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Governance and institutional perspectives on advancing sustainable, inclusive, science and evidence-based solutions for the Sustainable Development Goals

Note by the Secretariat

The Secretariat has the honour to transmit to the Committee of Experts on Public Administration the paper prepared by Committee members Rolf Alter, Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi and Louis Meuleman, in collaboration with fellow Committee members Lamia Moubayed Bissat and Alketa Peci.

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Governance and institutional perspectives on advancing sustainable, inclusive, science and evidence-based solutions for the Sustainable Development Goals

Summary

The present paper serves to examine the question of advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-informed solutions for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals from a governance and institutional perspective. Measures to accelerate progress towards the Goals in key transition areas are considered, bearing in mind the three dimensions of sustainable development and the interlinkages across the Goals and targets. Examples of specific actions, policies and measures that are most urgently needed to advance sustainable development are addressed within a global context of multiple crises that hinder the continuous implementation of the Goals and make it difficult to integrate reflections of a long-term vision of society into policy processes. The paper reflects the theme of the twenty-fourth session of the Committee and is intended to serve as the basis of a contribution to the 2025 high-level segment of the 2025 session of the Economic and Social Council and the 2025 high-level political forum on sustainable development. It concludes with recommendations and five key messages that could be considered for inclusion in the 2025 ministerial declaration.

I. Global context

1. Five years before the intended completion of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, our globalized world is in turmoil, marked by unprecedented challenges of polycrisis management, geopolitical relations, the devastating toll of wars and the erosion of respect for international law.

2. Economic and social crises are cascading across national systems and borders. The impacts of climate change and natural disasters are causing shocks and disruption, and no region is being spared. Climate change and its impacts make people and ecosystems more prone to natural hazards, the hazards themselves becoming more common and more pronounced. Mitigating climate change calls increasingly for urgent systemic policy responses (such as a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and changes in consumption and production patterns more generally) while climate change adaptation is akin to disaster risk reduction.

3. These crises are connected in ways that we have never witnessed before and have negative impacts on several Sustainable Development Goals. While starting out as a crisis of health systems (affecting progress towards Goal 3), the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic brought many economies to a standstill (Goal 8) and provoked unprecedented levels of public expenditure that risked crowding out financing for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda as a whole. The pandemic also tended to shift the balance of political power towards the executive branches of Government at the expense of parliaments, lower levels of government and participatory processes more generally (Goal 16).

4. Decisive measures to launch a coordinated global recovery (“building back better”) met with resistance due to calls in some countries for greater economic sovereignty and political nationalism (Goal 17). At the same time, there has been a growing rejection of unfettered globalization in many quarters, given widening inequalities between and within countries, wealth accumulation by corporate elites and the dominance of finance over social development and environmental protection.

5. Some Governments have reverted to building walls against flows of people, goods, services and capital, triggering a spike in inflation, especially in the prices of food and energy, which disproportionately affect the poorest and most vulnerable. Responding to the needs of refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons has posed additional challenges due to sheer numbers and the economic, social and political complexities that countries and areas face in providing for or hosting them. Refugees and asylum seekers, whether fleeing from conflict or economic hardship or both, are often portrayed as a burden in receiving countries, for example, despite their positive economic impact on the countries in which they settle and their potential contribution to addressing labour shortages arising from demographic shifts.

6. Growing distrust in the ability of Governments to deliver public goods and services as promised, including in emergency situations, and in the integrity of political leaders has become a global trend. This trend mirrors a decline in the perceived legitimacy and credibility of democratic institutions, fuelling political instability and undermining the rule of law (Goal 16). Policy responses can range from improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the government machinery to reviving and enforcing ethical standards in both the public and the private sectors.

