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Building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions
at all levels: elaborating principles of effective
governance for sustainable development building on the
work of the Committee at its sixteenth session

Elaborating principles of effective governance for sustainable development

Note by the Secretariat**

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   * E/C.16/2018/1.

  ** This paper was prepared by the Secretariat under the leadership and guidance of Committee members Geert Bouckaert, Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi and Ora-orn Poocharoen. The paper is intended to support the work of the Committee and reflects the views of the experts.

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Summary

At its fifteenth session, the Committee of Experts on Public Administration discussed the possibility of developing a voluntary set of internationally recognized principles of responsible and effective governance that could provide helpful guidance to countries in addressing a broad range of governance challenges associated with implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Committee continued its consideration of the issue at its sixteenth session, with an exploration of the purpose, scope and application of the proposed principles, as well as related concrete practices. The Committee decided that, at its seventeenth session, it would build on the conceptual framework presented at the sixteenth session, with the essential elements of Sustainable Development Goal 16 of effectiveness, accountability and inclusiveness at its core.

The present paper sets out a preliminary draft of the basic principles for consideration. The Committee has recognized that achieving the targets of Sustainable Development Goal 16 will be critical to the implementation of all the Sustainable Development Goals and that both national and subnational authorities have an important role to play. The draft principles are therefore intended to be useful across all areas of governance and institution-building that are relevant to the Sustainable Development Goals. As previously agreed by the Committee, they have been articulated as brief statements of some depth, but are also sufficiently general to elicit the broad support of countries.

The Committee and other entities have explored a range of commonly used strategies for operationalizing responsive and effective governance, many of which have been recognized and endorsed over the years in the resolutions of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, in the outcomes of major United Nations conference and summits and in the relevant treaties on human rights or corruption prevention. A variety of such strategies are set out in the present paper and linked to practices that are supported by technical guidelines at the international level. Consideration is given as to how to assess such practices for relevance and the strength of the empirical evidence of their impact on outcomes related to the Sustainable Development Goals.

Interested Committee members working on the present paper have pointed to the need to consider the role of public administration in different spheres of government action. Five layers of governance have been proposed as a model for understanding the everyday reality of institutions and to further contextualize the application of the principles. The five layers comprise the management of individual organizations, collaboration across the government, relations with non-State actors, organizational attitudes and behaviours, and governance at the systemic level. Each of the basic principles may guide action in all five areas.

Finally, in the paper, consideration is given to ways of linking the principles with global efforts to support the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, and further action is recommended to identify specific practices and related technical guidelines, including from a sectoral perspective, taking into account the interrelationships inherent in the Goals and the fact that the principles are voluntary.

I. Background

1.   At its fifteenth session, the Committee of Experts on Public Administration discussed the possibility of developing a set of internationally recognized principles of responsible and effective governance that could provide helpful guidance to countries in addressing a broad range of governance challenges associated with implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. While good governance and related concepts, such as the rule of law, participation, accountability and transparency, have been frequently noted in international commitments and agreements, the Committee found them to be general in nature and open to interpretation. The Committee thus decided to draft, with the assistance of the Secretariat, a set of voluntary governance principles, with a view to providing a baseline for future policy and practice and encouraging the study of more specific issues in public administration.

2.   The Committee continued its consideration of the matter at its sixteenth session, with an exploration of the purpose, scope and application of the proposed principles, as well as related concrete practices. In considering the Committee's report, the Economic and Social Council recognized that there was a need for pragmatic ongoing improvements in national and local governance capabilities to achieve the 2030 Agenda and other international agreements, and noted that the Committee's work in this area could serve as an important reference point in building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels and in support of the implementation of all of the Sustainable Development Goals.

3.   The Committee agreed that relating the principles to practices that are operational could address the tension between aspirational goals and a need for practical improvements in governance; however, the question of what constitutes a practice in this sense was the subject of some debate at the sixteenth session and not fully resolved. Accordingly, in the present paper the issue of the identification of related practices is considered and criteria and mechanisms for evaluating the strength of the evidence of their success are proposed. The Committee's view was that relevant practices should not be excluded from the experts' consideration; however, such practices should be well-defined and actionable within a given context and aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals.

4.   The Committee recommended continuing with the elaboration of principles of effective governance for sustainable development at its seventeenth session, building on the conceptual framework presented at the sixteenth session, with the essential elements of Sustainable Development Goal 16 of effectiveness, accountability and inclusiveness at its core. A summary of that work, as well as the main observations and conclusions of the discussion, are contained in the Committee's sessional report (E/2017/44-E/C.16/2017/8, chap. III.E).

