



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
28 January 2021

Original: English

Committee of Experts on Public Administration

Twentieth session

12–16 April 2021

Item 3 of the provisional agenda*

Governance and public administration aspects of the theme of the 2021 session of the Economic and Social Council and the 2021 high-level political forum on sustainable development

Building inclusive, effective and resilient institutions for sustainable recovery from the coronavirus disease pandemic and timely implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals

Note by the Secretariat

The Secretariat has the honour to transmit to the Committee of Experts on Public Administration the paper prepared by Committee members Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi and Louis Meuleman, in collaboration with fellow Committee members Paul Jackson, Margaret Kobia, Geert Bouckaert and Henry Sardaryan and Moni Pizani.

* E/C.16/2021/1.



Building inclusive, effective and resilient institutions for sustainable recovery from the coronavirus disease pandemic and timely implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals

Summary

The present paper is intended to provide a basis for the discussions of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration on its substantive input for the thematic review of the 2021 high-level political forum on sustainable development and its in-depth review of Sustainable Development Goals 16 and 17 and of the integrated, indivisible and interlinked nature of the Goals. It builds on the work of the Committee, at its nineteenth session, with regard to the promotion of effective governance and institutional reform to accelerate delivery of the Goals (see [E/2020/44](#), chap. III, and Economic and Social Council resolution 2020/21 on the report of the Committee on that session).

The theme of the paper is aligned to the theme of the forum and of the Council for the 2021 session: “Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development”.

The authors suggest that building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will depend on five overarching policy measures. First, recommitting to structures and processes for sustained and multilateral consultation, coordination and cooperation. Second, reallocating priorities, redirecting resources and reconsidering policies that have proved dysfunctional and counterproductive and left countries unprepared to deal with major crises like the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Third, focusing on the long term in public policymaking. Fourth, recognizing the quality of institutions, institutional reform and governance as a strategic policy area. Fifth, considering Governments as providers of first and last resort in order to restore public trust. The authors also emphasize that the paths leading to effective implementation of the Goals will be those that mainstream the rule of law and distributive justice in government programmes and projects.

The authors conclude the paper with reflections on arrangements for dialogue on institutional aspects of Goal 16 between the members of the Committee and voluntary national review countries, while setting out various elements that could be considered for inclusion in the 2021 ministerial declaration of the forum.

I. Areas requiring urgent attention

1. The ongoing pandemic has brought to light a number of pivotal elements of the managerial models that have held sway in the past and that may now need to be revisited, and possibly revised. None has perhaps been more central than the belief in a business model of governance, according to which a Government should conduct itself in the economic sphere in ways that approximate to best practices in business. In this business model, cost-cutting measures have been pursued in the search for greater efficiency. The “three Ds” – downsizing, deregulation and de-bureaucratization – have also been promoted with that end in mind. A lot of good has come from this attempt to govern according to the same model and pattern used by business enterprises. Initiatives have been fostered and Governments have been encouraged to become more flexible, agile and lean.

2. However, in that process, some Governments or sectors of public administration have lost sight of their core function, as well as of the pivotal needs of the public. Although Governments should be agile and lean, they also need to be able to cope with unforeseen contingencies not unlike the present pandemic. They must be able to provide succour to citizens in need, whatever their origin or status, by offering shelter, money, food or medicine. What is often forgotten, especially during times of plenty, is that Governments serve as providers of first and last resort. With regard to the provision of some public goods, such as security and justice, one must ask whether efficiency and cost are the only measures of performance. Arguably, one of the primary roles of the State is to provide a justice system that is effective, accessible, fair and in accordance with the rule of law.

