Expert Group Meeting
"*United Nations E-Government Survey 2016: E-Government for Sustainable Development*"

AIDE-MEMOIRE

Organized by the
Division for Public Administration and Development Management
Department of Economic and Social Affairs
United Nations

16-17 March 2015

1. SPONSORSHIP AND PURPOSE

The Division for Public Administration and Development Management (DPADM) of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) is organizing an Expert Group Meeting (EGM) entitled "*United Nations E-Government Survey 2016: E-Government for Sustainable Development",* which will be held at United Nations Headquarters in New York from 16 to 17 March 2015.

The purpose of the meeting is to provide a platform for experts to (a) exchange views on challenges emerging issues and trends related to e-government for sustainable development, (b) identify possible thematic areas, emerging issues and e- services relevant to the *United Nations E-Government Survey 2016* from a sustainable development perspective, (c) review the Survey's methodology and discuss possible assessment measures for the identified issues and e-services. The experts will provide advice and recommendations on how to integrate these issues into the next edition of the *United Nations E-Government Survey* and will take into account the feedback and suggestions received from Member States during the consultative meetings in Bahrain, Belgium, Colombia, Estonia, Kazakhstan, Morocco, and Republic of Korea held prior to the EGM. It is the first time that these consultative meetings are being organized by DPADM in collaboration with a number of regional hosts in order to allow for a more inclusive, open and participatory approach in the design of the Survey. Through a participatory approach that included discussions at roundtables and in plenary sessions, government officials were invited to discuss and respond to a set of questions and to provide concrete suggestions and feedback on the themes and methodology of the United Nations E-Government Survey 2016 to be considered during the EGM.

2. BACKGROUND

The United Nations has supported Member States in developing national policies and practices, which aim to promote the United Nations development agenda, and is committed to promoting the exchange of experiences, knowledge and best practices regarding innovative public governance contributing to social, economic and environmental development in line with the post-2015 development agenda. The General Assembly itself has highlighted the importance of knowledge-sharing activities in resolution 57/277,[1] noting that particular emphasis should be given to the exchange of experiences related to the role of public policies in the implementation of internationally agreed goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration – which are currently being debated within the context of Sustainable Development Goals. Resolution 50/225 underscored that international cooperation should be strengthened in the field of public administration, including South-South and Inter-Regional cooperation.[2] According to these guiding principles, UNDESA, through DPADM, has actively assisted Member States to enhance their public governance capacities through capacity development workshops, expert group meetings, publications, and the online knowledge repository of the United Nations Public Administration Network (UNPAN).

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[1] General Assembly resolution 57/277, *Public administration and development*, A/RES/57/277 (7 March 2003), available from undocs.org/A/RES/57/277.

[2] General Assembly resolution 50/225, *Public administration and development*, A/RES/50/225 (1 May 1996), available from undocs.org/A/RES/50/225.

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. Now in its 8th edition, under the theme E-Government for the Future We Want", the Survey has been used as an impartial reference by policy-makers, government officials, United Nations agencies and other global and regional organizations to benchmark e-Government development in all regions and guide policy formulation and implementation. The Survey, which is intended for government officials, academics, intergovernmental institutions, civil society organizations, the private sector and citizens at large, is therefore a valuable capacity building tool used by UNDESA to support Member States in advancing e-government for sustainable development. In the Rio+20 Outcome Document, *The Future We Want*, Member States stressed: *"We recognize that information and communications technology is facilitating the flow of information between governments and the public. In this regards, it is essential to work towards improved access to information and communications technology, especially broadband networks and services, and bridge the digital divide, recognizing the contribution of international cooperation in this regards"* (Paragraph 44).[3]

Since its inception, the conceptual framework of the *United Nations E-Government Survey* has adopted 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 capital. 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

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3 General Assembly resolution 66/288, The future we want, A/RES/66/288 (11 September 2012), available from undocs.org/A/RES/66/288.