7. The number, severity and duration of hostilities and outright wars call for active international engagement in conflict resolution. This is particularly pressing in the light of the devastating impact of current conflicts on civilian populations, breaches

of international law, and genocide on a scale not seen since the Second World War.¹ A comprehensive multilateralism has served the global community for decades by supporting a promising, albeit imperfect, world order. The recent demise of multilateralism has contributed to losses of freedom, prosperity, opportunity, peacebuilding and trust. These losses are no longer registered primarily or exclusively in the global South. The earlier, often asymmetric impact of international negotiation is giving way to negative outcomes being registered in both developed and developing countries, depending on their exposure to global value chains, geographical location, gaps and delays in structural adjustments or fiscal policy stances and other factors.²

8. There are, however, cases in which countries have managed to stay the course of implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals despite the worsening international context. Indonesia, among others, has documented continuous progress in its past three voluntary national review reports. It is expected to do so again in its fourth report to the high-level political forum on sustainable development in 2025. In addition, the number of voluntary local reviews has increased every year, demonstrating the widening engagement of subnational governments with implementation of the Goals.

9. The international community has erected significant signposts that provide policy guidance to Member States, offering platforms for global discussions and the renewal of shared visions and commitments to joint action for accelerated implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

10. At the Summit of the Future held in September 2024, world leaders adopted the Pact for the Future and the annexes thereto: the Global Digital Compact and Declaration on Future Generations. The Pact's 56 Actions are bold – but are they commensurate with the evolving challenges of reality? And to what extent can they be effective in preventing the misuse of digital technology and artificial intelligence in warfare, the disruption of supply chains, or threats to global security? Multilateralism is under attack when it is needed most.

11. Action must reflect the growing recognition of economic diversity within and between countries and regions. We have seen a more nuanced understanding of economic and social progress evolve that goes beyond, but does not entirely replace, the classical dualism of developed and developing countries. Poor and rich countries must, at the same time, deal with turmoil and polycrises, with short- and long-term challenges and with ongoing processes of attaining the Sustainable Development Goals. This requires adequate problem-solving public institutions and governance as elaborated in the commitments and actions of the Declaration on Future Generations.

12. The present paper therefore builds on both the governance and the institutional perspectives of a world in turmoil and the previous recommendations for action in key areas of public administration to support the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. The critical challenges for research, advice and government decision makers consist of providing and being open to science-informed evidence on the combined framework of both pillars. Only then may governments succeed in navigating the current complexities and advance the implementation of the Goals within the 2030 timeframe.

¹ This refers to warfare practices that have been characterized as being consistent with genocide.

² Jomo Kwame Sundaram, “Western finance running economies of the rest”, International Development Economics Associates, blog, 19 November 2024 (first published in Inter Press Service, argues that two thirds of overall income inequality is international, exacerbating the North-South divide).

II. Advancing science- and evidence-informed solutions in public policymaking

13. While multilateralism is under siege and the legitimacy of democratic institutions is increasingly questioned, science- and evidence-informed insights can help to reduce political tensions. Data-driven decision-making and scientific innovation can serve not only as tools for progress but also as essential pillars for resilience and adaptation of economies and societies in volatile times.

14. The application of science- and evidence-informed insights in public administration can inform policy and nurture common understanding of challenges among different groups in the policymaking process. Climate change serves as a prime example of how scientific evidence can provide a common ground for policy discussions, even amid political tensions. By grounding climate policy in scientific evidence, policymakers can move beyond ideological debates to focus on collaborative solutions to this global challenge. The reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change attest to how robust evidence guides negotiations of sensitive issues such as global warming affecting small island developing States that are threatened by sea-level rise, the sharing of the dwindling carbon budget, and the achievement of emissions reductions by 2030. The reports contribute key input to the negotiations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and guide policymakers in the formulation of potential solutions, such as the long-term temperature goal of the Paris Agreement.³

15. The critical importance of evidence in driving effective health policy and improving practice is also well established across clinical care, public health and health systems.⁴ The World Health Organization supports countries in adopting rigorous and transparent evidence-informed decision-making processes to enhance the effectiveness, efficiency and equity of health policies and interventions by optimizing resource allocation, minimizing research waste and improving transparency and accountability.⁵

16. The translation of evidence into actionable policies necessitates strong institutional capacity and sufficient resources where there are often gaps, whether the evidence is scientific, that is, produced through rigorous research, or tacit, that is, encompassing opinions, expertise and contextual knowledge. The research-to-policy gap⁶ is further exacerbated by political instability, power struggles and budgetary constraints.⁷

