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Urgently transforming institutions for a greener, more inclusive and more resilient world at a time of multiple crises

Note by the Secretariat

The Secretariat has the honour to transmit herewith to the Committee of Experts on Public Administration the paper prepared by Committee members Louis Meuleman and Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi in collaboration with fellow Committee members Rolf Alter, Aigul Kosherbayeva, Ronald Mendoza, Katarina Ott, Carlos Santiso and Najat Zarrouk.

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Urgently transforming institutions for a greener, more inclusive and more resilient world at a time of multiple crises

Summary

The focus of the present paper is on how to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals through more inclusive governance and more resilient public administration. The authors of the paper discuss lessons learned from responses to and recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, as well as some of the underlying structural challenges in governance and public administration that may be inhibiting the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development amid multiple crises.

The paper concludes with recommendations and key messages that could be considered at the 2023 high-level political forum on sustainable development, convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, and included in the forum's political declaration to be adopted at the 2023 Sustainable Development Goals Summit.

I. Background

1. The focus of the present paper is on how to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals through more inclusive governance and more resilient public administration. This focus is important because the implementation of the Goals is not lagging behind because the Goals are ill designed, as some are claiming,[1] but because their governance and the capacities of public administration are not always sufficiently tailored, and mobilizing domestic and global resources to support sustainable development remains a key challenge for many developing countries, among a host of other factors. It is important to emphasize that the Goals are not designed as a blueprint but as a road map to be detailed nationally into concrete policy objectives and governance frameworks. Reopening the discussion on the Goals would be unwise because it would risk additional delays.

2. The paper covers some of the underlying structural challenges in governance and public administration that may be inhibiting the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development amid multiple crises, as well as lessons learned from responses to and recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The starting point is the observation that the world is, generally, in bad shape, with virtually all countries facing very troubling events. In the words of the Secretary-General, "As the world faces cascading and interlinked global crises and conflicts, the aspirations set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are in jeopardy."[2] There are many examples of Governments wholly consumed with short-term aims in the face of challenges associated with climate change, energy and health crises, food insecurity, inequalities, armed conflict and civil strife.

3. This situation creates unprecedented challenges that require unprecedented political and administrative responses, for which, in some cases, no legal basis exists. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic has been a novel emergency, at least with regard to its scale and impacts. Although the possibility of a pandemic had been factored into many national risk assessments, response preparedness often had not. Therefore, many Governments have had to rely on fast-track procedures to adopt dedicated emergency legislation.

4. An undue focus on emergency measures and fast-track legislative procedures bears risks, however. Fast-track laws and policies are usually politically legitimized by short-term needs. They are not highly evidence-informed or based on a thorough analysis of needs and expectations. Their proponents tend to skip over consultation with relevant stakeholders and often do not take broader sustainable development objectives into account. The fast-track route to emergency response has also generated corruption risks in many countries; this in turn has undermined public trust. At the same time, Governments are under pressure to make better progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and address the underlying causes of crises and conflict, such as the transgression of planetary boundaries, the continuation of unsustainable consumption and the unfair distribution of wealth and opportunities that hamper a just transition towards sustainability over the longer term.

5. The paradox that needs to be solved is how to apply emergency governance for the short term when needed while keeping a focus on long-term and inclusive governance for complex problems. This is in line with what the Committee of Experts on Public Administration has argued in recent years, namely that transformation

[1] "Overall, our assessment indicates that although there are some limited effects of the SDGs, they are not yet a transformative force in and of themselves." Frank Biermann and others, "Scientific evidence on the political impact of the Sustainable Development Goals", *Nature Sustainability*, vol. 5, September 2022, pp. 795–800.

[2] *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022* (United Nations publication, 2022), foreword.

towards sustainable development requires contextualized, tailor-made and flexible governance that aims to combine and manage successful combinations of ideas from different governance styles, or "metagovernance".[3] More agile government and agile service delivery in terms of capacity to deliver, response to unexpected crises, and building resilience are also essential.

