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Challenges for institutions in ensuring that no one is left behind

Contribution by the Committee of Experts on Public Administration to the 2016 thematic review of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

1. The Committee of Experts on Public Administration welcomes the adoption of “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development”. The 17 goals and 169 targets will provide critical reference points for governments in designing or revamping institutional arrangements, policies, strategies and plans to eradicate poverty and achieve a better, more sustainable world.
2. Public institutions have a critical role in ensuring the successful implementation of all SDGs and targets. Not only do governments have primary responsibility for policy-making and delivering basic services for all, but they also often pioneer research and technology of critical importance for improving people’s lives while mitigating risks such as climate change and responding to shocks.
3. “Leaving no one behind” is a core principle of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It should guide public administrations in delivering on all their functions, alongside the principles of effectiveness, inclusiveness and accountability.

Many are lagging behind

4. Many women, men and children continue to live on the margins of societies. Many are isolated, whether in rural areas or in cities, and lack access to infrastructure, resources and information, and are left out of decision making. The State has a critical responsibility to reach out to them, understand and address their needs and empower them to live a life of dignity.
5. Various factors hinder access to public services by the poorest and most vulnerable, including discrimination, affordability, geographical distance, physical environment, language, culture, and lack of access to digital and other technologies. Barriers and constraints vary greatly depending on the population groups concerned, be they children, youth, persons with disabilities, people living with HIV/AIDS, older persons, indigenous peoples, refugees and internally displaced persons, migrants, slum dwellers or others living in extreme poverty. Women often face difficulties in accessing public services and interacting with public institutions.

6. Young people without a job deserve particular attention. Youth unemployment remains unacceptably high and can result in a long-lasting “scarring effect” on young people, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds.¹
7. People from all segments of the population have equal rights to benefit from public policies and public services.

Commitment, institutional arrangements and policies to leave no one behind

8. It is important that the highest levels of Government express their strong commitment and determination to leaving no one behind and undertake sustained efforts to ensure that this principle pervades the work of all public institutions at all levels. Leaving no one behind should be embedded in efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda from the outset.
9. Some Member States are in the process of creating or identifying various kinds of institutional arrangements to guide implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It would be important that the responsibility to steer implementation be entrusted to a ministry or office with sufficient authority and resources, such as the Office of the Head of Government or an independent national authority, depending on the national context, working with the legislative branch. This will help keep the focus on leaving no one behind across all SDGs and support a more integrated approach to policy-making.
10. Countries should identify those who are at risk of being left behind through consultation with all levels of government and all segments of civil society. Governments need to engage the poorest and most vulnerable people in identifying their needs and ways to address them at local and national levels, and to support efforts of communities to organize themselves for development.
11. Legislation, public policies and public services should actively contribute to improving the situations of the poorest and most vulnerable.
12. Ensuring that no one is left behind requires a coherent and integrated strategy consistent with national and sustainable development strategies. In addition, sectoral policies need to proactively address the situations of the poorest and most vulnerable. This includes efforts to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls; promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth; ensure full and productive employment and decent work for all; address youth unemployment; build entrepreneurial capacities; make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable; reduce inequality within and between countries and combat climate change. Education and training are also critical.
13. No country should be left behind and special attention must be given to the acute challenges public institutions face in countries in special situations such as the least developed countries, small island developing States and countries in post-conflict situations. Utmost efforts should be made to avoid a decline of official development assistance allocated to supporting the sustainable development needs of developing countries. Policy coherence is also critical. Efforts to realize the SDGs and address climate change should be mutually reinforcing.
14. Large inflows of migrants and refugees pose unprecedented challenges and severe strains on public institutions. Global and regional responsibility-sharing could be strengthened by allowing countries

¹ Resolution adopted at the International Labour Conference in 2012.

faced with large-scale movements and those hosting large refugee and migrant populations to access development assistance. Equally important is the need to relocate refugees through resettlement agreement and other legal pathways such as temporary protection and humanitarian visas.

Mobilizing local authorities and other actors

15. Besides national governments, local authorities are well placed to understand and respond to the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable and have a particular role in ensuring that no one is left behind. The HLPF could call on local authorities to develop ‘local 2030 Agendas’ that place a special focus on ensuring that no one is left behind, and are supported by commensurate means of implementation, including capacity building and enhanced ability to mobilise resources, with responsibilities devolved incrementally so that lack of capacities does not stall implementation. Community-driven development should also be encouraged.
16. Working with non-governmental organizations may be a way to provide assistance and services to those furthest behind. It should be accompanied by mechanisms to ensure adequate standards for public services and shared accountability of State and non-State actors in delivering quality services to all with special emphasis on the poorest and most vulnerable.
17. A major initiative is needed to raise awareness and understanding about the vision of the 2030 Agenda and the commitment to leaving no one behind within public administrations and societies at large. All people have the right to be informed in easily understandable terms and to express their views about public policy and public services for sustainable development.

Inclusiveness and participation

18. Institutions should proactively reach out to the poorest and most vulnerable to engage them in shaping policies and designing, monitoring and assessing programmes that respond to their needs. Innovative approaches may be needed. For the voice of the poorest and most vulnerable to be truly heard, public institutions at the local and national levels need to be fully representative of different segments of the population. This may require anti-discrimination laws and regulations and, in some cases, removing the structural barriers that make it more difficult for members of vulnerable or disadvantaged groups to hold offices, which some countries achieve, for example, through affirmative action policies.
19. Public servants in national and sub-national administrations have a responsibility for ensuring that no one is left behind. Respecting long established principles such as non-discrimination or merit-based recruitment will be critical.

Accountability and trust

20. Governments, parliaments and the judiciary should enhance efforts to ensure that public administrations are held accountable for the impact of their work including on the poorest and most vulnerable. Accountability mechanisms need to be inclusive and to engage all segments of the population. Independent audit institutions can help review implementation. Governments must take the lead in defining national targets and baseline data. This information needs to be publicized for effective and inclusive review of SDG implementation.
21. Particularly urgent is to increase the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts. High-quality, timely and reliable geospatial

data, citizen-generated data, open data and big data can also be valuable in assessing the situations of the poorest and most vulnerable.

22. Building the capacities of public institutions at all levels is critical for realising all of the SDGs. Capacities are needed to develop, implement and analyse national plans for realizing the SDGs, including strategies for eradicating poverty and inequality, elaborate scenarios, evaluate and review progress, and collect and analyse statistics. International support for these efforts is important.
23. The HLPF is an important platform for countries to exchange good practices and lessons learned on institutional arrangements and policies, as well as their impact in implementing the SDGs and improving the lives of the poorest and most vulnerable. Actions to leave no one behind should be an integral part of its future national and thematic reviews of the implementation of the SDGs.
24. The Committee of Experts on Public Administration will continue to provide inputs to the annual thematic reviews of the HLPF on the challenges faced by institutions in supporting the SDGs and ways to overcome them and leave no one behind. It can also keep track of good practices and lessons regarding institutional arrangements in these areas. Good practices regarding institutional arrangements for the SDGs can also be posted on the Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform.²

² <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/>