

## EFFECTIVENESS OF PUBLIC GOVERNANCE IN THE FACE OF THE PRINCIPLE OF EQUALITY OF CITIZENS: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC POLICIES IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

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### ABSTRACT

The article examines the difficulty of reconciling state efficiency with citizens' equality in the DRC. It shows that the pursuit of administrative performance does not necessarily ensure social justice. In Kinshasa, public services are more accessible but unevenly distributed. Urban and peripheral areas experience significant disparities in service delivery. In provinces such as Tshuapa, the weak presence of the state deepens inequalities. Access to education, healthcare, and basic services varies greatly across territories.

Thus, equality remains largely formal rather than effectively realized in practice. Logistical and institutional constraints limit the effectiveness of public policies. A governance approach adapted to local realities is essential to strengthen national cohesion.

**Keywords:** Public governance, administrative efficiency, equality of citizens, public policies, territorial inequalities, distributive justice, general interest. Since we publish in three languages, we prefer to publish the first version in French.

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The analysis of the effectiveness of public governance in the face of the principle of equality of 8 citizens is part of a central reflection of contemporary administrative sciences, that of the tension between the search for performance and the respect of normative requirements. This issue highlights a fundamental question: can public action be both effective and equitable?

Since the formation of the modern state, as conceived by Max Weber, public administration has been based on a bureaucratic model based on legal rationality, hierarchy and predictability (Weber, 1971). Today, this logic is reinforced by reforms inspired by New Public Management, which value performance, the measurement of *შედეგებს* and the optimization of public resources. In this perspective, effectiveness becomes a central criterion for evaluating public action.

However, this development raises a major question. The state cannot be reduced to a simple technical organization oriented towards the production of services. It is also the guarantor of a fundamental principle, which is the equality of citizens before the law and before the public service. As Pierre Rosanvallon points out, contemporary democratic legitimacy is not only

based on the ability to produce results, but also on impartiality and justice in their distribution (Rosanvallon, 2008).

In the same vein, Jacques Chevallier insists on the fact that the rule of law cannot be limited to a managerial logic without compromising its regulatory and egalitarian vocation (Chevallier, 2017).

In the context of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, this tension takes on a particularly concrete dimension. The country is marked by strong territorial disparities, inequalities in infrastructure and significant differences in administrative capacity between provinces such as: Kinshasa, Tshuapa, Tshopo or Equateur. These imbalances call into question the real capacity of the State to guarantee substantial equality in access to essential public services.

On the one hand, administrative efficiency is often measured through technical indicators such as speed of execution, budget management or simplification of procedures. On the other hand, equality refers to a deeper requirement, both legal and moral, which presupposes equitable access to public goods for all citizens, regardless of their location. This distinction highlights a gap between formal equality, enshrined in the texts, and real equality, observable in practice.

Thus, despite a reform discourse focused on modernization and performance, territorial inequalities persist. Some provinces benefit from a stronger state presence and better access to public services, while others remain marginalized. This situation reveals a disconnect between an ideal vision of public action that is both effective and equitable and a reality marked by institutional asymmetries and an unequal distribution of national resources.

Faced with this observation, a central question arises: how to reconcile the requirement of administrative efficiency with the principle of equality of citizens in the implementation of public policies in the DRC? In other words, is improving administrative performance enough to guarantee social justice, or is it necessary to rethink the instruments of governance to explicitly integrate the egalitarian dimension?

This question highlights a structural tension between managerial rationality and constitutional normativity. As Rosanvallon (2008) reminds us, the legitimacy of public action is based not only on its effectiveness, but also on its ability to reduce inequalities and to be perceived as fair by citizens.

In this perspective, the objective of the study is to critically analyze the compatibility between administrative efficiency and equality of citizens in the implementation of public policies in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Through a comparative approach of the provinces, it is a question of understanding whether the quest for performance really contributes to the general interest or whether it risks, on the contrary, reinforcing existing imbalances.

All in all, this reflection invites us to go beyond a strictly technical vision of public governance to adopt a more global approach, where efficiency and equity are not opposed, but complement each other. The challenge is not only to produce effective public policies, but to ensure that they effectively benefit all citizens, in a logic of justice and national cohesion.