3. The current pandemic illustrates the failure of a purely business-oriented model, with Governments taking the lead on the provision of basic services and acting as the paymasters of millions of people who would otherwise have become destitute, unable to find shelter or to put food on the table. By contrast, several Governments in the global North have bailed out businesses and intervened to prevent mass market failure. In an era in which certain types of risks are increasing and disasters may be becoming more common, Governments need to act less like businesses and yet retain their agility and acumen. They also need to develop important strategic reserves, gather and process intelligence and information effectively and be able to sustain capacity and service provision in adverse contexts, including pandemics, hurricanes, tsunamis, forest fires and civil unrest. Coping with mega-events, such as civil unrest and environmental disasters, requires the development of new mindsets and skills, as well as of inclusive institutions that are able to incorporate diverse voices.

4. Experience shows that the impact of disasters and crises is rarely gender neutral and the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has been no exception. The pandemic and the measures to prevent COVID-19 from spreading have hit women disproportionately hard. The involvement of women in legislative, policy and budgetary decision-making processes is therefore vital to advancing inclusive institutions. Without more inclusive approaches, the exclusion of communities, and increasing inequality and poverty, will threaten public stability and security.

5. At the national and international levels, disparities are morphing into threats, not only to peace and security, but also in the form of social unrest and of vast movements of population. More affluent countries may not be able to peacefully absorb migrants in such high numbers. More importantly, migrants’ countries of origin cannot afford to lose them. Keeping the peace, reconciling differences, dealing with legitimate grievances and appeasing rising tensions will depend not only on communities and institutions, but also on public servants and leaders, who have very different competencies than they did in the past. Emphasis must be placed on

communities and institutions bringing people together and on the ability of public servants to work together across borders to support vulnerable, and sometimes volatile, populations.

6. Working effectively across borders and on the international stage is one of the founding aims of the United Nations. Gradually, the patterns of leadership have changed in the global North away from a reliance on beliefs that had been shaped during wars and towards leadership styles more in line with the Charter of the United Nations. However, there have been periods when that trend has been challenged by populist or nationalist leaders less supportive of the global aspirations of the Charter. In addition, many parts of the world continue to face severe problems with leadership, in particular in contexts of conflict, insecurity, deprivation of human rights, contested sovereignty and the presence of transnational criminal or violent groups, and in large ungoverned regions. The United Nations can play a critical role by setting an example and supporting positive forms of leadership within those contexts, as well as through its own leadership in favour of good governance, democracy, inclusion, multilateralism, security and justice.

7. In a world of vast disparities, elitism and hegemony should cede ground to increasing diversity and differentiation, as well as to polycentric and multilevel governance. A new prismatic world that is still in the making hinges on a different kind of leadership, one that eschews conflict-driven approaches in favour of common values of tolerance, respect, accommodation and compromise. There should be little doubt that that world could be made to work for the good of all. For some people, accustomed to having their own way, the adjustment to new patterns may be difficult and slow. At the same time, it should be recognized that, in many parts of the world, there are significant populations that have been or are currently being left behind. The prevalence of conflicts, insecurity and migration, as well as the lack of access to justice or to the means of sustainable living, is a blight on everyone and there is a danger that the current pandemic could expose and worsen inequalities and division.

8. Very gradually, people are learning to internalize the view that theirs may be only one among many creeds with a claim to legitimacy. Whereas many leaders in the past cast themselves as crusaders combating for the triumph of belief systems that they deemed to be the only true ones, the leaders of the future will need to be master builders of bridges between opposing sides, as well as peacemakers and mediators skilled in the art of give and take and competent at negotiation and arbitration. They will share a different mindset, employ a different language and tone of voice and prefer constructive approaches over flashy arguments that have too often in the past led to impasses. They will favour mutually beneficial answers to problems rather than winner-takes-all solutions.

9. Adherence to the principles and values of the Charter of the United Nations should supplant the dysfunctional and conflict-ridden patterns of interaction of the past decades. For the international system to work, leadership suited to the twenty-first century is required and leaders able to cope with risk and uncertainty. Although the United Nations calls for leadership, it also calls for leaders cast in a different mould: one fit for the twenty-first century and that allows for coping better with risk and uncertainty.

