INTRODUCTION:
INSTITUTIONS AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

A. The importance of institutions for sustainable development

Institutions are paramount to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The strengthening of national institutions to deliver the SDGs is seen as a priority in many Member States, as shown by their voluntary presentations at the UN high-level political forum on sustainable development during the first three years of SDG follow-up and review.[1]

The Agenda and the SDGs prominently feature institutions, both as a cross-cutting issue in many of the goals and as a standalone goal (SDG 16), "Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels". The targets under SDG 16 highlight several concepts that may be viewed as institutional principles: effectiveness, transparency, accountability, anti-corruption, inclusiveness of decision-making processes, access to information, non-discrimination of laws and policies. Those principles apply to all the Goals.[2]

The inclusion of SDG 16 in the SDGs, as a self-standing goal on a par with sectoral goals such as education, health, poverty eradication, and others, is a game-changer. While everybody agrees on the importance of peace, inclusiveness and institutions for development, in previous global development frameworks, these aspects tended to be relegated to the background, with the exception of so-called "means of implementation". As argued in the World Public Sector Report 2018, the existence of SDG 16 sends a strong signal that institutions are not neutral conduits for implementing strategies and policies; rather, the institutional setup is a primary enabler and determinant of sustainable development outcomes. It may foster a greater focus of all development actors on the "how", and help refocus attention on the importance for development outcomes of dimensions such as accountability, anti-corruption, transparency and participation.

The very first review of SDG 16 at the high-level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF) in July 2019, as part of the forum's annual review of progress on a subset of the SDGs, will provide a platform to reflect on the adequacy and effectiveness of existing societal and institutional arrangements for supporting the implementation of all the SDGs.

This report aims to contribute to this effort, focusing on the institutional dimensions of SDG 16. It aims to provide an overview of trends in relation to the application of broad institutional principles highlighted in SDG 16 (effectiveness, access to information, transparency, accountability, anti-corruption, inclusiveness of decision-making processes, non-discriminatory laws and policies), highlighting experiences from past decades both at the sectoral and cross-sectoral levels, as well as an initial view of what is known about the effectiveness of initiatives in these areas, in different national contexts.

By reviewing key challenges and opportunities for enhancing the performance of public institutions in the context of the SDGs, the report aims to inform efforts by all countries to foster progress on critical dimensions of institutions for the SDGs, by drawing lessons on how current trends and innovative experiments might lead to long-term success in achieving the SDGs, in different developmental and governance contexts. The report is intended as an initial stocktaking; additional work in coming years will be needed to fully address the vast scope of institutions for sustainable development.

B. Scope of the report

SDG 16 is an amalgam of targets covering three dimensions: human rights, peace and security, and institutions for development. The focus of the report is on the institutional dimensions of the SDGs, as fleshed out in SDG 16 and outlined in the 2030 Agenda. Specifically, within SDG 16, the report limits its scope to the following targets: 16.5, 16.6, 16.7, 16.10 and 16.b (see Box 1.1). These targets are arguably the most directly relevant to public institutions, even though the case could be made that other targets could be considered as well.[3]

As with other SDG areas, work on the institutional dimensions highlighted by SDG 16 has a long history that pre-dates the SDGs themselves. Transparency, accountability, corruption, non-

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Box A. Institutional principles encapsulated in SDG 16 targets on which the report focuses

- 16.5 Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms
- 16.6 Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels
- 16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels
- 16.10 Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements
- 16.b Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development

discrimination, and other fields each have their own academic disciplines, communities of practice, and international rules. Within each of these broad fields, work is often fragmented, and no comprehensive stock-taking of global trends is readily available. SDG 16 provides a convenient frame for looking at global trends in these areas.

