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New governance insights to advance the Sustainable Development Goals and eradicate poverty

Note by the Secretariat

The Secretariat has the honour to transmit to the Committee of Experts on Public Administration the paper prepared by Committee members Louis Meuleman, Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi and Rolf Alter, in collaboration with fellow Committee members Linda Bilmes, Augustin Fosu, Juraj Nemec, Katarina Ott, Alketa Peci and Najat Zarrouk.

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New governance insights to advance the Sustainable Development Goals and eradicate poverty

Summary

In the present paper, the authors elaborate on key governance and institutional areas where new sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals are being delivered effectively and provide examples of specific actions, policies and measures that are needed most urgently to eradicate poverty and reinforce the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The paper also contains an institutional perspective on the impacts of multiple crises on the implementation of the Goals, to be reviewed in depth at the 2024 high-level political forum on sustainable development. The paper concludes with recommendations and five key messages that could be considered for inclusion in the ministerial declaration of the forum.

I. Background

1. New ways are needed to reinforce the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, eradicate poverty and hunger, and navigate multiple crises. Effective, accountable and inclusive institutions, combined with adequate governance arrangements, must deliver sustainable, resilient, innovative and citizen-centred solutions.

2. The quality of public administration and governance arrangements is higher than ever on the political agenda. There is growing consensus among countries that sustainable development can only be advanced through a multipronged approach comprising a commitment to, prioritization of and planning for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals; budgeting for the Goals; a competent and capable public sector workforce; effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels; and broad participation of and partnerships with all stakeholders. This so-called pentagram of action (see figure I), together with effective communication by Governments, can serve to build mutual confidence and renew shared ambitions.

3. By putting policy goals at the centre of public debate and neglecting institutional reforms for their implementation, many Governments have risked falling short on action. Large public investments can be ineffectual if the institutions that should ensure effectiveness, accountability and inclusiveness are not committed, ready or capable of delivering on the promise of the Sustainable Development Goals.

4. The pressures of compounding crises that societies are facing, including the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the impacts of climate change, inflation, food insecurity, conflict, widening inequalities among and within countries, and weakening economic growth, are prompting Governments worldwide to remain in crisis management mode at the expense of implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. Emergency responses tend to crowd out implementation of the Goals, increasing tensions among competing policy priorities, which are further heightened by high levels of fiscal stress in many countries. Demands for financial resources to deal with multiple concurrent crises have been expanding rapidly, while fiscal space has become tighter in most countries.

5. In anticipation of decreased fiscal capacity, many Governments have reduced public investment, notably in areas related to implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. The crises that have wiped out years of progress related to the Goals are interrelated, fuelling intensities, but those interconnections could be turned into opportunities,[1] including in connection with current and ongoing conflicts. This links directly to progress on Goal 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions.

6. In addition, the multilateral world order of rules-based institutionalized globalization seems to be in demise as new geopolitical configurations are emerging, with concerns about national economic dependencies and interruptions of global value chains leading Governments to favour measures of national security and sovereignty. Demographic changes also play a role. In 2021, for example, Brazil, the Russian Federation, India, China and South Africa had a combined population of 3.24 billion people, over 40 per cent of the world population,[2] and the combined value of their gross domestic product (GDP) in purchasing power parity has increased significantly since 2000.[3]

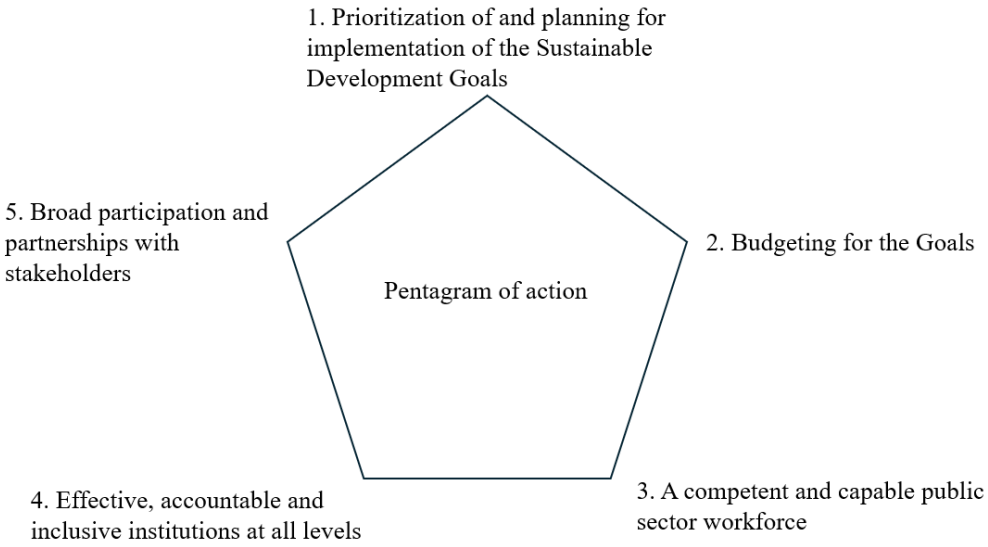
[1] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, “Global Sustainable Report 2023: key messages”, 2023.

[2] Aaron O’Neill, “Total population of the BRICS countries from 2000 to 2028”, Statista, 29 November 2023.

[3] Statista, “GDP in purchasing power parity of the BRICS and G7 countries from 2000 to 2023, 1 November 2023”.

7. Given that there are no indications that the above-mentioned dynamics will weaken any time soon, advancing the Sustainable Development Goals and eradicating poverty calls for more than systemic innovations in data collection, capacity-building and monitoring and evaluation. New approaches in governance need to be rolled out if the vision and ambition of the 2030 Agenda is to become a reality.