II. Getting to a draft of the principles

5.   Building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels is a sustainable development commitment in its own right and is reflected in specific targets under Sustainable Development Goal 16. Target 16.6, for example, calls for development of effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels, and target 16.7 calls for responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels. It is recognized, in addition, that achieving the targets of Goal 16 will be critical to the implementation of all the Sustainable Development Goals and

that there appear to be strong, positive linkages between the institution-building objectives of the 2030 Agenda and most of the other targets.

6. For example, the ability to explore innovative sources of financing, manage public-private partnerships, adopt new approaches to biodiversity preservation, improve wastewater treatment, strengthen social protection and expand access to health care all require adequate capacity on the part of the institutions that have a lead role in putting the relevant laws and regulations to work. Both national and subnational authorities have an important role to play in delivering on the various targets. The principles should therefore be designed to be useful across all areas of governance and institution-building that are relevant to the Sustainable Development Goals.

7. Given the scope of the 2030 Agenda, a question arises as to whether application of the principles should extend to the administration of executive and legislative organs, the security and justice sectors, independent constitutional bodies and State corporations. Here, regional experiences with principles and practices of governance may offer some guidance. The African Charter on Values and Principles of Public Service and Administration, the European Union-Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Principles of Public Administration for European Union enlargement countries as well as for neighbourhood policy countries, and the Ibero-American Charter for the Public Service all point towards a broad understanding of what constitutes a country's administrative system. This includes any institution or organization that undertakes public service duties (the African Charter on Values and Principles of Public Service and Administration), independent constitutional bodies, as well as the Parliament and judiciary within the scope of their scrutiny and oversight powers over the State administration (the European Union-OECD Principles of Public Administration), and both centralized and decentralized bodies, whether or not they have their own legal personalities (the Ibero-American Charter for Public Service).

8. The Committee has stressed that the principles must be consistent with the Charter of the United Nations and international law and the outcomes of major United Nations conferences and summits, as well as with relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and of the Economic and Social Council. At the same time, the principles are expected to be few in number, expressed in non-technical language and relatively easy for non-specialists to recall. The Committee noted that the conceptual framework discussed at its sixteenth session met all of these requirements and could serve as a foundation for further elaboration. The basic elements were: (a) competence, sound public policy and cooperation under the rubric of effectiveness; (b) integrity, transparency and independent oversight under accountability; and (c) non-discrimination, participation, subsidiarity and intergenerational equity under inclusiveness. In addition, the principle of leaving no one behind was affirmed as a core principle of public administration by the Committee and the Economic and Social Council and could be included as an additional element.

9. The Committee has further advised that the principles should be articulated as brief statements of some depth that are sufficiently general to elicit broad support and expressed in non-technical language. With this in mind, a draft of the basic principles of responsive and effective governance for sustainable development is provided in annex I to the present document. The phrasing is based on the common meanings of words and/or on otherwise widely accepted expressions pertaining, for example, to basic commitments to non-discrimination (principle 7), the needs of future generations in the context of sustainable development (principle 10) and leaving no

one behind (principle 11). The statement on participation (principle 8) was provided by the Committee itself during the fifteenth session. In addition, in order to provide context, the draft principles include a preambular paragraph clarifying their overall purpose and scope.

III. Relating the principles to concrete practices

Recalling commonly used strategies

10.   The principles need to be useful to people involved in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and various other commitments who would like to make specific governance improvements in accordance with their own needs and priorities and are seeking reliable action-oriented guidance. The administrative, economic, social and political sciences have had much to contribute in this regard, and, indeed, the Committee and other entities have explored a range of commonly used strategies for addressing important governance challenges in the past, such as building a professional civil service or promoting integrated policymaking to enhance effectiveness, ensuring the independence of the auditing function or expanding the availability of open government data to strengthen accountability, and institutionalizing participation mechanisms or strengthening local finance to foster inclusiveness. Many such strategies have been recognized and endorsed over the years in the resolutions of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, in the outcomes of major United Nations conference and summits and in the relevant treaties on human rights or corruption prevention. At the same time, ensuring the full success of such strategies has remained a challenge in many countries.

11.   It may be helpful to recall these commonly used strategies as a guide-post in identifying concrete practices that Governments could adopt in addressing specific problems that may be bottlenecks to the achievement of a particular goal. A variety of such strategies, linked to technical guidelines, are shown in annex II. Like the principles themselves, it may be expected that the main strategies do not change much over time.

