2016 Astana Economic Forum
"The New Economic Reality: Diversification, Innovation and Knowledge Economy"

Concept Note

Workshop on
“Bridging the digital divide between people and countries”

Jointly organized by
The Division for Public Administration and Development Management
Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations
and
The Ministry of Investments and Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan

Astana, Kazakhstan
25 – 26 May 2016
1. SPONSORSHIP AND PURPOSE

The Division for Public Administration and Development Management (DPADM) of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) will organize, in cooperation with the Ministry for Investment and Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan, a workshop on “Bridging the Digital Divide Within and Among Countries”. Over 200 participants are expected to attend the workshop, including government officials, representatives from the private sector and civil society.

The meeting is organized during the 2016 Astana Economic Forum, which will focus on “The New Economic Reality: Diversification, Innovation and Knowledge Economy”, will take place in Astana, Kazakhstan from 25 to 26 May 2016. Organized and held with the support and direct involvement of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Astana Economic Forum is one of the largest international forums in the world, which annually brings together over 5000 delegates from 150 countries, including key policy-makers, Nobel laureates, scientists, IT and e-government experts, journalists and business representatives. The mission of the Forum is to discuss the challenges and opportunities for long-term development of the world economy, assist in the definition and strengthening of the role of Kazakhstan in the international community, as well as to find solutions to the greatest economic and social challenges of our times.

On 25 May, the Ministry of Investments and Development of the Government of Kazakhstan and the Division of Public Administration and Development Management of the Department of Social and Economic Affairs will co-organise a panel discussion on “Bridging the digital divide between people and countries – Leaving no one behind” in order to elicit feedback and guidance from international experts.

2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

2.1. Background

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals\(^1\) and 169 targets adopted at a major UN summit in September 2015 are an Agenda of great scale and ambition. They seek to build on the Millennium Development Goals and complete what these did not achieve. They are integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental. They integrate aspects of related climate change, peaceful and inclusive societies and inclusive, effective and accountable institutions.

The means to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development were addressed at the Third International Conference on Financing for Development which took place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in July 2015 and focused on financing sustainable development. From 30\(^{th}\) November to 11\(^{th}\) December 2015 at the 21\(^{st}\) Conference of the Parties (COP21) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Member States adopted a binding agreement on the long-term reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, thus elaborating

\(^1\) Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

on SDG13 related to climate change

The United Nations is committed to promoting the exchange of experiences, knowledge and best practices regarding the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The workshop held during the 2016 Astana Economic Forum will support this endeavour. The UN General Assembly itself has highlighted the importance of knowledge-sharing activities and stated that particular emphasis should be given to the exchange of experience related to the role of public administration in the implementation of internationally agreed goals (Resolution 57/277). It also underscored that international cooperation should be strengthened in the field of public administration, including South-South and Inter-Regional cooperation (Resolution 50/225).

In 2015, the UN General Assembly, following the overall review of the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) adopted the outcome document on the overall review of the implementation of the outcomes of the WSIS. The outcome document addresses a range of emerging challenges and opportunities and welcomes the remarkable evolution and spread of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to almost every community in the world enabling knowledge sharing, economic growth and empowering sustainable development. At the same time, the document highlights the significant digital divides, which need to be addressed through strengthened enabling policy environments and international cooperation to improve affordability, access, education, capacity-building, multilingualism, cultural preservation, investment and appropriate financing. Earlier, the 2030 agenda committed to significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020.

Since 2003, DESA has collected, shared, and disseminated innovative practices in public governance through the United Nations Public Service Awards (UNPSA) and Forum. Moreover, with the emergence of e-government as a powerful tool to help transform public administration and promote good governance, DPADM has published the United Nations E-Government Survey since 2003, highlighting recent e-government trends and development of countries worldwide. The Survey, from its first edition, has become a useful reference to guide e-government development efforts at international, regional and local levels and serves as a benchmark for Member States.

One of the main focuses of the Astana Economic Forum is to implement actions that will grow the economy of Member States and create opportunities for use technology to support implementing sustainable development goals. Thus, this workshop will look at ways in which innovations are able to bridge the digital divide and to ensure that no one is left behind.

2.2. Context

The 2016 Astana Economic Forum comes at a time when governments are required to be more responsive, transparent, and accountable to efficiently respond to the challenges of sustainable development. Governments nowadays are being transformed into a facilitator role

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which enables people to take a more proactive stand in developing their respective futures. Technology, accompanied by various measures, has helped empower citizens to be more active on social media, demand more openness and accountability through the use of open government data, become co-creators of government data, and exert their economic power through the use of crowd-funding.

The theme of this year’s Forum, which is on “The New Economic Reality: Diversification, Innovation and Knowledge Economy”, is very timely and provides an opportunity to discuss how leveraging innovations can ensure that no one is left behind as countries progress in their respective economic growth. By implementing a knowledge economy, Member States can benefit from new technology and ICT tools, such as the Internet of things, big data, cloud technology, social media, and open government data to transform traditional forms of government into smart ones which can respond to complex needs and various challenges proactively. Many people will benefit from having more user-friendly e-services.

ICTs will play a critical role in promoting, advancing and measuring Sustainable Development Goals. Their role is important in order to realize the principle of “leaving no one behind” during the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. As it is stated in the Agenda, the spread of information and communications technology and global interconnectedness has great potential to accelerate human progress, to bridge the digital divide and to develop knowledge societies, as does scientific and technological innovation across areas as diverse as medicine and energy. ICTs can play a role by reaching out to marginalized and vulnerable groups particularly via mobile technologies, by making institutions more efficient, transparent, inclusive and participatory particularly via deployment of electronic government. They are also critical in monitoring and evaluation aspects to make sure that all marginalized and vulnerable groups are included and advanced in the development policies.

