

**SEVENTH SESSION OF THE
COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS ON PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**

Welcome Remarks

By Mr. Guido Bertucci, Director, DPADM/UNDESA

Madame President,
Honorable Ministers,
Distinguished delegates,
Special Guests and Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen

I am delighted to be here today and to address you, the distinguished members of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration at the opening of its 7th session. I also feel privileged to have the opportunity to do so on this very special occasion of the 60th Anniversary of the United Nations Programme in Public Administration. Since its inception in 1948, the Programme has come along a long way in promoting innovative public administration for the political, economic and social development of all nations. So, allow me to acknowledge once more and reiterate my sincere appreciation for your hard work and important contributions to this success record.

As this committee has reiterated in numerous occasions, public administration is key for the achievement of the Internationally Agreed Development Goals (IADGs). You, as Committee Members, have contributed significantly to improving government operations around the world and the ongoing implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In this respect, General Assembly resolution 50/255, adopted on the occasion of its 50th Resumed Session, was a pivotal document in highlighting the new role and scope of public administration.¹

Also highlighted in this important document and the succeeding ones, was capacity-building as a major component of the overall efforts to achieve poverty eradication, economic growth and sustainable development. In fact, United Nations Millennium Declaration, the progenitor of the MDGs, implies that all countries should have or acquire the capacity to achieve the development goals.²

Capacity-building is a complex and multifaceted notion. At its inception, capacity-building was synonymous with human resource development. As such, capacity-building efforts were mostly concerned with training those individuals needed to run the organizations and institutions of emerging States.

With time, and in line with the changing governance challenges and needs of public administrations worldwide, the meaning and practice of capacity-building was enlarged. Capacity-building came to be equated with “countries’ ability to define and realize goals

¹ GA Resolution 50/255 (1996). Para 7.

² E/2002/58. Report of the Secretary General to ECOSOC. United Nations System Support for Capacity-Building.

effectively and efficiently,”³ or “their ability to perform functions, solve problems, and set and achieve objectives.”⁴

In this new and more comprehensive understanding of capacity-building, *human resource development* as well as *institution-building*, both grounded within the *societal context*, were viewed, and rightly so, as crucial elements of capacity-building.⁵

That said, there is no blueprint or a rigorous formula for capacity-building and development. Questions still remain: How can governments build their capacities, i.e., set the right objectives and find the most adequate means to solve problems that stand on the way to achieve these objectives? How can governments and governance actors undertake these actions to effectively address policy choices and successfully implement adequate development programmes?

In this regard, CEPA’s substantive meetings have shown that capacity building is not just about addressing immediate weaknesses or constraints in policy-making and implementation. It is also a long-term process of development, in which the public sector becomes better equipped to respond to changing contexts. Historically, state failure has occurred not because of distortions in markets or absence of democratic governance per se. State failure has taken place in the absence of *adequate institutional and political capacity to adapt to changing socioeconomic conditions*.⁶

In numerous ways, and over long periods of time, societies and governance systems, including public administrations, have been adapting and transforming. The most challenging adaptations and periods of transition have taken place at those places where the dearth of resources, both human and material, has been the utmost. This is one of the reasons why capacity building appears to be a priority in developing countries, particularly in crisis and post-conflict countries.

CEPA’s committed work in the field of public administration and governance has shown that, in order to be successful, capacity-building efforts need to put due emphasis on national ownership and the demand-driven quality of development. Today, individuals, institutions and societies determine their own development objectives and generate their own capacity development objectives based on assessments of current capacities and expected achievements.⁷ Today, the mobilization of local resources and home-grown ingenuity to solve problems become essential for sustainable development and effective governance worldwide.⁸

³ UNDP/UNICEF (1999). Capacity Development: An Analysis and Synthesis of its Current Conceptualisation and Implications for Practice. Harare.

⁴ <http://mirror.undp.org/magnet/policy/glossary.htm>

⁵ Fukuda-Parr, Sakiko, Carlos Lopez and Khalid Malik (eds.) Capacity for Development: New Solutions to Old Problems. London: Earthscan, 2002.

⁶ Khan, Mushtaq H. “State Failure in Developing Countries and Strategies of Institutional Reform.” Draft ABCDE Conference, Oslo 24-26 June, 2002, p.1.

⁷ Wignaraja, Kanni. Capacity Development: Policy and Applications. December 2007. <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/un/unpan028353.pdf>

⁸ UNU (2002). Diversity and Homogeneity: Fostering Innovativeness for Local Environmental Management. International Symposium

Note: The contribution of Ms. Peride Blind in researching for this presentation is much appreciated.

Bringing together a wealth of knowledge, values, approaches and experiences that mutually enrich each other, DESA has long been a dedicated supporter of capacity building. DESA has serviced the Committee of Experts on Public Administration with outmost energy and dedication in order to promote effective public administration and sound governance worldwide.

But experts in governance and public administration know that in certain quarters, especially among development economists, the importance of institutional and administrative capacity to design and implement socio-economic policies is often underestimated. My questions to them are: what are the best institutional mechanisms to formulate the most appropriate socio-economic policies for a given country? What are the most appropriate implementation capacities required to make those policies produce results? I do not think economists have the answers; experts in public administration do.

As Public administration continues to provide the foundation for maintaining confidence in the stability and continuity of the state, efforts to enhance its professionalism and integrity and to buttress its impartiality, legality and transparency continue to be critical to effective governance. Therefore, let us not forget that the United Nations, while highlighting the importance of new practices and tools to improve governance and public administration capacity, such as public management techniques and e-government applications, it must continue to assist member states in building those intrinsic capacities of the state as those I just mentioned.

Madam President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Sadly, this is the last time that I will be addressing you in my capacity as the Director of the Division of Public Administration and Development Management in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. As you might be aware, I will reach the mandatory age of retirement at the end of July completing a wonderful journey of thirty-four years of service at the United Nations. I must say that it has been a real honor and a distinct privilege to have worked with you over all these years and I would like to thank each and every one of you for your genuine dedication to sound public administration and effective governance.

The ECOSOC looks to CEPA for continuing advice, as well as to the Secretariat, in order to strengthen public administration and governance systems and processes of Member States." As such, I feel privileged to have had the opportunity of working with distinguished experts such as yourselves. I certainly will be watching your next achievements with great interest and pride.

I thank you for your attention