12.   Many countries follow traditional or new public management approaches to governance. Some are more actively pursuing forms of collaborative governance. The main strategies highlighted by the Committee and other United Nations bodies should be relevant in all governance paradigms. Similarly, they should be relevant regardless of variations in national legal systems.

Assessing the relevance of a practice

13.   Having delineated the basic principles and commonly used strategies for realizing them, there remains the difficulty of relating them to helpful practices, which are expected to be great in number and highly varied. The Committee has stressed that such practices should be concrete if they are to be of use to practitioners and clearly connected with the specific governance challenges to be addressed. How to assess the relevance of practices in this sense is not obvious. Practices that appear to be applicable may refer to broadly defined concepts (e.g., rule of law or smart cities), pertain to public policy but not directly to institution-building (e.g., fiscal and monetary policy or the designation of protected areas) or they may be more indicative than actionable (e.g., public services are delivered).

14.   While relevance is often a matter of interpretation based on an individual's knowledge and experience, a pragmatic approach would be to look for a connection

to one of the commonly used strategies listed in annex II and actionability, that is, whether the practice is supported by operational guidelines (e.g., on the management of organizational performance in health services, measures to prevent corruption in access to education, or gender-responsive budgeting) and is actually being implemented in countries. Further efforts to engage the United Nations agencies and other international organizations in the work of the Committee on governance practices could be beneficial in this regard, but there are also other approaches that any user may need to take into account, particularly when it comes to sectoral issues.

15. Accredited professional bodies at the international level may also have published standards and guidelines to draw on. Where seemingly good ideas are not necessarily supported by technical guidelines, more work may be needed to codify them.

16. The Committee has stressed that the practices are not intended to be a list of things that Governments should be doing. Each practice could be useful or not, depending on national and local contexts, visions, models, needs and priorities.

17. The Committee has also stressed that there is no single way of organizing institutions that are responsive and effective, although such institutions may share common features. The adoption of any practice will be conditioned to a large degree by the political feasibility of particular reforms. It will also greatly depend on the characteristics of a country, including the capacities of its institutions. Moreover, countries may have their own legislation and approaches, which might in some cases go further than what is suggested by the Committee.

Finding empirical evidence of the impact of practices on sustainable development

18. In addition to assessing relevance, attention should be given to ensuring that there is sufficient empirical evidence of the impact of a practice on the achievement of one or more of the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as consistency with the principles of responsive and effective governance. In addition, consideration should be given to the country and sectoral context to which the practice applies. Investing in the groundwork to ensure that expected outcomes are understood and seen in context is important. In discussing diversity and non-discrimination, for example, the Committee has recognized that, within institutions, a balance must be found between the concern for integrating people who have been discriminated against and giving equal chances to all, and ensuring sufficient human resource capacity for the efficient functioning of the public service.

19. In assessing the evidence for the effect of a practice on the achievement of one or more of the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals, including the targets of Goal 16, differences in confidence levels may be observed. To use a simple scale, the evidence could be classified as indeterminate, weak, moderate or strong. The absence of moderate or strong evidence would not necessarily preclude knowledge of a practice from being shared. Any number of innovations may show promise in specific situations and, though their potential impact on the Sustainable Development Goals may not have been determined in general, it can nonetheless be helpful for others who are actively engaged in related efforts to be aware of them early on. Innovative practices being implemented by some countries, including, possibly, achievements recognized through the United Nations Public Service Award, could fall into this category, though there should be acknowledgement that what works in one country may not work in another.

Engaging subject area experts

20. An added value of the practices could be that they are independently assessed by subject area experts according to strictly professional considerations. As was pointed out at the sixteenth session, significant support from the larger research community may be needed to identify relevant practices, assess the scope and strength of the evidence base and possibly promote comparative research, for example, through the United Nations and other international organizations as well as academic networks. The elaboration of some objective standards may be helpful in this regard. For example, where there is reasonable evidence of the success of a practice in one country, the practice could be shared, but with the evidence classified as "indeterminate" in general, pending a more in-depth independent review following a defined process.

Examples of commonly used strategies and related practices

21. An illustrative selection of commonly used strategies and related practices to realize principles of effective governance for sustainable development is shown in annex II. These examples are drawn from the work of international organizations as well as professional associations with expertise in specialized fields of administration, such as risk management, regulatory analysis and impact assessment. The compilation could be formalized and extended, taking into account the interface between the principles and different layers of governance discussed below.

