Measuring and Evaluating e-Participation (METEP): Assessment of Readiness at the Country Level

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INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

The Concept Paper entitled *Developing capacity for participatory governance through e-participation: engaging citizens in policy and decision-making processes using ICTs* prepared by the UNDESA’s Division for Public Administration and Development Management (DPADM) highlights the importance of e-participation for good governance in the 21st century. Specifically, the Paper outlines the scope of e-participation in order to construct a framework (guide) for Measuring and Evaluating e-Participation (METEP) with the purpose of better understanding the status of ICT-enabled participatory practices in different socio-economic contexts. It is argued that the use of ICTs not only can provide high quality information and explicit knowledge to citizens but empower them for more effective participation in public life and policies.

The ultimate objective of METEP is to promote and strengthen government capacities to engage citizens in public policy and decision-making processes by using e-participation technologies and good governance practices in order to assist developing countries to successfully implement policies, programmes and projects related the development goals in the economic, social and environmental area.

UNDESA has accumulated a substantial experience in promoting the development of electronic government across the United Nations Member States. Especially successful and influential has been its biennial e-Government Surveys which, since 2001, have measured progress in national e-government development and ranked countries according to their readiness in terms of (i) online services, (ii) telecommunication infrastructure, (iii) human capital. The pilot assessment of e-participation has also been undertaken in recent years.

There is a pressing need to further promote e-participation instruments by deepening and widening their use in public administration in view of the growing demand from citizens to influence national policies to the extent they wish. Ordinary people too often feel powerless, and it is not sufficient any more just to voice their concerns; the latter should be heard and acted upon by their governments. There is a growing demand to participate in public policy making from the outset rather than changing them afterwards, often at high cost.

On the other hand, the smart use of ICTs for citizen engagement has a high leapfrogging potential, as evidenced by the advancement of a developing Kazakhstan to the top of the best performing in e-participation countries.¹ There must be a better understanding of the factors determining the state of preparedness for successful e-participation activities, which need to be adequately identified, measured, and shared.

The proposed METEP assessment diagnostics will help better understand those factors that make e-participation succeed or fail. It will be done, firstly, by developing an analytical framework and, secondly, by translating it into an actionable system of indicators and questions to measure various aspects of e-participation readiness and progress.

¹ UN e-Government Survey 2012
The METEP framework consists of two main parts. Part One presents major conceptual approaches that form the overall e-participation principles, criteria and models by highlighting the importance of effective, transparent and responsive public institutions. The proposed approach draws on the known principles of successful e-participation recognised by both scholars and governance practitioners. A review of the dominant e-participation models is supplemented by the demonstration of two case studies to illustrate how various participatory actions work – or do not work – in real world; for example, it’s been concluded that such key e-participation stages as e-Information, e-Consultation and e-Decision-making may overlap, while the provision of information and consultations are often directly embedded in the policy making process. Such findings have helped distil the most applicable assessment methods described later in the framework.

Part Two represents the assessment framework per se, i.e. the definition of what is measured. Three key building blocks have been identified to construct the foundation of the e-participation assessment tool viewed from political, social and technical perspectives. Political side is represented by legal/organisational frameworks, modalities/channels and outreach plans. The social dimension includes such e-participation levels and stages as e-Information, e-Consultation, and e-Decision-making. The technical perspective of e-participation is described with the help of specific citizen engagement technologies present in the field of open government/data, social media, mobile/wireless communications, and dedicated web sites/portals. The Self-assessment Questionnaire has been designed to obtain relevant information about the state of e-participation readiness of individual government institutions at national, regional and local levels. Not only the availability of citizen engagement e-tools is measured but also their actual use in terms of the quality of the public input channelled via these tools. In addition, the Questionnaire is designed to evaluate e-participation progress by assessing existing practices (it could be stand-alone initiatives, services, or projects). It is the METEP’s central analytical and data collection instrument aiming at gathering information of both quantitative and qualitative character supported by relevant evidence. The method of scoring is described as well.

The state of e-participation readiness and progress will be assessed at both country and government institutions levels on an ongoing basis with support of a dedicated web-based database to reflect the diversity of socio-economic conditions. This interactive facility will be created together with interested Member States to improve the exchange of lessons learned. Eventually, the METEP the self-assessment exercise can be extended in future to include non-government structures as well – civil society organisations and non-organised citizens – that use public engagement technologies to connect with their government from ground-up.

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2 For simplicity, the terms ‘initiatives’, ‘services’, ‘projects’ are considered as interchangeable synonyms depending on the context.
PART ONE: Conceptual Framework

_e-Participation Approach_

Participation offline

OECD defines active participation as ‘a relationship based on partnership with government in which citizens actively engage in defining the process and content of policy-making. It acknowledges equal standing for citizens in setting the agenda, proposing policy options and shaping the policy dialogue – although the responsibility for the final decision or policy formulation rests with government.\(^3\) This definition captures key aspects of public participation as such, be it offline or online.