II. Assessment of the situation regarding the principle of leaving no one behind from a public administration perspective

10. Leaving no one behind is an ambitious objective for any Member State. It is at the core of Sustainable Development Goal 16, in particular the promotion of inclusive societies and the rule of law. Equality before the law is both a constitutional and a

political principle of governance. Arguably, the idea of equality before the law has lost ground over the past few decades, under the tremendous pressure of economic forces. Those forces may in a number of cases have created tremendous wealth, but they have also caused inequality on an unprecedented scale. Within and across borders, inequality is starkly visible, affecting public life in ways that pose a threat to communities and governance under the rule of law. Inequalities undermine the notion of an even playing field and of freedom and justice for all. In the United States of America alone, there are currently four trillionaires. In New York City, there are more than 100 billionaires, alongside an estimated 60,000 to 80,000 homeless people. Homelessness and food insecurity have vastly increased because of the pandemic, creating many challenges in education, housing, public health and other areas, which public authorities are finding difficult to address. For example, following the imposition of lockdown measures as a result of the pandemic, women and men were told to stay at home, and schools and day-care facilities were closed, which increased the burden of unpaid care and domestic work. The effects of such conditions on both adults and children may well be felt long in the future.

11. For more than three decades, in the constellation of neoliberal doctrines, the shrinking or minimal State has been accepted as fact or as a law of nature and it has been thought that Governments would be ill-advised to attempt to tamper with that belief. Advancement of the economy has been seen as predicated on technological progress, mostly through private initiatives. What was required, as many people saw it, was to give a free rein to businesses and individual initiative, unbounded by bureaucracy and State regulation. In that vein, trade unionism, for example, has sometimes been frowned upon as an attack on freedom.

12. When the pandemic struck, the primacy of freedom over the needs and aspirations of people and communities was voiced again, this time on behalf of groups and individuals constrained by lockdown restrictions. Likewise, groups hostile to attempts to limit fossil fuel emissions in connection with climate change advanced claims about their freedom. Close to 2 million people have died as a result of the pandemic, and many more worldwide as a consequence of failures attributable to resistance to government action and regulation in the name of freedom.

13. Previous crises have demonstrated the close interdependence of humans and their communities, with some people according more weight to humans, and others to the community. That interdependence and the complexity of the issues and challenges that currently confront Governments and public administrations on both the national and international levels bring into sharp relief the fallacies that can arise from one-dimensional thinking. Such thinking has prevailed across the board since the 1990s, for example, by narrowing the assessment of multifaceted issues to a focus solely on the state of the economy.

14. Many have been left behind because of that approach, mostly women, children, migrants and refugees, older persons, people from rural areas and, more generally, the poor and people on the margins of society. Technology is another force that contributes to inequality. The digital divide means that the access of many people to the benefits of education and welfare becomes more problematic by the day, especially during times of crisis. As a result of this persistent gap in digital access, work opportunities are skewed against millions of people, in particular women.

15. Women have tended to be more vulnerable to the economic and social effects of crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, because of pre-existing inequalities. According to the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), globally, 40 per cent of all employed women (around 510 million women) work in the hardest-hit sectors, compared with 36.6 per cent of all employed men. Some 58 per cent of employed women work in informal

employment, while women are overrepresented among health workers and first responders, accounting for over 70 per cent of all employees in that sector, which has been particularly negatively affected by the COVID-19 crisis.¹

16. The problem is compounded by poverty and disparities in schooling, university education, housing, health and nutrition, among other factors. Although the issue could largely be overcome through forceful and concerted government action, in the past three decades, the constellation of neoliberal thinking has led to education, health and housing also becoming contributors to a phenomenon in communities and towns whereby some neighbourhoods, schools and even hospitals are reserved for the poor and others for the elite. The dichotomy between the living conditions of the needy and the affluent has been starkly revealed during the current global pandemic.