22. As noted by the Committee at the sixteenth session, the work could be further illustrated with case studies and promising approaches observed at the national and subnational levels. By way of example, such cases might refer to the creation of a unit under the Head of State or Government to promote a more integrated approach to policy implementation and promote delivery standards and results in priority areas (collaboration); the creation of semi-autonomous tax agencies to enhance revenue administration and reduce corruption (integrity); and measures to ensure equal access of all users to public services and prohibit discrimination in delivery (non-discrimination).

IV. Interface between the principles and different layers of governance

23. At its sixteenth session, the Committee deliberated extensively on practical considerations relating to the development context of governance and the need for an outcome orientation in identifying practices and recognition of the power dynamics, attitudes, behaviours and interests that may enhance or hinder efforts at readying institutions and policies for implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In order to leave no one behind, it may be necessary, more than ever, to equip institutions to reach the furthest behind first and improve the lives of the poorest and most vulnerable.

24. The Committee also observed that the principles could usefully spur countries to think about feasible reforms that would take into account each country's starting point and prioritize key problems according to each country's capacities and context. For reforms to succeed, they must be politically supportable and practically implementable, in addition to being relevant and effective, which may in turn imply the creation of an environment for decision-making that encourages delegation and experimentation to solve particular problems.

25.   In subsequent consultations, interested members working on the present paper have pointed to the need to consider the role of public administration in different spheres of government action. Five layers of governance have been proposed as a model for understanding the everyday reality of institutions and to further contextualize the application of the principles. The five layers comprise: the management of individual organizations; collaboration across government; relations with non-State actors; organizational attitudes and behaviours; and governance at the systemic level. Each of the basic principles set out in annex I may guide action in all five areas.

Management of individual organizations

26.   Sometimes there has been more of an emphasis on management methods and techniques common to the public sector, while at other times the emphasis has been on practices common to the private sector. This has resulted in a range of visions on what effective management is and should be, and whether public, private or not-for-profit status makes a difference in approaches taken to management practices. In the public sector, a suitable legal framework is necessary to guide management and ensure a degree of freedom in managing personnel and finances and sharing information, which is essential to finding innovative solutions to governance challenges. The digitization of the public sector and rapid technological changes are also affecting the ways in which government operations are organized and public services are delivered.

27.   Effective management calls, inter alia, for experienced and transformational leadership and a focus on delivering services that contribute to achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Also essential are: (a) the capacity to address complex problems with a focus on the problems people care about most; (b) the ability to innovate to respond to new and emerging challenges; (c) the potential to mobilize financing from all sources — public and private — and use resources efficiently and effectively; and (d) the ability to attract and retain sufficient human resources capable of addressing national economic and social needs.

28.   Accountability requires attention to ensuring that there are no conflicts of interest on the part of government officials or other actors who are involved, that public institutions are open about their decisions and operations and that reliable internal control, internal audit and external audit mechanisms are in place.

29.   Inclusiveness implies the presence of a diverse and motivated workforce that is representative of the population served, a commitment to and mechanisms for engaging people in decision-making, including women and the poorest and most vulnerable, as well as a sense of ownership of the mission, vision and objectives of the organization.

30.   Public sector reforms designed to improve the management of individual organizations may address issues related to personnel, finance (budgeting, accounting, auditing), strategy, organization, performance evaluation of policymakers and public servants, communication, leadership, the creation of platforms and mechanisms for more participatory policies and decision-making and for feedback and learning and inventory control, among other things. The implementation of such reforms continues to be a major challenge in many countries.

Collaboration across government

31.   Collaboration is about interaction among a range of organizations with a common interest, whereby a set of outputs delivered by these organizations jointly contributes to a shared outcome. Such collaboration could be pursued on a territorial basis, for example, among the departments and offices of a local government, or functionally, for example among organizations working in a given policy field or towards a common end, such as the Sustainable Development Goals. Collaboration entails attention to interactions, synergies and coordination, and a clear division of labour through, for example, integrated policies, horizontal and vertical integration, transversal policies and cross-border collaboration, among other things.

32.   Effectiveness in collaboration depends on there being a sufficient evidence base and sufficient capacities and competencies on the part of all organizations concerned. The leadership of a high-impact agency could be useful in obtaining commitment, ensuring coordination and guiding efforts towards a shared objective. Public-public partnerships can be valuable, particularly in supporting and equipping local authorities. Accountability implies that all organizations should prioritize shared ownership of a common outcome over their own outputs. Conflicts of interest between the objectives of a single organization and the realization of a shared outcome such as Sustainable Development Goal should be minimized. This requires an understanding of relations among sectors, transparency and a clear indication of who is responsible for what. Inclusiveness and participation are also crucial for collaboration across government, so that efforts are guided by the needs of people. The vertical distribution of responsibilities across the levels of government and the related assignment of accountability also need to be even-handed.

