



# Application of the principles of effective governance for sustainable development for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals\*

## Summary

In the context of application of the principles of effective governance, inclusiveness is a cornerstone of sustainable development. Countries should build on efforts to implement their own models of participation that leave no one behind while strengthening the enabling environment for civic engagement. Regarding governance indicators, multidimensional coverage of each of the 11 principles could provide a useful way to enhance policy analysis related to SDG 16. Indicators should be detailed enough to capture the quality of a government's response to the SDGs while addressing important analytical gaps in review processes.

## 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 12)

*Encourage* the Committee 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 13)

*Welcome* the ongoing initiative of the African Peer Review Mechanism of the African Union to promote the application of the principles among its member States in collaboration with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, and *encourage* other regional mechanisms, such as those associated with the United Nations regional commissions, to develop and implement similar initiatives in alignment with their own mandates and processes. (Paragraph 14)

*Encourage* Governments at all levels to enhance efforts to promote the meaningful participation of stakeholders in matters that directly affect them, including the poorest and most vulnerable, and to implement models of participation based on whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches that leave no one behind. (Paragraph 16)

► See ECOSOC resolution 2023/28

---

\* Excerpt from Committee of Experts on Public Administration, Report on the [twenty-second session](#). See Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2022, Supplement No. 24 ([E/2023/44-E/C.16/2023/9](#))

## Discussion

### A. Promoting the principle of participation

---

The Committee observes that public participation is a cornerstone of effective governance for sustainable development and intrinsic to the common vision of the 2030 Agenda. Countries should build their own models of public participation that leaves no one behind, paying particular attention to women, young people and vulnerable groups whose voices might not otherwise be heard in policy processes, even when their interests are directly affected.

### Institutionalizing participation in government administration

---

The means of engagement are too often devised in response to an immediate or specific need or to meet ad hoc requirements despite decades of study and experience, including on the part of operational agencies supporting national development objectives in the field. While recognizing that new opportunities have emerged, especially in the digital realm, there is nonetheless a wealth of knowledge to draw on from all development contexts. The co-production of services with citizens as partners rather than subjects, participatory budgeting and gender budgeting are some examples of well-developed practice areas.

The setting up of normative and institutional arrangements is seen as vital to strengthening the quality of participation, both offline and online, as well as to fostering the legitimacy of public policy based on the inclusion of all relevant stakeholders and to promoting accountability for meaningful participation on the part of government officials. This effort could enhance ownership of the Goals and support effective implementation, monitoring and review at all levels. The Committee notes that the absence of participation also comes at a cost, for

Governments should adopt whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches, encompassing a truly multilevel and multi-stakeholder governance system that puts people at the centre of development. They should create an enabling environment for participation, by protecting the right of participation and civic space. Political will and the means of implementation are some of the main elements of creating such an enabling environment.

example, in the rejection of the outcomes of expert reviews that do not involve stakeholders even if the same conclusions have been reached in another forum through an inclusive process.

A change of mindsets, attitudes and behaviours on the part of public officials, who might be reluctant to widen the use and scope of participatory processes, is a crucial step that calls for attention by Governments.

Having Governments give and receive feedback on participatory exercises undertaken or planned could help to promote trust and engagement. Such an effort could also help Governments ensure that public participation mechanisms, processes and tools, including digital platforms, are well designed, implemented and monitored. The specific capacity-building needs of subnational authorities need to be considered, given the ambitions set out in the 2030 Agenda and the persistent difficulties associated with limited administrative capacity at the local level. The relative inattention paid to stakeholder engagement in voluntary local review reports is seen as a possible concern in the localization of the Goals.

## Strengthening the enabling environment for participation

---

Governments should urgently address challenges that hamper the implementation of public participation, including a lack of public trust in government, a limited understanding of individual rights and civic duty, and a limited capacity of civil society actors to monitor policy implementation, while taking into account the national context.

A holistic approach should be taken, and public servants and non-State actors at all levels should be empowered and trained through education and

capacity-building measures, including the provision of adequate training to increase their awareness of their rights, duties and obligations, which could strengthen their sense of belonging and ownership. It is noted that, given their proximity to citizens, subnational governments are well-positioned to benefit from participation strategies. It is also noted that civil society organizations might choose to strengthen their own participatory approaches and will not wait to be invited to voice their concerns.

