



## Background

Two years ago, Member States of the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which ambitions to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development by 2030. The Agenda emphasizes the importance of the interlinkages and integrated nature of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Acknowledging possible synergies and trade-offs between the sustainable development goals and targets will make it much easier to achieve the SDGs. It will help avoid unwanted side effects of actions aiming to accelerate progress towards one target on the realization of other targets.

It is recognized that the national level will be critical for the achievement of the Goals. At the national level, understanding how to adapt institutional frameworks to deliver integrated policies that effectively address existing interlinkages among the SDGs will be critical to achieving progress; it will also have important implications for national public administrations and public service. Broadly speaking, promoting integration implies finding ways to foster cooperation and common approaches among institutions at all levels dealing with closely interrelated issues. This may entail putting in place adequate institutional arrangements, public administration practices, mechanisms, capacities, budgetary arrangements and resources. It also encompasses various modalities of engagement of non-state stakeholders in decision-making.

The World Public Sector Report 2018 aims to inform efforts by all countries to foster policy integration, highlighting the challenges and opportunities that exist for public institutions and public administration. It illustrates how different types of interlinkages that exist among the SDGs can be addressed from an institutional perspective, based on examples. Through this, the report aims to sketch areas where public institutions need to work closely together; the types of tools that can be used to this effect; and the broader implications for public institutions and public service. The report aims to assist national policy makers, especially those working in institutions entrusted with SDG implementation as well as in planning, finance and sector ministries and in local governments, to implement the SDGs in an integrated fashion.

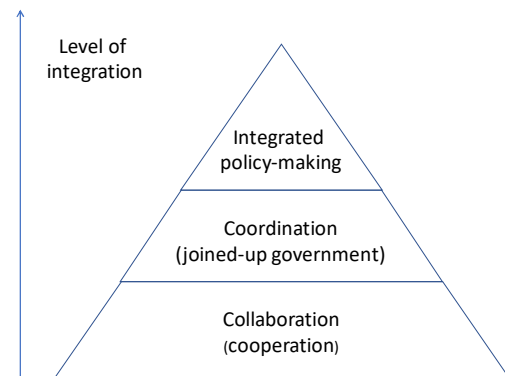
The report is organized around three broad overarching questions. First, what are challenges to and opportunities for policy integration at different stages of policy cycle at the national level, from the institutional perspective? Second, what are examples of institutional and administrative arrangements that can foster integrated approaches to the whole Agenda 2030? And lastly, what are challenges and opportunities for public institutions and public administration to deliver integrated approaches in different SDG or nexus areas? Chapter 1 frames

these overarching questions and introduces the rest of the report.

## Defining and measuring integration

Broadly speaking, policy integration concerns “the management of cross-cutting issues in policy-making that transcend the boundaries of established policy fields and do not correspond to the institutional responsibilities of individual departments”. The term “integration” itself is used in at least three slightly different meaning in the literature. The first and most common usage refers to integration as a variable or dimension applying to policies in a given area, which goes from least coherent to fully coherent. Alternatively, integration can refer to the process of making policy around a specific issue more coherent. Lastly, integration can also refer to the ideal of policies that achieve a high or the highest degree of coherence. A variety of related concepts and terms are often used in the literature.

Figure 1: Degrees in policy integration and related concepts



Source: Stead and Meijers, 2009.

In this report, the term “integration” is considered in a broad sense. Integrated policy-making is used to refer to policy processes that: (i) systematically identify relevant and important linkages of particular issues across the SDGs and consider those linkages in design of policies; (ii) are consistent across scales of implementation (and in particular, given the focus here on the national level, from the local to the national); (iii) involve the relevant stakeholders in design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation; and (iv) provide adequate resources for implementation at all relevant levels.

In order to analyse integration efforts from the institutional perspective, the report considers three standard dimensions of integration: horizontal integration, i.e. integration across sectors or institutions; vertical integration, i.e. how the actions of national and sub-national levels of government can be aligned to result in coherent outcomes; engagement of all stakeholders in the realisation of shared objectives. Taken together, these three

dimensions of integration cover all the relevant categories put forward by the literature such as policy coherence, whole-of-government approaches and whole-of-society approaches.

### **Sustainable development, integration and institutions**

The interdependence among sustainable development issues has been recognized for a long time and is perhaps the most fundamental tenet of the concept of sustainable development. Essentially, while the consideration of multiple linkages across sectors adds constraints to decision-making, integrated policy-making allows for a broader definition of problems that enlarges the policy space, potentially yielding socially superior solutions that cannot be found by focusing only on sector-specific policies. Other potential benefits of integration include the production of shared visions across sectors and actors. In the past few years work on trade-offs and synergies has been mushrooming and have considered many parts of the SDGs.

