

Overview of past discussions of CEPA on participatory governance

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1. Background and mandate

A commitment to participation was agreed early on in the work of the United Nations through the International Bill of Human Rights comprising the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948, as well as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) which entered into force in 1976. Monitoring of the implementation of these and other human rights treaty obligations is the responsibility of the Human Rights Council (UNHRC) and related expert treaty bodies such as the Human Rights Committee. Article 25 of the ICCPR stipulates, inter alia, that every citizen has the right to take part in the conduct of public affairs and to have access to public services on general terms of equality. A set of guidelines on the effective implementation of the right to participate in public affairs is currently being prepared under the auspices of the UNHRC drawing on a global study of best practices and challenges in this area.

In addition, the principle and objective of participation has been reflected in numerous international agreements such as Agenda 21 (1992), the Copenhagen Declaration and Plan of Action (1995), Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and Millennium Declaration (2000), among others. Member States agreed that the commitment and genuine involvement of all social groups is essential to the effective implementation of the objectives, policies and mechanisms agreed to by governments in all programme areas of Agenda 21, and that one of the fundamental prerequisites for the achievement of sustainable development is broad public participation in decision-making. Discussions on progress and gaps in the implementation of commitments to participation from the outcomes of the major UN conferences and summits take place in the responsible functional commissions of ECOSOC.

Critically, Sustainable Development Goal 16 of the 2030 Agenda (adopted in 2015) renews the commitment of governments to building inclusive institutions and specifically, in target 16.7, to ensuring responsive, inclusive and participatory and representative decision-making at all levels. Provisions for follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda, moreover, envisage that a robust, voluntary, effective, participatory, transparent and integrated follow-up and review framework will make a vital contribution to implementation and help countries maximize progress and ensure that no one is left behind. Member States have been actively engaging civil society and the private sector in implementation of the SDGs. At the global level, the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) has the central role for follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda. The theme of the HLPF review in 2019 will be “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality.”

CEPA, for its part, is mandated to provide policy advice and programmatic guidance on participatory governance from a public administration perspective. It can thus discuss, for example, the methods and tools for enhancing citizen engagement to help realize the principle of leaving no one behind and improve development outcomes, especially implementation of the SDGs. CEPA is also concerned with important linkages between target 16.7 and other SDGs, notably 16.6 on developing effective, accountable and transparent institutions, and 16.10 on ensuring public access to information and

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protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements, as well as to the achievement of the SDGs as a whole.

2. Past CEPA discussions

Enhancing the capacity of public administration (2002-2006)

The first five sessions of CEPA underlined participation as one of the three major criteria for evaluating the performance of public administration, the other two being efficiency and transparency. Citizen-driven policy formulation was stressed together with engaged governance and accountability, and people's engagement was associated with partnerships and building trust in government. Finally, participatory institutions and public participation in policy development and service delivery, including the participation of the public in the monitoring and evaluation of the participatory processes themselves were stressed. All sessions put significant emphasis on the enabling role of e-government and information and communication technologies in deepening participation.

Tools for engagement in particular situations (2007-2011)

The next five sessions of CEPA continued their emphasis on citizen and civic engagement with increasing focus on the different tools for engaging citizens, civil society, private sector and other governance actors in different contexts such as the crisis and post-conflict situations, developing countries, and in different sectors such as public health and human resources.

Collaborative approaches (2012-2015)

The following four CEPA sessions examined the effect of citizen engagement in public governance at national and local levels of administration. Public trust and accountability, institution-building and continuous support for capacity development in public administration were among the most salient results of effective citizen engagement. Voice and representation at the community level and effective local governance through bottom-up approaches to citizen engagement and open data were also highlighted. The strengthening of national and local capacities for sustainable development through participatory, transparent and accountable governance and women's participation and leadership in the public sector other areas stated in the reports.

3. CEPA work on participation and engagement in the context of the 2030 Agenda

Participation in the post-2015 era (2015)

CEPA's fourteenth session (2015) linked the SDGs to the idea of public sector transformation fuelled by enhanced access to public services. Successful achievement of the SDGs and their integration into national policies were associated with effective non-State actors' engagement in decision-making processes. The session also considered the need to explicitly address the difficulties faced by

marginalized groups in participating in public life and in accessing basic services, often hampered by abject poverty. Technical and substantive equality of opportunity was underscored as an important concern in public consultation processes as was the role of formal and informal institutions. Recommendations included the creation of a public honesty barometer as an indicator of participatory governance and responsive public service delivery, and continued support for electronic open government characterized by transparency, accountability and connectivity. Training of public servants on citizen engagement concepts and methods also received attention as did participatory and inclusive public leadership styles. ECOSOC reaffirmed that access to public service by citizens should be a central concern of public sector transformation in pursuit of the SDGs, and encouraged Member States to create pathways to citizen engagement with a view to designing policies and strategies in an inclusive manner, inter alia, by strengthening regulatory processes of public consultation with all stakeholders at all levels.

Participatory governance for integrated and inclusive implementation of the SDGs (2016)

Transforming public institutions for integrated and inclusive policy-making and review of the SDGs was the main topic of CEPA's fifteenth session (2016). Three components of citizen engagement were brought to light: effective, transparent and accountable institutions, policies and knowledge-sharing in support of coherent and integrated SDG implementation, collaborative and evidence-based governance, and a culture of inclusion and engagement. The Committee stressed the enabling role of education, communication, advocacy, capacity-building, open government, accountability, decentralization and local governance. The challenge of managing mechanisms to engage with civil society through social media and other platforms was also noted. Governments were encouraged to ensure that public institutions include civil servants from all segments of the population. In line with the 2016 thematic review of the HLPF on the theme of "Leaving no one behind," the notion of SDG localization was discussed and the need for including the areas where SDG deficits are the highest, i.e., low income urban areas, remote rural areas, poverty-stricken suburban areas and conflict-ridden zones. In considering the CEPA report, ECOSOC acknowledged the need to develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels and to ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels, and underscored the fact that policies, programmes and actions for implementing the SDGs should be designed and monitored in a participatory and transparent manner with a built-in concern for accountability.

