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Department:
Public Service and Administration
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**2024 OECD GLOBAL FORUM
ON BUILDING TRUST AND REINFORCING
DEMOCRACY AGENDA
MILAN, ITALY**

SUBJECT:	2024 OECD GLOBAL FORUM ON BUILDING TRUST AND REINFORCING DEMOCRACY AGENDA
DATE:	21-22 OCTOBER 2023
DRAFTER:	WILLIE VUKELA
VENUE:	MILAN, ITALY

21-22 October 2024



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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. The 2024 OECD Global Forum on Building Trust and Reinforcing Democracy Agenda is a multilateral initiative.
- 1.2. The 2024 OECD Global Forum on Building Trust and Reinforcing Democracy was convened under the theme “*Breaking New Ground for the Future of Democracy: Dignity-Security- Trust*” from 21 to 22 October 2024 in Milan, Italy. Most importantly, this Forum served as the 2nd OECD Global Forum on Building Trust and Reinforcing Democracy.

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1. On 7 August 2023 the Minister received an invitation from the Elsa Pilichowski: Director of OECD - Public Governance Directorate.
- 2.2. The South African delegation was made up of the Deputy Minister, Willie Vukela the Deputy Director-General of GSAI and Zandile Ngubeni.
- 2.3. The Deputy Minister participated in the launch of the OECD Africa Governance Platform. The launch provided an opportunity for discussion on the policy dialogue and shared expertise between Africa and the OECD countries.
- 2.4. One of the key highlights of the OECD Forum in Milan, Italy it brought together global Ministers, former Ministers, senior government officials, civil society, and the private sector to reflect on the evolution of the challenges to democratic governance and to establish concrete plan, evidence-based action to reinforce democracy.

3. PURPOSE OF THE MEETING

- 3.1. The purpose of the Forum was to focus on the following: -
 - 1) Post 2024- What is next for Democracy?
 - 2) Trust and the resilience of democracies-New evidence and the way forward,

- 3) Making people's voice account- Reinforcing representative democracy through meaningful citizen participation,
- 4) Unlocking citizens satisfaction with public services,
- 5) Engaging Citizens in Green Transition,
- 6) The new frontier of democracy and prosperity: Promoting the rule of law by providing access to justice for all,
- 7) Governing with Artificial Intelligence (AI) -Strengthening the case for democracy,
- 8) Information Integrity: Promoting government transparency and constructive engagement, and
- 9) Building resilience to address foreign interference in open societies.
- 10)Launch of the OECD Africa Governance Platform

4. DISCUSSIONS, SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES, AND OBSERVATIONS

4.1. DISCUSSIONS

- 4.1.1. Minister for the Public Administration in Italy, Paolo Zangrillo joined by the Deputy Secretary of OECD, Mary Beth Goodman officially opened the 2024 OECD Global Forum on Building Trust and Reinforcing Democracy Agenda.
- 4.1.2. The Forum discussed solutions to increasing threats caused by the advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and technological advancement to citizen relations and public participation with respect to service delivery.
- 4.1.3. The Forum noted that in recent decades, governments and public administrations globally made important strides in improving the design of services for better user experiences through digital government reforms. As such strides ensured that more public services can now be conducted online quickly and securely thanks to digital systems such as digital identity.
- 4.1.4. The Forum further noted with dismay that government reforms to transform service delivery in some countries have fallen short of creating better user experiences. Spearheaded by technological considerations rather than human needs or experiences, in some countries public services have inadvertently led to new forms

of exclusion for those lacking internet access or the necessary skills as well as those needing face-to-face support.

4.1.5. On the issue of service delivery, the discussion was centred around public servants who are essential to the success of any effort to improve public services in communities.

4.1.6. Public administrations and governments globally are required to drive service delivery improvements by inculcating skills to transform complex service delivery systems. This requires adapting approaches to promote public servants' engagement with reforms, allowing them to propose alternatives for improvement and take on the ground action.

5. SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES

5.1. Delegates pledged and committed to continue advancing efforts to address the issue of corruption, citizens relations and public participation and create a safe digital environment for citizens, ensuring access to justice for all.

5.2. There is a need for more meaningful and inclusive opportunities for citizen participation and influence in decision-making processes. This includes setting clear expectations about the role of deliberative and direct democracy within representative democracies, creating mechanisms through which governments give all people a voice and respond to these voices, and supporting spaces and capacities for civic and political engagement.

5.3. Policies designed to promote political inclusivity and engagement or to mitigate economic vulnerability and discrimination could also be key to minimising trust gaps between people from different backgrounds.

5.4. A reduction in red tape and improvements in regulations around public service design and delivery can greatly benefit people and businesses in terms of saving time, effort and resources when acquiring and submitting documentation, or in accelerating response time from government.

5.5. The Forum exceptionally agreed that the rule of law is the cornerstone of any democratic society. Democracy cannot function without an effective rule of law that ensures the peaceful transfer of power, protects citizens from the arbitrary exercise of authority, and guarantees accountability for those in power. The rule of law is also essential to establishing trustworthy institutions, providing legitimacy to government action, and it plays a crucial role in promoting economic opportunity, protecting fundamental rights, and ensuring effective justice for all.

6. DECISIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. DECISIONS

6.1.1. The Forum took a decision to develop consultative, participatory and deliberate processes alongside, and these are deployed in combination with, long-established mechanisms of representative democracy.

6.1.2. The Forum further took a decision to request public administrations and governments globally to establish an environment throughout the entire policy cycle to enable the safe, secure and trustworthy development, deployment and use of AI. These efforts include defining strategic objectives, exploring new institutional arrangements, developing policy instruments and new regulatory frameworks, and attracting the necessary capacities to use AI effectively and efficiently in the public sector.

