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Effective Governance for Sustainable Development: 11 Principles to Put in Practice

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

The UN Committee of Experts on Public Administration (CEPA) and UN DESA have prepared 11 basic principles that should clarify the governance agenda, taking into account different governance structures, national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities.

Operationalizing the principles and undertaking related strategic actions that are known to be effective in particular contexts is essential to taking the work on principles to the next level.

The full realization of the Sustainable Development Goals and other internationally agreed development objectives strongly depends on a common understanding of the basic principles of effective governance for sustainable development. On 2 July 2018, the UN Economic and Social Committee endorsed a [set of 11 principles](#) prepared by the [UN Committee of Experts on Public Administration \(CEPA\)](#) and UN DESA. This is an important starting point: without such guiding principles, implementation of the SDGs risks being inconsistent and ineffective.

The 11 basic principles should 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 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.

Operationalizing the principles and undertaking related strategic actions that are known to be

effective in particular contexts is essential to taking the work on principles to the next level. To be helpful, associated practices will need to be clearly relevant, feasible to implement, and based on sufficient empirical evidence of their impact on the achievement of the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals. To that end, it would be important to define criteria and mechanisms for evaluating the strength of the evidence of impact, together with other experts, and ensure that practices are well defined and actionable in different contexts, while allowing space for experimentation. This will be a key priority of CEPA while preparing its 18th session to be held in April 2019. Meanwhile we hope that the 11 principles, presented below, will already now be used to guide SDG implementation. Each principle is followed by examples of commonly used strategies.

The first three principles focus on **effectiveness**.

1. Competence

To perform their functions effectively, institutions are to have sufficient expertise, resources and tools to deal adequately with the mandates under their authority. Commonly used strategies include promotion of a professional public sector workforce, strategic human resources management, leadership development and training of civil servants, performance management, results-based management, financial management and control, efficient and fair revenue administration, and investment in e-government.

2. **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. This regards strategic planning and foresight, regulatory impact analysis, promotion of coherent policymaking, strengthening national statistical systems, monitoring and evaluation systems, science-policy interface, risk management frameworks, and data sharing.

3. **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. This includes centre of government coordination under the Head of State or Government, and collaboration, coordination, integration and dialogue across levels of government and functional areas.

Three more principles address **accountability**:

4. **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. This is about promotion of anti-corruption policies, practices and bodies, codes of conduct for public officials, competitive public procurement, elimination of bribery and trading in influence, conflict of interest policies, whistle-blower protection, and provision of adequate remuneration and equitable pay scales for public servants

5. **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. Examples are proactive disclosure of information, budget transparency, open government data, registries of beneficial ownership, and lobby registries.

6. **Independent oversight**

To retain trust in government, oversight agencies are to act according to strictly professional considerations and apart from and unaffected by others. This covers promotion of the independence of regulatory agencies, arrangements for review of administrative decisions by courts or other bodies, independent audit, and respect for legality.

Five principles focus on **inclusiveness**:

7. **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. This includes promotion of equitable fiscal and monetary policy, promotion of social equity, data disaggregation, and systematic follow-up and review.

8. **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. Strategies include 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, and gender-responsive budgeting.

9. **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. Examples are free and fair election, regulatory process of public consultation, multi-stakeholder forums, participatory budgeting, and community-driven development.

10. **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. Examples include fiscal federalism, strengthening urban governance, strengthening municipal finance and local finance systems, enhancement of local capacity for prevention, adaptation and mitigation of external shocks, and multilevel governance.

11. **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. This includes sustainable development impact assessment, long-term public debt management, long-term territorial planning and spatial development, and ecosystem management.

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