Asia-Pacific Task Force of the Global Initiative of Schools of Public Administration on Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
"Mobilizing and equipping public servants to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals"

Common Competency Framework for Implementing the SDGs

Why is it important to develop a competency framework for public servants to realize the Sustainable Development Goals?

Examining how public institutions work, particularly in terms of delivering public services, is key to understanding what actions must be undertaken to realize the SDGs. Critically, public servants form the backbone of such institutions, with the success of implementing the key principles of the 2030 Agenda resting on the ability of the civil service to adapt to the changes in mindset and behavior required by the 2030 Agenda.

In order to make institutions effective, accountable and inclusive, as elaborated in SDG 16, public administration systems must define new competency frameworks that can advance the principles of the 2030 Agenda across public service and ensure that they are put in practice. They must also reflect the principles of effective governance for sustainable development, which were developed by the Committee of Experts on Public Administration (CEPA) and endorsed by the Economic and Social Council on 2 July 2018. The principles highlight the need for pragmatic and ongoing improvements in national and local governance capabilities to reach the SDGs[1].

What is a competency framework in support of the Sustainable Development Goals?

As the UN Competency Framework highlights, competencies are forward-looking describing the skills and attributes officials need to build a new organizational culture and meet future challenges. However, "they also provide a sound basis for consistent and objective performance standards by creating shared language about what is needed and expected".[2] Equally, mindsets comprise the beliefs, worldview, and self-perception that matter for individuals as psychological factors governing how choices are made and habits are formed. These include value-based, motivational or non-cognitive factors that can matter even more than cognitive factors for day to day decision-making.[3]

The competencies proposed herein are designed to advance achievement of all 17 Goals and 169 Targets of the 2030 Agenda. The competencies are based upon the key principles of the 2030 Agenda (Figure 1), which include transformation, integration, leaving no one behind and universality.[4] These principles serve to guide public service values, mindsets and competencies for strengthened performance measurement of civil service. As such, the following competency framework is organized around these four key principles. The framework is developed for further consultation and adaptation to national contexts.

---

[1] https://publicadministration.un.org/en/Intergovernmental-Support/CEPA/Principles-of-Effective-Governance
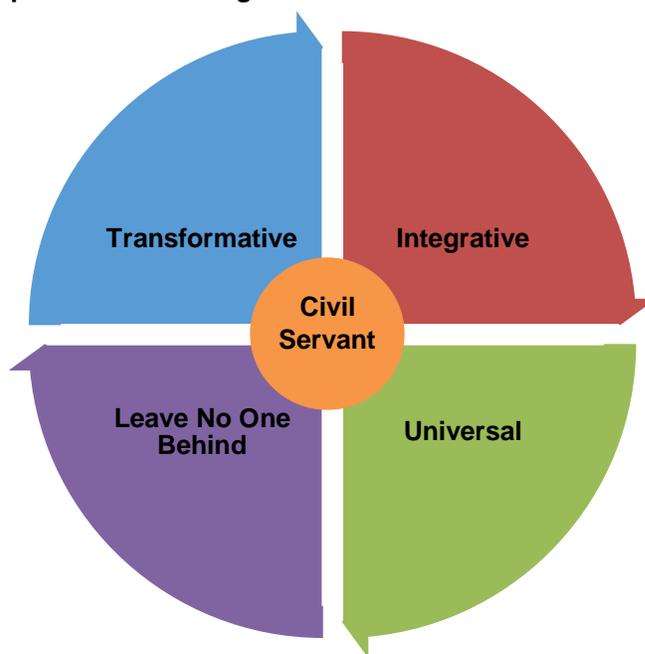
[2] UN Competency Framework (2011)

[3] Dweck, Carol S. et al. (2014) Academic Tenacity Mindsets and Skills that Promote Long-Term Learning. Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Retrieved from: https://ed.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/manual/dweck-walton-cohen-2014.pdf

[4] United Nations, 2015. Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development A/RES/70/1. Accessed at: http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E

Schools of public administration and civil service colleges may wish to compare and adapt the framework according to existing performance management frameworks. Countries may also add competencies in an iterative process that can inform south-south, north-south and triangular cooperation among public administration systems.

