



**United Nations**

Department of  
Economic and  
Social Affairs



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# Changing Mindsets and Governance Capacities for Policy Coherence for a Holistic Implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the Arab Region

Online Training  
Workshop Key Insights

16 March 2021

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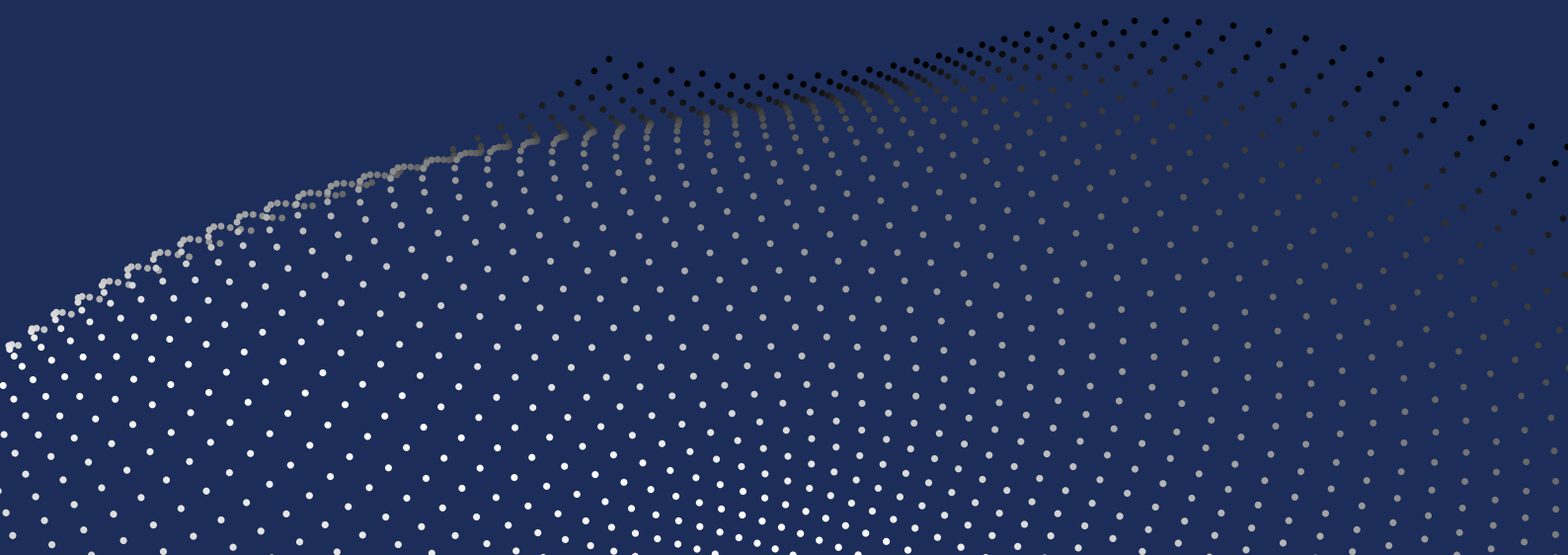
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# ABOUT THE REPORT

This report summarizes the key messages that were conveyed by facilitators, participants and external speakers during the online training workshop on “Changing Mindsets and Strengthening Governance Capacities for Policy Coherence for a Holistic Implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the Arab region”. The four-day workshop was organized by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations (UN DESA), through its Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG) and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UNESCWA). It was held virtually on 26 and 28 January and 2 and 4 February 2021 and was joined by a number of public servants from Bahrain, Morocco and Oman, working in policy planning, finance, human resources, information technology and statistical functions of different national government departments.

The workshop was held under the responsibility of Juwang Zhu (Director, DPIDG) and led by a team of United Nations staff led by Adriana Alberti, Veronique Verbruggen and Mariastefania Senese from UN DESA and Younes Abouyoub and Karam Karam from UN ESCWA. The UN DESA team comprised Nosipho Dhladhla, Aimee Gao, Rosanne Greco, Anni Haataja-Beerli, Gregory McGann, Benedicte Francoise Niviere, Maria Stella Simpas, Huiwen Tan, Kim Wooyoung, Shiyang Xu, Yi Yang, and Markus Zock. The team from UN ESCWA included Sumaya Almajthoob and Maya Ramadan. The lay-out and design of the publication was undertaken by a UN Volunteer, Ilona Szczepanczyk.

Facilitators and speakers included Aslam Alam (Bangladesh Institute for Information Literacy and Sustainable Development), Rolf Alter (Hertie School of Governance), David Alzate (Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab), Jesper Christiansen (States of Change), Abhinav Chugh (World Economic Forum), Hana Lakhdar Ghazal (Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab), Diana Alarcón González (Mexico City Government), Thurid Hustedt (Hertie School of Governance), Marja Innanen (Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development), Georges Lobo (European Commission), Louis Meuleman (United Nations Committee of Experts on Public Administration (2018-2021)) and Sherman Tan (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Singapore). The team wishes to thank very much public servants from Bahrain, Morocco and Oman for their active participation and for sharing their national experiences.



## Objectives of the Workshop

The workshop aimed to raise awareness and develop capacities among senior public servants from the Arab region on the need for effective institutional arrangements for holistic policy coherence to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It also highlighted the importance of changing mindsets and key competencies needed for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Furthermore, the workshop served to pilot draft material related to two training toolkits on “Strengthening Institutional Arrangements and Governance Capacity for Policy Coherence to implement the SDGs” and “Public Servants’ Mindsets and Capacities to Implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. The toolkits are part of the UN DESA “Curriculum on Governance for the SDGs”. It will be made available on the website of the United Nations Public Administration Network (<https://unpan.un.org/>).