17. Widespread and growing inequalities are incompatible with articles 22 to 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which heralded a brighter and better future for men and women, and are manifestly one of the issues that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is meant to address. The pandemic has brought to light the need for government action, nationally and internationally, mostly directed at closing the vast disparities and bridging gaps within and across borders.

18. The Committee and the Economic and Social Council underscore that achieving the Goals, leaving no one behind and mitigating the adverse social, economic and financial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on all societies depends on addressing the deep inequalities that exist in many countries, which may require institution-building and capacity development in the long term, even more than leadership. Poverty and exclusion must be addressed head-on in order to achieve Goal 16.

19. Exclusion should be addressed by including people at the centre of action and systemically tackling their needs. Also, the deeper causes of poverty and exclusion should be addressed systematically, not through palliatives but through institution-building and development policies that are effective and focused on the long term. Addressing gross inadequacies in health care, education, welfare, housing and infrastructure that separate the privileged from the underprivileged, while leaving no one behind, is aspirational and a beacon for action.

III. Measures at all levels to promote sustainable and resilient recovery from the pandemic

20. The pandemic has shown that well-functioning public administration and effective governance frameworks are preconditions for coping with the crisis. It could even be argued that the pandemic would have had less of an impact and been less likely to have occurred if all of the Goals had already been achieved. In support of that theory is the observation that the governance requirements to fight the pandemic are similar to the governance requirements to realize the Goals, such as the focus on long-term resilience. The pandemic has illustrated the importance of strong public institutions and effective partnerships between Governments and other key actors. It has also confirmed the fact that the 2030 Agenda is a good compass for measuring sustainability and that mechanisms must be used to increase the resilience of institutions and improve governance for the implementation of all of the Goals, in particular Goals 16 and 17, without which the implementation of Goals 1 to 15 would not be possible.

¹ UN-Women, “COVID-19 and its economic toll on women: the story behind the numbers”, 16 September 2020.

21. The terms “sustainable” and “resilient” stand out in deliberations about how to deal with the COVID-19 crisis and increase institutional readiness for coping with future crises. Policymakers need to ask themselves which structures and traits add resilience and sustainability to efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda, in particular because those efforts must be global and holistic, and not short term or limited to a narrow area of government or segment of the population. That also raises the question of for whom resilience should be built. Where large numbers of people live in precarious contexts and are beyond the effective reach of States, there are serious issues about inclusiveness and about whether institutions have the resilience to continue delivering services and providing security to those populations.

IV. Measures and policy recommendations on building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

22. Given the broad range of experiences in responding to the pandemic and the fact that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions remains a major global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development, suggested key policies and measures to ensure sustainable and resilient recovery and to build an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda are set out below.

A. Recommitting to structures and processes for sustained and multilateral consultation, coordination and cooperation

23. Following the protracted unipolar movement of the past three decades, it has become evident that the structures and processes of the United Nations aimed at sustained and multilateral consultation, coordination and cooperation need to be reinforced. Few of the major challenges that the world faces can be effectively addressed without cooperation and consultation, including the peaceful resolution of disputes. Sadly, the past three decades have seen several regional conflicts erupt, including in Western Asia, North Africa and the Middle East. Rampant violence has triggered vast levels of instability, which has blocked development efforts, while violence has become the primary driver of migration. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has recently estimated that as many as 80 million people around the world have been forcibly displaced as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations or events seriously disturbing public order.²

B. Reallocating priorities, redirecting resources and reconsidering policies

24. In parallel to the need for recommitment to structures and processes, described in the section above, there is a pressing need to reallocate priorities, redirect resources and reconsider policies that have proved dysfunctional and counterproductive and left countries unprepared to deal with major crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. During the past decade, the world has added trillions of dollars to the vast sums spent on armaments and wars. A mere fraction of that amount would suffice to make the COVID-19 vaccines available to all, leaving no one behind anywhere in the world. In 2020, when hospital beds, equipment and medication were badly needed, there were significant shortages of those items, even in high-income countries. One reason for

² UNHCR, *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2019* (Geneva, 2020).

those shortages was the proclivity of companies for mergers and acquisitions, which reflected the preponderance of economic considerations in the health field as a whole.

