The Group of Experts (after 2002 called the Committee of Experts on Public Administration), which is a subsidiary body of ECOSOC, performs the following functions: (a) reviews the issues, challenges and trends under the subject area globally, with special attention to developing countries; (b) identifies and recommends critical areas for priority action by Member States or its various groups to deal with these challenges; (c) suggests both broadly and specifically what activities the Programme can undertake to assist the Member States, especially the less developed ones; (d) makes recommendations and suggested resolutions for ECOSOC; (e) reviews the activities of the Programme to assess how the earlier decisions and resolutions have been implemented; and (f) recommends revisions and changes in future Programme activities, including their focus and priorities.

Organization of the meetings of experts

From 1967 to 2000, 15 meetings of the Group of Experts took place about every two years, alternating locations between the United Nations Headquarters in New York and the Palais des Nations in Geneva, and synchronizing with the time frame of the United Nations biennial budgetary process. These meetings lasted initially for two weeks. However, because of time constraints of the experts as well as budgetary considerations, the duration became limited to six to seven working days. The experts were invited in the name of the Secretary-General and acted in their individual expert capacity. The first meeting had 15 experts, but in subsequent meetings the numbers were raised to 20 and above to ensure representation from leading political and administrative systems as well as from countries in different stages of development. Most experts were senior government officials from both central, system-wide ministries (such as personnel, finance and administrative reform) and individual, operational ministries (education, health etc.) with the occasional inclusion of well-known academicians. Attention was given to select experienced experts in line with the agenda of a meeting, focusing on specific areas of activity and/or regions.

The staff of the Secretariat administrative unit dealing with public administration managed all aspects of the meetings, including selecting experts, preparing documents, organizing the agenda, presenting the final reports to ECOSOC.
and implementing ECOSOC resolutions. They used several practical considerations in choosing the countries from which experts would be invited and selecting specific individuals. Typically, one third of the experts had previous meeting experience in order to provide some continuity. New members were chosen on the basis of the relevance of their current work experience to some agenda items, the record of their past experience and publications, and recommendations from relevant countries.

As the Programme was tasked with coordinating public administration activities within the United Nations system, representatives of specialized agencies, other organizations of the United Nations system, and regional and interregional public administration and finance organizations attended the meetings. These representatives met one or two days before the main meeting and presented reports on their agencies’ activities. They then prepared a report together at an informal inter-agency meeting, later presented to the full meeting.

**Documents for the meeting and its actual operation**

Usually, the Secretariat staff prepared the background papers, covering the topics of each agenda item for discussion by the experts. However, in special cases, additional papers were drawn from specialized consultants or reports from previous seminars and workshops. There were occasions when individual experts also brought papers reflecting their experiences in dealing with specific agenda items. Usually, they were on specific administrative reforms and especially on innovative techniques and themes. The documents also included the report from the informal inter-agency working group comprising representatives of the regional commissions, specialized agencies and other organizations of the United Nations system. The report included recommendations for strengthening mutual collaboration.

The meeting elected its own officers, who were supported in their deliberations by the Secretariat staff, who provided technical support and also worked as resource persons as required. These officers usually included one Chairperson, several Vice-Chairpersons, depending on the need to reflect regional and individual interests, and one Rapporteur. Together, the office holders worked as the bureau for the meeting. Occasionally, the bureau also created ad hoc subcommittees for specific issues. The Rapporteur usually prepared the draft of the meeting report, including the reports of any ad hoc subcommittees, with the support of the Secretariat staff. The draft report was circulated among all participants and reviewed, line by line, before its recommendations were adopted at the final session of the meeting.
Presentation of the report

Usually, the Director of the Division presented the report of the Group of Experts to ECOSOC for its consideration and subsequent adoption of a resolution. There were occasions when the Chairperson of the Group of Experts joined the Director in presenting the report of a meeting. Once approved, the resolution and the accompanying report become the legislative basis of the future work under the Programme.

It may be noted that these reports and the supporting documents are substantive in their approach and contents. They are published and distributed widely. More recently, reports of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration are uploaded on the UNPAN website. Each report represents a time-specific snapshot of the status of public administration from the perspective of United Nations Member States and provides guidance about how various Member States, especially the less developed ones, can improve their systems of governance and public administration in their social and economic development.

A case study of a meeting of the Group of Experts

The seventh meeting of the Group of Experts on the United Nations Programme on Public Administration and Finance was convened at the United Nations Office in Geneva from 17 to 27 October 1984. The meeting had the following terms of reference:

(a) To review and discuss challenges and constraints in public administration in developing countries in the 1980s;

(b) To analyse the specific needs of developing countries, particularly the least developed, especially in the field of training and institution-building;

(c) To review the support of and assistance from the United Nations system for technical cooperation among developing countries in the development of public administration and finance;

(d) To review the United Nations work programme on public administration and finance;

(e) To recommend new modalities of technical cooperation that would increase the effectiveness of United Nations activities in the field of public administration and finance.
The meeting was attended by 24 experts from as many countries. The representatives of several United Nations bodies and specialized agencies and other non-governmental organizations attended the meeting as observers. A selected group of administrative and technical staff provided the secretariat services for the meeting.

