

Rebuilding Trust in Government by Advancing Innovation in Public Service Delivery for Social Inclusion in the Global South

Second World Summit for Social Development Solutions Session

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Report

Introduction

The Solutions Session on “*Rebuilding Trust in Government by Advancing Innovation in Public Service Delivery for Social Inclusion in the Global South*” was held on 5 November 2025 at the Qatar National Convention Center, during the Second World Summit for Social Development. The event was organized by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), through its Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG) and the United Nations Project Office on Governance (UNPOG), in collaboration with the Republic of Maldives and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA).

The session convened high-level representatives from governments, civil society organizations, the private sector, and international organizations to examine the roots of declining trust in government, explore strategies to rebuild confidence through innovation and inclusiveness, and identify key actions for the way forward. The session was opened by H.E. Ms. Khrystyna Hayovyshyn, Chair of the 64th Commission for Social Development (CSocD64) and Deputy Permanent Representative of the Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the United Nations.



The Opening Session, titled “*Rebuilding Trust in Government: Key Challenges and Issues*,” featured interventions by Ms. Adriana Alberti, Chief of the Programme Management and Capacity Development Unit in the Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG) of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), and Mr. Younes Abouyoub, Chief of Governance and State-Building in the Governance and Conflict Prevention Division for the Arab Region at the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN ESCWA). H.E. Dr. Ali Naseer Mohamed, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Maldives to the United Nations, also delivered remarks.

The panel featured H.E. Ms. Yorleni León Marchena, Minister of Human Development and Social Inclusion of Costa Rica; Ms. Mariyam Midhfa Naeem, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Maldives; Dr. Despoina Afroditi Milaki, United Nations Representative of the International Presentation Association; and Mr. Philipp-Andreas Schmidt, Head of Public Affairs, Science and Sustainability for Bayer in the Middle East.

Speakers emphasized that rebuilding trust in public institutions is critical, as public institutions are a catalyst for change across all the 17 Sustainable Development Goals - ensuring that global commitments translate into tangible results through fair policies, sound regulations, and inclusive public services that truly leave no one behind. The *World Social Report 2025* has highlighted that trust in institutions and trust among people are central determinants of social resilience. Trust is the foundation of the social contract and an essential enabler for achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Trust is the invisible glue that binds societies together. It is the foundation upon which people’s confidence in public institutions, policies, and progress is built. When citizens believe in their institutions, they are more likely to participate in public life, comply with laws, invest in their communities, and work together for the common good. In times of crisis, from pandemics to climate shocks, high-trust societies respond faster and recover more equitably.

Yet today, that trust is under pressure. Around the world, people are questioning whether governments can deliver on their promises to provide jobs, ensure quality public services, and respond effectively to crises. Economic uncertainty, inequality, corruption, disinformation, and lack of transparency all erode confidence. When trust breaks down, social cohesion weakens, polarization deepens, and the very fabric of democracy begins to fray.

Rebuilding and maintaining trust requires more than good intentions. It demands visible progress in people’s lives and effective cooperation between governments, communities, and all partners in development.

1. Why is Trust in Government Low

Participants identified several interconnected factors driving the erosion of trust in public institutions across the world:



- **Ineffectiveness and slow responsiveness:** Governments are struggling to meet citizens' expectations in the face of complex crises — from economic shocks to technological disruptions and climate change. As the Minister of Costa Rica highlighted, many governments were built for the realities of the 20th century and are now too slow and fragmented to respond effectively to today's fast-changing and interconnected challenges. This gap has widened the disconnect between citizens and institutions.
- **Inequality and social exclusion:** Persistent disparities in access to education, healthcare, digital connectivity, and employment have deepened inequality and weakened social cohesion. When services fail to reach the poorest and most vulnerable, citizens perceive governance as unfair and unrepresentative. The *Global Sustainable Development Report 2025* underscores that getting SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) back on track requires additional support to vulnerable groups, measures to combat discrimination, and structural reforms to ensure inclusive growth.
- **Corruption and weak accountability:** Opaque decision-making, limited oversight, and tolerance of impunity have undermined confidence in the integrity of public institutions. Citizens often feel excluded from policymaking and unable to hold leaders accountable.
- **Misinformation and polarization:** Disinformation, amplified through digital platforms, has distorted public understanding of policies and reduced confidence in public communication.
- **Lack of visible results:** When government promises are not matched by measurable improvements in daily life, trust erodes further. People begin to question not only capacity but also commitment to serve the public good.

