

SESSION 9: TAKING CEPA PRINCIPLES TO STRENGTHEN INSTITUTIONS, POLICY COHERENCE AND GOVERNANCE IN THE POST-COVID-19 ERA

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Guiding Question 1 - What does it mean in practice to reimagine the role of institutions and shift towards transformative pathways that strengthen resilience and accelerate action to achieve the SDG?

The Covid 19 pandemic has exposed risks and vulnerabilities, including the structural fault lines and inequity in the access and provision of services of governments in terms of their unpreparedness for crises, weaknesses in accountability and government coordination, inadequacies in public infrastructure and investment, including in health systems and education, and imbalances in economic and social development. The pandemic has exposed fault lines in the health systems and provision of health care, including in developed countries during a crisis, for example New York, saw the strain of the health system the height of Covid 19.

The pandemic has emphasised the need for intergovernmental coordination and cooperation, highlighting the significance and role of the UN system as well as regional organizations such as the AU. As much as there is commitment to coordinated governance between and within countries, it is not realised in practice/implementation and provision of services. This should be a requirement in building the resilience of institutions. Further, institutions tend to stop short from catalysing some of their good visions into implementation.

The pandemic has presented a unique opportunity to rethink the role of institutions so that they shift from their usual past practices to transformative pathways that strengthen resilience to future shocks and accelerate action to achieve SDGs. to the mantra of building “back better” or “building forward better” to the point of ‘using a crisis’. Strengthening resilience means being able to seize the opportunities for transformation that Covid 19 has presented for institutions so that goals under the ECOSOC theme such as Goals 4 (quality education), 5 (gender equality) can be achieved speedily. ... also the climate change moment but we should not see the “inequities in climate change as we see with the vaccines”

Such transformative pathways are where institutions do use the opportunity provided by the crisis to do things differently from the norm. Three approaches to transformation include; (1) Structural approach where the institutions focus on deep changes in the foundations of politics, economy and society, with radical transformations happening, however there is a danger of crisis and tension, (2) Systemic approach where the institutions maintain a commitment to policy change through incentives, investments and policy initiatives, usually led by the state but clear social compacting with the private sector and civil society including organised labour and (3) Enabling approach where there is revealing of the different values, knowledge and relationships (including power relations) involved in change. The best transformative approach/es to follow for each country depends on country specific circumstances.

When transformation is successful, it strengthens the resilience of institutions and accelerates action to achieve SDGs. Resilience should help institutions to ‘build forward’ towards improved development outcomes and survive future shocks. Strengthening resilience requires governance approaches, institutions and policies that are better geared to dealing with risk as poor policy choices can make a society exposed to hazards more vulnerable.

For strengthened resilience of institutions to achieve SDGs knowledge, information, experience, education and effective communication are essential elements translating information and knowledge into action. However, social, cultural and gender considerations should be taken into account. To reduce exposure and vulnerability of institutions, prudent macroeconomic and fiscal policies, key sectoral policies (e.g. agricultural development) and mainstreaming risks (e.g. climate change related) into national planning and budgeting are necessary. These increase the options through which basic needs can be met in times of crisis providing income and health security, in particular to vulnerable populations.

For South Africa, the challenges of unemployment and inequality are prevalent. Unemployment affects mostly youth and people with disabilities. More needs to be done to ensure that the social contract between government, private sector and labour is seen in operation to alleviate these challenges and also to ensure improved service delivery.

South Africa implemented the District Development Model, whereby joint and collaborative planning is undertaken at local, district and metropolitan levels by all three spheres of governance resulting in a single strategically focussed One Plan for each of the 44 districts and 8 metropolitan geographic areas in the country. The model aims to maximise social development and economic growth; integrating and coordinating; democratising development; and leading and learning. The model therefore enables the three spheres of government to work together, with communities and stakeholders, to plan, budget and implement in unison.

Service delivery challenges can also be turned into local level development opportunities, through localised procurement and job creation which promotes and supports local businesses, and that involves communities. The objectives of the District Development Model are to coordinate a government response to challenges of poverty, unemployment, and inequality particularly amongst women, youth and people living with disabilities and to narrow the distance between people and government by strengthening the coordination role and capacities at the District and City levels, amongst other objectives

It is important to evaluate the success of the District Development Model so far and come up with suggestions to strengthen the resilience of the model for the achievement of SDGs.

One way to transform institutions towards resilience and accelerate action to achieve SDGs is to adopt the voluntary local reviews VLR approach. The benefits of VLR are that they allow institutions to carry out self-assessment and reflection on progress, improve coordination transparency/accountability, cooperation (horizontal and vertical) and awareness. Local governments can listen to the needs of people and reflect them in local policy making. The key phases in VLR include planning, data collection, reporting and follow-up with monitoring and evaluation frameworks

Taking from Kenya's example as explained by previous presenters, VLR allows for bottom-up approach and localisation of SDGs enabling institutions to come up with locally backed strategies. The VLRs can be used to input into national local reviews (NLR), thus home grown solutions are developed for institution building while facilitating citizen engagement. SDG Champions from all counties are trained to ensure institutionalisation of SDG coordination. The role of private sector and civil society can never be underrated with their participation in development plans, producing complementary VLRs.

To further strengthen resilience of institutions all stakeholders need to work together to identify priorities and ensure peer review across different regions. As in the Kenyan case, a coordinated data collection approach is necessary while standards and norms for data handling are observed to ensure quality, accurate data for decision making by the institutions.

Institutions can be more resilient when SDGs are mainstreamed in the country's integrated development plans. It is also prudent to first carry out pilot VLR in a few chosen regions to establish best practices before spreading to all regions, and to check policy consistency with SDGs, a baseline gap analysis can be done to ensure implementation of reforms.

Strong institutions can be strengthened through democracy and leaders need to practice sound policy making. Research and capacity building also needs to be promoted. Also important is regional economic integration for example the African Continental Free Trade agreement, capacity building, women and youth involvement, peace and security, conflict management and inclusion of the socially disadvantaged. For resilient institutions, it is important to ensure transparent, accountable and participatory management of public finances, while sustainable public procurement is utilized.