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Guatemala's Achilles' Heel: The 2030 Agenda and the Fight against Corruption

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IPI launched the SDGs4Peace project in 2016 to understand how the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is being rooted at the national and local levels and to support the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In its preamble, the 2030 Agenda states, "There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development." The SDGs4Peace project asks how countries are operationalizing this link in practice to realize the 2030 Agenda's holistic vision.

The project focuses on five case studies: the Gambia, Greece, Guatemala, Lebanon, and Myanmar. Each of these case studies is based on fieldwork, including interviews with representatives of governments, the private sector, academia, and civil society. While these countries are at different levels of development, each is going through a period of internal transformation. Implementation of the 2030 Agenda therefore provides them an opportunity not only to buttress existing aspirations but also to build new partnerships that transcend traditional approaches.

As many countries are only just starting to implement the 2030 Agenda, this project also presents an opportunity to discuss the SDGs—and why they matter—with local leaders and communities. By bridging the gap between the local and the global, it can highlight ways of working toward shared goals and adapting those ways of working to specific contexts.

This issue brief was drafted by Jimena Leiva Roesch. The views expressed in this publication represent those of the author and not necessarily those of the International Peace Institute. IPI welcomes consideration of a wide range of perspectives in the pursuit of a well-informed debate on critical policies and issues in international affairs.

Introduction

In late 2015, momentum toward implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was steadily building in Guatemala. The country appeared to be breaking from the past and overcoming years of tolerating impunity and corruption at all levels of government and society. The adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) seemed to align perfectly with the reforms underway, particularly the targets embedded in SDG 16 on "promot[ing] peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provid[ing] access to justice for all and build[ing] effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels."[1] The centerpiece of Guatemala's fight against corruption was the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (*Comisión Internacional contra la Impunidad en Guatemala*, or CICIG). This unique mechanism, set up through an agreement with the United Nations in 2006, works with government institutions to investigate corruption entrenched in the national political system (see Box 1).

The population's anger against corruption reached a boiling point following new allegations of high-level corruption in 2015. Peaceful demonstrations called for greater transparency and accountability in state institutions, leading to the resignation of President Otto Pérez Molina and half his cabinet. As former Minister of Foreign Affairs Gert Rosenthal said at the time, "Civil society has found its voice, and that is a very positive sign."[2] Later that year, Guatemalans elected a new president, Jimmy Morales, who vowed to continue the fight against corruption.

Despite this promise, in August 2017, CICIG and the attorney general presented evidence that President Morales was complicit in illegally financing his party during the presidential campaign. The resulting standoff between the government and CICIG polarized Guatemala between those supporting the fight to stamp out corruption (equated with supporting CICIG) and those pushing back against that fight (equated with supporting the government). At the same time, members of the private sector have been subject to investigations by CICIG and, as a result, much of the commission's private sector support has receded. Moreover, social media, as well as new media outlets such as call centers, have been used to spread false messages that confuse the population and trigger polarization.[3] Overall, however, the majority of

1 UN General Assembly Resolution 70/1 (October 21, 2015), UN Doc. A/RES/70/1.
2 Interview with Gert Rosenthal, former minister of foreign affairs, New York, October 2017.
3 Interview with Gonzalo Marroquín, director of *Crónica* magazine, Guatemala, November 2018.

Guatemalans approve of CICIG's work, with over 70 percent expressing some degree of trust in the commission.[4]

Guatemala's governance crisis is also part of the legacy of securitization it inherited from a thirty-six-year civil war that wore down the country's social fabric. The 1996 peace agreement brought neither the anticipated social benefits nor inclusive growth and did not reform the corrupt structures in place during the war, including the military. In the current political environment, these old security-driven mentalities are resurfacing; for example, the 2019 budget increased military funding while areas related to sustainable development continue to receive inadequate resources.[5]

Guatemala stands at an important crossroads. Recent gains made toward improving governance and tackling corruption are being reversed. This could have a ripple effect on Guatemala's prospects to advance on the 2030 Agenda: "We still lack national and foreign investment because of corruption, we still lack highways and efficient ports because of corruption, we still lack decent hospitals and schools because of corruption," as a human rights leader recently wrote.[6] Progress on SDG 16 is thus essential not only to address Guatemala's governance challenges but also to address longstanding socioeconomic needs such as extreme poverty, chronic malnutrition, inadequate access to and quality of healthcare and education, and violence against women and girls.

