



Consultative Meetings on
“E-Government for Sustainable Development”

Preparatory Process for the
2016 United Nations E-Government Survey

AIDE-MEMOIRE

Organized by the
Division for Public Administration and Development Management,
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1. SPONSORSHIP AND PURPOSE

Over the past years, due to a growing interest in the United Nations E-Government Survey and its methodology, Member States have requested to have a greater role in enhancing the Survey. In order to respond to Member States' request, and to allow for a more inclusive, open and participatory approach in the design of the Survey, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), Division for Public Administration and Development Management (DPADM), in collaboration with a number of regional hosts, is organizing for the first time consultative meetings on "E-Government for Sustainable Development" as part of the preparatory process of the upcoming Survey.

The primary objective of these meetings is to obtain feedback on past editions of the Survey and provide suggestions for the 2016 Survey. The feedback received will be compiled by UNDESA and presented to an Expert Group Meeting (EGM), which will be held in March 2015 to discuss the themes and outline of the United Nations E-Government Survey 2016. Consultative meetings will be held in various parts of the world to ensure geographical representation. An online platform to gather feedback from all Member States and other key stakeholders will also be made available on the United Nations Public Administration Network (UNPAN).

2. BACKGROUND

Since 2003, DPADM has published every two years the United Nations E-Government Survey to share knowledge about global e-government trends, issues, and innovative practices, as well as challenges and opportunities of e-government development. The Survey is the only report in the world that assesses the e-government development status of the 193 United Nations Member States. It serves as a tool for decision-makers to identify their areas of strength and challenges in e-government and to guide e-government policies and strategies.

The conceptual framework of the United Nations E-Government Survey has been adopting a holistic view of e-government resting on three important dimensions (i) the availability of online services and content, (ii) telecommunication infrastructure and (iii) human capacity. The Survey assesses the e-government readiness of the 193 Member States of the United Nations according to a quantitative composite index of online presence based on website assessment, telecommunication infrastructure, and human resource endowment. The United Nations e-Government Development Index (EGDI) is a composite index based on the weighted average of three normalized indices where 1/3 is derived from a telecommunications infrastructure index, 1/3 from a human capital index, and 1/3 from the online service index. The combined EGDI score gives an indication of e-government development across the 193 United Nations Member States relative to each other as opposed to being an absolute measure with a finite goal. While the data related to human capital is provided by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the data for telecommunication infrastructure is provided by the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), the data for the Online Service Index (OSI) comes from a survey questionnaire which is developed by

UNDESA/DPADM. The answers to the questions are compiled by UNDESA. The Survey uses a supply side approach – assessing the supply of information and services on websites – as its primary form of data collection.

The questionnaire used to assess online services of a country is structured in four sections corresponding to the four stages of e-government development, i.e. emerging presence, enhanced presence, transactional presence, and connected presence. Although the weight of the OSI is equal to the others, there is greater opportunity to improve quickly in this area and affect the overall EGDI ranking because improvements in human capital and infrastructure take longer. In order to capture e-government development, the survey questionnaire is updated prior to each biennial Survey. Most of the questions in the survey questionnaire are binary as to whether a particular feature is present on a website (yes, or 1) or unavailable (no, or 0) with few range questions. The questions are structured according to key thematic areas.

The methodological framework has remained consistent across survey periods while updating its components to reflect the new trends in e-government as well as the new indicators for the telecommunication and human capital. During the past ten years, the Survey and methodology was improved and some of the EGDI sub-components were added or removed to capture current developments. This is a particularly challenging task since comparability across years needs to be ensured while adapting the Survey to current developments in the area of e-government so as to reflect the complex, dynamic, innovative and evolving nature of ICTs and their application in government, as well as new societal challenges.

Every two years the Survey focuses on a key thematic area, which is considered relevant for the international community. In the 2014 edition, the theme “E-Government for the Future We Want” highlighted the potential of e-government to promote the Rio+20 agenda and its follow-up, in line with the global community’s debate on sustainable development. The themes for the Survey’s questionnaire were selected during an Expert Group Meeting (EGM). Accordingly, the Survey was enhanced by introducing new questions on Open Government Data, e-Participation and Whole-of-Government while removing some outdated questions. These changes, which are needed to better capture emerging trends and issues, may slightly impact country’s rankings from year to year. As mentioned earlier, rankings are in relative and not absolute terms. Thus the six themes included whole-of-government, e-participation, mobile and multi-channel service delivery, digital divide and vulnerable groups, usage and open government data.

