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From Government-driven to Citizen-centric Public Service Delivery

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Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to begin by expressing my sincere thanks to the United Nations University, the China National School of Administration, Fudan University, SUNY at Albany, University of Oxford and the State Information Center for inviting me to be back in my home city to participate at this very important event. E-government is not only just part of our work – **but it is also our passion.**

I am, therefore, delighted to be given this opportunity to share with you the key findings of the 2010 **United Nations E-government Survey,** which I hope will give you a sense of the global perspectives on e-governance and the shift from **government-driven to citizen-centric public service delivery**. Such a shift is necessary to be supported by strong e-government systems and healthy e-governance processes.

My presentation today will first highlight the most recent findings from the 2010 United Nations e-Government Survey and touch upon the three main groups of e-strategies that link e-government and e-governance. Then I will conclude by sharing with you the updated focus areas of the next Survey.

The United Nations e-Government Survey was initiated in 2001 by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, through my Division which is responsible for managing the United Nations Public Administration Programme established by the Member States in 1948. The Survey was designed to reflect the direction that public administration was taking at the time as result of the growing impact of ICT. It assesses the e-government development of the 192 UN Member States according to a quantitative composite index including (i) e-service delivery, (ii) telecommunication infrastructure, and (iii) human capital endowment. It also assesses the "e-governance" status in these countries by looking at the reach and effectiveness of e-tools for citizen participation and engagement.

The Survey is well-known globally and its data is used extensively by renowned organizations and their publications, such as:

- the World Bank
- the OECD
- the Economist-EIU
- the European Union (EU)
- the World Economic Forum
- the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), just to name a few.

Here is a simple table that lists the top performers in the e-government and e-governance (also known as e-participation) indices of 2010:

Before I explain the table in more detail, I would like to underscore that you can find an explanation of how the Survey defines and connects 'e-government' and 'e-governance' concepts in the paper prepared for this meeting. Suffice it to say here that for the purposes of the UN Survey, 'e-government' is 'electronic-based citizen-centric public service delivery' whereas 'e-governance' is 'how a government delivers those citizen-centric public services'.

If you compare the top performers in e-government with those in e-governance, you will notice that top e-government performers are mostly from the developed countries. However, this is not necessarily the case for the e-governance top achievers.

This year's Survey reveals that developing and transition countries such as Bahrain, China, Chile, Colombia, Croatia, Estonia, Malaysia, Mexico, Mongolia, Lithuania, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have made the top 35 in e-governance.[1] We also see that these countries tend to do better in e-government than other developing and transition countries, as several of them are also in the top 35 of the e-government index, namely Bahrain, Chile, Columbia, Croatia Estonia, Lithuania, and Malaysia.

These findings are important for several reasons:

Firstly, because they show a strong association between the two concepts—e-government and e-governance.
Secondly, because they suggest that strengthening e-governance often precedes the building of strong e-governments.
And thirdly, because they also challenge the general undertaking in the current literature that successful e-government can only take place in advanced economies.

It is true, however, that there is a correlation between strong economies and e-government development. For instance, if we run a regional analysis, we see that Europe is by far the most advanced region in **e-government development**, followed by the Americas and Asia. Oceania and Africa are the final two regions whose e-government development scores are below the 2010 world average.

When **e-governance** is examined from a regional perspective, we find once again Europe as the most successful region, followed by Asia, where many countries have made great strides in 2010 towards making citizens full partners in e-service delivery.

[1] Categorization of developing countries according to the United Nations (unstats.un.org/unsd/methods/m49/m49regin.htm and http://www.unctad.org/en/docs/tdstat30_enfr.pdf) and the International Monetary Fund (http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2010/01/weodata/groups.htm#oem).

Now let me focus on the Survey's e-government and e-governance notions at a more in-depth level.

I have already mentioned that e-government is about **citizen-centric public service delivery**, and that e-governance is the **governments' performance** in carrying out such delivery.

Yet, what are some of the indicators that the UN Survey employs when measuring e-government and e-governance?

