

CHAPTER 6

Promoting an Inclusive Mindset in the Public Sector to Leave No One Behind

Ensuring that no one is left behind is the overarching principle of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The 2030 Agenda specifically calls for inclusion and empowerment of those who are vulnerable or in vulnerable situations, by stating *“People who are vulnerable must be empowered. Those whose needs are reflected in the Agenda include all children, youth, persons with disabilities (of whom more than 80 percent live in poverty), people living with HIV/AIDS, older persons, indigenous peoples, refugees and internally displaced persons and migrants”*.^{71,72} Furthermore, the Principles for Effective Governance for Sustainable Development, finalized by the United Nations Committee of Experts on Public Administration and endorsed in 2018 by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), highlight the importance of “inclusiveness” through five principles: leaving no one behind, non-discrimination, participation, subsidiarity, and intergenerational equity.⁷³

In an effort to implement these principles, policymakers in several countries are moving towards universal policies and targeted approaches, especially in relation to effective and inclusive COVID-19 responses and recovery. Such policies are also complemented by targeted measures to address the specific needs of disadvantaged and marginalized groups. To foster inclusiveness and leave no one behind, it is essential that public servants be equipped with an inclusive mindset supported by policies and strategies for inclusion. To the extent possible, the latter should reflect the views and rights of all people, including those who are vulnerable or in vulnerable situations, while continuously correcting individual, organizational, and societal blind spots. This chapter examines what an inclusive mindset is; it highlights the challenges of developing an inclusive mindset and illustrates the competencies required to develop an inclusive mindset in the public sector. It concludes by offering a set of strategies to foster an inclusive mindset in public institutions to implement the principle of leaving no one behind.

1

What is an inclusive mindset: concept and key features*

In general, mindsets provide the basis for decisions, where humans cognitively make choices based on habits, beliefs, values, and behavioral biases.⁷⁴ Among a variety of mindsets, building an inclusive mindset in the public sector has become a priority for ensuring inclusiveness and leaving no one behind due to the increased social inequality between different social groups and even within the same social group.⁷⁵ An inclusive mindset embraces assumptions, perspectives, and behaviors that are based on and promote inclusiveness.

The primary feature of an inclusive mindset is openness to diversity, participation, and collaboration.

Having an inclusive mindset requires understanding, admitting, and accepting differences among various groups and individuals and rectifying the biases, prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination against certain groups and communities, such as slum dwellers, persons living in poverty, the homeless, and poor rural communities, among others. The bias and discrimination against targeted groups of people that are based on ethnic, religious, cultural, and other social factors should be condemned and uprooted through interventions by public institutions.

To be more specific, public servants who have an inclusive mindset exhibit a cluster of six signature traits^{76,77}:

- **Commitment to inclusiveness:** being committed to diversity and inclusion through the alignment of public servants' values to the principle of inclusiveness.
- **Awareness of possible biases towards vulnerable groups or people in vulnerable situations:** being mindful of personal/individual blind spots as well as flaws in the system/organization and making efforts to promote meritocracy and ensure "fair play".
- **Courage to correct actions that promote exclusion:** being courageous by accepting personal biases towards certain social groups and weaknesses in dealing with them, admitting mistakes when made, challenging the status quo, and creating the space for personal corrective actions and for others to contribute.
- **Cultural inclusiveness:** being effective in cross-cultural interactions and adapting as required.
- **Emotional intelligence, including empathy:** demonstrating an open mindset and exhibiting a desire to understand others' views and experiences, listening without judgment, and showing empathy to put oneself in the shoes of other people.
- **Collaboration:** empowering others, leveraging the diversity of views and perspectives within and outside the public sector, and focusing on collaboration with an array of stakeholders, especially those furthest left behind.

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2

Challenges of developing an inclusive mindset in the public sector

Ensuring that no one is left behind is very challenging considering the multi-faceted vulnerabilities and specific needs of those who are vulnerable or in vulnerable situations. The latter is made more complex by the fact that people's vulnerabilities and needs are changing or continuously evolving over time and are heterogeneous within one group.

