

Department of Economic and Social Affairs
Division for Public Administration and
Development Management

Policy integration in government in pursuit of the sustainable development goals

**Report of the expert group meeting held on 28 and 29 January 2015 at United Nations
Headquarters, New York**



United Nations

Acronyms

ASEAN: Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CEPA: Committee of Experts on Public Administration
CMMI: Capability Model Maturity Integration
ECOSOC: Economic and Social Council
EGM: Expert Group Meeting
EU: European Union
ICT: Information and Communications Technology
LDCs: Least Development Countries
MDGs: Millennium Development Goals
MICs: Middle Income Countries
NAFTA-CEC: North America Free Trade Agreement–Commission for Environmental Cooperation
OECD: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OPM3: Organizational Project Management Maturity Model
P3M3: Portfolio, Program, and Project Management Maturity Model
SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals
SIDS: Small Island Developing States
SMART: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Time-bound
SoD: Strategy on Development
UNDESA: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP: United Nations Development Programme
UN-OCHA: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNOPS: United Nations Office for Project Services

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Key messages of the expert group meeting

- Policy integration is a concept and set of practices still subject to overlapping definitions and conceptual fuzziness. Some see it as normative, some as instrumental. Greater clarity is needed in discussions on the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda.
- The main challenge of policy integration stems from the fact that it is not business as usual – not normal practice – for governments to integrate. This will be particularly difficult given the complexities of sustainability and the post-2015 development agenda.
- There are rich examples of historical and contemporary policy integration experiences that we can learn from. However, many of them have not been documented with this purpose in mind, hence warranting follow-up.
- Elaborating a dense set of linkages between sub-national, national, regional and global governance arrangements will be essential in promoting policy integration efforts.
- The political, economic, scientific and governance dimensions of policy integration are often downplayed (as they often were during the MDG period), yet will be critical to the success of policy integration as a target of the SDGs.
- The role of civil society and the private sector is well recognized across the SDGs and within specific sectors, for example by the Sustainable Energy for All initiative of the Secretary-General. Civil society and the private sector also have a role to play in policy integration. This process of “endogenizing” the SDGs is critical if they are to have meaning to people and inspire action.
- Knowledge networks and institutional mechanisms to support cross-boundary thinking and problem-solving are critical supports for integrated policymaking.
- Sectoral and inter-sectoral policymaking should support one another. If integrated policymaking is to work, it should incorporate adequate understanding of the sectoral building blocks and sectoral incentives to participate. By its nature, the SDG framework is both sectoral and inter-sectoral.
- A better sense is needed of how policy integration will play out across different regions and in different types of countries, such as the LDCs and countries emerging from conflict, and what sequencing of reforms may be implied given the different resources, capacities and governance systems.

Introduction

This report summarizes presentations and discussions that took place at the Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on “Policy integration in government in pursuit of sustainable development goals”, held at the United Nations Headquarters on 28 and 29 January 2015.

The meeting, organized by the Division for Public Administration and Development Management of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), brought together experts from academia, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations system and other organizations to review developments in the field of policy integration in government administration, the conditions that make policy integration viable, and the obstacles to its adoption as a common practice in government institutions.

The main objectives of the EGM were:

- To elicit views on how to translate conceptual notions of policy coherence and principles of policymaking into practical terms;
- To establish a baseline understanding of the capacity of government administrations to pursue integration in the context of the SDGs; and
- To connect observations and conclusions to specific points in the policy cycles, taking into account political and institutional realities.

Policy integration in government is central to the sustainable development paradigm and presents a key governance challenge in pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This is particularly the case in view of the rising complexity of social problems and global issues with important national and local impacts such as climate change. Effective 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 competencies of individual ministries. While policy integration is central to the sustainable development paradigm, bringing about the delivery of integrated policies is a daunting challenge, especially in developing countries where, for example, administrative silos are prevalent.

The EGM provided an opportunity to elicit the insights of the experts as inputs to the 14th session of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Public Administration (CEPA), to be held from 20 to 24 April 2015 under the banner of “Building trust in government in pursuit of sustainable development goals, what will it take?”

In September 2014, the United Nations General Assembly decided that the report of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals 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 “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.

Summary of the discussion

The meeting consisted of eight sessions held over two days, roughly divided into the exploration of challenges surrounding policy integration (day one) and practical ways of strengthening policy integration (day two), although in practice the two themes were not easily separable. At the end of each day, the experts went over the results of the day’s session, discussed conclusions and observations, and identified significant gaps in our understanding of the current state of policy integration.

Session 1: Setting the scene

The first session was opened by Mr. Thomas Gass, Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs, followed by a presentation by Ms. Diana Alarcón, Senior Economic Affairs Officer, UNDESA, on policy integration, and a presentation of a conceptual framework for understanding of governmental capacities underlying policy integration by Mr. Scott Fritzen, Associate Provost of New York University, Shanghai.

Key points from opening remarks by Mr. Thomas Gass included the following:

- **The SDGs have goals and targets that have a potential to be transformative.** This is because fundamentally the SDGs are based on a commitment that no one should be left behind, and that inequalities across different outcome dimensions of social and economic and environmental practice need to be addressed for the most vulnerable populations. These goals also have the potential to become a much stronger basis for accountability at the national level between the government and the population of each country. Fulfilling these functions will require integration across these policy goals and targets.
- **Why is the challenge of policy integration so difficult?** Government institutions involved in sectors and implementing the SDGs are often organized along functional silos with fragmented agenda-setting, and lack adequate arrangements for policy integration across levels and sectors of government. But it is too simple and risky to just replace vertical silos by horizontal ones. Effective institutional arrangements facilitating policy integration are still subject to considerable uncertainty due to differences in environments.
- **We need to know what works, where, when and why** to promote policy integration. There have been many approaches to this in the past, for example in the form of national sustainable development councils and strategies.

Further points contributed in the presentation on policy integration challenges in the post-2015 development agenda by Ms. Diana Alarcón included the following:

- **There are significant qualitative differences between MDGs and SDGs that impact on the discussion of policy integration.** The MDGs were clear, simple, quantitative and easy-to-communicate targets. In contrast, the United Nations post-2015 agenda, with the SDGs at its core, is intended to be transformative, integrated and universal. It is not focused on a “single-issue approach” (e.g., on malaria and tuberculosis in health, or “enrolment in primary education” in education) but includes a systems development approach (e.g., on “health systems capacity” and life-long learning outcomes). This will require fundamental changes in the way policymaking takes place in countries, rather than simply an alignment of resources and development cooperation with targets.
- **Given that countries will have to find their own pathways towards incorporating SDGs into national policy frameworks,** a number of relevant experiences stand out as relevant for developing countries, such as the formulation of integrated poverty reduction strategies and employment rich growth, etc. But the main challenge now is integrating sustainability across the environmental, economic and social dimensions of development.
- **There are deep implications for technical assistance packages provided to countries:** Specifically, there is a need to customize support for policy integration on the technical side to match the characteristics and capacity levels of countries at different stages of development and facing different types of development challenges, such as the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Middle Income Countries (MICs) and countries in conflict and post-conflict situations. Assistance needs to focus not just on basic service delivery but also on how to improve the capacities of countries to assess policy options.