### Thematic Focus

The workshop focused on four themes:

**Session 1** provided participants with an overview of governance capacities needed for policy coherence and changing mindsets in the context of the 2030 Agenda. It included an assessment of countries’ needs regarding institutional arrangements for policy coherence and changing mindsets (based on a pre-questionnaire) and familiarization with building blocks for policy coherence, various institutional arrangements as well as mindset shifts at multiple levels (individual, organizational and institutional) that are desirable to promote policy coherence.

**Session 3** focused on cross-governmental and inter-ministerial collaboration, including discussions among participants on the importance of different types of mindsets needed for collaboration. The session also featured peer-to-peer learning among countries that have promoted policy coherence through a roundtable discussion on institutional arrangements for policy coherence and changing mindsets.

**Session 2** focused on planning and systems thinking. Participants discussed their countries’ policy priorities, linking them to system thinking, long-term planning and monitoring policies in an integrated manner, taking also into consideration the importance of politics in the policy cycle. The session also stressed the importance of experimental and strategic mindsets to implement the SDGs and realize the principles of the 2030 Agenda.

In **Session 4**, participants discussed gaps, challenges and strategies of multi-stakeholder engagement based on the readiness assessment and reflected on actions that could be planned as a takeaway and triggers for change upon completion of the training.

# CHALLENGES IN THE ARAB REGION

The COVID-19 pandemic is undermining the achievement of all the Sustainable Development Goals by hitting all segments of the population, all sectors of the economy, and all regions of the world. Its impact has affected the most the poor and the vulnerable and caused million job losses globally. Also, the effects of the pandemic and the measures taken to mitigate its impact have overwhelmed health systems globally<sup>1</sup>.

**The pandemic** has reversed development gains and exacerbated the situation of vulnerable people. As UN Secretary-General António Guterres stated in April 2020, it has also shown us that “In an interconnected world, none of us is safe until all of us are safe.”<sup>2</sup>

Despite some progress prior to the pandemic, countries were not on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals<sup>3</sup>. As the pandemic lingers on worldwide and poverty and unemployment are likely to increase in the aftermath of the pandemic, business as usual will no longer be sufficient to overcome the pandemic (crisis response) and build back in a sustainable manner. Developing short-term policies to respond swiftly to the crisis, without considering the inter-generational effects, can run the risk of increasing the impacts of climate change (e.g., further water shortages), which in turn can potentially trigger conflict, and aggravate volatility and fragility.

The Arab world faces an unprecedented challenge that could lead an already volatile region into complete relapse. 8.3 million people in the region are expected to fall into poverty because of COVID-19.

The pandemic affects in particular those Arab countries where years of conflict and unrest have destroyed the health infrastructure. At the same time, the pandemic has exacerbated institutional vulnerabilities to address poverty and socio-economic challenges and lack of coordination among levels of government.

**As stated in the first Arab Human Development Report 2002<sup>4</sup>, and later on in the Arab Governance Report series published by ESCWA, governance – along with scientific knowledge production and utilization, and gender equality – has always been a critical issue in the Arab region.** While governance and full respect of human rights and freedoms have improved in some Arab countries over time, it has not in others, partly due to large disruptions and conflict in the past ten years.

The negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic will be visible in the years to come: Today, the region finds itself in a difficult situation where its real gross domestic product is projected to fall by 4.1 percent in 2020, with oil exporters particularly hard hit by the economic impact of necessary lockdowns and a decline in oil prices, combined with heavy reliance on remittances and tourism.<sup>5</sup> A high number of job losses and many people falling into poverty could add to further migration in the region that already counts millions of internally displaced people.<sup>6</sup>

In various Arab countries, COVID-19 has highlighted the challenges faced by public institutions in dealing with the crisis. In some instances, measures were not taken seriously by the citizens and the health crisis was poorly handled. However, some other countries have

*The COVID-19 crisis has underscored the importance of strong public institutions as main pillars for sustainable development and the need for enhanced political cooperation in the Arab region*

**Youness Abouyoub**

Chief, Governance and State Building Section, UNESCWA

managed, to a various extent, to leverage a comprehensive approach to tackle the pandemic by engaging and partnering with non-state actors, such as civil society organizations and the private sector. Other groups of countries – some of them in a conflict situation – took swift actions and responded very quickly. They were able to coordinate policy responses across government levels notwithstanding the institutional fragmentation and divisions. Successful countries in fighting COVID-19 had in place clear lines of authority and responsibilities and had strategic plans for responding to the crisis both during the outbreaks and the recovery phase.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/un-desa-policy-brief-81-impact-of-covid-19-on-sdg-progress-a-statistical-perspective/>

<sup>2</sup> United Nations (24 April 2020). None of us is safe until we all are, says UN chief at EU push to end COVID-19 pandemic. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sgsm20059.doc.htm> (last accessed on February 9, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg\\_policy\\_brief\\_covid-19\\_and\\_arab\\_states\\_english\\_version\\_july\\_2020.pdf](https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg_policy_brief_covid-19_and_arab_states_english_version_july_2020.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Development Programme (2002). Arab Human Development Report 2002. Creating Opportunities for Future Generations. Retrieved from [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/rbas\\_ahdr2002\\_en.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/rbas_ahdr2002_en.pdf) (last accessed on February 9, 2021).

<sup>5</sup> International Monetary Fund (October 2020). Regional Economic Outlook. Middle East and Central Asia. Retrieved from <https://www.imf.org/-/media/Files/Publications/REO/MCD-CCA/2020/October/English/mreo1020-full-report.ashx> (last accessed on February 9, 2021).