The meeting had before it two documents prepared by the Secretariat: “Development administration: scenarios and search for effectiveness” (ST/SG/AC.7/1984/L.2) and “United Nations Programme on Public Administration and Finance” (ST/SG/AC.7/1984/L.3). The meeting also decided to adopt, as part of its report, two other sets of recommendations: (a) a statement entitled “Public administration in developing countries: priorities and recommendations” and (b) “Sub-Saharan Africa: action programme in public administration”.

**Analysis and recommendations by the meetings of experts: 1967-2000**

In total, 15 meetings of the Group of Experts were held from its inception in 1967 to 2002, when the Group of Experts was replaced by the Committee of Experts. One common focus of all the meetings was to review the role that the Programme on Public Administration played in contributing to the goals of the United Nations development decades. The following paragraphs highlight the specific contribution of the meetings of the Group of Experts to each of the decades.


At its first meeting, the Group of Experts noted the significance of public administration, its scope and contents and identified some priority areas that required special attention under the Programme. The Group acknowledged that effective administration was the crucial element in the formulation and implementation of development plans and programmes to advance economic and social conditions, particularly in developing and newly independent countries. It also noted that deficiencies in organization and management at all levels of government created major obstacles to progress in fulfilling national aspirations and goals. It emphasized that public administration was an essential vehicle for formulating and implementing national policies and plans. Unless public administration was greatly modernized, progress would be even slower in reaching national goals.

The Group recommended that public administration should be understood as the totality of the administrative processes of government, since it covered
areas that were not sometimes associated with “general administration”, such as judicial administration, and administrative services within the legislative branch. The experts also noted that development involves not just economic and social change, but the transformation of whole societies. As such, public administration should be viewed as an essential instrument for managing and implementing this process of transformation.

The Group further noted that the two major inputs in administrative processes—personnel administration and financial administration—required the special attention of the United Nations. Furthermore, the Group emphasized that decentralization and local government were crucial to the success of development programmes, because measures to improve administration at the local level would increase the participation of the people in development activities and would thereby accelerate economic and social progress.


Four meetings of the Group of Experts were organized during the Second Development Decade, in 1971, 1975, 1977 and 1980, hereafter referred to as “the meetings”. The highlights of these meetings included elaboration of technical assistance activities under the Programme, broadening the substantive scope of the Programme by including public finance components, aligning the activities of the Programme to achieve the goals of the new international economic order, and organizing the review of Programme activities under new formats: changes and trends in public administration and finance and the role of the public sector in the economic development of developing countries. A midterm review of the contributions made by Programme activities towards achieving the goals of the International Development Strategy was undertaken as well, launching the preparatory activities for the next development decade.

The second meeting identified seven major areas under which the Programme would continue to provide technical cooperation projects for developing countries. They were: (a) major administrative reform; (b) administrative aspects of planning and plan implementation; (c) personnel administration; (d) training; (e) organization and methods; (f) supervision and management of public enterprises; and (g) decentralization and local government.

In assessing the achievements and shortcomings during the previous decade (1960-1970), the meeting noted with regret that the role of public administration in development was still not well appreciated. Recalling the shortfalls in the implementation of development plans in the 1960s, the meeting agreed that far greater effort would be needed in the 1970s to increase the adminis-
trative capability of national and international institutions if the next decade was to become a decade of achievement. Accordingly, it expressed the hope that ECOSOC and the General Assembly would emphasize the strategic role of public administration in accelerating the pace of economic and social development.

The third meeting reviewed the activities of the United Nations Programme on Public Administration during the previous four years (1971-1974) and their contribution to the midterm review of the progress made in implementing the relevant provisions of the International Development Strategy for the Second United Nations Development Decade. In this context, it was noted that three major developments had occurred during this period: (a) the reorganization of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs to establish the new Division of Public Administration and Finance; (b) the Declaration on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order; and (c) the adoption of the Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States.

In 1973 and 1974, the administrative unit implementing the United Nations Programme on Public Administration was reorganized in line with the recommendation of the second meeting of experts in 1971. As a result of this reorganization, three components of public finance were grouped together under the Division of Public Administration and Finance: (a) government budgeting and financial management; (b) tax administration; and (c) development of financial institutions, which hitherto had been the responsibility of the Public Finance and Financial Institutions Division. Accordingly, the substantive scope of the third meeting of experts was extended to cover the entire work programme of the reconstituted Division.

As a result, the Programme on Public Administration was divided into five major substantive components: (a) personnel administration and training; (b) organization and management services; (c) development programme management; (d) government budget and financial management; and (e) development of financial institutions.

The meeting also identified critical areas for improvement with detailed suggestions on topics including: personnel administration; public administration training and management development; manpower planning for the public service; management techniques; administration of major development sectors, programmes and projects; public finance; government budgeting; tax administration; financial institutions; public enterprises; and research in public administration and finance.
The fourth meeting reviewed progress in public administration and finance in developing countries and recommended additional measures appropriate for public administration and finance techniques aligned with the development of a new international economic order. It also reviewed the feasibility of the development of pertinent objectives in public administration and finance for the 1980s; and, in the light of the foregoing, reviewed the integrated United Nations Programme on Public Administration and Finance. It also reviewed the progress of the Programme between 1974 and 1977 and the proposed work programme for the biennium 1978-1979.