- Whole-of-government and collaborative governance

The 2014 Survey focuses even more than in previous years on whole of government and collaborative public governance issues at the national level as the key to addressing these complex and wide scope challenges which require integrated responses. In this context, a number of enabling factors are needed to advance whole of government. First, there is a critical need for new forms of collaborative leadership and shared organizational culture, including re-shaping values, mindsets, attitudes and behaviors in the public sector

through visible guiding principles and leadership. Second, new forms of institutional frameworks for effective coordination, cooperation and accountability need to be put in place across government, between governments and with relevant non-public actors which can contribute to creating public value. Third, innovative coordination processes are essential, as is making such services inclusive and accessible by all groups in society, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. Fourth, and linked to this, collaborative mechanisms are required to engage citizens in service delivery and decision-making processes which are citizen- and user-centric and, where relevant, user-driven via co-creation and crowdsourcing through decentralized governance systems.

- E-Participation

There are clear opportunities for the future improvement of e-participation, including technology trends such as social media and mobile devices/technology which are inherently interactive, as well as crowdsourcing. There are also severe challenges, including the digital divide, low user take-up and the lack of incentives to participate. These opportunities and challenges call for effective strategies to create an enabling environment for e-participation, including appropriate legal and institutional frameworks, capacity-development for digital media literacy for citizens and a seamless integration of online and offline features for public participation. Successful strategies need to address both formal and informal approaches to citizen engagement. To increase the likelihood of success for e-participation strategy, governments can benefit from those platforms and channels that are already in use by citizens rather than creating new ones. Promoting a clear idea and understanding of e-participation by integrating both online and offline communication tools and channels will help reach groups that are difficult to reach. Governments should encourage issues-related participation and provide consistent feedback on consultations to citizens. Motivating engagement depends more on a sense of belonging to a political community with shared traditions and values than simply civic duty, as it does on linking these directly to the pressing issues of sustainable development.

- Mobile and multichannel service delivery

There is increasing expectation for easier access to more public information and public services from anywhere, anytime through multiple channels or citizen touch-points. The 2014 Survey shows that digital channels, with both their diversity and spread, are being increasingly adopted by almost all countries, while counter (face-to-face service) and telephone (voice) services, have continued to serve as fundamental channels. Between 2012 and 2014, the number of countries offering mobile apps and mobile portals doubled, where they are often used directly to support poverty eradication, gender equality and social inclusion, as well as promote economic development, environmental protection and disaster management. The use of social media by governments is also increasing fast along with the use of public kiosks in remote areas for providing access to online services, especially to marginalized groups and where the individual use of ICT is not widespread. Both social media and mobile channels typically do not require high investment costs as they ride on consumerisation and non-governmental platforms, but they often need a business transformation and strong commitment in the public

administration to maximise benefits. Therefore, it is imperative for government managers to leverage the different advantages offered by various channels and find smart ways to increase usage of online services and reach out to disadvantaged and vulnerable groups for social inclusion.

- Digital divide/vulnerable groups

While initially the digital divide was considered primarily an issue of access to relevant information technology infrastructure, it is increasingly about capability and ability to access and use ICT. One aspect of the digital divide is also the e-government usage divide, which is generally correlated with demographic and socio-economic characteristics, such as income, education and age. Overall, despite some progress in providing a plethora of e-services and online information, efforts at mitigating the digital divide in any meaningful way have not reaped large dividends. In recent years, policy makers have progressively focused on the link between use of new technologies, education and social inclusion, particularly of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. By 2014, 64 per cent of the national government portals and websites provided integrated links to sources of archived information (policies, budget, legal documents, etc.) related to some disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, namely people living in poverty, persons with disabilities, older persons, immigrants and youth.

