Key Messages from Webinar 3 on Transparency, Accountability and Ethics in Public Institutions

1. **Key points from the presentation on Open Government, Open Data and Transparency by Patricio Lloret, Undersecretary, General Undersecretariat of Anti-Corruption Public Policy, Ecuador**

   - **Good practices to promote transparency, accountability and ethics:** Good practices to promote transparency, accountability and ethics in the public sector in Ecuador include activities related to *participation* (such as public debates, citizen consultation and involvement and co-design and co-production of policies and public services), *collaboration and innovation* (such as interoperability, infrastructure and digital public governance), and *transparency, accountability and integrity* (such as portals and open data, public information and indexes and civic competencies, clear language and ethics in the public sector).

   - **Open government national action plan:** Ecuador's first national action plan on open government partnership (2019-2021) included goals on open data policy and guidelines, re-design and update of the open data portal, public procurement information platform, implementation of participation rights and access to environmental information, adherence to EITI and confirmation of the multi-stakeholder group, toolkit for the promotion of the right of access to public information, co-creation of the National Plans Citizen Observatory against gender-based violence, citizen innovation laboratory, simplification of legal paperwork and Civil Society Observatory, and on co-creation of a strategy to improve the quality of public services. There is a 94% compliance with the goals with 55 milestones executed and 59 milestones planned for.

   - **Plain language:** Plain language makes it easier for the public to understand and use government communications. The plain language network in Ecuador was established in July 2023 with members from public institutions, civil society and academia.

   - **Key skills and mindsets to uphold and promote transparency, accountability and ethics:** Transparency ("the more strictly we are watched, the better we behave", Jeremy Bentham) versus integrity ("integrity is doing the right thing, even if nobody is watching", Jim Stovall).

   - **Key takeaways:** i) Digital Democracy, Citizen Participation and Civil Space strengthening are key elements to promote transparency, accountability and ethics in the public sector, ii) Open Government and its pillars are key to strengthen democracy and to regain public trust, and iii) Public Innovation topics and solutions must be citizen-sourced and citizen-centered in order to maximize results.

2. **Key messages from the presentation on Technology for Anti-Corruption in Thailand and Southeast Asia by Torplus Yomnak, Assistant Professor of Economics, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand and Director, Knowledge Hub for Regional Anti-Corruption and Good Governance Collaboration (KRAC)**

   - **Open data:** Open data leads to enhanced transparency and more effective anti-corruption efforts and monitoring of use of public funds. It enables people to whistleblow more

effectively. An example is an open data database on public procurement in Thailand (actai.co) that everyone can use and identify potential cases of corruption. The database includes official information such as the bid prices and information on the bidding companies. With information, people can make a difference. Linking people with technology creates effective anti-corruption ecosystems.

- **Collaboration:** There is a need for collaboration among anti-corruption organizations to discuss new tools, technologies and ideas to make anti-corruption efforts more effective. An example of this is the Southeast Asian Anti-Corruption Network (SEA-ACN) for Civil Society Organizations. It was launched in December 2023 with 15 member organizations from 8 countries across ASEAN region and ASIA. It focuses on open data, public procurement, business integrity and whistleblowing protection.

3. **Key points from the presentation on Transparency and Accountability against Corruption: The Roots by Evangelos Mantzaris, Senior Researcher, Stellenbosch University, South Africa**

- **Government transparency:** Government transparency is a government's obligation to be open, accountable and honest with citizens on how it is conducting business and spending taxes. To ensure that transparency alleviates corruption, information must not only reach and be received by the public, but the public must act upon obtaining the information.
- **Public Service Anti-corruption Strategy:** A Public Service Anti-corruption Strategy is informed by the need for a holistic and integrated approach to fighting corruption, with a balanced mixture of prevention, investigation, prosecution and public participation as the platform for the strategy. Examples of transparency and accountability in local government interactions include open budgets, public disclosures, public meetings and hearings, online portals and databases, open data Initiatives, live streaming of meetings and timely and regular updates.
- **Accountability:** Accountability refers to the obligation of public servants and public institution to account for their activities, provide information about decisions and actions, explain and justify decisions, accept responsibility for them, and to disclose the results in a transparent manner. Specifically, in terms of corruption, the principle of accountability holds that States have a duty to respect, protect and fulfil rights. In the case of an alleged violation of rights, they must investigate, prosecute and provide an effective remedy. In general, accountability is taking responsibility for a particular action or goal. Public sector accountability can be seen as appropriate people taking responsibility for working towards appropriately defined results.