Such vulnerabilities are compounded by a number of newly emerging challenges arising from climate change, urbanization, public health emergencies, such as COVID-19, as well as the 4th Industrial Revolution and the accelerated pace of digital transformation. The latter risks further exacerbating existing digital divides between rural and urban, youth and older persons, and men and women, which in return will further widen socio-economic inequalities. This situation has led many countries to step up their efforts to implement a national strategy for building an inclusive society. This includes possible actions to unlock the full potential of all people by leveraging society's collective intelligence and by mobilizing whole-of-society efforts, including by empowering vulnerable groups as agents of change and promoting the well-being of all. There is a wide range of challenges in the public sector towards developing an inclusive mindset, namely lack of commitment to inclusion; implicit biases, prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination; lack of capacities to address the challenges of vulnerable groups; and lack of capacity for collaboration with other stakeholders and empowerment of those who are vulnerable or in vulnerable situations.

1. Lack of commitment to inclusion

Just understanding diversity is not enough for building an inclusive mindset. Public sector leaders must also be committed to inclusion, in line with SDG 16.7, and ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making at all levels. To implement the principle of inclusion, public servants should fully understand the meaning of respect for diversity of vulnerable groups and people in vulnerable situations by: i) working effectively with people from all backgrounds and not discriminating against any individual or group; ii) treating all people equally with dignity and respect without bias, including gender bias; iii) encouraging participatory and gender-responsive and pro-poor budgeting; iv) showing respect for and understanding of diverse points

of view and demonstrating this understanding in daily public service delivery and decision-making; and v) conducting a periodic review of own biases and behaviors to avoid stereotypical responses.⁷⁸

2. Implicit biases, prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination

To transform the public sector, it is necessary that public servants acknowledge and understand their biases and prejudices, which are usually the result of stereotypes emanating from cultural, ethnic, religious, and other values and beliefs. A stereotype has traditionally been defined as "overgeneralized attributes associated with the members of a social group, with the implication that it applies to all group members".⁷⁹ The UN Report on the World Social Situation 2016 found that discriminatory norms and behaviors remain widespread and continue to drive social exclusion.⁸⁰

It is important to note that while formal institutional barriers which disadvantaged and marginalized groups confront are easy to detect, informal barriers are often more subtle, therefore making it difficult to measure discrimination.⁸¹

To promote the social inclusion of disadvantaged and marginalized groups, the public sector should raise awareness of existing stereotypes, and the values, beliefs, and implicit biases towards certain groups of people. To address the unique vulnerabilities and special needs of vulnerable groups, the public sector should develop new capacities and skills through training and leadership dialogues to build an inclusive mindset. The trainings can focus on how to listen to different voices of people from different backgrounds and how to work together with vulnerable groups through, for example, co-designing and co-creating public services.

3. Lack of capacities to address the challenges of vulnerable groups

Those who are vulnerable or in vulnerable situations often have the lowest share of development gains and are most at risk from any social, economic, or environmental shocks. To provide more inclusive public services and ensure better engagement of disadvantaged and marginalized groups and communities, public servants need to be equipped with the necessary capacities to deliver last-mile public services. In addition to a lack of commitment to inclusion and diversity in the public sector of some countries, another major barrier is the intention-action gap, which leads to behaviors and actions that reinforce social exclusion even if public servants have good intentions. Another common challenge in addressing and understanding the needs of vulnerable populations is the lack of timely, reliable, and disaggregated data.⁸² Generating disaggregated data by gender, age, disability, location, etc. is required for an accurate assessment of the specific vulnerabilities of vulnerable groups

and their special needs. In this regard, government should strengthen capacities in civil registration and vital statistics, such as ID management systems, to ensure that all people are included in the official statistics from the beginning of their lives. Digital technologies can facilitate this process.

With spiraling demands for services, rising expectations, and significantly diminished budgets, the public sector is expected to deliver more and better with less resources for the whole society. The public sector is also expected to deliver services that meet the needs of disadvantaged and marginalized groups. Public institutions are increasingly leveraging digital technologies to improve the efficiency and coverage of social services. Thus, the public sector should invest in developing new capacities, in particular digital mindsets, skills, and literacy, and extending access to the Internet to remote and rural areas, improving its accessibility and affordability, and enhancing the relevance of the content, especially for disadvantaged and marginal groups and communities.