6. Political leaders and public managers who are capable of managing crises and urgently transforming institutions for a greener, more inclusive and more resilient world are needed more than ever. They need to have an open mind to consider new opportunities. Every crisis opens doors to innovation that may have been closed for a long time. The need to streamline procedures to more quickly address emerging concerns, for example, opens new possibilities to bring about the transformation of governance and the modernization of public administration, which are essential to enabling the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Political agendas tend to be shifted when crises occur, which can renew an emphasis on tackling poverty, exclusion and inequality. In Latin America, for example, there has been a re-emergence of Governments confronting these challenges and putting social issues at the top of the agenda during the pandemic.

7. There is growing evidence that strong trust in public institutions, policies and policymaking processes contributes to stronger collective action. For example, public trust leads to greater compliance with public health responses, regulations and the tax system. In the longer term, trust is needed to help Governments to tackle long-term societal challenges such as climate change, ageing populations and changing labour markets.[4] Conversely, low levels of public trust lead to weaker collective action and poorer service delivery.

8. Additional recommendations by the scientific community on ways to enhance pandemic management include effective public-private partnerships, strengthening inclusiveness in social protection and health systems and improving public sector communication strategies to trigger and incentivize individual and household behaviours as well as agency-level interventions, all of which contribute to whole-of-society responses.[5]

9. Progress towards sustainable development requires well-functioning public institutions. Goal 16, with its call for effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels, underscores that sustainable development can be achieved only if institutions have the capacity to respond adequately to the challenges in implementing the Goals. This calls for a strong public administration that engages in partnerships with civil society, business and academia, in pursuit of the public interest and common good. In addition, greater responsiveness in policymaking and service delivery is pivotal. A 2022 survey on the drivers of trust in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, for example, found that low trust is driven in part by people's perceptions of a lack of responsiveness on the part of

[3] "Metagovernance" can be defined as an approach which produces some degree of coordinated governance, by designing and managing sound combinations of hierarchical, market and network governance, to achieve the best possible outcomes from the viewpoint of those responsible for public sector performance. See e.g. Ingeborg Niestroy and Louis Meuleman, *Managing the Implementation of the SDGs* (Luxembourg, European Union, 2022); Jon Pierre and B. Guy Peters, *Governance, Politics and the State* (London, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020).

[4] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Building Trust to Reinforce Democracy: Main Findings from the 2021 OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions* (Paris, 2022).

[5] Ferid Belhaj, "Social protection for all in need: lessons from the COVID-19 response in MENA", World Bank Blogs: Arab Voices, 26 April 2021; Jeffrey V. Lazarus and others, "A multinational Delphi consensus to end the COVID-19 public health threat", *Nature*, vol. 611, November 2022, pp. 332–345.

Governments to their priorities and to emerging challenges.[6] Three dimensions need to be assessed to ensure that governance is effective: mechanisms, processes and results.

10. Some Governments have shown themselves to be agile in their reactions to the pandemic and other recent crises, while others have had more difficulty responding. Some Governments may have agility built in and/or a tradition to leave much unregulated, for example. There is a broad consensus that the pandemic has shown that managerial reforms in the public sector, such as outsourcing and the financialization of the economy, have decreased the resilience of socioeconomic systems as a whole. Some countries have shown more resilience in their production and health systems due, respectively, to the capacity of their Government to coordinate private sector activity and to the largely public ownership of critical elements of their health system. Experience in tackling severe acute respiratory syndrome outbreaks helped some countries in South-East Asia to respond quickly to the pandemic with large-scale tracking of infections and the establishment of travel restrictions and physical distancing rules.[7] Nevertheless, experiences are mixed, and economies in the region are still grappling with an uneven exit from the pandemic, as well as the effects of a delayed reopening of the region's larger economies.

11. There is no shortage of technical guidance available that can support Governments in building strong and forward-looking institutions for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. A growing series of guidance notes published by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat in support of the Committee's work is a case in point. For example, a guidance note on strategic planning and foresight encourages government officials to engage with questions beyond the "planning horizon" to disrupt status quo thinking and "open new perspectives".[8]

12. One of the greatest challenges in governance reforms continues to be reducing inequalities nationally and internationally in access to education, health care, housing and economic opportunities, for example. Race adds to the divide. These inequalities encourage migration, depriving developing countries of their best and brightest, among other impacts. Fighting inequality in all its forms calls for long-term strategic approaches. Greater emphasis could be given to ethics, equity and equality as three new Es in public service with an emphasis on the long-term interests of society and the needs of those who are all too often left behind.