Several traditional public participation methods have been formalized in the past. It is important to make a brief review of them, for it is not uncommon that offline and online participation processes overlap and influence one another. These are:

1) **Referenda** – **participants**: involve all members of the public; **scale**: can be national or local; **mechanism**: via casting vote by way of choosing one or more options; **duration**: single event; **impact**: all participants have equal influence.

2) **Public hearings/enquiries** – **participants**: involve only interested citizens, as well as experts/politicians; **scale**: depends of the venue size; **duration**: may last weeks/months/years; **mechanism**: via making presentations on policy issues; **impact**: opinions can be voiced but no direct impact on the outcome.

3) **Public opinion surveys** – **participants**: involve hundreds and thousands of participants who represent interested population segments; **scale**: typically national; **duration**: single events lasting several minutes; **mechanism**: via written questionnaire or telephone surveys; **impact**: opinions can be recorded but no direct impact on the outcome.

4) **Negotiated rule-making** – **participants**: involve small number of representatives of stakeholder groups, as well as representatives of the general public; **scale**: small groups; **duration**: may last days/weeks/months but with strict deadlines; **mechanism**: via small group discussion; **impact**: direct impact on the outcome.

5) **Consensus conference** – **participants**: involve a small number (between 10 to 15) members of the public who are not experts on the issues, selected by the organizers; **scale**: small; **mechanism**: via working committees (consensus may be required), preparatory demonstrations and lectures to inform the panelists about the issues followed by a few-day conference; meetings are open to public, conclusions presented via report or press-conference; involves independent facilitators questioning experts selected by stakeholders; **duration**: few days; **impact**: direct impact on the outcome.

6) **Citizens’ jury/panel** – **participants**: involve between 10 and 20 members of the public selected by stakeholder panel to resemble the local population; **scale**: small; **mechanism**:

via meetings with independent facilitators questioning experts selected by the stakeholders; meetings are not necessarily public with conclusions presented via report or press-conference; duration: few/several days or more; impact: direct impact on the outcome.

7) **Citizen/public advisory committees** – participants: involve up to a few dozen participants selected by sponsors to represent key interest groups, not necessarily the general public; scale: small; duration: may last for extended period of time; mechanism: via small group meetings organized by sponsors to examine significant issues; impact: opinions can be recorded but no direct impact on the outcome.

8) **Focus groups** – participants: involve up to 12-15 members of the public; scale: small; mechanism: via single meetings (recorded and facilitated free discussions); duration: up to 2 hours; impact: opinions can be recorded but no direct impact on the outcome.

Whereas this is not an exhaustive list of all available participation methods that are practiced in an offline environment, it represents the major clusters of them. Their characteristic features are (a) a rather small scale, limited by the venue size, which does not permit to engage broader sections of the society, and (b) a primary focus on consultations. The advantage of certain offline methods is a built-in mechanism to directly influence decisions following the process of consultations, especially in the case of referenda, negotiated rule-making and consensus meetings.

**Participation online**

E-Participation is still a novel concept, with no commonly agreed definition of it. The prevailing assumption is that e-participation opens up **new technology-enabled possibilities to improve government policies** by connecting ‘citizens with one another and with their elected representatives through public deliberation’.

Likewise, UNDESA defines e-participation as the **process of engaging citizens through ICTs in policy and decision-making** in order to make it participatory, inclusive, and deliberative.

In this definition, e-participation is an openly pro-citizen concept aiming to (a) realising in practice the conceptual promise of ICT-enabled democratic citizenship through engagement and civic empowerment, and (b) making the governing institutions significantly more participatory by institutionalising participation as a normative value (for example, in the form of public online consultations and deliberations supported by respective legal acts).

The following participatory activities realised through ICT tools are the most common:

- e-Campaigning, including e-Petitioning
- Community building / Collaborative e-environments

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5 Concept paper ‘Developing capacity for participatory governance through e-participation’, UNDESA, New York.

In substance, these e-participation methods do not differ substantially from those practiced offline. Yet in the digital age, opportunities offered by ICTs raise expectations for greater participation, especially by widening the scale and base of participation and thus by overcoming the limitations imposed by the size of offline venues.

**Principles of e-participation**

OECD emphasises ten guiding principles to be applied as cross-cutting issues for successful implementation of e-participation activities. These are:

1) *Commitment* – demonstration of leadership.

2) *Rights* – demonstration of how government institutions meet their obligation to secure citizens’ right to access information, be consulted and participate in policy development.

3) *Clarity* – demonstration of clarity of objectives and citizens’ roles at each phase from the very outset of e-participation process.

4) *Time* – demonstration of sufficient time allotted at each phase as early as possible to ensure that all possible policy options are considered.