Some targets of SDG 16 combine multiple features that institutions should have. For example, target 16.6 refers to three critical institutional principles: accountability, transparency, and effectiveness. Yet, for conceptual clarity, each of these principles deserves analysis in its own right. For this reason, the report is organized around the institutional principles of SDG 16, rather than around the targets themselves. Specifically, the report focuses on the following principles: access to information, transparency, accountability, anti-corruption, inclusiveness of decision-making processes, non-discrimination and effectiveness.[4] These institutional principles have guided the work of the United Nations Programme on Public Administration and Finance, and are a subset of the principles of effective governance put forward by the Committee of Experts on Public Administration (CEPA) and adopted by the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations in 2018.[5]

Due to the vast scope of institutional issues relevant to the 2030 Agenda, choices had to be made in terms of coverage. First, the report focuses on the national level, and international institutions are mentioned only as they contribute to shape the development of national institutional landscapes. Second, in keeping with the traditional remit of the World Public Sector Report, the scope is limited to public institutions and public administration. This means that issues of high relevance to the realization of the 2030 Agenda in relation to the private sector (for example, private sector accountability) are not addressed here. Third, within its general scope, the report presents in-depth analysis of only a small sample of issues (see below).

C. Conceptual framework for the report

The focus of the report is on public institutions to deliver the SDGs. In line with previous editions of the report, institutions are understood in a broad sense (including social norms, laws, standards, etc.). The conceptual framework for the report is based on the interplay among three broad sets of concepts: (1) societal goals and strategies to achieve them, as articulated in the 2030 Agenda and SDGs; (2) the institutional principles highlighted in SDG 16; and (3) tools and instruments that support institution building and functioning. In practice, it is this interplay that determines how well institutions work for the achievement of societal goals.

The institutional principles highlighted in SDG 16 are a combination of traditional Weberian principles (e.g. accountability, effectiveness) and more recent principles (e.g. access to information) which, taken together, do not suffice to

Figure A.

Conceptual framework for the World Public Sector Report 2019

Source: Author's elaboration.
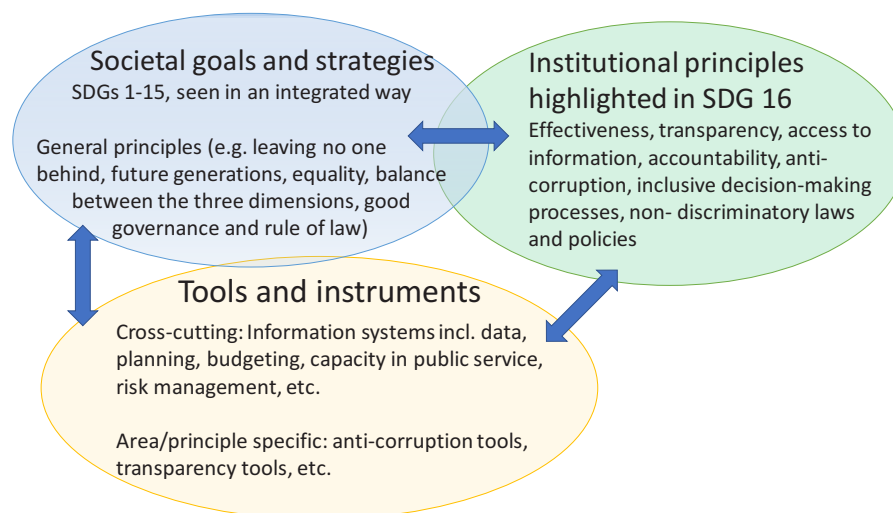
define institutions that "work well" for society. For example, inclusive decision-making processes do not necessarily result in inclusive outcomes. While it is arguable that the more recent principles (e.g. non-discrimination, inclusive decision-making processes, etc.) are closer to societal aspirations and provide some outside "direction" to public institutions, they do so only in a partial way.

In order to design institutions that work well for society, broader goals, aspirations, visions, and strategies are required. In the 2030 Agenda, these are provided by many of the targets in Goals 1 to 15, as well as by general principles recalled in the Agenda itself (e.g. leaving no one behind, concern for future generations, empowerment, and balance between the economic, social and environmental dimensions). These should inform (and determine) how institutions that follow the principles of SDG 16 should function.

In turn, a whole set of tools and instruments can support the operationalization of the principles highlighted in SDG 16. Those include both cross-cutting tools such as budgeting, planning, data and information systems, risk management, e-government, procurement, awareness raising and capacity building, and principle- or area-specific tools, such as anti-corruption tools. When looking at institutions for the SDGs in a practical context, those tools are of critical importance, as it is at that level that changes in public institutions and public administration can be concretely achieved.

