UNITED NATIONS   NATIONS UNIES

Video Message from
MS. HAIYAN QIAN, DIRECTOR
DIVISION FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND DEVELOPMENT
MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS

7th UNPAN Capacity Building Workshop

Next Stage in Open Government Data: Using Data for Transparency,
Accountability and Collaboration

Cape Town, South Africa, 10-12 October 2012

Minister Sisulu and Deputy Minister Dlodlo, Ministry of Public Service and
Administration, South Africa,
Distinguished Experts and Guests,
Partners of the United Nations Public Administration Network,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to have the opportunity to address you again through the virtue of
the technological evolution even though we are more than twelve thousand kilometers
apart.

Since its inception in 2000, the mission of the United Nations Public
Administration Network, or UNPAN, has always been facilitating information exchange,
experience sharing, and training in the area of public governance and public administration.
As I mentioned briefly in my earlier statement, UNPAN can certainly lay claim to success
in fulfilling its mission with all the contributions from its global, regional and national
partners thus far.

There has been much progress since the information age with disruptive
innovations like the Internet and mobile technologies. Today we live in a connected age,
with the proliferation of broadband Internet, smart phones and other mobile devices, and
the global phenomenon of information explosion, connected social networks, big data and
linked data. However, we are nowhere close to realizing the full potential of these
technologies for information sharing and citizen engagement.

It is no surprise, therefore, that citizens are more informed, and they expect to know
more about their governments and to have increased opportunities to raise their voice in
order to play a greater role in influencing public service delivery. We have seen this trend
in many parts of the world specifically the growing flow of information in societies through
social media in the Arab world and its impact on governments in the region

Over the past few years, this socio-economic change has driven governments to start publishing open government data pertaining to governance and public affairs. This has led to transparency and value co-creation that empowers citizens through knowledge.

Back in 2010, the United Nations E-Government Survey highlighted advocacy actions by some governments that promoted "government as a platform" or government as a provider of data and services for partners to exploit.

Evidence has indicated that public sector efficiency is enhanced by transferring some of the demands of government to non-government organizations, the private sector and the media. These sectors have proven to consume and utilize open government data in various capacities and innovative ways[1].

This is a clear demonstration of the impact of collaboration between governments and citizens through the use of open government data.

In the 2012[2] edition of the Survey, the rapid advancement of open data initiatives that offered new opportunities for sustainable development was underscored. One significant trend was the institutionalisation of national coordinating authorities, such as a Chief Information Officers, by various countries from both developed and developing regions, to coordinate e-government development including open government data initiatives.

We also witnessed how governments inform citizens through publishing open government data on issues related to climate change and the fragile environment. And how open government data is being utilized to deliver effective disaster preparedness and crisis management programmes, including those initiated by third parties such as the civil society and the private sector.

The recently launched Kenyan Government's open data website[3] is one of the most comprehensive portals in sub-Saharan Africa and also one of the few examples from developing countries. It holds the potential to generate the needed integration for sustainable development. Its data are drawn from several sources, including the Ministries of Finance, Planning, Health and Education and the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. The website itself is organized by six sectors – education, energy, health, water and sanitation, population and poverty.

The provision of open government data not only allows citizens to access public service information but also provides some insights on underperformance and inefficiencies in public services. This helps tackle corruption, and allows citizens and the media to hold governments to account and strengthens citizen engagement.

---

[1] UN E-Government Survey 2010, chapter 1, p. 16.

[2] UN E-Government Survey 2012

[3] Refer to opendata.go.ke

This is precisely the role of open government data in improving transparency and accountability of government and citizen-centric service delivery.

This brings me to today's topic, the "Next Stage in Open Government Data: Using Data for Transparency, Accountability and Collaboration."

What exactly are the "open" principles? One must not forget that accessibility and participation are of the foremost interest to recipients and users of open government data.