Hence, potential benefits of integrated policy-making are clear. The costs of lack of policy coherence are also apparent – both in national contexts and across boundaries. Yet, fostering integration in practice has proven difficult. Many agree that a major cause of the observed shortcomings is an inability to both mainstream sustainable development principles in the work of existing institutions and achieve the degree of coordination, coherence and integration that sustainable development requires. Common obstacles and challenges to integration documented in the literature include: cultural clashes among government agencies; vested interests in society; the fact that integrated planning may challenge the implicit hierarchy of government agencies; diluted ownership; diluted and sometimes conflicting accountability lines; budget processes that are not well adapted for integrated planning; misaligned incentives for cooperation within agencies; and additional complexity due to supra-national factors, including legal commitments and implication of regional actors and donors in national policy formulation.

Perhaps the main obstacle to integration in the past was the lack of political legitimacy of sustainable development as a paradigm. While sustainable development was inscribed in the constitutions of some countries along with fundamental rights that are part of the sustainable development “package” and made inroads into laws and regulations pertaining to specific sectors, it also had to compete on an unequal footing with the traditional development approach and with better resourced sectoral frameworks (for example in recent years, climate change). On the institutional side, the adoption of sustainable development without renunciation of other paradigms often resulted in the creation of parallel institutions, which coexisted with older, stronger institutions focusing on business as usual.

In spite of these difficulties, the past 25 years since the Earth summit offer a rich body of experiences and lessons in terms of institutional setups and arrangements and public administration management efforts that aimed to foster integration and coherence. For example, national sustainable development strategies (NSDS), national sustainable development councils (NSDC) and Local Agenda 21s were instruments put forward by Agenda 21, which aimed to promote integration. Many tools and instruments related to participation were also pioneered following the Earth Summit. At the sector level, attempts at integration in many sectors have also resulted in the

development of integrative concepts and institutional experiments, the lessons of which could be harnessed for the benefit of SDG implementation. The report aims to take a first step in this direction.

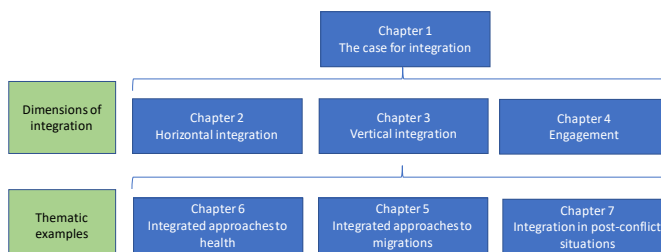
### **The 2030 Agenda and the prospects for integration**

There are many reasons to think that the adoption of the 2030 Agenda may significantly change the prospects for integration, including at the national level. In a nutshell, the Agenda and the SDGs have elevated the status of sustainable development on the international policy agenda, increasing the legitimacy and relevance of integrated perspectives and approaches. In addition, the explicit focus of the Agenda on institutions as an intrinsic component of sustainable development provides an impetus for governments to devote more attention to finding institutional models and public administration approaches that effectively support integrated approaches. These positive changes in legitimacy and relevance of integrated approaches are further supported by progress in the scientific understanding of interlinkages among sustainable development issues on the one hand, as well as by the development of analytical methods, tools and information systems that support integration in public institutions in practice.

### **The World Public Sector Report 2018**

The focus of the report is at the national level, including the sub-national and local levels. The report reviews efforts made by countries in terms of institutional arrangements in the public sector to promote policy integration. The methodological approach chosen by the report is generic and can be applied to any issue or sector. It consists in identifying critical interlinkages between the issues being examined with the rest of the SDGs, and assessing how national public institutions and public administration address those linkages. In order to analyze institutional frameworks and administrative practices in a consistent way, the report and all its chapters use a grid of analysis that is based on the three dimensions of integration presented above (horizontal integration, vertical integration, and engagement). The report is purposely empirical and does not aim to build or test a theory of policy integration. Rather, it aims to point to a broad range of relevant examples of institutions and administrative arrangements for integration at the national level, distilling key features of those.

**Figure 2. Structure of the World Public Sector Report 2018**



Source: author’s elaboration.

### **More information**

The World Public Sector Report 2018, its executive summary and other materials are available at:

<https://publicadministration.un.org/en/Research/World-Public-Sector-Reports>