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# UNITED NATIONS

**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL**

**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)**

# Report

## Capacity Building Workshop on Open Government in the Arab Region
## Beirut, 25-27 September 2018

**Summary**

The Regional Workshop on Open Government in the Arab Region was implemented within the framework of the UN Development Account project entitled "Institutional Development for Better Service Delivery Towards the Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in Western Asia". The project aims at building the capacity of member countries to use technology to enhance transparency and accountability as well as adopt more effective and efficient participatory approaches to address the current development, social and political challenges in the region.

The main objective of the workshop is to build the capacity of participants on open government, specifically the four-phased ESCWA framework and provide them with the knowledge on options, tools and actions to develop and implement open government initiatives in the Arab region.

The workshop was divided into nine sessions that discussed topics related to open government and its impact, participation, collaboration and engagement, concepts and benefits of open data as well as the technical and legal aspects. The workshop included practical exercises that stimulated discussions on case studies and success stories.

This report provides an overview of the main themes and discussions addressed during the workshop as well as the results of the evaluation.

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**Introduction**

1.      The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) organized a regional capacity building workshop on Open Government in the Arab Region. The meeting was held at ESCWA in Beirut during the period from 25 to 27 September 2018.

2.      The main objective of the workshop was to build the capacity of participants on open government, based on ESCWA training material and the ESCWA Policy Framework on Open Government for the Arab Region, described in the study on "Fostering Open Government in the Arab Region".

3.      The workshop was held within the framework of the UN Development Account on "Institutional Development for Better Service Delivery Towards the Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals". 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, TDD focuses specifically on the employment of emerging technologies and embracing the openness concept to achieve the project objective.  Within this context, the workshop's objectives and topics directly support Goal 16 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development "Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels".

4.      This report is divided into three sections: section I highlights the main outcome of the workshop, while section II provides a summary of the presentations and the main topics of discussions held during the sessions. Section III reviews the organization of work, including information regarding the workshop agenda, participants and evaluation.

## I.   OUTCOMES

5.      The training and subsequent discussions during the workshop led to the following conclusions and recommendations:

(a)  The workshop familiarized participants from Arab countries with the different tools, options and actions that can be used to develop, improve, and/or implement open government, specifically through open data and participation strategies;

(b)  Detailed discussions and training on open data has increased awareness among participants about the technical aspects that should be considered by government. This is especially of importance for countries currently implementing and updating open data strategies and initiatives.;

(c)  Participants are knowledgeable on possible benefits, challenges, and pitfalls in the implementation of open government as was illustrated through the presentations and discussions of case studies from across the region, including Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia. ;

(d)  Discussions stressed on the importance of on laws related to the right to access information in open government is that its absence or presence can negatively or positively influence open data initiatives and it is currently a requirement for OGP membership;

(e)  Participants emphasized the need to replicate the capacity building workshop on open government at the national and regional levels to reach more government officials and associated stakeholders.

## II.   TOPICS OF DISSCUSSION

6.      The workshop spanned two and a half days and consisted of nine sessions. Topics discussed during the workshop focused on regional perspectives of open government, the impact of open government, participation,

collaboration and engagement open government and achieving SDGs, the concepts, benefits and technical aspects of open data, as well as legal aspects, specifically access to information law and regulation. The contents of presentations and discussions are summarized in the following sections and are organized according to topics.

## A. Opening

7. Mr. Haidar Fraihat, Director of the Technology for Development Division at ESCWA welcomed the participants and experts at the workshop. He briefed the audience on the objectives of the workshop and the topics tackled during the sessions. He highlighted the work of the Technology for Development Division in in the field of open government and e-government.

8. ESCWA opening speech was delivered by Mr. Mounir Tabet, Deputy Executive Secretary for Programme. He emphasized the importance of using technology to promote development, enhance governmental processes, improve accountability, transparency and involvement of all citizens in decision-making. He also highlighted the role of technology in inclusive economic and social development as well as in bridging the gap between the region and the rest of the world. During his speech, Mr. Tabet explained that ESCWA has been working for several years on regional integration and comprehensive economic and social development for all through developing frameworks. These frameworks seek to promote democratic governance through cooperation between civil society, citizens, and government, which is in line with Agenda 2030.

