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Improving engagement and communication between Governments and stakeholders, including through access to information, open government and electronic and mobile solutions

Improving engagement and communication between government and stakeholders through online and mobile solutions

This conference room paper was prepared by Committee member Rowena Bethel. The content of and the views expressed in the paper are those of the author, and do not imply any expression of opinion on the part of the United Nations.

I. The rationale for unprecedented levels of communication and engagement between stakeholders?

1. Sustainable development in the context of the SDGs mandates that no-one is left behind. Fundamentally therefore, the key to realizing this overarching goal lies in having a profound appreciation of exactly what it will take to achieve this ideal. It is also important to appreciate that what it will take will differ from one country to another. Nonetheless, it has become manifestly clear that policy coherence, *in all cases*, is a key ingredient. There has been repeated emphasis that connecting policies, processes and delivery modes must be manifested in a tangible way so that the outcomes, as they are intended in the SDGs, can be effectively realized.

2. In order to effectively tackle policy coherence for the 2030 agenda therefore, calls, in the first instance, for a comprehensive and incisive understanding of what the circumstances are in each nation that prevent the realization of the SDGs. This also requires a level of understanding of what ordinary citizens and businesses need in order to be effective participants in the delivery of the new agenda.

3. The (2030 Agenda) post 2015 agenda, therefore, demands even greater coherence in the way public administration operates, both internally and with external stakeholders. This is an imperative which now requires policy formulation to include relevant and adequate considerations of the three dimensions of sustainability in the 2030 agenda in an holistic way. Many commentators have observed that broad stakeholder engagement, as a principle for transformative public administration, demonstrates the move “from Government *for* the people and *of* the people, to government *by* the people”.

Simply put, citizens must be empowered to influence the decisions that affect them recognizing, (as another commentator observed), the lack of the state's capacity to solve all problems that citizens truly care about; and that the input of citizens is necessary to address the complexity of issues that they face.

II. Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) as enablers of better government

4. The past two decades witnessed a series of incremental developments by Governments in their respective take-up of ICTs as a primary enabler of a more transparent and accountable ecosystem of public governance. The differential pace of this take-up has been wide ranging. Some countries are far advanced with the pervasiveness of their digital environments and societal take-up, whilst others continue to face challenges in this area. Encouragingly the UN 2014 E-Government survey observed that all 193 member countries of the United Nations have national websites.¹

5. Apart from the necessary internal re-engineering of business processes required to ensure that the needs of stakeholders are addressed in an holistic way, ICTs have been the primary enabler of progress in meeting the high levels of policy integration necessary for a whole-of-government approach that can achieve sustainable development. ICTs have been the primary technical facilitator for transforming the public governance model in this regard.

6. Moreover through continuing progress in innovation, ICTs have enabled continuing cycles of transformation i.e. its adaptability supports dynamic public administration with the ability to evolve in tandem with societal needs and expectations.

7. Significantly, the adoption of ICTs within public administration has contributed to building trust in government through the use of the tools and solutions that provide insight into how decisions are made; and also provide the means by which citizens may give input and feedback on the activities of government, for example, through the use of social network services such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, amongst others.

8. The ability of ICTs to create the enabling infrastructure that permits Government to push out information to masses of people in real time, make available Government information on a large scale, and provide the means for interaction with Government machinery has been nothing short of revolutionary. The evidence is clear from successive findings of the UN e-Government surveys that technology has been harnessed successfully to transform Government, its governance structures and the business of public administration across the globe. It has, also, through this means, deepened democracy.

III. Online Government

9. The move to online government began around the mid-1990s. For the purposes of this paper I am using the simple Gartner maturity model to describe what has generally been a four step evolutionary e-Government path. The Gartner maturity model is only one of several such models. In the Gartner model Governments first establish a web presence that provides static information; then progresses to having interactive solutions that enable the download of forms as well as email responses to enquiries; this is followed in the third phase by the provision of secure transactional activities with government agencies. The fourth stage typically produces a greater degree of back-office integration (connected or joined-up government) within Government, facilitating one stop shop experiences over the Internet around, for example, life events. This stage also typically involves the creation of open source platforms utilizing open government data, so that more collaborative opportunities between government and its stakeholders are available using the Internet space.