## 2.0 CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The analysis of the effectiveness of public governance in the light of the principle of equality of citizens requires a rigorous conceptual and methodological apparatus, capable of articulating the instrumental, normative and institutional dimensions of public action. It is a question of going beyond a descriptive approach to inscribe the reflection in an epistemological problematic where the theory of the State, the sociology of organizations and the political philosophy of public law intersect.

### 2.2 Methodological frameworks

In this study, David Easton's systems method and the comparative approach are used.

#### 2.2.1 The systemic method developed by David Easton (D. Easton, 1965)

It conceives of public action as a structured political system of interactions between society and public institutions. In this perspective, the political system functions through a dynamic process articulated around several analytical elements, including inputs (social demands and support), institutional conversion mechanisms, outputs (decisions and public policies) and feedback (feedback from society).

In this author's work, the implementation of the systemic method emphasizes a set of interdependent analytical operations that make it possible to explain how a political-administrative system functions in the face of public problems.

Thus, according to David Easton, systemic analysis is based on four fundamental operations:

#### 1) Identification of inputs

It is the set of demands and support addressed to the political system. In the Congolese context, these requests come from the populations of the various provinces as well as from the neighborhoods of Kinshasa, and mainly concern access to basic public services such as health, education, infrastructure and electricity.

However, these solicitations are not expressed with the same intensity or relayed with the same efficiency depending on the space. Some provinces, because of their strategic position or political weight, have more influential channels of expression, while others struggle to make their needs heard.

In the same way, within Kinshasa, the central districts benefit from better institutional visibility than the peripheral districts, which introduces from this first operation an inequality in the consideration of citizens' needs.

#### 2) Analysis of the conversion process (conversion)

This is the central operation at Easton. It consists of studying how the system transforms inputs into public decisions. This therefore implies the functioning of institutions, administrative practices, interplay of actors (political, administrative, technical) ...

In the context of this study, it appears that this conversion does not take place in a neutral way. It is influenced by political logics, power relations and, in some cases, by governance practices that favour some territorial entities to the detriment of others.

Thus, similar requests made by different provinces or by different neighbourhoods do not give rise to the same decisions, which reflects the existence of selective filtering within the political system.

### **3) Output analysis**

This operation focuses on the results produced by the system, i.e. the public policies actually produced by the political system. These are the concrete actions of the state, such as the construction of infrastructure, the implementation of social programs or the provision of public services.

The comparative analysis carried out in this study highlights an unequal distribution of these outputs. Some provinces benefit from significant public investment, while others remain under-equipped.

At the level of Kinshasa, the differences between neighbourhoods are also evident, with privileged areas where public action is visible and others where it remains insufficient. This unequal distribution of public policies is a direct attack on the principle of equality of citizens.

### **4) Feedback analysis**

It corresponds to the reactions of the populations to the public policies implemented. These reactions can take the form of satisfaction, contestation, or disengagement. In disadvantaged areas, the inadequacy of public intervention gives rise to a feeling of injustice and marginalization, reflecting a negative perception of State action.

However, in the context studied, this feedback is poorly integrated into the decision-making process. The mechanisms for effectively reporting the concerns of the population to the authorities appear to be limited, which prevents a correction of the imbalances observed and contributes to their persistence.

The application of these four fundamental operations of the systemic method thus makes it possible to show that the inequality of citizens in the face of public policies in the Democratic Republic of Congo is the result of a methodical process, in which each step participates in the production and reproduction of disparities between provinces and between neighborhoods of Kinshasa.

#### **2.2.2 Comparative approach**

The comparative approach, used in addition to the systemic method, makes it possible to analyze inequalities in the implementation of public policies in the Democratic Republic of Congo. It consists of linking different territorial realities in order to reveal the differences, similarities and explanatory factors, beyond a simple description of the situations.

At the provincial level, this approach shows that, despite a common institutional framework, public policies produce uneven effects: some regions benefit from more investment, infrastructure and social services, while others lag behind. In Kinshasa, the comparison between neighbourhoods also reveals significant disparities in access to public services and facilities, confirming the existence of intra-urban inequalities.

Beyond the observation, the comparative approach makes it possible to identify the causes of these imbalances, in particular the political weight, economic factors or the location of territories. It thus highlights the structural nature of inequalities and questions the respect of the principle of equality of citizens in public action in the DRC.