6.2. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.2.1. The Forum recommended the use of new technologies in the justice system, particularly Artificial Intelligence (AI), which can enhance efficiency and effectiveness, however it should be used with caution.

6.2.2. Furthermore, the Forum recommended the application of technology which can play a pivotal role in the transformation of service delivery by enabling better data collection and analysis to identify gaps and biases, facilitating access to legal information and services through digital platforms, and automating administrative tasks to increase efficiency. Technological innovations such as AI-driven tools can help detect patterns of discrimination or inefficiency, while online dispute resolution

platforms can help make justice more accessible, especially for underserved populations. Moreover, technology can support more transparent processes by providing real-time tracking of cases and budget allocations, empowering citizens with greater visibility and involvement in the justice system.

- 6.2.3. The Forum further recommended that meaningful citizen engagement and public participation must be developed by all governments to meet growing citizen expectations and to tackle complex policy challenges.
- 6.2.4. Further recommendation is that Governments must use a range of tools to measure the public's satisfaction with public services and to understand their experiences and issues. Increasingly, governments are surveying the public and public services' users, to help understand their experiences with public services and what improvements they would like to see.
- 6.2.5. Most importantly, it has been recommended that governments must adhere to a credible rule of law which calls for a justice sector that ensures that individuals, especially vulnerable populations, have access to, and receive public services that respond to their needs in a timely and equitable manner.
- 6.2.6. In this recommendation of advancing the rule of law and improving access to justice for all, countries are encouraged to prioritise establishing a truly people-centered justice system, in line with the OECD Recommendation on Access to Justice and People-centered Justice Systems.

7. LESSONS LEARNT AND EMERGING ISSUES

- 7.1. The Deputy Minister had bilateral engagements with different formations, amongst others are:-
 - 7.1.1. Head of Accountability Lab
 - 7.1.2. Director-General of Ministry of Public Administration, Spain
 - 7.1.3. Deputy Secretary General of OECD.

7.2. Bilateral with the Director-General of Ministry of Public Administration, Spain

7.2.1. This bilateral meeting was guided by the fact that Spain is now the Chair of the Open Government Partnership (OGP), took over from Kenya. Spain Chairship was endorsed by the multilateral organisation at the 8th Global Conference of the Open Government Partnership, which was held in September 2023 in Tallinn (Estonia). Important to note is that for years, Spain has been represented in the OGP by the three levels of public administration, national, regional and local. Spanish situation is more similar to that of South Africa, which consists of three spheres of government, national, provincial and local.

7.2.2. In 2025 Spain will convene a statutory summit of global coalition of government leaders, civil society activists and international partners those who are advancing open government and renewing democracy beyond the ballot box.

7.2.3. During the Summit, participants will have the opportunity to discuss the challenges and opportunities they face in the pursuit of greater transparency, service delivery, and citizen empowerment.

7.2.4. The bilateral meeting between the Deputy Minister and the Spain delegates was anchored around the following Agenda Items: -

7.2.4.1. Professionalisation of the Public Sector,

7.2.4.2. Share expertise on the work of the Open Government Partnership (OGP),

7.2.4.3. Provide an opportunity for Spain as the Chair of OGP to leverage the work of APRM in Africa.

7.3. Bilateral with the with the Head of Accountability Lab

7.3.1. The bilateral was influenced by the fact that Accountability Lab, focuses on community knowledge-building, youth civic participation, and fighting corruption. Interestingly the main program for Accountability Lab is to promote civic engagement and tackle service delivery issues, which in the main these are challenges that DPSA is pre-occupied with. Accountability Lab has footprint in South Africa, of which the Integrity Icon campaign highlights and celebrates excellence in public service.

7.3.2. The bilateral meeting between the Deputy Minister and the Head of Accountability Lab was premised on the following Agenda Items:-

- 7.3.2.1. Additional Partnership with the DPSA,
- 7.3.2.2. The Integrity Icon campaign in South Africa to celebrate honest government officials,
- 7.3.2.3. Joint outreach with South African youth to support public service,
- 7.3.2.4. Joint Research to identify policy gaps,
- 7.3.2.5. Possibility of entering into an MoU.

7.4. Bilateral with the Deputy Secretary-General of OECD

7.4.1. The Deputy Secretary-General of OECD areas of focus include the digital and technological transformation, science and innovation, global relations, trade, and agriculture. These further include Policy and governance, anti-corruption, and democratic governance.

7.4.2. The bilateral meeting between the Deputy Minister and the Deputy Secretary of OECD, amongst others included the following Agenda Items:-

- 7.4.2.1. How to deal with corruption in the public service,
- 7.4.2.2. Professionalisation of the public sector,
- 7.4.2.3. Digital transformation of the public sector,
- 7.4.2.4. Citizen empowerment in policy making.

7.5. The Deputy Minister participated in the launch of the OECD Africa Governance Platform. The launch provided an opportunity for discussion on the policy dialogue and shared expertise between Africa and the OECD countries.

8. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE DPSA

8.1. The Department of Public Service and Administration to strengthen the citizen relations and public participation mechanisms.

- 8.2. The Department to collaborate and partner with the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development in order to roll out access to justice for all, in all Provinces under the principles of the Open Government Partnership (OGP).
- 8.3. The Department to lead and fast track the process of digital transformation for the public sector.
- 8.4. The Department to conduct citizen satisfaction survey gauges the trust level and publishes the results.

END!



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