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Challenges for institutions in the transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies

Contribution by the Committee of Experts on Public Administration to the 2018 thematic review of the high-level political forum on sustainable development

A. Assessment of the situation regarding the principle of "ensuring that no one is left behind" towards sustainable and resilient societies

Currently, many regions, countries and individuals lag behind others with respect to their access to, and consumption of, critical services such as health, education, justice and information, to name a few. There is thus still a long way to go until the principle of leaving no one behind is fully implemented.

Recent research shows that widening wealth and income inequalities among regions, countries and individuals and the lack of trust that permeates many societies jeopardizes the efforts of leaving no one behind. Vulnerable people in the bottom forty percent of populations include the poor, children, youth, elderly, women, indigenous peoples, people with disabilities and those in remote areas, displaced populations and alienated groups including ex-combatants in post-conflict contexts. War and strife have led to the still ongoing migrant and refugee crisis, which has culminated in over 22.5 million refugees and an additional 65.3 internally displaced people. These and associated challenges put the SDG 16 at the core of all efforts undertaken towards leaving no one behind and building sustainable and resilient societies.

In terms of values and norms, the concept of leaving no one behind connotes, *inter alia*, egalitarianism, equality, equity, fairness, social justice, engagement, inclusiveness, collaboration and socio-economic protection. In terms of integrated policy and practice, it calls for a strong focus on the disadvantaged and the marginalized. In terms of its multidimensional applications, the principle entails the identification of the poorest and the most vulnerable, and an understanding of their needs. Integration of vulnerabilities together with the capacity to respond into development policies is key to implementing the leave no one behind principle. Policy measures should not only *a posteriori* aim at reducing vulnerabilities. They should also strive for increasing the resilience and responsiveness of public administration at all levels, among things by helping institutions become more attuned to the needs of vulnerable groups and aware that even if vulnerabilities are not readily visible, they may still exist.

B. Gaps, areas requiring urgent attention, risks and challenges

Gaps between legal frameworks, policies and public service delivery expectations

While the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the achievement of the SDGs are a shared ambition of the Member States, not all countries have in place the necessary legal frameworks, policies and resources to support this ambitious undertaking. Some countries have explicitly integrated the

SDGs in their national sustainable development plans while others have created action plans dedicated in part or entirely to the SDGs. However, it is one thing to integrate SDGs in a national development plan, and another to pursue strategies of leaving no one behind. Countries should realize that it is necessary to develop specific action plans for this purpose, and continuously pursue their implementation. They should concentrate on strengthening their governance and institutional capacities including financial resources, human capital and technical know-how. They should also strive to continuously improve their public service delivery models in line with people's changing needs.

Financial resource gap

For many developing countries including low- and middle-income countries, and especially the LDCs, LLDCs and SIDs, the implementation of the transformative 2030 Agenda and the SDGs outstrips their financial and human resources. Financing is also a challenge in developed country settings where diverse groups or areas are left behind for a host of reasons ranging from socioeconomic to demographic and other factors. Bridging the financing gap can be done through international development partnerships and by developed countries fulfilling their financing commitments to sustainable development. It can also be done via local resource mobilization, enhanced self-reliance, South-South and triangular cooperation. Innovative financial technology applications and inclusive finance are other ways to work for bridging the financial resource gap. Greater international cooperation and various multi-stakeholder partnership modalities including but not limited to local communities and groups and public-private partnerships, are pivotal in addressing this gap and supporting SDG implementation.

Deficits in institutional and human resource capacities

Decentralisation cannot be taken at face-value as a positive factor for coherence. Supported by appropriate local governance capacities, structures and mechanisms and when in line with national priorities, decentralisation can lead to higher collaboration, coordination, participation, inclusiveness, integration and resilience. In many places, public servants have not been trained to operate within decentralized governance frameworks. Such capacities should be developed to enable governments to instil values, norms and practices of inclusion, collaboration, partnership, coordination and integration over time. Skills and competency profiles of public servants also need to be enhanced in line with technological advances, such as in robotics, artificial intelligence, blockchain, the Internet of things, genomic medicine, biometrics, behavioural insights and data science.

