



2024 UN PUBLIC SERVICE FORUM AND AWARDS CEREMONY

WORKSHOP 7

Strengthening Public Institutions for Climate Action

CONCEPT NOTE

Organiser: United Nations Project Office on Governance (UNPOG) / Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG) / United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA)



Introduction

The 2024 United Nations Public Service Forum will take place in Incheon, the Republic of Korea from 24-26 June 2024 under the theme 'Fostering Innovation amid Global Challenges: A Public Sector Perspective'.

The Forum will be comprised of a series of workshops where various elements related to the overall theme will be explored in more detail. Workshop 7 will explore the importance of strengthening public institutions for climate action.

Objective

This hands-on workshop aims to support participating countries in identifying transformative actions that contribute to building strong public institutions at all levels for climate action and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) implementation, including through empowering sub-national/local government in their efforts to localise climate action efforts. Additionally, the workshop aims to equip public institutions at all levels with tools to effectively address climate change through improved multilevel governance practices, innovative solutions, and strategic foresight. The workshop also aims to explore digital solutions and innovative forward-looking strategies to urgently identify key opportunities, gaps and challenges in addressing climate change.

Focus

Climate change is the defining issue of our time, and we are at a critical moment. It intensifies heatwaves, droughts, flooding, wildfires and famines while threatening food production, submerging low-lying countries and cities as sea levels rise due to melting glaciers and increasingly extreme weather. The Climate Change 2023 Synthesis Report of the IPCC¹ highlights the unequal contributions to global greenhouse gas emissions, driven by unsustainable energy and land use, as well as consumption patterns. Human-caused climate change is already impacting weather extremes globally, leading to widespread adverse impacts, especially affecting vulnerable communities.

SDG Goal 13, which calls for urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts, underscores the critical need to address this global challenge. The effects of climate change are now affecting every country on every continent, particularly the least developed countries (LDCs), landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) and small island developing States (SIDS). It disrupts national economies and profoundly impacts lives, incurring significant costs for individuals, communities, and countries, both today and into the future. Progress towards the attainment of Goal 13 has encountered stagnation or regression globally, largely due to institutional issues, including the fragmented distribution of responsibilities for addressing climate change and ensuring the sustainable management, protection, and restoration of natural resources in many nations.

¹ IPCC (2023). [AR6 Synthesis Report: Climate Change 2023](#)

Tackling climate change demands a paradigm shift in mitigation and adaptation measures, financing, institutional arrangements, and coordination across national, regional, and local levels. Frontier technologies and digital transformation, alongside strategic foresight, have emerged as powerful catalysts to facilitate this shift, fostering collaboration, transparency, and data-driven decision-making across government at all levels. The UN system has identified six transitions where game changing interventions are needed.² Rooted in the 17 Goals, these transitions represent a useful organising frame that can spotlight investment pathways to accelerate SDG progress within and across countries, with the prevailing country context determining the priority level and action accorded to each area. To drive these transitions, government actors at all levels are urged to work collaboratively across ministries and engage civil society and private sectors in an inclusive and participatory manner, incorporating principle of effective governance, to identify synergies and trade-offs.³ One of the transitions is climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution which requires strengthening public institutions through transformed policy and regulatory frameworks and through enhanced national public sector capabilities to deliver and implement climate policy action.

Structure

This workshop will be composed of an opening session, three in-depth thematic sessions, and a closing session. The opening session will welcome participants and introduce the focus and objective of the workshop. The rapporteur will present key conclusions and recommendations at the closing of each thematic session. The closing session will consist of key conclusions as well as a discussion among participants to identify key messages that will be presented in the plenary at the UN Public Service Forum.

Session 1: Multilevel Governance for Climate Action

The full realisation of the SDGs and other internationally agreed development objectives strongly depends on a common understanding of the basic principles of effective governance for sustainable development.⁴ One of the principles of effective governance is ‘subsidiarity’ which promotes government that is responsive to the needs and aspirations of all people, and central authorities that perform only those tasks which cannot be performed effectively at a more intermediate or local level. Multilevel governance, commonly used strategies to operationalise the principle of subsidiarity, is foundational to the global effort to combat climate change, recognising that effective action requires collaboration and coordination across various levels of government, as well as with non-state actors. At the international level, frameworks such as the Paris Agreement provide a foundation for collective action and ambition. However, meaningful progress hinges on the integration of climate considerations into policies and decision-making processes at national, subnational, and local levels. This entails empowering local authorities, engaging stakeholders, and fostering partnerships to ensure coherence and alignment in climate strategies and actions. This approach not only enhances the effectiveness and efficiency of climate responses but also fosters inclusivity,

² <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/six-transitions-investment-pathways-deliver-sdgs>

³ <https://www.un.org/fr/node/97777>

⁴ https://publicadministration.un.org/Portals/1/Images/CEPA/Principles_of_effective_governance_english.pdf

resilience, and innovation, thereby advancing the shared goal of a sustainable and climate-resilient future for all. Effective multilevel governance is enabled by strengthening structural and institutional setting in which different levels of government distribute roles and responsibilities, coordinate and cooperate on climate action, as well as the specific instruments that are implemented at different levels of government to support and implement local climate action. This approach also entails narrowing or closing policy gaps among government levels through tools for vertical coordination among governments at various levels as well as with other stakeholders such as civil societies, community organisations, the private sector, among others and horizontal coordination within and amongst governments at the same level as well as coordination with and amongst non-State actors. Despite the strong advocacy for multilevel governance, current climate action at both the national and local levels fall significantly short of realising their full potential. The session aims to support the workshop's participating countries in identifying transformative actions that contribute to building strong institutions and strengthening multilevel governance for climate action and SDGs implementation, including through empowering subnational governments in their efforts to localise climate action.

