

8 March 2016

Committee of Experts on Public Administration

Fifteenth session, 18-22 April 2016

Item 3 (c) of the provisional agenda

Ensuring effective and innovative implementation, monitoring and impact evaluation of the policies identified in support of the sustainable development goals

Promotion of innovation and learning in the course of public policy implementation

This conference room paper was prepared by Committee member Marta Oyhanarte and submitted in English and Spanish. The content of and the views expressed in the paper are those of the author, and do not imply any expression of opinion on the part of the United Nations.

Transforming our world

At the World Summit on Sustainable Development 2015, which took place from the 25th to the 27th of September at the UN headquarters in New York, Member States of the UN approved the new Global Agenda for Sustainable Development, consisting of 17 objectives and 169 goals which must be met by 2030. The Goals and Objectives are integrated and indivisible in nature and encompass economic, social and environmental spheres.

In the final stage of a negotiation process that has taken more than two years and has had unprecedented participation from civil society, governments united behind an ambitious agenda agreeing, by consensus, on the document "[Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#)".

The new agenda for sustainable development is affirmed in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) signed in the year 2000. These focused on reducing hunger and poverty, stemming child mortality, improving maternal health, universal primary education, combating HIV, AIDS and other diseases, promoting gender equality, environmental sustainability and presentation of a global partnership for development in 2015. Tremendous progress on the MDGs has been made, which shows the value of a unifying agenda supported by goals and objectives. Despite this success, much remains to be done. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) seek to complete what the MDGs did not achieve, and go much further to address the root causes of poverty and inequality, like the universal need for a development that benefits everyone.

With the presence of more than a hundred heads of state and government, the different countries pledged to concentrate efforts on five main areas of work: People, Prosperity, Planet, Peace and Partnership. These areas of action, called "The Five Ps" encompass, amongst other things, the commitment of the States to eradicate hunger and achieve food security; ensure a healthy lifestyle and quality education; achieve gender equality; ensure access to water and sustainable energy; promote sustained economic growth; adopt urgent measures against climate change; promote peace; facilitate access to justice and strengthen a global alliance for sustainable development.

It is the first development agenda in which negotiation involved all Member States and which is valid for all of them over the next 15 years. By adopting it, States pledged to mobilize the necessary resources for implementation through alliances centered especially on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable.

It is also recognized that urban development and management of cities are crucial to the quality of life, therefore, work with local authorities and communities to stimulate innovation and job creation is the way to achieve social cohesion, personal security and better quality of life for all.

The Agenda implies a common and universal commitment, however, since each country faces specific challenges in their pursuit of sustainable development, the states have full sovereignty over their wealth, resources and economic activity, and each will set their own national targets, sticking to the Sustainable Development Goals.

The new agenda requires a new "Global Agreement" which ensures the implementation of the necessary policies to achieve it. And it goes beyond that because in order to make it a reality, it should be inspired by values such as solidarity, trust, equality, dialogue, ethical leadership, transparency, fraternity, austerity and mutual respect that facilitate an intense commitment among governments, the private sector and the social sector.

From this agenda onwards, the need is reinforced to develop indicators that provide quality data, which is accessible, timely and reliable for those for whom the collaboration of international institutions, academia and philanthropic organizations is of great importance to provide elements for political decisions. Thus, also measuring the progress being obtained. Moreover, the necessary capacities must be developed, and strategies to promote higher agreements between rulers and ruled must be prioritized.

«We are determined to end worldwide poverty and hunger by 2030, to combat inequalities within and between countries, to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies, to protect human rights and promote gender equality and empowerment of women and girls, and to ensure lasting protection of the planet and its natural resources.», noted States in the resolution.