The presentation by Mr. Scott Fritzen on the “strategic triangle of challenges for policy integration” highlighted the following:

- **The challenge of policy integration – understood mainly as the identification of synergies and trade-offs between policies as part of a policy portfolio – is immense.** It is made more difficult by a shift in our contemporary context of policymaking. Societies are seeing increasingly complex problems – often called “wicked problems” because of the way they defy simple definition and are difficult to resolve, potentially leading to chronic policy underperformance. For the SDGs, there is a greater attempt in most countries to approach problems from a multi-level governance and multi-sector point of view, heightening the need for coordination and integration.
- **We need new ways of thinking about governmental policy capacities** underpinning integration for sustainable development. A “strategic triangle” of such capacities is necessary to get change accomplished on the ground, including:
 - Effective policy design – “picking important problems and figuring out what it will take to solve them”;

- Effective implementation – underpinned by strong operational capacities in individual government agencies as well as a strong connective glue across implementation networks; and
 - Effective stakeholder support, which in practice means effective political capacities to include and moderate demands from different parties affected by policy implementation, and to maintain support for a given policy regime long enough for it to have any chance of working (and to adjust it as necessary based on policy learning).
- **A process approach to policy integration** is also needed, because integration must take place across the stages of the process: problem definition and agenda setting, policy formulation, decision-making, implementation and evaluation/learning. If we focus, conceptually or practically, on integration in one part (typically, design) to the exclusion of others, we are not likely to see real change happen on the ground.
 - **Decentralization is a good example** of the complexities of policy integration in practice. The goal of decentralization enjoys widespread support, with the World Bank reporting a great majority of countries engaged in some type of decentralization reform around the world. Despite this, decentralization reforms face numerous challenges. One of these is inconsistency at the level of design. For example, multiple, conflicting ideologies - such as reducing the size of government or increasing democratic participation at the grassroots – may motivate different stakeholders pressing for decentralization in a given country context, leading to inconsistencies in the design of the actual reforms, and the metrics used to assess their success. Another challenge is ensuring sufficient stakeholder support, including at the central level, for decentralization reforms.
 - There is a paradoxical quality to some reform labels, for instance when central authorities institute reforms that in practice strengthen central level controls even while calling these same reforms “decentralization”. Capacity constraints that hamper actors from playing an appropriate role in a decentralizing system may hinder reform effectiveness at both the central and local levels. Given the significant and important roles that local governments and communities will play in the implementation of the SDGs, it will be important to monitor the state of intergovernmental relations and reforms within countries.

The following were among the points that emerged from the general discussion:

- Capacities for integration are uneven across countries, and **a key question is about the sequence of capacity building necessary to make integration happen**. For instance, if there is no merit-based or efficient civil service, could one still apply sophisticated policy integration techniques? Might a complement of strategies be required in many instances, including private sector and civil society engagement?
- Policy integration challenges are fundamentally political. “Everyone agrees with the need for coordination, but no one wants to be ‘coordinated’”. To understand the political and economic forces that are supporting or impeding integration, **we would need to develop a framework of**

“political economy of policy integration”, similar to the models of the political economy of pro-poor growth developed two decades ago. Very little work is taking place in this vein.

- Countries have complex characteristics, context and political economy, which means there is no single approach to “transferring learning or technology” that will fit all cases. The issue in the next two years will be how to help countries find their place within a transformative agenda and assist them in **strengthening national processes that identify local needs for transformation** in political, economic, social and environmental systems—which will be unique to each country.

Coordinated policymaking and implementation: the Convention on the Rights of the Child and National Programmes of Action for Children (1990s)

There are interesting examples of attempts to steer policymaking towards more integrated outcomes across the international community that have fallen off the radar screen of many people, and which need to be studied.

One such example is the United Nations Children’s Fund support in the 1990s to help countries develop, and then decentralize, National Programmes of Action that comprised an integrated framework for social policy affecting children. In some countries, for example in Vietnam, this framework was quite influential and successful, though fraught with capacity challenges that varied even sub-nationally according to resource constraints, political commitment and social cohesion in different local governments. What appears to have been powerful was the combination of national commitment to an international agreement (the Convention on the Rights of the Child) coupled with a more or less unified format for the national programmes, which outlined policy commitments across multiple areas yet had significant customization in analysis and programme design taking into account country and local government characteristics.

Session 2: Policy frameworks and institutional arrangements

Session 2 explored the institutional arrangements that must underpin integrated policymaking, with a focus on knowledge networks and policy modeling. It addressed questions such as: (a) when efforts to promote horizontal integration in government have been most productive; and, (b) how traditional institutional arrangements have been re-organized to be more flexible, adaptive, effective and collaborative, so as to promote integrated policymaking.

In her presentation on policy frameworks and institutional arrangements, Ms. Sharon S. Dawes, Professor Emerita of the Rockefeller College of Public Affairs & Policy, State University of New York at Albany, highlighted the following:

- **Uncoordinated policymaking has deep roots.** Typical policymaking experiences involve multiple independent policy processes, each with its own history, power relationships, stakeholders and costs, which can result in interdependent policy outcomes that are unexpected, undesirable and even misunderstood.
- **Overcoming uncoordinated policymaking requires an understanding of institutions and their effects, and on how to promote “cross-boundary thinking”.** Many policies are formulated with multiple stakeholders from across broad networks, for example, an emerging institutional arrangement. Complexity increases as networks grow to include multiple jurisdictions and levels of government, and as the purposes to which they are put increase (as in any integration across SDG domains).
- **Research on public sector knowledge networks is valuable** in helping us understand multi-actor networks that must work together to achieve policy integration. For example, research suggests that trust—establishing and building it—is a powerful determining factor in the collaboration and sustainability of multi-actor networks. The early stage in collaborations is critical. Stakeholders who must collaborate should feel they are not only invited but also heard. To build trust, it is advisable not to start with the hardest or biggest problem, but rather with the lowest hanging fruit, which can help build trust, as a capability that lives beyond the solution of a particular problem.

Examples of successful multi-actor, multi-sector collaboration within public sector knowledge networks

Air quality monitoring: IRNow-I Shanghai. Involved the United States Environmental Protection Agency and Shanghai Environmental Monitoring Center in updating and enhancing AIRNow for global use in air quality monitoring and forecasting.

Public health surveillance: HAJJ-MDSS. Built by the Saudi Ministry of Health and United States Center for Disease Control and Prevention to allow rapid detection of infectious diseases among Hajj pilgrims and to enhance prevention and control measures through real-time surveillance information for public health decision-making.

Geospatial data: New York State Geographic Information Systems data sharing cooperative involves a broad multi-sector community of practice in geo-spatial data sharing and governance.

