

**High Commissioner for Human Rights:
Protecting human rights and ensuring good governance**

Division for Public Administration and Development Management (DPADM)
United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
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Introduction

- The objective of this note is to provide information on work of DESA, through DPADM, in areas of citizen engagement, electronic and mobile government, and public institution and human resources capacity building of the public service, to ensure the promotion and protection of and respect for human rights, impartiality, accountability, transparency, and the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity, as well as other activities developed to assist and support the public service at the national, regional and international levels.
- Access to and quality of public service delivery is critical to the development of any country and works towards the achievement of implementing the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Global, regional and national commitments to sustainable development and poverty reduction require that all citizens have access to quality public services. Inefficient provision of these basic services potentially affects the dignity and well-being of citizens and infringes upon their rights.

Electronic and Mobile Government

- The growing availability of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and their systemic utilization in policies and approaches creates an opportunity for governments to deliver effective, transparent, seamless and timely services to the public. Through the use of multichannel platforms such as social media, e-participation tools and recent paradigms of open data, a growing number of citizens are now using these online services through various platforms, including computers, mobile phones, and tablets.
- The rapid increase in the usage of mobile phones in rural areas of the world has made access to public information and services more widely accessible. For example, for those without a fixed address or a bank account a cell phone provides a means of contact as well as a means by which they can pay bills. Unlike other forms of communication, including most web technologies, mobile phones do not require literacy, although they can play a role in its development, while at the same time contributing to sustainable development that is people-centred and inclusive while bridging the digital-divide.

- DPADM's publication, the United Nations E-Government Survey, studies Member States' efforts in e-government and ICTs for sustainable development. It assesses the e-government development of the 193 Member States of the United Nations according to a quantitative composite index comprising (i) e-information and e-services, (ii) telecommunication infrastructure, and (iii) human capital endowment. In addition, it assesses the capability and capacity of governments around the world to encourage e-participation for effective public policy decision making.
- While providing a comparative assessment of global e-government development, the United Nations E-Government Survey highlights the strategies, tools and best practices developed and practiced by pioneering countries, and taps into the collective wisdom of global strategists and practitioners as to how to leverage e-government to better serve the public. As such, the Survey suggests a way forward for governments towards greater innovation, consolidation of their e-government strategies and the development of evidence-based policies that will facilitate the adoption of emerging technologies and effectively respond to the emerging needs of citizens.

Citizen Engagement

- By applying transparency through informing, consulting and involving citizens in joint decision-making, governments can achieve more efficient and equitable outcomes for greater public accountability. Integrity, transparency and accountability as well as improved service delivery and citizen participation are key to eradicating extreme poverty and attaining sustainable impact.
- DESA, through DPADM, has been working over the past years to strengthen the role that citizens can play in holding public servants at all levels accountable to higher standards of professionalism and integrity. The Division's activities in this area are based on the observation that unprofessional behaviour and corruption in government are symptoms of poor administration and mismanagement. These situations allow unscrupulous public officials to misuse their entrusted power for private gain, contrary to the spirit of public service. They are also based on the knowledge and experience that citizen engagement can strengthen the accountability of institutions, by opening the behaviour and decisions of politicians and government officials to public scrutiny. The more accountable politicians and officials are for their actions, the greater the likelihood of more positive outcomes in the public interest. In this way, the Division's activities focus on engaging citizens in the role of oversight and 'watchdog' for different branches of government, including the executive and the legislative branches; and at different stages of the policy cycle, including the monitoring and evaluation stages; and in different sectors, especially those most closely related to the implementation of the development agenda, including health, education, environment and public finance. In conducting its activities in this area, the Division has sought leverage the United Nations' uniquely global membership, through fostering international dialogue and the exchange of experiences.

- DPADM is also in the process of building the United Nations Public Administration Country Studies (UNPACS) -- a comprehensive, up-to-date and readily-accessible knowledge-base providing national data and information on all 193 Member States on conventional and emerging topics related to public administration, with a focus on four different dimensions of public administration, namely the policy and regulatory frameworks, the organizational frameworks, the channels and modalities, and the cases of effective practices. UNPACS aims to enable government and all other stakeholders to make evidenced-based decisions for the implementation of the internationally agreed development agenda including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Public Administration and Capacity Building

- A professional and motivated public service is critical for the effective, efficient, responsive, transparent, accountable and ethical governance of any country. It is essential for maintaining the rule of law including the formulation and implementation of socio-economic policies, production and equitable distribution of public goods and services, and the responsible and frugal management of public resources including finances. Whether it is in the achievement of global, regional or national commitments, the translation of such aspirations into tangible results is in the hands of human resources. The knowledge, know-how and skills, networks and attitudes of personnel in the public sector are at the heart of the performance of countries because it is through them and by them that services are planned and delivered, critical innovations conceived and realized, and needed reforms carried out.
- DESA, through DPADM, has worked to strengthen the capacity of human resources in the public sector, and has developed a number of analytical products and capacity building tools to provide guidance to the Member States in this crucial area. It has developed a Network of Human Resources Managers in Africa which addresses many of the above-mentioned issues, as well as standards of excellence in public administration education and training, and has provided support to the Member States in the development of public service charters, particularly for Africa and Latin America.
- At the national level, DESA, through DPADM, has provided support in building and/or re-building the capacities of the public service, particularly with a view to strengthening human rights and sustainable development in post-conflict situations, through advisory services and missions. It has also developed activities to support the public service at regional and international levels, mainly through knowledge sharing by organizing forums, expert group meetings and capacity development workshops, bringing together a wide range of development stakeholders from across the globe.

- In terms of analytical research and policy advice, DPADM has contributed to the analysis of emerging issues and the dissemination of good practices through several publications and is in the process of finalizing a tool-kit on “Reconstructing Public Administration after Conflict,” which presents methodologies and approaches that have been successfully developed and deployed by DPADM’s advisors on how to reconstruct public administration after conflict. This tool-kit, which contains a number of case studies, also highlights good practices in post-conflict situations and will be transformed into an online training course.
- Every year DPADM organizes the United Nations Public Service Forum on a critical area of public governance and holds a United Nations Public Service Awards Ceremony. This strategically coincides with the United Nations Public Service Day in order to recognize the institutional contributions made by public servants. The Awards discover and recognize innovative solutions in a number of areas such as preventing corruption in the public service, fostering participation of citizens in policy-making, promoting whole-of-government approaches in the information age, promoting gender responsive delivery of public services and overall improvement of public service delivery in cognizance of the value of an efficient public service towards meeting basic human rights. The Forum facilitates dialogue on how governments can effectively engage citizens in public affairs and deliver services efficiently and equitably. It also provides the opportunity to reflect upon what can be done better to ensure that citizens have at the very least, access to basic services, enjoy decent living standards and have an active role in shaping the decisions that affect their lives.
- The overriding purpose for promoting public governance and public administration capacities is to enable them to support (a) peace and security, (b) social rehabilitation and human rights, and (c) development processes. These three major goals require appropriate governance and public administration institutions, processes and leadership. Development is not possible without peace and security, but successful development contributes to peace and security by reducing some of the tensions that give rise to conflict. If governments do not guarantee the respect of universal human rights, tensions among majority and minority groups are likely to escalate into violence and threaten peace and security and by extension, development. This shows the critical role that governance systems, institutions, processes and practices play in achieving all three inextricably intertwined pillars of the United Nations’ - peace and security, development, and human rights.