

# **UN SYSTEM TASK TEAM ON THE **POST-2015** UN DEVELOPMENT AGENDA**



## **Governance and development**

### **Thematic Think Piece**

**UNDESA, UNDP, UNESCO**

The views expressed in this paper are those of the signing agencies and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations.

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Following on the outcome of the 2010 High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals, the United Nations Secretary-General established the UN System Task Team in September 2011 to support UN system-wide preparations for the post-2015 UN development agenda, in consultation with all stakeholders. The Task Team is led by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme and brings together senior experts from over 50 UN entities and international organizations to provide system-wide support to the post-2015 consultation process, including analytical input, expertise and outreach.

## Governance and development

### 1. Scope and relevance of the issue

Governance refers to the exercise of political and administrative authority at all levels to manage a country's affairs. It comprises the mechanisms, processes and institutions, through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences.<sup>1</sup> Specific reference is made to democratic governance as “a process of creating and sustaining an environment for inclusive and responsive political processes and settlements.”<sup>2</sup> The institutional and human capacities for governance determine the way in which the effectiveness of public policies and strategies is attained, especially in service delivery.

What does it mean to promote good governance for human development? Much discussion about the definition of good governance has centred on what makes institutions and rules more effective and efficient, in order to achieve equity, transparency, participation, responsiveness, accountability, and the rule of law. These aspects are crucial for human development and the eradication of poverty since ineffective institutions usually result in the greatest harm to those who are poor and vulnerable.

Without reference to a universal standard for governance, the notion of what is good is thus defined by the desired outcome, which varies from one situation to another. Nonetheless, two broad governance issues can be discerned. The first pertains to institutions of governance, including public administration and public services connected, in particular, with the sound management of resources, delivery of and equitable access to public services, responsiveness to the views of citizens and their participation in decisions that concern them. Strategies adopted in response – including better personnel management,

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<sup>1</sup> Committee of Experts on Public Administration, Definition of basic concepts and terminologies in governance and public administration (E/C.16/2006/4) (New York, 2006)

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Report 2011 (New York, 2011)

transparency in public finance, a curb on corruption, citizen participation and enhanced accountability – have since become common currency in public administration dialogue.<sup>3</sup>

In addition, performance norms have been the subject of debate in the fields of education,<sup>4</sup> health,<sup>5</sup> finance<sup>6</sup> and other development sectors. Targeted goals within each functional area tend to echo emergent aspects of administration applicable to all government functions, namely transparency, accountability, integrity, equity, efficiency and responsiveness.<sup>7</sup>

The second broad governance issue is concerned with concepts of democracy and the rule of law, including with rights-based claims to equality before the law, judicial independence, participation in the conduct of public affairs, electoral integrity, political plurality, freedom of expression and media independence.<sup>8</sup> These claims include demands for gender equality and the inclusion of youth and marginalized groups. Integral to effective implementation is an informed and empowered citizenry engaged in transparent and accountable governance processes. Free and pluralistic media are considered essential to such ends as is the right to freely access information held by public bodies.<sup>9</sup>

The commitment to democratic and accountable systems of governance was reaffirmed at the World Summit in 2005, and again by Heads of State and Government in 2010.

To some, democracy implies certain institutional arrangements, which raises political sensitivities. Thus, member States point out that, while democracies share common features such as those just mentioned there is no single model of operation. Rather, democracy is a “universal value” based on the freely expressed will of the people to determine their own political, economic, social and cultural systems and full participation in all aspects of their

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3 Some pertinent UN resolutions include General Assembly res. 50/225, 55/61, 66/209 and Economic and Social Council res. 2011/22

4 UNESCO, *Overcoming Inequality: Why Governance Matters* (Paris, 2009)

5 World Health Organization, *Health Systems Governance* (Geneva, 2008)

6 Report of the Secretary-General, *Strengthening of institutional arrangements to promote international cooperation in tax matters, including the Committee of Experts on International Cooperation in Tax Matters*, E/2011/76 (New York, 2011)

7 See, for example, *The Dakar Framework for Action: Education for All* (Dakar, 2000)

8 General Assembly Resolution 59/201

9 UNESCO General Conference Resolution 55 adopted at its 33rd session

lives.<sup>10</sup> The blending of transparent, accountable and capable institutions of governance with concepts of democracy and the rule of law is common in governance debates as they are closely connected and mutually reinforcing. Member States consider progress in these areas to be essential for the realization of social and people-centred sustainable development.<sup>11</sup>