5) *Evaluation* – demonstration of the assessment mechanism deployed by authorities to evaluate their performance at each phase of participation.

6) *Objectivity* – demonstration of the objective nature of information provided, its completeness and accessibility to all willing to participate in policy making.

7) *Resources* – demonstration of the provision of adequate and accessible resources – technical, financial, human – needed to conduct participatory activities at every stage.

8) *Co-ordination* – demonstration of effective inter-agency co-ordination activities across the government to exclude duplication of effort, prevent ‘participation fatigue’ on the citizens’ part.

9) *Accountability* – demonstration of the effective, responsible and transparent use by the government of citizen’s feedback and other participation activities for policy making as part of broader accountability mechanisms.

10) *Active citizenship* – demonstration of efforts aimed at encouraging civic activism by increasing capacities and skills of the citizenry to participate in policy making in a meaningful and informed manner.
Importance of openness and inclusiveness

Concerned with the often too low effectiveness and impact of e-participation initiatives, OECD further stresses the importance of ensuring that policy making process is *open* and *inclusive*. While openness will make citizens more informed about possible policy options, inclusion would engage not only those who are ‘able but unwilling’ to participate but also those who are ‘willing but unable’; otherwise speaking, to expand the participation base of actors as much as technically feasible.

In a special study investigating the performance of e-participation initiatives by assessing the validity of the ten guiding principles, OECD has discovered that the greatest progress was made in establishing legal rights (principle number 2) ensuring access to information. A substantial progress was also made in demonstrating government’s commitments and leadership (principle number 1), as well as in supporting active citizenship (principle number 10). On the other hand, the hardest to apply were the principles dealing with the lack of adequate resources (number 7) and time to participate (number 4), and especially the difficulties encountered while evaluating participation efforts (the principle number 5).

OECD concludes that governments need to:

- **Mainstream public engagement to improve policy performance.** Investments are needed to embed open and inclusive policy making as part of government’s “core business”, build skills among civil servants and establish a supportive political and administrative culture.

- **Develop effective evaluation tools.** Evaluating the quality of open and inclusive policy making processes and their impacts is a new frontier for most governments. Countries need to pool their efforts to develop appropriate evaluation frameworks, tools and training.

- **Leverage technology and the participative web.** Blogs, wikis and social media (also known as Web 2.0) do not automatically deliver public engagement. The conceptual models underpinning the participative web (i.e. horizontal vs. vertical; iterative vs. sequential; open vs. proprietary; multiple vs. binary) may be more powerful, and of wider application, than the tools themselves.

- **Adopt sound principles to support practice.** “One size fits all” is not an option. To be effective, open and inclusive policy making must be appropriately designed and context specific for a given country, level of government and policy field. A robust set of principles can guide practitioners when designing, implementing and evaluating e-participation initiatives.

Governments need, first, to identify barriers that prevent citizens from meaningful participation, and, secondly, substantially lower them by checking whether the public engagement tools are effective in this respect; for example, through the provision of multilingual information by

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focusing on youth, marginalized, poor; make the very act of participation attractive by putting forward policy issues that directly affect people’s lives, combine offline (face-to-face) and online modes of participation, be pro-active in public engagement when seeking to engage with them. Openness and inclusiveness need to be strengthened by accomplishing efficacy and equity of public participation through demonstration of evidence-based decision-making.

**Models of e-participation**

e-Participation as a socio-political phenomenon is viewed in practice as a particular, ICT-enabled *civic empowerment and engagement process*. An engagement and process-based approach has been central in building conceptual models of e-participation. The most widely used e-participation model is based on the OECD\(^8\) concept comprising three main stages of participation, namely: (i) *e-Information* – provision of information on the Internet, (ii) *e-Consultation* – organizing public consultations online, and (iii) *e-Decision-making* – evolving citizens directly in decision processes (Figure 1).

![Figure 1 – e-Participation maturity stages (participatory actions)](image)

Effectively, these are the stages of engaging citizens within the framework of government-to-citizen, citizen-to-citizen and citizen-to-government interactions, with the ultimate objective to take decisions that include people’s interest. At the first stage, necessary information is supplied to citizens via ICT channels in a targeted manner in order to help them make informed choices at the second phase of public consultations, for example, exploiting the Web 2.0 benefits of user-generated content (USG) provided by independent social media or interactive features of dedicated government web site and portals. The third stage of making decisions per se may include e-voting via secure government systems or the use of the ‘Like/Dislike’ feature provided by social media. Policy making here is the logical pinnacle of all preceding e-participation activities.