Inclusive approaches to sustainable development (2017)

The Committee underscored that it is necessary to launch efforts to rally public servants around the Goals and instil a sense of commitment in them with innovative ways of working based on participation and engagement. Inclusive and participatory approaches to problem-solving, decision-making and resource allocation, including budgeting were also highlighted by the Committee. Cross-societal engagement was another participatory mechanism that received attention particularly with respect to different causes and interests ranging from environment to shelter and safety, and across different local territories towards co-production of resources and services. Other important elements to strengthen

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whole-of-society approaches to public administration included disaggregated data, decentralization and local governance with involvement of local communities in SDG implementation and related processes, and financial and human capital. On the advice of CEPA, ECOSOC invited Member States to ensure that policies to implement the SDGs are developed in a participatory, inclusive and collaborative fashion, noting that it is important to institutionalize participation and engagement. The Council encouraged Governments to develop an open government system as a model of governance that focuses on citizens and establishes a new relationship between public administration and society.

Civil society and private sector involvement in SDG implementation and review (2017)

The session underscored all stakeholders' participation and the important role of multi-stakeholder partnerships in policy formulation and implementation. It put emphasis on civil society, private sector, and to a lesser extent on the media as vital SDG actors. The creation of multi-stakeholder forums and the promotion of an enabling environment for erecting such platforms including through open government were underlined. Supporting documents alluded to the latest trends of decline in stakeholder engagement, and its possibly negative effects on the implementation of the SDGs. ECOSOC underscored that there is no single blueprint for implementing the SDGs and that identifying the most effective policies in a given context requires the participation and engagement of all stakeholders, inter alia, local authorities, civil society and the private sector, on various policy options.

Engagement of vulnerable groups in SDGs (2017)

Multiple and intersecting dimensions of poverty and their pernicious effects on participation and engagement received attention in the 2017 session. The Committee observed that discrimination, exclusion from decision-making processes and institutions, and lack of participation by the poor and the vulnerable were among the causes of poverty. Vulnerable groups should be at the core of diversity and non-discrimination strategies and related community-driven development efforts. The Committee discussed steps that could be taken to engage vulnerable groups in public discourse and leave no one behind. In addition to the vulnerable groups, middle-class also received attention, particularly with respect to their involvement in poverty eradication strategies and pro-poor public policies. On the advice of CEPA, ECOSOC reiterated that, in designing poverty eradication strategies, Governments need to engage civil society and all segments of society, including the poorest and most vulnerable people. The Council noted that, to reach the poorest and most vulnerable, governments often need to work with civil society and the private sector, and encouraged them to continue to leverage such partnerships while safeguarding the quality and affordability of public services for all.

4. Selected reference material

CEPA 16th session (2017)

Successfully achieving the SDGs: what is to be done? by Allan Rosenbaum (E/C.16/2017/2)

<http://workspace.unpan.org/sites/Internet/Documents/UNPAN96915.pdf>

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Understanding the needs of local authorities and communities and supporting and equipping them for the implementation of the SDGs by Najat Zarrouk

<http://workspace.unpan.org/sites/Internet/Documents/UNPAN96923.pdf>

Institutional leadership and the SDGs by Jose Castelazo (E/C.16/2017/4)

<http://workspace.unpan.org/sites/Internet/Documents/UNPAN97063.pdf>

Institutional arrangements for the SDGs by Jan Ziekow and Rowena Bethel (E/C.16/2017/5)

<http://workspace.unpan.org/sites/Internet/Documents/UNPAN96912.pdf>

Conference room paper on transforming local authorities and communities into informed stakeholders to achieve the SDGs by Palouki Massina (in French)

<http://workspace.unpan.org/sites/Internet/Documents/CR%20paper%20by%20Palouki%20MASSINA%20item%203a.docx.pdf>

Conference room paper on eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity while leaving no one behind: Implications for public administration

http://workspace.unpan.org/sites/Internet/Documents/CEPA%20CRP%20on%20e_poverty.docx.pdf

Compilation of 2016 and 2017 VNR statements

https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/17035Compilation_of_Main_Messages_from_2017_VNRs.pdf

The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2016: Leaving No One Behind

<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2016/leaving-no-one-behind>

CEPA 15th session (2016)

Conference room paper--Improving engagement and communication between government and stakeholders through online and mobile solutions by Rowena Bethel

<http://workspace.unpan.org/sites/Internet/Documents/CRP%203b%20by%20Rowena%20Bethel%20Apr%202016.docx.pdf>

CEPA 14th session (2015)

Redefining relationships and responsibilities to support participatory governance and responsive public service delivery, including through e-solutions: note by the Secretariat

<http://workspace.unpan.org/sites/Internet/Documents/UNPAN94203.pdf>

Report of the expert group meeting on formal/informal institutions for citizen engagement for implementing the post-2015 development agenda

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<http://workspace.unpan.org/sites/Internet/Documents/UNPAN94094.pdf>

CEPA 11th session (2012)

Transparency, accountability and citizens' engagement by Marta Oyhanarte

<http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/un/unpan048420.pdf>

Conference room paper on transparency, accountability and citizens' engagement by Mushtaq Khan

<http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/un/unpan048444.pdf>