AIDE-MEMOIRE ON

Expert Group Meeting
"The Future of Digital Government for Sustainable Development in Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Small Island Developing States (SIDS), and the Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs)"

Part of Preparatory Process for the
United Nations E-Government Survey 2020

Organized by the
United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA)
Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG)

4-5 June 2019
Incheon, Republic of Korea

1. PURPOSE

The Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG), UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), through its Project Office on Governance (UNPOG), is organizing an Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on the Emerging Trends and Needs of Digital Government in Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and the Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs). This is part of the preparation process of the United Nations E-Government Survey 2020.

The purpose of the meeting is to provide a platform for governance and public administration practioners and experts (including in e-government) from UN entities, international organizations and academia to share regional and country perspectives, especially those of LDCs, SIDS and LLDCs in the Asia Pacific region. It focusses on:

1. how the 2020 E-government Survey can capture and reflect in its assessment on the emerging issues and trends in new technologies and e-government, as well as digital challenges with the country groupings LDCs, SIDS and LLDCs.
2. how to enhance digital inclusion, engagement and partnerships for leaving no one behind and ways to capture this through improving/updating the E-participation index (EPI)[1] and
3. expanded collaboration between UN DESA and other regional actors and international organizations in working in the fields of e-government, new technologies and digital cooperation, especially in meeting the needs of LDCs, SIDS and LLDCs.

During this Expert Group Meeting, the exchange of views and reflections will be used to update the current methodological approach of the Survey, ensuring to capture the current trends and cutting-edge ways that digital government could be deployed by LDCs, SIDS and LLDCs to achieve the SDGs, integrated to respective national development goals.

2. BACKGROUND

UN DESA assessed e-government development for the first time in 2001 with a survey entitled "Benchmarking E-government: A Global Perspective -- Assessing the UN Member States". The survey analyzes the approach, progress and commitment of all United Nations Member States [2] to the advancement of e-government. It also examines how digital technologies and innovations are impacting the public sector changing people's everyday lives, enhancing their wellbeing and contributing to the achievement of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The survey is based on the understanding that e-government improves the quality of and access to government services; supports participation, transparency, and accountability; helps to improve coordination in government; contributes to social equity as well as to managing the risk of disasters or

---

[2] https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/en-us/About/Overview/E-Participation-Index

reducing carbon emissions. Since 2003 it has been published at regular intervals, becoming a flagship recurrent publication of UN DESA.

While giving an indicative assessment of the diffusion of e-government through a performance rating of national governments relative to one another, the survey is not designed to capture e-government development in an absolute sense. It rather presents the ranking of e-government development across the 193 Member States by assessing e-government development according to a quantitative composite index based on Online Service, Telecommunication Infrastructure, and Human Capital indexes. The idea is to provide decision makers with information that enables them to identify how they compare with others in e-government development, understand their areas of strengths and challenges, as well as to consider suggested options on how best to move ahead.

In preparation for each new edition of the Survey, great attention is given to reviewing its thematic areas, as well as to updating the questionnaire used to assess the online presence of countries. The number of new questions and themes is limited in scope to avoid major discrepancies with the previous editions and allow for comparative analysis over time.

3. CONTEXT

Digital revolution, signifying the scale, spread, and speed of change brought about by digital technology, is considered as the greatest single enabler of sustainable development in upcoming years and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has embraced the spread of ICTs for their potential to accelerate human progress, bridge divides and develop knowledge societies. As highlighted also in the UN Secretary General's Strategy on New Technologies "digital technologies can offer powerful new ways to achieve our shared commitments to each and every one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)", and "can turbocharge" the world's efforts for peace and sustainable development.

In June 2018 the United Nations Secretary-General launched the High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation, further elevating the importance of digital technologies in contributing to the realization of the 2030 Agenda. This relates particularly to targets with a deadline of 2020, including SDG target 9c on significantly increasing access to information and communications technology and striving to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020.

While digital technologies cut uniquely across international borders, cooperation at global, regional and national levels is critical to realize the full social and economic potential of digital technologies, mitigating the risks they pose, and curtailing any unintended consequences. Thus, addressing the challenges of digitalization would need concerted efforts of various stakeholders for identifying opportunities for innovation and diffusion of digital technologies and for finding regional and country-specific solutions to bridge the digital divides.