- Usage

Leveraging e-government to deliver development impacts depends on effective usage. While the progress of e-government services on the supply side is generally increasing, improvements are also needed to the demand side. In the member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), e-government usage averages out at 50 per cent, but there is great variation among countries and the use of more advanced services such as accessing and sending forms online is much less, especially as such services require robust security and payment systems. In developing countries these numbers are even lower. Countries' efforts to develop e-government therefore need to go hand in hand with their efforts to increase usability features such as simplicity and personalisation, usage monitoring and tracking, and user feedback and usage promotion. Increasing uptake is also dependent on aligning, mixing and integrating channels appropriate to specific service types and user groups. In this context, both mobile and social media are becoming more important both to deliver services and to interact with users in a variety of ways. Policy efforts to increase take-up should, however, not aim just to increase usage, but should also focus on obtaining the maximum benefit from that usage for all stakeholders.

- Open Government Data

The recent recognition of the importance of Open Government Data (OGD) in meeting the rights of individuals, businesses and civil organizations to access and use government information, to engage in policymaking, to improve existing public services as well as to co-create and even create new public services, is significant. However, OGD has limited value if the data published is not utilized, which means involving stakeholders and

focusing on developing sustainable ecosystems of users. The 2014 Survey found that while many countries use government websites to share data, only 46 countries have dedicated data portals. Most government sectors are making OGD available in machine-readable format. While the use of data in developed countries has made enormous progress in recent years, developing countries have made much less headway. Therefore, they need to increase awareness, provide sufficient capacities and assist public officials with the implementation of open government data initiatives. Although open data provides many opportunities and capabilities for government agencies, its real impact will not be realized without carefully planned data governance, both within the public sector as well as with appropriate non-public stakeholders. There is a need to develop appropriate policy, legal and institutional frameworks to ensure that basic rights to information are available and well known. Since OGD initiatives require cooperation between various government agencies, strong political and top-level vision and management are essential. In addition, issues concerning data quality related to authenticity, integrity and re-use standards are important, as is data privacy and protection against misuse. Governments, therefore, need to ensure an appropriate balance between the need for privacy on the one hand and openness on the other.

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 by UNDESA to assess the online presence of countries. The number of new questions and themes is limited in scope in order to avoid big discrepancies with the previous editions. It is important to maintain a certain degree of historical methodological consistency of the Survey, which has allowed for comparative analysis over time. Keeping in mind the above constraints, opportunities abound in adapting the Survey to current trends, such as usage, impact, outcomes, and sustainable development from a supplemental approach, or finding proxy indicators by which to measure them.

The consultative meetings will provide a valuable opportunity to collect potential suggestions in preparation for the 2016 Survey as it will encourage participants to offer feedback on possible themes for consideration in the 2016 edition. Thus, prior to attending the consultative meetings, Government representatives are encouraged to review the United Nations E-Government Survey 2014, and possibly previous editions. In addition, they are encouraged to take note of some of the issues outlined above in section 4 in order to ensure a fruitful deliberation.

3. CONTEXT

At the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development held in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012, a global consensus was reached affirming that “to achieve our sustainable development goals we need institutions at all levels that are effective, transparent, accountable and democratic.”¹ Governments increasingly face a more active citizenry demanding for (a) more customised services that fit people’s unique expectations, (b)

¹ General Assembly resolution 66/288, *The Future We Want*, A/RES/68/288 (11 September 2012), available from http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/66/288&Lang=E

greater degree of transparency, accountability and efficiency of a variety of governmental services, and (c) greater citizen participation in decision-making processes.

The 2014 United Nations E-Government Survey ² reconfirms that countries in all regions of the world and at all levels of development are enhancing access to information, efficiency, transparency and accountability of the public sector, and removing barriers to public services. Such efforts are vital to achieving broad public participation in decision-making for equitable economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection for all. From being merely “service providers”, governments are becoming “facilitators” of public value co-creation, making use of information and communication technology to maximize and optimize their outreach potential. Innovation and the use of ICTs are helping to reinvent government in such a way that existing institutional arrangements can be restructured and new innovative arrangements can flourish, paving the way for a collaborative, effective, inclusive, transparent, and accountable government, which is critical for sustainable development. Good practices from around the world show that implementation of people-centric e-government programs can help governments advancing sustainable development by stimulating inclusive and transformative economic growth and providing better access to services overarching health, education, labor and environment. It further ensures social inclusion of all groups, particularly of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, as the extended access to information with use of new technologies not only foster justice through open, accountable and transparent judicial institutions for safe and peaceful societies, but also facilitate partnerships among global, regional and local stakeholders for the advancement of sustainable development.

