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Written Statement by International Institute of Administrative Sciences (IIAS)

Agenda item 3: Ensuring effective implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals through leadership, action and means.

1 The 2016 IIAS-IASIA Joint Congress

The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security and the Chinese Academy of Governance hosted the 2016 Joint Congress of the International Institute of Administrative Sciences (IIAS) and of the International Association of Schools and Institutes of Administration (IASIA) on 20-23 September in Chengdu, China.

The Congress examined the overarching theme of "Building Capacities for Sustainable Governance", through scientific research papers selected on basis of a competitive call. This main theme was worked out in three subthemes which, taken together, sketch a policy process for implementing the 2030 agenda:

• The subtheme "Building Public Service Human and Financial Resources Capacity" refers to the kind of financial, human and other inputs needed to progress towards the SDG agenda; to the efforts that can be made to ensure the adequate presence, in quantity and quality, of these inputs; and to the different contexts and baselines from where SDG policies start.

• The subtheme "Strategic Visions and Priorities for Sustainable Governance" refers to the process whereby, in a given context and taking into account the baseline and the available capacities, a vision for sustainable development is developed, strategic objectives are adopted, and a course of action is decided for the years to come.

• The subtheme "Building modern legal, institutional, and organizational governance systems" refers to the governance arrangements that are put in place to ensure the proper implementation of the SDG priorities decided upon.

The IASIA Working Groups moreover discussed scientific contributions to the 2030 agenda in these specialized fields:

•   Education and training in public administration
•   Public sector ethics and culture
•   Public sector reform
•   Subnational governance and development
•   Gender, diversity and equity
•   Public sector leadership and governance
•   Public policy, public decision-making and policy implementation

- Public sector human resources management
- International dimensions of the public administration.

The IIAS-IASIA Congress moreover offered an independent forum for international institutions where to share their strategic vision, projects and priorities with the participants. It featured panels of

- The UNCEPA (United Nations Committee of Experts on Public Administration)
- The OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development)
- The Development Banks in Asia panel, with the Asian Development Bank, the Export-Import Bank of China, and the China Development Bank
- The BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa)
- The AGPA (Asian Group for Public Administration)
- The Host Country.

2 Main Lessons of the Congress

Although all scientific contributions addressed rather specialized issues from specific approaches, overarching lessons could be learned by all participants.

2.1 The SDGs show the way for humanity

There was a general consensus, across the different nations and cultures represented at the Congress, that the SDGs is the universal, legitimate and exhaustive framework the humanity needs to orient its development. Environmental, social and economic criteria constitute the triple bottom line by which to judge human actions.

2.2 Governance is no stand-alone SDG but an essential enabler of all SDGs

Governance refers to the institutional arrangements involving all actors of a society to deliver public goods and services. As public goods, all SDGs require context-sensitive and functional governance arrangements. Accordingly, most contributions analyzed how governance arrangements could better contribute to all SDGs, far beyond the 16th SDG on peace, justice and strong institutions.

2.3 A paradigm shift is needed to realize the SDGs

All SDGs are interdependent, and all governance levels are interdependent to realize them. This makes the SDG framework unique. Consequently, the SDGs cannot be addressed one by one, nation by nation, level by level, by specialists only. Rather, they require:

- Interdisciplinary approaches across policy fields;
- Multi-level governance, integrating international, regional, national, provincial and local levels;
- Participative governance, involving government, the private sector and the citizens in the coproduction of the SDGs

We call sustainable governance this new paradigm which assumes the interdependence between specialized fields, levels of government and all stakeholders and devise governance arrangements accordingly

2.4   Enablers of sustainable governance

Across the different contributions presented at the Congress, a range of critical enablers of sustainable governance could be identified, much in line with Head and Alford (2015):

•   Complex and systemic thinking: decomposing complex problems into smaller and more manageable ones is considered unsuited to address the challenge of sustainable development. Interactions and value conflicts need to be integrated from the outset in ways of thinking and communicating about the SDGs (Hood & Peters 2004).