The uptake of these technologies can also be instrumental in reducing the cost in SDG implementation. They can pave the way for developing countries, including the low and middle-income countries and LDCs, to leapfrog. Several aspects of the 'fourth industrial revolution' have still not been harnessed adequately in many parts of the world due in part to the dearth of sufficient financial, technical and human resources, and unreceptive mind-sets. In this regard, investment in ICT-enabled provision of public services at the local level can be encouraged. This can also support improving the quality of public services, promoting transparency, and facilitating the establishment and working of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

Safety and security gap

A focus on the political consensus for peace is paramount for bridging the safety and security gap in post-conflict contexts. Reinforcing people's commitment to peace and sustainable development requires forms of governance that facilitate pluralism, suppressing hate and discrimination, and viewing governance as a "value-institution." It calls for effectively interlinking the governance and peace components of the SDG 16. From a governance perspective, the continuity of reforms of leaving no one behind is vital. From a security perspective, inclusion of the alienated groups and local communities,

including those living in remote areas and ex-combatants, is key. From a development perspective, all conflict countries have high poverty rates. Ending violence in these contexts could contribute to eradicating poverty and leaving no one behind.

Migration is one area where safety and security concerns warrant policy-makers' urgent attention. Migrants and refugees are often subject to human trafficking, smuggling and other threats. Similarly, migration policies often relate to policy areas such as criminal justice and counter-terrorism. Like migration, corruption is another area where safety and security concerns converge with governance and development challenges. Whistle-blowing systems, for instance, include criminal penalties for retaliation, false reporting and protection against harassment, discrimination or physical harm. Countering corruption demands ethical public administration and accountable governance. Likewise, governance efforts start with curbing corruption, among other things.

Gaps in the capacity of local governments, authorities and communities

As government institutions which are closest to the people, local governments have a particular role in eradicating poverty and delivering public services including through their close collaboration and partnering with central governments and regional governments at the subnational level. Local governments are not the sub-contractors of the central and regional governments. They should have the capacity to make appropriate decisions, raise funds and collect taxes. They should also have the necessary financial and human capacities and resources, and access to disaggregated data to develop and implement the necessary plans of action. In this context, it becomes important to move towards multilevel and multi-stakeholder approaches to implement the Goals – at national and local levels. Such approaches should be collaborative, ensuring early warning and appropriate support when it is identified that one level is holding back the entire implementation chain. Central government can create an environment to allow local governments to deliver on their responsibilities, including by filling gaps and resolving conflicts, and by enabling all other governance actors to play their role. Similarly, "local Agenda 2030' or 'local SDGs achievement plans' can also be supported. Programmes for developing capacity in the public sector, improving public service and service delivery would benefit from the inclusion of perspectives on local capacity development.

C. Valuable lessons learned on transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies

Importance of comprehensive capacity development

Poverty and inequality are perennial issues in many countries. A commitment to leaving no one behind in such contexts calls for sustained and comprehensive capacity development with focus on how governments, leaders, public servants can change their mind-sets, behaviour, attitude, conduct, practices to better align them with integrated development and the leaving no one behind principle. Awareness and internalisation of the 2030 Agenda and of its SDGs is an indispensable step towards this aim. In this regard, the training of public leaders and public servants in central and local governments is important. Public administration and civil service training schools and training institutes should revise their curricula to provide such training and to create the transformational leaders and public servants who will be implementing the 2030 Agenda. It is important that this type of transformational leadership in the public service is accompanied by meritocratic, impartial and inclusive recruitment and other policies that ensure diversity. Having vulnerable groups in senior leadership positions can make public administrations better attuned to previously overlooked needs of populations. Reflecting the societal diversity in government representation, such as leaders from different groups and communities, can

also support building social and political trust. Diversity can benefit all governance actors in and beyond the public sector, including the private sector and civil society.

