Working Together: Integration, Institutions and the Sustainable Development Goals, World Public Sector Report 2018

Book review by PREDRAG BEJAKOVIĆ*
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In the current world, although there has been a significant progress in the reduction of poverty and inequality, a persistent problem is the lack of improvement in integration, which causes social exclusion. Furthermore, modern economic development is often not sustainable of the long-term, while institutions are not fully adapted to the needs of social challenges. A newly published release by the United Nation *World Public Sector Report 2018*[1] using a holistic approach very nicely sheds light on the additional measures that are needed to the collaborative efforts of various stakeholders in the inclusion of those that are left out. This excellent report was prepared by many authors using mixed methods that combined literature reviews and expert contributions. The team composed of United Nations personnel was led by David Le Blanc under the responsibility of Marion Barthélemy.

The United Nations in 2016 adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (the successor to its Millennium Development Goals), which should eliminate poverty and achieve sustainable development by 2030. (Steven Pinker in *Enlightenment Now* states that not even Jesus was that optimistic: he told the indignant disciples, "The poor you will always have with you.") The Agenda underlines the importance of the interlinkages and integrated nature of the sustainable development goals (SDGs). Achieving possible synergies and strengthening trade-offs between the sustainable development goals and targets will enable much easier achievement of the SDGs. This should boost the allocation of resources and help avoid the adverse side effects of actions aiming to hasten progress in one area on the realisation of targets in other areas.

One of the goals of the report is to present the positive experience of many countries with the intention of transferring the best practice in policy integration for the attainment of SDGs. The authors are fully aware that different types of existing interlinkages among the SDGs can be addressed and improved from an institutional perspective. Thus, the report aims to define areas where public institutions need to work more closely together; the types of measures that can be involved in this process, and the broader implications for and consequences of collaboration between public institutions and public service.

Improving integration involves finding ways to strengthen cooperation and common approaches among institutions at various levels dealing with closely interrelated issues. Policy integration comprises the management of crosscutting actions and measures in a policy-making process that transits the boundaries of established policy fields. Such measures very often do not correspond to the institutional responsibilities of individual units and departments.

In the modern literature, the term *integration* is used in various slightly different meanings. The most common usage defines integration as a dimension variable, with policies in specific issue areas being more integrated than before. Otherwise,

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[1] The report is available at http://workspace.unpan.org/sites/Internet/Documents/UNPAN98152.pdf.

integration can be deemed as the more coherent process of defining and implementing policy related to a specific issue. Finally, integration can also denote the ideal of policies that achieve a higher degree of coherence. In this report, the term *integration* is considered in a broad sense, while the potential challenges, shortcomings and gains of integrated policy-making are clear. The challenges in the past were the lack of political legitimacy of sustainable development as a paradigm and insufficient attention of various levels of government to the issue of sustainable development. Shortcomings are an inability to mainstream sustainable development principles in the work of available institutions on one hand and resistance to achieve the degree of coordination among institutions that are needed for sustainable development on the other. Gains of the integrated approach are socially superior solutions that cannot be achieved by focusing only on sector-specific policies, and shared visions across sectors and various actors. Positive changes in relevance and legitimacy are supported by progress in the scientific researchers that fully understand the interlinkages among sustainable development topics on the one hand, as well as by the development of tools, analytical methods and information systems that support integration of different stakeholders in public and private sector on the other.

The report is organized around three broad principal questions. First, what are from the institutional perspective, the challenges to and prospects for policy integration at various policy cycle phases at the national level? Second, are there any positive cases of institutional and administrative organisations that can support integrated approaches to the 2030 Agenda, and if so, what are they? Finally, what are the opportunities and challenges for public administration and public institutions to ensure integrated approaches in diverse SDG or groups of closely related goals?

The report consists of two main parts. In the first part, chapter one explains the reasons and case for integration and introduces the methodological framework. The second chapter focuses on horizontal integration, chapter three on vertical integration, while chapter four deals with successful engagement of stakeholders. The second part of the publication applies the relevant framework of integrated approaches to international migration: health and integration of peace, security and development in post-conflict situations.

Forms of integration are explained in chapter one. The modern literature distinguishes three dimensions of integration. *Horizontal integration* encompasses integration across sectors or institutions. *Vertical integration* expresses how the actions of various (national and sub-national) levels of government can be adjusted to achieve coherent outcomes. The third dimension is *engagement of all stakeholders* in the integrated realisation of shared objectives. Taken together, these three dimensions of integration encompass all the relevant categories proposed by the literature, primarily partnerships, participation and coherence. The approach and content of the initiatives can be formal or informal. The latter refers to joint activities that involve various stakeholders from the non-state sector, in addition to the whole of

government, with the state usually having a coordinating role. When analysing policy integration, there is a need to consider different aspects, like the institutional efforts made by governments to promote integrated policy-making and policy coherence; activities related to collaboration and coordination; and measures of achieved integration and policy coherence regarding achieved outcomes.