- Another important theme in the literature concerns **policy modeling research**, which emphasizes the need to carefully select and cultivate stakeholders, educate them on their roles, engage knowledgeable facilitators, select tools and techniques suited to the problem, and above all to consider policymaking as a learning process.

Partnerships that survived the early trust challenge and went on to accomplish significant results

Land use planning: UrbanSIM software program is a transportation and land use modeling system that helps policymakers and stakeholders understand the 20–30-year impacts on communities, including effects on the economy and the environment of different land use and transportation choices. UrbanSIM estimates the direct effects of different infrastructure and policy choices, as well as the outcomes of individual and group responses. Sets of competing values expressed by stakeholders themselves are incorporated directly into the model to facilitate land-use choices. Those viewing the results of a given simulation can see explicitly that certain values have been articulated. The simulation projects to a 20-30 year time horizon, not short-term effects.

Global public health: KidRisk Project on polio eradication uses extensive stakeholder engagement and a range of computational and modeling techniques to develop integrated analytical models to evaluate the global risks, benefits and costs of policy choices for polio eradication.

Interconnected development goals: The Millennium Institute Threshold 21 development model makes accessible system dynamics modeling tools and other analytic techniques to help national leaders use systems thinking and tools in analyzing and understanding the interconnectedness among economic, social and environmental factors, as well as issues of environmental sustainability, and peace and security.

- The key challenges we face in policy integration for sustainable development are to **develop the capability and legitimacy of governments to engage in policy development**, grounded in citizen and stakeholder engagement; **to develop better models and tools for understanding complexity** by citizens, not just expert modelers; and, to **better connect research and practice** through rich connectivity among expert communities and the public.
- The right **guiding questions** might therefore be:
 - What conditions promote and support holistic understanding of complex problems and environments and the many boundaries they represent?
 - How can traditional institutional actors be made more open to flexible, adaptive, evidence-based, and collaborative policy making?
 - What institutional factors stand in the way of policy processes that can address the SDGs in an integrated way?
 - What are some of the successful cases of policy integration in government administration and what can we learn from them?

The following were among the most important points to emerge from this session’s general discussion:

- **The United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) has worked on a number of interesting models promoting integration**, including the Capability Model Maturity Integration (CMMI), the Portfolio, Program, and Project Management Maturity Model (P3M3), the Organizational Project Management Maturity Model (OPM3), among others. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN-OCHA) has made important strides in disaster risk reduction working with country responses to disasters, at both local and national levels. The Asia-Pacific region has seen huge changes that have brought greater institutional effectiveness in reducing loss of lives during disasters.
- When looking at successful cases, we can generally see that **the bigger the success, the longer the timeframe it took to achieve it**. For example, it took the United States decades to integrate education, industrial and security policies in the post-World War II period. Another example is the use of trade liberalization policies as a fulcrum to integrate welfare, education research and development policies, etc. Hence, we have to move away from a desire for quick successes when it comes to the SDGs, which are about very long-term, ambitious, transformational objectives.
- **Maintaining and bringing into play the institutional memory of various historical policy integration attempts is a big challenge** and something that many governments and international organizations overlook.
- The underlying point is that **policy integration will be most useful when it is not seen as a technical outcome** – the policy analyst providing the answer to the question for the decision maker—**but rather as a process of convening stakeholders to discuss an issue together**, which can help build trust. The SDGs will not be like a “puppet-show where policy analysts are controlling what every single actor is doing”, but rather like a “scene setter” that induces changes, incentives and awareness at the margins.
- In many countries, policy integration efforts often focus on conducting Environmental Impact Assessments. However, these assessments are limited in scope (primarily concerned as they are with environmental issues) and rarely have the ability to redirect expenditure, e.g., on infrastructure spending. **Governments should engage in broader-ranging strategic assessments of policy integration opportunities**. One positive approach to overcome this is through the use of “ministerial clustering” whereby related ministries are brought under a common policymaking umbrella structurally. The Philippine Department of Public Works and Highways offers an example. Together with other ministries with heavy infrastructural investments, the Ministry worked with UNOPS to refine their strategic choices for infrastructure investment to reduce risk and achieve sustainability.
- **We should not frame “sectoral” as bad and “cross-sectoral” as the ideal**. Policymaking is mostly sectoral. Policy integration efforts will be more effective not by forcing actors to overcome sectoral thinking, but by encouraging them to explore integration as a “win also” from a sectoral perspective. Money flows through the sectors, as well as most implementation pathways.

Coping with trans-boundary air pollution in Western Europe from the 1970s to the present

Western European Governments engaged multiple sectors, such as agriculture, transportation, manufacturing, energy production, in ways that were unanticipated when coordination mechanisms that were progressive and learning-based were set up. This involved a lot of model development and the setting of goals without necessarily knowing how the goals were to be achieved, and then investing in the means to uncover the way forward. The process was politically contentious but ultimately successful. The outcome is that Western Europe has achieved rapid gains in average air quality.

Session 3: Assessing government capacity for policy integration

Europe has had a great deal of practical, sustained experience with environmental policy regulation. Session 3 focused on the exploration of the complex and fruitful experience of European countries in promoting environmental policy integration. It also addressed the planning, delivery and accountability arrangements that need to be put into place to support policy integration.

In his presentation on assessing government capacity for policy integration: learning from the past twenty-five years, Mr. Reinhard Steurer, Associate Professor, Institute of Forest, Environmental and Natural Resource Policy, University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna, made the following points, among others:

- **The rationale for policy integration is as old as specialized governments**, but has been given new impetus due to the fragmentation of governments and emergence of complex problems.
- In the European Union (EU), progress exists in terms of:
 - Political concepts and rhetoric reflecting integrative intentions towards the natural environment, e.g., the concept of “green growth” rather than “growth at any cost”.
 - Positive developments towards establishing a legal basis for sustainable development, e.g., Climate Change Act 2008 and sustainable budgeting trials in the United Kingdom; budget outlays supporting environmental integration in policymaking in the form of the Delta Programme for Climate Change Adaptation in the Netherlands; sectoral sustainable development strategies in the United Kingdom; institutionalized Sustainable Development Councils in the United Kingdom and Germany; and, in general, a greater awareness as a result of previously failed policy coordination attempts.
- **Sometimes goals and strategies associated with policy integration have fallen short**, for a number of reasons:

- Strategies as *policy documents* often had too many goals with no clear priorities, were too “Un-SMART” (not being Specific, Measurable, Adequate, Realistic and Timed), or were too far from sectoral interests and commitments.
- Strategies as *integrated governance arrangements* often were too ambitious – trying to coordinate all of government policymaking rather than focusing on more limited but more feasible areas of interdependence in policymaking and too ‘voluntary’ with no clear legal basis.
- Strategies as *capacity building* often failed to rise beyond the pro-forma (e.g., Sustainability Impact Assessments) or to achieve political relevance (e.g., development of comprehensive data sets related to sustainability but with little connection to political incentives to pay attention to them, let alone use them).

