United Nations | Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Aide Memoire
Expert Group Meeting

"Enhancing Innovation to Build Resilient and Responsive Public Administration to Support the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – An SDGs Mid-Term Review Perspective"

The Expert Group Meeting is organized by the Public Service Innovation Branch (PISB), Division of Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG), the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA)

7-8 September 2023
Conference Room B
United Nations Secretariat
New York

Format in person/remote presentations

Background

Given the importance of the implementation of SDGs and at a critical development juncture, the Secretary General of the United Nations has called upon a 2023 SDG Summit. The 2023 SDG Summit will be convened on 19-20 September 2023 during the UN General Assembly high-level week. Heads of State and Government will gather at the United Nations Headquarters in New York to follow-up and review the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). They will carry out a comprehensive review of the state of the implementation of the SDGs, respond to multiple and interlocking crisis facing the world, and provide high-level political guidance on transformative and accelerated actions leading up to the target year of 2030 for achieving the SDGs. https://www.un.org/en/conferences/SDGSummit2023

The covid-19 pandemic has revealed the world's shared vulnerability and interconnectedness. It has exposed human rights concerns and worsened deep fragilities and inequalities and has severely tested our leadership and institutional frameworks at local, national, regional and global levels. It

has brought us together leading to a move from whole of government approach to whole of society approach at a much larger scale. Digitalization and innovation have bridged the response to ensure continuity of social public services such as education, health, social services, and partnership between institutions and people they serve have strengthen across the world.

"Now is the time to renew the social contract between governments and their people and within societies, to rebuild trust and embrace a comprehensive vision of human rights. People need to see results…it should include updated governance arrangements to deliver better public goods and usher in the new era of universal social protection, health coverage, education, skills, decent work and housing, as well as universal access to the internet as a basic human right" – Our Common Agenda, Report of the Secretary General of the United Nations, 2021[1]

In his report, the Secretary General of the United Nations recognizes that there is a growing discontent between people and institutions that serve them, with many feeling they are left behind, there is an even deeper crisis of trust leading to an increase in social movements around the world. The report highlights the need for a renewed social contract anchored in human rights and fit for 21st century. Its three foundations would be (i) building trust, (ii) ensuring inclusion, protection, and participation, as well as (iii) measuring and valuing what matters to people and the planet form the three foundations of the renewed social contract.

Building trust between people and institutions remains a challenge. UNDESA Policy Brief #75[2] COVID-19: Reaffirming state-people governance relationships discusses the role of effective governance, in particular the role of the relationship between the state and people, in building countries' resilience and in responding to and managing nation and international-wide crisis. It highlights the interrelationships of resilience and effective governance as critical in shaping public policy and determining government responses, strategies, and approaches in tackling the crisis. Failure to deliver what people need most, including basic public services leads to mistrust, regardless how open institutions are to public concerns, highly affecting the trust.
Regulatory frameworks that ensure effectiveness and accountability are crucial in public service delivery, but it rests with the capacity of institutions and public servants to reduce the administrative burdens and allow for people to gain access to such services.

At a time of change and challenge as of now, ensuring inclusion, protection and participation remains crucial. The whole of society approach should be emphasized where societies can discuss the most essential and valued public goods and the best means of ensuring their delivery.
Once again, the pandemic has shown the paramount importance of investments in public systems and ensuring quality public servants[3]. The public servant sits at the heart of ensuring effective

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[1] Our Common Agenda-https://www.un.org/en/un75/common-agenda
Report of the UN Secretary General-2021 is an agenda of action designed to accelerate the implementation of existing agreements, including the SDGs.
[2] UNDESA Policy Brief # 75 May 2020: COVID-19 Reaffirming state-people governance relationships https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/un-desa-policy-brief-75-covid-19-reaffirming-state-people-governance-relationships/
[2] CEPA Principles of effective Governance https://publicadministration.un.org/Portals/1/Images/CEPA/Principles_of_effective_governance_english.pdf
[3] https://www.un.org/en/un75/common-agenda (pg 24)

responses to the crisis, whether as a frontline worker in healthcare, or in devising strategies and plans to mitigate its impacts[4].

The Covid -19 pandemic has increased the need for concerted government actions at the subnational, national and international levels[5]. Effective responses require the acceleration of governance reforms, aiming to increase their capacities to respond to economic, social and environmental shocks. The pandemic has exacerbated multidimensional inequalities and innovative approaches are needed to tackle the challenges and turn them into opportunities.

Resilience and effective governance go hand in hand and are key elements of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development[6]. Its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide for a global transformational vision/strategy aiming to build resilient societies that are based on the values of equity, equality, inclusion, integration, accountability, collaboration, partnership, justice, peace and security.

The report of 20th session of CEPA, April 2021[7] (E/2021/44; E/C.16/2021/7) highlights the importance of placing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable development at the center of its work and advise on how public administration can support the implementation and progress reviews of the sustainable development goals.