33.   Reforms to improve collaboration may consist of the implementation of hierarchical mechanisms, such as input-based budgets, top-down instructions and control lines; market mechanisms, such as output-based budgets, tendering and vouchers; network mechanisms, such as knowledge and personnel exchanges, the sharing of corporate identities and the pooling of resources; and new mechanisms to consult and engage people in decision-making.

Relations with non-State actors

34.   There is also a need to manage the interfaces between the public sector, civil society and the private sector. This implies the presence of sufficient governance capacity in civil society and the private sector.

35.   The effectiveness of relations with non-State actors can be improved throughout the policy cycle in an open system of government, with stakeholders involved in the implementation and evaluation of initiatives from the beginning. With a sense of ownership comes a higher probability of constructive civic action. In the implementation stage, there is contracting out, there are partnerships and there is delegation to the private sector, to civil society and to citizens. Some countries recommend using partnerships with the private sector, civil society and local governments to assure continuity of public services in times of crises and to reach the poorest and most vulnerable, as well as to manage public investments. With regard to accountability, relations with non-State actors need to be governed in a transparent, legal and functional way, inter alia, to reduce opportunities for corruption and guarantee the quality of public services.

36.   In order to promote inclusiveness, clearly defined responsibilities and accountability requirements should be spelled out in situations of contracting out,

partnerships and delegation of authority, regardless of whether the relationships among the parties are hierarchical, market-based or network-based. Weak governance in these areas can lead to a high risk of corruption or institutional capture or to a situation in which the cost is for the public sector and the benefits for the stakeholder. It is important not to exclude stakeholders that could potentially contribute to design, decision-making, production and evaluation.

37. Reforms at this layer of governance are related to supporting, regulating and framing the way markets, civil society organizations and citizen participation should work. Investment in the governance capacity of private sector and civil society organizations can be essential to obtaining strong performance, particularly when public service delivery is delegated or contracted out, for example through a shared risk management model in public-private partnerships or shared financial and performance reporting systems. Broad principles may suffice in some areas, while, in others, specific regulation may be helpful, as seen, for example, in the supervision and risk management of the banking sector.

38. Another major reform area involves guaranteeing capacity within the public sector to create ongoing exchange of activities with the private sector and civil society. This implies the capacity to know the field and establish partnerships. There also needs to be a solid, transparent and competent capacity to contract out, including monitoring, inspecting and evaluating partnerships and contracts.

Organizational attitudes and behaviours

39. In order to realize the Sustainable Development Goals, attention must be paid to the interaction between the "hardware" of an organization and its "software", in terms of values, culture and ideas. Governance should not just be focused on the results. It should also be focused on appropriate behaviours and attitudes of agents in the field of the Sustainable Development Goals. The key governance concepts are values and ideas, such as integrity and transparency, a focus on serving people and a culture of responsibility, accountability, openness, citizen orientation and service delivery. Inappropriateness, in terms of governance, would be characterized by corruption, fraud, lack of transparency, preferential treatment of some segments of the population, or a culture of irresponsibility and absence of accountability. The goal is to increase the value of public institutions to society to legitimize the public sphere. This has to do with perceptions that expectations are being met, which leads to satisfaction and ultimately to trust.

40. Effectiveness with respect to attitudes and behaviours implies a focus on cooperation and results for citizens. Accountability at this layer implies the values and cultures of integrity, transparency and oversight. Inclusion implies non-discrimination, participation, subsidiarity and equity.

41. The development of leadership programmes is a crucial type of project in reform programmes dealing with organizational culture. Even if it is accepted that cultural change takes a long time and is difficult, and given the situation that removing people is not always possible or easy, training and education can be beneficial in changing ideas held by society about appropriate organizational attitudes and behaviours.

Governance at the systemic level

42. Governance at the systemic level concerns the political economy and social contract of the State itself. It is essential to take into account the historical institutions and culture of a country, with its administrative tradition and political history, in order

to have well-functioning governance at the State level and in society at large. The major mechanisms of decision-making in a country and the division of responsibilities and accountability for public policies and service delivery are the main elements of governance at the systemic level. The basic framing document for systemic governance is the country's constitution, which may provide for checks and balances in governance structures and stipulate the degree of decentralization as an expression of the degree of freedom allowed in public policy in different parts of a country. Another major element relates to the proportion of gross domestic product (GDP) associated with the State, the private sector and civil society, and the way public resources are allocated by the Government. Allocation mechanisms of price, budget and negotiated transfers, which have an important bearing on infrastructure financing, come into play.