Guiding questions:

- 1. How can different instruments for multilevel governance support the realisation of climate mitigation and adaptation potentials?*
- 2. What approaches to coordination and cooperation can strengthen the participation of local and regional governments in national climate action coordination bodies and mechanisms?*
- 3. How can existing gaps in policy and coordination between national, subnational, and local levels be identified and addressed to ensure a coherent and aligned approach to tackling climate change?*
- 4. How can we ensure that multilevel governance for climate action is inclusive, prioritises equity and justice, and addresses the specific vulnerabilities and needs of different communities?*

Session 2: Harnessing Digital Solutions in Public Institutions for Climate Action

Digital solutions play a crucial role in enhancing the transparency and accountability of public institutions, especially when it comes to climate action. By leveraging technology, public institutions can improve their ability to address climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. The Paris Agreement highlights the importance of technology for the implementation of mitigation and adaptation actions, and the importance of strengthening cooperative action on technology development and transfer. The UN E-Government Survey 2020 and 2022 highlight the increasing significance of digital technologies in strengthening public institutions for climate action. Governments worldwide have increasingly adopted e-governance strategies, utilising digital platforms to streamline communication, collaboration, and coordination among different levels of government. Institutions can leverage digital platforms to collect, analyse and visualise data related to climate change impacts, which enables evidence-based policymaking. Furthermore, data-sharing mechanisms facilitate the integration of climate policies and actions across national, regional, and local levels by facilitating real-time information sharing on climate risks, vulnerabilities, and best practices. This fosters informed

decision-making across government levels. Digital technologies are increasingly shaping responses to climate change. Yet nearly three billion people still need to be digitally connected, with the vast majority concentrated in LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS.⁵ Investing in inclusive digitalisation and climate action is deeply interconnected. Climate-responsive applications and services are essential, alongside universally accessible digital foundations like connectivity, data infrastructure, and digital literacy. The session aims to explore how digital solutions can capitalise on key opportunities to strengthen public institutions involved in climate action, thereby improving policy outcomes and engaging stakeholders towards a more sustainable and resilient future.

Guiding questions:

- 1. What are the key digital technologies and solutions currently being used or explored in the context of climate action?*
- 2. What strategies and best practices can governments adopt to bridge the digital divides, particularly in Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs), and Small Island Developing States (SIDS), to ensure inclusive access to climate-responsive digital solutions?*
- 3. How can digital platforms and data-sharing mechanisms be leveraged to enhance collaboration and coordination among different levels of government and stakeholders in implementing climate actions?*
- 4. How can digital technologies be effectively harnessed to enhance transparency and accountability in public institutions, particularly in ensuring equitable participation and representation of vulnerable communities?*
- 5. How can institutions become more agile and adaptive in leveraging digital innovations to address evolving climate challenges?*

Session 3: Strategic Foresight for Climate Action

With escalating climate extremes, rapid technological advances and uncertain societal dynamics, countries are facing a multitude of possible, probable and preferable futures that we need to anticipate, imagine and work towards. To tackle global challenges like the climate crisis and rising inequalities, governments must ensure that today's decisions pave the way for future success. Countries need to incorporate strategic foresight and futures-thinking if they are to navigate rising uncertainty, seize emerging opportunities and accelerate climate action and the implementation of the SDGs to the benefit of future generations. By envisioning diverse futures, strategic foresight empowers governments to design agile policies to effectively navigate potential future disruptions, thus enhancing long-term policy success. With strategic foresight, governments can anticipate and prepare for both near- and long-term threats associated with climate change. For example, governments could prioritise strategic foresight in their fight against climate change by developing national strategic foresight frameworks for climate change. These frameworks could include trends, drivers of change, and scenarios that public institutions could use to develop better informed policies and strategies. Strategic foresight would empower governments to anticipate and mitigate the risks of climate change, leading to a more resilient and sustainable future. This session

⁵ The World Bank (2023). [Green Digital Transformation: How to Sustainably Close the Digital Divide and Harness Digital Tools for Climate Action](#)

focuses on how public institutions can create more future-ready policies and strategies by promoting strategic foresight and integrating scenario planning into existing policy processes. This session also showcases innovative forward-looking strategies to improve policy planning, tackle climate change and build resilience.

Guiding questions:

- 1. What are the potential barriers and challenges to implementing strategic foresight for climate action within public institutions, and how can these be overcome to foster a culture of proactive, future-oriented policymaking?*
- 2. How can countries enhance their strategic foresight and futures-thinking capabilities to anticipate and prepare for a diverse range of potential climate futures amidst escalating climate extremes and rapid technological advances?*
- 3. How can governments leverage scenario planning and other forward-looking approaches to inform decision-making, prioritise climate actions, and build resilience in the face of uncertainty and complexity?*
- 4. How can governments integrate futures thinking into current policy and decision-making processes to ensure long-term sustainability, resilience, and effectiveness in addressing the climate crisis?*
- 5. How can public institutions leverage strategic foresight frameworks and tools to identify and address both near- and long-term threats associated with climate change, and how can these insights inform more resilient and sustainable policy planning and decision-making processes?*

This workshop will conclude with key messages and recommendations from all the sessions of the workshop. The workshop rapporteur will lead a discussion, among participants, to identify key messages that will feed into the Forum's Rapporteur's Report on the last day of the UNPS Forum.

Organisational Details

- This workshop is organised by the United Nations Project Office on Governance (UNPOG)/Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG).
- Participants are expected to come from central and local government officials, policymakers, public government experts, public sector institutions, practitioners, civil society, academics, and media that promote gender-responsive public service, as well as international organisations and agencies dedicated to the work of gender equality and women empowerment.
- The workshop will be conducted in English.

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