UNDP Administrator, Helen Clark, mentioned: *"This agreement marks an important milestone for putting our world on an inclusive and sustainable course. If we all work together, we have the opportunity to fulfill the citizens' aspirations of peace, prosperity and welfare, and preserve our planet.*

Quality of democracy

In order to make the ambitious vision of the Agenda 2030 a reality, doubled efforts are needed to improve the quality of democracies. The State is a set of institutions that has the power to regulate the functioning of society. That State must have the right level of performance to be promoting economic development and social equity. The good or bad functioning of the State shows what quality of democracy we have. To address the challenge of a quality democracy, it is essential to build citizenship. Only a democracy of citizens can return to politics its deliberative dimension, achieve the revaluation of the government tasks and generate cultural transformation that provides citizens with increasing amounts of responsibility in order to associate and integrate them into a collective common enterprise. Countries with higher growth and greater international recognition are those that have managed to organize their public life, that is to say, they have a quality democracy.

There are new mechanisms that facilitate citizen participation in public issues that complement existing ones -the most classic is the right to vote- and help improve the quality of democracy. Successful experiences such as participatory development of regulations, budget shaping in a participatory manner, the establishment of advisory councils, development of strategic plans, conduction of public hearings, the increasing use of social networks and new technologies, among other things, provide citizens channels for direct expression of their demands. In a crisis of representation, these instruments are windows that allow channeling of the needs from a constantly changing society. Democratic reinvention takes the most diverse characteristics generating concrete institutional innovations and learning that indicates we are in the presence of a new configuration between representative and participatory democracy. And now, as never before, happiness is considered more and more as an objective of public policies and indicator of social progress.

There is a basic pillar for the development of quality democracies: access to information, because the joint decision-making and participation are illusory if citizens do not have ensured access to the information in possession of the state. The right of access to public information permeates all these mechanisms of participation by becoming a prerequisite to exercise them. Expecting people to

collaborate, to participate, to commit, without giving them the possibility to know the necessary information to decide, is useless. The solution to this problem is not the imposition of limits on participation, but the lifting of barriers to access to information and the generation of innovative and integrated policies that allow commitment and action by all stakeholders.

Encouragement to innovate and integrate

Current challenges involve recognizing the complexity of our world today, with its uncertainties and chaos. It involves thinking about the State and its institutions from a systemic perspective that goes beyond the narrow view of administrative policy. It transcends it and focuses on human beings and their basic needs.

It involves encouraging innovation and integration processes that make a difference in how the public is managed.

Innovation focuses on the implementation of creative ways to improve services and processes and increase the efficiency and effectiveness of public institutions.

While awareness of the need for innovation in public administrations is growing, so too are many obstacles that can arise when implementing them: the deep-rooted procedures, the fear of taking risks, the absence of skills, the lack of financial support, and different stakes, among other things.

In turn, opportunities to innovate are also many: new leaderships, growth of the culture of evaluation, facility to acquire new capabilities, political support, widespread use of new technologies, adoption of models used by NGOs and private companies as well as cooperation between social sectors.

Those who are committed to innovation should know, too, that this requires thinking of strategies to cushion tensions that any change causes.

For example: How do you balance the representativeness of the political leadership of public organizations, with the professionalism required at the conduction and officialdom?

How to streamline management for results, without forgetting the processes that guarantee procedural quality, impartiality, transparency and probity in the management?

How to balance tradition with change, ensuring predictability in the organization of work, and at the same time, management of the innovation?

How to articulate public-private consensus and preserve the State leadership in sustainability of country projects for the long term?

How to promote citizen participation processes without colliding with representativeness from the institutions of democracy?

In order to manage these tensions, the time has arrived to make the administration a friendly expert system, oriented towards the community and broad inclusion that offers mediation in the democratization of public information and, at the same time, developing greater civic skills and boosting recognition of the inherent civic responsibilities to democratic coexistence.

In turn, consideration of the social, economic and environmental goals and objectives requires policy integration and coordination between different government structures; a change of mentality and change in the way of operation in silos.

Sustainable development emphasizes an integral approach, and interdependent and balanced consideration of the social, economic and environmental goals and objectives.