This study analyzes recent gains and setbacks in Guatemala's efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda and provides recommendations for ways the country can fight corruption and securitization to sustain peace and promote sustainable development. It is based on interviews conducted during several trips to Guatemala in 2017 and 2018, as well as with Guatemalan officials in New York between 2017 and 2019. Interviews were conducted with a wide variety of sources, including high-level government officials from various ministries, UN officials, and representatives of civil society groups and the private sector.

Figure 1. The seventeen SDGs

4 Elizabeth J. Zechmeister and Dinorah Azpuru, "What Does the Public Report on Corruption, the CICIG, the Public Ministry, and the Constitutional Court in Guatemala?" Latin American Public Opinion Project, August 31, 2017.

5 Gladys Olmstead, "El Presupuesto 2019 Está Repleto de Trampas Clianterales," *Nomada*, November 28, 2018.

6 Mamfredo Marroquín, "Es la Corrupcion Idiota," *El Periodico*, February 19, 2019

From MDGs to SDGs: A Break from the Past?

Guatemala was one of the first countries to support the creation of universal, international development goals.[7] Guatemalan leaders were critical of the first iteration of this project (the Millennium Development Goals, or MDGs) for not including an explicit, standalone goal on peace that would address issues such as access to justice, inclusion, and strengthening of state institutions.[8] As a leading voice in negotiating the SDGs, Guatemala therefore advocated both for the creation of SDG 16 and for peace to be a crosscutting issue in all the SDGs.

Looking at Guatemala's progress toward the SDGs requires first looking at how it fared on the MDGs. Guatemala met only 44 percent of the MDG indicators within their fifteen-year lifespan.[9] Guatemala has neither developed its social services nor invested in making them accessible to the population. Indeed, since the adoption of the peace accord, indicators related to food security (MDG 1), health (MDGs 4, 5, and 6), and education (MDG 2) have stagnated. Guatemala's child malnutrition rate is 47 percent.[10] Guatemala's final report on achievement of the MDGs highlighted that it had "advanced on the achievement of the goals at a rate that [was] insufficient and, in many areas, unsatisfactory to meet the minimum development standards set out in the MDGs."[11] The country's 2017 national voluntary review cited lack of national ownership, political will, follow-up mechanisms, monitoring and evaluation, and widespread understanding of the goals as reasons for these shortcomings.[12] "The MDGs were largely seen as a UN agenda," according to an official from the Secretariat of Planning and Programming.[13]

Moreover, the MDG framework did not include issues related to peace and governance that might hamper progress, such as entrenched corruption in state institutions, non-inclusive institutions, and limited access to the justice system. The SDGs now include targets on governance that can help address these systemic issues. Guatemala's 2017 national voluntary review identifies tackling corruption and improving governance as top priorities, both of which align with SDG 16.[14]

Despite the setbacks with the MDGs and recent political challenges, Guatemala has made some progress toward implementing the 2030 Agenda. The National Development Plan (NDP), which was launched in 2016 and runs until 2032, was developed alongside the SDGs and therefore shares similar priorities. There has also been progress at the technical level. The Secretariat of Planning and Programming led extensive consultations to "rais[e] awareness and prioritiz[e] the goals and targets [of the SDGs] according to the national context."[15] It also conducted 144 workshops in which 4,000 representatives of ministries, indigenous groups, civil society, and academia participated.[16] In 2018, universities started to include the SDGs in their curricula, which could raise awareness of the 2030 Agenda.[17]

During this consultative process, Guatemala prioritized 76 percent of the SDG targets (129 out of 169).[18] With so many targets, one of the many challenges the country faces is the lack of capacity to assess progress. The Secretariat of Planning and Programming noted, "One of the major challenges is how to measure the indicators. We only have the capacity to measure 46.8 percent of the total indicators contained in our SDG plan."[19]

