

Overview of past discussions of CEPA on policy coherence and integrated approaches to sustainable development

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1. Background and mandate

The 2030 Agenda stresses the integrated, indivisible and universal nature of the SDGs and building synergies across all dimensions of sustainable development is essential for its effective implementation. This has brought back to the fore the need for integrated policies that address economic, social and environmental dimensions and the interrelations among sectors. There is also an SDG target on enhancing policy coherence for sustainable development (17.14) which is further recognized as an important systemic issue in the context of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on financing for development.

The 2017 United Nations high level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF), as the main platform for reviewing implementation of the SDGs, acknowledged that countries have established a range of mechanisms to facilitate coordination, including cross-sectoral government working groups, multi-stakeholder committees, and high-level coordinators. Yet, many countries continue to grapple with the challenge of developing policies that integrate economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development and build on the synergies between the various goals and targets. For this to happen, it is important to rethink the way institutions are organized, work, make, deliver and review policies.

ECOSOC has invited CEPA to place the 2030 Agenda at the centre of its work, thus giving CEPA, as the only expert body in the United Nations dedicated to governance and public administration issues, a critical mandate to provide advice and programmatic guidance on the various institutional aspects of enhancing policy coherence and promoting integrated approaches to sustainable development.

2. Past CEPA discussions on integrated approaches to development

Promoting administration-wide strategies (2002)

CEPA recognized as early as its first session that coordination among public sector institutions would be essential in achieving the targets of the Millennium Declaration. To do so, central agencies should consider introducing and maintaining effective inter agency and inter-ministerial cooperation, supported by a robust common information management system for tracking the progress of policy and programme implementation, evaluating the performance of line ministries, providing input into political decision-making and managing accountability for resources. The primary role of the central guidance function, it was observed, was to develop consensus on a vision, formulate a long-term strategy for the identified priorities and coordinate the implementation of that strategy administration-wide. Institutions of governance and public administration in Africa specifically needed to have effective coordination, integration and synergy among themselves as well as with institutions in the civil society and private sector at the local, national, regional and global levels to facilitate achievement of the MDGs.

Encouraging participation and partnership (2002-2004)

CEPA also underscored, beginning with its first session, that participation of civil society and the private sector in public policy dialogue was needed to promote social justice and equity in the delivery of public services, particularly in situations of post-conflict reconstruction. By the same token, it was understood that all actors have a key role to play in social and economic progress and that governments need to enhance their understanding of how to create synergies and bring about greater coordination among the undertakings of the public sector, the private sector and civil society in particular in view of the changes brought about by globalization and of the limited resources within which States operate.

Highlighting systemic approaches to sectoral issue areas (2005-2013)

In later reflections on the annual themes of the Economic and Social Council and other priority issues, CEPA began to underscore the value of more integrated approaches to addressing public policy challenges within sectoral areas. For example, to strengthen disaster risk management, CEPA advised that it was necessary to define the competences, responsibilities and the respective decision-making powers of central and local governments, coordinate the efforts of public sector entities both vertically and horizontally, and further engage the donor community in coordination of international aid resources. Human security was another area where promoting integration of domestic sectoral policies as well as domestic and international development agendas could be useful, particularly in Africa. Similar concerns about collaboration were raised by CEPA in connection with environmental issues. CEPA has also observed that more systemic approaches to public policy could help achieve development targets in areas such as health, poverty eradication and social protection, and gender equality.

Noting the growing complexity of governance issues (2014)

At its thirteenth session, CEPA stressed that the governance challenges of sustainable development are characterized by growing complexity and dynamism in decision-making and implementation mechanisms, and encouraged Member States and international organizations undertaking reforms aimed at promoting an innovative environment, agile approaches and a culture of collaboration, openness and knowledge-sharing to use scientific, technological and analytical tools as instruments to support innovative decision-making and implementation in the public sector and reduce risks to public accountability and trust arising from governance complexity.

3. CEPA work on policy coherence in the context of the 2030 Agenda

Challenges of integrated policymaking (2015)

CEPA began to undertake a more in-depth treatment of the issue of policy coherence and its implications for government in pursuit of the SDGs in 2015 in advance of the adoption of 2030 Agenda. Exploring the challenges and implications of strengthening policy development processes, CEPA underlined that although integrated approaches have a long history, they are far from being “business as usual” in most areas of public policymaking. Overly hierarchical structures, lack of a common direction, sectoral self-interest and a complicated division of labour can impede collaborative approaches. These structural challenges are compounded by inadequate mechanisms

for allocating resources for cross-cutting issues and ensuring shared accountability, a lack of interdisciplinary skills, perceived loss of power or authority, competition for resources and corruption.

