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

Regional Workshop on Open Government in the Arab Region

Beirut, Lebanon, 25-27 September 2018

Information Note

1.   Background

Open government is a relatively new and innovative concept that refers to a government, which is effective and efficient in the performance of its duties, transparent in and accountable for its actions, and accessible to all through its services. It also refers to a government that is responsive to the needs of its citizens, values their knowledge and expertise in decision-making, and embraces new and emerging technologies to enhance its governance. Open government, has the potential to increase trust in Government, fight corruption, and improve growth, while citizen engagement through shared responsibilities and open collaboration can lead to tailored services and policies in line with the needs of the people and the future vision of the Government.

Implementing open government is not an easy task, as it requires changes to long-standing systems, changes in the way government thinks and changes in the way citizens perceive their responsibility and role in governance. To aid in the implementation of open government in the Arab region, ESCWA developed an open government framework. Build on existing systems, this four-phased model, can be used by government institutions, departments, and ministries to systematically introduce and develop open government. The phases are openness, participation, collaboration and involvement. To successfully achieve such implementation, it is necessary to build the capacity of government decision-makers and employees that can drive the development and innovative services, products, programmes, processes and procedures to bring about open government.

The workshop forms part of a broader Development Account project entitled "Institutional development for better service delivery towards the achievement of the sustainable development goals in Western Asia" which was launched in 2016 by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). The overall objective of the project is to build the capacity of ESCWA Member States to utilize emerging technologies for increasing transparency, accountability and to adopt a more effective and efficient participatory approach to governance. In its part of the project, the Technology for Development Division focus specifically on the employment of emerging technologies and embracing the openness concept to achieve the project objective.

The workshop, its objective and topics stand in direct support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, especially Goal 16 "Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels". Under Goal 16, the development of effective, accountable and transparent institutions (16.6), responsive, inclusive participatory and representative decision-making (16.7), and public access to information is promoted (16.10), are all in-line with the purpose and objectives of open government.

2.   Objectives

The main objective of this workshop is to build the capacity of participants on open government, specifically the four phased ESCWA framework with sessions on the different phases. The capacity building will provide participants with knowledge on options, tools and actions to develop and implementation open government initiatives in the Arab region, especially related to open data and participation. The workshop

activities will be based on the draft capacity development material developed by ESCWA as well as the Commission's study on an open government policy framework for Arab countries.

During the workshop selected regional and national initiatives will be showcased to stimulate the sharing of knowledge and lessons learned.

3.   Topics

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

(1)   Openness and better governance, and its meaning for inclusive sustainable development in the Arab region.

(2)   Fostering open government in the region in the context of the four-phased ESCWA Open Government Framework;

(3)   Promoting transparency and accountability of government through open data;

(4)   Increasing and reforming the participation of citizens in government for greater responsiveness and accountability; and

(5)   International and regional experiences as well as national case studies from the region and beyond.

4.   Outcomes

The expected outcomes of the workshop are:

(1)   Participants have greater knowledge on open government in general and specifically about the ESCWA open government policy framework for the Arab region;

(2)   Participants can develop and implement better strategies on open data, participation, collaboration and engagement needed to achieve open government in the Arab region;

(3)   Participants are familiar with different tools, options and actions that can be used to improve open government, open data and participation (collaboration and engagement).

(4)   Participants formed linkages for greater knowledge sharing on best practices, considerations, solutions and challenges between government officials from the Arab region.

5.   Previous and related work by ESCWA

- ESCWA (2018). *Fostering open government in the Arab region*. Available from https://www.unescwa.org/study-fostering-open-government-arab-region.

- 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). *Guideline on Fostering Innovation in the Public Sector of the Arab Region*. Available from https://www.unescwa.org/guideline-public-sector-innovation-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 (2016). *Arab Sustainable Development Report, 2015*. Available: https://www.unescwa.org/publications/arab-sustainable-development-report-2015.

- 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.

6.   Participation and registration

Participants of the workshop should be government decision-makers working to bring greater accountability, transparency, responsiveness and effectiveness to their Governments through openness in service delivery, processes and interaction with citizens. **Participation is by invitation only**.

To promote gender equality and achieve greater gender balance in activities, invited institutions and organizations are strongly encouraged to nominate women to participate in the workshop.

Participants should register for the workshop by filling out the registration form and returning it by email, to Ms. Nibal Idlebi at idelbi@un.org, CC escwa-tdd-innovationsection@un.org no later than **15 August 2018**.

7.   Organization, format, venue and dates
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The workshop is organized by the Innovation Section of the Technology for Development Division (TDD) at ESCWA. It will take place between 25 and 27 September 2018 at UN House, Beirut.

It will include several specialised and general presentations focused on building capacity around open government. It will also include international, regional and national 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 Lebanon and to secure one ahead of their anticipated travel date.

ESCWA will cover the travel and daily subsistence allowance (DSA) of nominated participants from invited Governments, organizations and NGOs 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/workshop-first-regional-open-government-arab-region

Address inquiries and requests for additional information to:

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