The principles of effective governance for sustainable development, as defined by the United Nations Committee of Experts on Public Administration[8] provide a roadmap in achieving UN development Agendas including SDGs, Paris Agreement, and so on. Implementation of such principles can guide countries towards whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches, leading to structural and systemic changes for the better.

The United Nations Committee of Experts on Public Administration (CEPA) outlined 11 principles of effective governance[9], categorized into three groups: (i) effectiveness – competence, sound policymaking, and collaboration; (ii) accountability – integrity, transparency and independent oversight; (iii) inclusiveness – leaving no on behind, non-discrimination, participation, subsidiarity and intergenerational equity.

In an interconnected and interdependent world, the successful response highly depends on international cooperation and coordinated response. This crisis once again has confirmed the unparallel and unreplaceable role of UN and UN partners in addressing global challenges.

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[4] UNDESA Paper # 79 June 2020: The role of public service and public servants during the COVID-19 https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/un-desa-policy-brief-79-the-role-of-public-service-and-public-servants-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/
[5] ECOSOC – CEPA: Key messages and recommendations March 2021 "Building inclusive, effective and resilient institutions for sustainable recovery from the coronavirus disease pandemic and timely implementation of the SDGs" https://publicadministration.un.org/portals/1/cepa%20contribution%20to%202021%20hlpf.pdf
[6] "Reaffirming State-People Governance Relationships", UNDESA Policy Brief – prepared by John-Mary Kauzya, Chief of Public Service Innovation Branch/DPIDG – May 2020
[7] Report on the 20th session of CEPA (April 2021) https://undocs.org/en/e/c.16/2021/7
[8] CEPA - Principles of effective governance for sustainable development https://publicadministration.un.org/en/Intergovernmental-Support/CEPA/Principles-of-Effective-Governance
[9] https://publicadministration.un.org/Portals/1/Images/CEPA/Principles_of_effective_governance_english.pdf

Globally, coordinated efforts from vaccine access and distribution to debt suspension, to access to technologies and internet, to careful and coordinated adoption of new technologies, to free flow of information have shown us the importance of global development cooperation.

Global governance has remained at the heart of global response to COVID-19 and restoring trust into UN at its historic milestone of 75th birthday. The intersected crisis has once again confirmed the importance of governance not only in addressing their specific impacts, but addressing their direct social, economic and environmental impacts, ensuring that our road to recovery aligns with the global commitments of the 2030 UN Development Agenda, Paris Agreement, Disaster Risk Reduction, etc.

Context and Main Discussion Themes of the Expert Group Meeting

This Expert Group Meeting comes at a challenging time, as an opportunity to discuss the public service delivery at the intersection of innovation, public sector rebuilding and multiple crisis through the lenses of mid-term review of SDGs.

It will aim to provide a platform to discuss the adaptive responses to continuity and innovation in public service delivery, lessons learnt, but more importantly to discuss the way forward in a world where the role of governance will be crucial in our collective efforts to rebuild our societies at a time of intersected crisis and ensure that we remain on track for the implementation of SDGs.

This Expert Group Meeting will enhance our understanding of challenges and opportunities in building political leadership and institutional capacities, enhancing regulatory frameworks and inclusive processes, ensuring responsible technology diffusion and technology uptake, strengthening public financial management systems, and rebuilding a public administration work force through enhanced innovative approaches and technologies.

The pandemic, with its unprecedented scale and challenge, has unleashed a new era of innovation in public sector and has provided us ample examples on all the above. While analyzing public administrations response to tackle the emergency of the crisis, we should not lose the vision for the future as outlined in the UN 2030 Development Agenda. This EGM offers the opportunity to take stock of such innovative approaches and discuss potential pathways to ensure enhanced innovation in building responsive public administration, capable of responding to multiple crisis and ensuring the implementation of SDGs.

This EGM will focus on challenges and opportunities for our societies and public administration leading this paradigm shift from global, regional, national and subnational perspectives.

The discussions will be led by a UNDESA's work on mid-term review and developed according to the six following themes:

    I.   Political Leadership and Institutional Frameworks of innovation

The pandemic once again has shown the importance of political leadership capable of taking decision under challenges crisis. What did we learn from the response to COVID-19 and what should be the way forward? The critical role of institutions in the achievements of SDGs in post covid-19 recovery calls for institutions to develop more creative, flexible, and integrated ways of working, to address the structural and procedural weaknesses that might hinder the implementation of SDGs. Achieving sustainable development and strengthening resilience requires long-term perspective in public policymaking, together with institution-building at all levels. What are the challenges in such institutional building in different regions?