E-participation in this conceptualisation includes all three above-listed stages contrary to a narrower definition that existed some time ago to denote the decision-making process only.\(^9\) However, in real life these distinctive e-participation stages may well co-exist with one another at the same time and even overlap. Therefore, in this framework, each e-participation stage is

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\(^8\) Citizens as Partners: Information, consultation and public participation in policy-making. Paris: OECD, 2001; see also UNDESA’s overview of e-participation models (prepared by Nahleen Ahmed, DPADM, April 2006).

also considered as a type of participatory action undertaken either as a succession of steps or in parallel. This three-stage e-participation model has been widely used with certain variations. For example, the Inform-Consult-Empower approach\(^\text{10}\) places special emphasis on the reduction of technological, social, organisational, cultural and political barriers.

To a large extent, this model is based on a level-based approach by distinguishing between the levels when technology is used for (i) e-Enabling via informing, especially those who require special support to gain access the right information, (ii) e-Engaging via consulting with citizens to enable deeper contributions and support deliberative debate on policy issues, and (iii) e-Empowering via supporting active participation and facilitating bottom-up ideas to influence the political agenda.\(^\text{11}\) This model highlights the importance of active participation at all levels. Despite a slightly different vocabulary, it closely follows the OECD’s stage-based logic.

The Association for Public Participation (IAPP) proposes a five-tiered classification that in many ways combines the previous three models, namely:

- **Information provision:** fact sheets, web sites, open houses.
- **Consultation:** public comment, focus groups, surveys, public meetings.
- **Involving the public:** workshops, deliberative polling.
- **Collaboration:** citizen advisory committees, consensus-building, participatory decision making.
- **Empowerment:** citizens’ juries, ballots, delegated decisions.

All the models have one thing in common – they start with information provision followed by public consultations; in the definition of the IAPP, consultations are additionally split into various organisational, collaborative and representational forms. However, the most ambiguous is the stage of decision making. While the OECD model presumes direct involvement of citizens in making policies, the other models are more flexible in defining what decision-making entails; for example, it is possible to influence government decision makers already at the stage of consultations by choosing between policy options.

There are five principal high-level stages of making policies as far as the engagement of citizens via ICTs is concerned:\(^\text{12}\)

1) **Agenda setting** – identifying the problem that prompts a need for a policy change or to have a new policy altogether;

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2) **Analysis** – identifying the scope of the problem and mapping out activities needed to produce a policy draft; this includes: gathering evidence, consulting with key stakeholders, developing options, etc.

3) **Creating the policy** – creating an acceptable for main stakeholder policy document including undertaking pilots and putting in place an action plan to implement the policy.

4) **Implementing the policy** – elaborating and enacting necessary legislation, regulation, guidance.

5) **Monitoring the policy** – evaluating the implementation process to check out whether or not the policy is working through seeking feedback from policy beneficiaries and, if required, going back to the first stage.

In reality, certain forms of information provision, consultative and collaborative actions are the integral parts of decision making. The demonstration cases that are described below underline this point.

**Demonstration cases of e-participation stages**

**Case 1 – e-Information & e-Consultation functionality: Africa4All Parliamentary Initiative** (funded by the European Commission). Its aim is ‘Connecting African Parliaments & Citizens through Innovative ICT’. A project launched a few years ago, has developed a dedicated web site featuring a special participation tool – Civic Bench (see screen-shot below in Figure 2) – to engage the African public in discussing seven important policy topics including Poverty eradication using ICT, Gender issues in ICT policies and legislation, Maternal health and family planning in the context of poverty reduction and so forth.

![Figure 2 – e-Participation tool of Africa4All initiative](image)

The topic Poverty reduction using ICT encompasses at once two of three stages of e-participation. The icons Documents and Articles are design to supply relevant information about the topic, while the icon Discussion should contain citizens’ contributions. The web site does not

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13 There has been no particular purpose in choosing the presented cases except for illustration; many other cases would do as well.

have a function of e-Decision-making to directly participate in policy shaping, given the international nature of this initiative (that cannot replace the decision making powers of sovereign states). However, no information was supplied, and no discussion took place following just one message posted three years ago (Figure 3). The same true for all other policy issues.

Yet this case should not be discarded outright as unsuccessful. The web site creators hardly believed that it would be possible to influence national policies via this particular e-participation tool alone. Its advantage has been that five participating countries could use this platform to discuss national issues by logging in into countries’ working area or by downloading the platform’s free software and localise it in an entirely new way to meet varied domestic needs.


The People’s Assembly Rahvakogu is a dedicated online platform for crowd-sourcing ideas and proposals to amend Estonia’s electoral laws, political party law, and other issues related. The original platform was developed in Iceland to discuss its future in the wake of the financial crisis and democracy failures to prevent it. Estonia adapted and localised it for its own needs – the development of participatory policies.

