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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Report

Workshop on fostering innovation in the public sectors of Arab countries Cairo, 30-31 October 2017

Summary

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) held a workshop on fostering public sector innovation in the Arab region in Cairo, on 30 and 31 October 2017, in cooperation with the Ministry of Planning, Monitoring and Administrative Reform of Egypt. The meeting brought together 40 mid-level government decision makers from 12 Arab countries, and consultants from Denmark and Greece. Government officials represented different ministries, all with an interest in fostering public sector innovation.

The main objective of the workshop was to raise awareness of innovation in the public sector among decision makers of the region, based on “Guidelines on fostering public sector innovation” produced by ESCWA. The importance of public sector innovation was illustrated through examples from the international arena, and regional and national case studies. ESCWA also presented its new policy framework for open government in the Arab region, which is designed for enhancing transparency, accountability and participation of citizens in decision-making.

CONTENTS

	<i>Paragraphs</i>	<i>Page</i>
Introduction	1-6	3
<i>Chapter</i>		
I. OUTCOMES	7-10	3
II. TOPICS OF DISSCUSSION	11-36	4
A. Public sector innovation: introduction with examples from Bahrain, Egypt and Jordan	12-14	4
B. Public sector innovation: concepts, challenges and benefits	15-16	4
C. Public sector innovation: types, steps and suitability	17-19	4
D. European Union perspectives for advanced government services.....	20-24	5
E. Open government linkage to public sector innovation	25-28	5
F. Interactive session: challenge ourselves	29-30	6
G. Public sector innovation and the demands of the SDGs.....	31-36	6
III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK	37-41	7
A. Venue and date	37	7
B. Participants	38	7
C. Opening	39-40	7
D. Evaluation.....	41	7
<i>Annex.</i> List of participants.....		9

Introduction

1. Well-informed citizens demanding better government services and better participation in decision-making processes, as well as technological advances, have pushed public sector innovation to the forefront as an essential component in governance.
2. In general, innovation is the implementation of a new way of achieving a result and/or performing work. It can be completely new, a change to a current system, or something that already exists elsewhere and is implemented for the first time in a new context. Thus, innovation can be related to a product, service, policy and programme, or a process. Innovation in the public sector differs from the private sector in that the focus is not monetary gain or corporate success, but rather provision of better government services and increased efficiency in administrative processes. This, in-turn, could enhance the social welfare of the people and increase economic growth of the country for a more sustainable future.
3. There are many benefits to public sector innovation, including better government service delivery, operation, decision-making, planning, and greater citizen participation and engagement. This could bring about better government transparency and accountability, and greater inclusion leading to better social, economic and environmental development. However, activating and sustaining public sector innovation can be very difficult due to the hierarchy, bureaucracy, culture, and status quo within the Government. The public sector is slow to change and normally requires some form of impetus, such as leadership changes, looming crises or internal problems.
4. There are several possible approaches and tools that Governments can employ to plan, activate and execute public sector innovation, such as bottom-up innovation, disruptive innovation and open innovation. Being aware of the potential of such approaches will make it possible for decision makers to select the ones suited to their needs and priorities, as well as their organizational culture, but also to sustain an innovative spirit within the various public sectors.
5. Public sector innovation is in direct support of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 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.” The public sector, through development of innovative solutions—whether services, processes, policies, programmes or products— can contribute to the achievement of SDG 16 and its targets, including “develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels” (16.6); “ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels” (16.7); and “ensure public access to information...” (16.10).
6. Innovation could also provide the Government and its institutions with the means to achieve the other SDGs. Some examples of other SDGs where public sector innovation can make a difference include:
 - (a) SDG 10, “Reduce inequality within and among countries”, especially target 10.2, on the empowerment and social, economic and political inclusion of all;
 - (b) SDG 5, "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls", especially target 5.5 on the full and effective participation of women in decision-making and equal opportunities for leadership, and target 5.b on the use of technology to support empowerment.

I. OUTCOMES

7. The main outcome of the workshop is that mid-level government decision makers are best equipped to become drivers of innovation in the public sector in their countries and offices. The quality of the information given during the workshop, as well as in the case studies and the ESCWA “Guidelines on fostering public sector innovation”, will help them to reach that objective.

8. Many Governments are currently focusing on open government or elements thereof. The links between this concept and public sector innovation has made it clear for participants that the success of the latter depends on innovative services, processes and products from within the Government.
9. ESCWA has received requests from countries for further workshops at the national level in the areas of public sector innovation and open government (specifically open data).
10. Participants of the workshop indicated in their evaluation that follow-up workshops were necessary in other Arab countries.

II. TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

11. The workshop consisted of seven sessions that addressed the following themes: (a) concepts, types, benefits and challenges of innovation in the public sector; (b) case studies from several Arab countries; (c) the ESCWA framework and the link between open government and public sector innovation; (d) lessons learned from Europe; and (e) public sector innovation and the SDGs.

