

## **Building capabilities and engaging employees to deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

### **6th Annual Meeting of the OECD Network of Schools of Government**

#### Meeting highlights

#### **Introduction**

The OECD's Network of Schools of Government (NSG) met for its 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting on 13-14 September 2018 in Helsinki, Finland, hosted by HAUS Institute of Public Management.

Held under the theme of “Building capabilities and engaging employees to deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)”, the meeting brought together over 40 representatives of schools of government, academic institutions, and national civil service bodies from 27 OECD member and non-member countries, as well as representatives from 3 European institutions. The meeting was chaired by Geert Bouckaert, President of IIAS.

The meeting was an opportunity to explore how Schools of Government can support their governments to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The SDGs present a challenging outcomes-oriented framework of goals and ambitions for all countries, regardless of their level of development, which require close collaboration across policy areas, levels of government and internationally. Furthermore the goals present a need to understand complex interactions and trade-offs among policy areas. This kind of complexity must be matched by the skills of civil servants, developed by institutions such as the members of the NSG.

The meeting provided an opportunity for many NSG members to share their experience and future plans to develop civil service skills and competencies important for making progress towards achieving the SDGs. For example, many NSG members are providing opportunities for civil servants to learn and adopt innovation skills and innovative approaches to develop and implement public policy. Participants also discussed skills for improving evidence-informed policy making and implementing systems approaches to problem solving. The meeting concluded with discussions on how best to leverage the potential of the NSG, with members identifying opportunities to improve the sharing of material and collaborate on SDG-related themes.

#### **DAY 1**

#### **Session 1: Introduction to the SDG: Challenges and Opportunities**

The session started with a presentation from the Secretariat on the challenges of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and how the OECD has been responding with work on policy coherence,

institutional coordination mechanisms, evidence-informed policy making and the changing skills needed in the public sector. The second part of the session was devoted to a roundtable discussion about how the SDGs provide a framework for thinking about complex policy challenges, and how NSG members are embedding different economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development into their work and approach to training. Discussions focused on how, more than ever, foreign policies complement domestic policies, and how the SDGs create a new narrative for development and transformation. For example the US-based Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA), an association of graduate education programs in public policy public affairs, is currently revising standards to include the SDGs (in particular SDG 16) as a philosophical foundation for programme accreditation. Other participants highlighted the need for a better understanding of best practices and a more multi-disciplinary approach to education. In this regard, schools like Korea's NHI or the Costa Rica University are broadening their role to work more with outside partners.

In smaller groups, all participants discussed the contribution schools can make to achieve the SDGs, and groups pointed out many concrete actions that show how to make the SDGs more tangible. Experiences include the establishment of a knowledge bank by Spain's INAP. Ireland's IPA is investing heavily on project management as a skill central to SDG implementation. Most participating schools have programmes or courses about the SDGs and/or on sustainability management; for example The Netherlands NSOB, Dubai's MBRSG or Bahrain's Institute of Public Administration are infusing the SDGs into their education curriculum. However, schools highlighted that the challenge is not only to provide appropriate development opportunities for the SDGs, but to also convince governments to prioritise this training for their civil servants. Many suggested that their governments were not yet approaching the SDGs as a domestic policy challenge.

### **Session 2: Achieving the SDGs through public sector innovation**

Evidence collected by the OECD strategic human resources management survey (SHRM) in 2016 highlights "public sector innovation" as one of the top HRM reform priorities in the public sector. As the level of innovation depends in a large extent on the skills and competencies of public employees, this session explored how Schools of Government are innovating and developing the skills necessary for an innovative civil service. Discussions provided input into the future directions of the work on skills for public sector innovation. Presentations and discussions suggested that digitalisation is currently an easy entry point into the debate about public sector innovation and reform. For example, Brazil's ENAP is using a suite of OECD peer reviews to strengthen international policy dialogue around the role of digital government; the development of public sector innovation systems, and the professionalisation of public service leadership to drive innovation and effect positive change. Spain's INAP aims to be a central player in the public transformation and to align its research and training with the commitments of the Agenda 2030. HAUS is investing in government-wide elearning systems and developing a playbook for digital learning.

During breakout groups, participants reflected on the leadership skills and behaviors that senior level public servants need to support innovation in their organizations. Key training areas include design thinking, social innovation, executive education programs, experimentation, behavioural economics or use of technology. Many Schools are developing leaders' skills, which are often crucial to move the innovation agenda forward and to support bottom-up initiatives.

### **Session 3: Draft recommendation on Public Service Leadership and Capability**

The first day ended with a discussion of the draft recommendation on Public Service Leadership and Capability, developed by the OECD's Public Employment and Management (PEM) working party. The draft Recommendation presents 14 principles which, together, are necessary to ensure a professional strategic and innovative civil service with the right skills and capacities to meet modern governance

challenges such as the SDGs. The members welcomed the OECD's work on these principles and emphasized various areas where schools of government play an important role, such as the development of skills, competencies, and public sector values. Discussions also focused on the importance of building and valuing managers as people developers, and on their capacity to provide free and frank evidence based advice to the political level.