The Assembly focuses specifically on five questions: the electoral system, political parties, competition between the political parties and their internal democracy, financing of the political parties, strengthening the role of civic society in politics between the elections, and stopping the politicization of public offices. The Assembly combines modern communication tools with traditional face-to-face discussions. The sequence of steps was as follows:
During the first stage in January 2013 people’s proposals on each topic were submitted, comments posted in support or rejection of the proposed ideas to reveal their public approval using the ‘Like/ dislike’ feature (see Figure 5).

At the second stage in February 2013, a select group of experts analysed the most popular proposals by aggregating them into a number of different scenarios and provided with the impact analysis report in the case of realisation in real life. The process of public input was closed in March 2013 by organising offline public meetings during the “deliberation day” to select the most preferred scenarios for presenting before the Parliament (Riigikogu) by the President (that will take place still in 2013). While this e-participation initiative is not formally an official government initiative per se, it’s been initiated by the President who as the state’s top executive has committed to follow up with law makers.
These two initiatives validate the relevance of the above models and confirm the point made earlier, namely: the key three (or five, for that matter) e-participation stages are closely interlinked. One the one hand, e-Decision-making can include e-Information and e-Consultation activities too, whereas the latter can substantially influence the former, on the other. For example, in the second demonstration case, the policy agenda items have been proposed by citizens (1st stage of the policy making life cycle) and then reviewed by them through citizen-to-citizen collaboration (2nd stage of policy development process).

E-participation is a two-sided process. On the one side, it is about empowering citizens to participate deeper and wider in policy making thanks to better conditions for active citizenship created by the government (regulatory frameworks and the deployment of ICT-based engagement tools). On the other side, it is about the actual process of public input channelled by active citizens back to the government via ICTs. It also means that the government must be prepared to accept and include citizens’ contributions into its machinery of policy making; that presents special demands for the quality and relevance of their input.

While, theoretically, the term ’e-participation’ includes both the government-led initiatives and those initiated by the citizenry on their own from ground-up, for practical reasons, the current version of this framework deals only the government top-down effort to empower civil society.

PART TWO: Assessment Framework

Goals
The overriding objective of the METEP assessment framework is to promote successful e-participation technologies and related good governance practices nationally, regionally and globally. The design of the METEP assessment tools would pursue a three-fold strategic objective aimed at

- eliminating barriers for participatory policy making,
- creating and exploiting effective public engagement tools that are accepted by citizens, and
- developing capacities for evaluating e-participation progress for best practice exchange and continuous learning.

Though there is a vast academic literature on e-participation, the practical experience – supported with tangible evidence – of its evaluation in real life is scarce. The existing recommendations propose, for example, to assess separately political, technical and social aspects of e-participation practices asking the following question15

Political perspective: Was the e-engagement effective in contributing to the decision-making process, and did it do so transparently? Did it engage the community affected? Were their contributions relevant to the policy topic, and were they informed contributions? How were

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conflicts handled and consensus reached? How were the contributions responded to? To what extent did they affect policy?

Technical perspective: To what extent did the design of ICT-based engagement tools directly contribute to the e-participation outcome? Whether the skills and experiences of the target audiences were accounted for when designing ICT tools?

Social perspective: How were the outcomes related to the e-participation process? How effectively did it enable those targeted to accomplish what they wanted? What circumstances helped or hindered them to realistically contribute? Were others excluded who should have been included?

Assessing technology for e-participation
The key factor that determines the design, deployment and use of particular public engagement technologies for citizens’ benefit is the availability of adequate capacities on the side of both governments and the citizenry. The UNDESA’s Working Group on e-participation at the recent Expert Group Meeting on “2014 E-government Survey: E-government as an enabler of collaborative governance” (4-5 December 2012) lists three specific areas for concern in developing capacity for e-participation, namely: (a) Open government/data and transparency, (b) Social media, and (c) Mobility (mobile technologies/devices/platforms).

These areas have been defined as representative trends in e-participation across the United Nations Member States. According to the Expert Group:

a) Open government/data brings opportunities for more informed decision-making, greater service innovation, and enhanced transparency. It also brings up challenges of the accuracy of data, data protection and privacy concerns, and differing social attitudes to open data that are linked to a diversity of cultural contexts.

b) Social media bring opportunities for cost-effective ways for governments to engage with citizens, especially since many citizens are already on popular sites. They provide platforms that enable citizens to become content creators for public policies and services that governments can tap, providing a wealth of information. Governments need to develop a strategy for utilizing citizen generated content for policy-making and service enhancement processes. There is a danger that governments can be sidelined in online citizen-to-citizen dialogues and discussions.

c) Mobility and wireless technology are the new emerging trends that provide opportunities for overcoming the digital divide in terms of geography and uneven infrastructure. They enable governments to target and customize information for citizens and also potentially to garner very specific data from individuals. Challenges coming with these trends stem from traditional e-government frameworks not covering the potential for convergence with existing channels and multi-channels. Governments should encourage mobile and wireless strategies, making sure there are commensurate data and privacy protection in place.