The fifth meeting identified the changes and trends in public administration and finance for development, especially as part of preparations for a new international development strategy for the 1980s; reviewed the role of the public sector in the economic development of developing countries; recommended substantive priorities for the 1980s in order to assist Secretariat officials in the formulation of future medium-term plans and programmes; and, finally, reviewed the modalities of implementation of the Programme in the light of the changing circumstances. In doing the above, the meeting discussed the Secretary-General’s report on public administration and finance for development: an action agenda for the 1980s, and the publication *Strengthening Public Administration and Finance for Development in the 1980s: Issues and Approaches*, which incorporated the report of the Secretary-General on the role of the public sector in promoting the economic development of developing countries.


Four meetings of the Group of Experts were held during this decade, in 1982, 1984, 1987 and 1989. The dominant issue that confronted the developing countries was the “fiscal crisis”. The challenge was how to assist Governments that were trying to reduce an overblown public sector without sacrificing basic services and hurting the most vulnerable groups in the societies. Other associated issues reviewed during this decade included critical and explicit evaluation of past Programme results; clarification of the role of the meetings in studying administration at the country, regional and international levels; assigning a greater priority to the performance and productivity of current public administration units than to the creation of new structures and expansion of public administration systems; and cutbacks and privatization. The meetings also noted that improving administrative measures required adopting policy changes.

In the sixth meeting, the experts were more critical and explicit in the evaluation of past results of the Programme on Public Administration and Finance in the previous two decades. For the first time, there was open recognition that
some of the objectives, goals and recommendations included in the General Assembly resolutions of 1974 on the new international economic order and the Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States could not be fulfilled in exactly the same manner in all developing countries.

The meeting’s report also included a dispassionate and objective enumeration and description of the various “difficulties”, “failures”, “deficiencies”, “delays”, “cost overruns”, “deviations” and “conflicts and tensions” faced or generated while trying to implement some of the recommended projects and activities of the Programme on Public Administration and Finance in many developing and least developed countries.

While casting serious doubts about the ability of international agencies, including the Programme, to bring about desired changes, the meeting emphasized that significant efforts should be expected from the developing countries themselves, vis-à-vis the international community and the United Nations. The latter was expected to play a supporting and secondary role, functioning more as a “clearing house”, by collecting and disseminating information of a comparative nature about the different public administration and finance reform efforts and their successes and failures, leading to a compilation of success stories.

The meeting showcased specific issues that were becoming relevant for social and economic development. Since most developing countries had established special commissions or departments of administrative reform, the meeting discussed country experiences in undertaking major administrative reform strategies and problems. The experts also showed continued interest in discussing management development and service delivery issues as well as the management of major development programmes. For the first time, the Group discussed regulatory administration in detail, highlighting the importance of combating corruption. The Group further noted the importance of studying the efficiency and performance of public enterprises.

The seventh meeting undertook a midterm review and noted the emergence of a dilemma in the role of public administration in development. It acknowledged that public administration systems in developing countries, which had expanded concomitantly with the pace of economic and social development, were facing a number of difficulties, emanating from both external and internal causes. In the face of these difficulties, most developing countries might have to review their present policies and strategies critically, and develop rational approaches and actions to deal with these constraints. The meeting noted the importance of moving ahead rationally and with objective data, rather than reacting to
crises in a knee-jerk manner and suffering the negative consequences of hasty actions. The meeting recommended that priority be given to the improvement of performance and productivity of existing institutions, instead of to the creation of new ones and further expansion of systems.

To illustrate such expansion and the onset of fiscal crisis, the meeting noted that several developing countries had gone too far in the creation of new parastatal institutions. This proliferation of parastatals was leading to duplication and the creation of overlapping institutions, often in the same economic and social sector. The concomitant overstaffing and elevated current expenditures exacerbated the fiscal crisis by further increasing the internal fiscal deficits and the external debt of most of the developing and least developed countries.

The growing fiscal crisis and the conflicting pressures under which many developing countries were muddling through began to raise questions concerning the role and efficiency of public administration in dealing with the emerging crisis. At the same time, several Western developed democracies (for example, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, New Zealand, Canada and the United States of America) undertook drastic civil service reforms with a focus on results and value for money that included significant cutbacks, privatization, deregulation, de-bureaucratization and decentralization. Against this background, the eighth meeting of experts dealt with the issues facing the developing countries and made four recommendations for the United Nations Programme. It pleaded for new and innovative policy options to be explored and for public administration to be flexible enough to accommodate and work with the private sector and civil society institutions.

First, the Group of Experts and the Secretariat accepted the fact that, no matter how just and desirable it might appear to the majority of United Nations Member States, no single model or set of recommendations was applicable in the same manner or sequence to all developing or least developed countries.

Second, the Group reaffirmed that the meeting should focus primarily on measures to be adopted at the national level, and only secondarily on proposals for supportive measures at the international level.

