



*Under the Patronage of Her Excellency the Minister of State for Administrative Reform
in Lebanon*

Expert group meeting on open government: emerging technologies for greater government transparency and accountability

UN-House, Beirut, 26-27 April 2017

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 citizenry, values the knowledge and expertise of citizens in decision-making, and embraces new and emerging technologies for the enhancement of 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.

Since its inception, technology influences the work of Governments and is a key enabler of open government initiatives. New technological trends such as open data, citizen-centric techniques, social media, e-participation, open collaboration, and open innovation are important tools that aid Governments in further developing and implementing inclusive services in cities and rural areas at national, sub-national and departmental levels. These new trends also allow for better public engagement by supporting shared decision-making, shared responsibility, and public dialogue.

Countries in the Arab region have made great strides in using technologies to deliver services to their citizens and other stakeholders. The focus has however, been on launching e-government initiatives and providing government e-services. The e-government capacities and levels of Arab countries continue to vary from basic access to information to more advanced transactional e-services. As technology continues to facilitate access information and knowledge the demands from people to their Governments has increased. At the same time complex issues, such as sustainable development, conflict and climate change coupled with financial pressure and economic downturn make it necessary for governments to strengthen their institutions in order to achieve better social and economic results in their countries. Stronger efficient public institutions, more transparent and effective governance and enhanced participatory services are essential to deliver better outcomes and safeguard a sustainable future. By developing open government initiatives, that promotes equal partnership between citizen and government, it is possible to deliver on the current and future needs of citizens.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development¹ states that good governance at all levels as well as transparent, effective and accountable institutions are necessary to build peaceful societies and achieve sustainable development. The Agenda has specific measures to achieve such societies in the form of 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). In order to implement these targets a partnership, between the Government (national and local), the private sector, civil society, and other stakeholders (such as the general public, and regional, sub-regional and international institutions), is envisioned.

The meeting and studies, discussed during the meeting, form part of a much 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.

2. Objectives

The main objective of this meeting is to discuss open government and its potential role in enhancing government transparency, government accountability, and the improvement of citizen participation and engagement in government decision making in the Arab region. The discussion will be based on the draft study developed by ESCWA “Open government policy framework for greater transparency and accountability in the public sector of Arab countries”.

The meeting will also discuss the status of open government in the Arab countries based on the results of the ESCWA survey on Open Government² and a literature review. The main findings of the survey will be presented and analysed including suggestions on advancing and promoting open government in the ESCWA member countries.

The EGM will also present open government concepts such as governance, participation and engagement, technological trends, open data and open government prerequisites that will influence the implementation of open government.

During the meeting selected international, regional and national initiatives will be showcased in order to stimulate the sharing of knowledge and lessons learned. This will include initiatives and projects of international and regional organizations such as the UN-DESA, World Bank, OECD and United Nations University.

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

² The questionnaire can be viewed at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/escwa-open-gov>

3. Topics

The following list of topics will be discussed during the course of the meeting:

- (1) Understanding open government, its concepts and the role of technology in the context of its contribution to the development of robust public institutions and as such the realization of government accountability, transparency, responsiveness, participation and accessibility.
- (2) The status of open government in the Arab region based on responses from member States to a questionnaire administered by ESCWA.
- (3) A policy framework for the promoting open government initiatives in the Arab region at national, sub-national and departmental levels that are in-line with national Sustainable Development Goals (Goal 16).
- (4) Application of the proposed policy framework at national level taking into consideration national and local conditions. Such application might include legislative and procedural change as well as the use of the appropriate technologies.
- (5) International and regional experiences as well as national case studies from the region and beyond.

4. Outcomes

The expected outcomes of the meeting are:

- (1) A common understanding on the policy framework for open government in the Arab region;
- (2) Greater awareness on open government, its concepts and status in the Arab region;
- (3) Proposals for enhancing the two studies presented by ESCWA; and
- (4) Linkages, networking and the sharing of best practices between experts from the Arab region as well as those located abroad.

5. Previous and related work by ESCWA

- Arab Sustainable Development Report, 2015. 2016. Available: <https://www.unescwa.org/publications/arab-sustainable-development-report-2015>.
- Arab governance report: governance challenges in countries undergoing transition. 2014. Available: <https://www.unescwa.org/publications/arab-governance-report-2014>.
- Impact of selected e-services on socioeconomic development in the Arab region. 2013. Available: <https://www.unescwa.org/publications/impact-selected-e-services-socioeconomic-development-arab-region>.
- Report (E/ESCWA/ECRI/2012/WG.1/Report). December 2012. Expert Group Meeting on Good Governance and the Establishment of the Institution-Based State, Cairo, 8-10 September. Available: <https://www.unescwa.org/publications/report-expert-group-meeting-good-governance-and-establishment-institution-based-state>.

6. Participation and registration

Participants will include government officials from e-government and/or public administration ministries/authorities, experts from civil society, the legal sector and international organizations and individuals. Participation is by invitation only.

Participants should register for the workshop by filling out the registration form and returning it by email, to escwa-tdd@un.org before 20 March 2017.

7. Organization, format, venue and dates

The EGM organized by the Technology for Development Division (TDD) at ESCWA, will take place from 26 to 27 April 2016 at UN-House in Beirut, Lebanon.

It will include a number of specialised and general presentations on open government and international and regional case studies from selected countries, as well as panel discussions.

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 secure one ahead of their anticipated travel date.

ESCWA will cover the travel and daily subsistence allowance (DSA) of one participant from invited 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/open-government-emerging-technologies-arab-region>

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