25. Perhaps the time has come to reposition public service, rather than profit, at the centre of fields such as health care, education, affordable housing and social protection, and to prioritize those fields when it comes to resource allocation.

26. An underlying objective of Goal 16 is to support peace rather than impose hard security. Partnerships with local authorities and civil society are key in that regard. The United Nations needs to recognize and develop processes that allow a bottom-up approach, moving beyond State institutions that may be dysfunctional, illegitimate or simply not representative. Such an approach brings the political process back to the fore through recognition of the fact that peacebuilding may require explicit challenges to the power structures that perpetuate poor governance, as well as to unresponsive and exclusive institutions.

C. Focusing on the long term in public policymaking

27. Sustainable development and resilience require a focus on the long term and on strategy over tactics, as has been called for in the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement on climate change, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and related international agreements. Sustainable development and resilience depend on institutions and institution-building, as well as capacity development in the public sector at all levels. Following three decades of sustained international efforts to build or reinforce public institutions between 1945 and 1975, the world has witnessed a change of course since the late 1980s. Privatization, outsourcing and the deregulation of markets overtook the systematic efforts of the public sector aimed at sustained capacity-building, on the untested assumption that, when the need arose, the resources needed could be secured from the private sector, increasingly through global supply chains.

28. Goal 16 sets out a development-based approach to preventing violent conflict, that is inclusive of governance and access to justice. This long-term and holistic, but difficult, approach provides an alternative to the top-down, short-term, crisis-driven and securitized approaches that have characterized linear intervention approaches to violence, which are based primarily on securitized responses to counter-terrorism, crime and conflict.

29. Poor-quality public administration, resulting in a silo-based approach and contradictory policies, a lack of human resources, inflexibility, the inability to deal with the complex or even chaotic problems linked to transformational challenges, such as the climate crisis, and inaction where action is needed, may seem to have a neutral impact on the public budget in the short run, but it leads to huge societal costs in the long run. Countries with better-equipped public institutions have generally been able to cope with the pandemic better than others. With that in mind, it might be useful to reconsider where development funds are allocated.

30. Some Governments are having a hard time changing to a focus on long-term policymaking, which points to a need to support the organizational reform of the public sector, emphasize the best interests of the general public, make changes on the basis of lessons learned and tackle path dependency that might lead to ineffectiveness.

D. Recognizing the quality of institutions, institutional reform and governance as a strategic policy area

31. Ensuring the effectiveness of public administration and governance is not only a technical matter associated with administrative overheads, but also an important

strategic policy area in itself. It is linked to Goal 16 because it relates to the quality of public institutions, with Goal 17 because it is concerned with policy coherence for sustainable development, and with the cross-cutting Goal 11, on sustainable cities and communities. Building and reforming public institutions is usually considered a political task, but the strategy and direction of institutional reform is often not seen as a policy area. That is a contradiction and may be one reason why those responsible for governance and public administration often consider themselves not to be part of the 2030 Agenda policy framework. Nevertheless, they should be part of that framework and be considered as essential partners in national interministerial committees on the implementation of the Goals. Only then can they develop adequate institutional mechanisms and ensure that competences and skills in the workforce enable the mainstreaming of the Goals.

32. Justice reforms, for example, have historically been State-led, top-down and technocratic, and yet the everyday experience of most people in post-conflict and weak States has been of localized justice. Formal legal or court systems rarely reach parts of the countryside and, where they do, there have been issues regarding representation, corruption and impunity for certain groups. That has limited the success of efforts to improve the inclusiveness of justice systems, such as by improving inclusivity among professional staff by employing more female judges, or by improving the access of specific groups to justice. The customary authorities may not share concerns about human rights, accountability or gender, but may be the only available legal authority.