4. **Key points from the presentation on Enhancing Transparency, Accountability and Ethics in Public Institutions by Anni Haataja-Beeri, Programme Management Officer, PMCDU, DPIDG/UN DESA**

- **Why Sustainable Development Goal 16 of the 2030 Agenda is central to the achievement of all SDGs:** While issues related to transparency, accountability and anti-corruption are directly addressed in SDG 16 on Peace, justice and strong institutions, issues related to them underpin the achievement of all the SDGs and are central to the 2030 Agenda's key principle of leaving no one behind. Effective, inclusive and accountable public institutions and digital government are key to people's well-being in every society across the world. Through the design and

implementation of public policies and the delivery of services and programmes, effective governance and public institutions directly support the implementation of all the SDGs.

- **The 11 Principles of effective governance for sustainable development:** Public sector reforms needed to achieve the SDGs remain a major challenge in many countries. To address this challenge, the UN Committee of Experts on Public Administration (CEPA) has developed 11 Principles of effective governance for sustainable development. They include the principles of Integrity, Transparency and Independent Oversight. The Principles are made operational through 62 strategies on which there are several strategy guidance notes already available, including one on fiscal and budget transparency.

- **How corruption puts the SDGs at risk:** Corruption represents a major obstacle for achieving the SDGs. It misdirects funds intended for health, education and climate action among others, hampers economic growth, increases poverty through growing income inequality and reduced access to services. It undermines the quantity and quality of public services and restricts access to quality health, water and education, with a disproportionate impact on the poor. Corruption erodes peoples trust in public institutions, undermines the rule of law, democratic processes and justice. Corrupt practices are fundamentally in conflict with the principle of Leaving no one behind. As UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has said, "corruption is criminal, immoral and the ultimate betrayal of public trust."

- **Status of corruption related SDG 16 indicators:** Globally little or no progress towards SDG 16 has been made since the SDGs were adapted in 2015. Fair progress has been made in roughly one third of the targets under Goal 16, while about one quarter have stagnated or regressed and more than 40% of the targets still lack sufficient data for follow-up. Globally 13% of businesses and 20% of individuals paid a bribe to a public official or were asked to do so.

- **UN DESA's capacity development support in the areas of transparency, accountability – Curriculum on Governance for the SDGs:** The UN DESA Curriculum on Governance for the Sustainable Development Goals aims at developing the knowledge and capacities of public servants required to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Curriculum is a set of Training of Trainers Capacity Development Toolkits, which contain ready-to-use and customizable training material on key governance dimensions needed to advance SDG implementation. One of the toolkits is on Transparency, Accountability and Ethics in Public Institutions. It consists of materials for a 5-day training. UN DESA has also developed a 1-hour self-paced online training course on transparency, accountability and ethics in public institutions with focus on understanding and assessing corruption.

- **Summit of the Future and the Pact of the Future:** The Summit of the Future brings world leaders together in September 2024 at the UN Headquarters in NY. It will focus on how to deliver on the SDGs and other existing international commitments while also taking concrete steps to respond to challenges and opportunities of the future. This will be achieved through an action-oriented outcome document called the Pact for the Future. Transparent, effective and accountable institutions, addressing corruption, and transparency, accountability in the use, development and deployment of Artificial Intelligence are featured in the draft Pact.

Summary

- **Corruption puts the SDGs at risk:** Corruption represents a major obstacle for achieving the SDGs. It misdirects funds intended for health, education and climate action among others, hampers economic growth, increases poverty through growing income inequality and reduced access to services. It undermines the quantity and quality of public services and restricts access to quality health, water and education, with a disproportionate impact on the poor. Corruption erodes peoples trust in public institutions, undermines the rule of law, democratic processes and justice.
- **Citizen participation**: Important to engage people and ensure they have access to information. The information provided to the people needs to be easy to understand. Civil society plays a critical role in anti-corruption efforts and holding governments accountable and transparent.
- **Culture of integrity**: Ensuring public servants and leadership have the mindset that includes the values of transparency, accountability and ethics. UN DESA's Curriculum on Governance for the SDGs supports these efforts.
- **Open data**: Importance of having accurate data and making it accessible to people. Technology, however, is not the end goal but a tool to achieve more transparent and accountable public institutions.
- **Legal frameworks**: Importance of having legal frameworks on anti-corruption, transparency and access to information and enforcing them.
- **Holistic approach:** In transparency, accountability and anti-corruption efforts it is important to emply a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach.
- **Communication:** Important for public servants and public institutions to communicate to people their efforts, role and vision on enhancing transparency and accountability.