The relevance of public administration theory and practice for policy integration in pursuit of the SDGs

Remarks Prepared for:

Practical ways to strengthen policy integration in pursuit of the SDGs: Prospects for low- and middle-income countries (Session 8)

At the

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

By:

Sanjay K. Pandey, PhD
Shapiro Professor of Public Policy and Public Administration
Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration
The George Washington University
805 21st St NW, Room 601R
Washington, DC 20052
Email: skpandey@gwu.edu or sanjay.k.pandey@gmail.com
Phone: (202) 994-1084
Facsimile: (202) 994-6792
http://tspppa.gwu.edu/sanjay-k-pandey
BACKGROUND

The purpose of this meeting as presented in aide memoire is “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 Expert group meeting to be held over two days (28-29 January 2015) is divided in two parts. The second day of the meeting explores “practical ways to strengthen policy integration in pursuit of SDG” and these prepared notes form the basis for my remarks in Session 8 titled, “Prospects for Low- and Middle-Income Countries”.

MY PERSPECTIVE

I am Shapiro Professor of Public Policy and Public Administration at the Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration, The George Washington University and an Elected Fellow of the Congressionally chartered National Academy of Public Administration.

My scholarship and expertise in public administration is in public management, leadership, performance management, and other related domains. I believe that public administration theory and research have much to offer to matters of practical concern and action. Whereas the diversity of social and economic circumstances in low- and middle-income countries requires us to be careful in recommending “one size fits all” practical recommendations for policy integration, public administration theory and research offer a way to think carefully through what may be necessary for policy integration efforts to succeed.

THE CHALLENGE OF POLICY INTEGRATION

Government and public administration is often called upon to undertake some of the most complex challenges. Policy integration in pursuit of SDGs, despite its potential to have enormous positive benefits, will challenge low- and middle-income countries. The very nature of the task of policy integration is such that it challenges government agencies even in nations with well-developed administrative systems (Fountain 2013; Moynihan and Kroll 2014; Pandey, in press).

These challenges become even more prominent in post-conflict societies (Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff 2002). Whereas national contextual factors will do much to shape the magnitude of this challenge, success in policy integration will depend upon carefully coordinating the efforts of a variety of actors such as national and sub-national government agencies, private firms, nonprofit and social enterprise organizations, and bilateral and multilateral donor agencies. Although national governments in low- and middle-income countries can play an important role, it is important to recognize that
policy integration and performance of national governments reflects the collaborations, efforts, and performance of a range of actors from different sectors (Pandey 2010).

Given the complexity and the challenges inherent in pursuing successful action, we need to be cautious and humble in making recommendations on practical ways to strengthen policy integration. Indeed, a willingness to learn from other contexts and from results of past efforts is essential. With these caveats in mind, I want to make three key points:

1. **Analysis of institutional actors and setting of realistic expectations** -- It is important to have realistic expectations about the extent to which the wide variety of governmental and non-governmental actors can come together in pursuit of policy integration. The institutional analysis framework (please see Figure 1) offered by Nobel Laureate Oliver Williamson is particularly instructive (Williamson 1998). Pandey (2014) provides a relevant application of this framework to low- and middle-income countries as she examines anti-corruption reforms in Bangladesh, Nigeria, Slovenia and Uruguay (please see Figure 2). It is also important to note that the institutional context of organizations bestows specific advantages (please see Figure 3) and so finding the right mix of organizations from different sectors to work on challenging policy problems is important (Peng, Pandey, and Pandey, in press). The role and capacity of sub-national governments can be a source of strength or may need to be compensated by other actors’ efforts (Pandey 2002).

**Cases for discussion:**

**Bangladesh** – A case in point is World Bank’s cancellation of a $1.2 billion loan for the ambitious Padma Bridge project over repeated corruption concerns that remained unaddressed by the political leadership. Williamson’s (1998) institutional framework can be applied to determine strengths and weaknesses in Bangladesh’s institutional fabric. Application of the four-tiered framework highlights two NGOs in Bangladesh—BRAC and Grameen Bank—which provide a stunning narrative of powerful ideas, entrepreneurship, citizens, and technology combining to initiate innovative programs at the grassroots level. The four-tiered framework also highlights the nation’s weaknesses. Leveraging the strengths to mitigate the weaknesses will be essential for successful policy integration.

**Nigeria** – A contrasting case where a public organization plays a leading role is that of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) in combating corruption in Nigeria. A diligent application of Williamson’s (1998) institutional framework is insightful. Comparing findings for Nigeria with findings for other nations e.g. Bangladesh can be a helpful exercise too. One finding that stands out is that lack of strong domestic NGOs. The important role that NGOs (called nonprofits in the study) is highlighted in Peng, Pandey, and Pandey’s (in press) which compared the institutional contexts of public and nonprofit organizations.
2. **Emphasis on transparency** -- Promoting transparency as an important instrumental consideration will be key to success in policy integration. Ready and transparent information, even very basic and rudimentary information, has the potential to enhance trust and thereby foster cooperation in pursuit of common goals (see Pandey, 2012 on evidence on benefits of transparency).

**Case for discussion:**

**India** – The e-Governance initiative in the state in Gujarat offers an interesting case study. E-governance initiatives can have multiple goals such as, information sharing, citizen engagement, improved response times. Case anecdotes shared by consultants working with NGOs in Gujarat and a large sample study by Pandey (2012) suggest that e-governance platforms and interface do not have to be dynamic or state-of-the-art to have an impact. Transparency can be accomplished even through static web pages provided these webpages have comprehensive, relevant, timely and updated information.

3. **Use of qualitative and quantitative measurement instruments** -- In designing efforts to measure and monitor progress of policy integration towards SDGs, it will be especially important to develop and rely on both quantitative and qualitative measurement instruments. Qualitative measurement instruments recording the perspective of key stakeholders will be particularly important in learning and overcoming challenges.

**Case for discussion:**

**Ethiopia -- Children’s Experiences of Household Poverty in Ethiopia** (see Tafere 2014) – This Young Lives project in Ethiopia highlights the importance of collecting quantitative and qualitative data to understand the ways in which children’s lives are in poor households. The study investigators make the point that most poverty studies are conducted by collecting data from adults. Researchers/evaluators need to observe and collect qualitative data to uncover information about children and other household dynamics.
Works Cited


Figure 1. Oliver Williamson’s Institutional Analysis Framework

Figure 2. Williamson’s (1998) four-layered institutional framework applied to assess nations’ anticorruption strategies in Bangladesh, Nigeria, Slovenia, and Uruguay

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Examples of anti-corruption initiatives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>Informal institution level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>grass-roots initiatives, big changes in national institutions due to civil unrest and war, overhaul of nations’ administrative structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>Formal institution level strengthening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>strengthening democracy, tightening of rules and regulations, setting up of anti-corruption agencies, setting up a strong, independent judicial system and prosecuting of corrupt top officials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>Governance level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>decentralization, transparency, accountability, smaller size of government, privatization and citizen-engagement in governance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>Individual level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>merit-based recruitment, higher wages, education and training to build integrity, whistle-blower protection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure reproduced from Pandey, Sheela. 2014. Anti-Corruption Reform – Lessons from Nations with the Largest Reduction in Corruption Levels In Y. K. Dwivedi et al. (Eds.), Public Administration Reform: Market Demand from Public Organizations. Routledge/Taylor and Francis.
Figure 3. Differences in the institutional contexts of public and nonprofit organizations

![Diagram showing the institutional contexts of public and nonprofit organizations]

Standardized regression weights are reported as structural path estimates.

*P < 0.10; **P < 0.05; ***P < 0.01; ****P < 0.001