## **2. Significant trends in governance since 2000**

Since the Millennium Summit, a number of changes have taken place with a direct bearing on State capacity to formulate and execute national development strategies and build public trust in public institutions. Foremost among these are advances in the use of ICTs. The evolution of the Internet, including mobile and social networking technologies, has enabled the transformation of public administration in some countries and contributed to an alteration of the balance of power between citizens and the State in others. The Information Society has fostered, inter alia, a nascent open government movement that promotes transparency, accountability and participation,<sup>12</sup> and amplified a wave of national freedom of information laws adopted over the past ten years.<sup>13</sup> It has also renewed debate about the application of the right to seek, receive and impart information through any media and regardless of frontiers to the Internet and other new information technologies as they apply to traditional forms of media.<sup>14</sup>

Alongside the steady march of technology, one finds an ongoing experiment by governments in some contexts with citizen engagement and consultative processes and an increasing demand for participation and transparency from citizens - many using the new communication channels provided by ICTs, especially social media. This may be a reflection of increasing complexity of national and international affairs and a concomitant difficulty in forecasting the effect of changes to public policy on society and the economy. Whereas matters once discussed in confidence with selected experts or, possibly, representative

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10 General Assembly Resolution 66/163

11 General Assembly Resolutions 66/102 and 66/159

12 See, for example, the multilateral Open Government Partnership at <http://www.opengovpartnership.org/>,

13 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, About Freedom of Information, available at: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/freedom-of-expression/freedom-of-information/about/>

14 Washington declaration of the UNESCO World Press Freedom Day Conference, May 2011

stakeholders, governments are increasingly turning to broad-based and open consultations to define problems, explore options and forge consensus solutions more attuned to systemic dynamics.<sup>15</sup>

Corruption is an issue that has garnered particular attention since 2000, resulting in the entry into force in 2005 of the UN Convention against Corruption. Parties to the convention commit to the establishment of anticorruption bodies, enhanced transparency in the financing of election campaigns and political parties, efficiency of public servants, recruitment based on merit, transparency and accountability in matters of public finance and generally high standards of conduct in all areas of public affairs – in addition to tighter regulation of business and private financial transactions.

Recent events in the Arab States have again brought to the fore longstanding demands from young people for a development trajectory grounded on democratic governance, the rule of law and human rights. It has highlighted where the internationally agreed development agenda has failed to respond to core governance demands of populations. Across the world since 2005, it has been increasingly clear that democratic deficits lie at the core of critical development challenges related to state fragility, transition and social and political violence, inequality in the enjoyment of the benefits of growth and natural resources, increased demands on the natural environment and a global crisis of confidence in the integrity, capacity and legitimacy of the state to deliver on human development.

### **3. Incorporation of governance into post-2015**

Experience to date with the Millennium Development Goals has shown that, in many cases, sustained progress towards the MDGs has been underpinned by good governance and women's empowerment, and hampered by their absence.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> See, for example, O'Malley, P., Public Consultation and the Government of Canada: A Brief History and Some Related Issues, from a commissioned study on legislative and regulatory consultation practices

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World (New York, 2002); United Nations Development Programme, The Path to Achieving the MDGs: a synthesis of evidence from around the world (New York, 2010); United Nations Development Programme, Beyond the Mid-point: achieving the MDGs (New York, 2010)

Having identified good governance as a concern common to all countries, questions arise as to how member States might capture its various dimensions in a global development framework. Would it be feasible to propose explicit governance goals and targets in their own right? Should governance challenges be set out as part of the enabling conditions that need to be strengthened to foster development? Or, would it be better to mainstream governance issues into other development goals so as to build synergies among various development themes?

Clearly much depends on the scope and format of the post-2015 development agenda. As noted earlier, objectives such as transparency, accountability, inclusion and so on apply both in general and to specific sectors. They reflect fundamental principles, such as openness, equity and engagement, while at the same time enabling achievement of particular development outcomes, such as poverty reduction, education for all and environmental protection. Thus, as a technical matter there appears to be some latitude in the formulation.

One approach may be to reiterate a set of principles for the exercise of political and administrative authority at national and local levels. Drawing on international human rights treaties, the UN Convention against Corruption and other major agreements with near universal participation, such principles, clearly and simply stated in the post-2015 development agenda, might encompass commitments to increased transparency, enhanced accountability and oversight, stakeholder engagement and participation in decision-making, judicial independence and so on. Many of these principles have already been established as global reference points. Their non-binding nature in the context of the post-2015 agenda would help to reassure countries, especially those most challenged by weak institutions and issues with peace and security, that there is no conditionality attached. Such an approach, however, could be seen to avoid the lessons learned from the MDGs where principles without measures were not taken as a priority. If governance principles are adopted, their implementation would need to be regularly monitored and reported to generate the necessary impetus for moving forward.

A more direct approach could also be considered whereby countries commit to governance as a goal within the existing MDG-type framework as has been done in a few countries, accompanied by operational targets in specific sectors, for example working to enhance taxation, court administration or statistical capacity at the national level. This could provide a stronger basis for galvanizing support, particularly if also linked to other goals such as gender equality.

