Capacity Development Webinar on

"Advancing SMART Cities and Urban Digital Transformation to achieve Sustainable Development Goals"

Towards Better Governance and Better Life[1]

9 September 2021
Time: 8:00 – 10:30 am EDT

Background

The future of sustainable development will be determined in part in urban areas. With more than half of the world's people living in urban areas, urbanization is already impacting the progress in implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. If current trends continue, by 2050 urban population will reach approximately 70 per cent of the world's population and produce 85 per cent of global economic output, according to the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.[2]

Despite various challenges urbanization has generally been a driving force for sustainability when anchored on the principles of sustainable development. Cities are centers of science, technology and innovation (STI), engines of economic growth, and hubs of commerce and transportation. Cities are often expected to generate jobs and provide the infrastructure and access to education, health care, housing, energy, water and sanitation, transportation and communication and green space. Municipal governments are likewise expected to ensure that the benefits of urbanization are shared equitably to leave no one behind, addressing the needs of older persons, and persons with disabilities.

Rapid advancement of digital technologies and applications in recent years has created also enormous opportunities and expectations for cities to harness digital tools to advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Increasingly, digital technologies are integrated into the lives and livelihoods of people, spurring innovations across sectors, including banking, communication, commerce, education, entertainment, health care, shopping, telecommuting and others.

Digital technologies are often considered an essential part of the SMART city toolbox. Data and data science have allowed SMART cities to develop people-centric public service delivery and decision-making processes to increase residents' wellbeing, productivity and quality of life. Urban

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[1] The webinar is co-organized by United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, and Shanghai Big Data Center.

[2] 2018 Revision of World Urbanization Prospects

transport, education, public safety, public health, civic participation and the environmental sector are among the most frequent beneficiaries of SMART solutions.

Real time information on traffic enables drivers to identify alternative routes, reducing traffic jams, air pollution and environmental footprint. Data on crimes help public safety departments to adopt better preventive measures. Telemedicine, e-alerts and monitoring help address public health needs, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Digital tools have also been deployed to facilitate public participation in decision-making. At the local level, mobile devices have become an important avenue to improving public services, often allowing for instant dissemination of information about public transit, traffic conditions, weather information, safety alerts, and neighborhoods events to millions of subscribers and users. Deployed over time and on scale, such digital tools contribute toward the achievement of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

From this transformation is emerging an unprecedented level of "smartness" of cities, opening up new opportunities, as well as challenges, for cities to advance the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Increasingly, municipal governments are investing in digital infrastructure, including Internet of Things (IoT) sensors connected by high-speed communication networks. Similarly, service-oriented applications have mushroomed, tapping into big data and artificial intelligence (AI), offering solutions to streamline and simplify daily routines.

The role of digital government is also becoming more important as part of the emerging trend of SMART digital governance. As highlighted in the [United Nations E-Government Survey 2020](#), some local governments are building SMART cities, harnessing and leveraging digital technologies to accelerate sustainable development. For example, AI chatbots are being used to improve service delivery; and big data and analytics are being used in urban planning, implementing local government policies and optimizing a variety of public resources.

Deploying these digital technologies, notably, AI, IoT, Augmented and Virtual reality, robotics and other digital applications at a local scale, has proven incredibly useful in addressing a myriad of issues including climate change, air pollution, traffic congestion, ageing populations, unemployment, public safety, solid waste management, migration and others. SMART cities promise to transform sustainable urban development aiming at a better environment, social and economic conditions, improving the attractiveness and competitiveness of cities.

While such efforts are laudable, they remain the exception rather than the rule. According to the Local Online Service Index (LOSI), part of the [United Nations E-Government Survey 2020](#), the use of (or intention to use) emerging digital technologies was found in fewer than a quarter of the cities studied, possibly owing to resource constraints or a lack of capacity.

Such findings demonstrated once again that not all local governments are well equipped with the knowledge and ability to respond effectively to the digital age, in tapping the vast opportunities or mitigating the inherent risks. The pace and evolution of digitalization are surpassing the speed with which governments can put in place appropriate regulatory and policymaking frameworks to adapt and reap the benefits. Countries in special situations, such as least developed countries (LDCs), landlocked developing countries (LLDCs), small island developing States (SIDS), and countries with economies in transition, are often unprepared or ill-prepared for the onset of cybercrimes and cyberattacks, as well as waves of mis- and dis-information.

Unleashing SMART digital technologies while mitigating the risks is therefore an urgent task for the international community. It requires the engagement of all stakeholders working together to promote digital capacity-building to improve support for Governments, local authorities and other stakeholders.

The UN General Assembly in resolution 73/218 emphasized that "there is a pressing need to address the major impediments that developing countries face in accessing new technologies". It further stressed that "important and growing digital divides remain between and within developed and developing countries in terms of the availability, affordability and use of information and communications technologies and access to broadband". The resolution recognized that ICTs have the potential to provide new solutions to development challenges and to integrate developing and least developed countries into the global economy.