33. Another important way in which Governments can lead by example is by introducing sustainable public procurement. Public procurement represents, on average, 13 to 20 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP). By using the purchasing power of public administration to guide products and services towards sustainability, Governments can stimulate the markets for sustainable products. Sustainable public procurement is an essential enabler of Goal 12, which includes target 12.7, on the promotion of public procurement practices that are sustainable, in accordance with national policies and priorities. Moreover, sustainable public procurement supports the implementation of other Goals, such as those with social and environmental targets.³

E. Considering Governments as providers of first and last resort

34. What escapes attention is the quintessential role of Governments, the State and the public sector as providers of first and last resort. Public trust is predicated on people being convinced that in an emergency such as a pandemic, climate disaster or gang warfare, the Government will be able to cope, to provide opportunities and services and to ensure that there is an enabling environment for citizen engagement.

35. On account of climate change and increasing levels of insecurity in vast swaths of the world, large numbers of individuals are giving up hope and taking to the road. Often, they are the people that a country or region needs to rebuild its institutions and economy.

36. Government needs to be rebuilt around the principles of effective and inclusive governance and sustainable development. Capacity development involves three factors: institution-building, human resources development and technological

³ United Nations, "Institutions and governance for accelerating sustainable public procurement: report of the virtual expert group meeting convened by the Committee of Experts on Public Administration working group on institutions and governance for accelerating sustainable public procurement on 24 November 2020". Available at <https://publicadministration.un.org/Portals/1/Report%20CEPA%20EGM%20on%20SPP%2024%20Nov%202020%20FINAL.pdf>.

proress. A sustainable and resilient course towards the development of competent institutions depends equally on all three. It requires a professional civil service to safeguard institutions under the rule of law to contribute to the sound governance of the population. The principles of competence and effective governance for sustainable development are also required.

37. Countries with a public administration that is fragile, or even practically absent, are a case in point. In such cases, public institutions should be rebuilt, at least in part, through a bottom-up approach, not the top-down approach that has been used in the past four decades. The foundations could be the civil society and private sector initiatives that in many such cases deliver public services.

38. As observed at the nineteenth session of the Committee, effective public institutions are critical to promoting integrated approaches for the achievement of long-term development goals in the face of immediate challenges in conflict-affected countries. A balanced approach depends on attention being paid to short-term measures, such as ensuring security and providing access to basic services, and not only to longer-term considerations, such as conflict prevention, community inclusion, multitrack diplomacy, local capacity development and the challenges of migration.

V. Dialogue with voluntary national review countries on institutional aspects of Sustainable Development Goal 16

39. The Committee has included in its agenda an item entitled “Dialogue with voluntary national review countries on institutional aspects of Sustainable Development Goal 16”. The intention is for Committee members to engage with national officials during the session on specific areas of institution-building, drawing on principles of effective governance for sustainable development and commonly used strategies to operationalize them. Emphasis will be placed on lessons learned by Governments from the COVID-19 pandemic. The experts may also respond to specific questions from the countries participating in the voluntary national reviews at the 2021 high-level political forum on sustainable development. Goal 16 is instrumental to ensuring the integrated, indivisible and interlinked nature of the Goals and, as such, the achievement of Goal 1, on ending poverty; Goal 2, on ending hunger; Goal 3, on good health and well-being; Goal 8, on decent work and economic growth; Goal 10, on reducing inequalities; Goal 12, on sustainable consumption and production; and Goal 13, on climate action.

40. A policy brief by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs on the consequences of the pandemic for key dimensions of national institutions provides helpful contextual information on Goal 16.⁴ The policy brief includes discussions on the risks of limiting transparency and access to information; eroding safeguards to accountability, such as through violations of integrity, fraud and corruption; and restricting participation and engagement. It also includes considerations of the critical importance of those dimensions in providing a resilient response to the crisis and of the need for innovation in government administration and governance systems.