Figure 1. Key Principles of the 2030 Agenda for Public Service

The competency framework is proposed as a list of "core competencies"[5] linked to education for sustainable development and public governance. The competency framework also presents the key mindsets and related competencies in line with the United Nations Committee of Experts on Public Administration's Principles of Effective Governance for Sustainable Development.[6]

How was the competency framework developed?

The competency framework was developed by the Asia-Pacific Task Force of schools of public administration while UN DESA played a facilitating role during the period of August 2018-August 2019. The Asia-Pacific task force came together from 24-26 October 2018 during the UN DESA Regional Symposium in Incheon, Republic of Korea on "Mobilizing and equipping public servants to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals" where the first draft of the framework was developed as an outcome. The task force worked to revise the framework on a consultative basis, and it was presented at the 2019 UN Public Service Forum in Baku, Azerbaijan for finalization. The competency framework is intended to help member states, on a voluntary basis, to build the capacities needed to advance progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

---

[5] The United Nations notes that "the term competency refers to a combination of skills, attributes and behaviours that are directly related to successful performance on the job" and "Core competencies are the skills, attributes and behaviours which are considered important for all staff of the Organization, regardless of their function or level." The UN Competency Framework is available at:
https://careers.un.org/lbw/attachments/competencies_booklet_en.pdf

[6] CEPA (2018)

I. Transformative

Mindset	Competency
Growth: Perceives and values performance in a government context with a commitment to personal development, while seeking to impact national advancement and sustainable development. Actively keeps abreast of new knowledge and trends in own area of competence to ensure value addition for the institution.	**Professionalism:**[7] Exhibits motivation to tackle national and institutional development challenges within mandate of role. Shows interest to understand global development changes and challenges and their implications over national development strategies. Demonstrates professional competence and mastery of sustainable development both as a concept and value and its national application and relevance. Is conscientious and efficient in meeting commitments, observing deadlines and achieving results. Is motivated by professional rather than personal concerns. Shows persistence when faced with difficult problems or challenges. Assumes responsibility and accountability for successfully completing assignments or tasks; self-imposing standards of excellence to achieve related SDG targets rather than having standards imposed.
Forward-looking and Proactive: Ensures anticipatory, flexible and action-oriented behaviors to implement potential solutions and address challenges. Takes individual action ahead of deadlines, in order to achieve institution's related Sustainable Development Goals and targets. Coordinates within organizational role, projects, programs or initiatives to achieve specific SDG targets.	**Change Management:** Change management revolves around the ability to effectively perform in the face of an evolving professional and institutional environment, visioning and planning for growth, ensuring strengths of the institution and performance are optimized, while weaknesses and risks are minimized. The individual understands and anticipates change, adjusts behavior and treats change and new situations as opportunities for learning or growth; focuses on the beneficial aspects of change; speaking positively about the change to others.[8]
Critical-thinking: Analyzes and defines a problem to recommend a suitable way forward. Avoids accepting external policy recommendations for granted (blue print model) and aims for national ownership over policies. Engages constructively in critical thinking as an imperative for policy analysis and design, as well as for leadership in public service.	**Strategic problem-solving:**[9] Develops and breaks down problem scenarios to ensure the proposal of ideal solutions for the institution, where the solutions can be presented in a step-wise approach towards achievement of a target. Collectively designs and implements interventions, transitions, and transformative governance strategies toward sustainability. Exhibits an intimate understanding of strategic concepts such as intentionality, systemic inertia, path dependencies, barriers, viability, feasibility, ownership, effectiveness, efficiency of systemic interventions as well as potential of unintended consequences.
Innovative: Values the improvement of process and new solutions in work situations, while perceiving different and	**Creativity**[10]: Actively seeks to improve programmes or services, offering new and different options to solve problems and meet client/citizen needs. Promotes and

---

[7] UN Competency Framework (2011) and Harvard Competency Dictionary (2008)

[8] Harvard Competency Dictionary (2008). Retrieved March 29, 2019 from: https://apps2.campusservices.harvard.edu/cas/empldocs/cs/harvard_competency_dictionary_complete.pdf

[9] Weik et al (2011)