<sup>6</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2020). The Middle East and North Africa. In UNHCR Global Appeal 2020-2021 (pp. 100-107). Retrieved from [https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/ga2020/pdf/Chapter\\_MENA.pdf](https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/ga2020/pdf/Chapter_MENA.pdf) (last accessed on February 9, 2021).

# POLICY COHERENCE AND CHANGING MINDSETS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

**Overcoming this crisis calls for unparalleled actions and the role of effective governance has never been as important as it is today.** Governments, both at national and local levels, are at the frontline of implementing the SDGs and addressing the socio-economic consequences of the pandemic.

UN Member States have a real opportunity to rethink their development frameworks, seeking practical and expert guidance from the 11 Principles of Effective Governance for Sustainable Development<sup>7</sup> to improve their national and local governance capabilities to reach the SDGs.

The multitude and complexity of issues having an impact simultaneously call for transformational change and enhanced whole-of-government approaches through coordination across sectors and levels of government to ensure more inclusive, equitable and resilient societies. This requires, among other measures, capacity for organizing (government) institutions and other stakeholders engaged in SDG implementation to promote policy coherence. It also calls for strengthening public servants' capacity to implement the SDGs through the development of new mindsets, skills, and behaviors and through new ways of working together across organizational boundaries.

Policy coherence, collaborative leadership, strategic thinking and planning, evidence-based decision making, and

enhanced partnerships with academia and the private sector are all critical measures that can help governments elaborate immediate responses to uplift the poor and the vulnerable and reduce inequalities, including the one in gender. Also, investing in data is essential to respond to the crisis and accelerate SDG implementation.

A sustainable response will also require the reconfiguration of social systems, new ways of thinking, and approaches that can lead to a new social contract, where trust between citizens and public institutions can be enhanced, and to more equitable societies.

Policy coherence, which can be horizontal, vertical or both, is a solution to multi-sectoral policy challenges, such as the energy-land-water nexus in the context of climate change. It can be defined as "an attribute of policy that systematically reduces conflicts and promotes synergies between and within different policy areas to achieve the outcomes associated with jointly agreed policy objectives."<sup>8</sup> Policy coherence is also about stakeholder engagement through a whole-of-society approach. Policy coherence requires developing capacities along nine key building blocks (see Figure 1)<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> United Nations Economic and Social Council (2018). *Principles of effective governance for sustainable development*. Official Records, 2018. Supplement No. 24. E/2018/44-E/C.16/2018/8, para. 31. Retrieved from [https://publicadministration.un.org/Portals/1/Images/CEPA/Principles\\_of\\_effective\\_governance\\_english.pdf](https://publicadministration.un.org/Portals/1/Images/CEPA/Principles_of_effective_governance_english.pdf) (last accessed on January 22, 2021).

<sup>8</sup> M. Nilsson, T. Zamparutti, J.E. Petersen, B. Nykvist, P. Rudberg, J. McGuinn (2012). *Understanding policy coherence: analytical framework and examples of sector-environment policy interactions in the EU*, *Environ. Policy Gov.*, 22(6), 395-423.

<sup>9</sup> The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is the custodian for the SDG Indicator 17.14.1 (number of countries with mechanisms in place to enhance policy coherence for sustainable development). UNEP has developed an indicator framework composed of eight building blocks to measure progress towards policy coherence for sustainable development in a holistic manner and to identify areas of improvement on which governments should focus first. UNDESA complemented the framework with a building block on the topic of transformational leadership.

**Figure 1: Nine building blocks for policy coherence**



1. Political commitment



2. Transformational Leadership,  
Human Resources and  
Changing Mindset



3. System Thinking and  
Policy Linkages



4. Organizational Structures  
and Processes



5. Financing



6. Digital Technology and Data



7. Coherence between National  
and Local/Regional Level



8. Stakeholders' Engagement



9. Monitoring, Reporting and  
Evaluation Process

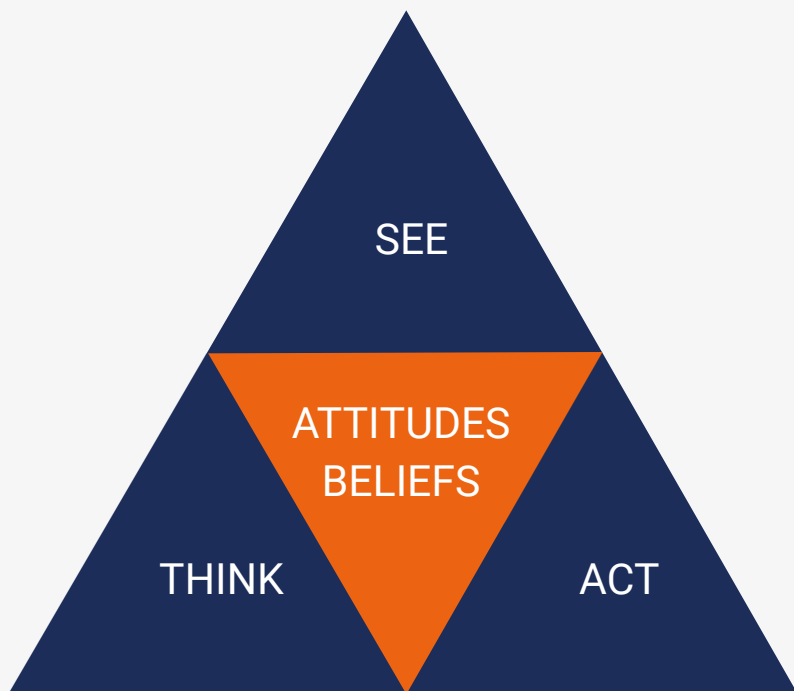
Source: UN DESA (<https://unpan.un.org/node/708>)