To learn from the mistakes as well as the achievements of the past twenty-five years in European policymaking with respect to sustainable development means **promoting a set of shifts in how we approach policy integration**, specifically:

<i>Shift from...</i>	<i>to...</i>
Too many Un-SMART goals	Operationalize long-term vision with short-term, SMART and sectoral priorities
Too ambitious	Shift attention from policy coordination to capacity building
Too voluntary	Work towards legal basis for SDGs; try sustainable budgeting/green fiscal reform
Too detached from sectoral policymaking	Do not try to overcome but embrace sectoral policymaking (sectoral sustainable development strategies)
Too uniform	Facilitate diversity and (global) exchange of good practices

Sustainable development monitoring politically irrelevant

Creative use of rankings (national, international) to make it interesting and give political incentives

Communication as a by-product

Reframe integrated strategies as communication tools – communicate common interests of different sectors. But information alone is not enough. Education and training is also necessary as seen in sustainable public procurement in Europe, which presents a successful policy integration case (see below).

Sustainable public procurement in Europe

Sustainable public procurement has been an important issue in Europe for the last ten years as governments discovered that they should “clean up their own act” instead of just lecturing the private sector about sustainability. At this point, every European country has a sustainable public procurement action plan in place and is reporting on progress to the European Commission.

The major obstacle, not surprisingly, was the fear that costs would be higher, but this has been handled in several creative ways, mainly by recognizing that costs can be saved by encouraging recycling as a part of procurement. For instance, in the Netherlands, the procurement office for paper discovered that when they buy new paper, they could simply contract for the recycling of the old paper that was being thrown out and shredded, which typically had high costs. Another example involves a requirement for the recycling of old textiles, such as military uniforms, at the same time as new ones are being procured. These examples emphasize the importance of training and education rather than just paying attention to a narrow interpretation of cost issues.

The ensuing discussion led to the following points and examples:

- There are **four factors that help explain when policy integration efforts succeed**:
 - **Clear goals** that unite experts, the public and decision-makers;
 - **Epistemic communities** that combine scientific networks that are united to advance a political objective;

- **Transnational management network** where there are people in positions of managerial authority at multiple scales across different jurisdictions that self-identify as working for a common purpose (because these networks are where the practical learning takes place); and
 - **Crosscutting political coalitions** to counter the influence of groups, who will be trying to make integration efforts fail. Ideally, these groups should be crosscutting in the sense that they are not single-issue coalitions.
- **Is policy integration a means to an end or an end in itself?** There are different perspectives on this. From one perspective, it is an end, because it expresses the necessity of incorporating for instance environmental sustainability into the policymaking process, without which we are all doomed in the long run. From another, it is a means to the achievement of any number of outcomes, some of which may be more highly valued than others and some of which may be deemed by some to be outright negative (A dictatorial regime could have a very “integrated” policy framework for achieving oppressive objectives, for instance.)
 - **A key problem is underfunding** of initiatives and institutions associated with integrated policymaking such as climate change committees or the project management boards coordinating national sustainable development programs. Without proper funding mechanisms, they are not “fit for purpose”.
 - **The use of competitive rankings is controversial.** While use may promote economic and political interests, or provide economic and political incentives to change behavior, they can perpetuate some problems by, for instance, blocking multi-dimensional thinking about a particular indicator.
 - **SDGs potentially offer a long-term vision that can go beyond short term political cycles, and thus raise the chances of sustained action.** The countries would be “signing up” to their vision of them, which could provide greater stability for sustained political action towards them. That is another way of saying that we should reinvent the strategies more as communication/awareness raising and capacity building tools rather than seeing them as a narrow set of specific institutions that must be adopted.

Three **engines for reform** are needed:

- **Institutional devices that help us favour the public good over private interest.** For example, in the trade liberalization agenda, there are specific fast track voting provisions in the US Congress that enabled the more complete adoption of reforms that were welfare enhancing, even though they appeared to be undemocratic on the surface.
- **To harness the power of private capital.** In the late 1800s, for instance, insurance markets combined with public regulators who instituted building codes together effectively tackled the problem of large urban fires. We need to be looking for similar instruments and mechanisms that can harness powerful sources of leverage for a particular public purpose.

- **To harness science effectively for the public good.** This is difficult and there are few extant examples of this, but it is extremely important. Climate science has been an extraordinary example where scientists have contributed time and expertise to synthesize science and communicated in plain language to policy and decision makers and the public. Another extraordinary example is public health, with expansive research and public communication and outreach to address pressing health challenges such as HIV-AIDS.

Session 4: Tensions between integration and decentralization

Session 4 focused on an in-depth analysis of the way in which decentralization shapes the context in which policy integration might take place. It examined the experience of several countries with decentralized administration and the balance between centralized and decentralized roles, responsibilities and resources that are necessary to promote successful policy outcomes on the ground.

In his presentation on tensions between integration and decentralization, Mr. Paul Smoke, Professor at the Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, New York University, highlighted the following:

- The nature and scope of policy integration depends on **how the intergovernmental system is designed and implemented.** Integration takes place in specific contexts at different levels in governmental systems.
- **Whether governments are already decentralized in a stable way, or are currently decentralizing, will have a big influence on the way policies get rolled out.** There are multiple types of decentralization – including the “gold standard” of full democratic decentralization with downward accountability to the people, to various more limited forms of partial, administrative decentralization with accountability directed to higher levels in the administrative system.
- **Many of the failures of decentralization (and by extension policy integration at the local level) come from having relatively heavy expectations** placed on local governments – with substantial authority on paper for delivering health, education, building roads, dealing with water supply etc. – **without the accompanying resources and effective institutions.** However, local government and communities are often extraordinarily relevant parties to the implementation and realization of SDGs.
- **Bringing local governments into the picture of SDG rollout is critical.** Local governments often complained that the MDGs were something “the central government was doing” – which created a lot of confusion. So a key issue is how to build ownership at all levels of the intergovernmental system behind policy integration? How to properly empower local governments to fulfill their tasks and missions in this area?

- **Local governments have an inherent advantage in policy integration, in theory, for certain kinds of integration.** The fragmentation of sectoral ministries in charge of delivering services can be mitigated at the local level by the smaller number of actors and greater overlaps in practice. For instance, intersectoral committees to promote integrated planning of child-related social services that can have more than twenty institutional representatives at the central level may, at the district level, only have five representatives, given the overlapping responsibilities of local government staff. This can make coordination and the visibility of the need for integration easier at the local level.