41. A conceptual framework for analysing progress made on institutional aspects of the Goals is set out in the 11 principles of effective governance for sustainable development endorsed by the Economic and Social Council in 2018. The essential purpose of the voluntary principles is to provide interested countries with practical and expert guidance on a broad range of governance challenges associated with the

⁴ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, “Resilient institutions in times of crisis: transparency, accountability and participation at the national level key to effective response to COVID-19”, Policy Brief, No. 73, May 2020.

implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The Committee has identified 62 commonly used strategies that can help to operationalize the principles.

42. The principles are being used in many countries to analyse the state of governance and to provide suggestions on governance innovation. A dedicated research project carried out by the African Peer Review Mechanism in 17 African countries should be finalized in the first quarter of 2021. One of the case studies in that project offers insights from Kenya that will also be relevant to many other countries. In the study, the conclusion reached is that top-level and centre-of-government political leadership remains critical to effective governance. Efforts to advance the 11 principles should, first and foremost, focus on government leadership buy-in. With regard to the notion that effective governance depends on a supportive policy and legislative environment, the implementation of the principles requires enabling legislation that standardizes practices throughout Government. Where appropriate, the principles can, as in the case of Kenya, be incorporated into the Constitution and national laws.

43. The effective implementation of the national values and principles of governance and public service continues to be constrained by the absence of an objective monitoring, evaluation and reporting framework that can be used by all public institutions. There is a need to establish measurable indicators and metrics and a systematic results framework for the principles.

44. From the assessment of the case study, it is evident that emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic have the potential to disrupt government functions and operations to such a degree that they impede the effective implementation of strategies, leading to ineffective governance. To return to stability quickly, greater emphasis is needed on collaboration, sound policymaking, transparency and enhanced oversight during emergency situations. For lack of a focus on those four elements, the adverse effects of emergencies can spiral into serious disruptions that could potentially reverse decades of progress. It might then take much more time and significant resources to recover from that setback.

45. In another study, the authors explore the extent to which the principles are applied in countries of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.⁵ Early findings suggest that all countries in the region will need to step up their efforts to implement the Goals and that this will require modern solutions, especially in the field of public administration. The study shows that the implementation of the 11 principles would directly affect the achievement of Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 16 and 17 and would contribute to the progress made on other Goals. An additional conclusion is that the principles are relevant for all State institutions, including the executive branch, legislative authorities, law enforcement agencies, judicial bodies and State-owned corporations. The study confirms what the Committee has consistently suggested: that the principles, like the 2030 Agenda as a whole, should be implemented taking into account countries' cultural and geographical specificities. For countries in the South Caucasus, for example, priority could be given to the implementation of the principles of inclusiveness and effectiveness, whereas Central Asian countries could focus on inclusiveness and accountability.

46. The results so far from evaluating the implementation of the 11 principles indicate that their application is a precondition for the effective implementation of all of the Goals, and that they facilitate the attainment of the targets of Goals 16 and 17, which are crucial enablers of the other Goals. Moreover, the 11 principles guide

⁵ See Henry Sardaryan, E. Zavyalova, and T. Krotova, *Implementation of the Principles of Effective Governance for Sustainable Development in Countries of the Former Soviet Union* (forthcoming).

countries towards a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to the 2030 Agenda.

VI. Key messages for possible inclusion in the ministerial declaration of the 2021 high-level political forum on sustainable development

47. The key messages conveyed by the Committee for the thematic review of the 2020 high-level political forum on sustainable development are largely still relevant and have been updated below for the 2021 high-level political forum on sustainable development.

48. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the need for concerted government action at the national and international levels, global cooperation under the banner of peace, the de-escalation of violence and the fostering of development under the principles of the rule of law and of leaving no one behind. Economic shocks as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic have further intensified the vulnerabilities of countries in conflict and post-conflict countries in a way that weakens their capacity to gain momentum for the attainment of most of the targets of the Goals. Peace, security and conflict management remain critical to the establishment of enabling conditions and an enabling environment for the advancement of the Goals. Countries in conflict and post-conflict countries therefore need redoubled development partnership efforts to recover from the ravages of the pandemic and return to the path to recovery. A special focus on development partnerships in those countries must go hand in hand with post-conflict reconstruction and development, and with efforts to establish peace and security sustainability structures.

49. Effective responses to the COVID-19 pandemic require the acceleration of administrative and governance reforms in all countries, in order to increase Governments' capability to address short- and long-term challenges and improve their resilience to economic, social and environmental shocks. The initial responses to the pandemic have shown that it is necessary and possible for Governments to play a proactive leading role, breaking the past trend of replacing public institutions with private ones. All over the world, Governments are reinventing themselves in order to be ready for a future in which they will be able to perform collaborative forms of leadership in a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach.

50. Putting the principle of leaving no one behind into action depends on deliberate steps being taken to address exclusion, through practical inclusivity policies that systemically address all segments of society and their respective needs.

51. To address the needs of those who are left behind, including women, their participation in decision-making processes and leadership roles is imperative. The promotion of an inclusive governance model allows co-creation with stakeholders, as well as women's leadership at the district, State and national levels, at which plans, policies and programmes provide an inclusive perspective, both in leading recovery from future emergencies and in tackling inequalities.

52. The global community and individual national Governments must systemically address the deeper causes of poverty and exclusion not through palliatives but through institution-building and development policies focused on the long term.

53. The application of the 11 principles of effective governance for sustainable development can underpin the achievement of the targets of Goals 16 and 17, which are the crucial enablers of the other Goals. The principles directly affect the achievement of Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 16 and 17, and can guide countries towards

whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches to the 2030 Agenda and lead to bold structural and systemic changes for the better.

54. “Silo thinking” continues to hamper the holistic implementation of the Goals and hinder action to ensure that no one is left behind. Overcoming a silo-based approach requires leadership from the top and a change in organizational culture, and is a precondition for implementing target 17.14 of the Goals, on enhancing policy coherence for sustainable development. It is recommended that countries begin using the self-assessment tool on policy coherence for sustainable development linked to tier II indicator 17.14.1, which was agreed in 2020 by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators.

55. The quality of public administration and governance should be an element of national and subnational strategic policies on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Departments responsible for governance and public administration are often not part of the 2030 Agenda policy framework yet, but are essential partners for developing adequate institutional mechanisms and ensuring that competences and skills in the workforce are directed to enabling the mainstreaming of the Goals.

56. The huge potential of sustainable public procurement is still underutilized. By using the purchasing power of public administration to guide products and services towards sustainability, Governments can lead by example and stimulate the markets for sustainable products. Public procurement represents, on average, 13 to 20 per cent of GDP. Creating the legal conditions for sustainable public procurement, and learning lessons from countries that are forerunners, supports the implementation of many of the Goals.

57. The COVID-19 pandemic has had an adverse impact on national economies, rolling back decades of growth and development. In some countries, the effects have caused a recession. Subsequent macroeconomic constraints have significantly worsened the capacity of Governments to build capable, effective and resilient institutions. In that context, global and country-level recovery efforts after the pandemic will have to be focused on restoring macroeconomic stability. Such stability will ensure that Governments have the necessary resources to guarantee sustainability during recovery.

58. Centres of Government remain critical to country-level policy prioritization both for national development goals and the Sustainable Development Goals. In recognition of the integrated nature of most national development goals, the Sustainable Development Goals and the current quest for post-COVID-19 recovery, there is a need for consistent messaging and engagement with the centre of Government on the critical role of policy prioritization in development outcomes. This engagement increases the chances that top-level government policymakers will prioritize inclusivity, effectiveness and resilience of institutions as the foundation for post-COVID-19 recovery efforts and long-term sustainable development.