II.   Regulatory Framework

The pandemic introduced paradigm shifts on the ways we work, learn, interact and more. The last years have shown the great potentials of public institutions in adopting to change as needed. How can we take stock of such positive development as we undertake the mid-term review of the SDGs and prepare for the path forward? What efforts are needed to institutionalize the new boundaries (regulate hybrid work, regulate, and recognize online education as part of formal education? How can we review and update our regulatory frameworks to ensure that nature or human made crisis will not lead to disruption of basic public service delivery

III.   Leave no one behind: multi-stakeholders' participation and whole of society approach.

In an unprecedented scale a common challenge such as a health pandemic moved us overnight from the whole of government approach to the whole of society approach. Businesses redirected their terms of productions according to the needs of pandemic and civil society has been a steady partner in ensuring an open and ongoing dialogue with all other stakeholders. How can we ensure that we are able to take stock on this new approach and new level of interactions? What are the lessons learnt from the early stages of the implementation of SDGs? How can we keep the momentum and whole of society collaboration shown during the multiple crisis as we move towards more sustainable development pathways? What have we achieved so far on our road to the implementation of SDGs and what transformational, innovative path should the government undergo to ensure that public policy and public services remain inclusive and address the needs of all groups within society? How can we ensure that the voices of youth and women are better heard?

IV.   Technology diffusion and technology uptake for innovative public policy and public service delivery –

How can we build resilience and responsiveness in public administration through technology diffusion and uptake? How the level of internet diffusion determined the level of online public service delivery? What are some of the early innovative approaches allowing for technology uptake in education and work? What are the patterns we see across the regions? What are the patterns we see across the different levels of development? Is there any evidence that digital gap led to increased gaps in levels of development? What are the challenges and opportunities of new technologies? How can we innovatively and responsively adopt them? What are the lessons learnt from the mid-term review of the SDGs? What are new pathways?

V.   Public Financial Management

The COVID-19 pandemic and its mounted response at all levels has stretched public financial resources to the limits, with many least-developed and developing countries facing critical debt distress. With intersecting crisis, how can we ensure that crisis response won't derail critical financing for the implementation of SDGs?

How can we ensure that countries will be able to maintain the path of implementing SDGs with medium- and long-term expectations of reduced financial resources? How can innovative approaches and innovative technologies improve the public financial management and what have we learnt so far?

VI.   Public Servants at the heart of building resilient and responsive governance through innovation.

The role of public servants in the pandemic response can be addressed along with lessons learnt. The ninth key roles of public servants can be highlighted as per above mentioned paper, respectively (i) ensuring continuity of public services; (ii) providing service before self; courage and humanness in practice (iii) quick thinking, creativity and innovation; (iv) information and awareness creation; (v) strategic thinking and planning amidst chaos; (vi) sustaining resilience and building a better effective and more responsive public service; (vii) building and enhancing State legitimacy, government credibility and people's trust; (viii) resource allocation and distributive accountability; and (ix) collaborative and networked leadership.

It is at this intersection of state-people governance relationships and public service-public servants' roles that the innovation takes place. In building resilient and responsive governance, we would need innovative approaches in leadership, institutions and strategies, means of implementation such as human and financial resources, but above all, we will need a new public administration that would address systematic and emergency issues with a changed mindset.

A comprehensive list of reference materials is provided in Annex I

Main objectives

The Expert Group Meeting will aim to serve as a platform for high level expertise, where ideas and experiences can be shared from experts representing all regions across various disciplines, at the intersection of innovation, governance, and SDGs.

The Expert Group Meeting will offer an opportunity to hold in depth discussions from high level experts in the areas of governance and public administration from around the worlds.
The discussions will take place through a balanced regional perspective, as there will be experts from each of the regions. respectively (Africa, Asia, North Africa, Europe, and Latin America).

A selected group of representatives from UNDESA and other UN entities will join the Expert Group Meeting to share their perspectives and experiences on the role of innovation in building responsive governance for the implementation of SDGs. The human right and gender perspective will be mainstreamed during the discussions.

Experts

The Expert Group Meeting will host over 15 high-level experts in innovation and public administration, representing 5 regions through a gender-balanced representation. Key UNDESA experts on governance and experts from other UN entities will be invited.

Main Outcome

The Expert Group Meeting will tackle some of the most important challenges and opportunities of innovation in building responsive public administration for the implementation of SDGs.

Its deliberations will be summarized in a report, with its findings and recommendations expected to be informing the work of Public Service Innovation Branch, and DPIDG at large, through three main pillars of mandated work, respectively normative, analytical, and capacity building.

Format, Venue, Time, Language

The Expert Group Meeting will take place in Conference Room 9, UN Secretariat on 7-8 September 2023. The meeting will be in person and the language will be English.

PSIB/DPIDG/UNDESA Organizing Team

1. Mrs. Elida Reci
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References/Literature/Annex I

1. Our Common Agenda - Report of the UN Secretary General,2021.
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2. 2023 Global Sustainable Development Report https://sdgs.un.org/gsdr/gsdr2023
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3. Economic and Social Council – Committee of Experts on Public Administration: Report
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