## B. Indicators of effective governance for sustainable development

---

The Committee notes that, despite some progress in monitoring and measuring progress on the Goals, data gaps continue to be a major obstacle in follow-up and review processes, for example due to missing time series, timeliness, data granularity and incomplete coverage by countries. In addition, the Committee indicates that some procedures to generate data from qualitative indicators are not statistically relevant.

Even if some of the main data gaps in the globally agreed Sustainable Development Goals indicator framework are addressed, the framework will still be deficient when it comes to assessing the quality of governance and its impact on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Most of the indicators refer to policy objectives rather than to how to achieve them.

### Indicators for priority-setting

---

In addressing these difficulties, a distinction could be made between indicators for priority-setting and indicators for analytical purposes. A handful of top-level indicators are often the most valuable for priority-setting, for example if choices have to be made between investing in roads or schools. A focus on human rights would be paramount in decision-making of this kind.

The Committee also notes that governance indices encapsulating diverse targets, instruments and institutional set-ups are sometimes used by decision-makers but could be criticized for their complexity, lack of methodological transparency and exclusion of qualitative assessments.

### Indicators for policy analysis

---

With respect to indicators for policy analysis, the Committee underscores that despite the causal relationship between the governance aspects of Goals 16 and 17 and the achievement of all the Goals, policy indicators are often preferred to governance indicators.

Analyses of the interconnections between elements of effective governance and all the Goals could feasibly be undertaken through multi-layered network analyses supported by artificial intelligence. An important step would be to precisely define indicators that reflect the governance principles,

drawing on the work of entities that are active in that area. The elaboration of an agreed methodology for indicator 17.14.1 of the Goals, on

policy coherence for sustainable development reflects recent progress along these lines.

## A way forward

---

The Committee agrees that indicators that provide comprehensive coverage of the principles would provide a useful starting point for future work. Indicators should be detailed enough to capture the quality of a government's response to the Goals at the national and subnational levels and address analytical gaps in review processes, while speaking to the way in which different dimensions of institution-building might reinforce or undermine each other in a range of national contexts.

Voluntary national reviews are only one part of the review architecture of the Goals. The governance principles and indicators could be addressed as a common thread linking the implementation of all the Goals both within and outside of formal review processes. The processes include related discussion of voluntary national reviews on the margins of the high-level political forum, thematic reviews of the Goals at the high-level political forum, regional-level

review mechanisms and national processes of review beyond the voluntary national reviews.

Going forward, further collaboration with, for example, the African Peer Review Mechanism, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the United Nations Development will be essential to ensuring relevance and legitimacy.

The Committee underscores that, in many respects, the ongoing initiative of the African Peer Review Mechanism to promote the application of the principles among its member States in collaboration with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat continues to be highly productive. Other regional mechanisms, such as those associated with the regional commissions, could be encouraged to develop and implement similar initiatives in alignment with their own mandates and processes.

---

## Technical guidance for government officials

UN DESA's work is supported by a growing series of strategy guidance notes on the many facets of effective governance for sustainable development which embody the knowledge and experience of hundreds of committed expert practitioners and academics from around the world.
















➤ [Read more](#)






## Related expert papers on this topic (2016-present)





Application of the principles of effective governance for sustainable development at the subnational level (E.C.16/2023/4) (23 January 2023)

[Arabic](#) | [Chinese](#) | [English](#) | [French](#) | [Russian](#) | [Spanish](#)