## B. Regional Perspectives on Open Government

9. Ms. Nibal Idlebi, Chief of the Innovation Section at ESCWA presented the ESCWA project on Fostering Institutional Development for Participatory Approaches towards the Achievement of the SDGs in Western Asia. The project aims to aid member states in adopting more efficient and effective participatory approaches to better engage citizens in decision-making and to increase transparency and accountability.During her presentation, Ms. Idlebi listed the project's activities that are within the scope of open government, including the formulating of an Arab open government framework, conducting an expert group meeting; preparing training material on the open government framework, organizing regional and national capacity building workshops; in addition to providing advisory services to member States and the establishment of a committee for practice to ensure the sustainability of the work.

10. She then proceeded to present ESCWA study on "Fostering Open Government in the Arab Region: Status of the Arab region and ESCWA framework". She explained the dimensions of the shift towards open government and provided a brief background on the models for its implementation as well as the Open Government Partnership that was initiated in 2011. Ms. Idlebi stated that the study is a part of efforts to encourage regional cooperation to formulate a unified open government framework to strengthen transparency and accountability of governments in the Arab region. She explained the methodology behind the study and the stages of its preparation, clarifying that it is divided into three chapters: (1) concepts and models of open government and success stories; (2) status of open government in the Arab region; and (3) the policy framework for strengthening open government in the Arab region and related legislations. Within this context, she presented the status of open government in the Arab region in terms of combating corruption, efficiency and accountability, and detailed the results of ESCWA survey on open government. Twelve Arab countries responded to the survey that consisted of seven sections: open government policies and strategies, open government data, openness and transparency policies and strategies, government portals, use of open government, legislations of open government and the challenges. Then Ms. Idlebi presented the third chapter on the policy framework for open government and touched on its four stages: transparency, participation, collaboration and engagement. She concluded her presentation by proposing few recommendations for the implementation of open government.

11.     A presentation on the OECD Analysis of the Opportunities and Challenges for Open Government in the Arab Region was given by Ms. Karine Badr, Policy Analyst and Project Coordinator at OECD.  Her presentation explored key advances and entry-points for open government reforms in the region through presenting the OECD Open Government Project, the timeline and findings of the 2015 survey on open government.  Ms. Badr also highlighted the three pillars of the recently adopted OECD recommendations of the Council on Open Government namely enabling environment, implementation framework, and way ahead.  She concluded her presentation by highlighting OECD work in the MENA region and identified a series of challenges that the MENA countries face, such as competing priorities for governance reforms and weak/slow implementation of legal frameworks.

## C.  IMPACT OF OPEN GOVERNMENT

12.     Mr. Mohammad Nawar Alawa, ESCWA Regional Advisor on Technology for Development presented a technical paper on the Economic Dimensions of Open Data.  He introduced the digital economy, its components and areas within the framework of goals 8, 9 and 17 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.  He also discussed the added value of the digital economy in developed and developing countries, especially, in the communication and employment sectors as well as the use of the Internet.  Mr. Alawa then defined the basic concepts, types and characteristics of open data and large data and its relation to the digital economy highlighting its economic impact and the expected impact on both the private and public sectors.  During his intervention, Mr. Alawa presented a business model for open data and detailed the economic impact and the expected impact on the private and public sectors.  He also presented case studies from the European Union and the United Kingdom.

13.     A presentation on Open Government Data as an Enabler of SDG 16 Implementation was delivered remotely by Ms. Arpine Korekyan, Governance and Public Administration Officer at the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.  Ms. Korekyan provided a brief background on the targets of SDGs 16 and 17, the importance of data in informing decision-makers, monitoring progress, inclusion and accountability, transparency, participation, effectiveness and efficiency, as well as innovation and research.  She also clarified that open government data can help institutions improve decision-making processes and public services such as reducing waste of recourses and unleash opportunities for innovation.  Within this context, her presentation focused on the effects of open data utilization and its far-reaching potential for impacting sustainable development with innovation, participatory governance and economic growth.  In addition, Ms. Korekyan presented the findings of the United Nations E-Government Survey 2018 and addressed the key challenges arising from the implementation of open data projects in public sector.

