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Opening remarks at the African regional webinar on
Resilience and Recovery from COVID-19 through sound
policymaking: risk management

Tuesday, 16 November 2021, 8 am-10 am

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to be here with you today and to open the first African regional webinar on “Resilience and Recovery from COVID-19 through Sound Policymaking”.

I am very grateful to Ms. Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, who is the Chair of the UN Committee of Experts on Public Administration, for joining us today.

I would also like to extend my deepest appreciation to the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) for its continued outstanding collaboration and to the Resident Coordinators Offices for their invaluable support.

[Overview of the Workshop]

The objective of today’s workshop is to share knowledge and help develop the capacities of national governments to promote sound policymaking, with a particular focus on risk management.

Today’s event is a follow-up of a virtual webinar on sound policymaking that UN DESA, in cooperation with APRM, organized in February 2021 which was attended by UN resident coordinators, regional organizations, government officials and civil society actors. Some of you may have taken part in this webinar.

Following the conclusion of the workshop, UN DESA received requests from countries in Africa to provide support in taking this work forward. Countries expressed particular interest in exploring the nexus between implementing the strategies in a way that ensured sound policymaking, risk-recovery and resilience after the pandemic.

Therefore, UN DESA and APRM are now spearheading a series of three webinars on sound policymaking, with a particular focus on policy coherence, strategic planning and foresight and

risk management frameworks. These three strategies are very relevant because they are key to resilience and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

[The role of effective institutions and sound policymaking in a post-Covid-age]

Sound policymaking is one of the eleven principles of effective governance for sustainable development, which were developed by the United Nations Committee of Experts on Public Administration and endorsed in 2018 by the United Nations Economic Council on Social and Economic Development.

Commonly used strategies include strategic planning and foresight, regulatory impact analysis, promotion of coherent policymaking, strengthening national statistical systems, monitoring and evaluation systems, science-policy interface, risk management frameworks and data sharing.

To operationalize the principle of sound policymaking, UN DESA has engaged leading experts to develop strategy guidance notes on three topics, namely risk management, policy coherence, and strategic planning and foresight.

Policy coherence is crucial because it can help balance policy synergies and trade-offs between short and long-term priorities and between the three dimensions of sustainable development.

Strategic planning and foresight involve exploring and preparing for a diversity of possible developments in order to future-proof strategies, identify new potential opportunities and challenges, and design innovative ways of improving well-being under rapidly evolving circumstances and in the face of high uncertainty.

Risk management – the topic of today – is key because the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the harsh consequences of flawed or inadequate risk (and crisis) management frameworks and practices in the public sector in countries around the world.

We know that national institutions have been strongly impacted by the coronavirus pandemic. The pandemic has affected key government functions and processes, undermining the effectiveness of government action. The need to respond quickly and with drastic measures has also created risks for public institutions and organisations.

The pandemic has raised the awareness and understanding of the importance of risk management. It has also provided an opportunity to strengthen capacities for risk management in the public sector.

There is a growing realization that risk-informed governance, and effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions, are more than ever needed to address present and future crises.

Having in place effective risk management frameworks is a critical dimension of sound policymaking. Among other things, effective risk management frameworks are essential to improving trust in government.

Building trust to improve people's experiences with public institutions and basic services is one of the key tenets of "Our Common Agenda", which the United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres launched in 2021.

Moving forward, governments must enhance institutional arrangements for sound policymaking and proactively equip themselves with the proper knowledge, tools, competencies for planning for future unknown shocks that could disrupt social, economic, and environmental stability.

Instilling a risk culture in the public sector is also imperative. Likewise, public servants need to embrace an agile mindset and develop competencies in systems-thinking to perceive the links, cause-effect relations, and dynamics affecting sustainable development; risk-informed adaptation to maintain effectiveness when experiencing change and continue delivering results within new structures or despite external shocks; and collaboration across all levels of government.

[Conclusion]

Ladies and gentlemen,

As governments are building back better after the Covid-19 pandemic, today more than ever there is a need to strengthen the capacities of public institutions in the area sound policymaking, particularly in risk management.

UN DESA stands ready to support countries in addressing the COVID-19 response and recovery with a particular focus on the governance dimensions of Goal 16.

I hope that today's webinar will promote an action-oriented learning journey on how to strengthen governance capacities for sound policymaking and I wish you very fruitful discussions.

Thank you.