These trends reveal the emergence of new technologies that are already affecting opportunities for engagement. Together with more traditional technologies – e.g. dedicated web-sites,
universal One Stop Shop portals or Internet discussion forums based on Web 2.0 functionalities – they form a pool of public engagement technologies, old and new, that need to be integrated for into the assessment methodology of e-participation development.

Inasmuch as the evaluation of e-participation is a complex and value-laden – and often context-sensitive concept – OECD recommends looking at a number of factors, technology features, concerning (a) Content (e.g. choice of languages, simplicity), (b) Format (e.g. choice of large fonts, availability of audio-recorded information), and (c) Channel (e.g. the choice of non-traditional channels, including using intermediaries to reach target groups). Such approach is especially useful when assessing how successful is the dissemination and uptake of government information, specifically for the benefit of the “willing but unable”. All in all, the engagement technologies and their features influence the effectiveness of a particular type of participatory action, as demonstrated in Figure 6 below.

![Figure 6 – Role of digital technologies for e-participation](image)

**Assessing policies and modalities of e-participation**

UNDESA proposes to consider a number of areas of government activities that can be considered as main criteria for e-participation assessment:

- **Legal Frameworks** – outline responsibilities to be undertaken by governments and delineate the roles of related public organizations. The existence or non-existence of legal frameworks determines whether public organizations will have the authority and support, in terms of resource allocation and development, to pursue e-participation. Legal frameworks also demonstrate governments’ prioritization of e-participation development and capacity building. It is essential to formulate such frameworks in a participatory manner to strengthen the effectiveness of citizen engagement through stronger motivation, ownership and satisfaction from participation.

- **Organizational Frameworks** – bring attention to organizational frameworks at the level of government institutions through which e-participation services are divided and

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16 The Concept Paper ‘Developing capacity for participatory governance through e-participation: engaging citizens in policy and decision-making processes using ICTs’ prepared by the UNDESA’s Division for Public Administration and Development Management (DPADM)
coordinated. Organizational arrangements affect the utilization of resources allotted for e-participation activities and determine their efficiency, productivity, and responsiveness.

- **Channels/Modalities** – address challenges of prioritizing and utilizing specific communication means for e-participation, which have cultural and financial implications; for example, smart investment in ICT development in a cost-effective way may result in significant efficiency impacts for public organizations. Cultural factors can help strategize the appropriateness of ICT investment in channels and modalities to foster inclusion.

- **Outreach** – directly impacts the inclusiveness of e-participation effort with a particular focus on stakeholder needs, especially of those that are disabled, displaced, aging or otherwise marginalized (e.g. minority groups); that is, whose lives are especially affected by policies. Outreach measures in the field of e-participation need to be aligned with complementary education and ICT skills development.

These criteria represent key e-participation policy domains. Coupled with engagement technologies and action types, they form the foundational building blocks of e-participation assessment. Block A reflects political factors conditioning the very possibility for e-participation to manifest itself through laws, organisational structures, communication tools, the role of main beneficiaries and stakeholders. Block B addresses the social needs for one or more e-participation action (stage), and Block C represents the technical side of citizen engagement tools (Figure 7).

![Figure 7 – Conceptual diagram of METEP](image)

The construction of e-participation diagnostics (self-assessment questions and indicators) would need to cut across all these blocks in different combinations. For example, the combination of sub-block A1-B1-C3 would deal with the issues describing the availability of laws regulating the use of mobile technologies for decision making, such as e-voting/e-referenda; and so forth.
The structure of METEP

METEP shall be applied in two main steps. The first step will measure e-participation readiness. It will be done by collecting and analyzing a variety of socio-economic and technological data/indicators via questionnaires to contextualize the preparedness for e-participation under each of the building blocks.

The second step will deal with the evaluation of real-life e-participation practices to assess the actual progress made of their implementation. It is envisaged that promoting the culture of evaluation will contribute strongly to the process of capacity building in the field of participatory governance. This step will be realised in full after the main lessons have been learned from step one. A new version of the METEP will be developed to evaluate real e-participation practices. Combining the context of readiness with real-life performance is seen as main value of METEP and its eventual attractiveness for end-users.

Assessment of e-participation readiness

Sources and levels of assessment

Three main information gathering instruments will be used to collect data and information at national, institutional and engagement tool (web sites/portals) levels. These are: (i) official statistics/reports for assessing the state of play at national and institutional levels, (ii) expert assessment (national, institutional and tool level), and (iii) self-assessment questionnaires for national, institutional and tool level. The METEP self-assessment questionnaire (see below) will be the main source, at least initially. In certain cases there will be a need for specialized surveys to obtain information with regard to the use of particular public engagement tools and e-participation practices (at a later stage).

