

## MODERNIZING CIVIL SERVICES FOR THE NEW SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AGENDA<sup>1</sup>

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It is a great pleasure to join you at this important event on “Meritocracy and Professional Ethics and Key Factors of Civil Service Effectiveness”. I thank the Government of Kazakhstan for the invitation and Mr. Alikhan Baimenov for the kind introduction. I am also delighted to be joined by leading experts and practitioners from government, academia, and UNDP for this first panel session on meritocracy in the civil service.

Ethics and meritocracy in civil service are important goals in their own right. They are also critical for making progress on sustainable development.

As such, this event comes at an important time. A new global development agenda embodying Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is due to be agreed at the United Nations in September this year. The agenda is shaping up to be bold, transformational, and universal, requiring commitment from all countries, developed and developing. It will have comprehensive coverage of sustainable development, and will carry over the unfinished business of the MDGs.

Last July, an Open Working Group of Member States proposed seventeen goals and 169 targets for the new sustainable development agenda. Goal 16 aims 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. Building strong and ethical public services will be essential for achieving this goal, as it will be for achieving other goals across the new agenda.

### ***Benefits of meritocracy and ethics in civil service***

A professional and modern civil service bound by ethics:

- builds public trust and confidence in governance and service delivery. How civil servants interact with citizens, including by being open to participation in public policy discussion,

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directly impacts on how citizens perceive the legitimacy of governance.

Public trust and confidence in governance is vital, and not least when authorities are trying to respond to some kind of shock. The outbreak of Ebola in West Africa is a case in point. A low level of trust between people and their governments has been identified as being among the factors which were a barrier to rapid and effective responses.

- is essential for building and sustaining the investor confidence, which is vital for growth and poverty eradication.<sup>3</sup>
- improves performance. Where the enabling environment for civil service recruitment, development, and promotion is based on fair and meritocratic practices, overall staff pride and motivation, as well as organisational performance, tends to increase.<sup>4</sup> Corruption also tends to be lower, and public services tend to be of higher quality and delivered more efficiently;<sup>5</sup> and
- strengthens action on non-discrimination and equal opportunity and helps build a civil service which reflects the society it serves. In *South Africa*, for example, merit-based systems incorporate commitments to redress discrimination.<sup>6</sup>

### *Advancing meritocracy and ethics in civil service*

Merit-based appointment in a civil service can be promoted by law, through a competent central recruitment agency, a code of conduct,

<sup>3</sup> Merit-based state bureaucracies are associated with higher growth rates: merit-based recruitment is the most significant factor, followed by promotion from within, and career stability (Evans and Rauch 1999).

<sup>4</sup> Merit-based recruitment and predictable, rewarding career ladders improve civil servants' capability and performance (Anderson et al. 2003) and are valued by citizens as an accountability mechanism (McCourt 2000).

<sup>5</sup> Basing personnel decisions on professional competence and merit is systematically associated with less corruption (Recantini et al. 2005). A merit-based system can also help attract well-educated individuals. This is important as higher educational attainment among civil servants is linked to higher tax revenue mobilisation, reduced corruption, better public financial management and higher economic growth (Arezki and Quintyn 2013; Arezki et al. 2012).

<sup>6</sup> See Page 33, *Gender Equality in Public Administration*, UNDP 2014.

and/or by the clear separation of administrative and political functions.

Such initiatives are usually embedded in broader institutional reforms which focus on performance management and leadership development. They require the active involvement of civil service commissions and civil service or public administration academies which have mandates to build capacity for an ethical and merit-based civil service.

To promote transparency and accountability, checks and balances within institutions are needed. That includes empowering citizens to participate in public processes, including by monitoring service delivery. In an age of advanced information and communications technologies (ICTs), there are many new opportunities and tools for opening up spaces and channels for citizens to engage with the civil service.

The “Ushahidi” platform is a good example of this. Ushahidi was developed as an early warning system in *Kenya* to support efforts to defuse outbreaks of violence after the 2007 elections. In effect the innovators behind it encouraged live reporting of incidents by text messaging or other means, and then were able to map what was happening and where help was needed, so that authorities could respond.

Ushahidi’s open source software is now being applied to other settings and circumstances around the world, including to track violence against immigrants, violence associated with elections, and pharmacy stock-outs, and to trigger responses from authorities. In *Afghanistan*, the platform has been used to develop Watertracker, a community-based, crowdsourced tool which empowers citizens to monitor the functioning of wells and other water points. An estimated thirty to fifty per cent of all water points in Afghanistan are not functional after two years, so the potential of this new technology to improve service delivery is huge.

Excellence in civil service cannot be achieved without reform-minded politicians and leaders willing to create a more client-oriented civil service. In *Kazakhstan*, the development of a meritocratic and professional civil service is part of an ambitious institutional reform agenda.

## *UNDP's contributions to public service excellence*

UNDP has long experience in supporting countries to implement public service reforms. We work with ministries, local authorities, constitutional bodies, and civil society organizations. Our aim is to ensure that meritocracy and ethical standards prevail. We emphasize the importance of improving services for the poor, excluded, and disadvantaged groups, including in the areas of HIV and health, education, social services, energy, and water and sanitation.

As a trusted partner of governments in Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, UNDP supports public administration and civil service reforms in the region by strengthening legal and regulatory frameworks aimed at preventing misconduct and corruption, training civil servants, and enhancing the capacity of oversight institutions.