The issue of changing mindsets is of paramount importance to promoting policy coherence. Feedback from schools of public administration has shown that single changes to the formal rules of institutions do not produce desired results. To implement institutional change, changes in public servants' mindsets through socialization, training and other mechanisms are critical as well. Individuals can be empowered to develop different mindsets such as an experimental, learning, fixed or growth mindset. This is because values, attitudes and beliefs – in other words, what one holds true about oneself or others – fundamentally shape behavior and compliance with (new) formal rules. The way how we see, think and act is very important in this change process (Figure 2):

- **“See”** refers to our perception system – what we see and hear, not just in the physical world, but socially, culturally, politically. How we “see” things is largely determined by the “frames” we use to make sense of reality.
- **“Think”** refers to the way we make sense of situations (consciously or subconsciously). We develop mental models of how the world works and anticipate how causes and effects may lead to certain situations. This also affects the way we interpret information, create patterns and ask critical questions.
- **“Act”** refers to the ways we use the data and signals we see and think about to inform behaviors and activities we deem possible and appropriate, and the manner in which we will carry them out.

**Figure 2: For institutional change, it matters how we see, think and act.**



# PLANNING AND SYSTEM THINKING

**Integrating systems thinking in policy planning, making and monitoring is an approach to cope with complex or “wicked” problems.** Interactions between different parts of a system – linkages, synergies, conflicts, trade-off – have to be identified through long-term planning and dedicated mechanisms such as a whole-of-government (alignment and coordination between ministries and across levels of government (national, local, regional) and a whole-of-society approach (including engagement with stakeholders). Systemic understanding does not only help address crises immediately but also develop in the long run the capacity of institutions to detect, analyze and adapt to similar crises in an integrated manner.

*Policy coherence has undoubtedly a political dimension.*

**Rolf Alter**

Senior Fellow, Hertie School of Governance

**Politics and public administration are complementary, but not the same.** Politics - that is the exercise of power by political leadership – reflecting programs, ideologies and vested interests, combined with public administration – that is the machinery of government – constitute the government. The following three variables matter for enhancing policy coherence in the policy process: decisions, participation and evidence. In other words, if one gives priority to a tradeoff, s/he has to provide evidence for its plausibility and engage with stakeholders that reflect the diversity of those with vested interests who want to contribute. Embarking on such process is a political decision.

**Public servants navigate politics between the domains of partisanship and expertise.** They can provide and mobilize evidence. They can support stakeholder engagement. They can also, for instance as senior public servant in the cabinet of a minister, provide expertise for decision-making. Public servants have different roles depending on how they were appointed. For example, there are those who enter a public administration as part of political leadership charged with program implementation. Navigating the reality of public policymaking is driven and decided by political leadership, but prepared and implemented by public servants.

**Multi-level governance (also called “cross-government”/cross-judiciary governance) is about the policy alignment across different levels of government and political orientations.** Stakeholder engagement for policy coherence can be complex for two reasons:

- First, the more complex (e.g., multi-sectorial) an issue is the more diverse the involvement of stakeholders with vested interests will be. Second, the time axis poses a real challenge for involving stakeholders to address issues whose full impact is only slightly visible now but is expected to become higher over time.
- A second reason why engagement with stakeholders is complex, is the fact that the stakeholders that governments engage with now, for example in the context of climate change, will most likely not be the same ones that the government will be dealing with by 2050. This explains, for example, the slow progress in the discussions on climate change.

## EXPERIMENTING IN PUBLIC SERVICE

**A key question many countries must ask is whether they are devising the public solutions and promoting the institutional capacity that can deal with the challenges they are facing now and in the future.** The COVID-19 crisis has triggered a large variety of responses by governments. This shows that, where there are high degrees of uncertainty and unclear cause-and-effect relationships, governments do not have clear answers and experiment what might work for them in practice. The future of public service delivery will depend much more on experimentation, a new culture of decision-making that is susceptible to testing assumptions and exploring opportunities for policymaking and implementation. An experimental mindset emphasizes for instance a shift from ideas (for instance, there is not that one idea to solve climate change) to hypotheses to be tested in correlation with others. To be legitimate, disclosure of failure is embraced in this process, rather than avoided (Figure 3). Some governments have shown to be open to failure and willing to learn from their own mistakes.

*An experimental mindset is about shifting from a culture of wanting to know things in advance (prescriptive) to a culture of learning and testing (explorative).*

### USING PLATFORMS TO MAKE SENSE OF COMPLEXITY

The World Economic Forum and a network of 250 knowledge institutions have developed and curate a platform<sup>10</sup> for strategic insights and contextual intelligence to explore and monitor hundreds of issues and forces driving transformational change across economies, industries, and global issues (e.g., artificial intelligence, ageing etc.). The platform allows to create own mappings of interconnected issues and can inform coherent policymaking.

### COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK FOR THE ARAB REGION

UNESCWA has developed the Arab Regional Job Competencies Framework based on a participatory methodology in which Arab public servants from 13 countries participated. The consultations touched upon the challenges facing the public sector, methodologies and modern forms of human resources management, in particular for senior management. The proposed framework highlights the importance of adopting the principle of “merit” and “efficiency” as a prerequisite for raising the level of public service and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.<sup>11</sup>

**Figure 3: Features of a paradigm shift in public governance**



<sup>10</sup> The platform is available via <https://intelligence.weforum.org/>

<sup>11</sup> United Nations Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (2020). Towards a Common Arab Regional Job Competencies Framework for Senior Public Servants within the Context of Agenda 2030 and Public Policy. Retrieved from <https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/publications/files/common-arab-regional-job-competencies-framework-senior-public-servants-arabic.pdf> (last accessed on January 28, 2021).

