United Nations | Department of Economic and Social Affairs

CEPA Committee of Experts on Public Administration

Helping countries build strong institutions for achievement of the SDGs

Principles of Effective Governance for Sustainable Development

Principles of Effective Governance for Sustainable Development

Why do we need these principles?

Institutions play a crucial role in the achievement of all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and targets. But public sector reforms needed to achieve the SDGs remain a major challenge in many countries.

In order to address this challenge concretely, the Committee of Experts on Public Administration (CEPA) has developed a set of principles of effective governance for sustainable development. The essential purpose of these voluntary principles is to provide practical, expert guidance to interested countries in a broad range of governance challenges associated with implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The 11 principles, endorsed by the Economic and Social Council in July 2018, highlight the need for pragmatic and ongoing improvements in national and local governance capabilities to reach the SDGs. To this end, the principles are linked to a variety of commonly used strategies for operationalizing responsive and effective governance.

Applying the principles and associated strategies to all public institutions can accelerate efforts to strengthen national and local governance capacities to achieve the 2030 Agenda and other international agreements.

How can they be of benefit?

The principles are designed to:

- Help interested countries, on a voluntary basis, build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels, with a view to achieving the shared vision for people and planet embodied in the 2030 Agenda

- Support countries in operationalizing the institutional aspects of SDG 16 through concrete strategies

- Promote mainstreaming of effective governance in SDG implementation and development plans and programmes at all levels

- Engage the relevant United Nations organizations, regional organizations and professional and academic communities, in an inclusive manner, together with all relevant stakeholders

- Bring together proven standards and operational guidelines in all areas of public sector institution-building relevant to SDG implementation

- Provide a baseline for policymaking while strengthening evidence-based and action-oriented implementation of and follow-up to the 2030 Agenda

The 11 principles

There are 11 principles of effective governance for sustainable development endorsed by ECOSOC. They are linked to 62 commonly used strategies for operationalizing responsive and effective governance. Many of these strategies have been recognized and endorsed over the years in various United Nations forums, resolutions and treaties.

The first three principles focus on effectiveness
UN Photo / Laura Jarriel

Competence

To perform their functions effectively, institutions are to have sufficient expertise, resources and tools to deal adequately with the mandates under their authority

Commonly used strategies to operationalize this principle include the promotion of a professional public sector workforce, strategic human resources management, leadership development and training of civil servants, performance management, results-based management, financial management and control, efficient and fair revenue administration and investment in e-government.

Principle 1

Sound policymaking

To achieve their intended results, public policies are to be coherent with one another and founded on true or well-established grounds, in full accordance with fact, reason and good sense

Commonly used strategies include strategic planning and foresight, regulatory impact analysis, promotion of coherent policymaking, strengthening national statistical systems, monitoring and evaluation systems, science-policy interface, risk management frameworks and data sharing.

Principle

2

Collaboration

To address problems of common interest, institutions at all levels of government and in all sectors should work together and jointly with non-State actors towards the same end, purpose and effect

Commonly used strategies include centre of government coordination under the Head of State or Government, collaboration, coordination, integration and dialogue across levels of government and functional areas, raising awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals, network-based governance and multi-stakeholder partnerships.

Principle 3

Three more principles address accountability

Photo: © UNICEF/UN063424/Schermbrucker

Integrity

To serve in the public interest, civil servants are to discharge their official duties honestly, fairly and in a manner consistent with soundness of moral principle

Commonly used strategies include the promotion of anti-corruption policies, practices and bodies, codes of conduct for public officials, competitive public procurement, elimination of bribery and trading in influence, conflict of interest policies, whistle-blower protection and provision of adequate remuneration and equitable pay scales for public servants.

Principle 4

Transparency

To ensure accountability and enable public scrutiny, institutions are to be open and candid in the execution of their functions and promote access to information, subject only to the specific and limited exceptions as are provided by law

Commonly used strategies include proactive disclosure of information, budget transparency, open government data, registries of beneficial ownership and lobby registries.

