Outcome report: Scalable e-government solutions for developing countries

Session Date and Time: Session 2, Monday 5 July 2021 (10:20 – 12:00 CEST). 100 minutes.

Opening remarks: Mr. Jaroslaw Ponder, Head of ITU Office for Europe, ITU

Moderator and setting the context: Mr. Sherman Kong, Senior Advisor, Digital Impact Alliance (DIAL) at the UN Foundation

Speakers:

> • Mr. Hani Eskandar, Senior Advisor, Digital Services, Telecommunication Development Bureau, ITU
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> • Ms. Sarah Theresa Fischer, Consultant, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, Germany
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> • Mr. Marten Kaevats, National Digital Advisor, Government Office of Estonia

1. **Session summary:** This session introduced an emerging trend in advanced digital government practice – the "whole-of-government" model of establishing reusable applicational components in a platform approach to facilitate delivery of services across multiple sectors and agencies. This is followed by an overview of the framework on the GovStack initiative, launched in October 2020 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia (MFA Estonia), the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of the Federal Republic of Germany (BMZ), and the Digital Impact Alliance (DIAL) at the United Nations Foundation, together with the International Telecommunication Union.

   GovStack as a joint effort seeks to accelerate digital transformation of government services in developing countries over the next 5 years, particularly in LDCs, LLDCs and SIDs. It is a community-driven, multistakeholder effort aimed at unpacking and simplifying the technical approach that goes into building holistic digital government services, accelerating countries' ownership of e-government solutions. It is an emerging technology insofar as it radically changes the paradigm for the elaboration and delivery of government services, substantially reducing cost and time to market.

   The session provided a space to implementing stakeholders to discuss the current status of the initiative, elaborate on its roots and its rationale, outline the next steps, and hear feedback and questions from member state delegates and other country ministerial representatives

2. **Main outcomes highlighting the following:**
   a. **Main issues and concepts discussed**
      - e-government in low resource settings
      - whole of government
      - building blocks approach
      - interoperability of e-government services
      - security of e-government services
      - building in-country capacities

b. **Key achievements** and **challenges** shared by the panellists and/or the audience. Best practice examples are Estonia, India and Singapore. They all elaborated on a whole-of-Government model to provide foundational digital platforms which can be used by any government agency across sectors to build new e-government services without the need to redesign, test and operate the underlying systems and infrastructure themselves every time. With regards to <u>challenges</u>, in-country capacity is missing in low-income settings when it comes to financial resources, enabling environment (e.g. governance), expert knowledge as well as strategic vision with a citizen-centric approach. This is often due to lack of coordination, government departments working in silos and lack of inclusivity in designing and developing government services. Additional challenges include lack of donor coordination in this field.

c. **Main conclusions** reached during the discussion
- *GovStack* is providing expert-sourced references, design thinking and a demonstrational exercise to build community, and illustrate and prove solutions which can be tailored to national context in achieving similar whole-of-government approach in digital implementation.
- Understand citizens needs and put the human dimension at the centre of development, including providing those with limited meaningful connectivity meaningful access to services.
- Industry must be engaged to generate a systemic change at the country level.

3. Panelists contributions to the outcome report

<u>What are the opportunities and challenges of emerging technology (specific to the session topic) for LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS</u>

ITU-Hani: [*The concept of "digital public infrastructure" is emerging as dominant in e-government discussion. While it presents significant opportunities to develop and scale digital public services, it also has technical and operational challenges driving up costs, which LDCs, LLDCs and SIDs, in particular, cannot solve alone*]

GIZ-Sarah: [*During the last year countries across the globe have recognized the significant potential of digital technologies to help weather the disruptions the pandemic has brought, as well as the need to quickly adapt both nascent and mature digital government services and infrastructure.*]

Estonia-Marten: [*The micro-service approach is essential for a gradual and fit for purpose creation of digital public services and application within a specific country. For LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDs, it is very important to have such structured approach to avoid leaps forward and develop robust services which also match the needs of the citizens*]

<u>What are the most important points/aspects of the emerging technology that should be considered in order to accelerate the digital transformation in LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS?</u>

ITU-Hani: [*Bringing down the cost of development of digital public services and applications through open-source, interoperable solutions and equip stakeholders with the tools to take ownership of the development of services and applications at the national level. This will accelerate the deployment of e-government services in low resource settings*]

GIZ-Sarah: [*We see digital public goods and the GovStack Initiative as a way to contribute to the SDGs as well as support partner countries in making their administrative services*]

more efficient, more transparent and more participatory. Now is the time to decide what infrastructure will be built and how to make it as good, secure and resilient as possible.]

Estonia-Marten: [*Implementing scalable e-government solutions is not only a technological problem but is a problem of mindset and legacy and monolithic digital architectures. This is often a reflection of the organizational framework at the government level and prevents from building solutions that are fit for purpose.*]

Takeaway: please provide one key word and one sentence that most fit the session topic

ITU-Hani: *Scalability / "GovStack lays the foundation for reusable, interoperable and secure by design building blocks, as well as capacity building in each country, fostering the changes for wide spread and low-cost deployment of digital public services and applications in LDCs, LLDCs, SIDs."*

GIZ-Sarah: *GovStack / "GovStack collaboration will power digital transformation and give governments the chance to build and deploy their digital services and applications in a cost-efficient, accelerated and integrated manner".*

Estonia-Marten: *Adaptiveness / "There is no one fits all solution when it comes digital government services and application and therefore equipping the countries with the tools, knowledge, and baseline building blocks, which are interoperable also cross-borders, is imperative to accelerate, particularly in low resource settings."*