Meeting on
“Innovations in Governance in the Mediterranean Region with a Special Focus on Methodologies for the Transfer of Innovations”

Introduction to the Theme

Adriana Alberti
Programme for Innovation in Public Administration in the Euro-Mediterranean Region
Division for Public Administration and Development Management
United Nations

23 – 25 April 2008 - Dubrovnik, Croatia
Excellencies, Distinguished experts, Ladies and Gentlemen, Mr. Chairperson:

It is a great pleasure for me to be here today among such a distinguished group of people. I would like to join Mr. Bertucci in thanking our host organization, the Central State Office for Administration of the Government of Croatia, for their collaboration in preparing this meeting. It has been indeed a wonderful experience to work with them.

The quest for innovations in the public sector has been on-going for quite sometime, but with the need for the world to achieve the commitments made by its leaders in the Millennium Declaration, the 2005 World Summit and many other global and regional conferences, it has attained a level of urgency. It has dawned on most people concerned with the improvement of performance in the public sector that although innovations in government are circumscribed in scope, they have the potential to trigger a bigger process of transformation of the State and produce general positive benefits to citizens through improved service delivery.

The global consensus on the urgency of innovations in the Public sector is not only manifested in the research efforts that are focusing on new pathways to improving the performance of governance and public administration institutions. It is also seen in the way innovators are readily coming together to share information and knowledge about their innovations and how they can be exchanged to minimize wastage of resources and to avoid re-inventing the wheel. There are networks of innovators being formed for purposes of sharing and adapting successful practices in innovation. One of them is the network of Innovators in the Mediterranean region which is being spearheaded by the Programme for Innovation in Public Administration in the Mediterranean Region - InnovMed as part of the Innovations Program of the Division for Public Administration and Development Management of UNDESA.

As shown by the United Nations Public Service Awards and a number of other award programmes in various regions of the world, there is great capacity in all corners of the globe to reinvent government and to launch innovative practices in governance. Disseminating information about innovations in government, and most importantly,
transforming this information into knowledge so that it may benefit countries looking for effective solutions to their governance problems, is a challenge that the United Nations has taken up very seriously. Although there are no “one-size-fits-all” solutions to complex issues, sharing successful experiences offers an opportunity for innovation in governance and public administration.

Learning from others and adapting successful experiences can be a very good tool to improve the performance of the public sector. Through the InnovMed programme, UNDESA can facilitate the process of transfer and adaptation of innovations in governance by designing and implementing pilot projects.

Governments that adapt a successful practice from another country can benefit in a relatively short time from the achievements of others and increase the quality of their public administration while Governments that wish to provide support in adapting their own locally grown successful initiative can gain greater prestige and recognition of excellence in the public service; contribute to improving the quality of life of citizens worldwide and learn important lessons from the process of adaptation in order to improve even further their own initiative.

Successful practices and innovations can be effectively transferred and there is evidence that it can be done. The process of adapting an innovation presents, however, a number of challenges. Knowing what to do is one thing, knowing how to do it is a challenge in its own right. To facilitate the replication of a best practice, governments interested in adapting innovations in governance need a set of tools and steps that can assist them in using the acquired knowledge about a successful practice and how to put that knowledge into practice.

In facilitating the transfer process, organizing study tours between an originating and a recipient organization hardly seems to suffice. Therefore, in replicating good practices there are two major issues of concern, knowledge management and organizational change.

Knowledge management implies transferring ideas, as well as know how, skills and lessons learned in the implementation process of an innovation. Knowledge management
depends heavily on the ability of both parties to recognize and communicate knowledge. For example, when it comes to recognition, the idea behind a specific innovation is more important than the innovation itself. The originating organization has to articulate knowledge, while the recipient organization has to explain and use knowledge for good practice, often in a modified or adapted form.

**Organizational change** starts with strong leadership, a clear vision and an organizational culture supportive of innovation. The chances that change may occur increase if leaders communicate about the need for change within the organization, as well as with other stakeholders. The latter has to be managed carefully resulting in a sense of direction. Social capital is vital to the creation, implementation and dissemination of innovation. Factors that hinder innovation are for example administrative formalism, a change in a law or adoption of a practice without reference to contextual variables and structural/institutional barriers that inhibit the implementation of an innovation. The natural tendency of people to reject a practice ‘that is not invented here’ doesn’t facilitate the innovation process either.

One of the purposes of this Meeting is to provide a methodology for the transfer of innovations in public administration. As you know, the objective of this Meeting is to provide a platform to:

a) Share knowledge about areas of successful and potential innovation in governments of the Mediterranean Region;
b) Present and discuss recommendations on how to promote further a culture of innovation in governance in the Mediterranean region, including the relevance of transferring best practices; and
c) Share information about selected innovative practices in public administration; and
d) Provide the opportunity to discuss and “experience” a transfer of innovation through a management training programme (during the third day).

The Meeting will be held over three days. The first two days of the Meeting will be articulated into plenary sessions. At the end of the Second Day of the Meeting, government officials and experts will discuss and adopt the “Dubrovnik Declaration on Promoting a
Culture of Innovation in Governance and Public Administration in the Mediterranean Region”. The third day will be devoted to a training programme related to the technical aspects of transferring innovations in public administration. It is targeted to government officials and experts that have already expressed interest (or are potentially interested) in replicating selected innovations. At the end of the Third Day of the Meeting, an Action Plan for the adaptation of selected innovations in public administration will be established. Special focus will also be given to the transfer of innovations as one of the modalities to exchange knowledge about good practices and to adapt successful ideas. In this context, the members of the Network of Innovators in Governance in the Mediterranean Region will talk about perceived challenges and opportunities in transferring innovations.

In brief, during these three days will look first at what governments have been doing in terms of innovation in public administration; what are the potential areas for innovation and how to facilitate the improvement of public sector performance through knowledge sharing and adaptation of good practices.

I thank you for your attention