Figure I
Pentagram of action to reinforce the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development



II. Urgently needed transformative actions to eradicate poverty and reinforce the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

A. Anchor the Sustainable Development Goals in the public discourse as a policy framework for the future

8. The first action should be to anchor the Sustainable Development Goals in the public discourse as a policy framework for the future that is able to guide Governments in leading societies and economies through the challenges of a shifting global context. The renewal of commitments by world leaders at the 2023 Sustainable Development Goals Summit provided much-needed impetus to reinforce the relationship between the Goals and national development plans and to stimulate greater awareness in society of the need to mobilize human and financial resources for delivery. Moreover, given the complex nature of the current polycrisis, risk management to address disaster preparedness and mitigation, and the strengthening of resilience could be particularly relevant to future policy debates at the national and subnational levels.

9. The establishment of the high-level political forum on sustainable development and the increasing engagement of countries could be considered important acknowledgements at the global level of the unique importance of the Sustainable Development Goals. By July 2023, 189 Member States had presented at least one voluntary national review, with 108 countries submitting two reviews, 14 countries submitting three reviews, and 2 countries submitting four reviews. According to the World Public Sector Report 2021, 16 of 24 countries studied had integrated the Goals

into their national sustainable development strategies as at the end of 2020.[4] However, while many countries have taken steps to ensure the alignment of their national development plans and strategies with the Goals, an analysis of the plans of six countries in Africa and Asia suggests that integration of the Goals at the national level has rarely gone beyond mapping and reporting, and it remains unclear whether the plans can fully reflect the transformative potential of the Goals.[5]

10. Adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals as the joint policy framework for the future could extend beyond academics, consultants and practitioners in specific disciplines if awareness is raised to a level where policymakers see the relevance and tangible benefits of the Goals to national development objectives. To this end, the Sustainable Development Goals should be infused into the work of national treasuries so that finance ministers view commitments to the Goals as part of the guidance that informs budget processes and not as an adjunct reporting requirement.

11. Another way to foster awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals in the structures, rules and mindsets of the public sector would be to make sustainable public administration a government priority. Where climate action is concerned, a sustainable public administration could, for example, lead the way in promoting and enforcing the reduction of carbon emissions, strengthening environmental protection and fostering the sustainable use of natural resources. Decisive action on the part of the public administration could encourage individuals, organizations and businesses to play their part.[6] The fact that some countries are already pursuing green public administration is an important step forward.[7] Greening in this sense refers to public management that systematically addresses environmental and climate-related challenges and solutions in decision-making, alongside social and economic parameters.

B. Promote sustainability through national budgets to increase public trust

12. Despite the diverse and growing availability of data to measure progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, more needs to be done to illustrate their benefits at both individual and societal level to ordinary citizens and voters. Focusing on the Goals as beneficial outcomes for society is likely to raise understanding and interest among citizens while enhancing the legitimacy of efforts by political leaders to promote implementation of the Goals.

13. Budgeting and fiscal management are important levers for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals as a global road map for public policies. The call for strong institutions for successful implementation of the Goals equally applies to expenditure and revenue management functions. This calls for strengthening the medium-term orientation of budgets, identifying and managing fiscal risks more systematically, including the accumulation of adequate fiscal buffers, improving

[4] *World Public Sector Report 2021: National institutional arrangements for implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals – a five-year stocktaking* (United Nations publication, 2021), fig. 1.1.

[5] Tarek Katramiz and Mahesti Okitasari, *Accelerating 2030 Agenda integration: aligning national development plans with the Sustainable Development Goals*, United Nations University policy brief No. 25 (Tokyo, United Nations University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability, 2021).

[6] Council of Europe, Conference on Green Public Administration in the Context of Good Democratic Governance: Exchange of Good European Practice, Main takeaways.

[7] See, for example, European Committee on Democracy and Governance, Report on Green Public Administration.

expenditure controls, ensuring that capacities of local governments are commensurate with their responsibilities and accompanied by adequate financial resources, boosting domestic revenue mobilization, and promoting digitalization of public financial management.

14. In the current context of fiscal stress, with higher deficits and increasing interest payments, fiscal reform is contingent in most countries on adjustments to the broader governance framework on three levels. At the political level, the leadership of countries should establish or renew explicit commitments to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals as the overarching vision of a policy framework for the future, and move beyond the focus on crisis management in revenue and expenditure measures.

15. At the organizational level, the evaluation of interlinkages, trade-offs and potential synergies among the Sustainable Development Goals should be embedded into the prioritization process for medium- to long-term policies. This would imply, for example, integrating impact assessment capacities together with budgeting functions into the coordinating structures for the implementation of the Goals, such as the centres of government.

16. At the competence level, foresight and risk management capacities should be equipped to feed into the evidence base for fiscal measures, beyond the focus on fiscal risks. This would improve the visibility of the medium-term financial plans in navigating potential risks, strengthen opportunities for building systemic resilience, and rationalize fiscal demands for crisis preparedness.

17. More fundamentally, pursuing an integrated strategic approach to fiscal institution-building can be expected to reverse the trend of declining trust of citizens and the private sector in government as the perception of public money well spent increases, the provision of public goods and services improves, the risk of corruption is reduced, tax compliance improves, and reliance on the informal sector declines.

C. Invest in changing mindsets in the public sector

18. Effective governance for sustainable development requires a change in mindsets to better support implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Key institutional enablers of sustainable development, such as coordination, collaboration, and enhancement of policy coherence, do not emerge by themselves, as evidenced by persistent silo and red-tape mentalities and the failure of many public sector reforms in meeting wider objectives. Prevalent attitudes and beliefs of the public sector workforce dating back to traditional theories and understandings of bureaucracy must be confronted and gradually replaced with mindsets underlying the concept of sustainable development, in addition to developing and upgrading capacities and competences. Recent work on changing mindsets points to the fact that the beliefs and attitudes of the public workforce can stand in the way of changing working methods, both at individual and organizational levels.[8] The principles of effective governance for sustainable development include a range of strategies to help the public sector workforce to establish attitudes compatible with the Goals.[9]

19. Such efforts should encompass the provision of adequate training to increase knowledge of the Sustainable Development Goals and their targets among the public

[8] *Changing Mindsets to Realize the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: How to promote new mindsets and behaviours in public institutions to implement the Sustainable Development Goals* (United Nations publication, 2021).