The distinction among these three categories is not always clear. For example, inclusive decision-making is as much an instrumental principle as a broader, general aspiration. The same goes for access to information, which is both an aspiration and a tool to achieve other ends. Yet, for the purpose of this report, these categories offer a clear organizational framework, which emphasizes the relationships among them.

D. Content of the report

The report uses the interplay among goals, institutional principles and tools as a unifying thread, and illustrates it through different entry points. A first type of chapter looks in detail at one of the institutional principles, anti-corruption (chapter 2), and examines how it applies to various SDG areas and what tools and instruments can be mobilized in this respect. A second type of chapter focuses on one cross-cutting tool and examines how it is relevant to the implementation of specific SDGs, also highlighting its connections with the SDG 16 principles. Budgeting (chapter 3) and risk management in public administration (chapter 4) were chosen as examples. A third type of chapter looks at a specific SDG area and examines how public institutions in this area address the various principles of SDG 16 in different contexts. For this year's report, the choice was made to focus on Goal 5, "achieve gender equality and empower

Figure B.

Chapters of the World Public Sector Report 2019
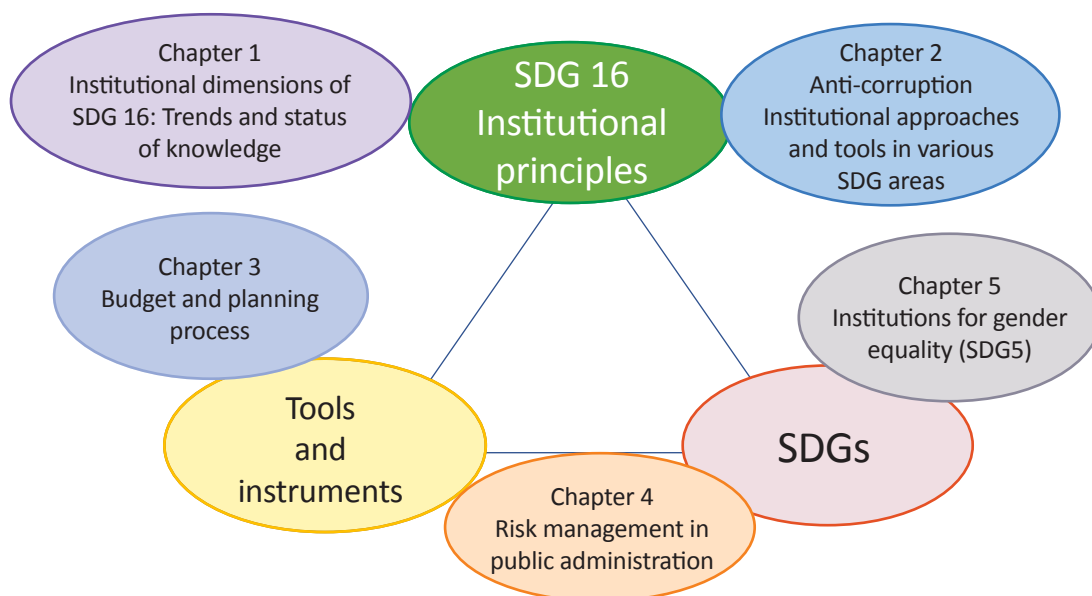
Source: Author's elaboration.

all women and girls" (chapter 5). In future years, other SDG areas, institutional principles and tools could be analyzed using the same framework.

Chapter 1 provides the background of the report. It is a preliminary stocktaking of developments in relation to the institutional principles of SDG 16. The chapter illustrates the conceptual complexity of the institutional principles, and the difficulties associated with defining and measuring progress on institutional dimensions of the SDGs more broadly; and briefly reviews current efforts in this respect. This is followed by short syntheses of global trends and lessons learned from institutional developments under transparency, access to information, accountability, inclusiveness of decision-making processes, and non-discrimination. The chapter highlights important gaps in knowledge regarding the effectiveness of various institutional arrangements, and suggests possible areas for consideration in order to better inform future reviews of progress on institutional aspects of SDG 16.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the challenges and opportunities for combating corruption in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals, focusing on public administration and the public sector. The chapter shows how anti-corruption relate to other institutional principles highlighted by SDG 16. It presents concrete ways in which countries have identified corruption risks and addressed corrupt practices at the systemic level and in different sectors. It analyzes the effectiveness of international instruments that have been put in place to address corruption, and their relationships with national efforts to fight corruption. The chapter also considers how countries are monitoring and measuring progress on anti-corruption and the effectiveness of anti-corruption strategies. Finally, it shows how the SDGs, including target 16.5, can provide an opportunity to countries to enhance the coherence and synergies among multiple anti-corruption instruments.

