



# Application of the principles of effective governance for sustainable development at the subnational level\*

## Summary

Subsidiarity, integrity, oversight, and participation are among the more salient elements when applying the principles of effective governance for sustainable development at the subnational level. Effective multi-level governance is key. Reforms might be needed to better support the achievement of the Goals, alongside further efforts to strengthen subnational governments and promote whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches, while enhancing fiscal capacity and financial management systems. Sustainable Development Goal implementation should be integrated into national and subnational policies that reflect local priorities, needs, challenges and opportunities in order to strengthen overall policy coherence across sectors, as well as to promote multilevel governance arrangements.

## Recommendations

The Committee recommends that the Council encourage governments at all levels to apply the principles of effective governance for sustainable development, endorsed by the Council in its resolution 2018/12 of 2 July 2018, to all public institutions and in support of the implementation of all Sustainable Development Goals, taking into account different governance structures, national and subnational realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities. (Paragraph 9)

The Committee also recommends that the Council encourage governments to continue to identify and review related technical guidelines and experiences to operationalize the principles at the national and subnational levels, including from sectoral perspectives, and to further engage the relevant United Nations organizations, regional organizations and professional and academic communities in this regard, in an inclusive manner, together with all relevant stakeholders. (Paragraph 10)

► See [ECOSOC resolution 2022/9](#)

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\* Excerpt from Committee of Experts on Public Administration, Report on the twenty-first session. See Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2022, Supplement No. 24 ([E/2022/44-E/C.16/2022/9](#))

## Discussion

### Assessment of strengths and weaknesses of subnational administration

As an analytical framework, the principles have been helpful in drawing attention to questions of effectiveness, accountability and inclusiveness, as well as good practices, while highlighting areas where governance improvements could be pursued, considering the context, needs and priorities of each country.

The localization of the Sustainable Development Goals, including their implementation and monitoring, requires different, integrated approaches and tools, including top-down and bottom-up approaches involving all levels of government, and a whole-of-society approach. Many multilevel governance arrangements exist but they might have to be reformed to better support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. A balance between top-down, bottom-up and real-time approaches to multilevel governance will be important.

### Building forward better

One of the main recommendations of the Committee is to promote the integration of Sustainable Development Goal implementation into national and subnational policies that reflect local priorities, needs, challenges and opportunities in order to strengthen overall policy coherence across sectors, as well as to promote multilevel governance arrangements. Territorial approaches to spatial development that value and build upon existing economic and social capital are seen as valuable and their use could be expanded. The coordination of policies across administrative boundaries and functions will help to optimize the interlinkages

The Committee reiterates that the main strength of subnational governments lays in their close relationship with and proximity to citizens. During the pandemic, subnational governments have been responsive and innovative in maintaining operations while managing and responding to the crisis, including by mobilizing resources and investing in capacities. There is a need to examine how such closeness to citizens could be leveraged to provide more rapid responses in many policy areas.

The biggest challenges for subnational authorities continue to be limitations in leadership, a lack of technical and managerial capacity, a lack of resources and data, and limited competences to advance global commitments while also fulfilling routine government functions. Those challenges are sometimes reflected in the low quality of public services and a lack of trust in institutions, especially in low-income countries and in countries where decentralization is a recent process.

between cities and commuting zones, and between rural and urban areas.

In addition, subnational authorities could consider institutionalizing integrity measures by establishing anti-corruption legal frameworks to boost freedom of information and whistle-blower protection, enhancing merit-based hiring to reduce inequalities and discriminatory practices within government, and expanding audit and control systems to enhance oversight. Raising awareness of the value of ethics and integrity among young people, through educational systems, could provide a solid foundation for future efforts.

Additional technical and financial support to subnational governments in many of the practice areas enumerated in the principles is seen as crucial. Alongside direct support from central Governments, that could be achieved through strengthened international partnerships in areas such as data collection and performance monitoring. Strengthening oversight by civil society, including through the application of a standard methodology for measuring people's satisfaction with public services, is found to be useful in promoting

institutional effectiveness, accountability and inclusiveness.

Strengthened efforts to promote transparency, access to information, open government and digital government and the promotion of participatory approaches, for example in budgeting, are identified as significant contributors to building trust in local authorities and engaging communities at the subnational level.

## Continued operationalization of the principles at all levels

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The Committee welcomes the efforts of the Secretariat to take the Committee's recommendations forward and appreciates the partnership of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs with the African Peer Review Mechanism, spearheaded by the Chair, which has yielded very satisfactory results and is seen as a model of collaboration. In addition to an African Peer Review Mechanism baseline study on the implementation of the principles, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the African Peer Review Mechanism have convened a series of regional workshops for African countries to enhance their understanding of the principles, as well as concrete strategies for operationalizing them. Such initiatives are to be encouraged.

Continued collaboration with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development is also

appreciated, including in the areas of policy coherence for sustainable development, multilevel governance and the promotion of a more granular examination of governance and public administration challenges at the subnational level. Strengthened engagement with United Cities and Local Governments could also be beneficial in promoting the principles at the subnational level.

The Committee stresses that additional resources for the Secretariat would be helpful to build on such engagement, strengthen interaction with regional and other organizations, and continue to expand the operationalization of the principles in response to the apparent demand and interest of many countries.
















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