[9] See https://publicadministration.desa.un.org/intergovernmental-support/cepa/principles-effective-governance-sustainable-development.

sector workforce. An ongoing review of the standards of excellence for public administration education and training, conducted by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the International Association of Schools and Institutes of Administration, suggested that there was a persistent gap among public servants across all levels of government, which could be addressed in a more timely and decisive manner.[10]

20. The review of the standards of excellence offered an opportunity for practical innovation by mainstreaming the Sustainable Development Goals into the curricula of schools and institutes of public administration. In the spirit of a whole-of-government approach, it would be helpful to extend this update of education and training standards beyond national schools of government to business schools and other academic institutes engaged in research and teaching in the field of economics and finance. At the same time, performance management should include rewards and incentives for changes in the behaviour and attitudes of public employees throughout government.

21. Changing mindsets in government also concerns policymakers at senior levels. Political and administrative leaders at both national and subnational levels will have to leave the ambiguities of the relationship between national development plans and the Sustainable Development Goals behind and commit publicly to the 2030 Agenda vision of a better future for all. They must endorse and advance Goals-based working methods in the delivery of policy outcomes, relying on evidence and assessment of trade-offs, and setting priorities at the political level. The public should engage more easily with the Goals once Governments live and work by them. Transparency about long-term Goals-based national plans, visions and strategies, properly decentralized, localized and territorialized in a spirit of proximity and subsidiarity, could also contribute to reversing the trend of declining trust in government at all levels.

D. Apply the principles of effective governance for sustainable development

22. Another priority is to shift the focus of public administration reform from questions of efficiency to effectiveness. Although such a shift has begun in many countries, it has been slow in arriving, due in part to the persistent influence of the new public management paradigm, which sees government efficiency as a primary objective of public sector reform, rather than the health of interrelated social, economic and ecological systems, and the vision and aspirations of sustainable development.

23. The limitations of the new public management paradigm are evident from the multiple crises that many countries continue to face. The pledge to leave no one behind, for example, is a cornerstone and transformative promise of the 2030 Agenda and related agendas on climate, urban development, disaster risk reduction and finance action. Despite some progress, hundreds of millions of people remain left behind, unable to fully participate in or benefit from human development, equal opportunities, innovation and digital transformation, economic growth and globalization. In all societies, the furthest behind tend to endure multiple and intersecting disadvantages, vulnerabilities and marginalization. Limited social mobility, coupled with pronounced inequalities, conspire to maintain and perpetuate

[10] For additional information on the review, see https://publicadministration.desa.un.org/un-desaiasia-review-and-upgrade-standards-excellence-public-administration-education-and-training.

the disadvantages and deprivations that leave people behind, within and between countries.[11]

24. According to the Global Sustainable Development Report 2023, transformation is both possible and inevitable. Governance and capacity-building are two critical levers for bringing about transformation in key areas that are relevant to progress on the Sustainable Development Goals under review in 2024, such as human well-being and capabilities, sustainable and just economies, and sustainable food systems and healthy nutrition patterns. The report sets out many specific interventions that could strengthen governance in these and other areas. The principles of effective governance for sustainable development, elaborated by the Committee and endorsed by the Economic and Social Council, give further shape to governance as a lever of transformation and provide an overarching analytical framework for assessing institutional capacity for achieving the Goals.

25. Governance and capacity-building take on particular significance at the subnational and local levels. It is at the territorial, community and grass-roots levels that the challenges of sustainable development and delays in the implementation of policies to leave no one behind are experienced. It is at this level that exclusion, inequalities, discrimination and lack of opportunities are felt. In many cases, local and regional authorities are dealing with challenges for which they may not be adequately equipped, in terms of financial and human resources, even if responsibility for these challenges has been transferred to them on paper under decentralization laws. Nor should subnational authorities be left on their own to resolve such challenges. Regardless of the model or the extent of decentralization in a country, both the central and local governments have a responsibility for realizing the Sustainable Development Goals, and it is critical that they work together in a spirit of collaboration and partnership.[12] To this end, new forms of collaborative multilevel governance should be piloted.

26. The Committee has repeatedly argued that there are no one-size-fits-all solutions to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goals 16 and 17. The mindset that there are best practices that can be applied everywhere without adaptation to specific circumstances remains widespread among leaders and practitioners of public administration. However, this idea is slowly giving way to the sharing of insights into good or inspiring practices, supported by peer learning that can reduce the likelihood of repeating the same mistakes again. Many actors are also doing important work to make public administration science relevant to current challenges. They include the International Institute of Administrative Sciences and the International Association of Schools and Institutes of Administration, with their national sections and academic research centres jointly identifying public governance solutions to address ongoing policy challenges.

27. Leaving no one behind, which is a core principle of public administration, requires an enabling environment based on whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches. Empowering those who have been left behind should be ensured through their meaningful participation in decision-making, the promotion and enforcement of non-discriminatory laws and policies, and interventions with a dedicated budget to support and address specific deprivations. Collecting and mapping lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, case studies and assessments of governance found in the voluntary national reviews and voluntary local reviews could serve as benchmarks and inspiration.

[11] Ambar Narayan and others, *Fair Progress? Economic Mobility across Generations Around the World* (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2018).

[12] See Economic and Social Council resolution 2018/12, para. 29.

E. Raise awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals

28. Closing gaps in awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals and changing the perceptions of the public and the private sector of their importance at all levels is another urgently needed transformative action. To many ordinary people, leaders, politicians, managers and civil servants around the world, the Goals are still unknown, despite the fast-growing Sustainable Development Goals community of professional experts. Many citizens are not aware of the ambitious nature of the Goals or their potential as a shared public policy framework to create better lives for everyone. The general perception and distrust of public institutions is primarily shaped by Governments performing crisis management. It is time to consider implementing and achieving the Goals as a common good and as a common concern for all actors and stakeholders.

