

MODALITIES FOR REGIONAL AND GLOBAL COOPERATION ON CIVIL SERVICE DEVELOPMENT TOWARDS THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS¹

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The discussion of regional and global cooperation on civil service development towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) today speaks to public service excellence as a universal priority and a key driver of government efforts to enhance the economic and social well-being of all peoples and to expand their capability to make informed choices on a larger offer of opportunities. This is at the heart of what we at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) refer to as sustainable human development, a process in which public administration plays a key role.

Building public service excellence is more important today than it has ever been in the past. The pace of global change and the rapidly evolving development landscape place an unprecedented level of demands on government capabilities, and on the civil service in particular.

The effectiveness of public administration and capacity of the civil service have also proven to be fundamental conditions of success in the process of securing national peace, security, political stability and socio-economic progress.

As the UN Secretary General mentioned in his Guidance Note on Democracy, the way in which the public administration at national and sub-national levels operates, shares or restricts information, delivers services in an equitable or discriminatory manner, and provides or prevents opportunities for people's participation, has a direct impact on the way people perceive the degree of legitimacy of the political settlement.

The UN therefore considers effective and responsive public administration as vital, not only from the perspective of its role in managing resources and in steering economic and social development, but also as a key instrument of good governance.

¹ *These are remarks delivered by Mr. Patrick Keuleers at the discussion panel of the Regional Hub of Civil Service in Astana «International Cooperation on Civil Service Excellence: A Bridge to Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals» at the UN Headquarters in New York, USA, on 19 June 2015.*

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It is thus not surprising that civil service effectiveness has taken central stage in the post-2015 debate, in response to people's aspirations for an honest and effective government.

The important role of public service excellence in the post-2015 agenda is essentially four-fold.

- First, public administration is the provider or manager of services needed to achieve many of the targets under the different goals.
- Second, it is the main instrument through which States exercise their legitimate monopoly over the collection and management of taxes and resources needed to finance the social, economic and cultural development of the nation, at all levels.
- Third, it plays a central role in strengthening the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance and
- Fourth, but and not least, public administration remains the critical vehicle through which the executive at national and sub-national levels communicates and interacts with the people and the private sector, and is thus one of the main vehicles to channel information and promote people's participation.

The ambition of the post-2015 development agenda is nothing short of a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to eradicate poverty. But it will take remarkable political commitment to find the means to achieve this ambition. It is therefore imperative that countries have a forum to exchange lessons, share knowledge and learn from common experiences in building civil services that are high-performing, results-oriented and people-focused.

The Republic of Kazakhstan must be applauded for stepping in to create such a forum, through the establishment of the Astana Civil Service Hub.

For those who practice the technical and political art of public administration and who seek to improve government performance at the service of people's well-being, the Astana Civil Service Hub offers a unique knowledge-sharing platform on innovative approaches and tools to guide civil service reform and motivation strategies needed to speed up delivery on the SDGs.

Together with UNDP's Global Policy Centre on Public Service Excellence, based in Singapore, the Astana Civil Service Hub can leverage south-south cooperation to promote a "best-fit for context" to yield the best possible results in a national context.

Earlier this morning the UNDP Associate Administrator articulated the critical role of government institutions in making progress on sustainable development, particularly on Goal 16 on promoting peaceful, safe, just and inclusive societies. It is worth highlighting some of the key recommendations which emerged from the global dialogue on building effective institutions, and which can be supported and advanced by the Astana Civil Service Hub, with respect to the future civil service research agenda.

- **First of all, the dialogue underlines the importance of upgrading institutional capacities to deliver an integrated and inclusive SDG agenda.** It recognizes that institutional capacity is a factor that accounts for differences in development results across countries and reiterates the importance of establishing professional civil service systems.
- **The Dialogue also recommends to replace the one-size-fits-all approach by a focus on innovation, foresight and constant learning and adaptation.** The diversity of institutional settings and capacities call for different solutions and innovations which should be widely shared and adapted, including through South-South and Triangular Cooperation.
- **A third recommendation of the Dialogue is to secure political buy-in and engagement in civil service reform:** Technical solutions are not sufficient. Country examples illustrate the importance of securing a firm political commitment to designing new institutions that foster transparency, accountability and inclusion and leadership by societal stakeholders.
- **Fourth, the Dialogue emphasizes the need, in post-conflict environments, to focus on reestablishing the core functions of government. It is important to build on institutional legacies and restore capabilities instead of forcing institutional reforms or best practices** that do not respond to the concrete realities which characterize institutions in fragile and conflict affected settings. The political settlement in these environments usually lacks the maturity and consolidation needed to muster the political will required for driving big bang reforms.
- **Fifth, the Dialogue called for enhanced data collection and dissemination,** for policy and decision-making at both national and local levels to be underpinned by sound evidence.
- **Sixth, it was recognized that respect for Rule of Law and human rights principles** such as access to information, accountability,

the right to be heard and the right to appeal must be at the heart of public service delivery at both national and local levels. Integrating rule of law principles in the public administration and creates a stronger state-society compact and improves trust between government and people.

- Finally, the Dialogue reminded that **women should not only be well represented in the civil service but also in decision-making positions**, even in those sectors where women have traditionally not played a prominent role. At the launch of UNDP's Gender Equality in Public Administration initiative last year, the Norwegian Ambassador made the important remark that fully including women in Norway's labour market had resulted in a larger financial gain than Norway's entire oil revenues. With the civil service still being one of the largest employers in many developing countries, the socio-economic importance of promoting gender equality and women's leadership in the civil service cannot be stressed enough.

To move forward on the establishment of professional, results-oriented and representative civil services and to meet people's demands for honest and responsive government, sustained support for technical solutions will need to be complemented by political resolve and innovative approaches. We need to bring together the global community of policy makers, practitioners and researchers who are already advancing this important agenda and to facilitate learning and experience-sharing.

The Astana Civil Service Hub has initiated this process in the Eastern European and CIS region and expanded its outreach to the global level through this conference today.

In conclusion, it should be reiterated that the overall achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals will depend in large part on the capacity and effectiveness of the civil service to translate the aspirations of the post-2015 development agenda into tangible results and services that will help end poverty and substantively reduce exclusion and inequalities in all countries and at all levels.

When analysing the kind of structural adaptation needed to underpin the durability of development results, capacity development of civil servants coupled with motivational incentives still stand out as an important driver of change. With the nature of the challenges increasingly crossing the national borders, learning also needs to

embrace the regional and global dimensions of both the problems and the solutions.

As such, the spirit of collaboration and cross-border mutual learning being cultivated by the Astana Civil Service Hub, is a positive contribution to that kind of collective action that is needed to place public service excellence at the heart of the post-2015 development agenda.