Given the growing importance of local government in advancing e-participation development (such as local budgeting and various environmental participatory initiatives undertaken at the level of local communities), the assessment of e-participation readiness of public institutions will be done at national (central), regional (sub-national) and local (municipal) levels.

According to the OECD, with regard to e-Information, for example, the following questions should be asked: Has the information reached the intended target groups? Whether the provision of information has the intended consequences? Which information product (education materials, brochures, guides, handbooks, leaflets, catalogues and annual reports) have been issued and disseminated? What has been the information delivery mechanism and channels (via direct mailing, information centres, events, advertising campaigns, use of civil society organisations? What do people know about substantive topics? Whether this knowledge is incomplete? Surveys will need to be representative and avoid bias in relation to certain social groups or geographical areas.

With regard to e-Consultation and e-Decision making, answers will be sought to understand the extent of consultations and their audience. Other questions would include the following: Whether there has been any reaction from those who had not been invited? How often consensus has been reached and how opinions have been aggregated? What policy issues have been discussed and how possible policy options have been explained (its consequences) and whether relevant background materials provided? Whether citizens’ ideas, suggestions and concerns have
influenced subsequent decisions and policies? What have been main stakeholder groups? Which government departments have participated in the consultation process and which one has been the leading agency? Whether there have been consultation guides available/prepared and whether these have been used? What has been the scale of public feedback and what has been the quality of public input? Whether the participating public provided its feedback regarding the organization of consultation process? Whether such feedback has been acknowledged by government officials/institutions in charge of the consultation?

Assessment indicators (in progress)

A series of indicators will be designed to measure various aspects of e-participation readiness. The following matrix (Table 1) will be used to relate key indicators to specific building blocks of e-participation assessment.

Table 1 – Matrix of e-participation indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Engagement technologies</th>
<th>e-Participation policy domains</th>
<th>A1 - Legal frameworks</th>
<th>A2 - Organizational frameworks</th>
<th>A3 - Modalities/ channels</th>
<th>A4 - Outreach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B1: e-Information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1: Open data/ government</td>
<td>Indicators</td>
<td>Indicators</td>
<td>Indicators</td>
<td>Indicators</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2: Social media</td>
<td>Indicators</td>
<td>Indicators</td>
<td>Indicators</td>
<td>Indicators</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C3: Mobility</td>
<td>Indicators</td>
<td>Indicators</td>
<td>Indicators</td>
<td>Indicators</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C4: Other incl. dedicated public engagement websites, geo-tagging platforms, etc.</td>
<td>Indicators</td>
<td>Indicators</td>
<td>Indicators</td>
<td>Indicators</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B2: e-Consultation</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>C1: Open data/ government</td>
<td>Indicators</td>
<td>Indicators</td>
<td>Indicators</td>
<td>Indicators</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Indicators</td>
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<td>Indicators</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B3: e-Decision-making</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>C1: Open data/ government</td>
<td>Indicators</td>
<td>Indicators</td>
<td>Indicators</td>
<td>Indicators</td>
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<td>Indicators</td>
<td>Indicators</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Self-Assessment Questionnaire (in progress)

The Self-Assessment Questionnaire will be designed to seek inputs from key e-participation stakeholders and actors, first of all from government officials in charge of institutions and
organizations at national, regional and local levels. Also, business leaders and civil society representatives will be involved in assessing e-participation readiness and initiatives at various levels.

Related country cases – to assess progress of e-participation practices (next phase)

It is planned that the next version of METEP diagnostics will evaluate the performance of actual e-participation practices and initiatives. This is an important part of METEP designed to encourage, on the one hand, taking stock of what is available. Many leaders may not necessarily realize that despite the lack of officially designated top-down e-participation projects, there are initiatives and less formalized e-participation practices underway on the ground, which need to be reported too. Knowing how successful such practices are may be an important incentive to reduce barriers for e-participation across the board. Also, developing local evaluation capacities is a critical public value on its own right that is able to significantly contribute to better governance in general.

It is proposed that priority would be given to measuring the quality of e-participation initiatives with support of relevant factual and quantitative evidence. Measurement could be undertaken at both country- and inter-country levels using universal Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

Measuring progress would motivate countries to track the expansion of e-participation on a continuous basis within the national context against the broader international background. In practical terms, that would mean that, while KPIs would be the same for all countries, the initial assessment of, for example, e-consultation activities would be done at the country level to measure the actual progress made using the same measurement scales; afterwards, all countries would be ranked on the basis of such progress and comparisons made with regard to the specific quantitative evidence-based indicators to support and justify the assigned scores.

It would be misleading to compare and rank countries using quantitative indicators alone across the board as it is done, for instance, in measuring Internet penetration or the availability of online services. The domain of e-participation reflects highly varied socio-political traditions and is qualitatively different from more tangible technology-enabled government processes. In many cases, engaging citizens does not require sophisticated technology. Therefore from the motivational point of view, measuring the progress made within countries is just as important as cross-country comparisons. Whereas the former would determine what and when should be done, the latter would provide the direction where to go and how to do it based on the other countries’ best practices; the latter will be additionally described and supported by factual evidence.