Whatever form the framework takes, it must both be premised on and support governance for peaceful, inclusive and responsive human development. In particular, it should lead member States and development actors to:

- Focus on strengthening institutions and human resource capacities at all levels, concentrating on parliaments, electoral bodies and related processes, the security and justice sectors, public services, and promoting coherence across institutions;
- Support a state-society compact and culture grounded in constitutionalism, access to justice, equality and human rights;
- Assist public institutions to become effective, responsive, accountable and representative through e-government and other means, foster public sector capacities and public-private partnerships at national and sub-national levels, prevent corruption and promote the transparent and sustainable management of public goods and financial and natural resources;
- Support capacity for cross-sectoral, integrated and inclusive decision-, policy- and law-making, at all levels;
- Ensure the strengthening of citizen participation and civil society organizations' engagement, including through e-participation, to ensure accountability and transparency and better inform decision-making;
- Support transparency and the right to access information about public affairs, encouraging states to adopt and implement legislation ensuring broad access to information by the public, including through the use of mobile, social media and other appropriate technologies;



- Strengthen the environment for an independent and pluralistic media, and ensure that the media serve the needs of society by reflecting a diversity of political views, cultures, languages and beliefs.

Governance monitoring and capacity development could usefully draw on the work of DESA, UNDP, the World Bank, OECD and others, while taking into account that implementation measures must be country-owned, and useful to national governments and other national stakeholders in the diversity of settings in which the UN operates, including in countries emerging from conflict and those in transition.

## **4. Incorporation of the governance issue in inter-governmental processes**

The Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary bodies are currently considering their role in the elaboration of and follow-up to the post-2015 development agenda. The functional commissions have been invited to prepare written inputs on cross-cutting and emerging issues that should find their place in the post-2015 development agenda. Inputs received by the end of 2012 may be fed into the contribution by the Council to the special event to be held during the 68th session of the General Assembly next year to follow-up on efforts towards achieving the MDGs.

Recognizing the importance of promoting a coherent, evidence-based approach to the governance issue, the Committee of Experts on Public Administration considered how it might contribute to discussions on the post-2015 agenda at its 11th session.<sup>17</sup> The Committee reinforced many of the points made above and expressed interest in studying the effect of specific national and local governance practices on development with a view to sharing the findings with ECOSOC at the 2013 substantive session.

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<sup>17</sup> CEPA, 11th session, 16-20 April 2012, report forthcoming. The Committee is a standing expert body of the Economic and Social Council

## **5. Conclusion**

The new framework must be based on an understanding of the importance of and a commitment to further promote resilient, legitimate and inclusive national and local institutions, as well as inclusive participation in public processes. It must address institutional and governance bottlenecks to ensure transformative and sustainable development. It must encourage the identification and support of options and initiatives that enhance the collaborative capacities of empowered societies to find peaceful, effective and long-term solutions to global, national and local development challenges.

## **UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda**

### **Membership**

*Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), Co-Chair*

*United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Co-Chair*

*Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)*

*Department of Public Information (DPI)*

*Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)*

*Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)*

*Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)*

*Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)*

*Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)*

*Executive Office of the Secretary-General (EOSG)*

*Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO)*

*Global Environment Facility (GEF)*

*International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)*

*International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)*

*International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)*

*International Labour Organization (ILO)*

*International Maritime Organization (IMO)*

*International Monetary Fund (IMF)*

*International Organization for Migration (IOM)*

*International Telecommunication Union (ITU)*

*Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)*

*Non-Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS)*

*Office of the Deputy Secretary-General (ODSG)*

*Office of the High Commission for Human Rights (OHCHR)*

*Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (OHRLLS)*

*Office of the Special Advisor on Africa (OSAA)*

*Peace building Support Office (PBSO)*

*United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)*

*United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)*

*United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)*  
*United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)*  
*United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (UN Women)*  
*United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)*  
*United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)*  
*United Nations Fund for International Partnerships (UNFIP)*  
*United Nations Global Compact Office*  
*United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)*  
*United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT)*  
*United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)*  
*United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR)*  
*United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR)*  
*United Nations Millennium Campaign*  
*United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA)*  
*United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)*  
*United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)*  
*United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)*  
*United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)*  
*United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD)*  
*United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination Secretariat (CEB)*  
*United Nations University (UNU)*  
*United Nations Volunteers (UNV)*  
*United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)*  
*Universal Postal Union (UPU)*  
*World Bank*  
*World Food Programme (WFP)*  
*World Health Organization (WHO)*  
*World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)*  
*World Meteorological Organization (WMO)*  
*World Trade Organization (WTO)*