17. Effective public administration prioritizes evidence-informed policymaking, ensuring accountability and transparency within its institutions to prevent undue influence or corruption. For instance, in the criminal justice system, analysing recidivism rates, racial disparities and the impact of incarceration informs more effective and equitable policies that address the root causes of crime and promote safer communities. Moreover, such data are vital for the calculation of Sustainable Development Goal 16 indicators, such as indicator 16.1.1 (number of intentional homicide victims per 100,000). In Cameroon, for example, a unified national

³ Gerritt Hansen and Oliver Geden, “Knowledge politics in the context of international climate negotiations”, SWP Comment, No. 25 (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 2023).

⁴ Paul Wilson and Trevor Andrew Sheldon, “Using evidence in health and healthcare”, in *What Works Now? Evidence Informed Policy and Practice* (Bristol, Policy Press, 2019).

⁵ World Health Organization (WHO), *Evidence, Policy, Impact: WHO Guide for Evidence-Informed Decision-Making* (Geneva, 2021).

⁶ Keith Martin, Zoë Mullan and Richard Horton, “Overcoming the research to policy gap”, *The Lancet: Global Health*, vol. 7, Nos. S1–S2 (March 2019).

⁷ Kathryn Oliver and others, “A systematic review of barriers to and facilitators of the use of evidence by policymakers”, *BMC Health Services Research*, vol. 14, No. 2 (2014).

intentional homicides database is expected to improve data quality and equip law enforcement and policymakers with evidence-informed tools to address these critical issues. In the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the mandatory “use of force” reporting system has provided valuable insights for the National Police Chiefs’ Council to improve officer training, tactics and use of equipment, ultimately enhancing the safety of both officers and the public.⁸

18. In a world where the interconnectedness of challenges is more apparent than ever – whether through the cascading effects of climate change, resource scarcity or geopolitical instability – science enables policymakers to identify trade-offs and synergies and to design integrated and coherent strategies that maximize benefits across multiple goals while adjusting interventions based on real-time data. For example, advancements in clean energy (Sustainable Development Goal 7) are not only critical for combating climate change but can also alleviate poverty (Goal 1) and improve health outcomes (Goal 3) by reducing air pollution and promoting sustainable development. Science provides the necessary tools to calibrate policy responses. Furthermore, evidence-informed policymaking can help to ensure that progress in one area does not undermine progress in others. This holistic, evidence-informed approach is essential in navigating the current global landscape in which crises spill across borders.

19. The Sustainable Development Goals are inherently interconnected, and scientific insights are indispensable for identifying interactions among them. A key gap in current Goal governance is the lack of systematic, science-informed analysis of interactions across Goal domains. The gap hinders the identification of root causes, delays the implementation of effective interventions and undermines our ability to track progress coherently. There is a need to encourage increased science-policy dialogue on the significance of interactions. The dialogue should serve as a foundation for policymakers and other stakeholders to define their priorities and implementation strategies while simultaneously fostering further knowledge development.

20. The Pact for the Future underscores the role of science and technology in fostering an inclusive, sustainable future.⁹ However, achieving this vision requires more than just technological solutions – it requires governance frameworks that leverage scientific expertise at all levels of government to ensure that technology is used responsibly and does not exacerbate existing inequalities or create new risks.

21. Digital technology provides an example of the need for effective governance frameworks. It is a powerful enabler of innovation in government, economy and society and for acceleration of the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals as articulated in the Global Digital Compact. However, it can also perpetuate inequalities and social discord, as evidenced, for example, by the role of social media platforms in enabling polarization while enriching multinational technology companies in many countries. The balance between enabling robust innovation and serving as guardians of the public interest calls for scientific understanding and evidence of how these platforms operate. The same dynamic is likely to be amplified by artificial intelligence and quantum computing and concerns ownership of and access to advanced technologies in general.