Third, the Group noted that many countries were experiencing a decrease in the availability of funds for public expenditures, thereby raising the ratio of current public consumption to investment and generating demands for cutbacks and economies in such expenditures. This development had given the international
financial institutions grounds to advocate cutbacks in public consumption, retrenchment in public services and a greater role for the private sector.

Fourth, as a result of the problems described in the above paragraph, there was a debate about the proper role of public administration in relation to other institutions of society—the private sector and civil society, among them. This debate, in turn, provoked many countries to raise questions about the role and efficacy of public administration as an instrument of development. As doubts about the performance of government institutions increased, demands increased for the privatization of selected activities hitherto performed by public organizations, particularly in mixed-economy countries. The meeting recognized that public administration needed to be oriented towards working cooperatively with various societal groups and to focus more on public management rather than being preoccupied with following only traditional approaches and methods.

By the time the ninth meeting was convened in early 1989, it had become abundantly clear to the experts that the most critical issues to be addressed should be how to resolve the economic problems related to the fiscal crisis that had been affecting most of the developing countries in the previous few years. The substantial growth of expenditures, followed by increasing gaps in the availability of resources, contributed to higher fiscal deficits and to rising debts, internal and external, resulting in a fiscal crisis in many countries.

The experts recognized that many countries faced “severe economic and social hardships and serious impediments to growth and development”. The situation was so serious in some cases that the priority issue was no longer how to advance but rather how to prevent future decline. In many situations, Governments had lost the policy initiative and could only react to demands and pressures from society and from external institutions. Most countries reacted with austerity measures in their attempt to improve economy, efficiency and productivity in government. This crisis was especially urgent for public enterprises that were considered important contributors to budget deficits and crippling external debt obligations.

A trend in many cases pointed towards reducing the scope and depth of the State’s direct intervention in the economy and reaffirming the role of private entrepreneurship. Governments of different political views adopted policies to transfer public enterprises to the private sector, and many more were considering orderly divestiture and privatization. In any case, there was a growing interest in the use of policy instruments as opposed to administrative controls, and policy options that often included privatization.

Six meetings were held during the decade, in 1991, 1993, 1995, 1997, 1998 and 2000. The highlights of review and advice offered by the experts included a reorientation of public administration to incorporate public management and governance principles, acceptance of such new realities as globalization, needs for transparency and accountability, the urgency of observing the rule of law and honouring human rights, and exploring new ways of defining the role of public administration and appropriate ways of carrying out its functions. The experts recognized that changed circumstances called for redesigning the State to face the new challenges and exploring ways in which States could develop and enhance the capacities of their various agents, including public administration, in carrying out their roles and functions effectively. These issues were further recognized during the fiftieth resumed session of the United Nations General Assembly that was held in 1996 to discuss public administration and development. The issues and challenges confronting States and their public administrations in the last decade of the twentieth century were similar to those that were noted in the decades of 1950s and 1960s. For better or worse, the context had changed dramatically, both globally and internally within each State. Furthermore, because of austerity measures and structural adjustment policies, public administration was no longer the exclusive agent of the State. The issues and the recommendations made by the expert group meetings are very briefly noted below.

The tenth meeting recognized that the 1990s presented extraordinary and difficult challenges to public administration and finance systems throughout the world. The meeting emphasized that public management innovations could play a vital role in national development. Countries experiencing radical transformation were seeking new roles and functions for government in order to attain new social and economic levels, in spite of current proposals to reduce the role of government in order to decrease the proportion of national resources consumed by the public service. The meeting noted that the new roles required modern management approaches and techniques and new skills for public administration and finance to undertake improvement programmes.

The eleventh meeting of experts accepted the new concept of “governance” as one way of reviewing the issues and challenges facing public administration. Most of their recommendations centred on the potential benefits of “good governance in two practical ways”. The first concerned the delivery of high-quality services to the public and the devolution of such activities to the private sector, either through “outsourcing” or “performance contracts” or by privatizing the public enterprises. This included “value for money in achieving the effective
implementation of policies”, implicitly suggesting that the State or govern-
ment’s new role should be that of establishing public policies and devolving the
operative responsibilities to “civil society”—the “steering rather than rowing”
principle of the new public management paradigm.

The second “practical way” of understanding “good governance” had to do with
the fair and equitable treatment of all citizens under the law. Safeguards for
individual freedom and openness in the conduct of government business were
important means to guarantee a more effective participation in public affairs.
The meeting further stated that the important hallmarks of “good governance”
were: (a) a willingness to let individuals and communities develop and realize
their full potential; (b) the encouragement of public participation in government
affairs; (c) openness in reviewing and reporting government achievement at the
local and national levels; and (d) the development of a stable economy.