29. Major investments should be made in mobilizing and rallying stakeholders worldwide around the Sustainable Development Goals by advocating, raising awareness, explaining their unique qualities and presenting their critical contributions to shaping a liveable future. The success of mobilization will largely be driven by making the participation and inclusion targets of the Goals a reality, in line with the whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches. This calls for Governments to play an active role by inviting, consulting and listening to stakeholders throughout the policy cycle, preparing citizens for participation, and strengthening the enabling environment for civic engagement. There are considerable opportunities for innovation, including new technologies, both in public administrations and among citizens.

30. Beyond inviting people to engage in consultations, dialogue and joint action with all relevant stakeholders must become core features of participation based on whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches that leave no one behind. Enabling citizens to exercise their right to be heard is particularly relevant at the subnational level, where much of the transformative action towards the Sustainable Development Goals will become reality.

31. Improving awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals should be more than the subject of periodic government campaigns. Awareness of the Goals should be integrated into the curricula of schools and higher education institutions to foster long-term changes to attitudes and mindsets that can lead to better understanding of government policies and actions, and of the responsibilities of citizens themselves to advance the Goals. The key to this will be to explain the value of the Goals in terms of their contribution to human well-being rather than as a set of discrete outputs to be produced by different sectors.

32. Another priority is to invest more in measures to build confidence between governments and the public on the journey towards the Sustainable Development Goals. The current low levels of confidence in the ability of governments to chart a path forward risk turning into resistance, in particular if disadvantaged and vulnerable groups perceive themselves to be left behind, while inequalities in access to public goods and services continue to grow. The poorest and most vulnerable in society risk being left further behind in any transformation that does not account for the needs and aspirations of disadvantaged groups. The same applies to countries.

33. This transformative dynamic requires holistic, enabling, comprehensive, coordinated and sustainable approaches involving the international community, governments at all levels, the various components of civil society, the private sector, academia and trade unions. It requires implementing targeted policies and addressing systemic issues that contribute to inequalities and exclusion, including in terms of governance, administration and public service delivery. Ongoing monitoring,

evaluation and adaptive management are essential to ensure that strategies remain effective and responsive to changing circumstances and living conditions for those left behind.

34. With its focus on building public sector capabilities, FutureGov, one of 12 high impact initiatives mobilized by the United Nations development system at the 2023 Sustainable Development Goals Summit, could make a valuable contribution to these efforts. FutureGov partners could be encouraged to take the transformative actions highlighted in the present paper into account in responding to capacity development needs.

III. Institutional perspectives on the impact of multiple crises on the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals 1, 2, 13, 16 and 17

A. Sustainable Development Goal 1 (no poverty)

35. Poverty is considered a state of human deprivation of basic needs. Absolute poverty corresponds to the inability to obtain the minimum resources or income required to satisfy basic human needs. In contrast, relative poverty measures a person's deprivation relative to the prevailing socioeconomic conditions in the location in which he or she lives. The measurement of poverty is still the subject of a variety of policy discussions, strategies, indicators and models. Sometimes material and financial aspects prevail over other dimensions of well-being. Nonetheless, Goal 1 clearly calls for multidimensional and contextualized perspectives on poverty, with an explicit commitment to ending poverty in all its forms everywhere.

Economic growth and income distribution

36. In economic terms, the Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023 notes that slow and uneven progress on poverty eradication may leave hundreds of millions in extreme poverty by 2030. Extreme poverty had experienced a significant decline in recent decades, but the COVID-19 pandemic reversed this positive trend. Even before the pandemic, the rate of poverty reduction was slowing, with extreme poverty falling from 10.8 per cent in 2015 to 8.4 per cent in 2019. In 2020, the number of people living in extreme poverty (724 million) surpassed pre-pandemic projections, reversing approximately three years of progress on poverty eradication. Recovery from the pandemic has been slow and uneven, with extreme poverty dropping from 9.3 per cent in 2020 to 8.8 per cent in 2021.

37. In developing countries, economic growth has been the main channel for poverty eradication since about 1990. However, a country's performance on poverty eradication targets depends both on its level of economic growth and on the distribution of income and wealth, with higher levels of inequality associated with lower rates of poverty reduction in both relative and absolute terms. This may explain in part why some developing countries have made less progress on poverty eradication than expected, despite significant economic growth in the aggregate. In a survey of over 100 developing countries, it was found that in nearly half of those countries, changes in income distribution played a complementary role alongside economic growth. Reducing income inequality was the main contributor to extreme poverty reduction in 26 per cent of countries, nearly half of which are in sub-Saharan Africa. Of the 18 per cent of countries that experienced an increase in poverty,

inequality was a key contributor, while in about 30 per cent of countries, inequality counteracted the poverty-reducing effect of income growth.[13]

38. High initial inequality of wealth and income constrains the transformation of economic growth into poverty eradication, given relatively high numbers of socially and economically neglected people who often have little access to productive resources or capital. Pro-poor economic growth can be achieved through high economic growth in general terms, coupled with the sharing of the benefits of growth in favour of those at the bottom of the income distribution, for example by providing them with means of production, such as human and financial capital, and by establishing an infrastructure that facilitates market participation.

Questions of multidimensional poverty

39. Other important poverty eradication measures are social protection programmes. Despite the expansion of social protection during the COVID-19 pandemic, over 4 billion people remain entirely unprotected. Many of the world's vulnerable population groups, including the young and the elderly, remain uncovered by statutory social protection programmes. Institutions must be geared towards making such programmes more effective and to ensuring the integration of beneficiaries into the formal economy and, in some instances, the informal economy, while dealing with the misconception that social protection programmes contribute to dependency.