22. The emphasis on advancing evidence-informed solutions for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and the quest for more and more high-quality data to inform both practitioners and policymakers go hand in hand with investments in artificial intelligence and other technologies. To work in collaboration and partnership

⁸ See www.unodc.org/unodc/frontpage/2024/April/unlocking-justice_-the-crucial-role-of-data-in-the-criminal-justice-system.html.

⁹ General Assembly resolution 79/1, sect. III (on science, technology and innovation).

and close all digital divides, it is crucial that countries be guided towards establishing robust frameworks for the collection, production, dissemination and governance of data. These frameworks must prioritize data quality, ensure fairness and address potential bias. Biased or inaccurate data will inevitably lead to biased and unreliable artificial intelligence outputs, thus undermining the global commitments to the digital future we seek and the objective of advancing evidence-informed solutions for achieving the Goals. The ethical use of artificial intelligence hinges on the availability of such frameworks, especially in critical areas such as criminal justice. The guidelines of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime provide valuable insights to countries in this area.¹⁰ New technologies must serve humanity and be designed with human rights in mind not to perpetuate existing societal inequities.

23. Beyond robust scientific insights, the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals demands new mindsets, transformational leadership, the strengthening of governance systems and partnerships to translate science into action in the current challenging global context. Effective governance is built on the foundation of strong, transparent and inclusive institutions, robust data systems, and strategic collaboration and co-creation across sectors and borders. Collaboration can lead to better science (the technical side of governance reform), in parallel with the sharing of benefits (the political side of reform).

24. By fostering interdisciplinary research that integrates insights from various fields, collaboration both drives advances in scientific understanding and enables more comprehensive and innovative solutions. In addition, the sharing of data and research findings among researchers and institutions accelerates scientific progress, minimizes redundancy and enhances the reliability and robustness of research outcomes. Crucially, the active involvement of stakeholders, including local communities and marginalized groups, in the research process helps to ensure that research addresses relevant concerns, leading to more effective and equitable interventions. This co-creation of knowledge ensures that policy design is scientifically sound as well as socially just and responsive to the needs of all stakeholders such that successful solutions can be taken to scale and integrated into national policies and global initiatives.

25. The need for science-informed solutions has taken on increased urgency. As Governments face mounting pressure from crises, the role of science in driving Sustainable Development Goal progress seems indispensable. A science-policy dialogue serves as a crucial tool for policy coherence. It helps to identify the conflicts and synergies that need to be managed across government departments and sectors, guiding where efforts should be focused for maximum efficiency and impact. In addition, science-policy dialogue highlights the key stakeholders who must be engaged to achieve collective outcomes across multiple interconnected policy areas.

26. Strengthening the science-policy interface, and the effective communication and utilization of scientific knowledge in government decision-making, are crucial aspects of advancing science and evidence-informed solutions for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Robust and integrated science advisory mechanisms are key to providing evidence-informed insights to policymakers at all levels, including parliaments and the executive branches of Government, and can be especially valuable where constitutions grant the latter the authority to initiate legislation.

27. At the same time, policymakers are well advised to create and uphold the regulatory and financial conditions for scientists to conduct high-quality independent research and effectively engage in policy processes. Clear channels of communication

¹⁰ UNODC, 2024.

must be established to raise awareness among politicians for relevant research agendas and to facilitate the timely and appropriate use of scientific evidence in policy formulation. Scientists need to convey the results of observations, empirical research and context-sensitive analysis, theory development, modelling and scenario development in formats that are synthetic, authoritative, timely and policy-relevant.¹¹

28. While science and evidence-informed solutions provide a valuable foundation for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, it is important to acknowledge that they are not the sole determinants of policy decisions. Legitimacy of elected officials and commitments to their voters, considerations of coalition-building, societal values and ethical considerations are all factors that shape public policymaking and its outcomes.

III. A pentagram of institutional and governance resilience – five transformative actions revisited

29. Can lessons be drawn from these experiences when considering the impact of a deteriorating global context on Sustainable Development Goal implementation? First and foremost, the scope, reach and depth of the current changes of context were hardly comparable with the COVID-19 crisis. The global context was, and continues to be, characterized by crises of multiple sources, multiple formats, medium- to long-term time horizons and different risk profiles, while the pandemic was a single, albeit dramatic, event. Second, there are hardly any extensive analyses or assessments available of the way in which the current global context might translate into impediments to Goal implementation.