# CROSS-GOVERNMENTAL AND INTER-MINISTERIAL COLLABORATION

Working in “silos” is a main cause of ineffective inter-ministerial collaboration and creates risks for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. A silo can be described as an isolated grouping, department etc. that functions apart from others, especially in a way seen as hindering communication and cooperation. Silos can take three different forms:<sup>12</sup>

- **Political silos (macro-level)** refer to competition between political leaders and the legal right and duty of the same to be the sole responsible, whilst also reflecting the different values of political parties in a democratic system.
- **Institutional/organizational silos (meso-level)** provide structure, focus, protection against other departments, clarity, responsibility, transparency and accountability, whilst also coming with a lack of trust between silos, as communication between silos may be prohibited or must go via hierarchy.
- **Mental silos (micro-level)** refer to a lack of common goals of individuals and the notion to not see and act beyond the job description.

Depending on the context of a country’s main organizational principle(s), “siloism” can be dealt with in various ways:

- In a **hierarchical governance context**, silos can be good and should be kept, as they provide structure.
- In a **network governance context**, silos can be connected and “taught to dance”.<sup>13</sup>
- In a **market governance context**, silos can be broken down to flatten the organization, as they are deemed unnecessary which is in particular applied in Anglo-Saxon countries.

*To achieve inter-ministerial collaboration, silos must not necessarily be broken down. They can be “taught to dance”.*

**Louis Meuleman**

United Nations Committee of Experts on Public Administration (2018-2021)

**Figure 4: How to deal with siloism in public administration?**



Amongst other things, inter-ministerial collaboration can be fostered by:

- Introducing more flexibility through a matrix organization;
- Merging (parts of) departments;
- Including all ministries and even subnational governments in horizontal coordination;
- Enhancing communication and collaboration skills based on the Harvard Mutual Gains Approach to negotiation;
- Informal, bottom-up networks; or
- Individuals that are willing and able to cross the boundaries of a social group within a bureaucracy by innovating, improving performance or co-producing in an effective manner, especially in multi-organizational settings (“boundary spanners”).

<sup>12</sup> Meuleman, L. (2018). *Metagovernance for Sustainability. A Framework for Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals*. London: Routledge.

<sup>13</sup> Niestroy, I. & Meuleman, L. (July 21, 2016). *Teaching Silos to Dance: A Condition to Implement the SDGs*.

Retrieved from <http://sdg.iisd.org/commentary/guest-articles/teaching-silos-to-dance-a-condition-to-implement-the-sdgs/> (last accessed on February 8, 2021).

**Decentralization, that is the transfer of authority to subnational levels, is a major public administration reform challenge in some Arab countries in which various government departments are involved depending on the country.**

The process aims to deliver public services more effectively and efficiently at regional and local levels and goes hand in hand with changes in legal frameworks and e-government capacity development to ensure that data and information can flow seamlessly on the same and between different levels of government. Nevertheless, the COVID-19 crisis has also revealed that governance in some countries has decentralized so much that there was no real power anymore with the central administration, where command and control should normally be in a crisis situation.

## INNOVATIVE MINDSET FOR CROSS-GOVERNMENTAL COLLABORATION

**Public sector innovators combine key attitudes and skills to successfully drive innovation in government and solve public problems.** Some of those we need to see more often in the mindsets of leaders at all levels (individuals, teams, organizations, ecosystem) and they include empathy, humility, enablement, reflection, agility, curiosity, imagination, focus on outcomes and courage.

**Small changes can “hack” the policy cycle and achieve something.** To embrace a “user-centered” mindset and understand policymaking as a circular instead of a linear process, public servants of the Ministry of Employment in Denmark for example were asked to complete short-term mandatory internships in public employment services to experience first-hand state-citizen interactions as frontline caseworkers and to collect data.<sup>14</sup>

*Paradoxically, the change of organizational culture can be a slow, time-consuming process in a context where strategies and objectives are time-bound and public servants already face high and complex workload.*

**Changing mindsets is about embracing new professional identities, learning, sense-making, feeling, thinking and acting differently, and the intention to change requires the right enabling conditions including recognition and incentives.** Paradoxically, the change of organizational

culture can be a slow, time-consuming process in contrast to a context where strategies and objectives are time-bound and public servants face a high and complex workload. Yet, a good starting question is to ask oneself about the triggers of change in one’s organization or how organizations can be nudged in a way to mainstream the SDGs in their work. Options for action could include public-sector recruitment and staff retention taking distance from a narrow vision of how a public servant should be, mandatory requirements for data sharing between government departments to create transparency and accountability, thereby fostering competition focusing on results instead of mere processes or the establishment of informal, bottom-up communities of practices.

## INTEROPERABILITY FOR SHARING INFORMATION

**Interoperability refers to the ability of organizations to interact through information, knowledge and data sharing systems.** Interoperability is needed to deliver public services more efficiently, in a less costly manner and in a borderless way. Practical examples show that public services are rarely delivered by only one government department. For example, the calculation of reduced tariffs for electricity supply to some households requires the seamless processing of data and information from different interconnected sources within the public administration. The European Interoperability Framework<sup>15</sup> recognizes twelve principles of European public services and four layers of interoperability: legal, organizational, semantic and technical.

The “Interoperability Academy”<sup>16</sup> aims at contributing to advanced digital skills of public servants in the area of interoperability to support policy, service delivery and impact evaluation.