II. An institutional perspective on selected Sustainable Development Goals to be reviewed in depth in 2023

13. Sustainable Development Goal 6 on clean water and sanitation is a crucial concern for local governments. Ensuring access to clean water and sanitation is, in general, the responsibility of local authorities. Access relies on an effective local administration and a public sector workforce with the skills to manage territorial development, engage in urban planning and oversee the use of natural resources under their jurisdiction, among other functions. Effective water governance and the sound management of water resources (e.g. to reduce waste and leakages) are critical to

[6] OECD, *Building Trust to Reinforce Democracy*.

[7] Mariana Mazzucato and Rainer Kattel, *COVID-19 and Public-Sector Capacity*, Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose Working Paper, No. WP 2020-12 (London, University College London Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose, 2020).

[8] See https://publicadministration.un.org/en/Intergovernmental-Support/Committee-of-Experts-on-Public-Administration/Governance-principles/Addressing-common-governance-challenges/CEPA-strategy-guidance-notes.

achieving Goal 6 and the "green transition" towards more sustainable models of development.

14. Local governments have a key role to play in improving water quality through environmental protection measures and sustainable solid waste management. However, integrated water resources management requires horizontal and vertical cooperation in planning and environmental policy between the central Government, subnational governments, municipalities and regions across borders, even as it should be kept in mind that local governments are well placed to support participatory management of water and sanitation services, including by slum dwellers.

15. There is an urgent need to support the capacity-building of local elected officials and territorial/local employees in this field. High levels of professionalism are required, which may be lacking, in particular in countries with more limited financing and in underserved and underresourced remote and rural areas.

16. Sustainable Development Goal 7 on affordable and clean energy is another matter of concern for local governments, which are often best placed to identify gaps in access to affordable energy, in particular among vulnerable groups. Local governments can contribute directly to energy efficiency by investing in energy-efficient planning and building and in green energy sources for public institutions. They can also introduce sustainability criteria in public procurement practices and reduce public spending on energy. In cities, local transport, urban mobility and planning policies and smart cities initiatives and innovations can have significant impacts on energy efficiency and carbon emissions. However, the need for relevant capacities, profiles and skills is a matter of urgency for local governments, in particular in developing countries.

17. Sustainable Development Goal 11 on sustainable cities and communities is a complex and complicated Goal from a governance and public administration perspective. The challenges facing subnational authorities vary greatly, in particular between urban and rural areas and increasingly between small municipalities and large cities in terms of administrative capacities. In urban areas, the main issues are often the absence of a clear separation of roles and responsibilities between the central Government and local governments; the financial resources existing or allocated to local governments; the lack of access to basic services in informal settlements; the high prices or cost of services for vulnerable citizens; the lack of quality control of water from private vendors; and the weaknesses in the regulation of private partners by the central Government. In rural areas, water may be free; however, getting to and from the source may entail a long journey, and the water may be contaminated. The first victims of this situation are women and girls. Women in rural areas are assigned the "social" role of procuring water, among other duties, and girls are sometimes taken out of school for such duties.

18. Sustainable Development Goal 17 on the means of implementation leads towards appropriate budget allocations and governmental agility for attaining the Goals. The design and credibility of budgets can make a pivotal difference. The European Union recovery fund, for example, obliges member countries to invest in responses to climate change and digitalization that align with sustainable development priorities. At the same time, large crisis management budgets have dramatically ramped up public debt in many countries, which risks creating financial constraints for the implementation of the Goals and many other important public investments, including modernizing governance and public administration.[9] The sudden availability

[9] Jeremy Bulow and others, "The debt pandemic: new steps are needed to improve sovereign debt workouts", *Finance and Development*, vol. 57, No. 3 (September 2020), pp. 12–16.

of huge crisis response budgets and the lack of independent auditing may also increase corruption.[10]

III. Transformative actions: good practices in addressing urgent challenges

19. Shifting and modernizing public sector mindsets have been key ingredients in the success of some countries. To respond to the fast-changing conditions of the pandemic and to maintain the momentum of innovation and reform, countries will need to navigate governance challenges in at least two areas. First, top-down approaches may have been effective for industrial policy and development planning in the past; however, crisis management and pandemic response have underscored the need for an important recalibration of the sharing of central and local government responsibilities and resources, providing more agile front-line responses to examine and act on early information with some type of coordinating role for central Governments. As the world slowly transitions to the endemicity of COVID-19 and begins to face new challenges, this central-local balance will prove crucial in promoting innovation amid coordinated and collective action.