For e-government, we look at:
--**E-infrastructure**: that is, the technological basis of systems.
--**E-literacy**: that is, the skill development and training of providers and users.
--**E-service**: that is, the provision of citizen-centric public services, which encompasses back-end integration and coordination among government agencies as well as interactive partnership between government, business, and citizens as co-owners and co-providers of public services.

For e-governance, we look at:
--E-information: that is, the online availability and openness of government information concerning their services operations.
--E-consultation: that is using the ICT-supported tools and mechanisms for seeking citizens' input in the process of design, implementation and evaluation of public services and products.
--**E-decision-making**: that is, deploying ICTpsupported tools and mechanisms to capture all citizens' contributions, particularly from vulnerable and the marginalized groups, as co-producers in the decision-making processes of public service delivery, which encompass interactive dialogue and partnership.

All these indicators used in defining e-government and e-governance are interlinked to achieve:

Citizen-centric public service delivery which can only be ensured by **a transformational government, which is a whole of government connecting and coordinating well between its agencies horizontally, between national and local governments vertically and between government and all other stakeholders diversely.**

Interlinking the e-components into strategy bundles, one finds three main groups that are of equal importance in terms of when and how they are applied.
These are:

Supply-side strategies: these involve e-infrastructure and e-information components.

Demand-driven strategies which include e-literacy and e-consultation dimensions.

Interactive Integration strategies that comprise e-service and e-decision-making processes where e-government and e-governance ultimately merge.

Citizen-centric public service delivery lies at the very heart of the transformational processes in building robust e-government and e-governance systems and processes.

I would now like to go into details for each one of the three strategy clusters, and show what governments have done up to 2009.

First: Supply-side strategies

Supply-side is composed of e-infrastructure and e-information.
For e-infrastructure, we look at a country's

- Internet usage/access
- diffusion of personal computers
- main telephone lines
- mobile phone usage/access
- fixed broadband subscribers

For e-information, we examine if and how government portals display information on

- e-participation policies or information
- information regarding inclusiveness in e-government
- citizen charters/service agreements
- information on employment opportunity, etc.

The table shows the top 40 ranked countries of the e-infrastructure index. Countries that score well in the e-infrastructure index as well as in the e-government and e-governance indices have invested not only in infrastructure but also in the connectivity and accessibility of their online services, particularly for those who have limited or no access to these services.

As we know by now that the mere availability of modern technologies and online services has, unfortunately, little effect if the majority of citizens do not have access to the Internet. The challenge for the government is, therefore, to develop the necessary infrastructure to help citizens particularly those marginalized groups that lack access. It is encouraging to note the exponential progress of Internet connectivity in recent years. The number of Internet users is now close to 2 billion, and it is estimated that another 1 billion will be online by 2015 – half the world's population.

According to the 2010 Survey, out of every 100 habitants, 58 are Internet users in the developed countries, compared to only 23 Internet users in the developing countries and 4 Internet users in the least developed countries. The digital divide still remains wide – with Africa and Arab States lagging behind Europe, Asia and the Americas. According to a study conducted by ITU, by the end of 2009, fixed broadband penetration, which is essential for countries to be able to offer advanced e-government services, stood at 23 per cent in the developed countries, compared to only 4 per cent in the developing countries.

One of the noteworthy developments is the rapid emergence and spread of mobile technology as a powerful tool for public service provision and delivery. Today, 67 per cent of the world's population, or about 4.6 billion people, are mobile subscribers – a significant increase from one billion in 2002. This is well over twice the number of the world's population with Internet access. In developed countries, mobile subscriptions are over 100 per cent of the population, meaning that there are more mobile devices being used than there are people. In developing countries, with 78 per cent of the population being mobile subscribers, the uptake is also significant considering that other technologies are scarce. Mobile subscriptions also drive wireless broadband growth, with mobile broadband growing faster than fixed broadband lines and second only to mobile phone growth itself.

By establishing online tools, countries have begun to provide information about government policies including inclusiveness in e-government and e-participation. However, the number of countries which do so is still less than 30%.

From an overall perspective, countries are doing a fairly good job in providing citizens with opportunity for email complaints, compliments or suggestions, etc. Information about employment opportunities is included in 34% of government websites. Citizen Charters and service agreements are still in minority with only 21% of government websites using them as of 2009.