Key points from the general discussion included the following:

- The literature on environmental federalism underscores that it **is important to find a match between the problem scale and government scale**, without which there will be problems. But it is complicated because political leadership that address problems such as climate change can come from unlikely sources – not the federal government in the United States, for instance, but more from the subnational authorities.
- **Disaggregated reporting on SDGs will be essential.** In the case of MDGs, this may not have happened as effectively as it could have and, thus, data which policymakers at all levels could use for evidenced-based decisions was not always available. This is a lesson learned from the MDGs that should be factored into the SDGs, if it has not been already.
- **Jargon – as has been rife in the case of decentralization – often combines to create a kind of “magical thinking” in the way we handle development cooperation.** We come to think that certain expressions by themselves are the “solution”.
- The way to build capacities for integrated policymaking, or for decentralization itself, including at the local level, is not necessarily to emphasize sending people to train in global executive programmes that cover particular skills. Rather, it is **to tie skills development to specific challenges that they are facing on the ground right now.**
- **Some goals in the current SDG formulation appear “utopian”** and not formulated in a way that can be easily unpacked. SDG 16 was particularly signaled out for attention in the discussion.

Decentralization dynamics in different countries

“Big-bang” decentralization of Uganda: Uganda was one of the countries that experimented with an early phase of “big-bang” decentralization in which many government functions including health and education were turned over to local governments. However, initial evidence indicated that they were not particularly effective in these tasks, with concerns over monies being diverted. The reaction of the central authorities was to snatch back those functions. A new phase of reform eventually developed, in which 98.5% of transfers from the central to local governments are “conditional”, wherein local governments get a block of resources for education and health but are constrained in how much they

can spend, even within these categories on specific line items. This undercut the possibility of building effective capacity for sustainable decentralization reforms at local levels. This case raises the question of how the mismatch between function and capacity in the initial decentralization wave could have been handled differently; how capacity could have been more systematically grown for the tasks at hand. For both general public sector decentralization trends and policy integration initiatives to succeed, a proper trajectory of rolling out a balance of roles, resources and authorities between central government ministries and local governments is needed.

Decentralization experiment in Cambodia: An initiative to set up Commune Councils at the grassroots level, in a post-conflict setting, primarily pursued for political reasons, was not matched with resource transfers. Decentralization was held hostage to political election cycles. Meanwhile, donors came to the rescue by providing needed support for decentralized institutions that could not take off due to the combination of macro-level political economy and bureaucratic resistance. The experiment helped to build trust and credibility for local leaders who have been totally disconnected from the government.

Community-driven development in Indonesia: This case shows the dangers of not working directly through governmental institutions in an integrated way. In Indonesia, funds were transferred directly to community institutions to build small-scale infrastructure projects, but without any provision for regular fiscal transfers from the government for maintenance of said infrastructure. This resulted in rapidly declining infrastructure with very little sustainability.

The case of the health sector in the Maldives: Health sector procurement was devolved down to the local level, where economies of scale were completely lost, leading to a lack of ability to respond to health crises without pharmaceuticals uniformly available throughout the country. The situation had to be reversed through recentralization and through external assistance by the United Nations.

Session 5: Dealing with complexity, uncertainty and risk

Session 5 began with an examination of several cases of effective policy integration as contained in the presentation, “Complexity, Uncertainty and Risk in the Building and Sustaining Trust in Government in Implementing SDGs” by Ms. Magdalena Muir, Research Associate, Arctic Institute of North America, Canada. Examining issues such as the most appropriate systemic responses to increased complexity, the regulatory reforms and risk management approaches that help reduce uncertainty in administrative outcomes, Ms. Muir highlighted the following:

- **A European vision of the SDGs**, outlined in 2014 by the European Commission, highlighted three key vision and principles: (1) Universality and differentiation based on national circumstances; (2) A transformative agenda that integrates the three dimensions of sustainable development and also addresses new challenges; and (3) Accountability. This specific emphasis on accountability implies the need for regular reviews of progress, commitments and implementation through a robust institutional framework including all stakeholders.

- Several well-documented **case studies of positive efforts to promote policy integration** exist as resources for our learning, among them:
 - The attempt to integrate the SDGs for Water, Agriculture, Energy and Climate for West Asia and North Africa, through the delineation of key linkages at the policy design level across sectors at a national level with Jordan given as an example; financial approaches for implementing the sustainable development goals; and community based and owned approaches to water scarcity.
 - Sustainable Tourism, which cuts across several of the SDGs, includes goals 11-14. The Small Islands-Green Destinations partnership offers assessment tools and data to contribute to sustainable economies within Small Island Developing States (SIDS), making them more attractive and competitive tourist destinations.
 - The Circum-Arctic, inclusive of the Arctic Council, Member States and six Permanent Participants, the Northern Forum and the Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region. They recognize and provide a unique forum for indigenous people through the Permanent Participants and Indigenous Peoples Secretariat. They also provide a forum for regional government organizations like the Northern Forum and the Conference of Parliamentarians. Finally, their six working groups are technical and include the participation of broad networks of physical and social scientists, experts and academic and civil society institutions; leading to broad and widely distributed assessment on climate change and impacts, circumpolar biodiversity monitoring, and public-private sector engagement.
 - The Commission for Environmental Cooperation of the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA-CEC), which oversees a process for inviting comments and complaints – including on websites – by citizens relating to the performance of their governments in carrying out labor- and environment-related obligations under their own laws. This process has led to significant changes in some areas, and shows the potential power of engaging private and voluntary actors. It also presents an example of the creative use of information and communications technology (ICT) to facilitate stakeholder participation.
 - EU approach to climate adaptation including EU Adaptation Strategy, the European Climate Adaptation Platform, and the process to review and integrate of climate adaptation across all EU directives, policies and funding.
 - Special status of SIDS, United Nations and global efforts for climate adaptation and mitigation, sustainable economic development and implementation of SDGs, providing an example of States and peoples coordinating actions and sharing learning for sustainability; and also outreach to other indigenous peoples (such as Arctic peoples and SIDS under Many Strong Voices (<http://www.manystrongvoices.org/>)).

Key points that emerged from the ensuing discussion were the following:

- While much good work takes place in bodies like the European Sustainable Development Network, more needs to be done to **raise the political profile and impact of such big networking platforms on major sustainability decisions** for important matters as energy development and infrastructure.
- There are **two ways of thinking about sectoral planning**. On the one hand, sectoral plans can be critical elements of a larger strategy. For instance, country-level climate adaptation plans in Europe have been successful because they are primarily based on sectorally organized chapters – agriculture, energy, health, water, etc. – within an overarching, regional (European) approach. It was necessary to get the sectors at country-level to buy into the regional adaptation strategy. On the other hand, there are integrative crosscutting impacts that sectoral plans may not address. The focus on climate adaptation at the European coastal and marine interface has been successful as an integrative multi-sector approach because of a shared recognition among sectors and countries that the European coasts and seas are heavily impacted by climate change in diverse ways, including through drought, erosion, eutrophication, flooding, precipitation and temperature extremes, in and out-migration and watershed changes.
- **Cities offer other excellent examples of where inter-sectoral integration must and can take place.** Cities are forming networks and learning from each other about concrete patterns and approaches to integration. The challenges and complexities faced by cities in a common category may be similar, which facilitates transfer of lessons. There has also been the partnering and learning between cities in developed and developing countries. Global and regional networks of cities for sustainability, carbon reduction and zero carbon were raised as examples.
- **There seem to be three enablers of policy integration.** Progress in addressing complexity and promoting integration may be possible in a politically meaningful time frame, i.e. ten years, when three conditions are present, as reflected in the European climate adaptation example:
 - Policy images underpinning a coherent approach to a commonly understood problem become more compelling. This “policy glue” can be fostered by scientific discourse if it is embedded in policy debates, as was the case for European climate adaptation.
 - Supportive policy constituencies or publics emerge. Coalition building became more effective, in part due to extensive regional and sectoral workshops and discussions that built knowledge of present and future, as well as public acceptance of European adaptation approaches and solutions that were nationally implemented.
 - Institutional arrangements that support the policy approach become more solid and predictable. These become ways of supporting and sustaining the attention being given to a particular issue. Under European adaptation strategy, all directives and policies were “climate proofed”.
- **The term “nexus” or policy nexus was put forward as an alternative** to talking about integration and coherence, one that reflects the interconnections between different policy domains, with the