The integration of policies for sustainable development will require rethinking traditional practices and considering cooperation between different government structures.

Obstacles to integration: excessively hierarchical structures, lack of a common and strategic political direction, individual interests at the sectorial level, mismanagement of resources and a complex division of labor, among other things.

Opportunities for integration: new leaderships, public-private partnerships, collective commitment, international cooperation, recognition of new links between regional, national and local governments, among other things.

Innovation and integration interact in a relationship of interdependence, enrichment and learning in the framework of governance, understood as the way cultural habits, political institutions and the economic system for a society have to be aligned in order to have the good life its desires.

The importance of implementation

The compliance of the SDG will come true if they go from being mere enunciation of wishes - "verbal acts" - to effective implementation of the measures that this aspiration requires.

Implementing a public policy is to operationalize a political decision, usually contained within a regulation. Implementation is necessarily a complicated process, if not conflicting, requiring coordination that integrates differences in a harmonious and effective collective action. A public policy has a training time, and to set it in action, you have to know that organizations or social partners will react differently. The public officials who must apply it will have different behaviors, and target groups will give different answers. The effort to change the behavior of large numbers of people requires a conceptual framework and technical skills that can be adjusted to different contexts as well as a temporary look at the medium and long term in order to make viable changes.

A policy can be well designed, go through the approval process and yet be totally ineffective if it is not implemented and applied correctly. The quality of implementation and the effective application of policies will depend largely on the extent to which policy makers have the incentives and resources to invest in the necessary capabilities.

It is much more likely that policies with good characteristics and properties arise in environments where there is more cooperation when formulating them. Implementation in a cooperative process improves the quality of policies. Likewise, the delegation of functions in a competent bureaucracy could be a good way to ensure and enforce inter-temporal execution of public policy, in other words, spanning more than one period of government. A strong and capable bureaucracy will probably improve the quality of implementation but it will also have feedback effects on other stages of the policy process. Having a competent and independent bureaucracy in which decision making can be delegated, formulation and implementation could facilitate policy adaptability. However, when it lacks a competent bureaucracy, it is more likely that policies deviate from public interest.

An efficient implementation should have 1) good design of the policy to be carried out, 2) a professional team with "mystique", 3) rigorous methodology, 4) continuous systematization of actions 5) good management of resources, 6) excellent allies, 7) joint cooperation networks, 8) development of the task in stages, and 9) internal and external assessments to reinitiate and replicate what would be the virtuous circle of change.

Evaluation

Public authorities increasingly need to acquire more knowledge and skills to manage complex, heterogeneous, diffuse and contradictory problems that their policies must resolve. Having at ones disposal tools that facilitate decision-taking and make the possible consequences and social impact of policies known, optimizes management.

In this regard, the evaluation of public policies, understood not only as an instrument of testing public action, but as an expression of a value judgment on the results and (desired or not) impacts of policies-plays a key role, because 1) it provides relevant information for planning, budget allocation, prioritization and decision-making, 2) it is a learning tool for public managers, 3) it contributes to accountability, 4) it facilitates social control and transparency of State 5) it legitimatizes public institutions before citizens..

A process through which this activity becomes an essential, accepted, continuous and integrated part to the management of the administration, as a further stage in the development of government policies and programs, is critical to achieving stability which will result in a deeper knowledge for management, which will generate an "assessment culture". This implies the recognition by the public administration, of the benefits of evaluation because through it the following will be able to be detected 1) what must be kept up because it is doing well, 2) what must be added because it is lacking and 3) what must be stopped because it does not work. These three components are great opportunities for learning.

Open government

We chose a definition built collectively: Open Government is a political doctrine characterized by the adoption of the philosophy on the free movement of software to the principles of democracy. Open Government aims for citizens to collaborate in the creation and improvement of public services and in strengthening transparency and accountability. (Wikipedia 2016)

When we talk about open government we are talking about more than the intensive use of new technologies, we are talking about a change of systemic nature, the transformation of administrations and governments, the creation of skills to generate a collaborative dialogue between officials and citizens. We are talking about values. We are talking about a new paradigm in public administration.