Figure 6.1: Key drivers for innovation from a systematic perspective



Source: <https://oecd-opsi.org/projects/country-studies/>

4. Lack of capacity for collaboration with other stakeholders and empowering those who are vulnerable or in vulnerable situations

To address the specific challenges faced by disadvantaged and marginalized groups and communities, the public sector should work with other relevant stakeholders. The public sector may lack the political will and human and financial capacities to collaborate with other stakeholders, especially in institutionalizing stakeholder engagement and mobilizing resources.

Engaging disadvantaged, marginalized, and other relevant stakeholders requires that public sector organizations have the competence to initiate or lead a participatory process. This process calls for: i) an organizational culture that is open to people and non-governmental stakeholders to participate in public affairs; ii) a clear mandate and resources to engage in stakeholder participation; and iii) an organization that is flexible to engage in consultation processes to learn and, if needed, revise their own policies and strategies. Meaningful stakeholder engagement needs careful planning of a just and transparent process, a skilled facilitation, and a robust evaluation of results. One important component of engagement with multiple stakeholders is mobilizing resources for facilitating the participation of disadvantaged and marginalized groups and communities, including through exploring innovative financing mechanisms such as crowdfunding, social impact bonds, blended financing, and commercial insurance, among others.

Meanwhile, the public sector may also lack the capacity to empower disadvantaged and marginalized groups as proactive agents of change, which requires: i) establishing an enabling environment (see Figure 6.2); ii) addressing the digital divide by investing in ICT infrastructure to improve accessibility and

affordability; and iii) building the capacity of vulnerable groups, including through awareness-raising campaigning, knowledge sharing, and promoting digital capacities. The capacity development process of empowering vulnerable groups could include identifying and engaging stakeholders, undertaking capacity needs assessment, defining interventions through a participatory strategy, building partnerships, as well as ensuring timely implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

Figure 6.2: Establishing an Enabling Environment



Source: Damon P. Coppola, 2020

3

Required competencies for building an inclusive mindset in the public sector

A number of competencies are required to promote an inclusive mindset among public servants. Major competencies for an inclusive mindset generally include: i) emotional intelligence, ii) communication, iii) respect for diversity, including flexibility and adaptability; iv) negotiation and facilitation, and vi) engagement and collaboration with other stakeholders.

Emotional intelligence, which refers to “the ability to understand and manage your own emotions, as well as recognize and influence the emotions of those around you”⁸³, is critical for an inclusive mindset. The four main domains of emotional intelligence are: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management, and there are 12 competencies which include empathy, organizational awareness, emotional self-control, and adaptability (see Figure 6.3).⁸⁴ One of these competencies is empathy, which is generally defined as “the ability to sense other people’s emotions, coupled with the ability to imagine what someone else might be thinking or feeling”.⁸⁵ Individuals with the competency of empathy would be attentive to

emotional cues and listen well; show sensitivity and understand others’ perspectives; and help out based on understanding other people’s needs and feelings.⁸⁶

Several governments around the world have been spearheading innovative practices to enhance empathy of public servants so they can better understand and respond to the needs of citizens, including the marginalized and vulnerable groups. For example, in Bangladesh, the Access to Information (a2i) initiative includes empathy training which aims at empowering public servants to place themselves in citizens’ shoes and motivate them with a sense of purpose for driving improvements in public service delivery, particularly by re-designing public services in a citizen-centric manner.⁸⁷ Another case is the Accessibility Empathy Lab in the United Kingdom which was set up at the Government Digital Service (GDS) to help raise awareness of government or public sector employees on the barriers citizens face and the ways that assistive technology and good design may contribute to overcoming them.⁸⁸

Figure 6.3: Emotional Intelligence Domains and Competencies

SELF-AWARENESS	SELF-MANAGEMENT	SOCIAL AWARENESS	RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT
Emotional self-awareness	Emotional self-control	Empathy	Influence
	Adaptability		Coach and mentor
	Achievement orientation	Organizational awareness	Conflict management
	Positive outlook		Teamwork
			Inspirational leadership

