

16th Session of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration (CEPA)
24 to 28 April 2017

Written Statement by Regional Hub of Civil Service in Astana

Agenda item 3: Ensuring effective implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals through leadership, action and means; (d) development of principles of effective government

At the outset, allow us to express our conviction that the initiative of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration in developing a set of internationally recognized principles of responsible and effective governance is a commendable milestone. It sets the standards for effective public institutions; a crucial prerequisite for the implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

Our comments pertain to the contents of the Secretariat Note (E/C.16/2017/6) titled “*Toward a set of internationally recognised principles of responsible and effective governance*”. It is also our perception that this Note proposes ways of looking at governance concepts, taking into account the realities of public service reform and that principles of responsible and effective governance should be linked to a set of good practices to implement them.

To start with, although the element of the prevalent political context vis-à-vis the feasibility of particular reforms is correctly acknowledged in several parts of the Note (see, for example, section II, par. 6; section III, par. 8 & 14; and section IV, par. 22 & 23); this should also be highlighted in the Preamble and/or the Introduction. It is a rather crucial element in the efforts to attain sound public institutions at the national level. In other words, as different target audiences have different expectations, the document should be sufficiently explicit on how their expectations should be met, right at the start.

Second, in preparing a set of principles for responsible and effective government, we should avoid excessive sophistication and unreasonable simplification of the concerned ideas and principles. The intention should be to prepare a versatile document that could be readily utilised in setting standards for effective government, taking into account global, regional and national challenges encountered in this turbulent environment, in which we live.

Furthermore, the document should clearly designate the way forward, providing the necessary guidelines on how best to reach the sustainability path. At the same time, the document should not encompass a mere enumeration of principles but it should also be saturated with examples of good practices, as well as explicit comments and the elaborations of experts, especially in the case where progress indicators for achieving the principles are included.

Below are a few ideas, which should be taken into account while considering the principles themselves:

First, while considering the multitude of structures and different levels of public governance, one should also keep in mind such factor as balance of institutional power, responsibility and availability of resources, in order to assess what could be a reasonable level of expectations from various government structures, at different levels, to carry out their mandates. Failing to consider these factors may lead to cases where public institutions, at a lower level, especially, are assigned with responsibilities for which they

either lack the authority and power, or the financial resources to carry them out. For structures of public governance to be effective, the scope of their powers and availability of human and financial resources should match the mandate, which they are assigned with. If such a balance is not in place, citizens and communities may develop a distorted understanding of who does what. This leads to false expectations of citizens. An element especially pertinent to emerging democracies.

Second, it has been recommended to articulate the requirements, in terms of transparency, accountability and inclusiveness that should be specially imposed on public servants and public institutions. It should escape no one that political elites in many a developing country, but not only there exclusively, have shown extreme reluctance to abide by or promote the values of transparency, inclusiveness, due process and accountability particularly in hiring, selection and promotion of key positions of influence in the broader public sector. The reason for this may vary from place to place but range from keeping the status quo in public governance, a weak culture of public service in the country to any personal grounds.

Third, an indiscriminate approach to law enforcement especially with regard to corruption, violation of norms and regulations, is important to be enunciated, as plainly as possible.

Fourth, comments on public servants, who consider consultations with members of the business community and of civil society as potentially risky and as threatening the integrity of public bodies should be taken into consideration. To be sure, the danger of developing risky, informal ties cannot be eliminated through the suggested process. Informal ties develop with or without official sanctions or interaction between the two parties. However, although such practices may be risky, they are considered necessary. Thus, this situation could be remedied by insisting that the consultations are transparent and officially documented.

Fifth, on the inclusion of indicators in the document under discussion, one should explicitly acknowledge and recognise that it is not always possible to compare countries due to their varying cultural context and historical trajectories and social and economic development factors. In our view, it may be more productive to focus on identifying and keeping track of trends in a country's development path.

Last, but not least, we propose that once the draft set of principles on effective governance is finalised, extensive deliberations should be organised. These should focus on its contents. They should engage representatives from the target audiences in order to inject their perceptions to the ideas examined.

In conclusion, one of the crucial factors of effective governance remains to be international and regional partnership and cooperation. It enables countries, including those from similar economic, social, and cultural contexts, choose, adapt and employ the most impactful solutions available through studying the best world and/or regional practices.

This is, in fact, what the Astana Regional Hub of Civil Service has been established for. Having grown from 25 founding countries in 2013 to 36 participating countries in 2017, the Regional Hub has turned into a multilateral institutional platform for the continuous exchange of knowledge and experience in the field of civil service development.

It aims at supporting governments in the region and beyond in their efforts to reform their civil service systems through fostering partnerships, demand-driven capacity building and peer-to-peer learning development activities, as well as the evidence-based solutions, informed by a comprehensive research agenda.

The geographical range of the Hub's participating countries stretches from the North America and Europe, through the CIS, the Caucasus and Central Asia to ASEAN countries, demonstrating that partnership for civil service excellence is a constant and universal need for all nations.