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E-government global trends: integrated services, open data, e-participation and digital technologies

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The 2016 United Nations E-Government Survey reports a positive global trend towards higher levels of e-government development. Countries in all regions are increasingly embracing innovation and utilizing ICTs to deliver services, increase transparency and engage people in decision-making processes.

The E-Government Development Index (EGDI) is based on three components: provision of online services, telecommunication connectivity, and human capacity. According to the 2016 survey, the list of countries leading in E-Government development is ranked as follows:

1. United Kingdom
2. Australia
3. Republic of Korea
4. Singapore
5. Finland
6. Sweden
7. Netherlands
8. New Zealand
9. Denmark
10. France

The report also highlights a number of trends, insights and recommendations in the areas of integrated services, open data, e-participation, digital technologies and bridging the digital divide.

Integration through e-government

1. A new trend in e-government is the evolution towards integrated public services through one-stop platforms. Services from various public agencies are bundled together as a single, joined-up service in a one-stop-shop. This makes it easier for people to interact with public administration.

2. According to the 2016 Survey: 90 countries (including over 50 developing countries) provide a link to a one-stop-shop service platform; 105 countries provide advanced search features; 98 countries require digital ID for online or mobile services; and 71 countries provide an online tracking system.

3. E-government can help connect individual systems and government functions, as well as public services, into a coherent system, thus enabling whole-of-government (WoG) service delivery in the economic, social and environmental areas.

4. Governments should aim to deliver integrated services, not only between economic, social and environmental areas but also between various sectors, subsectors and activities.

5. E-government will inevitably help siloed governments integrate. The automated systems used in e-government inherently require a certain level of standardisation, convergence and interconnectivity in order to work. This technological integration may then carry over into better institutional connectedness and integration.

6. Trends show an increasing number of countries with a government-wide CIO institution or equivalent authority body for coordinating national e-government development.

7. E-government serves as an enabler of policy integration. It provides governments with increased insight into complex issues and analysis of a situation or policy, and offers opportunities to re-engineer existing decision-making processes and information flows.

8. However, policy integration presents a major challenge for many countries. Formulating integrated policies requires deep insight into a range of complex issues across economic, social and environmental dimensions.

Open government data

1. In an effort to make public institutions more inclusive, effective, accountable and transparent, many governments are opening up their data for public information and scrutiny.

2. Making data available online for free allows the public and various civil society organizations to reuse and remix them for any purpose. This can potentially lead to innovation and new or improved services, new understanding and ideas.

3. In 2016, 128 out of 193 UN Member States provide datasets on government spending in machine readable formats. The use of open government data vary around the world in terms of the number of datasets released, how they are presented, and in the tools provided to increase usage of data.

4. Combining open data with new technologies like Big Data analytics, the Internet of Things, geographic information systems are powerful tools for efficiency gains and anticipatory governance, to focus on prevention rather than reaction.

5. The issue that many governments are tackling today is not whether to open up their data, but how to do so. Challenges include issues related to legal frameworks, policies and principles, data management and protection, identity management and privacy, as well as cyber security.

6. A government-wide vision, collaborative leadership, adequate human resources, appropriate legislation and institutional frameworks as well as clear data governance are essential to open up government data.

7. Strategies such as capacity building programmes, tutorials, open government data guidance tool-kits, data dictionaries, app competitions and data literacy campaigns are essential to empower people to use government data. These tools should be employed to reach out to all people in society, including vulnerable groups. Ensuring access to the Internet and bridging the digital divides is critical.

E-participation

1. E-participation is expanding all over the world. With growing access to social media, an increasing number of countries now proactively use networking opportunities to engage with people and evolve towards participatory decision-making. This is done through open data, online consultations and multiple ICT-related channels.

2. While developed countries are among the top 50 performers, many developing countries are making good progress as well. Lower income levels do not hamper posting basic public sector information online and using social networking for engaging with people on a broad range of development-related issues.

3. A growing number of e-participation applications and tools are put in place in various sectors, with the objective of responding to the needs of various communities. This can contribute to new forms of collaborative partnerships between government bodies and people, and reinforces the focus on people's needs.

4. E-participation depends on strong political commitment, collaborative leadership, vision and appropriate institutional frameworks that ensure structured ways of engaging people. E-participation also requires capacity development and training programmes for government leaders, public officials and for civil society, including digital literacy for vulnerable groups.

Online services and digital technologies

1. Countries across the world have made substantial progress in online service delivery. Higher levels of online service tend to be positively correlated with a country's income level.

2. Digital technologies — the Internet, mobile phones, and all the other tools to collect, store, analyze, and share information digitally — are being increasingly utilized.

3. Governments are increasingly adapting e-government services for the mobile platform, providing public sector field workers access to mobile applications, enabling smart/flexible working and delivering citizen services anytime, anywhere. In all sectors reviewed, mobile apps and SMS services have experienced a large and significant growth.

4. Accessibility and availability of mobile devices support improvements in health, education, agriculture, commerce, finance and social welfare. It can allow regions that leapfrogged into wireless broadband to step up innovation and narrow the digital divide. Overall, ensuring the accessibility and availability of broadband remains an urgent global priority.

5. The use of Geographic Information System (GIS) data and Internet of Things (IoT) hold the potential to transform the way public policy is formulated, implemented and monitored. Their early adoption has shown increased levels of civic participation and enhanced efficiency, transparency and accountability. However, improvements of legal and regulatory frameworks and enhanced cooperation are required at all levels.

6. Bridging the digital divide between countries and people is a key objective of the international community. It requires international cooperation and support. It also requires mobilizing the public and private sectors and societies to develop devices, applications, technologies, and safeguards that can enable and mobilize ICT for addressing poverty, illiteracy, and disease. Progress has to be accompanied by policies to equip people to use online and mobile services, and develop the necessary enabling environment and safeguards.

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