[10] UN Competency Framework (2011)

novel ways to deal with work problems and opportunities.	persuades others to consider new ideas. Takes calculated risks on new and unusual ideas; thinks "outside the box". Takes an interest in new ideas and new ways of doing things. Is not bound by current thinking or traditional approaches. **Design-thinking:** Applies a user-centric approach in the design of public services and policies, building scenarios and testing assumptions to ensure public services advance SDG target achievement. Integrates principles on user-centric service delivery and participatory governance to ensure solutions, policies and programmes are designed from the start with the citizen or end-user in mind. Integrates the perspective and voices of citizens into policy design. **Digital Literacy**[11]: Keeps abreast of available technology and shows willingness to learn new technology. Understands applicability and limitations of technology to the public service responsibilities and challenges at hand. Actively seeks to apply technology to appropriate tasks within government, seeking effectiveness, and transparency of government processes.
Ethical: Perceives importance of a code of ethics, and orients values and beliefs upon sound moral principles. Internalizes integrity as a core value guiding public service decisions. Perceives code of conduct as a central pillar of decision-making.	**Respect for Integrity**[12]**:** Serves in the public interest, discharging official duties honestly, fairly and in a manner consistent with soundness of moral principle. Promotes anti-corruption policies, practices and bodies in line with SDG 16.5. Strengthens and upholds codes of conduct for public officials and integrates these into performance frameworks. Ensures competitive and transparent public procurement procedures, promotes and ensures the elimination of bribery and trading in influence within public service. Aims to eliminate conflicts of interest and promotes whistle-blower protection policies. Provides adequate remuneration and equitable pay scales for public servants. **Transparent and Independent oversight**[13]**:** To retain trust in government, acts according to strictly professional considerations, complying with codes of conduct, promoting independent oversight. Is aware of the importance of checks and balances in government, arranges review of administrative decisions by courts or other bodies when necessary. Promotes independent audit, transparency of data and progress, and respect for legality.
Open and Empowering: Perceives importance of engagement, delegating and setting transparent expectations and	**Life-long learning:**[14] Keeps abreast of new developments in own occupation/profession. Actively seeks to develop oneself in line with sustainable development concepts and

---

[11] Technological Awareness, UN Competency Framework (2011)

[12] CEPA (2018)

[13] CEPA (2018)

[14] Commitment to Continuous Learning, UN Competency Framework (2011)

autonomy, the need to challenge the self and organization's achievement in line with key targets, as well as involving others when making decisions that affect them.	relates these concepts to professional and personal choices. Contributes to the learning of colleagues shares knowledge learned across the organization, seeking to apply knowledge to strengthen SDG achievements. Shows willingness to learn from others and seeks feedback to learn and improve public service delivery to achieve specific SDG targets. **Adaptive Leadership (Refers to Change Management also):[15]** Maintains effectiveness when experiencing major changes in the professional or personal context, adjusting effectively to continue delivering results within new work structures, processes, requirements, or cultures. Is flexible to changes and can ensure government public services remain delivering or continuously improve despite external shocks or risk factors. Plans for government services to be risk-informed and flexible to changing times and needs of constituents.
Results-oriented: Perceives and manages outputs and outcomes towards agreed results, aligning activities and actions with resources to achieve agreed targets and goals. Values the transparency monitoring of progress and communicates progress towards agreed SDGs and targets.	**Result-based management:[16]** Manages for results providing a coherent framework for strategic planning and management based on learning and accountability in a decentralized environment. Introduces a results-based approach to improve management effectiveness and accountability by defining realistic expected results, monitoring progress toward the achievement of the related SDG targets and integrates lessons learned to continuously improve public service management and delivery. In practice, relates and defines the SDG targets linking them to organizational plans and activities providing a focus for action; Specifies the government unit's expected results which contribute to these goals and align programs, processes and resources behind them; Monitors on-going performance, integrating lessons learnt into future planning; and improves accountability, based on continuous feedback strengthen government and national performance on the SDGs.

II.   Integrative

Mindset	Competency
Holistic / Systems-thinking: Perceives the links, causes-effects relations, and dynamics of social, economic and environmental systems affecting national public governance and sustainable development. Values assessment of the trade-offs, unforeseen risks, interconnections, complexity and	**System / integrative[17]:** Collectively analyzes complex systems across different domains (society, environment, economy, etc.) and across different scales (local, regional, and global), thereby considering cascading effects, inertia, feedback loops and other systemic features related to sustainability issues and sustainability problem-solving frameworks in the context of public service responsibilities. Analyzes complex systems including comprehending, empirically verifying, and articulating their structure, key