40. Further strategies to eradicate poverty in all its forms could include developing indicators, policies and strategies to properly measure and map the degree of poverty in each country; ensuring coherence between initiatives taken at all levels; investing in quality education, public sector workforce training and empowerment to promote autonomy, equality of opportunity, self-reliance and decent work; eliminating gender-based inequalities through legislation; reducing geographic disparities through balanced infrastructure investments and improvements in access to public services; improving the progressivity of tax systems; supporting the poor with the acquisition of productive financial and physical capital; and minimizing group-based inequalities and their adverse effects. Targeted reforms to improve governance and strengthen institutions will be needed to underpin all relevant efforts.

Improving government effectiveness

41. The elimination of poverty in all its forms calls for a strong emphasis on strengthening local institutions, policies, strategies and resources. A further question arises as to why inequality among countries is so pronounced compared with differences in the endowment of natural resources. For example, Africa is extremely rich in natural resources, yet most of the least developed countries are in Africa. Part of the reason is that the global trade environment, as governed by the World Trade Organization framework, is much more competitive and less favourable today for developing countries than it has been for their developed country counterparts. This situation cannot be addressed through financial support, institutional redesign and the changing of mindsets alone. Questions of political economy in relation to global, State and private sector powers are key determinants that need to be made transparent and addressed more prominently at the high-level political forum on sustainable development, and by the international financial institutions, among others.

[13] Augustin Fosu and Dede Woade Gafa, "Poverty, Inequality, and Governance: A Global Perspective" (University of Pretoria, 2023).

B. Sustainable Development Goal 2 (zero hunger)

42. The institutional aspects of Sustainable Development Goal 1 on ending poverty overlap with Goal 2, and it is recommended to tackle the institutional challenges of Goals 1 and 2 together.

43. According to the Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023, since 2015, the number of people facing hunger and food insecurity has been on the rise, a situation exacerbated by multiple crises and growing inequalities. In 2022, about 9.2 per cent of the world population was facing chronic hunger (735 million people), with 45 million children under the age of 5 suffering from wasting, 148 million having stunted growth and 37 million being overweight. To achieve Goal 2 by 2030, urgent coordinated action and policy solutions are required to address entrenched inequalities, transform food systems, invest in sustainable agricultural practices, and reduce and mitigate the impacts of the polycrisis on global nutrition and food security.

C. Sustainable Development Goal 13 (climate action)

44. According to the Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023, the pace and scale of current climate action plans are wholly insufficient to effectively tackle climate change. Deep, rapid and sustained reductions in greenhouse gas emissions are essential in all sectors, beginning now and continuing throughout the current decade, with emissions having to be cut by almost half by 2030. To secure a sustainable future for generations to come, concrete and transformative action is needed urgently. This requires raising ambition, covering entire economies and moving towards climate-resilient development, while outlining a clear path to achieve net-zero emissions.

45. Despite considerable scientific effort and some institutional progress towards achieving the climate related-Sustainable Development Goals, overall, the world is not on track to lower greenhouse gas emissions sufficiently to restrict global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. This failure will affect the world unevenly, with many of the worst impacts in regions that have contributed the least to global warming. Institutional actors (governments, private sector actors, multilateral agencies, institutional investors and regulatory agencies) bear tremendous responsibility for this situation. Until now, progress has been limited by a lack of funding (in particular for adaptation-related projects), failure to deliver on promises of funding, a lack of capacity in many countries to develop creditworthy projects, long delays in delivering concessional finance and grants, and restrictions on access to grants and loans by subnational governments, which produce some 70 per cent of global emissions.

46. In addition, there are important sectors, such as the global insurance sector, that have not been included in finding solutions to mitigating risks and developing solutions. Narrow risk mitigation through the provision of insurance in vulnerable areas may be of limited benefit to poor people in the absence of investments in physical and other infrastructure that are part of a broader mitigation effort, for example in the building of human settlements. A new governance approach could be to include regulation from governments, at different levels, to encourage investment by the insurance industry globally.

47. Another critical factor is that countries have not fully incorporated new statistical measures that include climate in the assessment of GDP and national accounts. The System of Environmental-Economic Accounting has been widely adopted, but most of the world is still using traditional metrics to measure economic output as the sum of production, without linking this to stocks and flows of natural capital assets and the health of ecosystems. As outlined in 2021 in the Dasgupta

review on the economics of biodiversity, the lack of such metrics distorts the true situation facing most economies.

48. Therefore, the Committee continues to encourage governments, private sector firms and a broad range of institutions to increase funding, support capacity development, and follow through on pledged assistance to address the climate crisis. Specific actions include:

(a) Strengthening the use and capacity of the public and private sector in natural capital accounting based on the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting;

(b) Strengthening the accountability of public institutions regarding environmental policies by incorporating the state of natural resources into regular performance assessments;

(c) Mobilizing greater financial support from developed countries and international organizations to meet the urgent needs and circumstances of developing countries;

(d) Increasing training for governments in developing countries to analyse climate data and designing projects that can attract investments from the public and private sectors;

(e) Facilitating the access of cities and subnational governments to climate finance, including grants, loans, concessional funding and all other types of potential funds;

(f) Increasing collaboration among vital institutional sectors that have been less involved, in particular the insurance industry, which plays a crucial role in covering risks associated with extreme weather events and rising sea levels that can lead to economic losses and damage to infrastructure;

(g) Assisting local and regional governments that use insurance firms, products, technology and data to help conduct assessments, model risk and quantify potential losses to develop adaptation plans and early warning systems, fund resilience programmes and build local capacity to improve risk assessment.

49. Both the Paris Agreement on climate change and Sustainable Development Goal 13 need to be localized. Consideration needs to be given to subnational contexts, challenges, expectations, needs and plans. A lot of effort is made at the national level, but many challenges and issues are lived at the grass-roots level. Local and other subnational authorities have raised their voices to ask for a clear sharing of roles, responsibilities and competences, adapted and decentralized policies and strategies, the transfer of appropriate resources and funding, the empowerment of people and communities, and investment in building the capacities of politicians and civil servants.

