E-Participation: Empowering People through Information Communication Technologies (ICTs)

Geneva, Switzerland
24-26 July 2013

A High Level Seminar by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA)

1 This meeting is organized jointly by the Division for Social Policy and Development (DSPD) and Division for Public Administration and Development Management (DPADM) of the UNDESA. DSPD is responsible for the expert group meeting (yellow track) while DPADM is holding a 3-day international meeting, to review the draft METEP toolkit (the Measurement and Evaluation Tool for E-Participation Readiness) design and application as part of its development account project entitled “Developing capacity for e-Participation: Engaging citizens in development policy and decision-making processes through ICTs.”
Background

United Nations Member States have recognized broad public participation as a “fundamental prerequisite for the achievement of sustainable development.” At the same time, people around the world are demanding active participation in public life. Participation is critical to ensure that development will lift people out of poverty and hunger, and a development path that leaves millions of people in poverty, unemployed, uneducated and socially excluded is not sustainable. Participation is also necessary to improve public accountability and, therefore, achieve good governance.

Recent inter-governmental deliberations have highlighted the importance of increasing public participation through the engagement and empowerment of citizens in the achievement of Internationally Agreed Development Goals (IADGs), including the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), and setting the development agenda beyond 2015. A weakness of the MDG framework is the perception that it was the outcome of a top-down process that did not involve citizens and, therefore, was not owned by the communities and populations that it intended to serve. As implied in outcome document of Rio +20, “The Future We Want”, it has been recognized by Governments that this weakness should not be replicated in the push for a common vision of sustainable development.

The United Nations Regional Commissions have also highlighted the aforementioned issues. In March 2012, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa recommended “efforts to articulate an African position on the development agenda beyond 2015 via making use of a participatory approach that takes into consideration the viewpoints of all Stakeholders.” As part of its regional Action Plan eLAC2015, the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) seeks to "build inclusive and innovative digital societies." And the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) has called for multiple actions on ICT accessibility, including the establishment of ICT accessibility units in relevant ministries and government agencies, to increase the participation of people with disabilities in decision-making processes.

http://www.unccd2012.org/thefuturewewant.html


There is a need to identify challenges in fostering public participation in political and economic processes at the national and sub-national levels. There is also a need to assess how the international community can help create a favorable environment for people’s empowerment.  

How can the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) position itself in addressing the challenges? A recent World Bank study on participation, although not optimistic about the direct benefits of induced-participation, provides a useful conceptual framework to look at, essentially, the top-down government-led participation and community-driven participation. This policy research report differentiates between “organic” and “induced” participation. The former is organized by civic groups outside government to “empower” individuals and communities while the latter refers to bureaucratically managed development interventions at inducing civic action. Both approaches aim to inform, consult and involve citizens and communities in development management planning and programmes to engage and empower them to make conscious decisions that affect their well-being and life choices.

UNDESA’s Division for Public Administration and Development Management (DPADM), along with other UN agencies and intergovernmental organizations, has documented the value of e-participation, quantitatively through the United Nations E-government Survey, and qualitatively by the United Nations Public Service Awards as an effective tool for empowering citizens through Information Technologies (ICTs). The 2012 Survey “e-Government for the People” has demonstrated that countries with strong online service delivery platforms have a higher likelihood of introducing ICT tools to engage their citizens in policy and decision-making processes. Most recently, the 2012 Public Service Awards have included several noteworthy cases of innovative uses of e-participation towards sustainable and equitable development. The potential transformative power of ICTs to enhance citizen participation has not, however, been fully harnessed for national development efforts.

Nor have Governments systematically applied ICTs to better identify and respond to citizens’ demands for new and improved public policies and services, which are critical to achieving the IADGs.

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11 A/RES/66/184. 66/184. Information and communications technologies for development. 6 February 2012
Taking cue of these concerns, the DPADM/UNDESA is organizing in partnership with the Division for Social Policy and Development (DSPD) a high-level joint expert group meeting on **E-Participation: Empowering people through ICTs**, to be held in **Geneva, Switzerland, from 24 to 26 July 2013**. Through e-participation, United Nations Member States can provide more responsive and effective public services to their citizens and engage them in policy decision-making processes in development planning and management, particularly in the post-2015 environment.