20. Second, the public sector needs to have the capacity and willingness to engage in public-private partnerships, where useful and necessary, particularly in mixed economies with a growing private sector. This strategy is even more critical because the private sector brings talent, expertise and resources in key sectors such as health care. In fact, the private sector is the bigger player in many of these mixed economies. In the Philippines, for example, the private sector in health care had a key role in pandemic response, notably in the acquisition and distribution of the life-saving vaccines that would prove crucial in the gradual transition to the "new normal".[11] Where formal partnerships are less feasible, better coordination of shared crises responses would be very helpful.

21. In addition, data and evaluations are critical to better inform priority setting during budgetary processes. Because public sector debt has increased for many countries during the pandemic, and given tepid global economic growth prospects, important trade-offs will need to be navigated to allocate resources more effectively in the medium term. For countries that do not have this evidence base to guide their budgets, political pressure from more influential or better-connected sectors will likely dominate the resource allocation process. In past periods of austerity, across-the-board budget cuts or targeted cuts that more severely affected social sector investments (e.g. in education, health care and social services) resulted in uneven and non-inclusive recovery from crises.[12]

22. The political economy of the budgetary process can be deeply influenced by either the presence or the absence of data and evidence to guide resource allocations.[13] For some sectoral advocates, it pays to underinvest in evidence generation in cases

[10] Ali Farazmand and others, "Corruption, lack of transparency and the misuse of public funds in times of crisis: an introduction", *Public Organization Review*, vol. 22, September 2022, pp. 497–503.

[11] Alex B. Brillantes and others, "Insights from a global public good lens on COVID-19 pandemic management", Ateneo Policy Center, Ateneo de Manila University, 2022.

[12] Ronald U. Mendoza, "Inclusive crises, exclusive recoveries, and policies to prevent a double whammy for the poor", Social and Economic Policy Working Paper, No. 1004 (New York, United Nations Children's Fund, 2010); Ronald U. Mendoza, "Crises and inequality: lessons from the global food, fuel, financial and economic crises of 2008–2010", *Global Policy*, vol. 2, No. 3 (October 2011), pp. 259–271.

[13] Alexander Hamilton and Craig Hammer, eds., *Data-Driven Decision Making in Fragile Contexts: Evidence from Sudan*, Directions in Development – Public Sector Governance (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2017).

where the evidence may actually undermine efforts to sustain resource allocations to their sectors.[14] Furthermore, the culture of non-evidence-based policymaking may be exacerbated by anti-science and anti-expertise tendencies associated with recent waves of populism.[15] Overcoming these pressures, in particular during periods of austerity, will be critical for countries to allocate and spend resources effectively.

23. Governments should collect, produce and use sex-disaggregated data to develop gender-responsive policies and initiatives. Although women make up almost half of the world's population, in most countries they remain on the margins of decision-making and are more vulnerable to economic shocks than men. Governments can make this crisis different from previous ones with women participating in efforts to rebuild the economy and create new norms driven by the COVID-19 pandemic, whether it be a growing recognition of the value of unpaid housework or the opportunity to work more flexible hours.

24. National Governments can maintain a course of strategic reforms for public administration and governance with the adoption of the 11 principles of effective governance for sustainable development, endorsed by the Economic and Social Council in 2018. Experience with the principles, as observed by the African Peer Review Mechanism and others, shows that they can help with setting national reform priorities for public administration and governance for sustainability, as well as the research needed to underpin and support these reforms. The principles are designed to provide interested countries with practical, expert guidance on a broad range of governance challenges associated with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

IV. A mixed review of institution-building at the midpoint towards 2030

25. Most Governments have quickly adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic and other crises emerging simultaneously or consequently by adopting emergency legislation and other measures to enable them to respond under unprecedented circumstances. Although crisis management evaluations are scattered so far, with no definitive word on calibration, proportionality, coherence and impact, one apparent downside is that emergency procedures offer almost unlimited power, which can be abused. There is a risk – and there are emerging examples – that emergency procedures are also used to accelerate policy and legislation for non-urgent (but important) problems.