ICTs can be a key tool if they result in improving the lives of the poor and the vulnerable who do not usually have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services. There has been a rapid spread of digital technologies. But there are important gaps in access between and within countries and between women and men and people of various generations, income levels and backgrounds. Government officials, in partnership with private sector and civil society, need to develop policy frameworks, services, content and technical standards that would ensure no one is left behind. The example of how mobile banking in Africa has brought direct benefits to millions of people who were previously unbanked is but one example. In addition, there is a need to lower barriers to access and ensure that tools and applications are developed with vulnerable communities in mind. By working together to close the digital and gender divide and to collaborate on accelerating a data revolution for sustainable development government officials and the international community can ensure that the benefits of ICTs are harnessed to the full extent to include vulnerable communities in local, national, and global economies. This also needs to be accompanied by actions in other development areas such as education to ensure that ICT truly helps the poorer and most vulnerable. With the right mix of measures people that have traditionally been disadvantaged may have the opportunity to access information, knowledge, services, and data that in the past, only the privileged ones had accessed, specifically in developing and least developed countries. Women and girls will be able to compete on level playing fields in terms of access to education, health, employment, wealth, and financing, by having more opportunities to succeed.
The principle of “leaving no one behind” is not limited to vulnerable groups within a country, but also encompasses countries, especially least developed countries, SIDS, landlocked countries, and countries in conflict or post-conflict situations. While all countries are challenged by the complexity of the policies required to implement the 2030 Agenda, countries in special situations have specific needs and capacity issues.

Measuring progress of the implementing the SDGs becomes a major challenge to Member States. According to the Sustainable Development Solution Network (SDSN) “It will take many years before an SDG indicator framework is underpinned by comprehensive data. In the meantime, interim measures are needed to promote the SDGs as practical tools for problem solving and to help countries identify priorities for early action.” The Bertelsmann Foundation proposed an SDG Index for OECD countries as a way of tracking SDG achievement and determining priorities for implementation in each country. In addition, the Overseas Development Institute presented a regional SDG Scorecard projecting trends across key dimensions of the SDGs. These two initiatives are just the beginning of many more SDG review initiatives that will keep track of progress to implement the principle of “Leaving no one behind”.

DPADM has also underscored the importance of promoting citizen-centric government and a knowledge society through the United Nations E-Government Survey, which it publishes every two years. The Survey suggests four development stages in e-government, respectively emerging, enhanced, transactional, and connected. In the emerging stage, government websites provide simple information on government policies in one-way communication. In the enhanced stage, websites deliver enhanced one-way or simple two-way e-communication between government and citizen such as downloadable forms for government services. In the transactional stage, they engage in full-fledged two-way communication services including requesting and receiving inputs on government policies, electronic voting, online financial transaction, etc. In the final stage of connected services, government websites provide electronic services, which cut across government departments and ministries in a joined-up manner. This connected stage is one of the factors that help governments deliver services in a more effective and responsive fashion.

3. OBJECTIVE

Against this backdrop, DESA is organizing a workshop on innovative approaches to bridge the digital divides and provide access to government services to the traditional disadvantaged population. A secondary goal is to enhance government’s capacity in the area of implementing the SDGs, particularly in emerging and developing countries, land-locked developing countries and least developing countries, through sharing of best practices, discussions, and peer-to-peer learning. The objectives of the workshop are as follows:

- To present new ideas in meeting the challenges of bridging the digital divides and of “Leaving no one behind” which is the core principle of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
- The role of bridging the digital divide in supporting sustainable development;
4. EXPECTED OUTPUTS

The Forum is expected to achieve the following goals:

- Highlight ICT’s cross-cutting contribution to the SDGs and poverty eradication;
- Identify innovative solutions to achieve the principle of “Leaving no one behind” in the 2030 Agenda;
- Identifying key issues that need to be tackled to create the foundation of developing a knowledge society through information and data sharing particularly for developing, land-lock developing and least developing countries;
- Emphasize the importance of bridging the digital divide and enabling environment to achieve SDGs particularly for the poorest and most vulnerable in developing, land-locked developing and least developing countries.

5. THEMES FOR DISCUSSION

Two inter-related sub-themes will be discussed in workshop sessions in order to enhance public administration capacity to meet the sustainable development goals as follows:

1. Bringing ICT to the Poorest and Furthest Behind
2. Ensuring that Digital Dividends Improve People’s Lives

Session 1 on “Bringing ICT to the Poorest and Furthest Behind” will introduce new trends on integrating the sustainable development goals with e-government to promote a knowledge society for all.

Session 2 on “Ensuring that Digital Dividends Improve People’s Lives” will showcase successful practices on the achieving the principle of “Leaving no one behind”. Presentations will also be made by ICT for Development practitioners on leveraging new technologies for achieving the SDGs.

6. ABOUT DESA

The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), through its Division for Public Administration and Development Management (DPADM), has organized global events on issues related to good governance, bridging the digital divide and e-government in order to provide government officials, as well as regional and international organizations, with a platform to exchange ideas, practices and strategies to advance the United Nations development agenda. DESA has actively assisted Member States to enhance their public governance capacities by organizing workshops, expert group meetings, as well as by issuing relevant publications, and sharing knowledge on public administration through an online repository, namely the United Nations Public Administration Network (UNPAN).