For the collection of data, documentary techniques have made it possible to analyze laws, reports and statistics to reveal the gap between norms and reality. The semi-structured interviews gathered in-depth information from public actors and civil society. The questionnaires measured citizens' perceptions of access to services and equity. Direct observation has made it possible to see in concrete terms the real functioning of public services. The comparative case studies helped to compare situations between different provinces. Secondary data provided additional information that already existed.

As for data processing, qualitative content analysis made it possible to interpret the discourses and practices of the actors. The quantitative analysis made it possible to process the numerical data collected. Statistical calculations were used to present the results in frequencies and percentages. All of these techniques have enabled a global and reliable understanding of governance.

## **2.1 Conceptual clarification**

SUMMARIZE THE DEFINITIONS OF CONCEPTS YOU USE IN A FEW LINES

### **2.1.1 Public governance: from hierarchical administration to multi-stakeholder coordination**

The notion of governance marks a paradigmatic shift in relation to the classical conception of public administration. In the Weberian tradition, the modern state is characterized by rational-legal domination and by the centrality of bureaucracy as an instrument of social regulation. Max Weber conceptualizes administration as an apparatus structured by hierarchy, technical competence and the impersonality of rules (Weber, 1978).

However, contemporary governance goes beyond the bureaucratic dimension alone. It refers to a system of coordination involving public actors, local authorities, private organisations and civil society. In this perspective, Guy Peters emphasizes that governance reflects a transformation of the state, moving from a vertical model of command to a horizontal model of negotiation and networking.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, this change can be observed through constitutional decentralization and the emergence of partnership mechanisms. However, the pluralization of decision-making centres complicates the uniform guarantee of territorial equality.

### **2.1.2 Administrative efficiency: instrumental rationality and public performance**

Efficiency, in its administrative sense, refers to the ability of an organization to achieve the assigned objectives with an optimal mobilization of resources. It is distinguished from efficiency (cost/result ratio) and effectiveness (real impact of policies).

The introduction of managerial logics in the public sector, particularly through New Public Management, has reinforced the centrality of performance indicators. The administration becomes evaluated according to quantifiable criteria including processing time, budget execution, quality of services. This orientation corresponds to what Weber (1978) already identified as the "formal rationalization" of social action.

However, a strictly instrumental approach carries the risk of reducing public action to a technocratic logic, to the detriment of its axiological dimension. Efficiency cannot be thought of independently of the purpose it serves, the general interest.

### **2.1.3 Equality of citizens: normative principle and substantive requirement**

The principle of equality is one of the pillars of the rule of law (Constitution of the DRC, 2006). In French administrative law, whose doctrinal influence remains significant than in the DRC, equality before the public service implies that users in a comparable situation are treated in the same way.

Jacques Chevallier (2017) reminds us that equality is not only a formal rule, it is a structuring requirement of administrative legitimacy. However, formal equality can coexist with deep material inequalities when institutional capacities vary from one territory to another.

The distinction between formal equality and substantive equality becomes crucial here. Substantive equality requires a correction of deep disparities in order to guarantee effective access to public goods. It commits the State to a distributive and territorial logic.

### **2.1.4 The general interest: a teleological category of public action**

The general interest is the normative purpose of administrative action. A concept historically rooted in the republican tradition, it refers to the synthesis of particular interests transcended by the collective will. However, the general interest cannot be presumed, it must be constructed and justified. In this regard, Pierre Rosanvallon (2008) shows that contemporary democratic legitimacy is based on three dimensions, namely: impartiality, reflexivity and proximity. Thus, the general interest cannot be reduced to decision-making efficiency, not at all, it presupposes a recognition of social and territorial diversity.

In the Congolese context, the central question then becomes: does administrative efficiency really contribute to the achievement of the general interest, or does it reinforce certain existing asymmetries?

## **3 0 RESULTS**

### **3.1 Introduction to Results**

The empirical analysis of public policies in the Democratic Republic of Congo reveals a systemic complexity that articulates the institutional, social and territorial dimensions of governance.

The data highlight contrasting trends across provinces, illustrating how the principle of equality of citizens enshrined in the Congolese Constitution is in practice unevenly respected and implemented (Ministry of Planning, 2020). This section identifies three main axes, namely: the citizen perception of the effectiveness of governance, the impact of public policies on the reduction of inequalities, and the critical analysis of the institutional mechanisms in place.