The move from technology-led supply-side information to demand-driven connected e-government is still a work-in-progress.

For the transition to occur, the receiving end, namely the citizen, should also be capable and trained so as to fully enjoy the benefits of the tools and mechanisms connecting them with an open government. This is the second demand-driven cluster of strategies.

Demand-driven strategies consist of e-literacy and e-consultation

- e-literacy is anchored in general literacy and human capital development.
- e-consultation includes e-tools, such as:
    - public consultation blogs
    - online surveys and polls
    - chat rooms and instant messaging
    - web logs, list servers and newsgroups
    - feedback forms, etc.

Countries are improving in their overall literacy rate and combined gross enrolment ratio in education, as seen from this chart. However, there remains a challenge for citizens in understanding the true benefits of e-government, even with the recent proliferation of e-services provided by the government. Website statistics have shown that the actual usage of e-services in some developed and most developing countries is still low. Very often, citizens may not even be aware of the existence of online government services. One of the causes for this lack of awareness, which is worth-noting, is the lack of governments' capacity in promoting and marketing their e-services.

In terms of demand-driven strategies, the use of online tools to better understand the market need is still rudimentary at the global level. Only 10% of countries worldwide use tools such as forums and newsgroups. Online polls and surveys, and online feedback forms are much more prevalent with 16% and 29% of countries incorporating them in their government websites as of 2009.

As mentioned before, mobile phones have become increasingly popular transformational devices that governments can use to connect with their citizens, particularly in the developing world. Mobile phone subscriptions have jumped from almost zero to over 50% of Sub-Saharan Africa. A few of countries have also begun to introduce mobile-services in both developed and developing countries.

For instance, Singapore delivers over 600 Internet-based services also to mobile devices, particularly through smartphones. Another example is the case in Rwanda, m-health services are delivered even to the remotest parts of the country. They include updated information on

HIV/AIDS, the monitoring of anti-retroviral drug administration, and patient data management and care.

That said, mobile technologies and services are still in the infant stage globally. However, moving dynamic Internet-based services to mobile is ongoing and highly promising from the demand side.

In general, the Survey found that the citizen's awareness of e-government services or capacity in using such services is quite low at the global level, even though in most of the countries the literacy rates are high or medium high. It alerts us that governments need to pay much more attention to what demand side prefers than what supply side wants to offer before investing in human, financial and technical resources which are always limited and precious.

While globally the evolution of e-government and e-governance is still at the phase of making the needed leap from supply-side to demand-driven, several countries have started moving towards adoption of the integrated and interaction strategies, where integrated citizen-centric e-services merge with inclusive interactive decision-making.

Integrated and interaction e-strategies include e-service and e-decision.

E-service refers to governments' capacity to

- provide four stages of e-services development, namely the emerging, interactive, transactional and connected stages
- use multimedia technology to interact with citizens
- consult citizens regularly on improving public policy/service delivery matters, etc.
- etc.

E-decision processes refer to the spread and the effectiveness of

- online discussion fora for decision-making, implementing and monitoring
- archives of past discussions
- online petitions
- officials' responsiveness to query/comments and their incorporation of feedback in policy, product and services
- official's invitation to citizens seeking suggestions and comments on developments in the decision-making, implementing and monitoring processes
- etc.

In the e-service development category, we find the familiar faces of the Republic of Korea, Japan, Singapore, United States of America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Israel, and European countries such as the United Kingdom, France, Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands and the Nordic countries as top performers. But we also see those developing countries that performed well in both the e-government/e-governance rankings such as Bahrain, Chile, Colombia and Malaysia.

In this day and age, nearly all governments of the world have websites (98%). Yet, a considerable portion of them (63%) still only offer the basic service of static online forms failing to make the leap to the Demand Driven namely transactional and connected phases.

Similarly, online submission and online payment functions are up and running for only a fraction of countries. As you can see, the numbers rarely go higher than 30% of the countries in these categories.

There is no reason to be pessimistic, however. We see that many countries provide site maps and interconnect their central government websites with those of their ministries and other public service providers. Numbers hover around 60-70 % for these categories.