43.   Efforts to improve the effectiveness of governance at the systemic level may encourage States to take a whole-of-government or integrated approach to policymaking, notably with respect to the Sustainable Development Goals. This approach implies that a systematic, constitutionally guaranteed, cooperation between levels of government is possible. For this approach to be effective, it is crucial that a country also have the necessary expertise, including in statistics and information and communications technology, to support its major policies and service delivery. In order to ensure accountability, legislation and technical guidelines on allocating resources and responsibilities for policy design, decision, implementation and evaluation, including mechanisms for transparency and oversight, must be in place. Inclusiveness comprises an institutional dimension that brings in all levels of government, a geographical dimension that extends to all parts of the country and a demographic dimension that involves all segments of the population and takes into consideration the needs of future generations.

44.   Depending on the governance traditions of the State and the national priorities with respect to the Sustainable Development Goals, it may be helpful to consider greater centralization or greater decentralization; to adopt policies that seek to adjust the public, private or civil society responsibilities; to enhance public accountability mechanisms; or to re-allocate resources in order to create an enabling environment that reinforces efforts to implement all of the Sustainable Development Goals in a country.

V. Linking with global efforts to support implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals

45.   Given that the Committee intends the principles to be a practical resource of an evolving nature, questions arise as to how they could be linked to efforts to support implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals at the global level. In this connection, it will be important to bring the principles to the attention of Governments in a way that is helpful to them in their efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda.

46.   One approach could be to continue to build on the effort to reference and bring together within one framework relevant standards and guidelines that have been or are being developed elsewhere in the United Nations system. In some cases, conventions and treaties may already lay down a framework for action that is of a legally binding nature, as, for example, in the case of the United Nations Convention against Corruption. Principles of effective governance could indeed build on those and other agreements, as articulated above, but be of a voluntary nature. In other cases, technical committees and the secretariats of various international organizations

may have formulated a variety of operational guidelines as follow-up to aspirational agreements and commitments made at the intergovernmental level.

47. There is ongoing discussion and development of relevant operational guidelines in many fields of endeavour throughout the United Nations system. Joint initiatives with the United Nations Development Programme, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and other interested entities of the United Nations system could be explored, with the first step being to identify guidelines relevant to implementation of the principles from various sectoral perspectives, taking into account the interrelationships inherent in the Sustainable Development Goals.

48. A second approach for linking with global efforts to support the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals may be to explore how the basic principles could be reflected in ongoing United Nations capacity development activities. An initial step could involve some form of self-assessment of the development cooperation strategies and programmes of the United Nations system for consistency with the principles, with a view to ensuring that the principles are reflected in United Nations support to national action. Similar assessments could be initiated of relevant technical standards of other organizations to promote alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals and the principle of leaving no one behind.

49. Global dialogue and knowledge-sharing are also beneficial for promoting effective governance. As suggested at the sixteenth session of the Committee, countries could be invited to provide examples of reforms and practices linked to a set of voluntary principles, which could also be beneficial for peer learning purposes. Such case studies could relate to national planning functions, statistical systems and tax administration, among other things, and the challenges and opportunities countries see in using these systems to help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Such initiatives could be further linked to ongoing activities to promote the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 16, such as Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies.

VI. Recommendations

50. In its earlier deliberations on governance principles, the Committee decided that the conceptual framework discussed at the sixteenth session could serve as a foundation for further elaboration and agreed that the basic principles should comprise: (a) competence, sound public policy and cooperation under the rubric of effectiveness; (b) integrity, transparency and independent oversight under accountability; and (c) non-discrimination, participation, subsidiarity and intergenerational equity under inclusiveness. Furthermore, the principle of leaving no one behind, which was affirmed by the Committee and the Economic and Social Council as a core principle of public administration, could be included as an additional element.

51. Challenges in the efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda in public administration, while specific and contextual, can often be traced back to insufficient attention to one or more common strategies for addressing these basic principles. In thinking about a particular problem, public servants may find it helpful to consider which of the principles are most relevant to the issue at hand and whether any of the commonly used strategies require additional attention in that context. Understood in this way, examples of related practices aligned with the Sustainable Development

Goals and the principle of leaving no one behind could provide relevant technical guidance, bearing in mind the evidence of the impact of the practice on sustainable development outcomes.

