Expert Group Meeting on

Technology and Innovation for Arab Public Institutions

Amman and remotely, 28-29 February 2024

PRELIMINARY INFORMATION NOTE

Background

Arab countries have invested substantial efforts in financing digital government initiatives across the region. Presently, the rapid expansion of emerging technologies and their perceived advantages, coupled with governments' commitment to elevated service delivery and operational excellence, necessitates a swift adoption of technology and the cultivation of innovative ideas and strategies.

Embracing digital transformation is a crucial strategy for elevating the effectiveness and efficiency of public institutions, fostering increased citizen participation in government decision-making, and instilling trust and confidence in these institutions. While emerging technologies play a crucial role in achieving government digital transformation, they cannot work in isolation. The mere adoption of such technologies necessitates a shift in government practices and mindset.

Effectively harnessing these technologies to enhance services and streamline operational procedures requires a steadfast commitment to innovation. Innovation serves as the driving force through which we can explore various possibilities, engage multiple stakeholders, and develop tailored solutions.

However, it's important to recognize that despite the numerous benefits, emerging technologies have the potential to adversely affect citizens' well-being if not utilized properly. Furthermore, the resource-intensive nature of innovation, coupled with the risk of potential failures, presents challenges to the seamless integration of innovative practices within the government.

ESCWA ENACT Project

ESCWA recently launched a project on "Expediting the use of technology and innovation for enhanced operations in Arab public institutions" (ENACT). The project is centred around the strategic and innovative use and deployment of emerging technologies aiming to accelerate the implementation of adopted strategies or plans in the public sector. ESCWA ENACT project further seeks to facilitate the utilisation of emerging technologies and innovation to enhance both the public services and back-office operations. The project covers areas that go beyond the deployment of emerging technologies, towards elevating the responsiveness, inclusiveness, trustworthiness, and effectiveness (RITE) of governments and their services, in support of the 2030 Development Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions.

To foster the establishment of effective, accountable, and inclusive Arab institutions, ESCWA has undertaken the development of several substantive materials advocating for governance models characterized by responsiveness, inclusiveness, trustworthiness, and effectiveness (RITE). These materials, in the form of

reports, emphasize the utilization of emerging technologies and innovation processes as instrumental tools in achieving these principles. The reports are:

1) Navigating the future: Building trust in digital government services through emerging technologies

2) An innovation model to enhance the operations and services of Arab public institutions.

3) The role of emerging technologies and innovation in enhancing effectiveness and decision-making in Arab public institutions.

4) Policies and best practices for leveraging the use of emerging technology and innovation in the development of stronger Arab public institutions.

Collectively, these reports provide a comprehensive and diverse framework dedicated to the development of digital government in the Arab region. The first three have been finalized and will be briefly presented during this meeting, while the fourth that serves as the main output of ESCWA ENACT project, it will be covered in meeting discussions.

Objectives

The meeting focuses on the importance of enhancing the use of emerging technologies and innovation in Arab public institutions for better government operations and services. It includes presenting thematically related and recent ESCWA studies for discussion, in addition to showcasing best practices in digital innovative government from various countries in the world and from Arab countries.

It presents an opportunity to facilitate a peer review of several proposed policies, measures, and recommendations that are intended to support Arab countries in benefiting from technology and innovation within public sector institutions. Discussions would result in valuable suggestions for finetuning the aforementioned fourth report that is intended to provide a comprehensive framework for the advancement of digital government in the Arab region.

Case studies from Arab countries, some of which are featured on the Arab Open and Innovative Government Portal, will be showcased along with the best practices from developed and developing countries.

Discussion Topics

During the meeting, the following topics will be discussed:

- Status of digital government and the use of emerging technologies in the Arab countries.

- Challenges of the use of emerging technology and innovation in public sector in the Arab region.

- Emerging technologies to improve the responsiveness, inclusiveness, trustworthiness, and effectiveness (RITE) of public services and operations.

- Policies, action plans, strategies, and regulations to promote responsive and inclusive Arab public institutions.

- Examples of national regional initiatives to promote RITE principles in government practices.

- Innovation for better use of emerging technologies in public sector: ESCWA Model for Innovation in Public Sector.

Expected Outcomes

The expected outcomes of this meeting include a set of practical and actionable recommendations on advancing RITE public institutions by fostering innovation within Arab public sector and strategically deploying emerging technologies based on best practices and relevant case studies.

Based on the presented best practices, the meeting will also identify trends and directions for enhancing the use of technologies and innovation in Arab public Institutions.

The meeting is also expected to result in the collection of feedback and suggestions for the project's fourth report titled "Policies and best practices for leveraging the use of emerging technology and innovation in the development of stronger Arab public institutions".

Organization and Participation

The meeting is a hybrid event and will take place at Kempinski Hotel in Amman, Jordan, and online through Zoom, from 28 to 29 February 2024. It will be conducted in both Arabic and English, with simultaneous interpretation.

Officials from ministries and public agencies working in information and communication technology, digital government, and administrative development are among those invited. Experts in digital government from the United Nations, academia, international and regional organizations, and non-governmental organizations will also be invited.

Please visit **https://indico.un.org/e/TIN-API** to register for the event.

More details, including access to event documents, can be found on the event page (En/Ar):

https://www.unescwa.org/events/technology-innovation-arab-public-institutions

https://www.unescwa.org/ar/events/التكنولوجيا-والابتكار-للمؤسسات-العامة-العربية

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