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Brief Intervention

Coming from the UNDP Crisis Bureau, I would like to contribute to our discussion by offering a perspective that emphasizes providing quality support to government leadership at the highest levels, especially in fragile and conflict-affected settings.

As it was previously mentioned, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development acknowledges the importance of effective and inclusive institutions in establishing lasting peace and prosperity. These objective gains even more importance, and yet proves more challenging, in countries affected by fragility, political instability, and conflict.

Currently, a quarter of the global population lives in fragile and conflict-affected settings. Fragility and conflict both arise from and contribute to governance deficiencies. Ineffective public institutions hinder development, resulting in increased poverty and inequality, which can fuel grievances, violence, and potentially conflict. At the same time, protracted violence and conflict erode the capacity of government institutions not only to function effectively and provide essential services, but also to cope with, recover from and prevent future crises.

At UNDP, we believe that enhancing core government functionality is critical for breaking this vicious cycle of poor governance, vulnerability, and violence.

For this to happen, few factors are more important than effective leadership from the top of the executive branch. There is growing recognition that a well-performing center of government is crucial for government leadership to maintain control over political and development processes, as well as to ensure the overall performance of government institutions.

Strengthening management at the center of government entails supporting leadership and coordination within the executive branch through structured and predictable processes and mechanisms for priority-setting, decision-making, coordination, and accountability, including communication with citizens. This is crucial to ensure that decisions - made by politicians, often non-specialists, often working under extreme pressure – are prudent and consistent.

For example, this can involve supporting crisis management from the center, as seen in the case of the COVID-19 response in Nigeria. This support enabled the government to effectively coordinate the healthcare system's response, issue relevant policies, manage public communication, facilitate coordination among states and various government agencies. Furthermore, it can include support for priority setting and strategy development, as in the case of Somali national development plans. It can also encompass policy design and implementation, as observed across several countries, including Sierra Leone and Lebanon. Additionally, such support can pertain to strategic communication from the center, which is particularly essential in developing contexts and in countries facing conflict or fragility.

Undoubtedly, the role of the center of government is becoming increasingly important in today's world, given the complex and multidimensional challenges, as well as compounding crises that we face. These challenges require holistic, integrated, and innovative approaches to governance, emphasizing the need for coordination, collaboration, and coherence, which can be fostered from the top of the government. Therefore, executive leadership and the center of government should be in focus of international support in the upcoming period. Relevant interventions should be designed and delivered with political astuteness and tailored to specific context. However, the key question that must be addressed in this context is how to reestablish government leaders' (and subsequently the center of government's) ownership of the SDGs. This is the linchpin for effectively leading and steering the necessary transformation to achieve the global goals.