7 Paula Caballero, "A Short History of the SDGs," *Impakter*, September 20, 2016.
8 David Donoghue, Felix Dodds, and Jimena Leiva Roesch, *Negotiating the Sustainable Development Goals: A Transformational Agenda in an Insecure World* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2016).
9 Guatemalan Secretariat of Planning and Programming, "Informe Final de Cumplimiento de los Objetivos de Desarrollo del Milenio," December 2015.
10 This statistic refers to chronic malnutrition in children between the ages of 6 and 59 months, as reported in the World Food Programme Country Brief on Guatemala, June 2018.
11 Guatemalan Secretariat of Planning and Programming, "Informe Final de Cumplimiento de los Objetivos de Desarrollo del Milenio," December 2015, p. 29.
12 Government of Guatemala, "Guatemala's National Voluntary Review 2017," pp. 13–14.
13 Interview with official from Guatemala's Secretary of Planning and Programming, Guatemala, January 2017.
14 Government of Guatemala, "Guatemala's National Voluntary Review 2017."
15 Interview with Abigail Alvarez, official from the Secretariat of Planning and Programming, Guatemala, January 2017.
16 Miguel Ángel Moir, Guatemala's national voluntary review presentation during the thirteenth meeting of the High-Level Political Forum, New York, July 19, 2017.
17 Interview with students from Universidad del Valle, Guatemala, November 2018.
18 Some of the targets that were not prioritized related to oceans and sustainable consumption and production as well as other targets that are not applicable to Guatemala as a middle-income country.
19 Government of Guatemala, "Guatemala's National Voluntary Review 2017."

The secretariat is also working with the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) to develop a methodology for implementing the 2030 Agenda through local municipalities. The secretariat helps each municipality develop a plan that charts community priorities, and both civil society and private sector actors are involved in the implementation. This model's bottom-up approach is inclusive and ensures the participation of local communities and authorities that often better understand local needs. This speaks to the vision of "an agenda for the people and by the people."[20] According to an official from the secretariat, "Many of these [community] priorities overlap with the content of the 2030 framework… even though the plans do not have the same language as the SDGs."[21]

At the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in July 2017, Guatemala presented its first national voluntary review. The review confirmed that the budget allocated to reaching the SDG priority targets is insufficient. To increase funding, Guatemala's Congress needs to approve an expanded budget, though doing so will be a complicated task because, as detailed in the 2017 review, the upper halls of government are largely unaware of the 2030 Agenda and there is a general lack of fiscal resources.[22] Moreover, the Secretariat of Planning and Programming—largely a technical body—does not have the political gravitas to persuade Congress to increase the budget for sustainable development projects.[23]

Congress is also currently focused more on power politics than on projects that support sustainable development. In particular, Congress has prioritized amending a reconciliation law that would offer the military amnesty for crimes against humanity committed during the civil war. A parliamentarian interviewed expressed that "Congress is provoking a climate of polarization and violence and no longer has any respect for the rule of law."[24] He also said that the focus on this reconciliation law is taking attention away from important socioeconomic issues.

Moreover, Guatemala has a chronic lack of resources. Low tax revenue is an impediment to increasing domestic spending on sustainable development. "The government has one of the lowest rates of revenue collection in the region," which severely restricts budgets for social services.[25] An official from a Guatemalan think tank highlighted that the country's value-added tax is very low, even by Central American standards, and "income tax is also very low, so tax collection is basically only based on the formal private sector."[26] However, only about 20 percent of Guatemalan businesses operate in the formal sector, according to one entrepreneur.[27] In 2016, the Ministry of Finance put forward a tax reform proposal, but Guatemala's Congress did not approve it. Several interviewees stated that Guatemalans are not ready for tax reform, as they lack the necessary trust in public authorities due to corruption and embezzlement of public funds. An economist highlighted the difficulty of discussing fiscal and tax reform because "there are not enough signals that show where the money is spent. People are not willing to pay an extra penny if the fate of their money will be the same as we have seen before."[28]

With government revenues unlikely to increase in the near future, the domestic private sector will be an important partner for the government in implementing the 2030 Agenda and could be a source of support, including financing. However, the UN Global Compact, which is seeking to increase the private sector's awareness of and action on the SDGs, only has one person working in Guatemala—a small team for such an ambitious agenda. As such, the Global Compact does not have the capacity to engage systematically with the domestic private sector, particularly small and medium enterprises.

20 UN General Assembly Resolution 70/1 (October 21, 2015), UN Doc. A/RES/70/1.
21 Interview with Guatemalan government official, New York, September 2018.
22 Government of Guatemala, "Guatemala's National Voluntary Review 2017," p. 12.
23 Interview with high-level official from Guatemala, New York, April 2017.
24 Interview with Guatemalan parliamentarian, New York, March 2019.
25 Helmer Velasquez and Arlyn Jimenez, "Guatemala Faced with the 2030 Agenda," Social Watch, 2016.
26 Interview with Juan Carlos Zapata, executive director of FUNDESA, Guatemala, January 2017.
27 Interview with Maria Pacheco, entrepreneur, Guatemala, January 2017.
28 Interview with economist, Guatemala, January 2017.