From left to right: Mr. Nitin Desai, former Under-Secretary-General of UNDESA; Mr. Bengt
Säve-Söderberg, President of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral
Assistance (IDEA); Mr. Richard Soudriette, President of the International Foundation for
Election Systems (IFES); and Mr. Harry Neufeld, Administration and Cost of Elections
(ACE) Project Coordinator, during the launching ceremony of the ACE website (www.
aceproject.org) developed by the Division for Public Administration and Development
Management of UNDESA, IDEA and IFES, 22 October 1998, United Nations
Headquarters, New York.
Other “governance”-related issues discussed at the eleventh meeting of the Group of Experts included accountability, performance, and information technology for public management. While discussing financial decentralization and revenue mobilization issues, such as devolution and its financial challenges, the meeting recognized that the existence of important differences in the stages of development, not only among developing countries, but also within its regions and localities, was a crucial factor to be taken into account. The meeting also noted that one of the most serious economic problems faced by many Governments in developing countries was how to make their public sector enterprises efficient and cost-competitive in global markets and how to develop the nascent private sector so that it could assimilate public sector enterprises after privatization.

The twelfth meeting was held to provide inputs, through ECOSOC, to the consolidated report of the Secretary-General on public administration and development, to be discussed by the General Assembly at its resumed session of April 1996. The Group of Experts recommended that national and regional representatives examine the role and capacity of public administration prior to the beginning of the resumed session of the General Assembly. To ensure follow-up of the resolution expected at the General Assembly session, the meeting recommended that the Group of Experts on Public Administration and Finance, a subsidiary body of ECOSOC serving in an ad hoc advisory capacity, be converted into the United Nations Committee of Experts on Public Administration. This conversion to a full-fledged subsidiary of ECOSOC would provide a more stable platform for follow-up and implementation of the recommendations of the resumed session of the General Assembly on public administration and development.

In the context of the resumed session of the General Assembly on public administration and development in 1996 and its resolution 50/225 of 19 April 1996, the thirteenth meeting was held in 1997 with the focus on redesigning the State for socio-economic development and change. Within the theme, five specific issues were identified as particularly relevant: promoting an enabling environment for sound governance; enhancing the professionalism and ethical values and image of the public service; rethinking the State for socio-economic development; creating an enabling environment for private sector development; and strengthening governmental capacity in the mobilization, management and accountability of financial resources.

The reconfiguration of the administrative State emerged from the discussion as an overarching concern and global need. The meeting shared the view that,
far from representing two adversarial forces, strong markets and strong States were truly complementary and necessary conditions for economic prosperity and social justice. A major trend throughout the world was that Governments and people were redefining the roles of the State and the public sector and changing the nature of governance. A parallel trend was that globalization was gathering momentum and rapidly changing the ways in which national economies operated. Another trend was the progress of science and technology, which constantly transformed the methods of production, service delivery, transportation, communications and information management. Yet another salient trend noted by the meeting was the emergence of a vibrant civil society as a dynamic partner in the conduct of public affairs and economic activity, nationally and internationally.

De-bureaucratization, decentralization and devolution of power to lower-level actors and to civil society had gained new prominence on the agendas of administrative reform. Experience showed, however, that wide diffusion of power was not without its problems. While promoting efficiency and popular participation, it had sometimes led to unregulated corruption at local levels, tendencies to be biased towards clients and the increased power of local elites. Furthermore, deregulation of the private sector led to instances of fraud, waste, abuse and corruption. To yield beneficial results, decentralization and deregulation needed to be combined with measures that promoted transparency and accountability in order to support honesty, integrity and professionalism in the management of all sectors. Only then could administration and management be expected to foster the realization of social, people-centred and people-driven development.

The experts felt that only a strong, proactive State could promote social justice, ensure universal access to high-quality services, and safeguard the rule of law and respect for human rights. A strong State was required to lobby for the poor and for the future, neither of which had a voice. The need to redesign a stronger and more strategic State did not need to result in “big government”. A strong State was fully compatible with mechanisms that encouraged cost-consciousness, fiscal responsibility and sound financial management. What it required, however, was a properly organized and duly equipped public administration system, encompassing structures and policies, which could attract, retain, develop and motivate high-calibre personnel. Professionalism, merit and an enforceable code of ethics were the essential ingredients of a much-needed strategy to restore and enhance the image of the public service. In turn, such a strategy called for capacity-building activities—a judicious combination of institution-building and human resources development.
The meeting recommended that, as a core component of the economic and social sector of the United Nations, the Programme on Public Administration should focus on promoting and monitoring the implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/225 of 19 April 1996, advancing global strategies and country-specific approaches that contributed to sound governance, strengthening institutional capacity and management development, and enhancing ethical standards and professionalism in the public service. To those ends, the Programme should not only provide advisory services and technical support to Governments but also serve as a hub and forum for a global exchange of information on policies, best practices and methods among Governments and intergovernmental and non-governmental institutions and also provide advisory services to interested Governments.

Some members and the Secretariat staff realized that the issues of public policy development and implementation, as called for by the landmark General Assembly resolution 50/225, had not been fully discussed in the previous meeting. Hence, within one year, the fourteenth meeting of experts was convened in 1998. This meeting explored current issues of governance, public administration and finance, and reviewed the work programme in those areas in the light of the resolution. The meeting called for an effective response to the challenges faced by the governance and administrative systems of all countries and for a focus on efforts to develop their capacity to implement commitments made at major global conferences organized by the United Nations during the current decade. Specifically, in relation to the developing countries or countries with economies in transition, the meeting recommended that the Programme focus attention on four broad areas of need:

(a) **Management of change.** The State must be in the forefront of implementing change and smoothing the path for progress. This entailed proactive measures to develop enabling policy frameworks, promote the use of new technologies, set up performance measurement and evaluation systems, overhaul administrative structures and design adequate patterns for the collection of internationally comparable, reliable and accurate data for policymaking processes.