### **3.1 Citizens' perception of the effectiveness of public governance**

One of the major results lies in the divergence of perception of public governance according to the territorial and socio-economic context.

#### **3.1.1 Kinshasa: centrality and institutional visibility**

In Kinshasa, the capital and main administrative and economic centre of the country, the visibility of public institutions is high. Citizens can more easily interact with public services and access information on policies. However, qualitative and quantitative surveys reveal that this proximity does not automatically guarantee equitable governance.

The centralization of resources creates a hierarchy of access to services, often favorable to urban and economically active populations. Social and fiscal programs, although numerous, suffer from selective implementation, leaving certain categories marginalized, including residents of peripheral neighborhoods and migrant populations. This observation underlines a discrepancy between the theoretical principle of equality and its concrete materialization, illustrating a gap between legal texts and administrative practice.

#### **3.2.2 Remote Provinces: Tshuapa and the Challenge of State Visibility**

In provinces such as Tshuapa, where the state struggles to deploy its services due to distance and logistical constraints (impassable roads, deficient infrastructure), the effectiveness of public governance is perceived as weak and sporadic. Access to education, health and justice remains highly unequal, creating a sense of abandonment and marginalization among citizens.

Local authorities, often insufficiently trained and endowed with limited resources, have limited room for manoeuvre to implement uniform public policies. These results suggest that the effectiveness of public governance in the DRC is strongly correlated with administrative density and the physical presence of the state, which introduces a form of implicit territorial inequality.

#### **3.2.3 Interprovincial Comparison**

The juxtaposition of Kinshasa and the peripheral provinces reveals a systemic divide in access to fundamental rights in the sense that Kinshasa residents benefit from increased exposure to social programs, but remain vulnerable to clientelist practices.

The populations of Tshuapa, Ituri and Kasai suffer a double disadvantage. Firstly, geographical distance, and secondly, the lack of monitoring and control mechanisms for public policies.

### **3.3 Analysis of the impact of public policies on equality**

The implementation of the principle of equality in public policies can be evaluated through several dimensions, including access to services, citizen participation and the redistribution of resources.

#### **3.3.1 Access to public services**

The results show an inequality in systemic access to essential services in the DRC.

Education: In some provinces, less than 40 per cent of children reach secondary school, while in Kinshasa the rate exceeds 70 per cent.

In the area of health, immunization and primary care programmes are concentrated in large cities, marginalizing rural areas.

This disparity is a clear indicator that public policies fail to standardize opportunities among citizens, in contradiction with the constitutional principle of equality.

#### **3.3.2 Citizen participation and social control**

The field research has shown that citizen participation in the decision-making process is unevenly distributed in the sense that Kinshasa's urban dwellers have easier access to public consultations, forums and the media, favouring their influence on local policies.

Data shows that in the peripheral provinces, the lack of robust consultation mechanisms reduces citizens' ability to express their needs or denounce dysfunctions. This asymmetry limits the effectiveness of public policies and accentuates perceptions of inequity.

#### **3.3.3 Redistribution of resources**

In this regard, the budget analysis reveals that the distribution of public resources is biased insofar as financial transfers to the provinces often depend on political proximity or population density, rather than on real needs. Major infrastructure projects are concentrated around urban centers and strategic axes, leaving remote areas underdeveloped despite the famous development program of 145 territories that unfortunately did not meet the expectations of the people.

These observations show that formal equality in law does not translate into real equality in practice, and that public governance remains a vector of inequality.

### **3.4 Illustrative cases: Kinshasa and Tshuapa**

To better understand the concrete implications of the results, two illustrative cases are presented below.

### **3.4.1 Kinshasa: intra-urban disparity**

Despite the concentration of services, the capital has notable differences between districts. The outlying districts, such as Kimbanseke or Nsele, have a deficit in health infrastructure and public schools. What is still disappointing is that redistribution programmes, such as subsidies to SMEs or social assistance, mainly favour central areas and populations that are already economically integrated.

This observation underlines that even in a dense urban environment, substantive equality remains compromised by institutional selectivity.