Source: Goleman, D. and Boyatzis, R.E. (2017). *Emotional Intelligence Has 12 Elements. Which Do You Need to Work On?* Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2017/02/emotional-intelligence-has-12-elements-which-do-you-need-to-work-on>

Communication skills are critical for public servants to be able to listen to the voices of citizens, especially those of the marginalized and vulnerable groups, and understand their vulnerabilities and needs. An inclusive mindset requires strategic communication skills for systemic understanding and interaction with people from all sectors of society.

Respect for diversity, including flexibility and adaptability, is necessary for personalized public services that are customized to address the special needs of each citizen, especially those of the marginalized and vulnerable groups which are indeed heterogeneous even within the same group and dynamic and evolving based on various factors and circumstances. This is an integral part of an inclusive mindset in policy designing and public service delivery.

Negotiation and facilitation are required skills for public servants to settle disputes among different stakeholders and reach agreements in the process of addressing the unique vulnerabilities of those who are vulnerable or in vulnerable situations. Public servants should be the upholders of the interests of vulnerable groups. Due to the multi-dimensional vulnerabilities of the poorest and vulnerable groups, public servants may need to negotiate or facilitate the process for arriving at optimal solutions through direct or facilitated discussions with different government departments and other relevant stakeholders, which may have different understandings, priorities, or strategies and approaches.

Leadership, attentive listening, building trust, and showing flexibility are all important negotiation skills. Facilitation is “the

act of helping other people to deal with a process or reach an agreement or solution without getting directly involved in the process or discussion yourself”.⁸⁹ Public servants as facilitators could lead the process and engage relevant stakeholders in the discussion to solve disputes and move through problem-solving processes, as well as to address specific challenges and multi-dimensional vulnerabilities confronted by the poorest and vulnerable groups. Public servants as a neutral party could facilitate the flow of right information to minimize information asymmetry and ensure fair treatment for the poorest and vulnerable groups and other relevant stakeholders.

Engagement and collaboration with other stakeholders are very important to ensure that public servants not only hear the voices of vulnerable groups but also engage them and other stakeholders in the process of policymaking and in the implementation process, for example, through effective consultation with the targeted groups for co-designing and co-creation. For effective engagement and collaboration, different stakeholders should agree and recognize common leadership responsibilities and commit resources for the sake of achieving a shared goal. According to the [Stakeholder Engagement Planning and Assessment Tool](#) for the 2030 Agenda developed by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) and International Association for Public Participation (IAP2),⁹⁰ inclusive engagement, which is one of the four dimensions of meaningful engagement, requires: i) stakeholder and context analysis; ii) diversity of perspectives; iii) reducing barriers to participation; iv) inclusion of vulnerable and marginalized groups; v) appropriateness from cultural perspectives; and vi) provision of safe spaces.⁹¹

4

Strategies and approaches to cultivating an inclusive mindset in the public sector

Developing an inclusive mindset in the public sector requires strategies and approaches to enhance capacities at individual, organizational, and institutional levels.

Strategy 1: Raising awareness of why an inclusive mindset is a core driver for building effective, accountable, and inclusive public institutions. Developing an inclusive mindset could start with sensitization campaigns among public servants on the importance of the principle of non-discrimination with an aim to: i) respect, protect, and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms for all; ii) ensure equitable access to public services provided on general terms of equality; iii) prohibit discrimination in public service delivery; iv) promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development in line with SDG Target 16.b; v) ensure equitable accessibility standards among public service standards, including at local level; vi) support cultural sensitivity audit of public institutions;

and vii) advance universal birth registration and legal identity for all in line with SDG 16.9.⁹²

Strategy 2: Promoting leadership development for inclusiveness. Developing an inclusive mindset should start with political commitment from top leaders. Political leaders should aim to build an inclusive society and make it an integral part of a national strategy to pursue inclusive growth and social equality and justice. Public sector leaders at all levels should raise awareness in the society and among public servants about the detrimental impact of social injustice, and inequality on long-term economic development and social stability. Meanwhile, public sector leaders should continuously upgrade their skills and enhance their capacities to engage other stakeholders and empower vulnerable groups. According to UNESCAP, there are four dimensions of quality engagement: purposeful, proactive, inclusive, and transformative⁹³ (see Figure 6.4).

