another (by a ratio of one to two), which probably reflects the varying confidence in the countries’ policing and legal institutions. Lastly, the lowest percentage of victims of at least one type of discrimination (16.b.1) was in Burundi (11% versus 61% in Cameroon). These different results highlight the need for a combined analysis of the different indicators (including a comparison of experience and perception) to get a better understanding of the specificities in the different national contexts.

In another register, corruption indicators are measurable based on the actual experience of the population (16.5.1). The measurement of the incidence of petty corruption shows that it affects a significant percentage of citizens in Uganda, Cote d’Ivoire and Cameroon: when invited to describe their experience, respectively 17%, 14% and 14% of users (those in contact with an administration) claimed to have personally been the victim of corruption over the past year. The incidence varies by location (urban or rural) and gender (men are generally more affected), and this is not solely due to a greater number of interactions. We may ask whether the differences between areas and based on gender are tied to the

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difference is perhaps in part because the first type of indicators were pushed by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and countries of the North, whereas the second were supported mainly by the South and were the focus of less effective lobbying.

<sup>24</sup>For more information on the analytical potential of results from GPS-SHaSA modules, see Razafindrakoto and Roubaud (2015).

different behaviours of different groups in the population (e.g., more integrity among women and rural inhabitants) or to the strategies of corrupt officials who may tend to target wealthier victims (most often men, household heads, urban dwellers, etc.).

To evaluate the percentage of the population that feels that decision-making is open and inclusive (16.7.2), we looked at those who estimated that access to information on political choices and budget management by central authorities was adequate. The results indicate very different situations: while respectively 47% and 42% of citizens in Malawi and Uganda feel sufficiently informed, only 6% of Malagasies and 13% of Beninese feel the same way. Given that for all the countries examined, less than half the population expressed their satisfaction, these indicators offer insight into the efforts needed from leaders in this area.

**Table 2 – The measurement of five SDG 16 indicators for eight African countries through the GPS-SHaSA module**

Indicators (%)	Benin	Burundi	Cameroon	Côte d'Ivoire	Madagascar	Malawi	Mali	Uganda
<b>16.1.3) Victims of violence (past 12 months)</b>								
Attack, harassment, break-in, theft	12.7	24.4	28.6	18.1	8.9	na	7.9	29.6
<b>16.1.4) Percentage of the population that feels that walking alone in their neighbourhood is without risk</b>								
Night and day	31.7	62.8	47.4	49.9	47.9	38.1	68.3	34.3
<b>16.3.1) Victims of violence who alerted an authority or other mediator</b>								
Victims who reported	74.3	42.6	47.1	64.4	75.0	na	33.7	60.4
<b>16.5.1) Corruption</b>								
Victim of corruption (paid a bribe)	2.4	2.4	14.2	13.7	4.3	3.3	2.4	16.8
<b>16.7.2) Open and reactive decision-making</b>								
Central authorities inform citizens about policies and budgets	12.7	27.4	20.4	38	6.2	46.9	28.4	41.6
<b>16.b.1) Discrimination suffered</b>								
At least one form	30.3	10.7	61.1	27.3	15.9	43.2	12.1	41.5

**Sources:** GPS-SHaSA module, NSO, different countries; calculations by the authors.

## Conclusion

This article examines the rise of governance as a topic at the international scale whose apex was the adoption of SDG 16. The question of why Africa is “in the lead” is particularly important given that Africa is also, paradoxically, the continent that faces the severest problems related to governance and conflict, including within the very institutions that helped promote the different pro-governance initiatives (African Union, NSOs, anti-corruption bodies, etc.). It is therefore necessary to question such interest at the highest level. Even if it is partially true, the answer that it is precisely because governance is a problem, that more attention is placed on the topic and that it is at the forefront in searching for solutions and monitoring the progress made is insufficient. The commitment of some African leaders is likely only a façade to follow the movement declared by the agenda of the international institutions: indeed, it is very common in the field of public policy to “pretend” so that nothing changes (Cling et al., 2004).



But even if interest in the topic of governance was partially feigned by some decision-makers at first, they have nevertheless been drawn into a process that has truly engaged the continent. This process has produced concrete results that have provided Africa with a pivotal role that it can legitimately defend. The sequence of processes that occurred at different (national and international) scales was favourable: more weight for the African continent in negotiations; the adoption of commitments of various sorts at the continental scale (charters, African programmes, etc.) which made African countries less reticent to commit to the topic of governance; and, lastly, concrete experience with the statistical measurement and monitoring of governance in different countries. According to our analyses, these processes were possible due to the flexible nature of institutional frameworks. Without claiming to be exhaustive on the topic, the functioning of institutions strikes us as a path for further research. If the creation of Weberian “legal-rational” authorities is without a doubt a sign of institutional consolidation, notably regarding patrimonial – or even kleptomaniac or criminal – mindsets, they do not necessarily encourage innovation. Indeed, the multiplication and rigidification of control procedures slow change – for the better and for the worse. This is clearly the case with the GPS-SHaSA initiative, which could not have been implemented so quickly or at a similar scale anywhere but in Africa.

To pursue the ideas discussed in this article and at this stage in the implementation of SDG 16, we would like to suggest three channels to explore. To begin, now that the Goal, targets and indicators have been adopted, the outcomes as well as the protagonists will shift towards the methodology of measuring indicators. The scientific battles, as well as the – not necessarily congruent – political and institutional ones will focus on gradually moving the indicators classified in tiers II and especially III into tier I, and on labelling the associated methods. The operations have already begun and the United Nations agencies specialized in these topics would especially like to take on a leadership role in their area of expertise. In this respect, Africa will not be playing on an equal battlefield to keep its leadership status. The “legal-rational” (including financial) clout of institutions from the North or other richer regions in the world will play in their favour during the implementation phase. Further, the monitoring and especially the use of indicators is going to be an enormous challenge. Will they actually be used by politicians or will they simply be a decorative alibi? Lastly, will implementation of SDG 16 have a specific impact – hopefully for positive change – on the trajectory of governance and conflict in countries and globally? In all three cases, Africa will be put to a difficult test to capitalize on its advantage and continue to stay in the lead. But the game is not over yet.

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