The pillars that form open government are: 1) transparency (commitment to all aspects of government administration and the services it provides are open to public scrutiny and supervision from society, 2) participation (expansion of spaces for dialogue with stakeholders to find the best solutions to public problems) and 3) collaboration (opening to the use of energies and capabilities of vast sectors of society).

An "open" administration increases competitiveness, develops collective energy and generates an environment of innovation. With its principles of transparency, participation and collaboration, it offers the potential to revitalize democracy in the world and the way in which the government and citizens interact daily within it. While Open Government is not a magic recipe for all problems, it is an essential component in the reform of the State (and the political system) for the XXI century.

The culture of open government is expanding, many administrations are adopting its principles and beginning to make the vision of a new culture in the management of public affairs a reality, but many others adopt laws or advertise the benefits of the new system and they remain in the early stages or they fail because they have little or no implementation capacity.

Two examples of Open Government where the virtuous circle of innovation, integration and learning can be seen: Uruguay Concursa and Irekia

Uruguay Concursa

The Uruguay Concursa vision: *"To be a competent team and reliable link between the citizen and the State, guaranteeing equal opportunity to access the Central Administration."*

Uruguay Concursa is an initiative from the Presidency of the Oriental Republic of Uruguay. It is a unit belonging to the National Civil Service Office, whose purpose is to create and manage the system of recruitment and selection of people for bodies within the Central Administration. For this, it counts on a computerized system which allows the processing and automating of various tasks related to the recruitment process. This system has two distinct parts: one containing all tasks related to internal work and the other, public-oriented, which allows the publishing of those named, the receiving of nominations and the reporting of results for each stage met.

From the start, in 2010, this initiative has perfected the system which allows transparent entry to public administration and which has strengthened the links of trust between the citizens and the government.

Uruguay Concursa received the UN Public Service Award in 2014.

Irekia

"The Office of Open Government, under the General Secretariat of the Presidency is who coordinates this tool. However, Irekia is a reflection of the work of all those who have public responsibilities in the Basque Government and its subsidiaries. The portal was presented and opened on the 25th of January 2010. "

"Irekia is the embryo of development in Open Government in Euskadi which is embodied in a tool, a practice of good governance towards transparency, participation and collaboration. We like to call it, an open window for citizen participation. "

"Irekia is a channel of direct communication between citizens and the Administration over the Internet with a non-administrative language and is based on the three pillars of Open Government:

- Transparency: From the Executive branches, information and real-time data are made available to the public on their activity, actions, decisions, plans and intentions.

-Participation: The actions, laws, decrees or measures taken by the Government are discussed, evaluated and complemented by the views of the public. But also those interested raise their own proposals, ideas or questions to be discussed and analyzed.

-Collaboration: the Basque Government collaborates with citizens, businesses and the rest of the Basque administrations, providing innovative tools and new methods of collaborative work. They listen to each other and work together to build a more connected society. "(Portal Irekia)

Since the start Irekia has shown rigor in the stages of the participatory process: defining, designing, making, evaluating. It is an entrenched initiative that is making significant progress in: cultural change, process change, organizational change and change in the relationship between the government and citizens. The always necessary face to face meetings and legal frameworks that give greater consistency to the model add to the application of new technologies, for example: Law of Transparency and Good Governance (2012) and Public Innovation Plan (2012) and other ongoing initiatives. The site has easy navigability. Several countries have shown interest in this form of management and it is hoped that many put it in place.

IREKIA has received, among other things, the UN Public Service Award in 2015.

Conclusion

"We can be the first successful generation in the fight against poverty, and we can be the last to have the chance to save the planet."

"The world will be a better place by 2030 if we succeed in our goals." Agenda 2030. Declaration: Transforming Our World. UN. September 2015.

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