Figure 6.4: Four dimensions of quality engagement



Source: UNESCAP & IAP2 (2018). Stakeholder Engagement Planning and Assessment Tool for the 2030 Agenda.

Strategy 3: Instituting a legal and regulatory framework to promote an inclusive mindset. It is essential to institute a legal and regulatory framework for building an inclusive mindset, which would make inclusion mandatory, not optional for public servants. First, the public sector itself should be required to be committed to a diverse workforce. A workforce in the public sector should duly reflect the diversity of the society they serve.

Box 6.1: France: ‘Balanced appointments in senior management of the public service’ law (January 2013)⁹⁴

This legislation seeks to ensure more equal opportunities of women among senior public servants by prioritizing women in the recruitment of senior government officials, municipalities, healthcare facilities as well as social institutions. The target is to reach an annual average of 40 per cent in first-time recruitment of women. If the numerical criterion is not fulfilled, the legislation mandates that the company make a financial compensation proportionate to the number of incomplete units. The feminization estimate for “management” positions was 34 per cent for first-time employment in 2014.

The diversity of the workforce could help ensure a good range of perspectives and expertise to promote innovation and creativity with better solutions and enhance decision-making for effective interactions with people. Second, the political representation by people of different backgrounds in legislative bodies should be safeguarded by legislation. Third, the public sector should promote fair employment for all people, irrespective of their ethnicity, religion, or gender, and provide incentives to create more job opportunities for vulnerable groups through collaboration with the private sector and civil society organizations.

Box 6.2: Singapore: The WorkRight Initiative of the Ministry of Manpower and CPF Board (Launched in 2012)⁹⁵

The Employment Act of Singapore was optimized to empower particularly low-paid Singaporean workers who are commonly senior, less qualified, and mainly employed in sectors, such as cleaning, protection, retail, foodservice by micro-entities. Despite unfair employment conditions, concerns of losing workplace and unawareness of their rights discouraged these marginalized groups from reporting violations. The key goal was to increase knowledge of low-wage workers and secure their pension protection by informing employers and employees via a public promotion strategy about their responsibilities and rights.

Strategy 4: Promoting an inclusive mindset by fostering values of inclusiveness at the organizational and institutional levels. The public sector should feature inclusiveness as its core value through its recruitment policy, codes of conduct and other instruments, which would lead to greater awareness and potentially to changes in the behavior of public servants. Practicing the principles of respecting diversity and non-discrimination during the selection process of new recruits could help develop an inclusive mindset of public servants in the long run.

Strategy 5: Setting up a new competency management framework that focuses on inclusiveness. The competency framework of the public sector should be under periodic review to incorporate the principle of inclusiveness and related competencies so as to promote an inclusive mindset. To achieve the SDGs and the principle of leaving no one behind, public servants need to broaden their perspectives, challenge the predominant social norms and stereotypes, change attitudes, and embrace new competencies and related behaviors that promote inclusion. They should align their personal values, attitudes, and behaviors with the core values and competencies related to equity, inclusion, and dignity for all.

Strategy 6: Adopting a whole-of-government approach to developing an inclusive mindset. Building an inclusive mindset should be fostered at all levels of governments, including among local governments. As local governments are more proxy to citizens and deliver all essential services at a local level, it is important that local officials develop an inclusive mindset to ensure inclusive services and the engagement of vulnerable groups. More importantly, with an inclusive mindset, local government officials can co-create and co-design customized public services together with vulnerable groups.