(b) **Institution-building and administrative reform.** In the light of current trends, bureaucratic structures were no longer working effectively. De-bureaucratization and decentralization must go in tandem with new approaches to management, emphasizing not only openness, adaptability, participation, flexibility, diversity and responsiveness but also the taking of measures that rein in fraud, waste, abuse and
corruption. Many new tasks of governance required public authorities to act as mediators, advocates or promoters, actively seeking partnerships with business and non-governmental organizations, or otherwise endeavouring to engage civil society in the pursuit of developmental objectives.

(c) **Human resources development.** To staff institutions effectively required constant upgrading of skills, developing leadership qualities, facilitating change in skill profiles and fostering career structures that emphasized mobility, the importance of integrity and professionalism, and the overriding claims of merit in the recruitment, placement and promotion of public servants.

(d) **Information.** The timely availability of reliable, accurate and relevant data had become a sine qua non not only for sound policymaking but also for the measurement, monitoring and evaluation of public sector performance. The United Nations Programme on Public Administration was expected to play a vital role in mobilizing and disseminating
information of vital importance to government, notably through the projected information clearing house.

The fifteenth meeting of the Group of Experts on Public Administration and Finance was held in 2000. Given the unique position of the United Nations in addressing the issue of globalization, the Group of Experts deliberated on the effects of globalization on the role and functioning of the State and its responses—institutional and managerial—to attain maximum benefits and minimal negative consequences. In further consideration of the marginalization effects of globalization, the Group of Experts also addressed the process that affects national and global economic governance systems. The meeting also made the following key recommendations with respect to the United Nations Programme on Public Administration:

(a) The proclamation of a United Nations Public Service Day to celebrate the value of service to the community at the local, national and global levels, with prizes to be awarded by the Secretary-General for contributions made to the cause of enhancing the role, prestige and visibility of public service;

(b) The preparation of a recurrent publication on the state of the public sector, which would contain basic data on the public sector, country public administration profiles and analysis of emerging issues relating to the public sector, as well as appropriate analysis of changes and trends;

(c) The drafting of the plan of action for the development of a project on the United Nations Public Administration Network (UNPAN) of regional
institutions for capacity-building in public administration as a mechanism for cooperation, utilizing information technology in this field, and, in order to deepen the impact of the project, the strengthening of the capacity of national ministries and national schools and institutes of public administration in developing countries and countries in transition to access data, information and training.

The Committee of Experts and the Millennium Declaration: 2001-2015

In 2002, following an earlier recommendation of the Group itself, ECOSOC restructured and revitalized the former Group of Experts on the United Nations Programme on Public Administration and Finance by renaming it the Committee of Experts on Public Administration. Unlike the Group of Experts, which provided advice to the Secretary-General and had a weak relationship to ECOSOC, the Committee was designed to provide formal advice to ECOSOC. The number of experts was increased to 24, who would now “be nominated by the Secretary-General, in consultation with member States, and approved by the Economic and Social Council”. The new Committee of Experts on Public Administration was to maintain the same status of the former Group of Experts as a “subsidiary body of the Economic and Social Council, without change in its [original] mandate”. The Committee would meet annually and its members would serve for four years.

The Committee met seven times from 2002 to 2008 and provided direction and detailed guidelines on dealing effectively with public administration issues related to the implementation of the Millennium Declaration and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. These guidelines focused on enhancing the capacity of public administration, identifying specific areas needed for revitalization, including human resources, a partnership-building approach, support for innovations in governance and public administration, and participatory governance and citizens’ engagement. The guidance provided under each of these areas is briefly reviewed hereinafter.

**Guidelines for the Programme on Public Administration**

The Committee of Experts at its first session made the following fundamental proposals and recommendations that would guide the Programme for the next four-year period:

- The United Nations Programme should focus on priority areas identified by the Committee regarding public administration issues related to the implementation of the Millennium Declaration;

- The United Nations Public Service Day should coincide with the African Public Service Day, that is, 23 June;

- A subcommittee should be established to review and refine a proposal prepared by the Secretariat on monitoring changes and trends in each national public sector in order to enhance the value of the World Public Sector Report;

- The role of UNPAN in providing advisory services and training should be enhanced and expanded to strengthen the capacity of national institutions of public administration;

- The analytical documents prepared under the Programme should be short, action-oriented and focused on the necessary conditions to ensure the successful implementation of good practices, and for that reason “a compendium of best practices should be prepared and disseminated to Member States”;

- The Programme should provide substantive support to the Global Forum on Reinventing Government;

- The Programme should provide inputs concerning e-government to the forthcoming World Summit on the Information Society;

- ECOSOC should consider authorizing annual meetings of the Committee in order to follow the progress of Member States and the United
Nations in enhancing the capacity of public administration to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

**Enhancing the capacity of public administration**

The Committee at its second session discussed how to enhance the capacity of public administration to implement the United Nations Millennium Declaration, the collection of basic data on the public sector and United Nations activities in public administration. The Committee recognized that the need to revitalize and revalidate public administration to enable the State to better serve citizens is an overarching priority for all countries. It noted that recent major international conferences and summits on topics of global concern laid emphasis on the central role of governance systems and institutions in promoting economic and social development; increasing the access to services for the vast majority of the poor; enforcing human rights legislation; enhancing the participation of women in the development process; and protecting the quality of the environment. Given the importance of efficient public administration systems for the attainment of social development goals, it also recommended that ECOSOC establish linkages between the work of the Commission for Social Development and the work of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration.

