UN-ESCWA
United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

Under the patronage of Her Excellency Dr. Hala Helmy El Said, the Minister of Planning, Monitoring and Administrative Reform, Egypt

Workshop on Fostering Innovation in the Public Sectors of Arab Countries

Cairo, Egypt, 30-31 October 2017

Information Note

1.   Background

Technological advances, coupled with well-informed citizens who require better services from Governments and who want to participate actively in its decision-making process, have pushed public sector innovation to the forefront as an essential component in the ever-growing requirements of citizens. To fulfil demands from citizens and generally achieve better governance, Governments are increasingly embracing the concepts of openness and inclusion, which allows for greater transparency, accountability, responsiveness and effectiveness, and further drives the need for public sector innovation.

In general, innovation is the implementation of a new way of achieving a result and/or performing work. It can be completely new, a change to a current system, or something that already exists elsewhere and is implemented for the first time. Thus, innovation can be related to a product, service, policy and programme, or a process.[1] Innovation in the public sector differs from the private sector in that the focus is not monetary gain or greater economic success for a few. The objective of public sector innovation is to provide better government services and improve administrative process, which in turn, enhances the social welfare of the people and increase economic growth of the country for a more sustainable future. It could also have as focus new or adapted technologies, or technology for supporting other forms of public sector innovation.

The benefits of innovation in the public sector are numerous and can include better Government service delivery, operation, decision-making and planning. These bring about greater citizen participation and engagement, government transparency and accountability and inclusion leading to better social, economic and environmental development. However, activating and sustaining public sector innovation can be very difficult due to the hierarchy, bureaucracy, culture, and status quo within the Government. The public sector is slow to change and normally requires some form of impetus, such as leadership changes, a looming crisis, or internal problems.

There are several possible approaches and tools that Governments can employ to plan, activate and execute public sector innovation, such as bottom-up innovation, disruptive innovation and open innovation, among others. Being aware and understanding these approaches will make it possible for Government decision-makers to select appropriate approaches based on their needs and priorities, as well as their organizational culture, but also to sustain an innovative spirit within the various public sectors.

Public sector innovation is in direct support of SDG 16 to "Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive

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[1] ECOSOC (2006). *Definition of basic concepts and terminologies in governance and public administration (E/C.16/2006/4)*. Prepared for the Fifth Session of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration, 27-31 March, New York.

institutions at all levels". The public sector, through self-development of innovative solutions—whether services, processes, policies, programmes or products — can achieve SDG 16 and its targets, such as the development of effective, accountable and transparent institutions (16.6), responsive, inclusive participatory and representative decision-making (16.7), and public access to information (16.10). Innovation could also provide the Government and its institutions with the means to achieve the other SDGs. Some examples of other SDGs where public sector innovation can make a difference include:

- SDG 10 "Reduce inequality within and among countries", especially target 10.2 that requires the empowerment and social, economic and political inclusion of all;

- SDG 5 "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls", especially target 5.5 with its focus on full and effective participation of women in decision-making as well as equal opportunities for leadership, and target 5.B which calls for the use of technology to support empowerment[2].

ESCWA is currently preparing a report on "Fostering innovation in the public sectors of the Arab region". This report will explore the motivation behind public sector innovation, and identifies the challenges that governments face and the existent tools that can help in boosting innovation in public sector. This report will be presented and discussed during this workshop.

2.   Objectives

The objective of this workshop is to raise awareness among government decision-makers of the Arab region on innovation in the public sector. It also aims at building better understanding among government officials about the various forms of innovation in public sector and its impact on social and economic development.

These objectives will be achieved through general discussions of concepts and challenges, approaches of public sector innovation, as well as tools and technologies. The value of public sector innovation will further be illustrated through examples from the international arena as well as regional and national case studies.

During this workshop, ESCWA will also present its new policy framework for open government in the Arab region, which is designed for enhancing transparency, accountability and participation of citizens in decision making.