The biannual Global E-Government Survey, one of the key DPIDG activities, serves as a data source to track the progress of digital and e-government development on global and regional levels. Each E-

DRAFT

Government Survey generates high interest among the UN Member States not only as a tool to track their progress, but also to learn from global experiences and gain insights for policy formulation in priority areas specific for their countries. The press coverage about the 2018 Survey alone reached 250 articles in 78 countries within the first two months after its publication in July 2018. By February 2019, thanks to UN Member States assistance, the Survey became available in five UN languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, Russian and Spanish) as well as in Portuguese and Korean.

Building on its long-standing work on electronic and digital government, DPIDG has continuously promoted smart and good governance, including through cooperation and knowledge exchange on issues related to digital governance with the five UN Economic and Social Commissions -- ESCAP, UNECA, ECLAC, ESCWA, UNECE. The five regional commissions also support further the Member States in utilization of digital technologies for sustainable development based on local circumstances and potential.

Thus, in line with the vision of Secretary-General for cooperation in the digital space among UN entities and Member State governments, DPIDG is dedicating a special track during the upcoming EGM for discussions of global and regional perspectives on digital government and the 2020 E-Government Survey.

4. FOCUS OF THE EGM:

The conceptual framework of Survey and the e-government development index (EGDI) is based on a holistic view of e-government development that incorporates three components: provision of online services through a quantitative survey assessment (the Online Services Index (OSI), assessed by DPIDG), availability of telecommunication connectivity (the Telecommunication Infrastructure Index (TII), assessed by ITU) and the level of human capacity development (the Human Capital Index (HCI), assessed by UNESCO). The Survey has also given a lot of attention thus far to assessing central government portals, including national portals, e-services portals and e-participation portals, as well as the websites of ministries of education, labour, social services, health, finance and environment and other related ministries, as applicable, in line with the priorities of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

To capture the fast-evolving e-government development, the online survey questionnaire is normally updated prior to each biennial Survey. Most of the questions are binary as to whether a feature is present on a website (yes, or 1) or unavailable (no, or 0). At the same time, the questionnaire provides an opportunity to improve some of the areas of inquiry based on emerging and promising e-government practices to improve the overall accuracy of OSI rankings.

Countries in special situations like LDCs, SIDS and LLDCs face geopolitical realities and socio-economic dependencies, along with prevalent development challenges such as the scarcity of resources, spatial segregation, capacity gaps and barriers to major markets. For example, the LDCs represent the poorest and weakest segment of the international community. They comprise more than 880 million people (about 12% of the world population), but account for less than 2% of the world gross domestic product (GDP) and about 1% of global trade in goods. Their low level of socio-economic development is

characterized by weak human and institutional capacities, low and unequally distributed income and scarcity of domestic financial resources. They often suffer from governance crises, political instability and, in some cases, internal and external conflicts. Despite the recognition of e-government as both an enabler and multiplier of sustainable development, the LDCs, however, have not been able reap sustainable benefits through e-government.

Among the small states, the SIDS are particularly vulnerable to climate change such as the rise in sea-level and large ocean-atmospheric interactions like typhoons and tsunamis. The SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action [S.A.M.O.A.] Pathway, adopted by the General Assembly in 2014, recognized the enabling role of information communication technologies (ICTs) to sustain high levels of economic and social growth in SIDS. It also highlighted the importance to increase connectivity and enhance the use of ICTs through improved infrastructure, training and national legislation, as well as through partnership with the private sector and other stakeholders. Likewise, despite the much-reported benefits of ICTs, its development and adoption by SIDS in general have so far been limited. Reasons for this include lack of awareness of what ICT can offer, insufficient telecommunications infrastructure and Internet connectivity, expensive Internet access, absence of adequate legal and regulatory frameworks, shortage of requisite human capacity, failure to use local language and content, and lack of entrepreneurship and a business culture open to change.

This EGM will reflect on country groups (LDCs, SIDS and LLDCs) perspectives on digital/e-government development and suggest improvements to survey methodology, if needed, to better measure e-government and how it contributes to the implementation of the SDGs. Given the overarching umbrella of leaving no one behind (LNOB) of 2030 Agenda and supporting digital inclusion, the EGM will particularly discuss possible improvements in the methodology for measuring e-participation (the E-Participation Index (EPI)).

5. OBJECTIVES OF THE EGM

The EGM aims to bring together the practioners, experts and other key stakeholders to stimulate discussions from country groups (LDCs, SIDS and LLDCs) perspectives on how e-government practices can fully capitalize on the promises of digital technologies supporting sustainable development. The experts will discuss the advancement of new technologies and innovative practices in the digital field to improve the assessment of the OSI and the *E-Government Survey 2020* overall. If necessary and possible, the experts will suggest improvements to the methodology of the survey, particularly on measuring the EPI for digital inclusion, and in considering the needs and demands of constituents in LDCs, SIDS and LLDCs.