The measurement system should be designed to encourage participatory governance innovation at the country level and reward it when progress is made despite of the initial base line, however low it could be.

The proposed sequence of assessment steps would include several tasks, sub-tasks and steps. First, a list of e-participation initiatives should be prepared by individual countries. It is essential that each initiative to be assessed should include goals and specific activities so as progress can be assessed. When a certain initiative is assessed for the first time, its performance should be
measured according to the goals set when it was launched. If no goals have not been formally formulated, the evaluator should make an attempt to define such goals if it is possible. If not, the initiative cannot be accepted for assessment. That should motivate countries to formulate e-participation clearly and on purpose and track their progress in the meantime so as to report what has been done for the past year.

The next validation steps will be as follows.

1. Decide who will act as the evaluator; that should be usually 2-3 government officials/experts responsible for e-participation/e-democracy or broader governance issues (assisted by other staff as needed);

2. Create a National Evaluation Board (NEB) as a supervisory and validation entity to oversee the assessment process; it is suggested that the board includes representatives of expert community and civil society active in democratic governance, including e-governance;

3. Collect e-governance activities that can qualify as e-participation initiatives eligible for assessment.

4. Define a list of e-participation initiatives; ensure that each initiative has clearly formulated goals, i.e. it should be clear what it is going to achieve.

5. Approve the list with the NEB;

6. Classify each initiative under each of e-participation category: e-Information, e-Consultation, (c) e-Decision making.

7. Fill in the e-Participation Template (annexed in Appendix 1).

8. Assess progress made within each initiative using a certain (e.g. five-point measurement scales).
9. The process of scoring should be evidence-based; evidence include quantitative values of the KPIs—such as the number of web sites, number of visitors, number of posts per a certain time frame, number of proposals formulated.

10. Produce a score board for each initiative.

11. Submit the scoring to the NEB for validation and consultation by board members who will review evidence and approve or amend scoring.

12. Produce the cumulative score board for all initiatives.

13. Submit the country’s validated score to UNDESA for further validation to ensure that the letter and spirit of the assessment methodology has been met; the assessment result can be returned to the NEB for further clarification/amendment.

14. Publish the final scores for each initiative and the country as a whole following UNDESA’s endorsement.

*July 2013*
APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Template for evaluating e-participation practices(next phase)

TEMPLATE\(^{17}\)

for describing and evaluating e-Participation Initiative

Title:
Topic: [e.g. (public) e-services for disadvantaged people | ICT and Aging - as per taxonomy…]

Sector: [e.g. Communication (infrastructure) | Education, Science and Research | Employment | Other Social Services - as per taxonomy]

Start date:
End date:

Status: [e.g. Operational | Completed | Idle - as per taxonomy …]

e-Participation block/ sub-block codes: [e.g. A2 - Organizational Framework | B2 - e-Consultation | C2- Social Media as per taxonomy…]

Target Users: [e.g. Any citizen | Disadvantaged/deprived communities | Older people (60+) | People with disability - as per taxonomy]

Target Users Description: […]

Scope: [e.g. Local | Regional | National | Cross-border | International - as per taxonomy …]

Language(s): […]

Policy Context and Legal Framework:

Implementation approach:

Technology choice: [e.g. Standards-based technology | Mainly (or only) open standards | Accessibility-compliant (minimum WAI AA) | Open source software - as per taxonomy …]

Funding source:

Project size:

Implementation and Management Approach:

Main stakeholders, their expected benefits:

\(^{17}\) Borrowed and adapted from the EU’s e-Practice [http://www.epractice.eu](http://www.epractice.eu)
Economic impact:

Social Impact:

Administrative efficiency gains:

Track record of sharing

Lessons learnt:

Evaluation scores:

• **Good progress** – the assigned scores possible: 4.5 and 5.0 – all goals achieved, targets met, activities implemented in as planned

  Justification & evidence: __________________________________________________________

• **Satisfactory progress** – the assigned scores possible: 3.0, 3.5, 4.0 (half-points are possible) – most goals achieved, targets met, activities implemented, minor deviations.

  Justification & evidence: __________________________________________________________

• **Certain progress** – the assigned score possible: 2.0 and 2.5 – some goals achieved, targets met, activities implemented, major deviations.

  Justification & evidence: __________________________________________________________

• **Marginal or no progress made** – the assigned score possible: 1.0 and 1.5 – no goals achieved but there is a strong, evidence-supported likelihood that they can be achieved in future.

  Justification & evidence: __________________________________________________________

**TOTAL SCORE:**
Appendix 2 – Template for reporting on interactive seminars (in progress)