Expert group meeting on
Policy integration in government in pursuit of the SDGs
28-29 January 2015, United Nations Headquarters, New York

About the meeting
From 28-29 January 2015, the Division for Public Administration and Development Management of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs will hold an expert group meeting at the United Nations Headquarters, New York, with the theme of “Policy integration in government in pursuit of the SDGs.”

The meeting will bring together experts from government, academia, the United Nations, OECD, World Bank and other organizations to review developments in the field of policy integration in government administration, the conditions that makes policy integration viable, and obstacles to its adoption as a common practice in government institutions. The meeting will tackle the “what?” and “how?” of integration, with special consideration of the prospects for policy integration in low- and middle-income countries.

Objectives
The meeting will provide an opportunity to elicit experts’ insights as an input to the 14th session of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration (CEPA), to be held from 20-24 April 2015 under the banner of “Building trust in government in pursuit of sustainable development goals, what will it take?” The meeting is expected to result in:

- Views on how to translate conceptual notions of policy coherence and principles of policymaking into practical terms
- Establishment of a baseline understanding of the capacity of administrations to pursue integration in pursuit of the sustainable development goals (SDGs)
- Building on work by UNEP, OECD, World Bank and others, connecting of observations and conclusions to policy cycles taking into account political and institutional realities

The output of the meeting will be a report containing insights into “what it will take” to advance policy integration in pursuit of the SDGs, and concrete options on how to enhance policy integration in government administration which can directly be fed into the CEPA 14th session.

Background
In September 2014, the United Nations General Assembly decided that the report of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (OWG) would be the main basis for integrating the SDGs into the post-2015 development agenda, while recognizing that other inputs will also be considered in the intergovernmental negotiation process. In anticipation of the adoption of a post-2015 development agenda in September 2015, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) is asking

1 See General Assembly resolution 68/309 of 10 September 2014.
“what it will take” to make the transition to a development framework based on the SDGs, and has invited CEPA and other subsidiary bodies to contribute their views.²

Stressing that people are at the centre of sustainable development, the OWG reiterated a commitment to freeing humanity from poverty and hunger as a matter of urgency, striving for a world that is just, equitable and inclusive, and working together to promote sustained and inclusive economic growth, social development and environmental protection and thereby to benefit all. To these ends, the Group proposed a set of 17 SDGs constituting an integrated, indivisible set of global priorities that recognize the linkages among economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainable development.

The OWG recognized that each country has primary responsibility for its own economic and social development and that the role of national policies, domestic resources and development strategies cannot be overemphasized. At the same time, the Group noted that there are different approaches, visions, models and tools available to each country, in accordance with its national circumstances and priorities, to achieve sustainable development in its three dimensions.³

While policy integration is central to the sustainable development paradigm, and set out as a distinct target in the OWG proposal, actually delivering integrated policies is a daunting challenge, especially in developing countries. Government institutions are often organized along functional lines with fragmented agenda-setting and administrative silos, and lack adequate arrangements for policy integration across levels and sectors of government.

Policy integration will present a key governance challenge in pursuit of the SDGs, particularly in view of the rising complexity of social problems and global issues with important national and local impacts such as climate change. Effectively policy integration is all the more important given the range of expertise from different institutions and sectors required to tackle the SDGs, as well as demands for more innovative, responsive and equitable service delivery, which transcend the competences of individual ministries.

CEPA, for its part, advises that trust in government will be essential to consolidating support for a post-2015 development agenda, and that fostering cooperation and participation are essential to the pursuit of the SDGs. To earn trust, governments must be seen as up to the challenge, inter alia, of enhancing integration of policy development processes. But like ECOSOC, CEPA is concerned with the practical question of what it will take to promote policy integration in a variety of contexts, taking into account both the global SDGs and national policies and priorities.

For example, policy integration depends on capable institutions and the adoption of approaches and tools in government applied to the analysis of complex issues, drawing on sometimes large volumes of data, and delivery of public services across multiple government agencies and jurisdictions. Adoption of information and communication technology (ICT) in government is known to play a significant facilitating role in this regard, and will be an important enabler of SDG implementation.

² See General Assembly resolution 68/1 of 20 September 2013, annex, para. 8.
Structure
The meeting will consist of eight sessions held over two days. The first day will be devoted to the “what” of policy integration by looking at some of the challenges faced by government administrations as they progress. The second day will focus on “how” with a discussion of practical ways to strengthen policy integration in pursuit of the SDGs, including consideration of the prospects for policy integration in low- and middle-income countries. At the end of each day, the experts will go over the results of the day’s session, discuss conclusions and observations, and identify any significant gaps in our understanding of the current state of policy integration. The provisional programme is as follows:

**Policy integration challenges in government administration**
Session 1: Setting the scene
Session 2: Policy frameworks and institutional arrangements
Session 3: Dealing with complexity, uncertainty and risk
Session 4: Tensions between integration and decentralization

**Practical ways to strengthen policy integration in pursuit of the SDGs**
Session 5: Assessing government capacity for policy integration
Session 6: Operational approaches and tools
Session 7: Facilitating role of ICT
Session 8: Prospects for low- and middle-income countries

**Conclusions and observations**

Participants
Approximately 15 participants are expected to attend the expect group meeting. The meeting will bring together experts from government, academia, the United Nations, OECD, World Bank and other organizations.

Dates and venue
The meeting will be held from 28-29 January 2015 at the United Nations Headquarters, New York, United States.

Language
The meeting will be conducted in English.

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