•   Committed and enabling leadership: sustainable support to the SDGs is expected of leaders. They should also provide the enabling environment for the interdisciplinary, multi-level and participative governance to blossom. Therefore, carrots and sermons are more functional than sticks (Bemelmans-Videc et al. 1998).

•   Innovation and experimentation: the Congress contributions made clear the magic formulas of the past won't be sufficient for sustainable development. They made equally clear that there is currently no universal recipe for implementing the SDGs, that there will probably never be one ever, and that it is probably better so. The SDGs give the opportunity to and require trying innovative and experimental approaches, evaluating their effectiveness, and discussing their transferability to other contexts in independent fora.

•   Trust: the implementation of the SDGs is likely to rest on innovative projects undertaken by networks of actors in given contexts. Actors need to trust one another to succeed, and their network need to be trusted by governments and the population.

2.5   The key role of local governments

Many contributions emphasized the cornerstone positions of the cities and of local governments more generally in providing these enabling factors for sustainable governance, contributing to the realization of the 2030 agenda:

•   Local governments have responsibilities for most policy fields targeted by the SDGs. Therefore, they are well positioned to organize the positive externalities between all specialties;
•   Local governments generally have more experience with non-representative mechanisms of participation by citizens and stakeholders. This experience can be mobilized for innovative SDG projects;
•   The distance between citizens, stakeholder and decision-makers is generally lower at the local government level, and this is expected to sustain he needed trust among actors to coproduce innovative SDG projects;

•   The high number and limited size of local governments allows various innovative and experimental approaches. It maximizes the likeliness that good practices emerge, and allows controlling the impact of failed innovations.

2.6   Barriers to sustainable governance

The SDGs call for a paradigm shift towards sustainable governance. It is an avant-garde project running against the current trends of:

•   Growing inequality: the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged populations is increasing in all regions of the world. This does not favor citizen participation or trust from citizens in their elites;
•   Institutionalized distrust: most public management reforms of the last decades assumed that public administrations should not be trusted, and installed intricate systems of monitoring whose net result has been to materialize this assumption;
•   Incomplete decentralization: national governments delegate responsibilities to local governments, but tend to transfer but a share of the corresponding resources;
•   Limited participation potential: the resources and willingness of citizens, corporations and public sector organization to coproduce sustainable development are finite;
•   Increasing geopolitical risks: terrorism, populism, protectionism, nationalism and militarism are on the rise, complicating the generation of win-win solutions at global level.

2.7   Conclusion

The 2030 pulls the humanity into the right direction of economic development, social progress, and environmental protection. Realizing the SDGs requires sustainable governance: across disciplines, across government levels and with the involvement of all. It is a challenging project requiring the commitment of everyone.

3   The Commitments of the IIAS to the 2030 Agenda

As global non-governmental organization specialized in public administration, the IIAS is determined to contribute to the realization of the SDGs:

•   It will work with its member states and national sections to identify, evaluate and valorize, in the framework of the United Nations Public Service Award, the good practices emerging in different regions of the world to realize the SDGs;
•   It will keep the SDGs at the agenda of its annual Congresses, offering an independent platform to researchers, international organizations and member countries to identify the governance arrangements which are functional for the SDGs agenda;
•   It will support the further professionalization of schools and institutes of administration through accreditation and advise services based on the UNDESA-IASIA Standards of Excellence in Public Administration and Training, and build capacities for sustainable governance;
•   It will support the further development of academic research in governance, by establishing new regional groups in North America, Oceania Middle East North Africa and Subsaharan Africa, and developing the existing ones in Europe, Latin America and Asia.

- It will connect with other global organizations to join forces for the 2030 agenda.

4   References

Bemelmans-Videc, M.-L., Rist, R. C., & E. Vendung (1998), Carrots, Sticks, and Sermons: Policy Instruments & Their Evaluation. New Brunswick New Jersey: Transaction Publishers.
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Hood, Christopher & G. Peters (2004), "The Middle-Aging of New Public Mangement: Into the Age of Paradox?", Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, 14 (3): 267-82.