As the SDGs makes high demands for horizontal integration on institutions at all levels, chapter two analyses the importance of effective horizontal integration for the implementation of the SDGs. Such integration is critical for resolving the interconnected nature of the SDGs, including synergies and trade-offs across different goals and targets. It is, however, well known that overcoming sectoral boundaries in the attainment of horizontal integration is a demanding and complex task. In such a process, governments have concrete measures and opportunities to improve integration in their structures and processes. A growing number of countries around the world are including SDGs into their national policies and putting in place adequate institutional frameworks. While some countries have given new mandates to existing mechanisms or institutions, others are establishing new coordination bodies and mechanisms for the implementation of the SDGs. Among many vital measures and instruments, the five most important are examined. The first are national strategies and plans because they define the overall direction and priorities. The second is the budget process that helps in implementation and realisation of national strategies at the level of programmes and activities. The third group consists of public services responsible for the implementation of government actions on the SDGs. This group has a critical role in achieving effective collaboration across institutions and sectors. Monitoring, evaluation and review processes for the SDGs are part of the fourth group that enables governments to assess progress in the activities of integration. Finally, different oversight institutions, parliaments and Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs) have a crucial role in insuring integration. The report contains many examples of integration from different countries, so this chapter presents the experiences from the Sierra Leone implementation of the Agenda for Prosperity, particularly the Poverty Reduction Strategy. The Budget Statement nominates the responsible stakeholders and the scope of their reporting responsibilities on the SDGs within the various government ministries and offices where resources were allocated.

The realisation of the SDGs requires the coordination of actions and measures of different levels of government. There are many reasons for such coordination. In most cases, the achievement of specific targets in each national context depends on the aggregation of local and regional outcomes, making coherent action a stipulation. Vertical integration may be an important step in promoting a shared vision and commitment to sustainable development across levels. It can enhance synergies and improve consistency across levels of government through mutually reinforcing and supportive actions. The third chapter examines current efforts in ensuring effective vertical policy integration during the implementation and follow-up and review of the SDGs. Vertical integration enables an opportunity for

political dialogue among the various parts of government, providing a possibility to generate trust and a more long-term vision across the public sector. The chapter analyses the potential benefits of vertical integration and some of its challenges and barriers. It also studies approaches and tools that different countries have implemented with the goal of enhancing vertical integration at different stages of the policy process, underlining innovative approaches and experiences. Potential challenges to vertical integration include the gap between the abstract and universal nature of SDGs and the specificity of local initiatives and policies, unawareness of SDGs by local governments; organizational, cultural and/or ideological differences between national and local governments; institutional weaknesses or poor coordination mechanisms between the different levels of government. Colombia can be mentioned as a positive example of successful and advanced vertical integration. With support from the Colombian national government, 32 departments and 31 capital cities have adopted and implemented local development plans that include SDG localized targets.

The fourth chapter presents the adoption of mechanisms for efficient stakeholder engagement, at both the systemic and the sector levels. It also looks at how it can affect outcomes in terms of integration. Many experiences have been observed regarding processes and mechanisms for stakeholder engagement in different sectors, at different levels of decision-making, and with various constituencies. Having in mind such examples, governments have become fully aware of the importance of stakeholder engagement in order to strengthen ownership of the SDGs and ensure their successful implementation and monitoring at all levels. Included stakeholders can enhance policy performance by helping in defining problems in ways that are more accurate. They can also provide information and insights relevant for identifying policy solutions and evaluating the implementation process. Enabling policy-making process to the inclusion and interaction with non-governmental actors helps governments better to understand people's needs and demands. Furthermore, non-governmental actors can be directly included in solving policy problems and contribute additional resources through the common generation of skills, knowledge, policy and technology. Of course, there are always some problems and costs. Wide stakeholder engagement usually takes time and can be an obstacle to the quick policy responses that some sustainable development challenges may need. While including the ideas and opinions of multiple stakeholders helps gain a more comprehensive and legitimate understanding of demanding policy problems, engagement can make it more difficult to reconcile divergent and even opposite views in commonly agreed policy solutions. It seems that the combination of different engagement strategies and collaboration of multiple stakeholders is more effective for increasing responsiveness and accountability than the use of one single engagement mechanism. The positive Finnish example of the government-led Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development with many stakeholders included from public and private sector and civil society, illustrates a possible way of mobilizing non-state actors that is fully consistent with government actions for SDG implementation. Investing time and resources in the

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selection process, and having clearly defined procedures and criteria for selecting stakeholders without doubt contribute to the effectiveness and efficiency of the engagement as well as its outputs and outcomes in terms of integration.

