

Webinar 4 on Strengthening Capacities for Strategic Foresight in Support of Sound Policy Making

Wednesday, 11 September 2024

Background

Sound policymaking is one of the eleven principles of effective governance for sustainable development finalized by the Committee of Experts on Public Administration (CEPA) and endorsed by the United Nations Economic and Social Council in 2018. It requires public policies to be coherent with one another and founded on well-established grounds, in full accordance with fact, reason and good sense. One of the commonly used strategies to implement sound policymaking is strategic foresight. The CEPA strategy guidance note on coherent strategic planning and foresight defines strategic foresight as “the capacity to think systematically about the future to inform decision making today”¹. It involves a methodical and organized approach to exploring beyond the predictable engaging with uncertainty and complexity². It plays a crucial role in enabling effective emergent strategic planning in dynamic and rapidly changing environments surpassing traditional linear problem-solving approaches.

Strategic foresight is key to sound policymaking as it provides a structured and participatory approach to exploring future challenges and opportunities, which allows policymakers to create resilient and adaptable governance strategies. Policymakers in traditional planning processes are often more comfortable projecting from the past rather than imagining the future and often incorrectly assume that the future will be an incremental iteration of the past or the present. A strategic foresight approach starts by exploring various future scenarios, typically beyond the planning horizon, before considering implications for the present.

Foresight methods can be used at all stages of policy and planning cycles to navigate uncertainties, incorporate diverse perspectives, and develop comprehensive strategies that are well-grounded and forward-thinking. A foresight-based approach is instrumental in ensuring that strategic policies and plans, such as national strategies, regional-level visions, local development plans, or frameworks for development cooperation, are developed to ensure a more equitable future, and incorporate diverse voices and perspectives. Instead of attempting to provide solutions for current challenges, strategic foresight encourages decision makers to explore the likely nature of future challenges. Strategic foresight emerges as a powerful tool for navigating uncertainties and shaping proactive policies and strategies. This webinar aims to explore the significance of strategic foresight in government planning and provide insights into its practical applications and benefits.

¹ [CEPA strategy guidance note on Strategic planning and foresight, page 1](#)

² [CEPA strategy guidance note on Strategic planning and foresight, page 2](#)

Objectives

- Enhance understanding of strategic planning and foresight in the public sector to address future complex challenges.
- Strengthen capacities on systems thinking and strategic foresight for policy coherence and long-term planning in the public sector.

Guiding questions

1. How does strategic foresight differ from the traditional planning approach?
2. For what purposes can strategic foresight be used in governments?
3. What are some key prerequisites (or enablers) for embedding strategic foresight in the public sector?
4. What are some good practices of applying strategic foresight in the public sector? What opportunities and challenges exist in applying strategic foresight in governments?
5. How can governments promote strategic foresight for sound policymaking?