Given Guatemala's failure to meet the MDGs, the question of whether or not implementation of the SDGs could be more effective persists. The SDGs have the potential to be a unifying platform for Guatemala's polarized society, particularly for policymakers, civil society, and businesses seeking increased accountability at the national level. At the time of writing, however, only small, intergovernmental circles and international actors seemed to be aware of the 2030 Agenda, and even fewer actors were engaging in its implementation. Moreover, the current leadership's level of commitment to the 2030 Agenda and SDG 16 is unclear. Guatemala has transformed from being one of the central promoters of SDG 16 to turning its back on the international community and rejecting its support in fighting corruption and strengthening the justice system.

Box 1. CICIG: A unique model for addressing corruption

Calls for reform of Guatemala's justice system began during peace negotiations in 1996. The creation of an international commission—CICIG—to help root out entrenched corruption in state institutions emerged from those negotiations. At the time of the signing of the peace accord, "Guatemala's negotiators and its population had the capacity to think about the future," noted a CICIG official. They knew that after the war there would be "a really weak state and very powerful corruption networks violating the state [and] using it as a tool for profit."[29] CICIG's mandate is to jointly investigate, together with national authorities, illegal networks such as organized crime that are entrenched in state institutions. This mandate is neatly in line with SDG 16's goal to foster peaceful societies with "effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels."[30]

CICIG is a "hybrid" investigative and prosecutorial body authorized by an agreement between the government of Guatemala and the UN. Its mandate directs it to conduct investigations and work with the national attorney general's office to prosecute cases in Guatemalan courts as a "complementary prosecutor." Guatemala is the only country in the world taking such an approach, and critics view CICIG as a violation of the country's sovereignty. However, the idea of CICIG was local, and Congress approved it; it was never imposed from the outside.[31]

CICIG's creation took almost a decade to gain support following the peace negotiations, and the commission finally started operating in 2007.[32] It became even more relevant in 2013, when Iván Velásquez, a Colombian prosecutor, became the commissioner. His term coincided with that of Guatemalan Attorney General Thelma Aldana, with whom he worked to unveil more than sixty criminal organizations that had ties with government institutions. To date, around 680 people have been prosecuted for corruption and similar crimes.[33] This remarkable record has also helped build capacity at the attorney general's office and in police units.[34]

Efforts to strengthen the rule of law and the justice system through the work of the attorney general's office and CICIG have made a positive contribution to sustainable development. According to officials interviewed in these two organizations in early 2016, public officials were using resources to implement policies aligned with the 2030 Agenda. "Officials are afraid to divert the resources provided because they know we are watching."[35]

29 Interview with CICIG official, Guatemala, January 2017.
30 UN General Assembly Resolution 70/1 (October 21, 2015), UN Doc. A/RES/70/1.
31 Adam Lupel and Jimena Leiva Roesch, "Corruption Scandal Renews Fight against Impunity in Guatemala," *IPI Global Observatory*, May 8, 2015.
32 Ibid.
33 CICIG, "11th Annual Work Report of CICIG," November 12, 2018, available at www.cicig.org/press-release-2018/11th-annual-work-report-of-cicig/?lang=en .
34 William D. Stanley and Charles T. Call, "UN Backed Anti-corruption Efforts Provoke a Backlash in Guatemala," *IPI Global Observatory*, February 5, 2019.
35 Interview with officials from the Office of the Attorney General, January 2017.

The Slowing Fight against Corruption

Corruption is Guatemala's Achilles' heel—if left unaddressed, it could undermine progress toward all the SDGs. Basic government functions—from building schools and hospitals to delivering basic services such as potable water to providing security—are hampered by corruption; it is a systemic problem that engulfs all state institutions.[36] Every year Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer reiterates that "corruption hits poor people the hardest."[37] Guatemala is no exception. In the country's 2017 voluntary national review, Guatemalan authorities prioritized fighting corruption and improving governance, in line with SDG 16 on peaceful societies, access to justice, and inclusion. Subsequently, however, the level of support for addressing corruption has significantly waned; some even say it has reversed.[38]