30. Given the complexities of the current global context, advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-informed solutions for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals can no longer be generated solely by improving the functioning of the government machinery. New governance and institutional perspectives that integrate an understanding of the evolving global context and its influence on societies together with government actions and capacities to stay the course towards achieving the Goals by 2030 need to be further elaborated and tested.

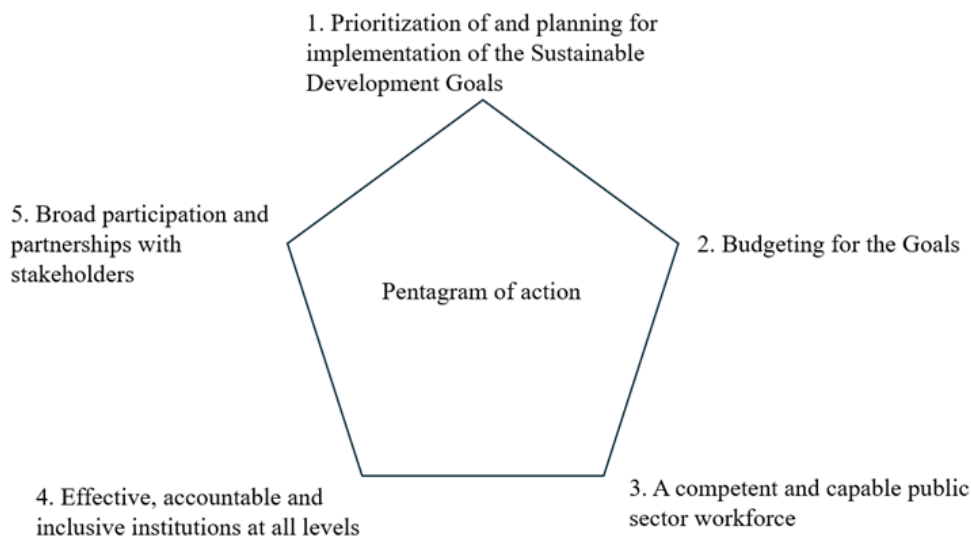
31. Efforts to implement the Sustainable Development Goals over the next five years should build on a systems-thinking approach in which the interdependence of global systems is recognized – adapting the framework of the Goals to address turmoil and crises and build resilience for the future simultaneously.

32. The Committee addressed the relationship between the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and macro-level developments to some extent in its 2024 input to the high-level political forum. A pentagram of action brought to the attention of the forum indicated five key transformative actions to accelerate Goal implementation. As shown in the figure below, these actions included: (a) prioritization of and planning for implementation of the Goals; (b) budgeting for the Goals; (c) a competent and capable public sector workforce; (d) effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels; and (e) broad participation and partnerships with stakeholders.¹²

¹¹ International Council for Science, *A Guide to SDG Interactions: From Science to Implementation*, International Council for Science (2019).

¹² See E/C.16/2024/2.

Figure
Pentagram of action to reinforce the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development



33. The five action areas of the pentagram remain highly relevant, especially since the signals of a comprehensive revival of commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals appear to be weakening. There is no doubt that a competent public sector workforce, accountable institutions, investment in digital government and broad participation of stakeholders, among others, will remain key ingredients for progress on equitable delivery of the Goals, and on the implementation of any other public policies for that matter.

Action area 1. Prioritization of and planning for implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals

34. The first action, prioritization of and planning for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, emerged from the observation that, in many countries, crisis management during the COVID-19 pandemic had crowded out partially or even largely the focus on the Goals. Recommending prioritization and planning for implementation of the Goals was intended to draw attention to the need for governments at all levels to reorient public policies explicitly towards the Goals. Ideally, this would enable alignment of “building back better” from COVID-19 and Goal implementation and generating synergies in accordance with the very concept of sustainable development. In reality, this long-term orientation is often undermined by the advent of multiple crises, including in recent times inflation, energy shortages, interruptions of global value chains and ongoing conflicts, for example, in Ukraine and the Middle East as well as the Sahel and Haiti.