### **3.4.2 Tshuapa: Governance and Structural Marginalization**

In Tshuapa, the challenges are amplified by the remoteness and weak presence of the state. People have to travel tens of kilometres to access an administrative centre or a health facility.

The lack of monitoring of public policies allows for the proliferation of informal practices and the intervention of non-state actors to fill the gaps. The case of Tshuapa illustrates the convergence between institutional inefficiency and the practical violation of the principle of equality, where the state struggles to ensure uniform coverage of rights and services.

Overall, the results show that the effectiveness of public governance in the DRC is highly contrasted, oscillating between areas of high institutional visibility and areas of virtual administrative abandonment. The principle of equality of citizens, although central to the national legislative corpus, remains largely theoretical in practice, affected by logistical, political and socio-economic constraints.

This analysis provides an empirical basis for critical reflection on the design and implementation of truly inclusive and equitable public policies, inviting us to rethink the modalities of planning, monitoring and citizen control throughout the national territory.

## **4.0 DISCUSSION**

The present discussion aims to articulate the results obtained with the fundamental theories and concepts relating to public governance and citizen equality, while situating these findings in the specific socio-political context of the Democratic Republic of Congo. It focuses on the analysis of governance mechanisms, the coherence between public policies and the effective realization of the principle of equality, and the confrontation with the reflections of major authors in the field.

### **4.1 Public governance and territorial inequalities: a problematic articulation**

The results clearly show that the effectiveness of public governance in the DRC is highly differentiated according to territory, corroborating the observations of Pierre Rosanvallon (1995) on "unequal treatment in the modern state" where access to rights and services depends on proximity to administrative centres and available resources. In Kinshasa, for example, despite the institutional density and concentration of public services, intra-urban disparities

persist, reflecting a hierarchy of access to rights, similar to what Jean-Michel Eyméri-Douzans (2010) reminds us in his analyses of urban governance in a post-conflict context.

Conversely, in peripheral provinces such as Tshuapa or Kasai, the state is almost absent, and the populations face systemic marginalization, illustrating the tension between the formal equality enshrined in the Congolese Constitution and real equality in access to public services. This territorial fragmentation is in line with the conclusions of Pierre Englebert (2003) on African states, for whom the legitimacy and effectiveness of public action depend on the state's ability to maintain effective control over the entire territory.

The gap observed between the central and peripheral areas underlines that Congolese public governance still operates according to a centralized and unequal model, where the concentration of resources in capitals and urban centers creates a polarization of opportunities.

In epistemological terms, this situation reflects a discontinuity between the legal norm and its implementation, reminiscent of the concept of the "governance gap" described by Robert Klitgaard (1991), where institutional efficiency is hampered by structural asymmetries and logistical constraints.

#### **4.2 Formal equality and substantive equality**

One of the main contributions of the study lies in the highlighting of the gap between formal equality and real equality, a central notion in the theory of the rule of law and administrative science. According to Rawls (1971), the equality of citizens cannot be reduced to a constitutional declaration; It requires effective mechanisms for redistribution and equitable access to resources and services.

In the Congolese context, our results confirm that public policies, whether in education, health, or financial redistribution, fail to ensure substantial equality between citizens. The peripheral provinces, often far from the main logistical and political routes, suffer from a lack of institutional coverage. This corresponds to what Martha Nussbaum (2000) calls limited capabilities, where poverty and spatial isolation restrict the real ability of individuals to exercise their fundamental rights.

Thus, the inequality observed is not only economic, but institutional and territorial, which complicates the task of public governance to achieve the constitutional principle of equality. This observation highlights that the mere existence of normative texts is not enough: administrative capacity and the coherence of implementation mechanisms are decisive in transforming the law into a tangible reality for all citizens.

#### **4.3 Governance and effectiveness of public policies: limits and prospects**

The discussion of the results invites us to question the notion of the effectiveness of public governance as it manifests itself in the Congolese context. Evidence shows that the implementation of public policies is hampered by several factors, including:

##### **4.3.1 Lack of effective control and monitoring mechanisms**

As Kaufmann and Kraay (2007) point out, governance is assessed not only by the formulation of policies, but above all by the ability to ensure coherence and transparency in their implementation. In the DRC, the non-existence or weakness of localized control structures contributes to the persistence of inequalities and the opacity of public management.