example of the energy-water-food security nexus being raised, as well as illustrated by UNDESA regional efforts in West Asian and North Africa. However, it was also noted that all of these terminologies do not necessarily have an independent reality, but rather people gain authority by using them – we have to be sensitive to socio-cultural perspectives on how and why people use certain terms.

Session 6: Operational approaches and tool

Session 6 explored the experience of the OECD, which has a number of relevant models and ongoing initiatives on the general theme of policy integration. Specific analytical tools and strategies to promote policy integration in different contexts have been attempted, which reflect different values and visions. Key points made in the presentation on operational approaches and tools for SDG policy integration by Ms. Hildegard Lingnau, Senior Counselor, Development Co-operation Directorate, OECD, included the following:

- The key question we face is, what are the analytical tools and “fit for purpose” behaviors and knowledge sharing that will help make integration across the SDGs happen? Existing approaches and tools to policy integration are not commensurate with the magnitude and complexity of global challenges as expressed by the SDGs. We need a change of institutional structures, mind-sets and ways of working at all levels.
- The key challenges that need to be addressed in the post-2015 era include:
 - **Universality** - the need to apply the SDGs to all countries at all levels of development;
 - **Creating a global enabling environment**, which will require hitherto unparalleled levels of policy coordination and institutional innovation;
 - **Establishing adequate mechanisms for diagnosing needs, prioritizing action and monitoring progress**, given the shift from a pure focus on economic growth to inclusive and green growth;
 - **Moving from “silo” approaches to more integrated and coherent policymaking.**
- A key success factor includes **bringing all actors on board** through multi-stakeholder partnerships, so as to build coalitions for action.

Key points and cases from the general discussion that followed included the following:

- In the developing world, the kind of partnerships fostered by the OECD between government and civil society may be difficult to bring into play because of weak relations between actors.

- There is a global governance vacuum, which needs to be filled with different approaches that go beyond business as usual. But what are the incentives for this to happen? One key source will be economic incentives, e.g., putting a price on unsustainable behavior. We have to think of ways to make the high cost of not taking an integrated approach visible to all. But economics is only one part of the picture, and we should not over rely on a single tool or approach.

New ways of working horizontally at OECD that can promote policy integration

Horizontal work at the OECD is the “new normal”, reflecting more joint work across OECD Directorates, including explicit horizontal projects, joint meetings of Committees and Bureaux, new ways of working through shared community portals and qualified majority voting instead of arriving at a consensus.

OECD Strategy on Development is a corporate framework that guides the work of the OECD on development, which attempts to make full use of evidence-based approaches, policy dialogue and knowledge sharing. Experience has shown that knowledge sharing within the strategy is most effective when several conditions are met, including a demand-driven process, a focus on complementarities and ensuring feedback and learning cycles.

Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development is an attempt to ensure that broader policies pursued by countries are coherent with the goal to promote worldwide development. It entails ensuring that interactions among various policies are considered and based on evidence-based analysis and multi-stakeholder policy dialogue.

OECD post-2015 work is based on a cross-directorate task team formulating papers that bridge different communities, as well as direct engagement in the negotiation process and with member countries on the emerging framework.

Session 7: Facilitating role of ICT and e-government

Session 7 revolved around the use of ICT to support policy integration, including questions such as: when investment in ICT is most beneficial to policy integration, what can be expected of the “data revolution” and “big data” initiatives, and what role social media has played in policy integration initiatives.

In his presentation on the role of ICT and e-government in policy integration to support the SDGs, Mr. Adegboyega Ojo, Research Fellow, Insight Centre for Data Analytics, National University of Ireland, Galway, highlighted the following:

- **ICT is sometimes a support for policy integration, and sometimes the actual domain in which integration needs to happen.** Possible patterns of applications of ICT in policy integration include:

- Supporting planning and management of policy integration initiatives including assessment of effectiveness (“type 1”). For example, to assess the impact of OECD policies on food security of individual developing countries, ICT was used to manage and analyze data collected from the field.
 - Generic applications in the development and sustainability of different policy integration mechanisms including objectives setting, institutional frameworks, engagement of stakeholders, resolution of conflicts, etc. This category of applications can be reused from one policy integration initiative to another (“type 2”). An example is the policy coordination initiative of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which aimed to support policy coordination among ASEAN bodies and its Secretariat. In addition to investing in common technology infrastructure and in interoperability and information sharing standards, the initiative involved common conferencing and collaborative software, e-participation initiatives to deepen engagement with ASEAN stakeholders, use of policy blogs and wikis, a social networking strategy aimed at youth.
 - Directed use of ICT in specific policy integration initiatives that is less transferrable (“type 3”). An example is the support for migrant language education in the Netherlands and Sweden, where highly personalized digital language contents have been developed to suit different profiles of migrant learners, ultimately facilitating their integration into society.
- Beyond these examples, there are **emerging opportunities** in leveraging big, open and linked data; open data from civil society and international organizations as ways of pulling together evidence for policy integration effectiveness; ICT-based policy modeling as explored in the second session; and, more accessible citizen deliberation platforms.

The EGM participants contributed a number of points in the general discussion to follow, including the following:

- There are clearly **different styles of engaging with ICT that are evident across generations**, that will affect possibilities for engaging different groups of citizens in a policy integration initiative. For example, the degree to which more senior public sector managers are familiar with social media and other uses of technology may be very different, given that they may not have had the same formative experiences with technology as new entrants to the civil service.
- One of the most promising uses of ICT is in **making use of the data needed to monitor SDG progress in a more timely fashion**. Faster feedback loops are needed to assess and correct policies at different levels. Care should be exercised to prevent the complexity of data collected from becoming overwhelming and to prevent the misuse of data that do not apply qualitative criteria to what is being analyzed.
- **Data should be “fit for purpose” and “fit for use”**. In other words, we need to consider and be explicit about data qualities such as completeness, how easy is it to manipulate, how free from

error, how believable it is, what kind of security is involved, how timely it is, etc. It is easy to be seduced by the possibilities that technology offers for getting the need to assess whether it is reliably helping to process and deliver information, and turn information into usable knowledge.