52. In some cases, the technical guidelines will be robust, having been thoroughly vetted for sufficiency of evidence and endorsed by a network of leading experts in the field. In other cases, practices may be more experimental — promising innovations that appear to have worked in particular situations but that have not been tested under different conditions. Relating the principles to concrete guidelines, evaluating the strength of the evidence of the impact of these practices on outcomes related to the Sustainable Development Goals and linking to global efforts to support implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals may be where the main challenges lie going forward.

53. With this in mind, and as a way forward, the Committee may wish to:

• Review and endorse the basic principles contained in annex I as a working document, while continuing to refine the related set of technical guidelines contained in annex II as a resource of an evolving nature;

• Endorse the idea of identifying practices that could provide helpful technical guidance on the operationalization of the basic principles;

• Provide guidance on the development of a process and guidelines for assessing the relevance of a practice to the principles, including alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals and the principle of leaving no one behind, find empirical evidence of their impact on outcomes related to the Sustainable Development Goals and engage in this effort subject area experts from the United Nations and other international and regional organizations, as well as regional and national training and research institutes, public administration associations and related entities;

• Discuss whether it would be helpful to identify specific technical guidelines to implement the principles from a sectoral perspective, in such fields as human resources, finance, education, health, labour, social welfare, the environment, security, justice and other areas related to the Sustainable Development Goals, taking into account the interrelationships inherent in the Goals.

Annex I

Draft basic principles of responsive and effective governance for sustainable development

Preamble

The full realization of the Sustainable Development Goals and other internationally agreed development objectives will hinge in no small part on a common understanding of the basic principles of responsive and effective governance for sustainable development. The basic principles set out below are intended to clarify the governance agenda, taking into account different governance structures, national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities. They have been developed by the Committee of Experts on Public Administration to help interested countries, on a voluntary basis, build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels, with a view to achieving the shared vision for the people and the planet embodied in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As basic principles, they apply to all public institutions, including the administration of executive and legislative organs, the security and justice sectors, independent constitutional bodies and State corporations. The principles are given depth and made operational through a selection of commonly used strategies and related practices, which are an integral and evolving part of this work.

Basic principle

Effectiveness

Competence	To perform their functions effectively, institutions are to have sufficient expertise, resources and tools to deal adequately with the mandates under their authority
Sound policymaking	To achieve their intended results, public policies are to be coherent with one another and founded on true or well-established grounds, in full accordance with fact, reason and good sense
Collaboration	To address problems of common interest, institutions at all levels of government and in all sectors should work together and jointly with non-State actors towards the same end, purpose and effect

Accountability

Integrity	To serve in the public interest, civil servants are to discharge their official duties honestly, fairly and in a manner consistent with soundness of moral principle
Transparency	To ensure accountability and enable public scrutiny, institutions are to be open and candid in the execution of their functions and promote access to information, subject only to the specific and limited exceptions as are provided by law

Independent oversight	To retain trust in government, oversight agencies are to act according to strictly professional considerations and apart from and unaffected by others

Inclusiveness

Non-discrimination	To respect, protect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, access to public service is to be provided on general terms of equality, without distinction of any kind as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, disability or other status
Participation	To have an effective State, all significant political groups should be actively involved in matters that directly affect them and have a chance to influence policy
Subsidiarity	To promote government that is responsive to the needs and aspirations of all people, central authorities should perform only those tasks which cannot be performed effectively at a more intermediate or local level
Intergenerational equity	To promote prosperity and quality of life for all, institutions should construct administrative acts that balance the short-term needs of today's generation with the longer-term needs of future generations
Leaving no one behind	To ensure that all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality, public policies are to take into account the needs and aspirations of all segments of society, including the poorest and most vulnerable and those subject to discrimination

Annex II

Commonly used strategies and an illustrative selection of related technical guidelines to operationalize the draft basic principles