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 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 recommended during the EGM in 2012. 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. In 2014, the Survey focused on six themes, namely whole-of-government, e-participation, mobile and multi-channel service delivery, digital divide and vulnerable groups, expanding usage and open government data.

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.

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 capable and effective institutions at all levels are needed in order to achieve the post-2015 sustainable development goals. Governments increasingly face a more active citizenry demanding for (a) more customised services that fit people's unique expectations, (b) greater degree of transparency, accountability and efficiency of a variety of governmental services, and (c) greater citizen participation in decision-making processes.

The *United Nations E-Government Survey 2014* 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. Good practices from around the world show that implementation of people-centric e-government programs can help governments advance 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 fosters justice through open, accountable and transparent judicial institutions for safe and peaceful societies, but also facilitates partnerships among global, regional and local stakeholders for the advancement of sustainable development.

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. E-government can help governments protect the planet by going green and promoting effective natural resource management; enhance prosperity by stimulating inclusive and transformative economic growth; promote prosperity by ensuring social inclusion of all groups, particularly of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. E-government can generate important benefits in the form of new employment, better access to health and education, and inclusion of women in service delivery. It can also ensure increased justice through open, accountable and transparent judicial institutions for safe and peaceful societies. The use of ICTs in government is also extremely valuable in fostering partnerships among global, regional and local stakeholders for the advancement of sustainable development.

4. OBJECTIVES

The EGM 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 *United Nations E-Government Survey 2016*. 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 innovative trends and services that support to sustainable development

- To provide suggestions related to the thematic areas and methodology of the 2016 edition.

5. 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:

- Common understanding of the critical role of e-Government in promoting sustainable development and enhanced knowledge of current e-government challenges and innovative approaches to address them

- Suggestions on key thematic areas, relevant issues and e-services for advancing sustainable development pillars and their integration to be considered in the United Nations E-Government Survey 2016 in line with the post-2015 development agenda

- Recommendations on possible enhancements to the Survey's methodology

6. ORGANIZATION

6.1. Participants

The Expert Group Meeting will be attended by a number of governance and public administration experts (including e-government), as well as experts in related areas drawn from a variety of fields, including academia, the United Nations system and other relevant international organizations.

6.2. 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 2014*, and possibly previous editions which are available online on UNPAN, as well as selected key documents on the post-2015 development agenda and sustainable development listed below.

- ➢ *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. Structure of the meeting

The Meeting will be organized over the course of two days and will be articulated into plenary sessions and working groups. Experts from different regions of the world will be invited to share their knowledge and views on e-government for sustainable development. To facilitate discussions and exchange of views, overview presentations consolidating findings and suggestions from the seven regional consultative meetings will be presented during the EGM.

6.4. Official languages

The official language of the Expert Group Meeting will be English.

6.5. Electronic networking

Electronic communication will be utilized to encourage wide and representative participation in discussions. All the documents of the Meeting will be on UNPAN at: http://www.unpan.org/DPADM/EGovernment/UNEGovernmentSurveys/2016UnitedNationsEGovernmentSurvey/tabid/1788/language/en-US/Default.aspx

CONTACT INFORMATION

For Substantive Matters:

Mr. Vincenzo Aquaro
Chief, e-Government
Division for Public Administration and Development Management
United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
Tel: +1-917-367-4524
Email: aquaro@un.org

Ms. Adriana Alberti
Senior Governance and Public Administration Officer
e-Government Branch
Division for Public Administration and Development Management
United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
Email: alberti@un.org

Ms. Zamira Dzhusupova
Governance and Public Administration Officer
e-Government Branch
Division for Public Administration and Development Management
United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
Email: dzhusupova@un.org

For Administrative Matters:

Ms. Madeleine Losch
Programme Assistant
e-Government Branch
Division for Public Administration and Development Management
United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
E-mail: loschm@un.org

Ms. Kyung Ae Lim
e-Government Branch
Division for Public Administration and Development Management
United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
E-mail: lim7@un.org