- **The growing use of chief information officer positions** is one indicator of interest in integrated, whole-of-government approaches. In 2014, there were some eighty-two countries with such positions in government, up from 29 in 2008. In some cases, change was triggered by shocks such as disasters that revealed a fragmented government set-up with limited ability among different government departments to communicate quickly.
- The role of **crowd sourcing of information and analysis about government operations should be further explored as an integrative tool**. An example is the website *ipaidabribe.org* which crowd-sources analysis and experience of corruption at the grassroots level in different municipalities of India.
- A number of countries have been experimenting with use of a **“dashboard” that makes data on public investment available** to everyone in real time. It can have multiple functions: to promote accountability, increase efficiency, and assist both governments and donors in directing resources where they are most needed. The approach is now being used in various United Nations agencies.

Session 8: Prospects for low- and middle-income countries

Policy integration models need to take into account the reality of low- and middle-income countries, which face different capacity constraints on both the administrative and fiscal sides. In addition, different methods and tools of policy integration may need to be incorporated into government administration, when restoring core government functions in countries emerging from conflict. Addressing these and other challenges, Ms. Laura Rival, Lecturer, Department of International Development, University of Oxford, led off this session with a presentation on achieving environmental and social policy integration in the Latin American Context, which drew on a paper by the same title:

- **Dependency on natural resources and environmental problems within a middle-income context** are characteristics common to many Latin American countries.
- It is critical to have spaces or forums where people from a variety of perspectives can come together to inspire each other, provide support and, if necessary, disagree with one another on a variety of linked issues. This is the concept of **“nexus” space and people who think in terms of policy integration**.
- **There are many opportunities for integrating policies that already exist**. For example, one can simply convene encounters among various socioeconomic groups and interests that do not typically

communicate or interact with each other, including marginalized people, where lessons can be learned across sectors.

- **There is a need to promote a nexus among policymakers** who have the vision of integrating policies and lessons that have developed completely independently of each other.
- **Regional initiatives** are important tools for integrating policies, but typically, they come from the outside, upon the recommendation of donors. To be successful, regional initiatives must be “endogenized”.

Mr. Jairo Acuna-Alfaro, Policy Advisor from the Governance and Peacebuilding Team of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) made an oral presentation that focused on the recent evaluation of United Nations support to restoration of core government functions in the aftermath of crisis and, citing the case of Vietnam, on policy integration in the transition from the low-income to middle-income grouping of countries. He made the following points:

- It is a common mistake to prescribe common policies to countries irrespective of their development stage, and to put countries into “boxes”, i.e. categories such as LDCs, MICs, post-conflict countries etc. There is a strong need to go into the specificities of context.
- **Key lessons learned for countries transitioning out of conflict** include:
 - **Governance deficits** must be addressed in both their political and technical manifestations.
 - **Strong domestic leadership, coupled with modest objectives, is crucial.** The system must not be overloaded with expectations that are initially impossible to achieve. Internal control mechanisms for the bureaucracy are essential to institutionalize before more ambitious reforms are considered.
 - **Strengthening the civil service** is key. In addition to the classic recommendations of the service being meritocratic and transparent, it should also be as inclusive as possible – a special need and priority in post-conflict settings.
- **Vietnam** serves as a case study both of successful endogenization of development (see box below) and of the transition towards middle-income country status, where policy processes are based increasingly on recognition of the voice and expectations of citizens and where the donor community still has a role to play.

The importance of context and sequencing in Vietnam

Vietnam is a success story in many respects on the MDGs. One reason for this success is the constant search of the one party system for endogenous ways to implement policies. This has sometimes stood in contrast to the so-called “Washington consensus” agendas of some of the major donors.

Still, *there have been major gaps in policy implementation*. The lack of policy integration at the grassroots was examined as part of the public administration reform process, and came down to very basic capacity constraints. To overcome these, UNDP attempted to work with endogenous tools and measures using the Vietnamese own rules and regulations of governance and public administration.

Specifically, the country's *grassroots democracy ordinance* and *anti-corruption law* became important standards for adjusting practices that often diverged on the ground. An example is the Vietnam Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index, an annual social accountability mechanism in the form of a survey of all sixty-three provinces with a sample size of around 14,000, is helping to produce a common understanding of the gaps, which then mass organizations, unique to the Vietnamese system, help to address. Now the Government has more information, more data on the delivery of governance and public administration, and is integrating these into results that inform the next cycle of policymaking.

Key points that emerged from the subsequent discussion included the following:

- It is important to follow incremental approaches to start with solutions that work and that may be different from country to country, from region to region, from sector to sector. Donors have not always been good at supporting heterogeneous approaches that are locally driven, which is why we need to do better in terms of the harmonization agenda (the Rome-Paris declaration).
- There are special organizations, i.e., boundary organizations—that play an important part in integration. They possess a particular kind of culture that operates at the interface between multiple scientific disciplines and operational cultures. Finding a way to strengthen them is important.
- Post-conflict settings often see a massive amount of infrastructure spending followed by zero coordination in terms of handover to the authorities when the donors leave. This is a key example of where more integration is needed.
- Policy integration for a transformative approach to governance is not new. Wherever there are successful transformations in the developing countries that have taken place over a period of ten to thirty years, for example, through demographic transitions, rapid industrialization, boosts in agricultural productivity, poverty reduction, etc., integrated policymaking is likely to be seen. We have to learn from such cases.

Concluding observations

Both day one and two concluded with a time for reflection, followed by the experts summarizing their important learning points for the day. A number of these are listed below:

- We still have quite a bit of way to go in pinning down what we mean by policy integration and related concepts such as policy coherence and coordination. Is it a process, a destination, a state of being? We could and need to be clearer about this as the post-2015 discussion progresses.
- The MDGs largely ignored the political and complex governance dimensions covered in this EGM. We have to do better this time and learn how to communicate their importance better. We tend to focus on management issues because they are seen as within our reach, but it is really in politics where we need to broaden our understanding of policy integration.
- We need to invest in mechanisms that will engender the most effective learning and discovery. We also need concrete substantive models for the interconnections between complex policymaking sectors like energy, water, health, infrastructure, education, etc.
- The SDGs will be meaningful to different types of people and stakeholders for different reasons. Looking forward, we should sketch out the most critical common intersections in policymaking and then find ways of building or strengthening epistemic communities around them.
- Inappropriate emphasis on one-dimensional models of human behavior is what we need to stay away from. Human beings are complex in their motivations and cannot be reduced to either political or economic factors. Institutional memory is also essential to our understanding.
- Political and collective commitment behind the SDGs might be strengthened by showing examples of where good and very poor practices are, and by shining a spotlight on these practices.
- We have both “dead horses” and “unsung heroes” in the area of policy integration, from previous generations and related attempts. We need much better means of documenting these and extracting lessons for the current SDG effort. We have only begun to do so. We need to learn from the past and avoid a one-size-fits-all fallacy.
- This EGM did not identify specific policy integration challenges and opportunities for LDCs. The experts thought that more study is needed on policy integration challenges in governance settings that are highly resource- and capacity-constrained, and/or under tremendous political, social or economic stress, to arrive at modalities that would be most appropriate and feasible under such conditions.
- We should stop trying to build systems that address a huge problem with every possible detail, and rather focus on incremental, modest objectives that are contextually relevant. Experiment with different approaches and learn, revise, repeat the usual experimental process. Investing in our learning capabilities and in seeing the policy cycle as a learning process can help us to do this.
- Policy integration goes against the natural order of things – it is not the way governments normally operate – so it is hard. Two necessary elements therefore are: (1) leadership at the head of the state

level; and (2) bottom-up support within civil society. International strategies need to find ways of promoting both levels.