## EVIDENCE-BASED POLICYMAKING

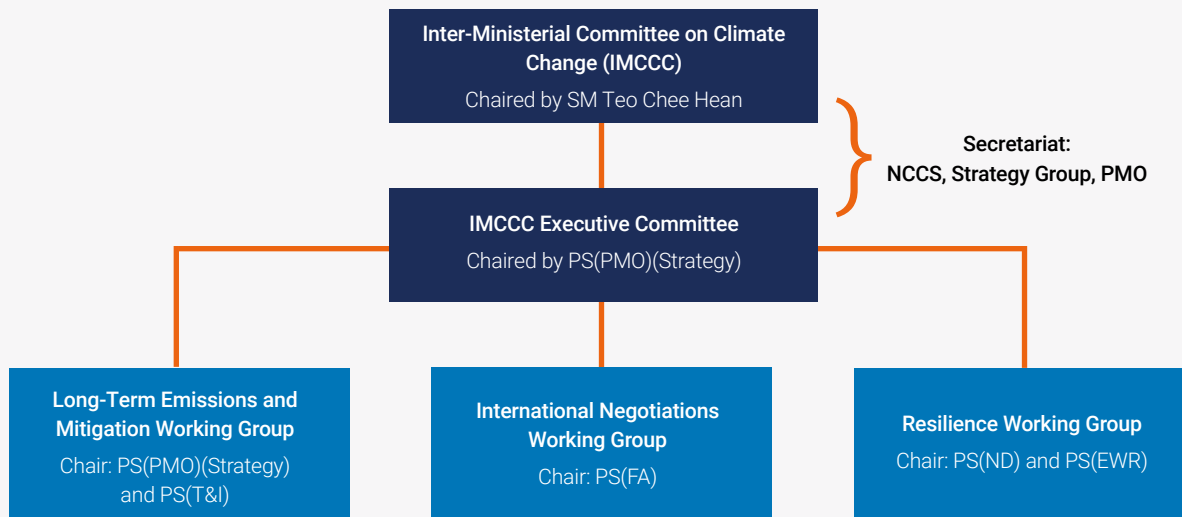
**There is a gap in evidence-based policymaking due to low prioritization and limited capacity of generating evidence, financial constraints, political uncertainty, finding and contextualization of the right evidence, behavioral biases in decision-making and lack of bureaucratic incentives to leverage and apply evidence.** An evidence-based mindset can be developed by generating tailored evidence to solve specific problems identified by policymakers, leveraging existing evidence from around the world to inform local decision-making and institutionalizing a holistic culture of evidence use. Randomized controlled trials, that is a type of scientific (often medical) experiment measuring the impact of a policy intervention by comparing a control group against one or more treatment groups, can be powerful tools to produce evidence. Adapting research designs to the local context and working with local researchers and implementers could mitigate some risks related to the validity of such studies.

<sup>14</sup> [https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/nesta\\_ideo\\_guide\\_jan2017.pdf](https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/nesta_ideo_guide_jan2017.pdf) Pg 18-23

<sup>15</sup> European Commission (2017). *New European Interoperability Framework. Promoting seamless services and data flows for European public administrations.* Retrieved from [https://ec.europa.eu/isa2/sites/isa/files/eif\\_brochure\\_final.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/isa2/sites/isa/files/eif_brochure_final.pdf) (last accessed on February 2, 2021).

<sup>16</sup> See also <https://joinup.ec.europa.eu/collection/digital-skills-public-sector/solution/interoperability-academy> (last accessed on February 2, 2021).

**Figure 5: Example of how Singapore is addressing climate change-related issues through an Inter-Ministerial Committee on Climate Change**



**From the perspective of public servants from Mexico and Singapore, capacities for policy coherence require the following:**

- A commitment to a vision (the image of where we want to go);
- Ownership of targets;
- Commitment and discipline to work towards joint results (in contrast to merely following processes) based on a clear system of accountability;
- Disregard of personal and political agendas;
- High sense of public service and responsibility;
- Respect to the hierarchy within a work ethics of equal partners;
- Strong leadership at the highest level;
- Long-term planning;
- In-depth understanding of unique circumstances and vulnerabilities, such as climate risks (Figure 5);
- Listening to the needs of citizens; and
- Being dynamic to foresee and adapt to future challenges.

**SDG implementation is challenged by budgetary constraints.**

How the available budget is spent is a political decision and the budget is usually approved by members of parliament after deliberations. Redefining priorities, that is for example redirecting existing resources spent on unnecessary or outdated administrative procedures in favor of the implementation of environmental policies, can still make a difference in a context of austerity. Not least, well-functioning taxation systems have a crucial role to raise revenue for government expenditures for SDG implementation.

# STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The success of the 2030 Agenda will greatly depend on how effectively governments engage national parliaments, local authorities, indigenous peoples, civil society, the scientific and academic community, the private sector and others in follow-up and implementation efforts, bridging the gap between people's needs and national policy setting.

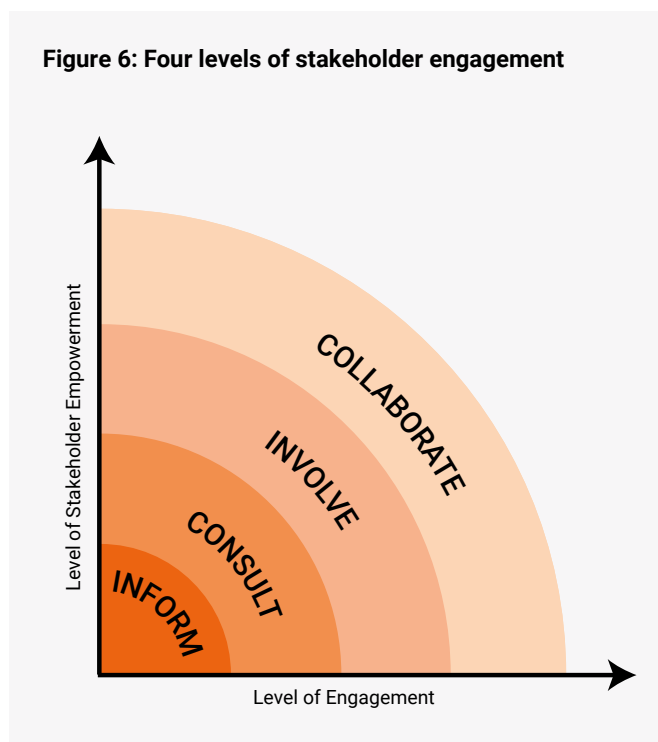
The SDGs also include specific targets on participation, notably:

- **SDG 5.5:** Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.
- **SDG 6.b:** Support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management.
- **SDG 11.3:** By 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries.
- **SDG 16.7:** Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.
- **SDG 17.17:** Encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships.<sup>17</sup>

**Four levels of stakeholder engagement (Figure 6) proposed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) can be a useful framework for categorizing a range of approaches for engaging stakeholder groups in the implementation and review of the 2030 Agenda.**<sup>18</sup>

1. **Inform**, that is a one-way communication, where governments inform stakeholders of their plans;
2. **Consult**, that is governments present plans and options for implementation and review, and receive feedback from stakeholders;
3. **Involve**, meaningful engagement of stakeholders with governments in generating plans and options for implementation and review, and carrying out actions based on decisions emerging from this input, while no formal decision-making authority is shared;
4. **Collaborate**, that is governments and stakeholders decide together on the implementation and review of plans in a long-term, complex and demanding, requiring resources.

**Figure 6: Four levels of stakeholder engagement**



The Framework for Planning and Assessing Quality Engagement<sup>19</sup> notes that stakeholder engagement should be:

- **Purposeful** (i.e. clear definition of what one wants to get out of the engagement);
- **Inclusive** (i.e. mapping and analysis of stakeholders, management of power imbalances, removal of barriers such as location, language or cultural bias that make engagement difficult);
- **Transformative** (i.e. use of methods that build understanding and collaboration across different groups in society); and
- **Proactive** (i.e. providing the information stakeholders need in an accessible and timely manner).

<sup>17</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs / United Nations Institute for Training and Research (2020). *Stakeholder Engagement and the 2020 Agenda. A Practical Guide*, p. 26. Retrieved from [https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-07/2703For\\_distribution\\_Stakeholder\\_Engagement\\_Practical\\_Guide\\_spreads\\_2.pdf](https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-07/2703For_distribution_Stakeholder_Engagement_Practical_Guide_spreads_2.pdf) (last accessed on February 8, 2021).

<sup>18</sup> IAP2 (2018). *IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation*. Retrieved from [https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/pillars/Spectrum\\_8.5x11\\_Print.pdf](https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/pillars/Spectrum_8.5x11_Print.pdf) (last accessed on February 8, 2021).

<sup>19</sup> United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific / IAP2 (2018). *Creating a Seat at the Table. Stakeholder Engagement for the 2030 Agenda*. Retrieved from [https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Stakeholder%20Engagement%20Indicator%20Framework%20Brochure\\_180518\\_0.pdf](https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Stakeholder%20Engagement%20Indicator%20Framework%20Brochure_180518_0.pdf) (last accessed on February 8, 2021).

*A key for effective stakeholder engagement is to address not only the “usual suspects” but also those that may not or only be loosely organized, but still matter for the functioning of society. The informal economy – a major job provider in developing countries – is an example.*

#### Participants referred to various stakeholder engagement initiatives in their countries, namely:

- An online one-stop shop for decision-making where stakeholders can give comments on proposed legislation which had already resulted in the halt and change of legislation before its issuance;
- Thematic advisory councils involving citizens in the management of public affairs issues to increase transparency and accountability; or
- The integration of engagement strategies in the curricula of national schools of public administration.

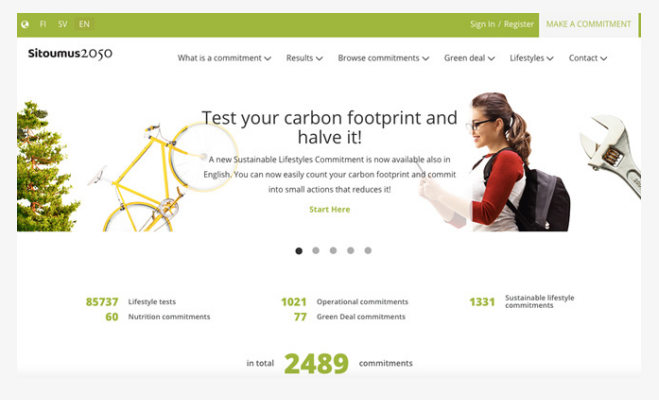
One main challenge with regard to stakeholder engagement is the analysis and synthesis of feedback, particularly if there are very many and opposing views received. Assistance from external, independent researchers, online forms for automatic data collection of stakeholders' key information or, in the future, artificial intelligence-based solutions evaluating the relevance and quality of contributions could be elements to meet this challenge.