D. Sustainable Development Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions)

50. Sustainable Development Goal 16 is to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. Its targets are related to promoting the rule of law at all levels, broadening and strengthening the participation of developing countries in institutions of global governance, and stepping up the fight against corruption and illicit financial flows.

51. In the political declaration adopted at the 2023 Sustainable Development Goals Summit, Member States reaffirmed that "sustainable development cannot be realized without peace and security; and peace and security will be at risk without sustainable development" (General Assembly resolution 78/1). They also reaffirmed "the need to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies that provide equal access to justice and that are based on respect for human rights (including the right to development), on effective rule of law and good governance at all levels and on transparent, effective and accountable institutions".

52. The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023 notes that to meet Goal 16 by 2030, action is needed to restore trust and to strengthen the capacity of institutions to secure justice for all and facilitate transitions to sustainable development. At the ministerial meeting held in September 2023 in preparation for the Summit of the Future, the Secretary-General said that the world is becoming multipolar, creating new opportunities for different countries to lead on the global stage. However, multipolarity without strong multilateral institutions creates serious risks, and could result in even greater geostrategic tensions, chaotic competition and further fragmentation. He noted that multilateral institutions will only survive if they are truly universal.

Progress on public sector workforce development

53. In its resolution 77/182 on human resources development, the General Assembly called upon the international community to place human resources development at the core of economic and social development and to develop short-, medium- and long-term strategies to effectively enhance human resources capacities. The Assembly recognized that educated, skilled, healthy, capable, productive and adaptable workforces are the foundation for achieving sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth and development. Human capital is a key driver of progress, not only on Sustainable Development Goal 16 but across all Goals.

54. To advance specific actions and policies that effectively deliver sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions to eradicate poverty and reinforce the 2030 Agenda, public administrations need to advance in adopting the principles of non-discrimination and leaving no one behind as drivers of public sector workforce development. Promoting and managing public sector workforce diversity, aimed at achieving societal representation, is key to the pursuit of equality and equity as key values of the public sector and advancing sustainable development.

55. Progress towards inclusion is hindered by insufficient data and indicators about public service workforce diversity. The pilot index on the development of a diverse central government workforce, developed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), focuses on three dimensions: the diversity of the workforce, the availability of data for measuring and tracking diversity in the public sector workforce, and the use of tools to attract and recruit diverse employees at all levels.

56. A more diverse workforce can enhance people's trust, strengthen democracy and foster innovation. Some progress can be seen in terms of gender balance in the public sector in some countries, due in part to the explicit endorsement of international organizations and increased gender-disaggregated data in governance indicators. Additional targeted measures, supported by disaggregated data and related analysis, may be needed to address questions of equity, inclusion and diversity in the public sector workforce more broadly.

57. The pandemic gave public institutions and leaders the focus, motivation and momentum needed to call for and legitimize innovative solutions, and transformed how they relate with one another and with their constituencies, sometimes

overcoming the traditional constraints of the public sector. However, in many administrative cultures, public managers may not be allowed to experiment with innovation, learn from unsuccessful attempts, or understand how to manage the risks associated with innovation failure. The polycrisis may actually pull in the opposite direction. There is a risk of limited managerial attention span and room for questioning the legitimacy of innovative solutions, which can undermine efforts to collaborate with diverse stakeholders.

58. Public servants need to be properly equipped with the knowledge and skills to promote innovation. It is important to ensure that workforce competencies are strong in areas such as technology, strategic anticipation, crisis management, adaptability, resilience and change management. Public managers need managerial discretion and flexibility to advance in this direction. Enhancing digital capacities in multiple forms and using policy learning and evidence can serve both innovation and transparent decision-making.

59. There is also a serious need to rehabilitate the public sector in the face of privatization and outsourcing. The public sector no longer attracts sufficient young talent. In many countries, it has become the last choice for young people seeking employment and faces strong competition for human resources from the private sector, civil society, international organizations and donor countries. This phenomenon has a serious impact at the subnational level, in particular in Africa.

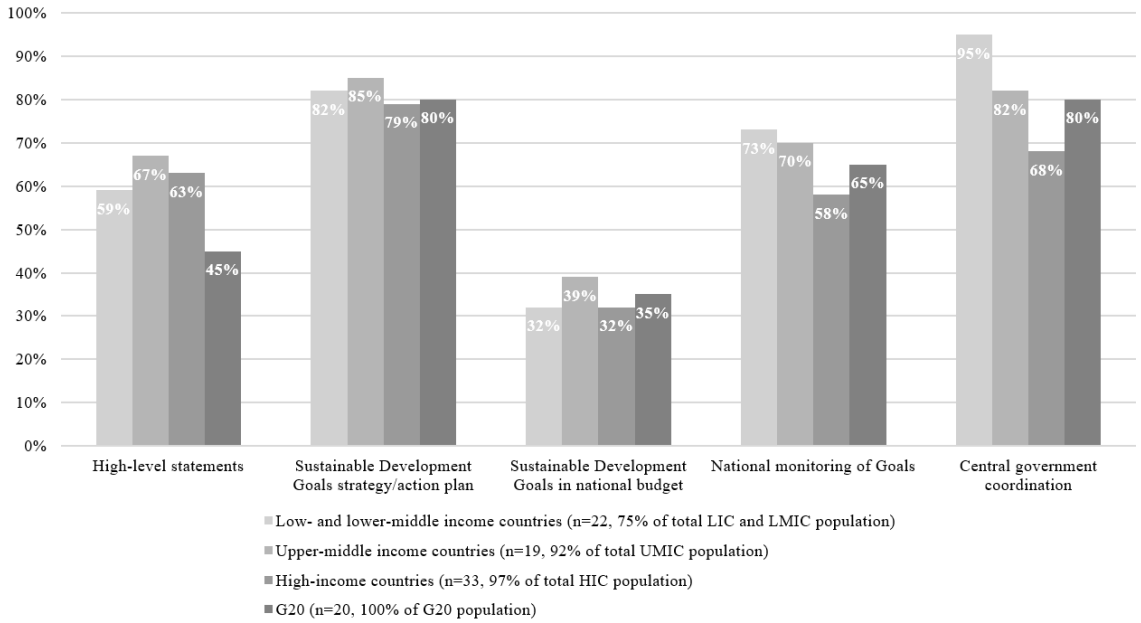
Towards public sector integration and coordination