The Committee recommended that ECOSOC bring the issue of governance and public administration to the forefront of the development agenda and suggested that the Council might wish to devote its next high-level segment to this topic. It further recommended that public administration issues become an integral part of the process of follow-up to conferences and suggested that the Committee itself could serve as a valuable source of advice to the intergovernmental machinery in that respect.

As mandated, the Committee reviewed and made recommendations on the United Nations Programme on Public Administration. In particular, the Committee recommended that the Secretariat continue to provide, upon request from Member States, technical advisory support in enhancing the quality of personnel in the public sector, strengthening governance and public administration systems and institutions, and fostering transparency and accountability, as well as reconstructing public administration in post-conflict countries. It also recommended that the Secretariat undertake additional work to analyse further and delineate the role of the State as enabler and user of knowledge and technology in order to support and encourage innovation throughout public administration and society as a whole.
The Committee noted the World Public Sector Report as being a valuable tool for policymakers and practitioners in Member States; recommended that the Secretariat should focus, in its next issue, on human resources development; and advised the Secretariat of the usefulness of having the publication translated into other languages. Finally, the Committee stressed the importance of capitalizing on the success of the United Nations Public Administration Network (UNPAN) by expanding its reach to the subregional level in order to strengthen the capacity of subregional institutions with regard to public administration.15

**Revitalizing public administration**

The Committee at its third session dealt with the following substantive items: (a) revitalizing public administration: (i) the role of human resources in revitalizing public administration; (ii) the role of the public sector in advancing the knowledge society; and (iii) strengthening public administration as a means of achieving the Millennium Development Goals through a partnership-building approach; (b) public sector institutional capacity for African renewal; (c) analysis of existing data on the public sector; and (d) review of the United Nations activities in the area of public administration.

The challenges of revitalizing public administration are complex and multi-dimensional, as technical issues are intertwined with the political dimension of defining the scope and role of the State. Revitalizing public administration entails bringing back the concept of the “public interest” and the practice of public participation in public administration processes. The purpose of revitalizing public administration must be linked to its overall purposes, namely, to support the goals of the State in promoting economic development, improving social conditions and overall well-being, and strengthening the rule of law. Improving services to citizens is crucial to revitalizing public administration. Yet, there is a large and increasing gap between public demands and what the public sector can do.

In dealing with the issue of human resources, the need for a holistic approach to reform, within a coherent context of policy, organization and leadership, should be stressed. The Committee noted the five building blocks needed to reform human resources management: (a) appropriate legal, policy and regulatory frameworks; (b) identifying common values, attitudes and professional standards; (c) developing a competency framework for core professional groups; (d) designing effective capacity development strategies; and (e) institutionalizing human resources planning.
Within the overarching agenda of revitalizing public administration, the Committee agreed that the issues related to the role of knowledge in a society and to public administration as a consumer and producer of knowledge were of great importance. The Committee stressed that a knowledge society must be productive, sustainable and socially coherent. In this context, the issue of human rights and freedom is important to ensure that the pervasiveness of the use of information and communications technologies in government should not lead to encroachment on the human right to privacy.

The Committee noted that the development of institutions of governance and public administration in Africa was critical in responding to the momentous challenges of achieving the Millennium Development Goals in general, and poverty eradication and sustainable development in Africa in particular. Without overcoming obstacles in governance and public administration, Africa would continue to lag behind in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

On the basis of its discussion, the Committee produced a set of recommendations for consideration by ECOSOC, Member States and the United Nations Secretariat.

**Strategic directions for the future**

The Committee of Experts at its fourth session in 2005 was primarily concerned with reviewing strategic directions of the Programme for the future and discussed the following issues: (a) emerging issues in revitalizing public administration; (b) searching for a bottom-up approach and methodologies for developing foundations and principles of sound public administration; (c) promoting and rewarding innovation and excellence for revitalizing public administration and service delivery: the introduction of United Nations Public Service Awards; and (d) review of the activities of the United Nations Programme on Public Administration.

The Committee accepted a conceptual framework set in the context of the Millennium Declaration, which identified three strategic directions for revitalizing public administration: (a) improving economic and social decision-making institutions and processes; (b) strengthening integrity, transparency and accountability; and (c) reconciling security requirements with demands for social service delivery. In the case of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), it was clear that capacity deficits in institutions and institutional processes adversely affect all the other areas of development. Therefore, in order to achieve the MDGs, it was critical to work simultaneously on all fronts to ensure that a vir-
tuous circle developed. For example, strengthening institutions has a positive effect on integrity, transparency and accountability, which in turn improves policy options, service delivery and human security. The institutions and institutional processes that are called upon to support market-based development are also expected to provide equitable distribution of the benefits of growth to all citizens.