In 2015, Guatemala lived through a transformation, and a culture of rule of law started to emerge after years of tolerating impunity and accepting corruption as the norm, both in government and in business. This occurred after CICIG and Attorney General Thelma Aldana revealed that the president and vice president were involved in an extensive criminal network that controlled the tax and customs systems. This led to an unprecedented number of peaceful protests demanding an end to Guatemala's corruption and culture of impunity. The vice president and president both subsequently stepped down. One parliamentarian interviewed for this research stated that Guatemalans "not only found out about the depth of corruption, but about how people got away with it. This explains why Guatemala's socioeconomic indicators are very low despite the fact that it is the largest economy in Central America."[39]

While the protests went largely unnoticed by the international community, they marked a significant turning point for Guatemala. The overwhelming support for the protests among youth, civil society, and the private sector shook the country from its many years of tolerating impunity. This was also a unique moment when Guatemalan society as a whole seemed to unite behind a common cause, generating a sense of shared national identity—something that is key to building a peaceful society.[40] However, this moment of unity was short-lived. As one journalist noted, this society-wide support was "genuine and spontaneous but lacked leadership and follow-up mechanisms as the situation evolved."[41]

Since the protests in 2015, political polarization in Guatemala has rapidly increased, and support for CICIG has waned. The current president and his family members' alleged involvement in corrupt practices created a standoff between the government and CICIG and, as a result, between the government and the UN. Morales tried to have the commissioner of CICIG expelled from the country in 2017, but the Constitutional Court blocked his request. Several members of the cabinet and government resigned because of the president's actions. One year later, Morales again demanded that the commissioner leave the country and refused to renew his visa.[42] This time, the president ignored the Constitutional Court's rejection of his request. This has led to "legal gridlock between the executive and judicial branches of government."[43] In 2018, the protests supporting CICIG were smaller and did not have a similar effect as in 2015.

Despite the fact that the president's action is a violation of the constitution, the United States has withdrawn its public support from CICIG, and the Guatemalan people are "confused by so many mixed messages," unsure who to support.[44] CICIG's commissioner has still not been allowed to reenter Guatemala and continues to work remotely. Most of CICIG's international personnel

36 Mamfredo Marroquín, "Es la Corrupcion Idiota."
37 Transparency International, "Poverty and Development," available at www.transparency.org/topic/detail/poverty_and_development .
38 Martín Rodríguez, "Guatemala Da un Paso Más hacia la Dictadura," *New York Times*, April 4, 2019.
39 Interview with parliamentarian, New York, March 2019.
40 Peter T. Coleman, "Half the Peace: The Fear Challenge and the Case for Promoting Peace," *IPI Global Observatory*, March 19, 2018.
41 Interview with Gonzalo Marroquín, Guatemala, November 2018.
42 Carlos Álvarez, "Jimmy Morales Dirige Gabinete Incluyendo a Ministros Que Renunciaron," *Prensa Libre*, October 2, 2018.
43 Interview with private sector leader, New York, January 2019.
44 Interview with journalist, Guatemala, November 2018.

have left the country. The judges blocking the president's decision and human rights leaders who supported them are being threatened and intimidated.[45]

This has driven a wedge between Guatemalans who support the president and those who support the commission. In a 2018 interview, a journalist highlighted that CICIG's commissioner was not blameless in creating this polarization. One of his mistakes was lobbying for new laws in Congress, which the journalist considered "far from the mandate of an international servant." This led to CICIG taking sides in national political debates—a "strategic error on its side."[46] For their part, politicians who opposed the commission fed polarization by spreading rumors that the new laws proposed by CICIG and the former attorney general were leftist policies. This political fearmongering revived Cold War ideologies that categorize people as either left-wing or right-wing, recalling the ideological polarization of Guatemala's civil war.

CICIG has also lost the support of another important group in Guatemala: the private sector. Guatemalan businesses have had a robust domestic presence for a long time. The head of a development think tank highlighted, "During the civil war, the private sector never left Guatemala, unlike other countries in the region; it chose to stay."[47] Family-owned companies remain and continue to run their business from Guatemala. While the private sector initially had a positive relationship with CICIG, the commission uncovered illicit funding from some of Guatemala's largest companies for President Morales's election campaign.[48] In response, the CEOs of seven companies issued a public apology for their behavior in April 2018.[49] Despite their apology, many of these companies' leaders have since gone silent or are openly supporting the president's actions against the commissioner. Speaking at a high-level event on infrastructure in Guatemala, one private sector leader criticized this divide, saying, "The fight against corruption is something that should unite us, but the current political crisis has created a polarization in society that we have never seen."[50] This polarization runs contrary to the spirit of the 2030 Agenda and Guatemala's own National Development Plan, which seek to promote a shared vision of the future among the government and the people.