- There is a tendency to discount the fact that governments rule and govern sectorally. Knowing in detail the history of government structures is key to understanding how certain ministries have existed for a very long time, while others are more recent. Some policy themes have a long history, and when this history is properly documented, it becomes clear that each government has had its own endogenous rules to work out multi-sectoral policies over time and across government structures.
- There is an erroneous perception that policy integration or policy coherence is needed because three separate dimensions – social, economic, and environmental – need to be brought into greater synergy. It is our perception that separates them in the first place. Seeing them as separate dimensions is part of the problem. This is deeply rooted in Western, dualistic understandings of the world. Many so-called sectoral policies are already and de facto “integrated” but our “filtering” lens does not make this visible, hence making it harder to truly reconcile social, economic and environmental goals.
- Inclusion for the poorest and most marginalized segments of society will be a litmus test across the SDGs.
- We need to include not only central governments in our thinking but also local governments and policy networks that cut across governmental and sectoral divides.
- We need to work in new partnerships that go far beyond governments – perhaps we may call these “nexus partnerships” – that help us to engage in knowledge sharing and good practices. A practical way of doing this might be to focus on a limited number – say, six – partnership approaches in every country for the six core policy interrelationships that we might identify.
- Elaborating a dense set of linkages between subnational, national and regional/global governance arrangements will be essential in promoting policy integration efforts. There are many concrete examples of how such linkages might function in practice.
 - In the EU, one sees mandatory/binding approaches (EU-level obligations that are binding on nations, typically with national discretion in implementation in some areas coupled with European enforcement mechanisms in others).
 - The Arctic Council model shows a complex interplay of consensus and national commitments, including a unique role for indigenous peoples at the intergovernmental level, with their full participation in working groups and regional sustainability initiatives.
 - NAFTA-CEC, as a binding trade agreement for three nations including environmental protections combined with CEC environmental complaints process and joint sustainability-climate initiative.

- We need to endogenize the SDGs. Even though they come out of thousands of discussions with people in many different places, but they still need to be flexible enough to be adapted locally. Documenting the qualitative experiences of people – their life experiences and narratives – should be part of the process. People have to feel that the SDGs are basically “theirs” rather than a technical issue to be dealt with by a distant expert with no local immersion or experience.
- The biggest gap we are facing is measuring “growth” in a way that takes interconnections into account. None of the progress we wish to see in policy integration for sustainable development will happen until economic growth as the ultimate value is reconsidered.
- The United Nations should look internally at how it implements policy integration, so as to become a model that inspires others.

Some definitions of policy integration and related expressions cited by participants

- Integration across development objectives is the balancing of three essential aspects of sustainable development in policymaking (economic, social and environmental aspects), and specifically the identification and articulation of tradeoffs and synergies between policies and policy goals, and the identification of integrative strategies that help countries achieve goals, as part of a policy portfolio. (presentation by Scott Fritzen)
- Policy Coherence is the systematic promotion of mutually reinforcing policy actions across government departments and agencies creating synergies towards achieving the agreed objectives. Within national governments, policy coherence issues arise between different types of public policies, between different levels of government, between different stakeholders and at an international level (OECD)
- “Policy coherence” implies that various components of policies correspond because they share a set of ideas or objectives. It is a relative term relating to the degree of interaction of relevant components. These policy components can cohere if they are linked by a “policy glue”, i.e., common objectives or ideas, and if they serve overlapping constituencies. As such, coherent policies do not need to be comprehensive all-in-one omnibus solutions to problems. But they do need to be responsive either to a commonly shared policy glue in the ideas and objectives that people bring, or to overlapping constituencies. (Peter J. May, Joshua Sapotichne and Samuel Workman, in: Policy Coherence and Policy Domains, 2006)
- Policy integration concerns “the management of cross-cutting issues in policymaking that transcend the boundaries of established policy fields, which often do not correspond to the institutional responsibilities of individual departments.” (presentation by Adegboyega Ojo)

Participating experts

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Reference material

Presentations and papers prepared for the meeting

Setting the scene

Policy integration challenges in the post-2015 development agenda. Presentation by Ms. Diana Alarcón, Senior Economic Affairs Officer, UNDESA

Policy integration: a strategic triangle of challenges. Presentation by Mr. Scott Fritzen, Associate Provost, New York University, Shanghai

Policy frameworks and institutional arrangements

Policy frameworks and institutional arrangements. Presentation by Ms. Sharon S. Dawes, Professor Emerita, Rockefeller College of Public Affairs & Policy, State University of New York

Assessing government capacity for policy integration

Assessing government capacity for policy integration: learning from the past 25 years. Presentation by Mr. Reinhard Steurer, Associate Professor, Institute of Forest, Environmental and Natural Resource Policy, University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna

Tensions between integration and decentralization

Tensions between Integration and Decentralization. Presentation by Mr. Paul Smoke, Professor, Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, New York University

Dealing with complexity, uncertainty and risk

Complexity, uncertainty and risk in building and sustaining trust in government in implementing SDGs. Presentation by Ms. Magdalena A.K. Muir, Research Associate, Arctic Institute of North America, Calgary

Operational approaches and tools

Operational approaches and tools for SDG policy integration. Paper by Ms. Hildegard Lingnau, Senior Counsellor, Development Co-operation Directorate, OECD

Facilitating role of ICT and e-government

Role of ICT and e-government in policy integration to support SDGs. Presentation by Mr. Adegboyega Ojo, Research Fellow, Insight Centre for Data Analytics, National University of Ireland, Galway

Prospects for low- and middle-income countries

Achieving environmental and social policy integration in the Latin American context. Presentation by Ms. Laura Rival, Lecturer, Department of International Development, University of Oxford

The relevance of public administration theory and practice for policy integration in pursuit of the SDGs: Practical ways to strengthen policy integration in pursuit of the SDGs. Remarks by Mr. Sanjay K. Pandey, Professor, George Washington University, Washington, D.C.

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Further information

<http://www.unpan.org/Events/BrowseEventsbyCalendar/tabid/94/mctl/EventDetails/ModuleID/1532/ItemID/2720/language/en-US/Default.aspx?selecteddate=1/28/2015>