Webinar: Managing Corruption Risks in the Health Sector in COVID-19

On 24 November 2020, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) hosted a webinar titled "Managing Corruption Risks in the Health Sector in COVID-19." Over 50 colleagues from headquarters and Country Offices were in attendance, ultimately demonstrating the relevance of this topic during the COVID-19 pandemic. The webinar sought to provide colleagues with an introduction to UNDP's Methodology for Corruption Risk Management while also providing an opportunity to highlight the anti-corruption work that UNDP's HIV, Health and Development Team and UNDP's Governance Team have been spearheading through the establishment of the Anti-Corruption, Transparency and Accountability (ACTA) for Health Alliance. Following this introductory webinar, a subsequent session will be held in which colleagues will learn how to implement the risk management methodology into their country's anti-corruption work.

To begin, colleagues received an introduction on the impact of corruption in health. Specifically, colleagues learned about the financial impact of corruption in health, how corruption prevents the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3 and 16, and how corruption reinforces inequalities. These topics were also looked at through the lens of COVID-19 and how the pandemic further exacerbates each element. Within this introduction by Mark DiBiase (Policy Specialist, HIV, Health and Development) from Headquarters, colleagues were also introduced to the ACTA for Health Alliance, an initiative created by the World Health Organization, the World Bank, the Global Fund and UNDP. Some recent accomplishments were also shared including the Alliance's side-event at the UN General Assembly in September 2019 in addition to its joint fundraising efforts to support the Alliance's work and objectives.

Following this introduction, Mostafa Hunter (Senior Consultant, Health, HIV and Development) provided attendees with insight into the vicious cycle that perpetuates corruption. Colleagues learned how poor governance creates accountability deficits, which increases vulnerability to corruption ultimately leading to systemic corruption, further perpetuating poor governance. Colleagues learned that such a cycle exacerbates the risk of corruption and undermines the sector and/or programme's capacity to realize its objectives. During crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, a weak cycle such as this impacts the response to corruption, ultimately worsening the effects of the crisis at-hand. He also elaborated on the step-by-step approach developed by UNDP to manage corruption risks.

Colleagues in attendance also learned how this negative cycle can lead to a multitude of entry points for the UNDP Methodology for Corruption Risk Management by hearing from the experiences and lessons learned by the Bureau for Arab States and Country Offices in Angola, Tunisia and Zimbabwe who had already piloted the tool.

Arkan El Seblani (Chief Technical Officer and Regional Project Manager, Anti-Corruption, UNDP Regional Hub for Arab States) discussed how their office's experiences taught them that corruption undermined the delivery of health outcomes and health results. As such, they determined that anti-corruption work should leverage corruption prevention methods that are based on a scientific approach. Such an approach would target the underlying problems that are often the reason for which corruption takes place. This approach would neither antagonize people as it would not be adversarial in-nature, nor provide broad reforms that become too difficult to enact. It would instead allow two communities such as those familiar with anti-corruption tools and those who are not, to come together.

Zeferino Teka (Programme Specialist, Governance) from UNDP Angola shared how the Country Office has made a pivot to make anti-corruption work a flagship policy for the Country Office. Most recently, they started focusing on privatization and prevention efforts to fight corruption. As such, UNDP Angola recently signed an agreement with the General Inspection Services to engage in corruption prevention. Given the value proposition that has become evident through the risk assessment methodology, they have come to

recognize the importance of ownership for stakeholders by sector, as multiples stakeholders also play a critical role in corruption prevention.

Thouraya Bekri (Coordinator, Strengthening Democratic Governance & Public Accountability Project) from Tunisia, discussed their office's experiences in establishing a multistakeholder joint national task force. The task force, which married the capacities of the anti-corruption community and the health community, worked together for over three years to leverage one another's skillsets to develop a common expertise. Such expertise helped reduce the knowledge gap on anti-corruption in the health sector, ultimately allowing the task force to develop a common mapping of corruption risks.

Emmanuel Boadi (Programme Manager, UNDP-Global Fund Project Management Unit) from Zimbabwe provided a summary of activities that the Country Office has been supporting since February 2019 when the initial ACTA for Health Alliance's multi-stakeholder meeting was held in Geneva. Since then, the Country Office has been assisting with a number of activities including supporting the audit and risk committees and pursuing the sponsorship of the Auditor-General and civil society, allowing some to attend the Alliance's initial workshop in Geneva in February 2019. Since then, the Country Office has also been engaging with the Swedish Embassy to support civil society in attending courses on anti-corruption in health.

In summary, the webinar provided colleagues across UNDP offices with an introductory opportunity to engage with the risk management methodology. This high-level overview discussed the risk-based corruption prevention framework, its applications in the health sector and in the context of COVID-19, and lessons and experienced learned from Country Offices. Such discussions aimed to provide colleagues with a foundational understanding of the intersection between anti-corruption and health and how to circumvent problems that have plagued this sector. Furthermore, the webinar sought to highlight the relevancy of corruption during the current COVID-19 pandemic and showcase how such crises can be detrimental to the health sector. Moving forward, UNDP will host a subsequent training in which interested Country Offices will have the chance to further explore the corruption risk management methodology and learn about opportunities for its implementation.