On accessibility, we acknowledge the need for governments to provide data in non-proprietary, structured and machine-readable formats. In addition, one must not forget the challenges in bridging the digital divide. In particular, how to ensure that vulnerable groups such as the poor, women, the physically challenged, the illiterate, the youth, the elderly, migrants and indigenous people are not deprived of the privilege to access data and information.

The level of accessibility and use of online services in some developing countries[4] -- not to mention the usage of open government data - have not made sufficient progress as compared to those in some developed countries. In fact, out of 193 Member States only 25 per cent have embarked in Open Government Data initiatives. This leads us to conclude the need for action, increased advocacy and capacity building in assisting countries in enhancing their public service delivery through new modalities like open government data.

On participation, let us not treat the open government data initiative as a one-way street. There needs to be provision for addressing the demand side in service delivery, including soliciting feedback and taking accountable actions to act on feedback received. Governments must develop a clear strategy for the informed, substantive and inclusive participation of its citizens.

In addition, we should not ignore other challenges such as the issues surrounding privacy and security. While openness promotes increased civil discourse and improved public welfare, it also raises privacy and security concerns that may legally prevent certain data sets from being shared publically.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Like many countries around the world, our tasks at the United Nations have become increasingly challenging in the face of the emerging issues and the economic downturn which have reduced public resources and at the same time increased the demand for effective public services.

The delivery of a framework for the Post-2015 Development Agenda is the prerogative of the Member States of the United Nations. However, the UN Secretariat's responsibility is to endeavour to inform Member States about the best available evidence and practice in the field.

---

[4] Bahrain, Brazil, China, Kenya, Mexico, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Uruguay

This directive has been guiding the work of my Division in advocacy, analytical research, capacity building, and of course, its roles as a member and coordinator of the network - UNPAN. With the aim of amplifying the impact of our work, in 2010, we embarked on an initiative to deliver a knowledge portal – the United Nations Public Administration Country Studies, or UNPACS.

By providing country data and information of all 193 Member States on conventional and emerging topics related to public administration, UNPACS will enable governments and all other stakeholders to make evidence-based decisions for the implementation of the internationally agreed development agenda, including the Millennium Development Goals and the Post 2015 Development Agenda.

Preliminary findings in UNPACS have indicated that, today, there are at least 91 Member States with legislation on Access to Information, 28 Member States have draft legislation, and 26 Member States have a provision in their constitution. Related to data privacy, 82 Member States have legislation, 6 countries are currently discussing a draft, and 9 countries have a constitutional provision.

Deniz Susar, Governance and Public Administration Officer, of my Division, will share with you some of our preliminary research findings on Open Government Data in a more detailed fashion.

Before I conclude I would like to leave you with two final thoughts.

First, in my earlier statement, I ask: what does UNPAN need to do differently to stay current and relevant? Let me take it one step further, what can each of us do as an individual or institution representing the government or civil society, and collectively as partners, to further our mission in serving the public in this connected age?

As we explore the recent trends in information and communication technologies and new media, can we also re-examine our role in moving from an information source provider to a citizen-centric service manager and a facilitator of connected information and services?

Second, what are the specific challenges that we have to address in opening government data?

For instance, what is the institutional framework and legal framework needed for open government data? What are the requirements for human and financial resources? Is there a need for a whole-of-government approach to launching open government initiatives? How do we overcome the digital divide? How does one identify the data sets to be released? How do we determine open standards to be adopted? How do we ensure the relevance and timeliness of data released? How do we measure the usefulness of data released? Is there any way to track return on investment? How do we monitor data usage and applications that evolve through the process? How do we measure the impact on

citizens? Do we need to create a section in UNPAN for sharing open data from your respective organizations and member states such as data.unpan.org?

Like all development issues, governments today are facing two core challenges – understanding and implementation.

Above are questions that need to be addressed carefully. I hope you will contribute valuable inputs, and/or gain useful knowledge about these issues during the course of the workshop over the next three days.

Thank you.