But this also means that about 26% of countries worldwide still lack links between their national government and ministry websites.

Also, only 61% of countries worldwide provide integration between their central government portal and the portals of more than 10 ministries. Among those ministries that are best interconnected with their respective national governments are **education, finance and labour**, in that order

We see that one-stop-shops are among the most wide-spread tools globally. 68% of countries offer one-stop-shop government portals. However, in the **connected stage**, only 16% of them employ a single sign-on for the convenience of users. Interaction with Heads of the State through e-consultation mechanisms is promising. 32% of countries have made this interaction possible as of 2009.

Overall, user autonomy in terms of co-ownership in service planning, production and evaluation is still developing. Initiating proposals, personalizing websites and tagging, ranking and assessing content are still at low levels, barely going over 10 % of all countries worldwide.

Integrated and interaction strategies are very much influenced and supported by Web 2.0 and multimedia tools. **Online discussion forums and archives of past discussion forums** are made available by 17% and 14% of countries, respectively.

Online petitions and voting are less prevalent at 9%. The least common is **e-consultation with government officials** with only 4% of countries providing this convenience to citizens.

The response rate of contacted government officials is a little more promising at 8%.

This is not surprising if one takes into consideration that governments worldwide are rarely customary users of **Web 2.0 tools**. Non-government actors use these tools more than twice as much as governments.

The **use of multimedia tools**, such as video, audio and RSS, is much more widespread than the e-decision tools that I just outlined. 35% use RSS to feed news and relevant information of interest to users. And only 13% of government sites meet the minimum levels for web accessibility--for those users with physical, sensory and other types of impairments.

Based on the above findings and trends, we need to constantly review its assessment criteria. Accordingly, the next Survey will focus on the following areas.

1. The first area relates to the rising importance of **integration, such as consolidating** ministry and agency websites into one national portal. Such integration and the creation of one-stop-shops, including the single sign-on option, make the lives of citizens to receive e-

government services much easier. That is why the next Survey will concentrate on the user friendly **services rather than the number of websites**—what is important is not how many websites there are, but how easy it is for citizens to get access to effective service. In fact, we have observed that governments in some countries started efforts in this area.

2. The second area consists of our increasing emphasis on **service usage**. The 2012 Survey will thus focus more closely on the statistics of websites and keep-track of **user take-up wherever possible**.

3. The third area is about **e-infrastructure** and its increasing role in bridging the **digital divide**. The next UN e-Government Survey will put specific emphasis on this lingering problem to give positive visibility to those countries that address this particular divide. Penetration of broadband is a crucial factor here, and it will receive increased attention in the next Survey.

4. Fourthly, and also in line with the third area, the 2012 Survey will stress **inclusion** to see which governments provide effective online tools for the inclusion of **vulnerable groups** — the poor, the physically handicapped, the illiterate women, children, the elderly, and minorities, etc. As such, the next Survey will underline the importance of equitable sustainable development, including the role of ICT.

5. Fifthly the next Survey will probe into the ways in which governments have tried to **connect their Internet and mobile services** to enhance their performance in citizen-centric public service delivery. This will aim to underline the growing need for providing public service through mobile devices as such device has a much higher penetration across populations in developing countries.

6. Last but not least, the next edition of the Survey is also expected to break new ground by looking at the use of e-government to provide information about environment related issues to its citizens to promote sustainable development.

Now, I would like to conclude by emphasizing that the United Nations e-Government Survey is not just about providing a snap shot of e-government activities and trends at the global level, it is also about making available the strategies and tools developed and practiced by certain pioneering governments to other United Nations Member States, especially the developing and the least developed countries.

It is hoped that these examples of best practice will encourage governments to become more open and innovative, to improve their e-government strategies and to develop evidence-based policies that will facilitate the adoption of emerging technologies to better respond to the needs of their citizens.

Meetings such as this one not only help focus attention on essential concepts for a better public service delivery but they also provide an opportunity for new ideas to flourish and thought-provoking questions to emerge.

I look forward to our further discussion on this important topic and I thank you for your attention.