10. Most recently, further progress along the eGovernment evolutionary curve, is emerging as countries move towards a digital government model in which the potential and value of the vast amounts of data that are stored in systems can be exploited to add value and help to create a culture of preemption in which Governments can anticipate needs of citizens and provide for these proactively. This is the era of smart cities, towns and countries, etc. However this level of societal advance is possible only through a high degree of integration at the policy and administrative levels of public administration. The technologies serve as tools to facilitate this integration, vertically and horizontally across sectors.

11. Each step or phase of the online government evolution also has its own characteristics for both online communication and/or engagement with stakeholders.

IV. Online and mobile solutions to engage and communicate with Government

12. Innovative online tools make managing citizen input easier while expanding engagement to a wider base.ⁱⁱ Communication and stakeholder engagement using online solutions occurs primarily through a Government's web presence. They customarily take several forms such as emailing, blogs, online fora, social media, wikis and weblogs, mobile apps and open government tools. Additionally the use of mobile phones and more recently smartphones have also provided avenues for interaction with Government, particularly in countries and territories that have challenges with access to fixed computer devices. The foregoing solutions are typically the pathways that enable stakeholders to obtain government information and express views and opinions on policies, including their implementation. The UN e-Government Survey understands e-participation

at three levels: e-information, e-consultation and e-decision-making – with the latter implying a higher degree of engagement.

13. The 2014 UN eGovernment survey illustrates two examples of online solutions, one from the Kingdom of Morocco and the other from the island nation of Mauritius.

14. In the case of Morocco, the Government has developed an e-consultation platform through a national website, where citizens can access legislative texts online, read and download them and post their comments and concerns. The government also presents its responses to citizens' comments and provides feedback; showing that they track the concerns and remarks of citizens, take them into consideration and deliver a response.

15. In the case of Mauritius, the Government portal offers citizens a platform for e-participation through chat rooms, a media library, blogs and discussion forums.

16. Crowdsourcing is another innovative mechanism available to Governments for engaging stakeholders. With policy crowdsourcing citizens have the opportunity to come up with policy solutions to major challenges that they face. For example, in a 2010 Report entitled "*Challenges and Solutions of Citizen Engagement in Developing Countries*", **Tobin Im, Wonhyuk Cho, Greg Porumbescu and Jungho Park** gave the example that in the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul, citizens were invited to come up with solutions to improve the health sector in the state. For those who did not have access to the Internet, buses equipped with Internet access and trained personnel travelled across the poorest areas of the state to collect ideas from the least privileged groups. As a result, they reported that at the end of this process there were 50 policy priorities selected, through a process that generated over 1300 citizen proposals with 122.000 popular votes. The policies selected were integrated in the health strategy of the state. The technology initially used in Rio Grande do Sul was subsequently replicated in other parts of Brazil.ⁱⁱⁱ

17. In his research paper entitled "*Citizens' Engagement in Policymaking and the Design of Public services*" **Brenton Holmes** cautioned that, amongst other things, for online engagement opportunities for citizens to be truly effective, they must be embedded in a broader context of government openness and transparency that includes robust legislative regimes for freedom of information, and public ownership and re-use of information gathered and generated by government.^{iv}

18. In June 2013, the Korean Government announced the new vision for government operation called "Government 3.0" which places emphasis on openness, sharing, communication, and collaboration. Under the new vision the Government proposed to undergo a paradigm shift that moved away from a government-led approach to a more people-oriented approach taking advantage of

the vast amounts of data potentially at its disposal through a more collaborative data management model.^v In a presentation on South Korea's move to Government 3.0 Executive Director of the National Information Society Agency Dr. Jeongwon Yoon stated words to the effect that "Ordinary Government handles what you need, smart government knows what you want".

V. MGovernment

19. According to the GSMA, Mobile Economy Report of 2015, "The mobile industry continues to scale rapidly, with a total of 3.6 billion unique mobile subscribers at the end of 2014. Half of the world's population now has a mobile subscription—up from just one in five 10 years ago. An additional one billion subscribers are predicted by 2020, taking the global penetration rate to approximately 60%."^{vi}

20. The ITU has recognised mobile government to be a facilitator of anytime anywhere service as well as being suited to reducing the digital divide. It's importance is heightened in countries with low levels of access to fixed computer devices. Examples given of mGovernment initiatives are: utilization of SMS messaging and Interactive Voice Response (IVR) for example to provide important information regarding national disasters and disaster recovery efforts; market trends; health and education notices.