Principle

5

Independent oversight

To retain trust in government, oversight agencies are to act according to strictly professional considerations and apart from and unaffected by others

Commonly used strategies include promotion of the independence of regulatory agencies, arrangements for review of administrative decisions by courts or other bodies, independent audit and respect for legality.

Principle 6

Five principles focus on inclusiveness

Photo: © UNICEF/UN0311775/Kokic

Leaving no one behind

To ensure that all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality, public policies are to take into account the needs and aspirations of all segments of society, including the poorest and most vulnerable and those subject to discrimination

Commonly used strategies include the promotion of equitable fiscal and monetary policy, promotion of social equity, data disaggregation, and systematic follow-up and review.

Principle 7

Non-discrimination

To respect, protect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, access to public service is to be provided on general terms of equality, without distinction of any kind as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, disability or other status

Commonly used strategies include the promotion of public sector workforce diversity, prohibition of discrimination in public service delivery, multilingual service delivery, accessibility standards, cultural audit of institutions, universal birth registration and gender-responsive budgeting.

Principle

8

Participation

To have an effective State, all significant political groups should be actively involved in matters that directly affect them and have a chance to influence policy

Commonly used strategies include free and fair elections, regulatory process of public consultation, multi-stakeholder forums, participatory budgeting and community-driven development.

Principle 9

Subsidiarity

To promote government that is responsive to the needs and aspirations of all people, central authorities should perform only those tasks which cannot be performed effectively at a more intermediate or local level

Commonly used strategies include fiscal federalism, strengthening urban governance, strengthening municipal finance and local finance systems, enhancement of local capacity for prevention, adaptation and mitigation of external shocks, and multilevel governance.

Principle
10

Intergenerational equity

To promote prosperity and quality of life for all, institutions should construct administrative acts that balance the short-term needs of today's generation with the longer-term needs of future generations

Commonly used strategies include sustainable development impact assessment, long-term public debt management, long-term territorial planning and spatial development, and ecosystem management.

Principle 11

CEPA

Committee of Experts on Public Administration

About CEPA

The Committee of Experts on Public Administration is an expert body of the United Nations that studies and makes recommendations to improve governance and public administration structures and processes for development. It assists the Economic and Social Council by reviewing trends, issues and priorities in public administration, notably in relation to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and in support of the implementation and progress reviews of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Committee is comprised of 24 experts who serve in their personal capacity. The experts are nominated by the Secretary-General, in consultation with Member States, and approved by the Council. The membership is drawn from the interrelated fields of public economics, public administration, and public finance and reflects geographical and gender balance. The term of office is four years.

Main activities of the Committee

An informal working group will continue to identify and review related technical guidelines to operationalize the principles in collaboration with relevant United Nations organizations, regional organizations and professional and academic communities in an inclusive manner.

The working group is supported in these efforts by the Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government in the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

The informal working group is also involved in associating global SDG indicators with each of the principles to strengthen the analytical basis for assessing the impact of reform policies on building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

CEPA is collaborating with the Praia Group on Governance Statistics of the United Nations Statistical Commission on indicators.

The CEPA working group is also engaging with the International Organization of Supreme Audit Organizations Development Initiative to provide input into a future audit model of implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Key milestones

April 2016
CEPA introduces the idea of developing principles to address needs of 2030 Agenda

April 2018
Principles of effective governance for sustainable development adopted by CEPA

July 2018
ECOSOC endorses the principles

September 2018
Informal CEPA working group convened to carry activity forward

April 2019
CEPA discusses possible links to global SDG indicators

October 2019
UN DESA-AU/APRM regional workshop on moving from principles to practice

July 2021
Target date for completion of guidance on strategies and indicators

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

19-00103_GDU October 2019

To learn more about the principles and how they can be used to help build strong institutions for achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, please contact:

Secretariat of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration
Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government
United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
2 UN Plaza, Room DC2-1729
New York, NY 10017
United States

dpidg@un.org | +1 212 963-2764

https://publicadministration.un.org/en/cepa