ECOSOC thus recognized that integrated policymaking, involving effective policy design and implementation, stakeholder engagement and coordination across government, calls for transformative leadership, creativity, critical thinking and analytical skills, supported by an enabling environment comprising, inter alia, lead agencies tasked with reducing fragmentation through a process of programme review, and behaviours that promote sharing of data, information, knowledge, ideas and resources.

Strengthening administrative capacity for policy coherence (2016)

Having identified some of above-mentioned main political and administrative challenges in enhancing policy coherence for sustainable development, CEPA looked in more detail at its fifteenth session at the nature of policy processes in government and the administrative capabilities that underpin them. CEPA further delved into some of the political and administrative questions of vertical coherence with a view to localizing the SDGs through the sharing of responsibilities and resources among levels of government.

National institutional arrangements and strategies (2017)

On the basis of CEPA's deliberations, ECOSOC has noted that many countries have initiated efforts to respond to the integrated nature of the SDGs, inter alia, by creating, reviewing or strengthening institutional arrangements, reaching out to engage stakeholders, enhancing statistical capacity to monitor progress, and taking steps to align national development strategies with the 2030 Agenda. ECOSOC has further noted that some countries have informed and engaged their parliaments in relation to the SDGs and encourages all Governments to consider undertaking similar efforts, while noting that some parliaments have taken a proactive role in their implementation.

ECOSOC recognizes that implementing the SDGs does not necessarily require the creation of new institutions and that existing institutions, such as planning ministries, have a critical role to play, working together towards the Goals.

Policy coherence from the perspective of specific policy domains (2017)

The Committee underscored that policies to implement the Goals will be most effective if they reflect the interlinkages among different Goals and targets such as those explored at the expert meeting on readying institutions and policies for integrated approaches held in Vienna in December 2016. Solutions to advance on one goal need to address a number of other related dimensions or targets, which interact with each other in dynamic ways. Understanding the important interrelations among the Goals is thus critical to accelerating their implementation, as is developing tools and find arrangements and ways to support the development of integrated approaches among institutions, especially among those dealing with closely interrelated targets. Noting CEPA's work in this area, ECOSOC reiterated the importance of the sectoral ministries in developing and implementing policies in their respective areas, taking into account the interrelationships inherent in the SDGs, and underscored that it may be useful to invite such ministries to identify the Goals and targets they will

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address most specifically and adjust or develop related implementation plans or strategies in cooperation with all relevant stakeholders. Practical tools to help policymakers in developing integrated plans and policies for implementing the SDGs based on interrelations among the targets are also needed.

4. Selected reference material

CEPA 16th session (2017)

Report of CEPA on its 16th session, chapter III.B on institutional arrangements for the SDGs

<http://workspace.unpan.org/sites/Internet/Documents/UNPAN97291.pdf>

Institutional arrangements for the SDGs by Jan Ziekow and Rowena Bethel, January 2017

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

Expert meeting on readying institutions and policies for integrated approaches to implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Vienna, December 2016

<http://workspace.unpan.org/sites/Internet/Documents/Report%20Vienna%20meeting%20FINAL.docx.pdf>

Compendium of national institutional arrangements for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, updated July 2017

<http://workspace.unpan.org/sites/Internet/Documents/UNPAN97468.pdf>

CEPA 15th session (2016)

Report of CEPA on its 15th session, chapter III.A on integrated policies for the SDGs

<http://workspace.unpan.org/sites/Internet/Documents/UNPAN96272.pdf>

Inclusive policy formulation and integration in the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs by Margaret Saner, January 2016

<http://workspace.unpan.org/sites/Internet/Documents/UNPAN95904.pdf>

Expert group meeting on moving from commitments to results in building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels, New York, February 2016

<http://workspace.unpan.org/sites/Internet/Documents/UNPAN96161.pdf>

CEPA 14th session (2015)

Report of CEPA on its 14th session, chapter III.B.3 on prioritization and informed decision-making

<http://workspace.unpan.org/sites/Internet/Documents/UNPAN94626.pdf>

Expert group meeting on policy integration in government in pursuit of the SDGs, New York, January 2015

<http://workspace.unpan.org/sites/Internet/Documents/UNPAN94443.pdf>