A. PUBLIC SECTOR INNOVATION: INTRODUCTION WITH EXAMPLES FROM BAHRAIN, EGYPT AND JORDAN

12. Egypt has a vision and Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) 2030 strategy in place, which propose options to foster public sector innovation. However, the STI ecosystem still faces challenges. The “quadruple model”, in which the public sector, academia, industry and citizens all collaborate, was suggested as a way to drive structural changes beyond what each sector could achieve on its own.

13. In Bahrain, public sector innovation is supported by pillars such as a mature infrastructure, laws and regulations, programmes that facilitate knowledge and skill development, and several government initiatives. Examples of public sector innovation from Bahrain include the eGovernment Excellence Award, a national complaints and suggestion system, Bahrain Open Data Initiative and the national strategy for smart devices.

14. Within Jordan, political will, private sector innovation, globalization and global competition all drive public sector innovation, fuelling change in government and the society. The forms of government innovation in Jordan include urban innovation, social innovation and workplace innovation. The "Jordan 2025" vision sets innovation ideals for citizens, businesses, the Government and the society. To achieve this vision, several projects have been implemented in the public sector of Jordan, such as mobile and e-payments systems, open data policy, public sector innovation incubator and an e-health programme.

B. PUBLIC SECTOR INNOVATION: CONCEPTS, CHALLENGES AND BENEFITS

15. Innovation becomes a possibility whenever there is a problem in a rule or procedure, or when a crisis develops. Innovation in the public sector should begin at a small scale, but bigger thinking and a higher purpose are required to fulfil a vision. Starting small takes less effort and commits the sector to less errors, thus making trial-and-error procedures less expensive, as one small innovation is introduced at a time.

16. In the United Arab Emirates, innovation in the Government is considered of high importance. The country boasts a centre for government innovation and considers innovation as a culture. Mohammed Bin Rashid Centre for Government Innovation is an example of a good practice: it provides workshops to develop the innovation capabilities of public sector teams; an integrated set of tools and resources to help the public sector to innovate; and fosters links with international experts in innovation.

C. PUBLIC SECTOR INNOVATION: TYPES, STEPS AND SUITABILITY

17. Innovation is a creative process, not easily defined, and expressed through many models and types. The types include bottom up, collaborative, continuous, disruptive, frugal, incremental, local and open innovation.

Each type has a different rationale, risk and promise (outcome/achievement), but beyond these elements, and in the context of development, it is necessary to include sustainability of innovation and the contribution of public sector innovation to the achievement of inclusive sustainable development.

18. The life cycle of an innovation in the public sector comprises several phases, namely ideation, deliberation, evolution and assimilation. Each of the phases has several steps and could be repeated several times. Each phase has corresponding technologies that aid in its implementation.

19. The Innovation Process Type and Time Maturity Model (IPTTM) model can be used in two ways: to determine the level of maturity of an innovation and whether any changes should be made; the other is as a systematic design tool to develop the implementation of an innovation.

D. EUROPEAN UNION PERSPECTIVES FOR ADVANCED GOVERNMENT SERVICES

20. The European Union follows the Open Method for Coordination (OMC) and incorporates an intergovernmental means of governance, based on the voluntary cooperation of member States. Examples of such operations are the ministerial e-government declarations and the bottom-up member States initiatives.

21. Horizon 2020 is the current European strategy. The 2016-2017 workplan emphasized co-creation and the promotion of the European public and cultural place. The 2017-2018 workplan incorporates government and governance of the future (trust in governance, new forms of delivering public services and goods) and has several studies on e-government and cross-border digital public services to achieve a single digital market.

22. Benchmarking European digital services focuses on user centricity, transparency, cross-border mobility and mobile friendliness of public websites, with the key enablers being e-ID, eDocuments, authentic sources, eSafe and single sign on (SSO).

23. Emerging technologies that Governments and the public sector are likely to use in the future will have significant impacts on the way Governments are organized and operated, as well as on how Governments are perceived and used. These technologies include blockchain, digital fabrication, geo-enabled information and service delivery, Internet of Things (IoT), big data, artificial intelligence, drones, robotics and virtual reality.

24. European Standards for Innovation Management 16555 is an innovation management system prepared by the Technical Committee CEN/TC 389 and the European Committee for Standardization. It follows the PDCA procedure (Plan-Do-Check-Act). It does not give a certification to the organizations that use it, but it is a road map that provides best practices in innovation, better understanding of innovation and related tools and procedures, ways to foster innovation inside the organization, metrics to measure the innovation impact and a common language to understand the innovation at a global level. The pillars of these Standards are: innovation management, strategic intelligence management, innovation thinking, intellectual property management, cooperation management, creativity management and innovation management evaluation.

E. OPEN GOVERNMENT LINKAGE TO PUBLIC SECTOR INNOVATION

25. Governance is a process whose actors are those who have the authority to make decisions and implement actions to manage the affairs of a country and/or its subdivisions. The dimensions of governance are accountability, transparency, effectiveness, inclusiveness, contestability and responsiveness, which are also the dimensions of open government.

26. Technology revolutions offer great opportunities to Governments and citizens. For instance, e-government and e-participation lead to better informed and aware citizens and enhance the delivery of public services and goods. Open government uses technology as an enabler, but goes beyond it, requiring political will, innovative processes and structures to effect change and bring about better governance. The Open Government

Implementation Model and the Loch Ness Model are examples of frameworks for the implementation of open government, associated with organizational, technological and socioeconomic challenges.