The EGM will aim to make proposals on the outline, content, and methodology of the 2020 Survey.

More specifically, the participants will address the below questions:

● What are the specific challenges in e-government/digital government development in LDCs, SIDS and LLDCs respectively?

- What are the dominant trends in the advancement of digital technologies that affect e-government globally and particularly LDCs, SIDS and LLDCs?
- What are the possible ways of capturing these trends and changes through the online survey questionnaire?
- How can we better complement the overall E-Government Survey methodology with the focus on LDCs, SIDS and LLDCs?
- How can EPI be adjusted or improved to capture better the aspects of digital inclusion, including e-participation, e-engagement and e-partnerships especially for LDCs, SIDS and LLDCs?
- In relation to LDCs, SIDS and LLDCs, what should the Survey focus on in general in 2020?

6. EXPECTED RESULTS

This two-day meeting will be tightly structured, with a clear focus on seeking advice and recommendations for updating the Survey themes, methodology, questionnaire and indicators. The EGM is expected to achieve the following outputs:

- Suggestions for improving the 2020 E-Government Survey, superficially through possible enhancements of the survey methodology to reflect challenges of LDCs, SIDS and LLDCs with a more in-depth country analysis and case studies.
- Recommendations on possible enhancements to the Survey methodology on E-Participation Index (EPI) to reflect trends and needs of LDCs, SIDS and LLDCs
- Suggestions on key thematic areas, relevant issues and e-services that can advance sustainable development and should be considered in the United Nations E-Government Survey 2020 in line with the SDGs and their Targets, also considering LDCs, SIDS and LLDCs
- Suggestions for a structured E-Government Survey focus on LDCs, SIDS and LLDCs, including the country group perspective and the thematic part.

7. ORGANIZATION

7.1. Participants

The EGM will be attended by a number of governance and public administration experts, practitioners and academia, from LDCs, SIDS and LLDCs. Special efforts will be made also to draw experts from a variety of fields, including the private sector and other relevant international organizations, such as the APEC, ADB, ILO, ITU Regional Office, Pacific Island Forum Secretariat, UN ESCAP, UNISDR, World Bank, and World Economic Forum.

7.2. Recommended readings for participants

To aid the meeting's deliberations, experts are encouraged to read and review, prior to the meeting, the *United Nations e-Government Survey 2018*, and possibly previous editions (available online) as well as selected key documents listed below.

1. 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Development Goals
2. SG's strategy on New Technologies
3. HLPF Report 2018
4. STI Forum Report 2018
5. Expert Group Meeting on "E-Government, Digital Cooperation and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)" - In Preparation of the United Nations E-Government Survey 2020 (1-2 April 2019, Conference Room 8, UN Secretariat Building, New York, NY 10017)
6. Informal Communique of Symposium on "Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SAMOA Pathway in Small Island Developing States -SIDS: Equipping Public Institutions and Mobilizing Partnerships", 21-23 February 2017, Nassau, Commonwealth of the Bahamas

7.3. Structure of the meeting

The Meeting will be organized over the course of two days with plenary sessions and working groups. Experts will be invited to share their knowledge and views. To facilitate discussions and exchanges of views, an overview paper will be prepared and presented in the plenary session of the first day.

7.4. Official languages

The official language of the EGM will be English.

7.5. Online communication

A mailing list will be created for participants to have discussions before and after the meeting.

CONTACT INFORMATION

For Substantive Matters:
Mr. Wai Min Kwok
Senior Governance and Public Administration Officer
Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG)
United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA)
Tel: +1 917-367-3026
Email: kwok@un.org

DRAFT

Mr. Keping Yao
Governance and Public Administration Expert
UN Project Office on Governance (UNPOG)
Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG)
United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA)
Tel: +82 32 859-8600
Email: yaok@un.org

Ms. Mi Kyoung Park
Governance and Public Administration Officer
UN Project Office on Governance (UNPOG)
Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG)
United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA)
Tel: +82 32 859-8600
Email: mikyoung.park@un.org

For Administrative Matters:
Ms. Hye Kyung Choi
UN Project Office on Governance (UNPOG)
Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG)
United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA)
Tel: +82 32 859-8600
E-mail: choi9@un.org