

**Economic and Social Council
Management Segment
New York, 8 June 2022 10:00 a.m.**

**Briefing on the report of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration
(CEPA) on its 21st session
By Ms. Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, Chair of the Committee**

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

It is my honour to brief you on the 21st session of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration, which took place from 4 to 8 April. The agenda was ambitious and wide-ranging, reflecting the myriad governance and public administration issues related to the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

On the ECOSOC theme, the Committee focussed on “Transforming institutions and building forward better towards 2030”. A key message was that building forward better from the pandemic, while advancing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, called for building of stronger, more effective, resilient, and credible public institutions at all levels. This in turn called for political will, a change of mindsets and the sound management of public resources.

None of the SDGs could be attained without addressing the plight of the weakest countries and the poor, who have been disproportionately affected by the economic impacts of the pandemic, and leaving no one behind. Recovery measures should focus on reopening and rebuilding economies in a sustainable manner, inter alia by providing assistance to countries in managing debt levels and inflation and investing in essential public services.

Institutional challenges and opportunities related to climate change and the protection of natural resources were a new area of study for the Committee. We noted with concern that the environmental Goals of the 2030 Agenda have stagnated or deteriorated across all regions, and planetary systems are at risk. To a large degree, this poor performance could be attributed to institutional factors.

For example, in most countries, there is no clear leadership role assigned to a specific ministry or government department for coordination across institutions. The picture is particularly complex in federal systems, where subnational governments are key actors in many areas of policymaking and regulation relevant to the Goals. Policy conflicts are frequent, in the allocation of resources for example, and change is difficult to achieve even where there is strong political will. In addition, ecosystem boundaries and institutional financing arrangements are often misaligned with government jurisdictions. Ecosystem management, territorial development, simplified regulatory frameworks, a clear distribution of responsibilities across all

levels of government, and enhanced capacities in natural capital accounting were seen as part of the solution.

The Committee stressed that building strong institutions in conflict-affected settings remained a crucial challenge. Progress was often hampered by an emphasis on the short-term need for security, on political interests and a persistent dependency on external actors. We observed that sustaining peace in countries emerging from conflict called for a long-term engagement in institution-building that is consistent with local norms and political realities. This should include bottom-up approaches to address the root causes of conflict, as well as the strengthening of tax collection systems, and strengthened risk assessment and conflict prevention measures.

Turning to the principles of effective governance for sustainable development, the Committee found questions of subsidiarity, integrity, oversight, and participation to be among the more salient governance concerns at the subnational level. We recommend paying particular attention to reforms in these areas to better support achievement of the Goals, alongside further efforts to promote whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches, while enhancing subnational fiscal capacity and financial management systems.

Open and inclusive public financial management at all levels is essential to ensuring government accountability and legitimacy. Especially in view of strong budgetary pressures, we also recommend accelerating action to increase transparency and equal participation in and oversight of the budgeting process, establishing transparent public procurement frameworks as a strategic tool to reinforce sustainable development and curb corrupt practices, and embedding commitments to the Goals in budgetary and financial processes at the national and subnational levels.

Building responsive and resilient institutions calls for more creative, flexible, and integrated ways of working, focused on the needs of people. Continued efforts to promote a professional public sector workforce will be needed to address the challenges ahead, as well as investing in digital skills, updating competency frameworks for the implementation of the SDGs, addressing inequalities within the public sector workforce and attending to social inequities in the design and delivery of public services.

The Committee underscored that digital government continued to offer immense opportunities to leapfrog development, improve public service delivery, combat corruption, reduce inequalities and improve state-citizen relations, if managed in a fair, ethical and people-centred manner. Those without ready access to technology risk being left further behind, beginning with more limited educational opportunities and all that that implies for substantive inequality of opportunity throughout life. As the situation is unlikely to change overnight and future disruptions can be reasonably expected, the Committee recommends that hybrid models of public service delivery be considered as a default.

To ensure that the digital transformation strengthens trust in government, addressing the risks of disinformation and polarization, is critical. Technologies can build trust, such as through digital IDs, if deployed effectively and with sufficient engagement of stakeholders, or they can deepen mistrust, for example when services are digitized without the possibility of independent oversight or adequate privacy safeguards. Implicit data bias in artificial intelligence is one concern for which adequate oversight mechanisms may be needed. This issue is not unique to CEPA but could have important implications for trust in government, so it was noted.

Lastly, the Committee engaged in a dialogue with VNR countries and VLR cities with the objective of promoting interaction on institutional aspects of SDG 16. While discussing the use of peer exchange platforms, members and observers agreed on the potential merits of a voluntary Committee-led peer exchange platform on institutional aspects of Goal 16. We also held a dedicated consultation with observers, including youth organizations.

The session concluded with the adoption of a draft resolution and a draft decision for the Council's consideration. We also affirmed our contribution to the 2022 HLPF.

I would like to assure you, Madame Vice-President, of CEPA's ongoing commitment to an integrated and action-oriented approach to the SDGs, to solid evidence-based reviews of progress and to working in an effective, transparent and inclusive manner. We will continue to participate actively in the Council's review of the work of the subsidiary bodies and remain enthusiastic supporters of collaboration across the ECOSOC system.

I thank you.