Principle	Commonly used strategies	Illustrative selection of related technical guidelines
Effectiveness		
Competence	• Promotion of professional merit-based civil service • Strategic human resources management • Promotion of leadership development and training of civil servants • Performance management • Results-based management • Financial management and control • Enhancement of revenue administration • Investment in e-government	International labour standards (ILO); ISO 9001 international standard for quality management systems (International Organization for Standardization); International Public Sector Accounting Standards (International Public Accounting Standards Board); Results based Budgeting Manual (Council of Europe); Guidelines for Public Financial Management Reform (Commonwealth Secretariat); Manual on Tax Collection and (Inter-American Center of Tax Administrations)
Sound policymaking	• Strategic planning and foresight • Regulatory impact analysis • Promotion of integrated policymaking • Strengthening national statistical systems • Monitoring and evaluation systems • Science-policy interface • Risk management frameworks	*Integrated Policymaking for Sustainable Development: A Reference Manual* (UNEP); international statistical standards (United Nations system and others); modelling tools for sustainable development policies (Department of Economic and Social Affairs); *Foresight: the Manual* (UNDP); Guiding Principles for Regulatory Quality and Performance (OECD); ISO 31000 international standard for risk management (International Organization for Standardization)
Collaboration	• Centre of government coordination under the Head of State or Government • Coordination and dialogue across levels of government and functional areas • Raising awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals • Network-based governance • Public-private partnerships	Principles for Public Governance of Public-Private Partnerships (OECD)
Accountability		
Integrity	• Establishment of anti-corruption agencies	National anti-corruption strategies: a practical guide for development and implementation (UNODC); guidelines on

Principle	*Commonly used strategies*	*Illustrative selection of related technical guidelines*
	• Codes of conduct for public officials • Competitive public procurement • Elimination of bribery and trading in influence • Conflict of interest policies • Whistle-blower protection • Provision of adequate remuneration and equitable pay scales for public servants	the implementation of article 9 of the United Nations Convention against Corruption, on public procurement (UNODC); International Standards on Combating Money Laundering and the Financing of Terrorism and Proliferation (Financial Action Task Force); e-procurement toolkit (World Bank)
Transparency	• Proactive disclosure of information • Budget transparency • Open government data • Registries of beneficial ownership • Lobby registries	Open government data toolkit (World Bank); Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative Standard (Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative); guidelines on open government data for citizen engagement (Department of Economic and Social Affairs)
Independent oversight	• Promotion of the independence of regulatory agencies • Arrangements for review of administrative decisions by courts or other bodies • Independent audit	Draft guidance on auditing preparedness for implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (Department of Economic and Social Affairs and International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions); International Professional Practices Framework for Internal Audit (Institute of Internal Auditors); Best Practice Principles for Regulatory Policy (OECD); *Handbook for Monitoring Administrative Justice* (OSCE)

Inclusiveness

Principle	*Commonly used strategies*	*Illustrative selection of related technical guidelines*
Non-discrimination	• Promotion of public sector workforce diversity • Prohibition of discrimination in public service delivery • Multilingual service delivery • Accessibility standards • Cultural audit of institutions • Universal birth registration • Gender-responsive budgeting	Gender-responsive budgeting principles, processes and tools (UNFPA, UN-Women); *Guidelines on Population Registration* (OSCE); web content accessibility guidelines (World Wide Web Consortium)
Participation	• Free and fair elections • Regulatory process of public consultation	Draft guidelines on the effective implementation of the right to participate in public affairs (OHCHR); ISO/TS 17582 particular requirements for the

Principle	Commonly used strategies	Illustrative selection of related technical guidelines
	• Multi-stakeholder forums • Participatory budgeting • Community-driven development	application of ISO 9001:2008 for electoral organizations at all levels of government (International Organization for Standardization)
Subsidiarity	• Fiscal federalism • Strengthening urban governance • Strengthening municipal finance and local finance systems • Enhancement of local capacity for prevention, adaptation and mitigation of external shocks	*Intergovernmental Fiscal Transfers: Principles and Practices* (World Bank); International Guidelines on Decentralization and Access to Basic Services for All (UN-Habitat); European benchmark of good governance at the local level (Council of Europe)
Intergenerational equity	• Sustainable development impact assessment • Long-term public debt management • Promotion of long-term territorial planning and spatial development • Ecosystem management	Guidance on integrating ecosystem considerations into climate change vulnerability and impact assessment (UNEP); International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning (UN-Habitat); International Principles for Social Impact Assessment (International Association for Impact Assessment)
Leaving no one behind	• Promotion of equitable fiscal and monetary policy • Promotion of social equity • Data disaggregation • Systematic follow-up and review	Guiding principles on extreme poverty and human rights (Human Rights Council); guidelines to support country reporting on the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations Development Group); voluntary common reporting guidelines for voluntary national reviews at the high-level political forum for sustainable development (Department of Economic and Social Affairs); draft standards for data disaggregation (Department of Economic and Social Affairs)

Abbreviations: ILO, International Labour Organization; OECD, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development; OHCHR, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights; OSCE, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe; UNDP, United Nations Development Programme; UNEP, United Nations Environment Programme; UNFPA, United Nations Population Fund; UN-Habitat, United Nations Human Settlements Programme; UNODC, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime; UN-Women, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.

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