Allow me to share some examples of our work in the region:

- In *Georgia, Moldova, and Montenegro*, for example, UNDP has played an important role in helping to jump-start public administration reform, and to bridge the capacity gaps in national institutions, by introducing Capacity Development Facilities.<sup>7</sup> These innovative mechanisms provide on-demand technical advice at the highest levels of a civil service, training and capacity building, and funding for key priorities through, for example, block grants to local municipalities to implement local development plans.<sup>8</sup>
- In the *Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Moldova*, UNDP also supports national institutions in the development and implementation of integrity plans<sup>9</sup> at central and local levels, to help identify and

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<sup>7</sup> These are “mechanisms through which relevant capacity development support services for a particular country, sector, institution are provided, funded, and/or coordinated in an integrated, cohesive, flexible, and mutually-supporting manner to respond effectively and sustainably to evolving capacity development needs”. Background materials contain additional information.

<sup>8</sup> *Capacity Development in Action Review of Capacity Development Facilities, Taking Stock of What's Out there & Conceptualizing, Establishing and Managing Capacity Development Facilities* UNDP July 2012.

<sup>9</sup> *Integrity plan*, are organizational plans for establishing and verifying the integrity of the organization. An Integrity plan is devoted to:

- identifying relevant corruption risks in different working fields of an individual organization;
- assessment, what danger corruption risks may pose to an individual organization;
- determining measures to reduce or eliminate corruption risks;

address corruption risks, and put in place measures to promote meritocracy and fairness in public service.

- Working with public administration academies throughout the region, we help develop curricula to support training and professional development of civil servants. In *Bosnia and Herzegovina* (BiH), UNDP helped establish the Federation of BiH Civil Service Agency, and created civil service training systems across the country.

As I mentioned earlier, information and communication technologies are powerful tools to promote the involvement of citizens in monitoring the activities of public administrations and in the delivery of better services to the public.

In *Kyrgyzstan*, UNDP and the World Bank have supported the adoption of an e-government strategy, and have conducted an assessment of the technological and civil service capacities and resources needed to open up data. This June, during the Kyrgyz Open Innovation Week supported by UNDP and others, civil servants will learn about standards for opening access to government data. Software developers and government officials will come together to find innovative solutions to challenges like ineffective public financial management.

UNDP also emphasizes the importance of innovative solutions to public service delivery challenges. For example, in the *Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, UNDP supported the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare to test three different approaches to improve service delivery centers in Roma communities. These service centers were designed as one-stop-shops to provide services related to social protection, employment, health, housing, education, and legal documentation. The most successful of the three tested approaches involved empowering young people as agents of change in their own communities. Equipped with tablets and smart phones, they combined youthful energy, technology, and local knowledge to raise community awareness of the services on offer, and increase the number of people who accessed the service centers.

### ***Strategic partnership between Kazakhstan and UNDP on civil service excellence***

We are delighted to be working closely with Kazakhstan on civil service excellence. Kazakhstan's strong commitment in this area

makes it a logical host of the Regional Hub of Civil Service in Astana, in which UNDP is proud to be a partner. Led by Chairman Baimenov, the Hub aims to do three things:

- serve as a network for the continuous exchange of experience and knowledge in the field of civil service, including through South-South and triangular co-operation;
- stimulate the improvement of civil services in the region;
- conduct joint research on innovations in the civil service, including on harnessing big data for evidence-based policymaking, and on leveraging new digital technologies and social media to promote citizen engagement.

Given the importance of civil service excellence to sustainable development, this Hub will help position Kazakhstan as a leader in the implementation of the new sustainable development agenda. Through the Hub, Kazakhstan and partners can share experiences and best practice. In this regard, I am pleased to see so many countries from the ECIS region represented here today, including *Georgia, Azerbaijan, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.*

I am confident, however, that the Hub's reach will extend beyond this region. Already staff from the Regional Hub of Civil Service in Astana have visited UNDP's Global Policy Centre for Public Service Excellence in Singapore to learn about the research conducted at the Centre, and to initiate joint research. Such collaboration and knowledge exchange will spur new thinking on achieving civil service excellence.

I welcome the idea launched by the Astana Regional Hub and our Global Policy Centre in Singapore to advocate for what they call a 'New Public Passion'. This builds on the concept of 'New Public Management', an influential reform approach closely associated with my own country, New Zealand. The 'New Public Passion' emphasizes that officials need to be empowered, and to *feel* empowered, to do what they joined the public service for in the first place, namely to serve citizens.

This 'New Public Passion' seeks to nurture high job satisfaction by ensuring that all civil servants feel directly engaged in improving the lives of their fellow citizens. UNDP's Global Centre for Public Service Excellence is now testing ideas on how to translate that aspiration into practice through a major research programme, in

partnership with the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore. This research will investigate drivers of motivation among officials in developing countries. Surprisingly little is known about this. In *Myanmar*, for example, the Centre is supporting a survey of civil servants' attitudes in order to understand more about what could drive civil servants to go the extra mile to serve disadvantaged groups. I hope that our contributions can help instil and renew such a sense of passion for development in public officials around the world.

I hope that the Astana Regional Hub will meet the high expectations placed on it by delivering concrete results and innovations in research, knowledge management, and capacity building on civil service excellence.

At UNDP, we are committed to supporting the Hub to achieve its objectives, and to working closely with the Government of Kazakhstan to that end. We look forward to continuing our work around the world in support of building professional and modern civil services.