Sustainable development demands policies that are systematically oriented towards the strengthening of linkages between different economic, social and environmental issues. The fifth chapter shows how national public institutions and administrations have used integrated approaches to respond to the needs of migrants and refugees the flows of whom have been increasing across the world. The way in which the multiple linkages between migration and the SDGs are transformed into national policies and realised in practice by public institutions and public administration reflects political processes of reconciling opposite opinions and demands of different stakeholders, including governments, civil society, and migrants themselves. The authors examine how public institutions and different stakeholders can better support integrated approaches to migration. How can they sustain the integration of the mentioned approaches in sustainable development measures, policies and institutional processes? Where and how can development policies make the most impact when it comes to serving those in the worst positions among international migrants? How can policy-makers and policy communities connect migration and socio-economic development through innovative services? No single model appears intrinsically better in terms of effective and efficient policy integration. Elements that might perhaps impact horizontal and vertical policy integration include the type of public administration system, the level of decentralisation and local governance, institutional capacity, previous experience and institutionalization of cooperation between various bodies of government, development of leadership, prevalence of modern technology usage including the capability and vigour of communication platforms, and, finally, the characteristics and the numbers of actors involved in policy-making. Morocco is a positive example of a country that undertook several waves of regularization of migrants in an irregular situation, followed by the opening of its public services to all migrants and refugees. Migrants in an irregular situation have access to public health services and can send their children to public schools. Additionally, regular migrants can participate in professional training and assistance with job search. This chapter concludes with an important statement: that integration of migration and development at all levels of public administration is not only a technical or rational process but also has to encompass cultural awareness, politics and perceptions. As migration and refugee issues are likely to remain a significant problem in the near future, there is a need for the proposal and implementation of efficient awareness and communication strategies and accountability systems in public administration.

Integrated approaches to health and well-being are the subject of analysis in the sixth chapter. Health is a crucial human right and an important characteristic of personal well-being. Health outcomes are impacted by many factors that are usually outside the health sector itself. At the national level, a vast array of policies and institutional settings have been developed to support the multiple linkages

between health and other SDG areas, with the intention to support integrated approaches. However, researches show that the focus of many efforts at integrated health initiatives has largely remained within the health care sector itself. Attempts at integration have been oriented to finding ways to enable non-health sectors and actors to serve the goals of the health sector, without necessarily considering the impact of health on those sectors and their principal objectives. Thus, in many countries the potential of integrated approaches to achieve synergies and minimise trade-offs across sectors and government levels may remain often unused. Universal healthcare for all migrants in Thailand is mentioned as a positive experience of interlinkages of health with other sectors. Migrants represent more than 6 percent of the Thai population. It is currently the only country in the world where illegal migrants have the same health care rights as nationals.

This very nice report finishes with chapter seven, which deals with the implementation of the SDGs in post-conflict situations and their implications for integrated approaches that enable improvements in sustainable development and peace. Conflicts annually lower a country's gross domestic product growth on average by two percentage points. Trends in the world show that the gap between conflict-affected countries and other developing states is widening. Countries emerging from conflict are the ones where the SDGs probably may not be obtained without some radical and innovative departures. An integrated context for SDG implementation involves ensuring that interventions aimed at preserving peace (including protecting human rights) and development are interlinked and mutually reinforcing. As countries in post-conflict situations face many pressing problems, for them the achievement of long-term development goals is much more difficult. In the face of many short and long-term priorities, efficient integrated approaches become even more important than in peaceful circumstances. Post-conflict situations mostly vary in the nature and degree of devastation, but often there is a need to mitigate the consequences of substantial physical, institutional and organizational destruction. Conflicts usually ruin national public administration and public institutions and they have to be rebuilt, often from scratch. Using recent examples, the authors in this chapter explore how this can be done. Sustainable development aspirations can be an inspiration for a common vision for the future. Such a vision needs to be transformed into coherent and integrated national policies that are future-looking, inclusive and endorse partnership between the government and society and support by various stakeholders. The policy integration and inclusion in Colombia achieved by the National Development Plan are provided as an example. The Colombian government made efforts to provide an inclusive platform for policy-making at the local level, giving a voice to earlier marginalized groups, and supporting their participation in local elections as candidates. The government also established the legal and institutional architecture for a territorial peacebuilding process. The coordination between central and local levels of government was achieved through the Inter-institutional Post-conflict Council.

The report presents country efforts to foster policy integration for SDGs. It provides examples of measures and ways by which linkages among SDGs can be achieved from an institutional perspective, and underlines the importance of integration challenges and opportunities for public institutions and public administration. This interesting and valuable report also explains the role and importance of budgets in tracking support to specific goals. The reader can only enjoy the final product and the incredible richness of the additional (more than 500) sources used in the preparation of the report.