-  Knowing better where countries stand on their way to 2030 ([Conference room paper](#)) (20 December 2022)
-  The use of governance indicators in Voluntary National Review and Voluntary Local Review processes and what it may mean for building strong institutions for the SDGs ([Conference room paper](#)) (20 January 2023)
-  Application of the principles of effective governance for sustainable development at the subnational level (E.C.16/2022/5) (24 January 2022)  
[Arabic](#) | [Chinese](#) | [English](#) | [French](#) | [Russian](#) | [Spanish](#)
-  The status of implementation of the principles of effective governance for sustainable development in Kenya ([Conference room paper](#)) (25 November 2020)
-  Effective governance for sustainable development: putting principles into practice and reviewing outcomes (E/C.16/2020/3) (20 January 2020)  
[Arabic](#) | [Chinese](#) | [English](#) | [French](#) | [Russian](#) | [Spanish](#)
-  Relating the principles of effective governance for sustainable development to practices and results (E/C.16/2019/4) (23 January 2019)  
[Arabic](#) | [Chinese](#) | [English](#) | [French](#) | [Russian](#) | [Spanish](#)
-  Elaborating principles of effective governance for sustainable development ([E/C.16/2018/5](#)) (14 February 2018)  
[Arabic](#) | [Chinese](#) | [English](#) | [French](#) | [Russian](#) | [Spanish](#)
-  The question of the protection of whistle-blowers (E/C.16/2018/6) (14 February 2018)  
[Arabic](#) | [Chinese](#) | [English](#) | [French](#) | [Russian](#) | [Spanish](#)
-  Institutional transformation to strengthen the well-being of rural and urban communities: the case of Malaysia (E/C.16/2018/7) (14 February 2018)  
[Arabic](#) | [Chinese](#) | [English](#) | [French](#) | [Russian](#) | [Spanish](#)
-  Appraising institutional capacity for policy integration ([Conference room paper](#)) (12 February 2018)
-  The issues for the current discussion are citizens' engagement in public decision making, effective institutions and access to information ([Conference room paper](#)) (25 April 2018)
-  Whistle-blower protection and the implementation of article 33 of the United Nations Convention against Corruption on the protection of reporting persons ([Conference room paper](#)) (19 April 2018)
-  Towards a set of internationally recognized principles of responsible and effective governance ([E/C.16/2017/6](#)) (3 February 2017)  
[Arabic](#) | [Chinese](#) | [English](#) | [French](#) | [Russian](#) | [Spanish](#)
-  Diversity and non-discrimination in public administration: strategic enablers of sustainable development (E/C.16/2016/3) (20 January 2016)  
[Arabic](#) | [Chinese](#) | [English](#) | [French](#) | [Russian](#) | [Spanish](#)
-  Oversight institutions, mechanisms and standards of government administration (E/C.16/2016/5) (18 January 2016)  
[Arabic](#) | [Chinese](#) | [English](#) | [French](#) | [Russian](#) | [Spanish](#)

-  Developing transformative leadership and enhancing relevant competencies of public servants (E/C.16/2016/7) (25 January 2016)  
[Arabic](#) | [Chinese](#) | [English](#) | [French](#) | [Russian](#) | [Spanish](#)
-  [Sharing responsibilities and resources among levels of government: localizing the SDGs \(Conference room paper\)](#) (January 2016)
-  [Promotion of diversity in employment and an inclusive workplace culture \(Conference room paper\)](#) (14 March 2016)
-  Promotion of innovation and learning in the course of public policy implementation (Conference room paper - [English](#) | [Spanish](#)) (8 March 2016)
-  Possible development of a set of internationally-recognized principles of governance by CEPA ([Background note](#)) (15 April 2016)

See also:

-  APRM baseline study on the implementation of CEPA principles in Africa ([Executive summary](#))
-  Praia City Group handbook on governance statistics ([Framework](#))

## [Related meetings](#)

-  HLPF 2023 VNR Lab: [Principles of effective governance in VNRs: Enhancing policy coherence for sustainable development](#) (19 July 2023, New York, USA)
-  Workshop: [Strengthening National Institutional Capacities for the UN Decade of Action and Delivery for Sustainable Development and AU Agenda 2063](#) (27 to 29 October 2022, Cape Town, South Africa)
-  Workshop: [Promotion of Intergenerational Equity for Sustainable Development](#) (8 March 2022, virtual meeting)
-  Webinar: [Policy Coherence in Africa in Response to COVID-19](#) (17 January 2022, virtual meeting)
-  Workshop: [Sound policymaking for sustainable development with a focus on Latin America](#) (18 February 2021, virtual meeting)
-  Workshop: [Sound policymaking for sustainable development with a focus on Africa](#) (18 February 2021, virtual meeting)
-  Workshop: [Strategic planning and foresight in Africa in response to COVID-19](#) (8 December 2021, virtual meeting)