

Executive Summary

Background

The idea of producing a publication on Changing Mindsets to Realize the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was conceived in 2019 as a follow-up to the workshop on “Mobilizing and Equipping Public Servants to Realize the 2030 Agenda”. The workshop brought together worldwide experts on the subject matter of changing mindsets and allowed for insightful discussions with many schools of public administration. It was organized by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) during the United Nations Public Service Forum in Baku, Republic of Azerbaijan.

The publication is intended as a companion document to the Curriculum on Governance for the Sustainable Development Goals and its Toolkit on Changing Mindsets in Public Institutions to Implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development developed by UN DESA, Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG). UN DESA/DPIDG’s mission is to support governments in strengthening their capacities to translate the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and other internationally agreed goals into institutional arrangements, strategies, and programmes for effective service delivery and participatory, accountable, and inclusive decision-making processes.

To facilitate the mainstreaming of the SDGs in the curricula of the schools of public administration, and promote knowledge sharing among these schools, DPIDG has established in 2017 the Global Initiative on Governance for the SDGs to equip public servants with the capacities to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Global Initiative was officially launched during the 2018 UN Public Service Forum in Marrakech, Kingdom of Morocco. It aims to bring into collaboration the directors and trainers from schools, civil service colleges, and similar training institutions to set the foundation for a holistic, participatory and action-oriented learning system, which is essential for generating positive change in the public service and for promoting sustainable development. The Global Initiative also aims at developing the capacities of governments and public servants (in terms of mindsets, knowledge, skills, and leadership competences) to support the implementation of the SDGs, provide data and information about development of national and local governments’ capacities across the world; and support institutional capacity development for improved public service delivery. Finally, the Initiative facilitates North-South and South-South exchange of policy ideas, methodologies and effective governance practices to ensure cross-fertilization and mutual learning.

Scope of the publication

This publication aims to support countries in building their capacities to realize Agenda 2030. It does so by providing key recommendations on how to promote public servants’ mindsets, competencies, and behaviors to foster effectiveness, accountability, and inclusiveness in the public sector.

Structure

The publication is divided into two parts. Part I (Chapters 1 to 10) examines key concepts related to changing mindsets. It offers strategies, approaches and tools that can facilitate a change in public servants’ mindsets and behaviors. Part II (Chapters 11 to 15) of the publication provides a regional perspective of what schools of public administration are doing to promote new mindsets and behaviors to achieve the SDGs. It features opportunities, approaches, and accelerators for developing capacities and promoting change in public service.

Overview of the Chapters

One of the most critical issues related to the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is how to translate its principles and aspirations into practice. Raising awareness and building the capacity of public servants is of paramount importance to close this gap. However, while much attention in capacity development efforts has been given to changes in rules, structures, processes, and how to leverage technologies, less attention is given to the issue of changing public servants’ mindsets and behaviors. Yet, realizing the SDGs in a holistic manner, meeting the demands of highly interconnected and fast evolving global challenges, and ensuring the well-being of all, particularly those furthest left behind, requires that public servants have a new set not only of capacities but also mindsets and competencies that allow public administration systems to be fit for purpose.

With nine years remaining to achieve the 2030 Agenda and faced with the challenge to effectively recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, governments need to work with a sense of urgency and rethink their policies and institutions to deliver quality services for all and create the conditions for more prosperous and equitable societies. As highlighted by the Committee of Experts on Public Administration (CEPA) in 2021, it is essential that governments give high priority to developing the right mindsets, capacities, and skills for mainstreaming and implementing the SDGs. Indeed, no meaningful government

transformation can happen without a change in public servants' mindsets, competencies, and behaviors, as illustrated throughout this publication.

Chapters 1 to 6 provide an overview of why changing mindsets in the public sector is critical to advancing the implementation of Agenda 2030 and how it can be accomplished. The Chapters also shed light on the critical role of internalization of principles and values by public servants. They underscore some of the key mindsets needed to advance the SDGs. In particular, Chapter 1 examines what new capacities, mindsets, and competencies are needed to implement the SDGs. It also highlights strategies that can help to change public servants' mindsets for institutional effectiveness. Chapter 2 examines in detail the imperatives of an SDGs-oriented mindset. It introduces the concept of Socially Conscious Leadership (SCL) values and explains how building the capacities of change-agents in SCL values is central to the realization of the SDGs. Chapter 3 argues that strategic intelligence is a critical component of agile governance and mindsets. An agile mindset in public service is needed to effectively address current socio-economic and environmental challenges, which are characterized by accelerating interdependence, velocity, and complexity. Chapter 4 examines why problem-solving learning is critical for changing public servants' mindsets to implement the SDGs. It highlights the need for an experimental mindset in the public service and an enabling environment that allows for risk-taking and innovation. Chapter 5 examines what an "evidence-based mindset" of public servants is and why it is essential to ensuring that rigorous evidence is applied to the policy design process. It also offers effective strategies on how to promote an evidence-based mindset within a bureaucracy. Chapter 6 highlights the importance of having an inclusive mindset to implement the SDGs to ensure that no one is left behind. It underlines challenges in cultivating values and behaviors of inclusiveness in the public sector and introduces key strategies and approaches to developing an inclusive mindset.

Chapters 7 to 10 provide an overview of what changes can be implemented at the organizational level to trigger change in the public sector. In particular, Chapter 7 underscores how behavioral science can and should be leveraged by public sector organizations to change and design environments that enable employees to follow through with their good intentions and to be their "best selves" at work. It offers several examples and strategies that can be used to accomplish this goal. Chapter 8 highlights the importance of institutional culture in orienting and transforming organizations. It explains why behavioral

insights can be applied to changing organizational culture, and how public sector organizations can use behavioral insights to advance the SDGs. Chapter 9 underlines the importance of shifting human resources practices from being transactional to being more strategic. It also examines how to attract the best talent in the public sector, and how to motivate them once they join the public service. Chapter 10 outlines how the mindsets of public servants are linked to the performance of public sector organizations, and how performance appraisals can contribute to that. Creating a higher-performing public sector is essential in attaining the 2030 Agenda. Performance appraisals can play an essential role in changing the mindsets of public officials, identifying, and strengthening weaknesses in their capabilities, and increasing the performance of public sector organizations.

Chapter 11 outlines the strategies that governments in Africa have deliberately designed regarding capacity development approaches to transform their public services. Chapter 12 reflects on how the Arab region is promoting new competencies and skills required to achieve Agenda 2030. Chapter 13 highlights why schools of public administration in Asia and the Pacific play a major role in developing the capacities of public servants and are helping to change their mindsets for SDGs implementation. Chapter 14 presents challenges and ways forward to integrate the SDGs into public administration curricula in Europe. Chapter 15 underlines the work that the Latin American Center for Development Administration (CLAD) is doing to formulate specific proposals around the 2030 Agenda, including an Ibero-American Charter on Innovation in Public Management, the Ibero-American Governance Index, and training courses related to transformational leadership, changing in mindsets and behaviors, and digital transformation.