Against this backdrop, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), through its Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG), in collaboration with Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences and Shanghai Big Data Center, is organizing a capacity building webinar on "Advancing SMART Cities and Digital Transformation to achieve Sustainable Development Goals." The webinar will focus on the case study of Shanghai. Shanghai's SMART city plan (2016-2020) has earned the City Award of 2020. Focused on the development of a wide array of resources including the deployment of digital Infrastructure, e-government services, a City Brain and the integration of information technology and industry, Shanghai's SMART city plan, under the name Smart Shanghai — People-Oriented Smart City - envisioned the deployment of the digital infrastructure needed to become the first "Dual Gigabit" city (a city with both wired and wireless gigabit broadband connectivity), achieving full 5G coverage in the downtown area and also accomplishing a Gigabit fiber coverage of 99% in the city. Additionally, the e-government initiative has managed to become a useful tool for its citizens and registered over 14.56 million users within a total population of over 24 million. A one-stop portal, the e-government system helps simplify such processes as applying for a business license. Through the portal, citizens can complete regulatory needs, pay utility bills, provide emergency-response information and more. Real-time maps and updated emergency information allow city officials and citizens to react and prepare for times of crisis.

The webinar is supported by the 2030 Agenda Sub-fund of the United Nations Peace and Development Fund. It aims to explore recent experiences in building SMART cities and exploring their contributions to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals through expert presentations, showcasing of best practices and success stories, and sharing of practical steps in building SMART cities, including lessons learned.

The webinar will bring into virtual collaboration municipal government officials responsible for digital transformation, and experts and decision-makers from the private sector, civil society, academia in relevant digital fields, including digital government, digital economy, science and technology and innovation (STI), institutes and businesses with expertise in digital transformation of the public sector. The recommendations of the Webinar as well as the analytical assessments of SMART technologies will feed into the preparation of a curriculum and toolkits for future capacity building efforts.

Objectives

The webinar aims to strengthen capacities of government decisionmakers and local authorities responsible for digital transformation and building SMART cities in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It further aims to strengthen the general knowledge and capacity of countries, especially the developing countries, and in particular the capacity of the LDCs, SIDS, LLDCs, and countries with economies in transition, to participate in, and benefit from, the growing opportunities of digitalization while mitigating the risks.

Format

The webinar will be convened on **9 September 2021**.

The webinar will be held virtually in English, through the Zoom platform as a video conferencing tool. It will also be live streamed through Facebook Live. Recordings will be posted on the event website after the conclusion of the webinar.

The webinar will be interactive and will engage participants in:
- Framing keynotes from experts;
- Presentations, critical reflection, discussion and case analysis, based on the experience of the municipality of Shanghai;
- Discussion panels.

The key recommendations and summary of the discussion will be disseminated through the UN DESA website and serve as inputs for future development of curriculum and toolkits.

Targeted Audience

The direct beneficiaries of the webinar are senior public service officials who are national or local government focal points responsible for digital transformation and SMART cities, and public servants and leaders from LDCs, LLDCs, SIDS and countries with economies in transition, who play key functional roles in integrating digital transformation in their national and local sustainable development strategy and programmes.

Expected Results

It is expected that participants will gain an enhanced understanding of the requirements and challenges for policy and decision-making in digital transformation and building SMART cities in developing countries to implement the 2030 Agenda. The webinar also aims to strengthen the individual and institutional capacity of public officials in digital transformation, including capacity to integrate digital transformation in national sustainable development plans.

Proposed Agenda

Time (EDT)	
8:00- 8: 30 am	**Moderator: Ms. Adriana Alberti, Chief of Programme Management and Capacity Building Unit, Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government, UN DESA** **Welcome Remarks** **Mr. Elliott Harris**, Assistant-Secretary-General and UN Chief Economist, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) (invited) **Mr. Zhu Zongyao**, Deputy Director, General Office of Shanghai Municipal Government **Mr. Wang Zhen,** Vice President of Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences
8:30-10:00 am (15minutes each)	**Moderator: Ms. Adriana Alberti, Chief of Programme Management and Capacity Building Unit, Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government, UN DESA** **Keynote presentations** - Mr. Tang Qifeng, General Manager of Shanghai Data Exchange Center - Mr. Jing Yijia, President of Institute of Global Public Policy, Fudan University - Mr. Deniz Suzar, Governance and Public Administration Officer - Mr. Liu Yingfeng, Deputy-Director of Shanghai Big Data Center - Mrs. Zhu Lin, Vice Director of Urban Perspective Data Hub, from School of Social and Public Administration, East China University of Science and Technology - Mr. Wang Xingquan, Director, Research Center of Science and Technology Innovation, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences
10:00–10:25 am	**Open Discussion** **Q&A from audience** **Panelists**

10:25–10:30 am	**Closing Remarks** • **Wrap up by Ms. Adriana Alberti, Chief of Programme Management and Capacity Building Unit, Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government, UN DESA**