



21st session of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration

Written statement by World Bank Group

Agenda item 9: Issues in Digital Government

The World Bank has extensive experience in supporting client countries on their transformation journeys for decades. We recognize the important role of technology in public sector transformation – technology has the potential to boost government efficiency, transparency, responsiveness, and citizen trust. There has been a seismic shift in the demand for support on leveraging technology for public sector transformation over the last seven years, culminating in the development of the GovTech initiative by the World Bank in 2018. GovTech is a whole-of-government approach to public sector modernization that leverages technology to promote simple, efficient, and transparent government, with citizens at the center of reforms.

Countries have different motivations to adopt GovTech solutions for public sector modernization. Some aim to increase government efficiency, respond to rising citizen demand for better public services, leverage the private sector experience in the adoption of technology, and to develop their digital economies. These motivations reflect the spillover effects GovTech can have on governance and economic development such as reduced petty corruption, increased efficiency, better service delivery, transparency and accountability, and the opportunity to create local tech ecosystems to implement, maintain, and build on GovTech solutions. Fostering local GovTech eco-systems to support governments' digital transformations can increase demand for digital skills, provide opportunities for SMEs, and contributing to private sector growth, competitiveness, and job creation.

While nearly every country has begun a digitization journey, they are not all at the same level of maturity. To better measure the global progress on GovTech, the World Bank launched the GovTech Maturity Index (GTMI) in 2021. The GTMI shows the state of GovTech maturity in 198 economies across the globe. The GTMI groupings provide insights into areas that could be strengthened to better deliver on the promise of public sector digital transformation.

GovTech is not only about technology and solutions, but also critical analog complements to further public sector modernization. These complements or enablers include strong institutional coordination, enabling laws and regulatory environment, change management, and

skilling that are crucial to successful implementation and ongoing use of digital government solutions.

Advancing digital government in developing countries can be challenging. For one, the capacity to leverage technology for public sector transformation is uneven. Many countries wrestle with significant digital divides in terms of connectivity, access to devices, literacy, and skills. These issues should shape reform agendas and implementation plans. Countries must also reform with an eye toward real threats such as cyberattacks, privacy and data breaches. There should also be a focus on ensuring a secure environment for users to increase trust and uptake.

Ensuring that digital government is inclusive is imperative. The needs of the poorest and most vulnerable beneficiaries should be considered to ensure they are not further marginalized by GovTech initiatives. Countries can increase inclusivity of solutions and services by providing assisted access to e-services, ensure they meet accessibility guidelines, and working to reduce the digital divides in terms of connectivity, devices, and skills. Incorporating demand side interventions to increase awareness and improve skills and literacy of beneficiaries can increase take-up of digital government services, increasing impact and return on investment.

Technology is not a panacea for poor governance, and in some cases can exacerbate issues such as fraud and corruption risk in core operations and procurement. Much has been written about the potential for digital solutions to help detect corruption through citizen feedback mechanisms, social network analysis, AI enabled algorithms, transparency of beneficial ownership of firms participating in public procurement, etc. However, these tools often require specialized data, skilled technical knowledge and capacity to apply them properly. In addition, certain legal and administrative foundations are needed if they are to make meaningful impacts on governance.

The amount of data produced by digital government systems is immense, but needs to be collected, used and shared responsibly. Governments have a wealth of data that can inform decision-making, and be used to monitor implementation of programs and policies, and target beneficiaries. There is also the potential for individuals and private sector organization to harness public data to create new values, including goods and services. This data is integral to new technologies such as machine learning and artificial intelligence such as those used for fraud detection noted above. While providing data through open data portals can increase transparency, it is important to ensure the data is anonymized and that users have the skills to explore and analyze the data properly for meaningful third party monitoring and evaluation. Attention should also be paid to data protection and privacy.

The promise of GovTech for recovery and resilience is just becoming clear. There is a renewed focus on the use of technology such as cloud-based solutions and as a platform (XaaS) for business continuity and crisis management. The COVID pandemic increased the urgency for and pace of GovTech reforms, and these solutions enabled access from anywhere which was necessary in times of remote government, remote work, and remote schooling. The lessons learned during this period of recovery and resilience can also be applied in environments characterized by fragility, violence and conflict to ensure continuity of government business.

Looking forward, there is more we can do in terms of making digital government more sustainable and climate conscious. The magnitude of the climate challenge cannot be understated. Greening GovTech, including procurement, is a new challenge for us all. There

are immense opportunities to make digital government more energy efficient, sustainable, and environmentally responsible. For instance, cloud solutions powered by renewable resources.