3.   Topics

The following list of topics will be discussed during the workshop:

(1) Understanding innovation in the public sector: its concepts, importance and benefits;

(2) Linkage between public sector innovation and the SDGs;

(3) The various approaches of public sector innovation, their operations and the conditions that may be required for each to be effective and sustainable;

(4) Open government as a driver of public sector innovation for achieving greater transparency, better accountability and more participation of citizens in government decision making;

(5) Fostering and sustaining innovation in the public sector, taking into consideration organizational culture, challenges, and potential costs;

(6) Tools and technologies that can be used to activate and sustain innovation in the public sector;

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[2] United Nations (2015). *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. Available form http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E, pp. 25-26.

(7) Policy for fostering innovation in public sectors.

4. Outcomes

The expected outcomes of the workshop are:

(1) Greater awareness among participants on public sector innovation, its concepts, importance, benefits, challenges, potential impacts especially for the achievement of SDGs in the Arab region;

(2) Common understanding of different approaches for fostering and sustaining public sector innovation, as well as mechanisms that can be used;

(3) Enhanced awareness about the open government concepts and components, including openness, participation, collaboration and engagement;

(4) Linkages, networking and the sharing of best practices and knowledge between experts from the Arab region as well as those located abroad; and

(5) Practical recommendations for fostering innovation in the public sectors of the Arab region.

5. Previous and related work by ESCWA

- ESCWA (2017). *Expert Group Meeting on Open Government and emerging technologies in the Arab Region*. Available from: https://www.unescwa.org/events/open-government-emerging-technologies-arab-region.

- ESCWA (2017). *Integration of Service Delivery in the Arab region- role of standards and interoperability.* Available from: https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/page_attachments/integration-service-delivery-arab-region-en.pdf.

- ESCWA (2015). *E-government module in the AIGLE project*. Available from: http://www.escwa.un.org/sites/aigle/editor/Download.asp?table_name=AIGLE_Documents&field_name=id&FileID=12.

- ESCWA (2015). *Regional Profile of the Information Society in the Arab Region, 2003-2015*. Beirut. Available from: https://www.unescwa.org/publications/profile-information-society-arab-region-2015.

- UAE Government and ESCWA (2015). *Smart Cities: Regional Perspectives*. Available from https://worldgovernmentsummit.org/api/publications/document/d1d75ec4-e97c-6578-b2f8-ff0000a7ddb6.

- ESCWA (2014). *Arab governance report: governance challenges in countries undergoing transition.* Beirut. Available from: https://www.unescwa.org/publications/arab-governance-report-2014.

- ESCWA (2013). *E-Government Strategies in Arab Countries: current status and development prospects*. Available from: https://www.unescwa.org/publications/e-government-strategies-arab-countries-current-status-and-development-prospects.

6. Participation and registration

Participants of the workshop should be mid-level government decision-makers working towards bringing change to Government service delivery, processes and interaction with citizens. Also, included should be participants

from civil society, academia and international organizations sharing their experiences and cases, thus raising the awareness of others. <u>Participation is by invitation only</u>.

Participants should register for the workshop by filling out the registration form and returning it by email, to denner@un.org before 8 September 2017.

7.   Organization, format, venue and dates

The workshop, organized by the Innovation Section of the Technology for Development Division (TDD) at ESCWA, will take place from 30 to 31 October 2017 in Egypt. The venue will be communicated later to all participants.

It will include several specialised and general presentations focused on raising awareness and building capacity around innovation in the public sector. It will also include international and regional case studies.

8.   Working language

Arabic and English are the working languages of the workshop. **Simultaneous interpretation between both languages will be provided.**

9.   Travel and accommodation

All participants are to inquire about their visa requirements from Egypt and to secure one ahead of their anticipated travel date.

ESCWA will cover the travel and daily subsistence allowance (DSA) of one participant from invited Governments and organizations in selected countries, especially those coming from least developed countries.

10.   Additional information

Further information and documentation is available at the following URL:
https://www.unescwa.org/events/innovation-public-sector-arab-region

Address inquiries and requests for additional information to:

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