---

[15] Harvard Competency Dictionary (2008)

[16] UNDP (2000)

[17] Weik et al. (2011)

Mindset	Competency
consequences of policies and programs for the SDGs.	components, and dynamics. Is able to build transition strategies toward sustainability, with an understanding of the dynamics of complex **social, economic, and environmental** systems and able to identify intervention points, anticipating future trajectories and staging transition processes in government.
Strategic: Perceives the importance of developing clear goals, thinking in cohesive steps to achieve a long-range goal or vision; allocating resources appropriately and foreseeing risks to ensure achievement of targets.	**Planning and Organizing[18]:** Develops clear goals that are consistent with agreed strategies such as the 2030 Agenda and specific SDG targets as they relate to current national and institutional plans and procedures. Identifies priority activities and assignments; adjusts priorities as required. Allocates appropriate amount of time and resources for completing work. Foresees risks and allows for contingencies when planning. Monitors and adjusts plans and actions as necessary. Uses time efficiently.
Evidence-based: Perceives the importance of grounding decision-making on proven evidence, sound data and established research. Values the importance of research and sound data in policymaking and governance.	**Informative literacy:** Recognizes the need for information, capable to locate, retrieve, analyze and utilize data and information for problem solving. Actively promotes transparency and the use of data in public policy and service design and delivery, integrating data-driven and evidence-based decision-making as the norm in public service. In line with SDG 16.10, ensures public access to information and ensures that government protects the fundamental freedoms of citizens and persons, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements. Utilizes policy screening tools to ensure risk-informed decision-making.
Collaborative: Perceives problems of common interest and positively conceives that dialogue, coordination, partnerships and networks can address problems.	**Cooperation**[19]: Integrates a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to work across silos and ensure network-based governance. Ensures centre of government coordination, integration and dialogue across levels of government and functional areas, while also raising awareness of the SDGs. Addresses problems of common interest, institutions at all levels of government and in all sectors jointly working together with non-State actors forming multi-stakeholder partnerships towards the same end, purpose and effect in line with SDG targets. Strengthens institutions, including through international cooperation, allows for building capacity at all levels. Strategically leverages South-south, North-South and triangular cooperation as per SDG 17.

III. Leaving no one behind

Mindset	Competency
Inclusive: Recognizes that all human beings can fulfill their potential in dignity	**Respect for diversity**[21]: Promotes public sector workforce diversity, and in line with SDG 16.7, ensures responsive,

---

[18] UN Competency Framework (2011)

[19] CEPA (2018)

[21] UN Competency Framework (2011)

and equality, understanding that public policies are to take into account the needs and aspirations of all segments of society, including the poorest and most vulnerable and those exposed to discrimination and unfair treatment.[20]	inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels. Works effectively with people from all backgrounds. Does not discriminate against any individual or group. Treats all people with dignity and respect. Treats men and women equally. Encourages participatory and gender-responsive and pro-poor budgeting. Shows respect for and understanding of diverse points of view and demonstrates this understanding in daily public service delivery and decision-making, in line with SDG 16.7. Examines own biases and behaviors to avoid stereotypical responses. **Non-Discriminatory[22]:** Respects, protect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, ensuring equitable access to public service provided on general terms of equality, without distinction of any kind as to race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, disability or other status. Prohibits discrimination in public service delivery. Promotes and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development in line with SDG target 16.B. Ensures multilingual service delivery in line with diversity of national official language needs and those of local ethnic or indigenous groups. Ensures equitable accessibility standards among public service standards, including at local level. Support cultural sensitivity audit of public institutions. Advances universal birth registration and a legal identity for all in line with SDG 16.9.
Empathic: Perceives and values the needs of others, can relate to situations of constituents and groups across society, valuing their challenges and constructing solutions to advance their development in line with SDG targets.	**Emotional Intelligence:** Recognizes, manages and communicates with emotional regulation. Responds appropriately to the emotions of other people. Is able to scan one's own internal biases and to ensure that all people are treated fairly.
Responsive: Perceives and values the needs of citizens and vulnerable groups, understanding how public service actions can service these abiding by a public service code of ethics.	**Client and Service Oriented[23]:** Takes ownership of all responsibilities and honors commitments. Delivers outputs for which one has responsibility within prescribed time, cost and quality standards, understanding the interplay between national to local government service in this regard. Operates in compliance with organizational regulations and rules, observing a code of ethics with constituents in mind. Supports and provides oversight and takes responsibility for ensuring results. Takes personal responsibility for his/her own shortcomings and those of the government unit, where applicable. Understands and strengthens local service delivery, promoting the importance of local and urban governance, Strengthening municipal finance and local finance systems. Coordinates from national to local levels, aiming to increase local capacity for prevention, adaptation and mitigation of external shocks to ensure national progress towards SDG achievement.