The Disconnect Between Development Aid and the 2030 Agenda

Even as Guatemala has experienced relatively stable economic growth (about 2.6 percent in 2018), poverty levels have increased to 59.3 percent as of 2014.[51] If the country is to address this paradox of growth and achieve the SDGs, the government must holistically attend to SDG 8 on inclusive growth. According to a high-level government official, "Growth is stable, but its distribution has no social impact."[52] The lack of policies to promote inclusive growth particularly affects those living in rural areas, where the absence of the state is greater, poverty and hunger are higher, and school enrollment is lower than in urban areas.

What has kept the rural economy afloat has been the constant flow of remittances, which account for over 10 percent of Guatemala's GDP.[53] Guatemala has "three economies," according to the former vice-minister of finance. "There is the formal, the informal, and the remittances that sustain the country."[54] Remittances are not fueling economic growth in any significant way; as a local elected official pointed out, families spend most of their income from remittances to fulfill short-term needs rather than to invest in long-term, sustainable initiatives.[55] A renowned economist and

45 Interview with parliamentarian, New York, March 2019.
46 Interview with journalist, Guatemala, November 2018.
47 Interview with Juan Carlos Zapata, Guatemala, January 2017.
48 Edwin Bercian, "Le Pedimos Disculpas a Guatemala," *Publinews*, April 19, 2018.
49 Roni Pocón, "Excancilleres y Exembajadores Apoyan a la Cicig y se lo Hacen Saber al Congreso de E.E.U.U," *Prensa Libre*, May 11, 2018.
50 Cindy Espina, "Es Necesaria la Lucha contra la Corrupción en los Estados," *El Periódico*, October 13, 2017.
51 World Bank, "Guatemala Overview," October 4, 2018.
52 Interview with Guatemalan government official, New York, March 2017.
53 Data sourced from World Bank, available at https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.DT.GD.ZS .
54 Interview with Gustavo Leiva, senior adviser at Fundasistemas, Guatemala, January 2016.
55 Interview with Leticia Pérez, municipal coordinator in Totonicapán, Guatemala, January 2017.

former minister of foreign affairs said, "In certain small towns, there is the illusion of prosperity. But the money spent is coming from remittances, not from a growing local economy."[56]

The past several years have also seen an increase in the number of unaccompanied minors journeying north in pursuit of human security and family reunification. For many Guatemalans, illegal migration provides an escape from extreme poverty, lack of employment opportunities, and gang violence.[57] In 2014, more than 17,000 unaccompanied children from Guatemala were apprehended for illegally entering the United States.[58] In response, the governments of Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and the United States adopted the Plan of the Alliance for Prosperity (A4P), which aims to reduce illegal migration and increase border security.[59]

Critics argue that the plan places too much focus on hard security issues. Under the administration of US President Donald Trump, funding that was traditionally managed by development agencies is now being channeled through "intelligence liaisons, defense attachés, military group colonels, [and Drug Enforcement Administration] agents."[60] This securitization of aid in US policy is reinforcing the power of Guatemala's military, which ruled the country during the civil war. This is contradictory to the spirit of the 2030 Agenda and its overall vision of peace, which requires a people-centered approach. The 2030 Agenda "represents a rare recognition that the most strategic tools available for addressing conflict… are in fact peacebuilding, governance and development efforts."[61]

A4P is an important source of funding that the US and recipient governments should align with the 2030 Agenda through both SDG 16 and SDG 17, which emphasizes global partnerships. An official with the US Agency for International Development (USAID), which is involved in implementing A4P, said that USAID's projects in Guatemala do not stem migration at the necessary scale, nor are they tied to an integrated vision of development and peace. The official pointed out that projects "are small and fragmented [and] do not lead to cumulative impact. They may have a palliative effect but not more than that."[62] The official explained that USAID focuses on reaching small producers as a way to implement the prosperity plan. However, these kinds of projects do not have the scale to transform the economy. A former minister of planning and programming corroborated this, saying, "Guatemala has over 3,000 communities, so the impact of investing in 200 communities is too small."[63]

Therefore, while A4P has been the most important geopolitical agenda in the sub-region, it remains largely isolated from efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda. The lack of connection between A4P and sustainable development in Guatemala is a missed opportunity to address issues in an integrated manner, which could have more impact and produce longer-term results. International aid should serve as a catalyst to push forward the localization of the 2030 Agenda instead of moving it farther away.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Guatemala's peaceful protests in 2015 were a historic breakthrough. Guatemalans rose up, demanded change, called for an end to their country's culture of impunity, and insisted that those in power respect the rule of law. It took the courage of many judges, government officials, civil society leaders, and entrepreneurs to unveil the corruption that had overtaken Guatemala's governance system.

