

**Economic and Social Council  
Management Segment  
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**Briefing on the report of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration  
(CEPA) on its nineteenth session**

**By Ms. Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, Chair of CEPA**

Mr Vice-President,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to introduce the report of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration on its nineteenth session.

**Theme of the session**

This year, due to the exceptional global situation, the Committee held its session through a combination of written consultations and informal meetings held from 13 to 28 May, using a virtual platform.

Our overall theme was “Promoting effective governance and institutional reform to accelerate delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals” in accordance with the 2020 theme of the HLPF and of ECOSOC. Throughout our discussions, we referred to the Covid-19 pandemic, and potential implications for the government and public sector workforce of the future.

**Decade of action and delivery**

Many countries may not be prepared to implement the SDGs at the desired scale and speed due to an undervaluing of the public sector in past decades and a general disregard for the contribution that it can make to addressing society’s needs when equipped with appropriate capacity, skills and mind sets.

We join others in recalling the importance of a timely implementation of the 2030 Agenda and recommend bold policy reforms to address the structural and procedural

weaknesses in institutions, at all levels, that may be hindering implementation of the Goals. Such action calls for ‘fast-track’ reform initiatives based on innovative breakthroughs as well as incremental reforms that target long-term, cumulative results.

We observe that silo-thinking in public institutions continues to hamper the holistic implementation of the SDGs and ensure that no one is left behind. We also draw attention to the continuing challenges of combatting corruption, which remains a crucial precondition for the acceleration of implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

### **Pandemic response and recovery**

The pandemic has exposed vulnerabilities of governments, for example in their unpreparedness for crisis, in the inadequacies of public infrastructure and investment, including in health systems, and broadly speaking in imbalances in economic and social development arising from public policy processes.

A key message of the Committee is that Governments should not simply aim to return to pre-existing procedures and institutional cultures in seeking to respond to the pandemic and planning for recovery. The pandemic presents a unique opportunity to reimagine the role of institutions and policymaking, promote new governance norms and shift from past practices to transformative pathways that strengthen resilience and accelerate action to achieve the SDGs.

Mitigating the adverse social, economic and financial consequences of the pandemic on all societies requires addressing the deep inequalities that exist in many countries. We reiterate the need for institutions at all levels to play a greater role in promoting and enforcing non-discriminatory laws and policies. We also recommend targeted action to recognize essential workers in the public sector.

As demonstrated in the current fight against the pandemic, local governments are often the first level providers in the delivery of the SDGs. Expanded efforts are needed to strengthen local government finance and financial management to this end, including through a concerted global effort to address severe budgetary challenges and financial risks that governments are currently facing at the subnational level.

Governments with robust digital platforms and tools have been better equipped to continue service delivery during the crisis. However, leveraging the benefits in health, education, employment and other areas going forward calls for greatly accelerated action

to address digital divides within and across countries, including in the provision of affordable access to high-speed broadband technology for all.

### Principles of effective governance

We heard during the 19<sup>th</sup> session that the principles of effective governance for sustainable development, endorsed by the Council in July 2018, have been put to test and proven useful as a guide to analysing complex governance challenges and building strong institutions to realize the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development.

Much technical work remains to be done to support their operationalization. The Committee will continue to expand on this framework in the intersessional period with an emphasis on strengthening the analytical basis for reform policies based on the principles, including through regional studies and indicators.

### Institutions and peacebuilding

We note that there has been a dramatic change in the nature of violent conflict over the last two decades, with conflicts becoming more complex and involving many more non-State actors over protracted periods. Such situations underscore the insufficiency of traditional approaches to State-building on their own and draw renewed attention to public administration reconstruction as a crucial part of peacebuilding in the medium- to long-term.

The provision of quality public services at the local level, as a core component of efforts to promote national cohesion and integrate communities into the wider society, can play a critical role in building trust and undermining the recruitment strategies of armed groups. Promoting national ownership of reforms, improving public financial management and addressing illicit financial flows with due regard to the nature of the conflict are pivotal.

### Budgeting for the SDGs

Achievement of the SDGs could be accelerated if the Goals were embedded in national and subnational budgets. We specifically recommend the adoption of practices to monitor and report on the use of public financial resources in support of the Goals, such as mapping and tracking budgetary contributions to each Goal.

The Committee also recommends accelerated action to increase transparency and equal participation in the budgeting process, establish transparent public procurement

frameworks as a strategic tool to reinforce sustainable development, and strengthen national control mechanisms, such as supreme audit institutions, along with other independent oversight institutions, in auditing budget performance.

### Public sector workforce and training

Building strong institutions at all levels calls for a comprehensive understanding of the scope and capabilities of the public sector workforce. We encourage countries to assess and address public sector workforce capability gaps, including gaps in digital skills, within the context of human resources and national development strategies, including policies and strategies to eradicate poverty and achieve the SDGs.

Strengthening of related training programmes, peer-to-peer learning, exchange of good practices within and across countries, and provision of basic training on the Goals for all public sector workers can all be of benefit.

Thank you.