

Workshop on Strengthening Institutional Capacities in Africa for Effective Implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063: Follow-up to the 2023 SDG Summit

CAPE TOWN, 28 OCTOBER 2023

Closing Remarks by Ms. Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, Chair of the UN Committee of Experts on Public Administration and Chancellor of Nelson Mandela University

Dear colleagues,

I would like to take this opportunity to share some closing remarks and reflections from the past three days.

The establishment and existence of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), the Secretariat of the African Union Governance architecture, has been transformative, particularly because of the peer-review component which allows heads of state to meet and perform candid reflections on their progress. But the APRM has also evolved in other important ways, including the holding of annual joint gatherings such as this one with UN-DESA and other partners, which has since 2019 generated positive and constructive debates, with crucial peer learning experiences for countries. This partnership needs to be built on.

The partnership with the private sector and their role in the public service has been a debate at this workshop. While the role of the private sector is crucial, the public service and public administration have a central and pivotal role. Debates around the need to reform the public sector must start from the assumption that the private sector should not supplant the public sector and public administration.

As the DESA USG noted at the opening, we have met here this week in the context of multiple crises and global uncertainty. The Political Declaration adopted by the General Assembly noted that the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals is in peril, globally. The stakes for the attainment of the SDGs are particularly high for our continent. In this meeting, we have heard of the fiscal pressures placed on African governments and their institutions in addressing emerging crises. We have heard how some countries exceeded their annual budget allocations in efforts to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and hence, diverted resources from other sectors, including building institutional capacity.

We also heard several countries highlight the economic pressures placed on governments due to geopolitical tensions, such as the war in Ukraine. Emerging security crises, increased

incidences of political instability, illicit financial flows and corruption have also threatened the ability of institutions in some African countries to deliver services to citizens and attain the SDGs. These unprecedented and concurrent challenges require us to reform our institutions to make them robust, resilient and fit for purpose. Furthermore, delivery of change at the speed, scale and impact required by the SDGs is demanding more from our public institutions than ever before.

There has been a real development and evolution in the level of discussion at this workshop. At our previous workshops, we did not talk of the principles of effective governance for sustainable development with the same authority, and it has now become very much part of the African dialogue, showing how the conversation at our workshops have moved from awareness raising to actual issues of implementation.

Colleagues,

We have also met at a time when global leaders have called for transformation and a rescue plan for the attainment of the SDGs. We must consider the SDGs and Agenda 2063 as our blueprints for recovery and transformation. The SDG Summit and its Political Declaration reaffirmed that ‘effective rule of law and good governance at all levels’ and ‘transparent, effective and accountable institutions’ are needed to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies.

Therefore, a central question has been how do we transform our institutions to meet this moment? The CEPA principles provide us with the framework and strategies to build the required institutions. Furthermore, the principles form our guidepost for building resilient institutions which are forward looking and able to effectively manage risk.

Many of the aspects of our discussions mirror the recommendations in 2023 Report of the Secretary-General on Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, namely that major investment is needed to strengthen public institutions; local and sub-national governments must be empowered; leveraging digital technologies and data can bear a dividend for institutions; follow-up and review processes should be strengthened.

We must meet this moment by taking immediate measures to scale up efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda, Agenda 2063 and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda. We must follow the 2023 Political Declaration through development cooperation and SDG investments. Importantly we must move towards reforming the international financial architecture. Providing predictable, sustainable and sufficient development finance to developing countries from all sources is urgent. The 2023 Political Declaration commits to take further actions to scale up financing for sustainable development, and I urge us all to read the Declaration, and to find ways to support payment suspensions, and debt restructuring, as appropriate, with an expansion of support and eligibility to vulnerable countries in need.

We have heard over the last three days how VNRs and VLRs have supported the domestication and localization of the 2030 Agenda. The VNRs indicate the African countries have aligned their national frameworks to the SDGs. However, we also must still reach further to ensure this translates into lasting institutional change. Furthermore, the findings for the VNRs should

provide feedback into evidence-based policy development and reform. We also discussed how SDG domestication should go beyond plans and reach the level of interventions and budgeted activities. This requires transforming the way we plan, allocate and track resources.

We heard how the VLRs help to amplify local voices and address the needs of local stakeholders, as municipalities and local authorities are often the providers of essential services to communities. VLRs and the APRM national governance reviews have been increasingly used as an entry point for strengthening sub-national governments, breaking down siloes and boosting multi-level governance.

Our sessions provided examples of homegrown solutions and innovations to develop accountability in the public sector, through the adoption of new technologies and upskilling of civil servants. Technology was identified as a major enabler of better governance and institutions. These interventions form an important part of the nationalization of the SDGs and transformation of public institutions. We must seek to build forward looking African institutions that reflect the values and aspirations of the African people.

Throughout our meeting there were calls for greater institutional coordination and policy coherence. We must make inquiries into how governments can foster synergies, minimize the trade-off and balance domestic and international priorities. Accelerating the delivery of the 2030 Agenda at all levels calls for more integrated solutions to achieve the vision and Goals of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. It also calls for a capable State at all levels and we encourage countries to design and implement integrated national institution-building strategies that address important capability gaps across the whole of government.

The achievement of SDGs will depend to a large extent on country-specific institutional conditions that provide incentives for their implementation and compliance. As I stated at the outset, we must all focus on the priority actions that need to be taken to equip governance systems and institutions for transformation at national and sub-national levels and meet our National Commitments to SDG transformation.

Thank you.