35. Where challenges are heavily affected by turbulences, complexity and heightened volatility, leaders must be opportunistic and open to dynamic partnerships that may differ from issue to issue. This attitude offers promising perspectives of delivering effective solutions,¹³ similar to successfully dealing with complex, “wicked” problems, where a series of “small wins” works best in cases where standard solutions are not feasible.¹⁴

¹³ Inspired by a recommendation from, World Economic Forum, *The Global Cooperation Barometer 2025*, 2nd ed. (Geneva, 2025).

¹⁴ Karle E. Weick, “Small wins: redefining the scale of social problems”, *American Psychologist*, vol. 39, No. 1 (1984).

36. Planning for Sustainable Development Goal implementation must be focused on achieving equity, beyond striving for equal treatment and opportunities. Solving inequality requires equity: each person has different circumstances, and the key is allocating the resources and opportunities needed to reach an equal outcome. An equitability test should be included in ex-ante regulatory impact assessments.

37. In addition, principles will have to be identified, policy priorities set and policy coherence ensured so that, as artificial intelligence systems evolve and are increasingly used in public administration, they reinforce the 2030 Agenda and leave no one behind. There is a need to continue the ongoing global discussion on building a shared understanding of both the positive and negative impacts of artificial intelligence, as well as other emerging technologies.

Action area 2. Budgeting for the Sustainable Development Goals

38. The second action, budgeting for the Goals, was a call for closer institutional integration of policymaking and budget planning and execution at all levels of government. Encouragement to embed commitments to the Goals in budgetary and financial processes at the national and subnational levels has coincided with a stark deterioration of fiscal positions in most countries, including a rapid accumulation of debt through earlier COVID-19-related fiscal interventions in some instances on a massive scale. As a consequence, efforts to monitor, report on and evaluate the use of public financial resources in support of the Goals through Sustainable Development Goal budgeting have remained scarce.

39. Countries are encouraged to develop or improve spending review frameworks and strategies and integrate them into the budget process to prevent managing the polycrisis from undermining the budget necessary to implement the Sustainable Development Goals. Such tools provide systematic updates on public expenditure and enable the government to manage the aggregate level of expenditure, identify savings or reallocation measures and improve effectiveness within programmes and policies.

40. Sustainable Development Goal localization needs sufficient, timely and equitable transfers of funding from national to local levels and needs funds to be raised directly at subnational levels. Greater local capacities in sustainable infrastructure asset management, and sustainable borrowing from private and public sources are emerging and should be scaled up to strengthen local financial viability.¹⁵

41. The third action, to invest in a competent and capable public sector workforce, the fourth action, on upgrading institutions at all levels, and the fifth action, on broadening participation and partnerships, are being equally affected by the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ensuing polycrises, rapid technological changes such as the development of artificial intelligence capabilities, and declining multilateralism.

Action area 3. A competent and capable public sector workforce

42. The capacities of governments to respond to the fast-changing national and international context while maintaining the focus on Sustainable Development Goal implementation requires a highly qualified public sector workforce. Human resource strategies must be aiming at attracting and retaining talent in public administration with the mindset of delivering public goods and services effectively and efficiently

¹⁵ See e.g., United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, “Inter-agency policy brief: accelerating SDG localization to deliver on the promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, 2024.

and strengthening trust in government, social cohesion and equitable treatment of all citizens.

43. Merit-based recruitment strategies, competitive compensation packages, professional development opportunities and a positive working environment are key elements of successful human resource strategies. Making the public workforce an adjustment variable of budget pressures carries short- and long-term risks of impeding sound public policies for development, innovation, sustainability and resilience.

Action area 4. Effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

44. Governments must manage the risks of democratic institutions being weakened domestically or through external pressures by strengthening institutional resilience. Raising the bar of parliamentary majorities required for legal changes of the status of public institutions could be one option for pre-emptive action. Promoting greater awareness of such risks in the short- and long-term among citizens would be a complementary action.

