

Building inclusive, effective and resilient institutions for sustainable recovery from the coronavirus disease pandemic and timely implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals

Key messages and selected recommendations

Contribution by the Committee of Experts on Public Administration to the 2021 high-level political forum on sustainable development

1. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the need for concerted government action at the subnational, national and international levels, global cooperation under the banner of peace, the de-escalation of violence and the fostering of development under the principles of the rule of law and of leaving no one behind. Economic shocks as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic have further intensified the vulnerabilities of countries in conflict and post-conflict countries in a way that weakens their capacity to gain momentum for the attainment of most of the targets of the Goals. Peace, security and conflict management remain critical to the establishment of enabling conditions and an enabling environment for the advancement of the Goals. Countries in conflict and post-conflict countries therefore need redoubled development partnership efforts to recover from the ravages of the pandemic and return to the path to recovery. A special focus on development partnerships in those countries must go hand in hand with post-conflict reconstruction and development, and with efforts to establish peace and security sustainability structures.

2. Effective responses to the COVID-19 pandemic require the acceleration of administrative and governance reforms in all countries, in order to increase Governments' capability to address short- and long-term challenges and improve their resilience to economic, social and environmental shocks. The initial responses to the pandemic have shown that it is necessary and possible for Governments to play a proactive leading role, breaking the past trend of replacing public institutions with private ones. All over the world, Governments are reinventing themselves in order to be ready for a future in which they will be able to perform collaborative forms of leadership in a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach.

3. Putting the principle of leaving no one behind into action depends on deliberate steps being taken to address exclusion, through practical inclusivity policies that systemically address all segments of society and their respective needs.

4. To address the needs of those who are left behind, including women, their participation in decision-making processes and leadership roles is imperative. The promotion of an inclusive governance model allows co-creation and collaboration with stakeholders, as well as women's leadership at the subnational and national levels, at which plans, policies and programmes provide an inclusive perspective, both in leading recovery from future emergencies and in tackling inequalities.

5. The global community and individual national Governments must systemically address the deeper causes of poverty and exclusion not through palliatives but through institution-building and development policies focused on the long term.

6. The application of the 11 principles of effective governance for sustainable development can underpin the achievement of the targets of Goals 16 and 17, which are the crucial enablers of the other Goals. The principles directly affect the achievement of Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 16 and 17, and can guide countries towards whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches to the 2030 Agenda and lead to bold structural and systemic changes for the better.

7. “Silo thinking” continues to hamper the holistic implementation of the Goals and hinder action to ensure that no one is left behind. Overcoming a silo-based approach requires leadership from the top and a change in organizational culture, and is a precondition for implementing target 17.14 of the Goals, on enhancing policy coherence for sustainable development. It is recommended that countries begin using the self-assessment tool on policy coherence for sustainable development linked to tier II indicator 17.14.1, which was agreed in 2020 by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators.

8. The quality of public administration and governance ought to be an element of national and subnational strategic policies on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Departments responsible for governance and public administration are often not part of the 2030 Agenda policy framework yet, but are essential partners for developing adequate institutional mechanisms and ensuring that competences and skills in the workforce are directed to enabling the mainstreaming of the Goals.

9. The huge potential of sustainable public procurement is still underutilized. By leveraging the purchasing power of public administration to guide products and services towards sustainability, Governments can lead by example and stimulate the markets for sustainable products. Public procurement represents, on average, 13 to 20 per cent of GDP. Creating the legal conditions for sustainable public procurement, and learning lessons from countries that are forerunners, supports the implementation of many of the Goals.

10. The COVID-19 pandemic has had an adverse impact on national economies, rolling back decades of growth and development. In some countries, the effects have caused a recession. Subsequent macroeconomic constraints have significantly worsened the capacity of Governments to build capable, effective and resilient institutions. In that context, global and country-level recovery efforts after the pandemic will have to be focused on restoring macroeconomic stability. Such stability will ensure that Governments have the necessary resources to guarantee sustainability during recovery.

11. Transparent, accountable and participatory management of public finances is a key element of effective governance, even more so during the COVID-19 pandemic, when governments around the world face decreasing revenues and increasing expenditures. Extraordinary circumstances, in which decisions are often made overnight, cannot be an excuse for a lack of transparency, accountability and participation. Such decisions may affect the effectiveness of public spending and public service provision, fairness in the distribution of public funds and political dynamics, not to mention the well-being of citizens, especially of vulnerable and excluded groups, altogether affecting implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

12. Centres of Government remain critical to country-level policy prioritization both for national development goals and the Sustainable Development Goals. In recognition of the integrated nature of most national development goals, the Sustainable Development Goals and the current quest for post-COVID-19 recovery, there is a need for consistent messaging and engagement with the centre of Government on the critical role of policy prioritization in development outcomes. This engagement increases the chances that top-

level government policymakers will prioritize inclusivity, effectiveness and resilience of institutions as the foundation for post-COVID-19 recovery efforts and long-term sustainable development.

13. One of the most effective ways for countries to ensure prioritisation of the Sustainable Development Goals and funding for them may be to reorganize national budgets so that they are based on programme performance budgeting systems. Such methods enable the Goals to become embedded in national budgets and facilitate monitoring of performance and progress towards their achievement.