---

[20] CEPA (2018)

[22] CEPA (2018)

[23] Client Orientation, UN Competency Framework (2011) and Subsidiarity, CEPA (2018)

IV.   Universal

Mindset	Competency
Accountability to present and future generations: Perceives the needs of current and future generations, with particular attention to the effects of changing demographics, access to natural resources, climate change and environmental impact factors. Perceives the importance of ensuring current governance and policies do not jeopardize the needs of future generations, ensuring long-term thinking and planning in public governance and in the design and equitable delivery of public services.	**Foresight**[24]: Envisions and identifies strategic issues, foreseeing opportunities and risks. Clearly communicates links between the national development and government institutional strategy and specific individual unit's public service goals. Aligns organizational direction to contribute to SDG target achievement, inspiring others to pursue that same direction. Conveys enthusiasm about future possibilities foreseeing positive aspects of change and transformation to achieve the SDGs by 2030. Foresees scenarios of achievement relating these backs to current reality and adjusting course to ensure accomplishments for specific SDG targets. **Respect for Inter-generational equity:**[25] Promotes prosperity and quality of life for all, noting especially the needs of today's children and how current actions may jeopardize the basic needs of future generations. Ensure that public service constructs administrative acts that balance the short-term needs of today's generation with the longer term needs of future generations through sustainable development impact assessments, Long-term public debt management, Long-term territorial planning and spatial development, appropriate ecosystem and common pool resource management. Promotes accountability and transparency to measure progress in delivery of public services and SDG target achievement especially among new and future generations. Ensures equitable access to public services especially among new generations.
Global:[26] Recognizes and appreciates international and domestic diversity. Appreciates the importance of working effectively across countries, languages, ethnicities and cultures, developing partnerships (north-south; south-south; and triangular partnerships), fostering dialogue and collaboration to strengthen institutions. Appreciates the importance of building a diverse, multi-cultural and inclusive workplace. Appreciates the importance of neighboring countries, regional and global affairs on national development. Seeks to stay informed on global affairs, relating these to a local and institutional context.	**Communication:**[27] Practices communication and dialogue within the organization and externally sharing information and knowledge equitably, inclusively, transparently and effectively. Clearly conveys information on sustainable development, pertinent global and national affairs, and interlinked topics, in a logically structured manner, that is accessible by all peoples, including those with disabilities. Information is transparently and effectively shared with a variety of media tailored to engage the target audience, ensuring that the audience comprehends, relates to the information, and retains the messages. Demonstrates an ability to facilitate dialogue across cultures, appreciating the perspective of all groups, from global to local audiences.

---

[24] Vision, UN Competency Framework (2011)

[25] CEPA (2018)

[26] Recommended as an essential mindset by Pakistan.

[27] Recommended as an essential competency by Viet Nam. Content adapted from the Harvard Competency Dictionary (2008)

Recommended Sources for Further Reading:

- UN Competency Framework (2011). Retrieved from:
  https://careers.un.org/lbw/attachments/competencies_booklet_en.pdf
- Harvard Competency Dictionary (2008) Retrieved from:
  https://www.seas.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/files/Human%20Resources/Harvard%20Competency%20Dictionary%20Complete.pdf
- CEPA Eleven Principles of Effective Governance for Sustainable Development (2018) Retrieved from: https://publicadministration.un.org/en/Intergovernmental-Support/CEPA/Principles-of-Effective-Governance
- UN Development Programme (UNDP) (2000). Results-based Management: Concepts and Methodology. Retrieved from:
  http://web.undp.org/evaluation/documents/RBMConceptsMethodgyjuly2002.pdf
- Wiek, Arnim. Withycombe, Lauren. Redman, Charles L. (2011) Key competencies in sustainability: a reference framework for academic program development. 6:203–218. Springer. DOI 10.1007/s11625-011-0132-6