For many developing countries, the existing public administration capacities seemed inadequate to mainstream poverty reduction within macroeconomic policy frameworks. In that regard, the challenge was to ensure that public administration structures were more pro-poor and MDGs-oriented. There was a need to look afresh at integrating the policy requirements of pro-poor policies with concerns regarding integrity, transparency and accountability. Accordingly, the development of poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs) offered an opportunity to create space for an accountable and participatory process that would be aligned with the objectives of the MDGs. The PRSP process could promote a stable macro-environment, a robust role for the private sector in line with
developmental objectives, and dialogue with civil society to influence public policy directly.

The Committee observed that the best assurance for human security was the realization of the commitments contained in the Millennium Declaration, and specifically the MDGs. In that regard, the issues of human security, articulated through the MDGs, needed reaffirmation. Otherwise, there was a risk that security would be interpreted and implemented within too narrow a focus without an appreciation of the wider context of the development challenges that critically affect security concerns. Of particular importance in that context was the need to ensure coherence between various domestic sectoral policies, as well as coherence between domestic and international agendas. The Committee concluded that a clear interdependence among those emerging challenges must be recognized as critical in achieving the goals of the Millennium Declaration.

The Committee recognized the United Nations Public Service Awards, launched in 2003 and presented on United Nations Public Service Day, as an effective means for recognizing outstanding achievement of public service institutions. The Committee endorsed continuation of the Awards programme with further attention to refinement of the scope of the work and its selection process.

**Innovations in governance and public administration**

The Committee agreed that identifying good practice and effective innovation would be important to break with “business as usual” and engage in innovative ways of designing public policies, delivering public services and organizing the way they function and deploy their resources. Sharing knowledge on innovations and successful practices could provide Governments with a set of concrete and workable options on how to achieve internationally agreed goals.

The Committee pointed out that political and cultural conditions outside and within the public sector, as well as wide acceptance from stakeholders in specific policy areas, determined whether an innovation was successful. It noted that innovations in the public sector depended on three critical factors: the willingness to change and take risks; managerial capacity to lead change and take risks; and the resources needed for such change.

The Committee shared the view that a single universal model of participatory governance was unrealistic, considering cross-cultural differences, but noted the important linkage between good governance and citizen participation. While there was only anecdotal evidence that citizen participation
leads to better performance by government and greater citizen satisfaction, the Committee shared the general view that the strengthening of participatory institutions and opportunities and mechanisms would go a long way towards building citizen trust in government. The Committee identified areas in which citizen participation was considered critical, such as decentralization, public policy design, implementation and evaluation, public service delivery, budgeting, project monitoring and assessment, performance auditing and expenditure tracking.

The Committee agreed on the need for a common language to facilitate communication on public administration issues brought before the Council and other United Nations entities. The development of a lexicon of clarified public administration terms, especially those frequently used in United Nations documents, would be highly valuable in the effort to reduce misunderstandings.
Participatory governance and citizens’ engagement

The Committee of Experts at its sixth session in 2007 dealt with the following substantive items: (a) participatory governance and citizens’ engagement in policy development, service delivery and budgeting; (b) a compendium of basic United Nations terminology in governance and public administration; (c) review of the activities of the United Nations Programme on Public Administration; and (d) the public administration perspective on the theme of the annual ministerial review during the 2007 high-level segment of ECOSOC, “Strengthening efforts to eradicate poverty and hunger, including through the global partnership for development”.

The Committee encouraged Member States to reaffirm and deepen participatory governance and citizen engagement and initiate necessary capacity-building initiatives. In addition, the Committee noted the need to continue including cross-cutting issues of governance and public administration, particularly participatory governance, on the ECOSOC agenda relating to the implementation of internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration.

Mr. Yoshinobu Yonekawa, Project Coordinator of the development account project entitled Poverty-Environment Nexus, during the Regional Workshop on Building Institutional Capacity, Partnership Development and Participatory Governance, Hue City, Viet Nam, 23-25 May 2006.
With regard to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, the Committee noted that key interventions needed to be made on many levels. They included: (a) developing international financial and trade policies for economic growth; (b) formulating national-level redistributive policies for social objectives; (c) mobilizing and deploying resources for implementing new programmes and strengthening existing ones; and (d) making governance and public administration more responsive, efficient and effective in implementing poverty alleviation initiatives.

The Committee encouraged the Division in charge of the Programme to support the work of the working group on the Compendium of Basic United Nations Terminology in Governance and Public Administration, in collaboration with other United Nations and external bodies that are involved in similar work and those that are in a position to provide support.

Finally, the Committee concurred on a draft resolution for its consideration and adoption. The Committee also recommended that a policy brief outlining the recommendations on the main substantive themes be prepared by the Secretariat after every session in consultation with the lead speakers and approved by the Committee Bureau. The policy brief would be a follow-up document to the current and future sessions for consideration by Member States.