60. Strong institutions for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals imply the need for effective coordination and integration across ministries and agencies at the national level. While some progress has been made in establishing institutions charged with ensuring coordination and integration, uncertainties prevail when it comes to their transformation into engines of effective coordination and integration in practice. According to a recent survey of 74 countries, most countries have pursued “soft” integration of the Goals into their public management practices and procedures, yet “hard” integration is generally missing.[14]

61. As shown in figure II, across five dimensions of integration of the Sustainable Development Goals into policy processes (high-level statements; existence of Sustainable Development Goals strategies or sectoral action plans; integration of the Goals into national budgets; national monitoring of the Goals; and central government coordination), budget integration is pursued by only one third of the countries surveyed by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network – a result that applies to all four World Bank income groupings and the Group of 20. Eighty per cent of countries have some form of strategy, vision or action plan on the Goals, again across all income categories. Approximately 60 per cent of countries have delivered high-level statements and carry out monitoring. Central government coordination is pursued by 80 per cent of countries, albeit through different institutional set-ups: 35 per cent of countries locate the coordination unit at the centre of government, nearly 60 per cent in a line ministry, and the rest in the ministry of foreign affairs. As the survey does not evaluate the effectiveness or influence of these dimensions in driving implementation of the Goals, the experience of individual countries might be useful to identify more accurately existing gaps in institutional effectiveness and policy implementation.

[14] Jeffrey D. Sachs and others, *Implementing the SDG Stimulus: Sustainable Development Report 2023* (Dublin, Dublin University Press, 2023).

Figure II
Integration of the Sustainable Development Goals into key policy processes of selected countries, by income group



Source: Implementing the SDG Stimulus: Sustainable Development Report 2023.

62. A good way to enhance public administration and governance could be to make Sustainable Development Goals targets 16.6 (develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels) and 17.14 (enhance policy coherence for sustainable development) the heart of a "power package" that could include a rolling action plan. Although related, these targets are often treated separately, if they are considered at all. Together, they can steer the quality of public administration and governance towards not just more efficiency but also greater effectiveness in achieving clear objectives, broad accountability (not only involving parliaments and oversight bodies), and inclusiveness beyond the usual stakeholders. Rolling action plans could focus on the next three to five years, with a concrete and budgeted plan for the first year, which would help to counter short-termism.[15]

Subnational institution building in conflict-affected countries

63. In conflict-affected countries, efforts should be made to resolve and prevent the root causes of conflict, while increasing the predictability of aid and making more effective use of global and country-level funds for peacebuilding and State-building to achieve sustainable development.

64. Conflicts often have complex causes and require institutionalized capacities to deal with them effectively and proactively. Outside interventions typically have limited impact and often take the form of law and order enforcement once the level and intensity of the conflict becomes an issue of national concern. Designing effective conflict management processes calls for, in the first instance, the inclusion of multiple and diverse stakeholders to disputes, such as local governments, to avoid defaulting to law and order responses alone. When conflicts do arise, local governments can play a key role in mediating between the parties involved, provided they have the necessary skills in peacebuilding and dialogue facilitation and tools to develop

[15] Louis Meuleman, "A 'power package' to enhance quality public administration and governance", International Institute for Sustainable Development, 4 October 2023.

strategies to prepare for negotiation. This may include the ability to bring together community leaders and stakeholders to discuss the issues at hand and to work towards finding mutually acceptable solutions.

Technology and public service innovation

65. Artificial intelligence is increasingly being used worldwide with immense potential benefits, augmenting human capabilities, increasing the well-being of people and contributing to the betterment of society. However, as the technology continues to evolve at an unprecedented pace, many challenges, risks and ethical concerns remain that must be addressed urgently. Governments have a particularly important role to play, both as regulators and users of artificial intelligence, especially given their huge influence over people's lives.

E. Sustainable Development Goal 17 (partnerships for the Goals)

Partnerships for shared success

66. Delivering on Sustainable Development Goal 17 can take many formats and include a broad range of stakeholders. Peer exchanges, peer review and peer learning from voluntary national reviews and voluntary local reviews is one particularly promising approach, provided the reviews are organized with a view to increasing ownership by all stakeholders and sharing knowledge and best practices. It should become the standard for voluntary national reviews and voluntary local reviews to include well-planned participatory processes, facilitate open discussions and integrate dissenting voices of stakeholders.

67. Increasing official development assistance (ODA) focused on the Sustainable Development Goals is another area that deserves greater attention. Given the difficulties with financing the Goals from domestic public resources at a time of fiscal stress, foreign funding support could play an increasing role in supporting implementation of the Goals, including in the form of development aid, support from multilateral and philanthropic organizations, and private sector investments. However, while foreign direct investment and remittances show impressive growth rates across all developing countries, ODA has remained on a very modest upward path for the last 20 years. Net ODA flows amounted to $206 billion in 2022, increasing by 15.3 per cent in real terms compared to 2021 (the highest growth rate on record). Total ODA represented 0.36 per cent of gross national income in 2022 and continues to remain below the 0.7 per cent target (target 17.2). Net bilateral ODA flows to African countries declined by 7.4 per cent in 2022.

68. A question remains as to how ODA, as a long-standing traditional financial support mechanism for developing countries, can facilitate revenue and expenditure management in times of fiscal stress. The volume, structure and purpose of ODA are important qualities to exploit its full potential.