26. As with the COVID-19 pandemic, issues such as climate change must be considered in context and in a holistic way. One size does not fit all; dealing with the pandemic in Africa could be quite different from dealing with the pandemic in the OECD area. Likewise, with climate change, in taking corrective actions, Governments must take into account the pressing needs and priorities of local people or risk forfeiting their support and cooperation. Addressing not only emergencies but also their causes and related mechanisms requires applying two governance responses at the same time: short-term, centralized, top-down crisis management and an inclusive, deliberative, collaborative approach that leaves no one behind and involves people and communities directly suffering from the impacts of climate change. The resulting contextualized responses should have medium- and long-term perspectives in addition to the short-term crisis management responses.

[14] Lant Pritchett, "It pays to be ignorant: a simple political economy of rigorous program evaluation", *The Journal of Policy Reform*, vol. 5, No. 4 (2002), pp. 251–269.

[15] Eric Merkley and Peter John Loewen, "Anti-intellectualism and the mass public's response to the COVID-19 pandemic", *Nature Human Behaviour*, vol. 5, June 2021, pp. 706–715.

27. Short-term risk management and longer-term strategic foresight to build resilience and anticipatory capabilities are both needed. Recent conflicts and health crises have shown the sort of risks that can arise from Governments abandoning strategic foresight capabilities. In addition, the capability to anticipate and prepare for future disruptions, brought about by the use of frontier technologies, for example, can take a long time to build (or rebuild), even in well-resourced countries that have had such capability in the past.

28. Another risk of focusing only on crises is that the best available knowledge is not mobilized for the implementation of the Goals: policies, programmes and resources aimed at protecting people during this challenging time will inevitably fall short without the evidence needed to focus and hone interventions.[16]

29. In the current volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world, the challenge is not only to switch from crisis management to complexity management, or vice versa, but also to achieve a dynamic (i.e. not rigid) balance between different governance approaches. The global challenges are too complex to think in "either/or" decisions; "and-and" decisions are needed. Although it may appear inefficient, some redundancy integrated in governance frameworks may even be necessary to make them effective. More tools and mechanisms should be included than seem to be necessary at first sight, because nobody can know which responses will work best and the stakes are too high to risk failure.

30. Pluralistic sustainability governance benefits from applying metagovernance mechanisms that bring some structure, order and management thinking to the complexity of governance frameworks. The application of a metagovernance approach can imply establishing additional coordination or oversight structures to ensure that sectoral governance frameworks are effective. It can also help in identifying the most effective and contextualized mixture of hierarchical, network and market mechanisms for the successful implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

31. An analysis of 40 voluntary national reviews from the Asia-Pacific region revealed that approximately 60 per cent of the implementation measures for the Sustainable Development Goals aimed at voluntary action (market and network governance) and that rule-based approaches (hierarchical governance) were generally not preferred.[17] A weak representation of environmental Goals in the voluntary national reviews was also observed. Environmental governance is usually strongly characterized by legislative responses. Since environmental rules usually restrict environmentally unsustainable behaviours, they may be met with more resistance than softer, non-legislative mechanisms. The latter, however, often work best in combination with and supported by legislation.

32. The "elephant in the room" as regards the implementation gaps of the 2030 Agenda is the political economy. Power relations between political and economic operators have a significant impact. One downside of public-private partnerships, for example, is that large international companies are powerful rule setters, defenders of the status quo and opponents of change if the change does not align with their interests. The creation of a United Nations "clearing house" could be considered; the mechanism could act as a platform to discuss (and/or negotiate) evident problems of this type, and/or organize peer learning between countries and between regional and economic groups.

[16] *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2021* (United Nations publication, 2021), p. 3.

[17] United Nations Environment Programme, *Strengthening the Environmental Dimension of the Voluntary National Reviews in Asia-Pacific: Lessons Learned and Ways Forward* (Bangkok, 2022).