14.     Ms. Lize Denner, Associate Programme Management Officer at the Innovation Section presented A New Way of Thinking: Open Government, Innovation and Achieving the SDGs.  Her presentation focused on the need for innovation in the public sector to aid in the enhancement of open government towards the achievement of the SDGs.  Within this scope, she identified different innovation processes.  Ms. Denner concluded by presenting the challenges facing innovation in the public sector as identified by ESCWA publication entitled "Guidelines on Fostering Innovation in the Public Sector of the Arab Region".

## D.  OPEN DATA CAPACITY BUILDING

15.     Mr. Khaled Sellami, Director General of the e-Government Unit at the Presidency of the Government in Tunisia comprehensively discussed Open Government Data: Concepts and National Strategy during his training session.  He started with an overview of the concept of open data, its definition, principles and objectives clarifying the types of potentially available government data, including administrative, statistical, policy and research related, as well as institutional.  Mr. Sellami examined the Data Value Chain and the impact of change in the relationship between the administration and citizens in relation to public data and explained that open data needs to be accessible, newly published, readable, non-discriminatory, continuously available, and preferably free of charge.  In addition, Mr. Sellami introduced the components of open data that include leadership, legal framework, technological infrastructure, stakeholders, connectivity, participation and

training and competency development.  He talked about the different components of open data strategy from the assessment to the elaboration of a national road map, addressing three questions: how to boost national programmes on open data, how to evaluate and build national policies, and how to overcome difficulties and face challenges of a whole-of-government and change management approach.  Mr. Sellami concluded his training session with a thorough discussion on the characteristics of data including policies, accessibility, rights, classification, value and format of data (including Metadata data), using examples from the Arab region.

16.    The training session on Technical Aspects, Technologies, and Platforms was extensively discussed by Mr. Kamel Mellah, Expert in Open Data Platforms at the ONSHOR Programme in Tunisia.  In his training session, Mr. Malleh addressed the technical nature of open data as data that is presented in open formats and can be processed automatically.  He also discussed the characteristics of open data in terms of metadata, data quality, data integrity, importance of periodic updates and the respect of international standards.  Mr Malleh explained how technical aspects/characteristics such as open format, machine readability and others increase the reuse potential to create services with high value added.  In addition, he identified several technical solutions and platforms that facilitates decision-making when launching national and/or sectoral open data initiatives.  He concluded his intervention with an example of the Tunisian experience in open data portals.

E.  PARTICIPATION CAPACITY BUILDING

17.    The training on Four-Phased ESCWA Framework on Open Government was given by Ms. Louise Thomasen, Director and Independent Consultant at coThomasen.  She started her session with brief example including the development stages of the Obama Open Government Directive 2009, the European Union initiative and its three pillars of open governance: open data, open decisions and open services, as well as the OECD digital government strategies.  Ms. Thomasen introduced the ESCWA Framework on Open Government and an overview of its four phases: openness, participation, collaboration and engagement.  She explained that the framework offers basic material for developing the capacity of government decision-makers in implementing successful government strategies in the Arab region, specifically the necessary building blocks for the implementation of the four phases.  She stressed that knowledge and opinion are the main concerns of collaboration which represents the two-way exchange of information, needed for better cooperation, between government and all its stakeholders.  She indicated that engagement is the shift towards the total engagement of non-government actors in the work of government through shared responsibility.

18.    Under the same topic, Mr. Morten Meyerhoff, Academic Fellow at the Operating Unit for Policy Driven Electronic Governance at the United Nations University (UNU), highlighted the key objectives of open government in relation to traditional core government services.  In his training session on Collaboration and Engagement: Open, Accessible and User-Centric Public Service Delivery, he provided a brief background on open government, governance and the concept of e-governance clarifying their benefits for administration, citizens and businesses.  He highlighted that benefits include product improvement, effectiveness in performance, cost reduction, sustainability through innovation and service improvement. Mr. Meyerhoff outlined and discussed the approaches for engagement and public-sector ecosystems for increased productivity and added value.  He illustrated the subject matter using practical examples on usability criteria, reuse of data, and direct and indirect user-engagement tools across service delivery channels.