Chapter 3 examines how budget processes can be harnessed to better support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals. Budget processes are a critical link in the chain that connects sustainable development objectives, strategies and plans to achieve those, public spending and outcomes. National efforts to link the budget process with the SDGs started very soon after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, supported by the international community. At the same time, efforts to better link the budget process with the SDGs are inscribed in long-term reform processes in public administration, and especially those that aim to strengthen public financial management systems. The first part of the chapter takes stock of ongoing efforts at the national level to link budget processes to the SDGs. The second part of the chapter examines how the budget process, as an institutional construct, applies and responds to the institutional

principles examined in this report: transparency and access to information, accountability, anti-corruption, participation, and non-discrimination.

Chapter 4 is a preliminary exploration of risk management in public administration in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals. Risk and related concepts permeate the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs. Public administration plays a central role in managing risk across all SDG areas, as risk manager, regulator, or in other roles. Strategies put in place by public administration to address risk in various areas also have impacts on the most vulnerable groups in society. The chapter examines how risks of various natures across the SDGs are addressed by public administration at the national level. It investigates the extent to which the incorporation of a risk perspective in public administration has changed over time, and how this has affected strategies, plans and policies in different areas. It presents some of the recent trends in terms of institutionalization of risk management in government, including institutional setups that countries have put in place to identify, assess and manage risk in a more holistic way. It illustrates mechanisms and tools that exist today in public administration to manage risk in different SDG areas, how countries are using them, and challenges they face in this regard. The chapter also examines the connections between risk management in public administration and the institutional principles of SDG 16.

Chapter 5 analyses how public institutions have been promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, called for in Sustainable Development Goal 5 of the 2030 Agenda. Gender equality is integral to achieving all the other goals. Conversely, progress on the other SDGs impacts gender equality outcomes. Institutions and their influence on gender equality have been studied from multiple angles and disciplines. Using the lens of the SDG 16 institutional principles, the chapter presents institutional approaches, tools and instruments used by countries to promote gender equality, reviewing what is known about their effectiveness in different contexts. It also assesses how the SDG 16 principles have informed the design and operation of institutions geared to promoting gender equality in specific sectors.

E. Preparation of the report

The preparation of the report was led and coordinated by the Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG) of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. The report was produced using mixed methods that combined literature review (both peer-reviewed and UN documents), contributions sent by individual experts and organizations in response to an open call published in July 2018, and

interviews with experts. Chapter leaders were responsible for reaching out to relevant experts within and outside the UN system, mobilizing networks of experts working on the topics considered in the report. In all, over 50 experts provided contributions for the report.

All chapters were informed by in-depth analysis of the development and public administration literatures, as well as analysis of national policy developments in relation to public administration. An expert group meeting was organised in support of the preparation of chapter 3 of the report, allowing for the incorporation of a broad range of inputs and perspectives in the chapter. Lastly, the report relied on peer review by UN and non-UN experts, in addition to internal review in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

Endnotes

[1] See United Nations, 2016, 2017, 2018, *synthesis of voluntary national reviews*, Division for Sustainable Development Goals.

[2] See United Nations, 2015, Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, A/RES/70/1. Available at: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld.

[3] For example, target 16.9 on civil registration is seen as a fundamental building block for other dimensions such as participation, inclusion and non-discrimination. See Chapter 1 in this report.

[4] Finding an appropriate terminology that encompasses all the institutional features (or institutional dimensions) highlighted by SDG 16 is not straightforward. The word "principle" is used in most of the literature to refer to concepts such as accountability, transparency and effectiveness. Corruption (or anti-corruption) is not a principle. Other dimensions such as non-discrimination may be called principles. For want of a better word, throughout the report we use "institutional principles" or "institutional dimensions" interchangeably.

[5] United Nations, 2018, *Principles of effective governance for sustainable development*, Economic and Social Council Official Records 2018, Supplement No. 24, E/2018/44-E/C.16/2018/8, para. 31.