Within DESA, DPSD promotes the empowerment of people to achieve the main objectives of the World Summit for Social Development, namely poverty eradication, social integration and employment and decent work and the well being of vulnerable groups of people (indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, youth, older persons and families) while DPADM promotes citizen-centric public administration and citizen-engagement for responsive, transparent and accountable governance. During the meeting, the two Divisions will address development challenges and help strengthen the social dimension of sustainable development through participation particularly by using ICTs and by also complementing the substantive approaches and coordinating activities with common objectives, that is, empowerment of people through public participation.

**Objectives**

The objective of the meeting is to **bring together policy-makers, experts, and practitioners on e-participation from around the world, with the purpose of enhancing their knowledge on e-participation and contributing through discussions and sharing of experiences to the development of an online e-participation self-assessment tool METEP (Measurement and Evaluation Tool for E-Participation Readiness).** METEP is developed by DPADM/UNDESA for the use of all United Nations Member States, with the aim of promoting e-participation around the world. METEP will be an online interactive tool to assist Governments and policy decision makers at any level throughout the world in developing, monitoring, refining and improving the context within which ICTs can be used to transform government to improve citizen participation. It is a tool designed to create the context for e-participation development. One of the keys to METEP is that it will group each of three e-participation elements under five pillars: Commitment, Legal, Vision and Policy, Organization, and Technology, which allows decision-makers to focus on one specific area at a time.

The meeting will also review the challenges and opportunities offered by ICTs, exchange ideas and share experience on existing policies, strategies and practices aimed at promoting e-participation. It will aim to provide evidence-based recommendations to strengthen stakeholders’ capacities and promote e-participation and ICTs as means for social inclusion and the empowerment of social groups. At the same time, the meeting will serve as **a forum for government officials to be designated as national e-participation focal points.** The focal points will be encouraged to form a network to share knowledge and experience in the area of e-participation. The network will collaborate closely with DPADM.
Output
The main output will be the development of the METEP methodology through discussions and brainstorming with all participants. Also, the meeting will lead the designation of national e-participation focal points that will collaborate closely with DPADM on the further development of METEP and other aspects of e-participation. The deliberations will result in a comprehensive report, outlining major findings and best practice recommendations, and containing case studies resulting from the workshop. The report will be published online for maximum global outreach in an environmental friendly fashion at minimum cost.

Additional outputs will be enhanced knowledge on the part of government decision-makers on e-participation; improved capacity for developing tools such as METEP through co-developing, refining the methodology with DPADM and other experts, improved capacity for promoting e-participation as well as endorsement and application of METEP for self-assessment.

Programme
Over the course of three days, participants will: 1) learn about national, regional and international experiences and perspectives on e-participation 2) learn and brainstorm on METEP, and 3) leave the seminar with a commitment and inspiration to institutionalize the knowledge needed for enabling national public administrations to promote e-participation to benefit businesses, civil society organizations and citizens through the initiation of METEP. The sessions during the meeting are as follows:

- E-Participation and Empowerment: Opportunities and Challenges for All
- METEP - the Measurement and Evaluation Tool for E-Participation Readiness
- Case Studies and Lessons Learned on E-Participation
- Recent Trends and Emerging Needs on E-Participation
- Empowerment and E-Participation: Policy Recommendations
- Three Stages of E-Participation & Break-out Groups

Participants
Government decision-makers and relevant business and civil society leaders from selected countries and interested, self-funded participants (e.g. academics, advisers from ministries of public information, information commissions, economic and social councils and similar institutions, public administration and/or planning ministries and other relevant units working with ICTs for public engagement); representatives of DESA, other invited experts.

Organization and management
The workshop will be conducted in English. All documents and papers presented will subsequently be posted at: http://www.unpan.org
Venue
The Workshop on will take place from 24 to 26 July 2013 at the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) Conference Center.

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