F.  COUNTRY EXPERIENCES

19.    A case study on Open Government in Morocco was presented by Mr. Ismail Amartini, the Head of Service of Bilateral Cooperation at the Ministry of Administrative Reform and Civil Service in Morocco.  His presentation highlighted the most important measures taken by the Ministry of Administrative Reform and Public Service to join Open Government Partnership (OGP).  He explained that the initiative aims to promote participatory democracy, improve the quality of public services, promote integrity, improve businesses and encourage investments as well as exchange experience and success stories with other countries and NGOs in the areas of transparency, openness and good governance.  Mr. Amartini explained that the government prepared a national work plan for OGP that included 19 commitments related to access to information, integrity

and fighting corruption, participation of citizens, increasing awareness on open government as well as issues related to environment and sustainable development. He also provided information on the laws and regulations issued by the Moroccan government in support of the work plan.

20.     The experience of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia "An Ambitious Nation: Effectively Governed Responsibly Enabled" was presented by Mr. Majid Aldraehim, Research and Innovation Manger in the Saudi e-Government Programme (Yesser).   Mr. Aldraehim clarified that the communication and information technology sector in the Kingdom includes the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, Communications and Information Technology Commission, Saudi Post, the National Center for Digital Certification, National Digitization Unit, in addition to the e-Government Programme (Yesser).   He also provided a brief overview on progress made to the process of e-government transactions during the period 2003-2017.   Mr. Aldraehim highlighted the digital transformation initiatives within the framework of the national transformation programme 2020 of the Saudi Arabia 2030 Vision, with a focus on open government. He concluded his presentation with a brief on the products and services of Yesser that aims to support the journey towards digital transformation in Saudi Arabia.

21.     Open data strategy was presented as a case study by Ms. Nada Khater, Head of e-Government Strategies at the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology in Jordan.   Her presentation entitled "Open Data: Big Impact" provided: 1) a detailed overview of the Open Government Data Policy in Jordan that was issued based on Law 47 of 2004, and that guarantees the right to access to information; 2) Economic Growth Stimulation Plan 2018-2022; and 3) the Third Plan for Jordan 2016-2018 for the Transparent Government Partnerships Initiative.   She clarified that the third plan included ten commitments on topics related to the accessibility to information, transparency, and the implementation of a policy to provide open data using technology.   The Joint Committee for Open Government Data, one of four bodies, consists of representatives of nine governmental institutions and a legal advisor. It is tasked with the implementation of the national open data policy through the preparation of a strategic framework (executive plan), dissemination of the open government data survey, and preparation of standardized computation.   Ms. Khater clarified that the Joint Committee cooperated with ESCWA through advisory services to conduct a study on the country's readiness for open government data, and national capacity building workshops.   Finally, the Open Government Data Platform in Jordan was launched in 2017 and contains three main sectors: business and economy, tourism and archeology and population and society.

22.     The case study from Oman was presented by Mr. Ahmed Al Balushi, Team Leader of International Relations at the Information Technology Authority in Oman.   In his case study, Journey of Oman Open Data, Mr. Al Balushi highlighted the five stages of open data in Oman which started with the initiation in 2012 and was followed by launching the open data section, conducting an open data contest, restarting open data and finally the launch of open data policy, license and data sets. He explained that the country's approach consisted of five steps, namely: identifying the sectors that are important from a global perspective; identifying specific fields of information for each sector; mapping of ministries that contribute to data; establishing a task force to check data availability; and follow-up to determine relevance of data.   In terms of policies, Mr. Al Balushi listed the royal decrees that addressed key points stated in the national and international mandates taking into consideration best practices in other countries: Royal Decree 60/2007, Royal Decree 118/2011, Royal Decree 40/2014, and Royal Decree 42/2015 in addition to the United Nations Guidelines on Open Data.   He also presented the national Open Government License for Oman.   As a result of this process, datasets from 17 ministries for 18 sectors are published through the Open Data Wave, National Open Data Portal and the Meta Data Dashboard.   Mr. Al Balushi concluded his presentation with some feedback results on the willingness to implement open data, the challenges and the current status of Oman compared to the Arab region and a summary of the process from policy development to the implementation of open data.