Importance of creativity and innovation

Implementing the 2030 Agenda to achieve the SDGs requires significant departures from the usual way of administering public affairs. It calls for radical shifts in understanding administration and building capacities. It demands institutionalized measures to engage the public sector workforce in creativity and innovation, and the creation of conditions for the latter to take root. It necessitates the search for fresh and new applications and tools for planning and implementing public services. It warrants networked capacities and collaborative working arrangements that promote debate and collective elaboration, implementation and analysis of policies.

There are numerous ways of promoting creativity and innovation in the public service. There can be established institutional structures that are semi-independent from the mainstream public service, such as the Centre for Public Service Innovation in South Africa. In this model, innovations can be incubated and applied in the public service to improve performance and service delivery. Alternatively, there can be provisions for specialized innovation structures in the public sector, such as the HUDUMA, Kenya or ASAN Service of Azerbaijan. In this model, innovation can ensue from within institutions endowed with specific mandates and resources.

Strategic actions in pursuit of leaving no one behind

Every country needs to assess its own context, design its own strategies and undertake the corresponding actions that can guide and lead to sustainable development that leaves no one behind. In general, however, the following are some of the action areas a government with an aspiration for developing 'leaving no one behind' policies could prioritize:

Data-related actions: Design, develop, utilize, support, make public and disseminate a robust data and information system that can ensure timely, accurate, disaggregated and high-quality data to identify and include those who are, or are likely to be, left behind. In so doing, data collection, measurement and analysis strategies should go beyond the measure of averages. Data science tools, such as real-time data, data visualization and machine learning along with behavioural approaches to policy-making can also be instrumental.

Multi-dimensional participatory approaches to governance: Adopt combinations of top-down, bottom-up and transversal approaches to governance to give voice to the vulnerable by engaging them in the search, design, implementation and follow-up of creative solutions to development challenges through shared action and ownership of outcomes. In so doing, legal frameworks, policies, strategies and right to access programs of service delivery and family level income generation, can involve vulnerable populations, including those with multiple intersecting vulnerabilities such as the poorest women in remote areas. Participatory decision-making and inclusive service delivery are key in this regard. They can contribute to developing an open government system as a model of governance that focuses on the most vulnerable and establishes a new state-society relationship.

Open government: Transparency, especially through regularly published and widely disseminated national and local government budgets (including budget proposals, enacted budgets, mid-year and end year reports, audit reports and citizen budget within them) can allow people to track the financing of SDGs, hold state institutions accountable in their use of resources and their performance in implementing the SDGs. Establishing the mechanisms for people to participate in open and inclusive

budgetary processes is thus a priority in developing leaving no one behind policies. It may also be beneficial to make linkages between the 2030 Agenda and other frameworks such as the Open Government Partnerships where similar or comparable objectives are found.

D. Emerging issues likely to affect building sustainable and resilient societies

Governments must respond effectively to many challenges including urbanization, environmental degradation, inequalities, migration, changing demographics, debt, corruption, technology, and others. To do so, they could consider including, in their national development plans, elements of sustainable, balanced and equitable growth, access to basic infrastructure, utilities, basic education, primary health-care, and environmental conservation, among other things.

To ensure that transformation is aligned with the principle of leaving no one behind, innovative models of service delivery can aim to better cope with the fast-evolving nature of technology, business requirements and expectations of the people. Integrated solutions can be developed to better respond to the needs of all communities and to better harness their engagement. In addition, efforts could also be made to promote responsive, flexible and collaborative systems and instil a new work culture in the public sector. Each country can focus on reshaping its public governance and services in line with its own aspirations, encompassing all domains and levels of public governance.

E. Areas where political guidance by the high-level political forum is required

CEPA has developed a framework that brings together the principles and commonly used strategies of effective governance emanating from United Nations agreements and commitments to sustainable development, and which is contained in the Annex to this contribution. Such a framework provides an important reference point in building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels and in support of the implementation of all SDGs. The principles could helpfully be linked with global efforts to support the implementation of the SDGs by reflecting them in ongoing United Nations capacity development activities as well as assessing development cooperation strategies and programmes. Similarly, self-assessment of relevant technical standards at the national level to promote alignment with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the principle of leaving no one behind could also be beneficial in building institutions in support of sustainable and resilient societies.