## DAY 2

The State Secretary from Finland's Prime Minister Office Paula Lehtomäki opened the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of the meeting by highlighting the universal importance of the 17 SDG. Finland is looking at its policy strategies through the lens of the 2030 Agenda. The country is also adopting an inclusive approach to sustainable development. Finland created a committee that brings together key stakeholders like trade unions, labour market associations and civil society in order to create a broader commitment in society for sustainable development.

### Session 4a: The role of evidence informed policy making in delivering on the SDGs

The first session of the second day opened with a presentation from the secretariat on the role of evidence informed policy making in delivering on the SDGs. Improving evidence quantity and quality in the civil service is a shared goal by many countries who are exploring ways to integrate and leverage data for better public sector outcomes. Participants discussed how evidence can help make sense of complexity; looking at complex policy challenges like SDGs, policymakers need to be prepared to better understand the different policy options, policy trade-offs, heterogeneous impacts on different segments of the population, multiple outcomes, long timescales, and large uncertainties.

Schools of government have a role to play in improving skills for data analysis and evidence informed decision-making. A modern civil service needs to be better prepared to engage with stakeholders, knowledge communities, citizens and politicians alike if it is to co-create effective policy solutions. The OECD and the European Commission's Joint Research Centre are working together to identify the drivers of political behaviour at individual, collective and institutional level and what are the skills, tools and processes, which need to be in place in order for evidence to take its proper place in policymaking.

Ireland's IPA has been developing value-for-money analysis skills to support the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service which provides analytical support across the government. Speakers also highlighted the importance of considering different evidence paradigms, and the need to look at paradigms that go beyond data. For example, Australia and New Zealand's School of Government (ANZSOG) is looking at the aboriginal experience and systems to challenge traditional western-based concepts of evidence.

### Session 4b: Systems thinking for the SDG

The secretariat opened the session with a presentation on the work of the Observatory for Public Sector Innovation (OPSI) which has been investigating systems approaches to address complex problems like the SDGs, and discussed tactics to initiate and carry out projects for systems change in the public sector. Participants discussed the need to create collective evidence for decision making, of moving beyond having data towards developing learning systems. Finland's experience trying to implement a strategic horizontal government programme highlighted that new mind-sets are necessary to challenge existing assumptions, ie new ways to think about systems. Jocelyne Bourgon from the Centre for Public Impact suggested that rather than breaking the silos, it is necessary to improve connectivity across them.

### Session 5: Creating value through the Network: development of case studies

The NSG meeting ended with a discussion on what members could contribute to create more value through the Network. This session started with a presentation from the secretariat about the results of a short questionnaire about the use of case studies by NSG members, which was conducted during the summer 2018 and responded to by 27 members from 25 countries. Results show that case studies are used widely used by members for classroom-based teaching, and often target public sector innovation, while very few explicitly focus on the SDGs. Results also show that the SDG, innovation and digital government are among the respondents' top 5 priorities to develop international case studies. Presentation by the from Schools in New Zealand, Bahrain and the Faroe Islands highlighted the vast opportunities to share case studies, while keeping in mind the need to ensure they are developed with specific contextual factors so as to be relevant.

Building on the discussion about case studies, participants identified the following opportunities to contribute to the network:

- **Participants supported the idea of working on case studies.** The survey and discussions showed that many schools produce and use case studies, which are sometimes freely available online. As a first step, the NSG could compile and disseminate what already exists. In a second phase, the Network could build up partnerships to develop content and a standardized approach to the case studies.
- **Participants welcomed the idea to contribute to research on public governance themes.** Research papers or projects could be based on publications such as [Government at a Glance](#), or thematic such as the SDGs, and possibly published in members' public administration journals.
- **Participants considered the NSG potential to disseminate members' information.** Information could concern events (in particular webinars), calls for partnerships, publications, etc.

**Participants considered involving NSG partners in national events:** by considering for example the presence of someone of the network (through skype) to give a speech or a presentation.

### Closing

The 6<sup>th</sup> Annual meeting concluded that to realize the SDGs the public sector needs values driven leadership and culture, capacity and skills, ability to adapt and to change. During the 2-day meeting participants discussed about the need to further inform the debate on achieving the SDG with analysis on public service capability in the fields of public sector innovation, leadership, systems thinking, evidence-informed policy making and digitalisation. The Secretariat will detail the follow up activities in further emails.

Discussions will continue in the 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the NSG, which will be hosted by Korea's National Human Resources Development Institute (NHI) in the fall 2019.