45. One example of the critical need for effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels pertains to mental health systems and services in post-conflict countries. Approximately 2 billion people worldwide currently live in areas directly or indirectly involved in conflicts either currently or recently with deleterious impacts on the mental health of affected populations.¹⁶ There are well-established links between mental health, individual functioning and a country's overall development that may be supported by improved and more widespread public health institutions while using the public sector's convening power to facilitate broad coalitions of State and non-State providers of mental health support. This role of convening and coordinating a wide range of non-State providers in areas beyond its reach is challenging for the public sector, not least because it also requires capacity for carrying out its own role.

Action area 5. Broad participation and partnerships with stakeholders

46. In line with Sustainable Development Goal 17, engaging actively in multilateral forums, seeking strategic partnerships and leveraging technical and financial assistance will remain crucial: there is no alternative. International cooperation and partnerships are essential to facilitate equitable sustainable development. Shared responsibilities are key to ensuring that no country is being left behind. Promoting diverse forms of international cooperation and partnerships, in particular South-South and triangular cooperation, can take into account the realities and needs of the partners involved.

47. Another example drawn from the Committee's current work relates to the adoption of renewable energy solutions. Inclusive dialogues among governments, research institutions and the private sector can serve to align interests, pool resources and streamline the large-scale deployment of renewable technologies. Such collaborative efforts can significantly reduce costs and accelerate the adoption of renewable energy solutions.

48. In addition, effectively coping with the impacts of extreme heat calls for decentralized efforts by governments guided by a whole-of-government approach. While national Governments can play an important role in establishing guiding principles through national action plans or other mechanisms, it is incumbent upon local governments to execute these policies and strategies and adapt them while

¹⁶ Bernardo Carpinello, "The mental health costs of armed conflicts: a review of systematic reviews conducted on refugees, asylum-seekers and people living in war zones", *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, vol. 20, No. 4 (February 2023).

defining and implementing context-specific and community-based solutions. By fostering collaboration between municipal authorities, community organizations and private actors, local initiatives can be tailored to better address the unique vulnerabilities and needs of local communities.

49. Promoting collaborative research on heat-resilient urban designs is equally critical. As cities increasingly grapple with rising temperatures, collaborative research can support the implementation of innovative designs that integrate green infrastructure, sustainable building materials and urban planning strategies to reduce urban heat island effects and build climate-resilient cities and communities.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

50. Staying the course of Sustainable Development Goal implementation within the 2030 Agenda at times of polycrises, geo-political tensions, conflicts and wars, declining trust in government, resource strain and fast-changing technology requires an urgent shift of governments towards comprehensive systems thinking. While the Goals themselves continue to provide a critical framework for addressing the root causes of these developments and building a sustainable future, governments should review their current approaches to implementation with a view to strengthening governance and institutional resilience at all levels of government, emphasizing equity, sustainability and solidarity. This includes anticipating and preventing legal initiatives to weaken or abolish democratic institutions, such as the independence of the justice system.

51. The decline of multilateralism, practiced for decades successfully in the framework of the international institutional architecture, and growing disrespect of international law are roadblocks to partnerships in the search for international solutions. They provoke losses in terms of lacking policy coherence, hitting countries and citizens of developed and emerging countries in mostly unpredictable ways and to unforeseeable extents.

52. A revival of and return to cooperative frameworks would avoid or at least reduce these losses of policy coherence. It would also open up opportunities to generate policy synergies in the delivery of interlinked global public goods, such as climate, health, migration, economic growth and development, political stability, the reduction of inequalities and the promotion of peace.

53. Governments engaging on the five areas of transformative action derived from the Committee's pentagram of action should benefit from inspiration by reform initiatives and experience in both advanced and emerging countries.

54. All transformative action should rely on science-informed evidence, generated through integrated, transparent and open advisory systems. While science and evidence-informed solutions provide a valuable foundation for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, they are not the sole determinants of policy decisions. Legitimacy of elected officials and commitments to their voters, considerations of coalition-building of majority governments, societal values and ethical considerations play determinant roles in shaping public policy.