A second area where political guidance by the HLPF is required is the development of more coherent policies, policy implementation and institutional frameworks. The indivisibility and the urgency of the SDGs make policy and institutional coherence a priority and call for better coordination and experience sharing among all relevant actors. This is important because fragmentation and silo-thinking are hampering the implementation of the SDGs. CEPA suggests three pathways to improve coherence. Firstly, institutional and policy coherence should be promoted together, context-sensitive and inclusive. Secondly, promotion of coherence requires structural attention and coordination, a broad range of tools, and might need specific work programmes or reforms. Thirdly, there is scope for a global peer-to-peer learning mechanism to support the necessary change of structures, processes, skills and mind-sets and to promote mutual learning, networking and knowledge exchange by all relevant stakeholders; in addition, national public administration schools and other training institutions should integrate the promotion of coherence for the SDGs in their curricula.

A third area concerns sound budgetary performance and transparent reporting. Building competent public fiscal management capacity at national and local levels together with adequate oversight capacity is a major challenge, particularly in post-conflict settings. Building sustainable capacity to govern should therefore start with public financial management including the mainstreaming of the Goals into

national finance strategies, which aim at bridging the gap between policy priorities and actual government spending and ensuring that the achievement of sustainable development does not rely on aid alone. Timely and regular production, publication and wide dissemination of at least executive budget proposals and reports can thus be considered. Also important are the establishment of effective public participation mechanisms in budgetary processes, and the formulation of indicators to monitor countries' progress in implementing such mechanisms and the related policies of leaving no one behind. The HLPF could shed light on the type and nature of such indicators to enhance accountability for leaving no one behind.

F. Policy recommendations on ways to accelerate progress in establishing sustainable and resilient societies

Resilience and sustainability have to do with ensuring a better future for all people and our planet in the long-run. Reaching the SDGs is a path that should create, along the way, the knowledge needed to measure the impact of programs and policies for leaving no one behind. Moreover, the values that are embedded in the 2030 Agenda need to be inculcated in the current generations to pass them on to the future ones. Future-oriented strategies and actions can increase the likelihood that countries stand a chance for building and maintaining resilient societies and realizing sustainable development, and that the poorest and the most vulnerable continue to access and benefit from public goods and services. With this in mind and to accelerate progress in establishing sustainable and resilient societies, CEPA recommends:

- Adopting and operationalizing the principles of responsive and effective governance for sustainable development and undertaking related strategic actions that are known to be effective in line with each country's unique needs and aspirations;
- Adopting the principle of leaving no one behind as a core principle of public administration, and ensuring that all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality by taking into account the needs and aspirations of all segments of society, including the poorest and most vulnerable and those subject to discrimination, in public policies at all levels;
- Introducing clear and comprehensive legal frameworks, policies, strategies and services that focus on and empowering the poorest and most vulnerable, and marshalling financial resources towards this end;
- Addressing violence and insecurity as a matter of priority as the absence of peace can otherwise throw healthy and prosperous communities into abject poverty and helplessness;
- Strengthening local governments, authorities and communities as integral actors of sustainable development in service delivery, infrastructure development, local resource mobilization or institutional and human resource capacity development;
- Fostering life-long learning cultures and supporting tailor-made and comprehensive capacity development in the public sector, and strengthening the institutions promoting such learning culture and capacity development.

Annex

Principles of responsive and effective governance for sustainable development

Preamble

The full realization of the Sustainable Development Goals and other internationally agreed development objectives will hinge in no small part on a common understanding of the basic principles of responsive and effective governance for sustainable development. The basic principles set out below are intended to clarify the governance agenda, taking into account different governance structures, national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities. They have been developed by the Committee of Experts on Public Administration to help interested countries, on a voluntary basis, build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels, with a view to achieving the shared vision for the people and the planet embodied in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As basic principles, they apply to all public institutions, including the administration of executive and legislative organs, the security and justice sectors, independent constitutional bodies and State corporations. The principles are given depth and made operational through a selection of commonly used strategies and related practices, which are an integral and evolving part of this work.