33. Imbalances in data transparency and evidence availability will also need to be addressed if countries are to arrive at more informed and cost-effective outcomes that successfully overcome chronic roadblocks due to the political economy of some of these reforms. Throughout this process, data- and evidence-based policymaking can play a key role in bridging divides, building reform coalitions, galvanizing the global public and arriving at fair, equitable and efficient outcomes across and within countries.[18]

34. Some of the current global crises have contributed to a gradual undermining of democratic institutions and processes and of the professional role of public administration, public service and governance due to "autocratization".[19] One aspect of autocratization is that inequality between the poor and the rich has increased globally during the last phase of neoliberalism in politics, which has resulted in distrust of institutions and democracies, expressed ultimately in populism and the call for more authoritarian styles of leadership. These phenomena have also been exacerbated by the rise of disinformation and misinformation, both domestically in national politics and in international relations.

35. Sustainable Development Goal indicator 17.14.1 on policy coherence for sustainable development is a crucial indicator in measuring policy coherence for effective governance for sustainable development. It has eight subindicators covering a range of institutional challenges, including leadership, horizontal coordination, vertical (multilevel) coordination, the use of monitoring mechanisms and knowledge, and stakeholder participation. The results of pilots of the self-assessment tool developed for the indicator by the United Nations Environment Programme revealed different assessments when used by government officials and by stakeholders. It is therefore recommended that stakeholders from civil society and business be involved in the assessment process to counter this. It is also recommended that countries start collecting data for the indicator following the globally agreed methodology to fulfil the requirement of national statistical offices to include the indicator in Sustainable Development Goal monitoring and reporting.

36. Indicator 17.14.1 is a composite indicator, an index, and indices should be interpreted carefully. They can only indicate and inform and not prescribe the necessary course of action. Indices are only a means, not an end. They are often used to provide comparable rankings. However, it can be argued that bringing the subindicators together in one number has little value added. One country may have the highest score on institutional leadership, efficiency or effectiveness while scoring the lowest on inclusiveness and public participation. Another country with the same index result could score the other way around. Such rankings therefore always contain value judgments, methodological choices and possibly also implicit political aims. An uncritical acceptance of rankings can lead to the unintended internalization of normative assumptions that could lead to poorer public policy outcomes instead of better ones. Using rankings is in line with the global increase of standardization, measurement and evaluation of complex social processes. This institutionalizes a view of the modern world as being measurable, comparable and stratified and as existing within a form of a competitive league with States striving to constantly perform better. However, although this world view is popular, it is certainly not universal.

37. Still, a meaningful comparison of the performance of countries is important, as the starting point for peer-to-peer learning, for example. Using a dashboard with all

[18] Ronald U. Mendoza, "Political economy of data- and evidence-based policymaking", IDinsight and Ateneo Policy Center, Ateneo de Manila University, 2023.

[19] João Alípio Correa, "Autocratization: the key to capturing today's democratic difficulties", The Loop: ECPR's Political Science Blog, 4 March 2022.

eight subindicators serves this purpose better than having one total score per country. Nevertheless, if policy coherence is to be assessed with one single indicator, the subindicator on interministerial and cross-sectoral coordination, in other words, a whole-of-government coordination, could be used as the headline indicator, as it is a precondition for the other seven subindicators.

38. The current lagging behind of implementation on the Sustainable Development Goals suggests that Governments should focus more on governance for the long term. This means, among others, integrating foresight in the planning for and implementation of the Goals. Moreover, at the midpoint between 2015 and 2030, the period allocated for attaining the Goals, it should be recommended that countries report in their voluntary national reviews and local authorities report in their voluntary local reviews on sustainability transformations towards both 2030 and 2050.

39. There is an urgent need to make policymaking and implementation for the 2030 Agenda more evidence-informed. Ex ante regulatory impact assessment is a crucial means to mainstream the Sustainable Development Goals in the early stages of policymaking and law-making. Often, the obstacle to the use of regulatory impact assessment is not a lack of guidance but that those responsible for implementing the Goals and those responsible for regulatory impact assessment work in different silos and do not know each other. Short-termism and "efficiency thinking" have resulted in the abolishment of dedicated science-to-policy advisory mechanisms. One of the consequences is that Governments tend to lean towards consultants rather than academics for evidence. However, the role of academics should also be challenged: the balance between being a wise observer and a knowledgeable partner of public administration and governance could be reconsidered. Investing in the capacity and skills to address the urgent societal questions of today and tomorrow should take place not only in public administration organizations but also in research programmes, with a focus on coordination mechanisms, indicators and monitoring, and foresight.

