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**Institutional aspects of the 2024 theme of the  
Economic and Social Council and the  
high-level political forum on sustainable development**

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## **FutureGov: Building public sector capabilities for the future**

This background note was prepared by Louis Meuleman, Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi and Rolf Alter in connection with the in-depth review of SDG 16 and SDG 17 at the 2024 high-level political forum. The FutureGov initiative was launched by the Secretary-General at the 2023 SDG Summit as one of twelve high impact initiatives to support Member States in building their public sector capabilities. The Committee is foreseen to provide guidance on the initiative.

1. Major investment is needed to strengthen public sector capabilities to achieve accelerated implementation of the SDGs. As the world becomes increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous, public institutions can no longer conduct business as usual.
2. The Committee fully agrees that governments must be equipped to anticipate development risks and effectively adapt and transform their public sectors for sustainable and inclusive development that speaks to the aspirations of their citizens. Gaps in public sector capabilities present an acute obstacle to the achievement of the SDGs, and Member States must adopt a renewed sense of purpose and urgency towards public sector transformation.
3. The FutureGov initiative will focus on three elements of public sector transformation:
  - **Skillsets:** Building public sector skillsets for adaptable and resilient institutions through a shared toolbox.
  - **Mindsets:** Shifting mindsets towards systems thinking and foresight for effective governance and inclusive service delivery, including through digital and data tools.
  - **Innovation:** Enabling broader and more impactful social and policy innovation in public sectors, supported by the requisite enabling environment.

4. The Committee commends this focus on human capital, as the key pillar, in the government “machinery”. Without the appropriate competencies, skills, capacities, capabilities, and organisational culture, even the best strategic policies and laws will not be implemented, as summarised in the aphorism that “culture eats strategy for breakfast” (attributed to Peter Drucker). The FutureGov initiative will be able to drive progress not only on SDG16, but across all SDGs. Achieving the SDGs will require strong public sector capabilities that are fit for purpose. FutureGov aims to develop the necessary skillsets, shift mindsets, and foster innovation in a way that empowers countries to accelerate SDG progress.
5. Audit institutions need to become catalyzers of learning, going beyond the audit/control function. This also includes forms of social accountability and partnerships with social organizations and citizens. Such policy learning cycle may foster the link between public spending and policy innovations for SDGs.
6. Last, but not least, human resources development strategies need to be premised on national development objectives and SDGs. Countries face new governance difficulties as they implement the SDGs and put the 11 principles of effective governance into effect. It will take changes in values, beliefs and attitudes, competencies, and behaviours, to transform governance in support of the SDGs. Public sector workforce mindsets will need to change if public service delivery is to become more effective in supporting the realization of the 2030 Agenda, accompanied by a comprehensive and holistic approach to capacity-building for modernizing governments.
7. There are various ways in which CEPA can provide guidance to FutureGov, such as:
  - (a) The 11 principles of effective governance for sustainable development <sup>1</sup>, developed by CEPA and endorsed by ECOSOC in 2018, aim to provide practical, expert guidance to interested countries on a broad range of governance challenges associated with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The principles provide an overarching analytical framework for assessing institutional capacity for achieving the SDGs and are accompanied by a series of CEPA strategy guidance notes.<sup>2</sup>
  - (b) Expert papers written by CEPA members for the annual sessions of the Committee since its creation on how to improve public administration and governance in all its facets<sup>3</sup> could be a source of inspiration for, among others, the future work of the Group of Friends of FutureGov, a coalition of Member States and institutions to be formed in 2024, committed to supporting peer countries through a FutureGov Facility. Other forms of guidance and collaboration could include the organisation of a joint meeting or Conference with a focus on scaling up of peer exchange and learning between countries on experiences and promising practices in implementing SDG 16 and SDG 17.

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<sup>1</sup> The principles are: [Under effectiveness:] competence; sound policy making; and collaboration; [Under accountability:] integrity; transparency; and independent oversight; and [Under inclusiveness:] leaving no one behind; non-discrimination; participation; subsidiarity; and intergenerational equity. See for more information: <https://publicadministration.desa.un.org/intergovernmental-support/cepa/principles-effective-governance-sustainable-development>

<sup>2</sup> See CEPA strategy guidance notes: <https://publicadministration.desa.un.org/intergovernmental-support/cepa/strategy-guidance-notes>.

<sup>3</sup> See: <https://publicadministration.desa.un.org/intergovernmental-support/cepa>