69. According to a joint assessment by the United Nations Development Programme and OECD, entitled "The G20 contribution to the 2030 Agenda in times of crises 2019–2023", three additional considerations for future action by the Group of 20 seem to be particularly relevant. The first is leadership to advance global cooperation frameworks on health, international taxation, debt, trade, investment and technology, climate change and environment that duly integrate the needs of developing countries. Second, further coordination of domestic policy reforms could serve to maximize collective synergies and manage spillover effects for mutual and global benefit. Third, further efforts could be encouraged to strengthen capacities in developing countries in key policy domains for the Goals.

70. There is also a need to invest in decentralized cooperation, such as partnerships, twin cities and networking between local and regional governments, as a key lever for peace, solidarity and sustainable development.

Support for countries in special situations

71. The United Nations conferences for countries in special situations, namely the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, illustrate the critical role of strategic partnerships for accelerated implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals when it comes to supporting countries with structural weaknesses in governance, insufficient capabilities, a lack of access to financing and which are in or emerging from conflict situations. The Doha Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the decade 2022–2031, for example, explicitly sets out both the ambition and the means for progress in implementation of the Goals. In such countries, experiences and practices from other parts of the world are not necessarily of immediate relevance as sources of inspiration for institutional reform.

Measuring progress on policy coherence

72. Monitoring and reporting on the performance of public administration and governance is a matter of both accountability and political visibility. The Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators carried out a comprehensive review of the global indicator framework and aims to submit its proposed refinements, revisions, replacements, additions and deletions to the fifty-sixth session of the Statistical Commission in March 2025 for consideration.[16] Indicators that are not performing well may be considered for deletion. This is a concern as one of the least performing indicators is indicator 17.14.1, from target 17.14 on enhanced policy coherence for sustainable development. This indicator can be seen as a proxy for measuring sustainable governance, as it covers eight essential areas of governance: institutionalization of political commitment; long-term considerations in decision-making; inter-ministerial and cross-sectoral coordination; participatory processes; policy linkages; alignment across government levels; monitoring and reporting for policy coherence; and financing for policy coherence.[17]

73. The methodology for measuring this tier II indicator (meaning that the indicator is conceptually clear, has an internationally established methodology and standards are available, but data are not regularly produced by countries) is based on self-assessment, which can be weak with regard to reliability, although this can be compensated for by including, for example, stakeholder engagement and peer review.[18] The United Nations Environment Programme, as the custodian agency for this indicator, has accelerated its work, set up a global community of practice and collected data from 39 countries (20 per cent). For it to become a tier I indicator, data would need to be collected from 50 per cent of countries. OECD and the African Peer Review Mechanism have also increased work on policy coherence for sustainable development, including in the form of peer learning.

74. If this key indicator remains virtually unused, measuring progress on institutional and governance performance will remain difficult. In addition, as long as no data are collected on this indicator, it does not appear in the lists of Sustainable Development Goal indicators published by national statistical offices and used for progress reports, such as voluntary national reviews and voluntary local reviews. If the indicator is not used, politicians who look at their country's Sustainable

[16] See https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/iaeg-sdgs/2025-comprehensive-review.

[17] United Nations Environment Programme, "Methodology for SDG indicator 17.14.1: mechanisms in place to enhance policy coherence for sustainable development", 2022.

[18] Louis Meuleman, *Waking Up a Sleeping Beauty? Towards a Quality Protocol for Indicator SDG 17.14.1 on Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development* (Brussels, European Commission).

Development Goals performance will not see whether there is a problem, although they ultimately determine the Government's priorities and the course of governance. Therefore, ongoing capacity-building work on policy coherence for sustainable development needs to be paired with using the indicator to assess the state of play and to be able to learn from other countries. National action plans on policy coherence for sustainable development can be a good accelerator of such a dual approach.

IV. Recommendations and key messages for inclusion in the ministerial declaration of the 2024 high-level political forum

75. **On the basis of the "pentagram of action" (see figure II), the following recommendations are proposed for consideration by Member States at the 2024 high-level political forum on sustainable development:**

(a) **Explicitly renew commitments to prioritize and plan for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. In particular, use the Goals as a policy framework for the future and as guidance to overcome the current polycrisis and to foster resilience; strengthen the references to individual Goals in country-specific development strategies, visions and national development plans; and emphasize both economic growth and social policy support to fight hunger, poverty and climate action;**

(b) **Integrate implementation of the Goals firmly into budget processes and procedures. In particular, prioritize the full integration of the Goals into the budgeting cycle from leadership and institutional coordination to the monitoring of the efficiency of expenditure measures, and reduce fiscal stress through medium-term financial planning;**

(c) **Strengthen the public sector workforce. In particular, promote the changing of mindsets at individual, institutional and organizational levels to raise awareness of the Goals and their targets, since the Goals are a policy imperative, among the workforce at all levels; enhance representation and diversity for effective public service delivery; and balance the values of efficiency and effectiveness of public administrations to honour the pledges to leave no one behind and ensure inclusiveness;**

(d) **Reinforce public institutions at all levels, which is important for the FutureGov initiative. In particular, promote and anchor trust in public institutions, the public sector and public administration through accountability, transparency and effective communication with the public; pursue localization of the Goals, in particular Goals 1 and 2, in the framework of sound multilevel governance arrangements and reinforced capacity-building. Capacity-building work on policy coherence for sustainable development needs to be paired with using indicator 17.14.1 to assess the state of play and learn from other countries;**

(e) **Mobilize broad participation and partnerships with all stakeholders and actively engage in international cooperation and coordination in support of assistance to the most vulnerable. In particular, deepen civic engagement; promote the participation of women and young people in parliamentary and electoral processes as candidates and voters; intensify multilateral public-private partnerships to better align financial support, capacity-building, training and insurance in response to the climate crisis; and enlarge opportunities for peer learning through regular reporting in voluntary national reviews and voluntary local reviews on progress in the integration of the Goals in the management processes and practices of public administrations.**