Principle		*Commonly used strategies*
Effectiveness		
Competence	To perform their functions effectively, institutions are to have sufficient expertise, resources and tools to deal adequately with the mandates under their authority	• Promotion of a professional public sector workforce • Strategic human resources management • Promotion of leadership development and training of civil servants • Performance management • Results-based management • Financial management and control • Efficient and fair revenue administration • Investment in e-government
Sound policymaking	To achieve their intended results, public policies are to be coherent with one another and founded on true or well-established grounds, in full accordance with fact, reason and good sense	• Strategic planning and foresight • Regulatory impact analysis • Promotion of coherent policymaking • Strengthening national statistical systems • Monitoring and evaluation systems • Science-policy interface

Principle		Commonly used strategies
		• Risk management frameworks
		• Data sharing
Collaboration	To address problems of common interest, institutions at all levels of government and in all sectors should work together and jointly with non-State actors towards the same end, purpose and effect	• Centre of government coordination under the Head of State or Government
		• Collaboration, coordination, integration and dialogue across levels of government and functional areas
		• Raising awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals
		• Network-based governance
		• Multi-stakeholder partnerships
Accountability		
Integrity	To serve in the public interest, civil servants are to discharge their official duties honestly, fairly and in a manner consistent with soundness of moral principle	• Promotion of anti-corruption policies, practices and bodies
		• Codes of conduct for public officials
		• Competitive public procurement
		• Elimination of bribery and trading in influence
		• Conflict of interest policies
		• Whistle-blower protection
		• Provision of adequate remuneration and equitable pay scales for public servants
Transparency	To ensure accountability and enable public scrutiny, institutions are to be open and candid in the execution of their functions and promote access to information, subject only to the specific and limited exceptions as are provided by law	• Proactive disclosure of information
		• Budget transparency
		• Open government data
		• Registries of beneficial ownership
		• Lobby registries
Independent oversight	To retain trust in government, oversight agencies are to act according to strictly professional considerations and apart from and unaffected by others	• Promotion of the independence of regulatory agencies
		• Arrangements for review of administrative decisions by courts or other bodies
		• Independent audit
		• Respect for legality

Principle		Commonly used strategies
Inclusiveness		
Leaving no one behind	To ensure that all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality, public policies are to take into account the needs and aspirations of all segments of society, including the poorest and most vulnerable and those subject to discrimination	• Promotion of equitable fiscal and monetary policy • Promotion of social equity • Data disaggregation • Systematic follow-up and review
Non-discrimination	To respect, protect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, access to public service is to be provided on general terms of equality, without distinction of any kind as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, disability or other status	• Promotion of public sector workforce diversity • Prohibition of discrimination in public service delivery • Multilingual service delivery • Accessibility standards • Cultural audit of institutions • Universal birth registration • Gender-responsive budgeting
Participation	To have an effective State, all significant political groups should be actively involved in matters that directly affect them and have a chance to influence policy	• Free and fair elections • Regulatory process of public consultation • Multi-stakeholder forums • Participatory budgeting • Community-driven development
Subsidiarity	To promote government that is responsive to the needs and aspirations of all people, central authorities should perform only those tasks which cannot be performed effectively at a more intermediate or local level	• Fiscal federalism • Strengthening urban governance • Strengthening municipal finance and local finance systems • Enhancement of local capacity for prevention, adaptation and mitigation of external shocks • Multilevel governance
Intergenerational equity	To promote prosperity and quality of life for all, institutions should construct administrative acts that balance the short-term needs of today's generation with the longer-term needs of future generations	• Sustainable development impact assessment • Long-term public debt management • Promotion of long-term territorial planning and spatial development • Ecosystem management