#### **4.3.2 Influence of local socio-political factors**

The establishment of public services is sometimes conditioned by clientelist or political logics, confirming the analyses of Englebort and Tull (2008) on the influence of power networks and boss-client relations in fragile African states.

#### **4.3.3 Logistical and territorial constraints**

Provinces such as Tshuapa illustrate the challenges of geographical isolation, poor infrastructure and dispersed populations. This reality limits the effectiveness of social programs and reproduces forms of structural marginalization.

These observations reveal that the effectiveness of public governance in the DRC is contingent on a complex articulation between administrative capacity, the physical presence of the state and local ownership of public policies. They also highlight the need for differentiated policies, adapted to territorial specificities and the real capacities of local institutions.

#### **4.4 Contribution to the literature and epistemological positioning**

The study enriches the reflection on public governance in post-conflict contexts and with strong territorial heterogeneity. From an epistemological point of view, it first confirms that governance cannot be reduced to the existence of laws and institutional structures because its effectiveness is measured in the ability to achieve substantive equality among citizens, according to Sen's (1999) concepts of human development and capabilities.

Confirms that the gaps between theory and practice illustrate a fundamental tension, typical of fragile states, between legal norms and the effectiveness of rights, in accordance with Max Weber's work on bureaucracy and the rational legitimacy of public action.

Finally, confirms that critical reflection on public policies must integrate both normative analysis (formal equality) and empirical analysis (substantive equality), in order to design interventions that go beyond the simple legal prescription and take into account the socio-territorial reality.

Thus, this discussion highlights the need for an integrative approach, combining institutional reform, strengthening local administrative capacity and the inclusion of citizens in the decision-making process, to reduce the gap between constitutional principle and citizens' lived experience.

#### **4.5 Practical implications and recommendations**

The results and this discussion suggest several lines of thought to improve the effectiveness of public governance and respect for the principle of equality in the DRC. These include:

#### **4.5.1 Operational decentralisation**

Strengthen local structures with appropriate budgetary and human resources to reduce territorial inequalities.

#### **4.5.2 Strengthening transparency and citizen control**

Develop monitoring and reporting mechanisms that allow citizens to actively participate in governance.

#### **4.5.3 Differentiated Approach by Province**

Design policies that are tailored to the specific realities of each province, rather than applying one-size-fits-all programs that appear to be ineffective in some provinces.

#### **4.5.4 Training and professionalisation of local actors**

Improve the technical and administrative skills of public officials to ensure the effective implementation of public policies.

These recommendations are in line with the work of Ostrom (1990) on polycentric governance, who emphasizes that the effectiveness of institutions depends on the ability to articulate local coordination and normative centralization.

In sum, the discussion of the results shows that public governance in the DRC remains an imperfect instrument to guarantee the equality of citizens, due to systemic, territorial and institutional constraints. The gap observed between formal equality and real equality is a major challenge for the consolidation of the State and the legitimacy of public policies.

The critical analysis proposed here contributes to enriching the literature on governance in the post-conflict African context, by highlighting the complexity of the interactions between institutions, citizens and territory, and by highlighting the need for a refoundation of public policy on normative, empirical and contextual bases.

### **5.0 CONCLUSION**

The analysis of public governance in the Democratic Republic of the Congo highlights a marked contrast between the constitutional principles of equality and their actual implementation. Despite a legal framework affirming the universality of rights, the effectiveness of this equality remains limited by structural, territorial and institutional constraints.

In Kinshasa, the strong presence of the state and the concentration of public services give an impression of performance, but mask significant inequalities between neighbourhoods. Conversely, in provinces such as Tshuapa, geographical remoteness and weak infrastructure accentuate the marginalization of populations, revealing a deep gap between formal and substantive equality.

Drawing on the contributions of Pierre Rosanvallon, Pierre Englebert, John Rawls and Amartya Sen, this reflection shows that the real challenge for public governance in the DRC lies in its ability to transform legal norms into concrete and inclusive practices.

The results thus underline the need for a renewed approach, based on better consideration of territorial realities, local capacity building and more active citizen participation. Thus, the effectiveness of public action cannot be dissociated from social justice. For equality to become real, it must be integrated into the very heart of public policies and institutional practices.

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