V. Key messages for inclusion in the political declaration of the 2023 Sustainable Development Goals Summit

The ability to respond quickly and effectively to crises is essential but insufficient for sustainable development

40. Governments are currently trying to tackle a cascade of simultaneous crises. The result is crisis governance as part of a "new normal", resulting in relative neglect in three areas: long-term thinking, use of the best available knowledge, and stakeholder participation. This is understandable, but dangerous. Climate change, for example, is not only a crisis in itself but also a very complex issue that needs to be addressed in a holistic manner and in context. Therefore, public officers should be trained to apply different governance approaches for different problems, mixing approaches and switching between them according to the requirements of the situation. In addition, if and where Governments focus too much of their attention on issues framed as crises, with the related emergency measures, societal stakeholders – civil society, business and academia – should step up and organize their role as "countervailing powers", helping to keep Governments democratically accountable and on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, with a long-term perspective and at all levels.

National Governments should empower subnational governments to accelerate Sustainable Development Goal implementation

41. There is much to gain as regards multilevel governance between the national and subnational levels. It is in the interest of national Governments to stimulate

subnational governments to regularly conduct voluntary local reviews and to promote inter-municipal collaboration and partnerships. This allows the scale-up of successful innovations, increasing the level of skills and their joint purchasing power for sustainable public procurement.

A functioning coordination mechanism for sustainable development across all ministries at the highest level is a must

42. Bridging the silos between departments and sectors is still an important challenge. An essential part of improving policy coherence for sustainable development (target 17.14) is the proven good practice of establishing a coordination mechanism for sustainable development across all ministries at the highest level. This is one of the eight subindicators of Sustainable Development Goal indicator 17.14.1. The United Nations Environment Programme has made available a self-assessment tool for measuring policy coherence following the methodology developed for indicator 17.14.1. The results of pilots with the self-assessment tool on the indicator suggest that the tool can deliver robust and reliable results only when stakeholders are involved. A delivery mechanism in the centre of Government that helps to advance targets and solve bottlenecks to accelerate the achievement of the Goals can also bring to bear the power of the highest political authority to align ministerial initiatives.

A rapid upgrade of risk management in government and its integration into Sustainable Development Goal-related coordination mechanisms is necessary

43. The COVID-19 pandemic and the current accumulation of global crises call for a rapid upgrade of risk management in government and its integration into Sustainable Development Goal-related coordination mechanisms, such as centres of Government or other piloting structures. Risk anticipation, prevention, mitigation, adaptation and resilience will reduce exposure to crises. They will also inform assessments of trade-offs and synergies among the Sustainable Development Goals and increase the coherence of implementation.

The need to strengthen institutions for more integrated solutions to achieve the vision and Goals of the 2030 Agenda remains strong

44. The need to strengthen institutions for more integrated solutions through whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches that can bring about transformative changes in governance and public policy to achieve the vision and Goals of the 2030 Agenda is still strong. Despite ongoing efforts to improve governance and a clear commitment to the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the global level, progress on the Goals is off-track. Meeting the challenges of transforming institutions for a greener, more inclusive and more resilient world will depend on accelerated efforts to build a capable State at all levels and in all areas of government action relevant to the Goals. Multidimensional analyses of institutions in relation to national sustainable development priorities and an agile portfolio approach to addressing capability gaps across the whole of government are seen as part of the solution.

Countries should be encouraged to integrate reflections on a vision of society in 2050 in their planning, monitoring and reporting on the Sustainable Development Goals

45. As the 2030 Agenda time frame is in the medium term and sustainable development also requires a long-term perspective in public policymaking, countries should be encouraged to integrate reflections on a vision of society in 2050 in their planning, monitoring and reporting on the Sustainable Development Goals. The *Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews* prepared by the

Department of Economic and Social Affairs could be adapted to incorporate this longer-term perspective.

Credible planning and execution of transparent and participatory national and subnational budgets are critical to the sound management of public financial resources

46. The credible planning and execution of transparent and participatory national and subnational budgets are critical to the sound management of public financial resources. Public financial management in times of crisis should ensure that countries continue to make progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals while guaranteeing that the core principles of fiscal discipline, legitimacy, predictability, credibility, participation, transparency and accountability are respected as much as possible.