4. OBJECTIVE

The consultative meeting aims to provide an open, inclusive and participatory platform to stimulate discussion on how e-government can advance sustainable development, and to contribute to the identification of emerging thematic areas, innovative practices and methodological issues, as input for the 2016 United Nations E-Government Survey. More specifically, participants will be able:

- To discuss e-government priorities, strategies and challenges, at the country and regional level in the context of sustainable development
- To share knowledge on recent e-government trends and new approaches that are being adopted by countries in support to sustainable development
- To provide suggestions related to the thematic areas and methodology of the 2016 edition.

² United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *United Nations E-Government Survey 2014: E-Government for the Future We Want* (New York: United Nations, 2014), available from <http://unpan3.un.org/egovkb/Reports/UN-E-Government-Survey-2014>

5. EXPECTED RESULTS

The consultative meetings are expected to achieve the following outputs:

- Increased understanding of the sustainable development goals as articulated in the post-2015 development agenda and the critical role of e-government in achieving them
- Enhanced knowledge of current e-government challenges, increased awareness of innovative e-government strategies and practices to advance sustainable development, and improved understanding of the United Nations E-Government Survey's thematic areas and methodology
- Suggestions on thematic areas, case studies and methodological enhancement in support of the preparatory process of the 2016 United Nations e-Government Survey to be discussed during an Expert Group Meeting in March 2015
- Recommendations to both the Member States and the United Nations Secretariat on how to enhance the use of the Survey as a capacity-building tool to promote sustainable development

6. ORGANIZATION

6.1. Participants

Participation in the face-to-face consultative meetings will be on an invitation-only basis, and Member States will be invited to attend one of the meetings. These meetings will be complemented by an online platform, which will be open to all multi-stakeholders, and help collect suggestions from governments, civil society and private sector. Participants to the consultative meetings will include Senior Government Officials at the top decision-making levels, particularly those who work as national Chief Information Officers, or hold equivalent positions within national governments and have specific responsibilities concerning e-government policy design, implementation, and evaluation, with impact on service delivery aspects.

6.2. Recommended readings for participants

Prior to attending the consultative meetings, participants are encouraged to review the following documents, including the United Nations E-Government Survey 2014 and possibly previous editions, in order to ensure a fruitful deliberation:

- [United Nations e-Government Survey](#)
- [The Future We Want: Outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development](#)
- [Synthesis Report of the Secretary-General On the Post-2015 Agenda](#)

6.3. Dates and Venues

5 December 2014, Cartagena, Colombia
29 January 2015, Manama, Bahrain
9-10 February 2015, Seoul, Republic of Korea
12-13 February 2015, Astana, Kazakhstan
17-18 February 2015, Brussels, Belgium
19-20 February 2015, Tallinn, Estonia
2-6 March 2015, Rabat, Morocco

17-18 March 2015, New York, Expert Group Meeting

6.4. Structure of the Meeting

The Meeting will be structured in three main sessions. After introductory remarks by UNDESA and the host, followed by an overall presentation by UNDESA, the first session will be devoted to exploring all enabling opportunities of e-government for sustainable development. UNDESA will provide an overview of the on-going debate on the post-2015 development agenda, present the main concepts of sustainable development, and highlight the role that e-government can play in this context. The presentation will be followed by facilitated discussions at round tables in small groups of 8 to 10 people to discuss (a) e-Government challenges and opportunities of e-government development at the country and regional level; (b) recent trends and new approaches of e-government development to advance sustainable development, which can be captured in the 2016 UN E-Government Survey. The discussions at roundtables will be shared in plenary session in order to capture all views. The second session will provide an opportunity to clarify the methodology of the Survey and to offer feedback and suggestions for enriching the methodology through group and plenary session discussions. The third session will be devoted to advancing the conceptual framework of the Survey to discuss possible incorporation of new elements, such as how to better reflect different government levels and country's characteristics. The last session will be devoted to wrap-up final remarks highlighting main insights from the participants. It will also aim at gathering ideas and suggestions on types of activities that can be organized in the future in order to enhance the use of the Survey as a tool for capacity-building.

6.5. Official languages

The Consultative Meetings will be conducted in English and other UN language commonly used in the each region.

6.6 Electronic networking

All the documents of the meeting will be posted on the online United Nations Public Administration Network (UNPAN) at: <http://www.unpan.org/>

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