G.   LEGAL ASPECTS OF OPEN GOVERNMENT: ACCESS TO INFORMATION LAW

23.     "Access to Information – Legal Principles and Problems" was presented by Mr. Wassim Hajjar, Supervisor of the ICT Center at the Ministry of Justice in Lebanon.   His presentation focused on the legal basis

and justifications for the practice of the right to access to information in the public sector. He discussed how the right is practiced, its scope, its aspects and restrictions, related measures and the persons involved in its applications. Mr. Hajjar detailed the problems resulting from the application of laws that governs the implementation of the right to access to information in the public sector in terms of the possible practical and legal solutions. He concluded his presentation by proposing several recommendations for open government including promoting the concept of open government, increasing the awareness of the citizens, preparing comprehensive plans, strengthening the ICT infrastructure, capacity building, managing data and archives, and reassessing and amending laws and regulations.

24.    The General Framework for the Establishment of the Authority for Access to Information in Tunisia, its focus and functions was presented by Mr. Adnene Lassoued, Deputy President of the Authority. He started his presentation with a background on the importance of access to information and the related international resolutions which acted as the main driving force behind the establishment of the Authority. He stated that access to information is one of the benefits experienced due to the democratic transitions in the country initiated by Decree No. 41 of 2011 on the access to administrative documents of public structures to promote the principle of transparency. The decree included principles and rules governing access to administrative documents, the nature of the documents that citizens can obtain and restrictions on access. Mr. Lassoued proceeded by listing the actions that Tunisia undertook after joining the Open Government Partnership (OGP) in 2014 and touched on the main resolutions that were issued, namely Article 32 of the country's constitution; Law No. 22 of 2016 that regulates the methods and procedures for exercising the right to access to information and Chapter 1 that guarantees transparency, accountability, performance quality and participation. Within this context, he focused his presentation on the amendments made to Decree 41 of 2011 in relation to judicial protection of the right to access to information through the creation of the Authority as an independent body that is authorized to deny access to information for short periods.

25.    During the closing session, discussions focused on the importance of open government and its impact in the Arab region. Participants stressed on the need to build the capacity of more stakeholders and decision-makers to implement open government, and requested ESCWA to replicate this workshop at the regional and national levels.

## III.  ORGANIZATION OF WORK

### A.  VENUE AND DATE

26.    The workshop was organized by the Innovation Section of ESCWA Technology for Development Division. It was held at ESCWA premises in Beirut from 25 to 27 September 2018.

### B.  PARTICIPANTS

27.    The capacity building workshop was attended by 39 participants, of whom 16 were women, from 12 ESCWA member States (Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen). The list of participants is included in the annex of this report.

### C.  AGENDA

28.    Presentations and discussions revolved around nine sessions. The agenda of the workshop is summarized below:

(a)  Opening statements.
(b)  Session I: regional perspectives of open government;
(c)  Session II: impact of open government and country experiences;
(d)  Session III: participation, collaboration and engagement in open government (1);

(e)   Session IV: open government for achieving SDGs;

(f)   Session V: open data 1 – concepts and benefits;

(g)   Session VI: open data 2 – technical aspects, technologies and platforms;

(h)   Session VII: participation, collaboration and engagement in open government (2);

(i)   Session VIII: legal aspects of open government – access to information law;

(j)   Session IX: country experiences in open data;

(k)   Closing session

## D.  DOCUMENTS

29.   The list of documents and presentations related to the workshop are available on ESCWA page on the following link: https://www.unescwa.org/events/workshop-first-regional-open-government-arab-regionhttps://www.unescwa.org/events/workshop-first-regional-open-government-arab-region.

## E.  EVALUATION

30.   An evaluation questionnaire was distributed to all participants to assess relevance, effectiveness, and impact of the workshop.  The overall feedback of participants indicated that the workshop met its objectives and the participants' expectations.  Most of the participants strongly agreed and agreed that the workshop was useful in terms of knowledge and skills obtained and exchange of experiences. They also confirmed the relevance of the workshop's content to their area of work (92%).

31.   Seventy-three per cent of the participants agreed that the workshop and all the sessions were well structured and organized preparations.  The majority rated the sessions as excellent or good and strongly agreed that the trainers were knowledgeable about the subject matter, attentive, engaging and well prepared. Participants requested ESCWA to organize additional and advanced workshops on open government and open data.  They recommended including more practical exercises and success stories from developing countries as well as inviting relevant legal departments in Arab countries.

# ANNEX:
# LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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