2. Promoting Trust: The Roles of Governments, Civil Society, and the Private Sector

Speakers agreed that restoring trust requires a shared commitment and collaboration among governments, civil society, and the private sector. Each plays a distinct yet interdependent role in ensuring that governance is effective, inclusive, transparent, and accountable.

Government

Governments must demonstrate that institutions can perform, listen, and deliver. Several country experiences were shared:

- Costa Rica underscored that trust is the backbone of its democratic tradition and the foundation of its social contract. However, today's challenges require governments to move beyond transparency as a mere data exercise and instead use information



to provide meaningful, responsive, and measurable results. The Costa Rican representative called for modernizing the state to make it more agile, data-driven, and citizen-centered, emphasizing that transparency should translate into better outcomes and stronger social cohesion.

- The Maldives shared how innovation and digital transformation can serve as a catalyst for rebuilding trust in a geographically dispersed island nation. With over 1,200 islands, a population of 500,000 inhabitants, and a constitutional obligation to provide services in each island, the Maldives has launched a “*Government 2.0 Transformation Agenda*” built on six guiding principles:
 1. Transparency in the design of services, so everyone has access to information
 2. Unified government systems, breaking institutional silos
 3. Citizen-centric service design, inclusive of migrants and multilingual users
 4. Data security and privacy as core commitments
 5. Timely and efficient delivery of digital services, and
 6. Digital identity and single-window access supported by strong cybersecurity.

This approach demonstrates how digital governance can enhance inclusion, accountability, and trust in public institutions. The importance of adopting ethical and human-centered innovation, expanding open data and feedback mechanisms, and ensuring representation of vulnerable groups in decision-making was also highlighted as a key component of digital transformation.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

Civil society leaders emphasized that CSOs are vital bridges between governments and communities. As illustrated by the International Presentation Association (IPA), NGOs work directly with people in vulnerable situations, gather community-based evidence, and bring it to national and international forums to inform policymaking. Working directly with people experiencing vulnerability, discrimination, or exclusion, NGOs deliver essential services and empower marginalized groups through education, skills training, and community resilience initiatives—from Indigenous communities in the Philippines to disaster-affected areas in Papua New Guinea and Australia.

Their advocacy helps ensure that services reflect real needs and that institutions remain accountable to those they serve. NGOs also contribute to evidence-based policymaking by collecting first-hand data and community insights that help governments design policies and services that truly reflect people’s needs. Through research and advocacy—such as the IPA’s study on gender-based violence and its publication *From Copenhagen to Doha: 30 Years of Advancing Social Development*—civil society provides valuable knowledge that strengthens policy relevance, inclusiveness, and legitimacy.



Moreover, NGOs act as independent watchdogs, monitoring government accountability and adherence to human rights, thereby reinforcing transparency and integrity. Participants emphasized that meaningful and continuous partnerships between governments and civil society are essential to ensure that public service delivery remains people-centered, inclusive, and connected to real community priorities.

Private Sector

Private sector participants highlighted that trust is built through dialogue, collaboration, and shared responsibility. Business representatives underscored the importance of public-private partnerships (PPPs) to deliver innovation and scale solutions. For example, companies such as Bayer emphasized that partnerships supporting government capacity building, private sector innovation, and civil society outreach are essential for sustainable and inclusive impact. A long-term, collaborative approach ensures that services are both effective and trusted. When the private sector aligns its actions with national goals (e.g., in food security, climate adaptation) and partners with governments, this strengthens the social contract and can help to build trust in institutions.