This fight against corruption eventually

56 Interview, New York, September 2018.

57 International Crisis Group, "Undocumented Migration from the Northern Triangle of Central America," October 25, 2017.

58 These numbers are for the fiscal year beginning October 1st of the calendar year prior. The number decreased to around 13,500 unaccompanied children in 2015 and 7,500 in 2016. Sourced from US Customs and Border Protection, available at www.cbp.gov/site-page/southwest-border-unaccompanied-alien-children-statistics-fy-2016 .

59 On March 29, 2019, Donald Trump directed the US State Department to cut off aid to all three countries.

60 Jake Johnson, "Miami Conference Signals Further Militarization of US Policy in Central America," *The Americas Blog*, Center for Economic and Policy Research, June 14, 2017.

61 Anna Möller-Loswick, "Is UN Goal 16 on Peace Being Misused to Justify Securitization?" *IPI Global Observatory*, October 11, 2017.

62 Interview with former secretary of planning and programming, Guatemala, January 2017.

63 Interview with Guatemalan government official, New York, March 2017.

generated a backlash, however, dividing Guatemalan society between supporters and opponents of CICIG. There is a lack of internal and external brokers that can help bridge the divide—a role the UN cannot play as it has become a party to the rising tensions.[64] The polarization of Guatemala's society has led to a collapse of ideological complexity; one is either seen as leftist (supporting CICIG) or right-wing (against CICIG). This "us-versus-them" scenario and the absence of dialogue among people with different views are dangerous for freedom of speech and the protection of human rights and democracy.

With Guatemala's government in crisis, implementation of the 2030 Agenda faces an uncertain future. Guatemala will present its second national voluntary review in July 2019, and how the government will frame its efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda—and particularly SDG 16—remains unclear. The elections in June 2019 will also play a decisive role in Guatemala's future trajectory. The new government will have to negotiate and consider the renewal of CICIG's mandate—set to expire on September 3, 2019—which will determine whether the fight against corruption in Guatemala continues building momentum, stalls, or, even worse, moves backward.

The following are recommendations for advancing Guatemala's progress toward implementing the 2030 Agenda:

- **Communicate the 2030 Agenda through multi-stakeholder outreach.** To address the lack of knowledge of the 2030 Agenda, government officials should work with the UN country team to build a communication strategy that links the agenda with local priorities. Such a strategy should include civil society—particularly youth groups—as well as the private sector. Schools can also be involved in this outreach, promoting the 2030 Agenda through both curricular and extracurricular activities, which, in turn, will extend the agenda's societal reach.
- **Improve monitoring of progress.** To monitor the 2030 Agenda, the Secretariat of Planning and Programming should establish an inter-institutional follow-up mechanism on the SDG targets. Those responsible for implementing this mechanism should meet regularly to plan and report on progress. International support is needed in order to address the deficit in data collection and analysis.
- **Align international aid plans, such as the Plan of the Alliance for Prosperity, with the 2030 Agenda's local objectives.** The governments of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador should work together to link the A4P with the 2030 Agenda through SDG 17 on global partnerships. This would help broaden the scope of the plan beyond short-term security concerns to long-term sustainable development projects. The increasing use of military and defense actors to deliver aid promotes a narrow, security-focused agenda. This agenda is only focused on the symptoms of the problem (e.g., migration north) instead of the root causes of underdevelopment and conflict that the 2030 Agenda's holistic framework addresses. This trend needs to be discouraged, and a conversation about aligning aid with the SDGs needs to take place.
- **Continue to engage with the private sector, particularly small and medium enterprises.** The Global Compact's office should be in conversation with a broad range of companies and help domestic businesses internalize the SDGs in their supply chains. A dialogue between the government, the private sector, and civil society must take place in order to reduce polarization, reiterate a call to uphold the rule of law, and chart a way forward.

64 Ibid.

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