**In Finland, the whole-of-society approach for sustainable development has been practiced now for almost 30 years and one important lesson learned is that, while political leadership is indeed needed, the 2030 Agenda needs to be on everyone's agenda.** The National Commission on Sustainable Development<sup>20</sup>, chaired and coordinated by the Prime Minister (the ministry of the environment is the vice-chair), is to ensure that the international sustainable development goals are included in national policy. The Commission has 57 members including representatives from churches, parliament,

academia, municipalities, businesses and civil society as well as an inter-ministerial secretariat including all ministries. Since 2017, an Agenda2030 Youth Group composed of 20 young people from all around Finland and an Expert Panel for Sustainable Development composed of 10 professors from different disciplines also provide their views on sustainable development in Finland, the latter importantly on the national SDG indicators from a science-based perspective. In addition, Finland implemented the following interesting engagement initiatives:

- Maintenance of an online platform<sup>21</sup> – a replicable website based on open code – where different actors – including municipalities, ministries, businesses, NGOs, schools and private citizens – can make commitments linked to 8 objectives that carry out the 17 SDGs (e.g. related to reducing the number of accidents at work) (Figure 7);
- Conducting a citizens' panel on sustainable development in Finland run by the Prime Minister in which 500 Finns assessed the state of SDG implementation based on indicators; and
- Publication of different assessments on the state of sustainable development in Finland in the 2020 Voluntary National Review report – from the government as well as the civil society perspective (led by the umbrella organization Finnish Development NGOs (Fingo)).<sup>22</sup>

**Figure 7: Finland's online platform for stakeholders to make SDG-related commitments**



<sup>20</sup> See also <https://kestavakehitys.fi/en/commission> (last accessed on February 8, 2021).

<sup>21</sup> See also <https://sitoumus2050.fi/en/web/sitoumus2050/home#/> (last accessed on February 8, 2021).

<sup>22</sup> Prime Minister's Office Finland (2020). Voluntary National Review 2020 Finland. Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Retrieved from [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26265VNR\\_Report\\_Finland\\_2020.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26265VNR_Report_Finland_2020.pdf) (last accessed on February 8, 2021).



## EMPATHY-BUILDING FOR STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

**Empathy-building is very important for changing mindsets and stakeholder engagement.** In essence, empathy is about putting yourself in the shoes of others, like for example in those of a person with disability, and to become better aware of cognitive biases and increase knowledge. Proximity is essential for building empathy. Though it is a time-consuming process, public servants of all levels need to directly engage with the people affected, that is public service seekers and providers. Therefore, as an activity in capacity development workshops, public servants can be dispatched to local service delivery points in fields such as health and family planning, social security, land agriculture, fisheries, education or police to experience, observe and listen whether for example the environment in which services are provided and sought is welcoming, intimidating, neutral or else. Such activity can bring bureaucrats outside their comfort zone and help them better understand policy reforms, implications and outcomes, and ultimately make public service delivery more effective, accountable, inclusive and transparent for example for older people or women.

*Procuring hardware and software has to go hand in hand with investment in “humanware” and building capability of computer users.”*

**Aslam Alam**

Director, Bangladesh Institute for Information Literacy and Sustainable Development

**A functioning information and communication technology system and data alone are not enough to improve public service delivery.** Raising awareness among public service providers and seekers of the public’s benefit of access to open data was also necessary for an effective engagement strategy and dependent on changing mindsets inside and outside of public institutions. Even though in some countries there is ample information publicly available online, in many countries public servants still tend to seek information physically and directly from colleagues. In this regard, building information literacy – how information is published and presented and how people can find and interpret it – is very important, notably in a pandemic where people are more inclined to find information digitally.

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## ABOUT THE CURRICULUM ON GOVERNANCE FOR THE SDGs

The Curriculum on Governance for the Sustainable Development Goals aims to promote critical understanding of sustainable development issues, enhance governance capacity, and strengthen public servants' awareness of their active role in contributing to the achievement of the SDGs. It aims at developing the knowledge and capacities required to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and support concrete outcomes and lasting impact.

### What is the Curriculum on Governance for the SDGs?

The Curriculum on Governance is a comprehensive set of Training of Trainers Capacity Development Toolkits, which contain ready-to-use and customizable training material on key governance dimensions needed to advance the implementation of the SDGs. The Curriculum provides methodologies and approaches to advance knowledge and assist governments in developing capacities at the individual, organizational, and institutional/societal level, to drive the transformational change needed to implement the 2030 Agenda.

The Training of Trainers Capacity Development Toolkits are structured around modules that include readings, self-assessment situation analysis, application of theories learned to concrete issues and challenges, priority setting exercises, cooperative and experiential learning through case studies, action planning, and other activities that can assist countries in advancing governance transformation for sustainable development. The Curriculum is composed of the following:

- A set of Training of Trainers Capacity Development Toolkits for 5-day or 3-day face to face capacity development workshops
- Online Courses on key governance issues to implement the SDGs
- Facilitated Online Training and Capacity Development Workshops
- Customized Online and Offline Capacity Development Workshops upon request of Member States
- Offering a Certificate of Attendance upon successful completion
- Global Community of Practice on key governance issues
- Hosted on UNPAN for networking and online exchange of knowledge

### How was the Curriculum Developed?

Based on extensive research on key governance issues, innovative methodologies and approaches, and incorporating reference to the findings of the UN inter-governmental work and existing relevant publications and analytical work related to governance and public institutions, the Curriculum on Governance for the SDGs is composed of Training of Trainers Capacity Development Toolkits. The Toolkits have been developed in a holistic way and are complementary. They are designed and implemented through the engagement of governments and schools of public administration. The Curriculum's methodology is based on key building blocks:

- Promoting systems thinking
- Leveraging the potential of ICT and digital government
- Fostering collaboration and co-creation
- Driving institutional transformational change
- Focusing on impact
- Enhancing flexibility

### How can the Curriculum's Capacity Development Toolkits be Used?

The Training of Trainers Capacity Development Toolkits are intended to be used in interactive, results-oriented and engaging training courses. They can be used for a five-day face-to-face training workshop or selected modules can be used for shorter training workshops. Modules from various toolkits can be combined based on a country's needs. The Training of Trainers Capacity Development Toolkits will be continuously updated and expanded based on the feedback received from schools of public administration and governments. The Toolkits are to be considered as "living documents".