3. Five Key Actions Moving Forward

The session concluded with consensus around five priority actions for governments and partners to rebuild and sustain trust in government:

1. Modernize State Institutions and Strengthen Whole-of-Government Approaches and Data-Driven Governance

Building on Costa Rica's call, governments should modernize bureaucratic structures, promote collaboration across government institutions, use data to measure results, and deliver concrete outcomes that citizens can benefit from. Furthermore, institutions must become agile and forward-looking, able to anticipate risks, use data strategically, and govern for the long term. Building a culture of innovation and foresight within public institutions is vital for anticipating challenges and maintaining public confidence.

2. Design Citizen-Centric and Inclusive Services

Governments must be guided by core principles—including equity, inclusivity, integrity, transparency, accountability, effectiveness, and responsiveness—to deliver high-quality and people-centered services that foster trust and social cohesion. Public services should be accessible to all, addressing systemic barriers faced by vulnerable and marginalized groups, and eliminating all forms of discrimination. The representative of Costa Rica shared a concrete example demonstrating how consulting women—particularly female heads of households, among the poorest in society—in the design of public services ensured that those services effectively addressed their specific needs and priorities. To ensure the design of citizen-centric and inclusive services, transformational leadership and new competencies are essential — alongside a change in public-sector mindsets toward a more human-centric, and innovative administration.



3. Promote Meaningful Participation

Governments must prioritize people's inclusion and promote their meaningful participation in policymaking and implementation at all levels. Grassroots voices must be placed at the heart of decision-making. To build a better future, space must be created for every voice—especially those of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged—whose experiences are key to improving programmes and services. No voice is too quiet to be heard. The engagement of civil society must not be optional, but essential. Thus, Governments must consult citizens, particularly women and vulnerable groups, to ensure that public services and policies address real needs. Designing with people—not for them—builds legitimacy and shared ownership. Thus, rebuilding trust depends on ensuring that people are part of the process — co-creating policies, co-producing services, and sharing responsibility for sustainable development.

4. Leverage Innovation and Digital Technologies for Transparency and Accessibility

As the Maldives experience shows, digital tools can bridge geographic and social divides when guided by principles of openness, data protection, and inclusivity. Technology should empower people, not exclude them. Public services should be accessible to all, addressing systemic barriers faced by vulnerable and marginalized groups, and eliminating all forms of discrimination. Transparency and accountability are equally vital. Open data systems, independent oversight, and integrity frameworks must become the norm. Citizens must have access to information, the ability to voice concerns safely, and confidence that institutions will act with integrity and efficiency.

5. Foster Partnerships and Collaborative Governance

Nobody can work alone; bringing together knowledge and diverse stakeholders to find solutions that meet people's needs is key. So, ultimately, restoring trust requires inclusive and collaborative governance, grounded in partnership among governments, civil society, and other stakeholders. By embracing these principles and working collaboratively in co-creating solutions and implementing programmes that benefit all citizens, governments can enhance the legitimacy of their institutions, improve service delivery, and accelerate progress toward the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Partnerships, if managed well and transparently, can enhance innovation, build credibility, and sustain long-term trust.

Conclusion

As emphasized by participants, trust is the foundation of the social contract, the currency of cooperation, and the cornerstone of resilient, inclusive societies. Experiences from Costa Rica and the Maldives demonstrate that while contexts differ, the goal is shared: governments must evolve to meet citizens needs and their growing expectations in a fast-paced world through innovation and partnerships. Representatives of the civil society organizations and the private sector underscored the importance of working together by building and sustaining partnerships.



Panelists agreed that rebuilding trust in government is both a moral imperative and a governance necessity. Trust cannot be restored through rhetoric—it must be earned through consistent delivery, transparency, and inclusion. Governments that deliver more inclusive, effective, and innovative services are better placed to rebuild public trust, enhance legitimacy, and accelerate progress toward the 2030 Agenda.

Moving forward, the Doha Political Declaration provides a shared vision of a world free from poverty, hunger, and discrimination. It calls for a future defined by equity, solidarity, and dignity for all. This, in turn, requires a renewed commitment to effective, inclusive, and accountable institutions as highlighted in Goal 16 of the 2030 Agenda. It requires prioritizing citizen engagement, innovation and digital inclusion, and multi-stakeholder collaboration as they are critical to rebuilding trust in government and accelerating progress toward a fairer, more sustainable future for all.