Strategy 7: Promoting effective monitoring and evaluation. Developing an inclusive mindset in the public sector can only be effectively materialized by linking Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to inclusive behaviors and diversity and inclusion outcomes. Monitoring and evaluation play a key role in helping governments and other stakeholders address the needs of the most vulnerable by ensuring continuous appraisal of the needs of the most vulnerable and of the outcomes of public administration programmes. This process is critical to determine whether measures taken on behalf of vulnerable populations must be revised to better serve the heterogeneous needs of groups and how to do so. Without data, inclusive policies and programs cannot be developed to address vulnerable groups’ needs.

Strategy 8: Developing incentives and reward mechanisms.

An effective mechanism should be established to recognize and reward those leaders who are champions of inclusiveness and are role models in displaying inclusive behaviors and in nurturing a culture that fosters an inclusive mindset among public servants. This rewards system could acknowledge the contribution of highly inclusive leaders across public institutions as well as showcase the benefits derived from their inclusive

behaviors. For example, the United Nations Public Service Awards recognizes innovative practices spearheaded by public institutions which deliver inclusive and equitable services for all, including through digital transformation.⁹⁶

Challenges, required competencies and strategies needed to promote an inclusive mindset in the public sector to leave no one behind are summarized in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1 Promoting an Inclusive Mindset in the Public Sector to Leave No One Behind

CHALLENGES	REQUIRED COMPETENCIES	STRATEGIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of commitment to inclusion • Implicit biases, prejudice, stereotypes and discrimination • Lack of capacities to address the challenges of vulnerable groups • Lack of capacity for collaboration with other stakeholders and empowering those who are vulnerable or in vulnerable situations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional intelligence • Communication • Respect for diversity, including flexibility and adaptability • Negotiation and facilitation • Engagement and collaboration with other stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategy 1: Raising awareness of why an inclusive mindset is a core driver for building effective, accountable, and inclusive public institutions • Strategy 2: Promoting leadership development for inclusiveness • Strategy 3: Instituting a legal and regulatory framework to promote an inclusive mindset • Strategy 4: Promoting an inclusive mindset by fostering values of inclusiveness at the organizational and institutional levels • Strategy 5: Setting up a new competency management framework that focuses on inclusiveness • Strategy 6: Adopting a whole-of-government approach to developing an inclusive mindset • Strategy 7: Promoting effective monitoring and evaluation • Strategy 8: Developing incentives and reward mechanisms

Conclusion and recommendations

Developing an inclusive mindset in the public sector is key to leaving no one behind and building an inclusive society, particularly considering the multi-dimensional and dynamically evolving vulnerability of different groups. Moreover, vulnerable groups, especially people living in poverty, the working poor, women and children, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized groups, have been disproportionately hit by the COVID-19 Pandemic. The impact of the pandemic on vulnerable groups will have not only immediate consequences but also indirect and long-term consequences. In this context, building an inclusive mindset in the public sector has become an even more urgent task than in the past. Changes in public servants' values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors towards inclusion are critical for a public sector that effectively addresses the needs of those furthest left behind.

Developing an inclusive mindset in the public sector requires a systematic approach to building capacities at individual, organizational, and institutional levels. Achieving the principle of "inclusiveness" of effective governance for sustainable development also hinges on building an inclusive mindset in the public sector.

The journey to transform the values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of public servants is a long one. Yet, it is important to start the process. An inclusive mindset in the public sector can be promoted, firstly, by raising the awareness of the urgency and necessity of developing an inclusive mindset in the public sector, especially with a view to the ongoing scourge of the pandemic. Secondly, political leaders should be committed to promoting inclusiveness in both the public sector and the whole society as well. Thirdly, the public sector should review its existing laws and regulations related to "inclusiveness" and ensure establishing legal and regulatory frameworks which are conducive to promoting an inclusive mindset as well as social inclusion of vulnerable groups in general. Fourthly, the competency framework of public servants should be reviewed and upgraded to give a prominent role to inclusiveness. Fifthly, due to the evolutionary process of building an inclusive mindset at all levels of public institutions, there should be an effective and dynamic mechanism to monitor and evaluate the performance of public servants on inclusive behaviors, diversity, and inclusion outcomes. Finally, it is critical to nurture a culture for respecting diversity and inclusiveness at all levels of government and in the whole society.

Endnotes

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