21. It has also been noted that the amalgamation of mobile devices and new media applications – which support quick access to integrated data, location-based services, and empowered citizens from any place at any time – is the cornerstone of the emerging impact of mobile governance. Mobile technologies are enhancing the value of government services: from an electronic wallet card linked to a mobile phone in Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates or the Philippines; to voting, registration or election monitoring in Morocco, Kenya, Estonia and Ukraine; to support of farmers with weather and market price alerts in Malaysia, Uganda, India and China; to co-ordination of real-time location data for emergency response in Turkey, the United States and France.^{vii}

22. Across the globe there are many examples of mobile based solutions that have opened links between citizens and their governments by providing communication channels at affordable rates. These cover access to a range of government services such as eVoting, tax filing, registration etc. via mobile phones including the payment of bills, the ability to receive and supply text messages and images to government agencies in a targeted way; the ability to make enquiries and the ability to engage with lawmakers.

VI. Conclusion

In the final analysis, successful implementation of the SDGs, so that no one is left behind, hinges on an effective communications framework in which the co-

relationships are appropriately assessed, analysed, understood and reconciled. ICTs offer the best practical means to conduct each of these pre-requisites.

The UN e-Government survey has been an immensely important gauge of where countries are in their national ICT strategies; as well as containing a wealth of benchmarking opportunities able to suit the developmental stage of all countries. Being published for more than a decade, the UN e-Government Survey already became an invaluable reference and a learning tool; the UN e-Government Survey 2016, under the theme "e-Government for Sustainable Development", can be seen as a comprehensive toolkit on how ICTs and e-Government could support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including case studies and hands-on approaches developed by UN member states.

In addition, the various databases within the UNPAN network provides a host of toolkits and other assistances that states may source to determine which technologies, programmes or policies best suit their stage of development or their specific circumstances.

For developing countries, least developed countries and SIDS, the UN is encouraged to continue the technical assistance programmes through their various agencies; and continue to develop useful toolkits and guides to assist countries particularly with country-specific ICT solutions and open government strategies that will facilitate the levels of engagement essential for tackling the implementation phase of the 2030 agenda. It will also be important to promote not just supply-side metrics but also demand-side metrics, such as the impact, usage and user satisfaction of online services in supporting the SDGs. It is therefore recommended that programmes supporting the improvement of institutional capacity to collect, use and publish relevant e-government data and compile indicators for analysis, monitoring and evaluation of progress in e-government should be strengthened, as well as capacity for the development of integrated digital strategies aimed at implementing the 2030 Agenda.

5. Conclusion.

It is recommended that DESA and DPADM and other UN agencies should continue to develop over the years a range of toolkits, best practices, technical assistance programmes manuals and other tools, approaches and methodologies to assist Governments with determining the best e-strategies for their respective stages of development and particular needs for implementing the 2030 Agenda.

ⁱ Egov survey reference

ⁱⁱ <http://www.granicus.com/solutions/citizen-engagement/citizen-overview/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Challenges and solutions of citizen engagement in developing countries, Tobin Im, Wonhyuk Cho, Greg Porumbescu and Jungho Park, 2010 page 5 -
<http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/un/unpan050847.pdf>

^{iv} Citizens' engagement in policymaking and the design of public services - Research Paper no. 1 2011–12 -
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http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp1112/12rp01#_Toc299099876

^v Republic of Korea National Action Plan on Open Government Partnership, page 1 -
[http://www.opengovpartnership.org/sites/default/files/140624_OGP_Action_Plan_Republic_of_Korea -
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^{vi} GSMA, The Mobile economy 2015
http://www.gsmamobileeconomy.com/GSMA_Global_Mobile_Economy_Report_2015.pdf

^{vii} Benefits and outcomes of m-government, ITU - <https://www.itu.int/ITU-D/cyb/app/docs/m-gov/Benefits%20and%20outcomes%20of%20M-government.pdf>