27. ESCWA has developed an open government framework to foster the implementation of open government in the Arab region. It is a four-stage framework based on existing models and adapted to the needs and circumstances of the region. The phases are transparency, participation, collaboration and involvement.

28. To achieve transparency and participation through open government, a road map can be used that also shows the relevant technology enablers. These lay the foundations of open government, as they facilitate citizens' access to the Government and vice versa and allow for more transparency in government decisions and actions. Within the road map there are six strategic areas, each with its own set of building blocks, which must be considered at every phase. These six areas are policy and strategy, institutional frameworks, legal and regulatory frameworks, government capacity, technology features and channels, and public capacity.

F. INTERACTIVE SESSION: CHALLENGE OURSELVES

29. The workshop participants were divided into four teams during the interactive session. Using existing examples of public sector innovation and the content of the presentations, teams were challenged to develop their own innovations whether in service delivery or government processes. They were encouraged to focus on developing innovations that could aid in the achievement of the SDGs.

30. The goal of the exercise was for participants to put into action the information received during the workshop, considering existing ideas, the peculiarities of the Arab region and the SDGs, to identify an innovative service or process. The session reinforced the idea that public sector innovation can help in achieving the SDGs.

G. PUBLIC SECTOR INNOVATION AND THE DEMANDS OF THE SDGs

31. Information and communications technology (ICT) is an important tool for “leap-frogging”, transformation, growth and achieving the SDGs, especially Goals 4, 8, 9, 11 and 17. Coupling it with innovation enables it to keep up with more demanding customers and changing environments.

32. Arab countries face several challenges in fostering innovation for the SDGs, including a lack of coherence between national and regional/local policies and a lack of a shared voice and vision at the regional/local level for public sector innovation. To resolve these challenges, a multi-stakeholder regional model could be implemented with several roles, such as improving the understanding of real challenges, providing inspiration for new approaches, helping to design better strategies and approaches, raising the awareness of public authorities to ensure public support, designing and implementing regional initiatives and setting up the necessary key performance indicators for their evaluation.

33. The Arab ICT Organization (AICTO) is an Arab governmental organization working under the aegis of the League of Arab States. It aims to develop ICT throughout the region and provide the required mechanisms to support cooperation and complementarity between AICTO members. It also aims to promote and enrich common policies and strategies to develop vital technological domains, and contribute to the implementation of the SDGs.

34. Actions of AICTO on innovation for the SDGs include the empowerment of Arab women through ICT, the Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) Centre of Excellence, promotion of cloud computing in the Arab region, a capacity-building platform on climate change, strengthening inter-country partnerships and producing studies on policies and new emergent technologies.

35. In the Sudan, a plan on e-government and transformation toward smart government 2016-2020, with five strategic goals, eight major initiatives and 38 projects, is in place. Accomplishments under the plan include

secondary school online results, online applications for universities, online application for the pilgrimage and regions information system. ORNIC 15, which collects national revenues electronically, is one of the most reliable projects that have been launched thus far.

36. Participants emphasized the role of technology and e-government as tools for public sector innovation, but stressed that, to achieve innovation process, re-engineering within the Government may be required. The resources of many Arab Governments are limited, it is therefore necessary to prioritize certain actions. Greater interaction between academia and the public sector could help to deliver on public sector innovation.

III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. VENUE AND DATE

37. The workshop was held by the ESCWA Technology for Development Division, in collaboration with the Ministry of Planning, Monitoring and Administrative Reform in Cairo, Egypt on 30 and 31 October 2017.

B. PARTICIPANTS

38. The expert group meeting was attended by 40 participants, 37.5 per cent of whom were women, from 12 ESCWA member States (Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen), in addition to experts from Denmark and Greece. The annex to the present report includes the list of participants.

C. OPENING

39. The workshop was opened by Ms. Nibal Idlebi, Innovation Section Chief at ESCWA. She spoke about the work of the ESCWA Technology for Development Division and its focus on innovation, the digital society and the knowledge economy in the Arab region. She emphasized the need for technology in advancing development and achieving the SDGs, and considered national and regional innovation ecosystems an integral part in of the development process. The speaker presented ESCWA studies on innovation, particularly the technical paper entitled “The innovation landscape in Arab countries: a critical analysis” and the guidelines for public sector innovation, which served as a basis for the workshop.

40. H.E. Ms. Hala Al Said, Minister of Planning, Monitoring and Administrative Reform, Egypt, gave the keynote speech. She described the importance of innovation in the public sector and emphasized the difference between private sector and public sector innovation. She said that private sector innovation aimed at realizing financial profit whereas public sector innovation aimed at providing better services to foster well-being and economic development for a sustainable future. The speaker highlighted the efforts of the Egyptian Government in the period 2016-2018, during which it promoted collaboration between public stakeholders to provide better governmental services through digital transformation. She mentioned the need for mechanisms to advance innovation for sustainable development in the Arab region, especially a framework that could help Arab countries to foster their innovation ecosystems.

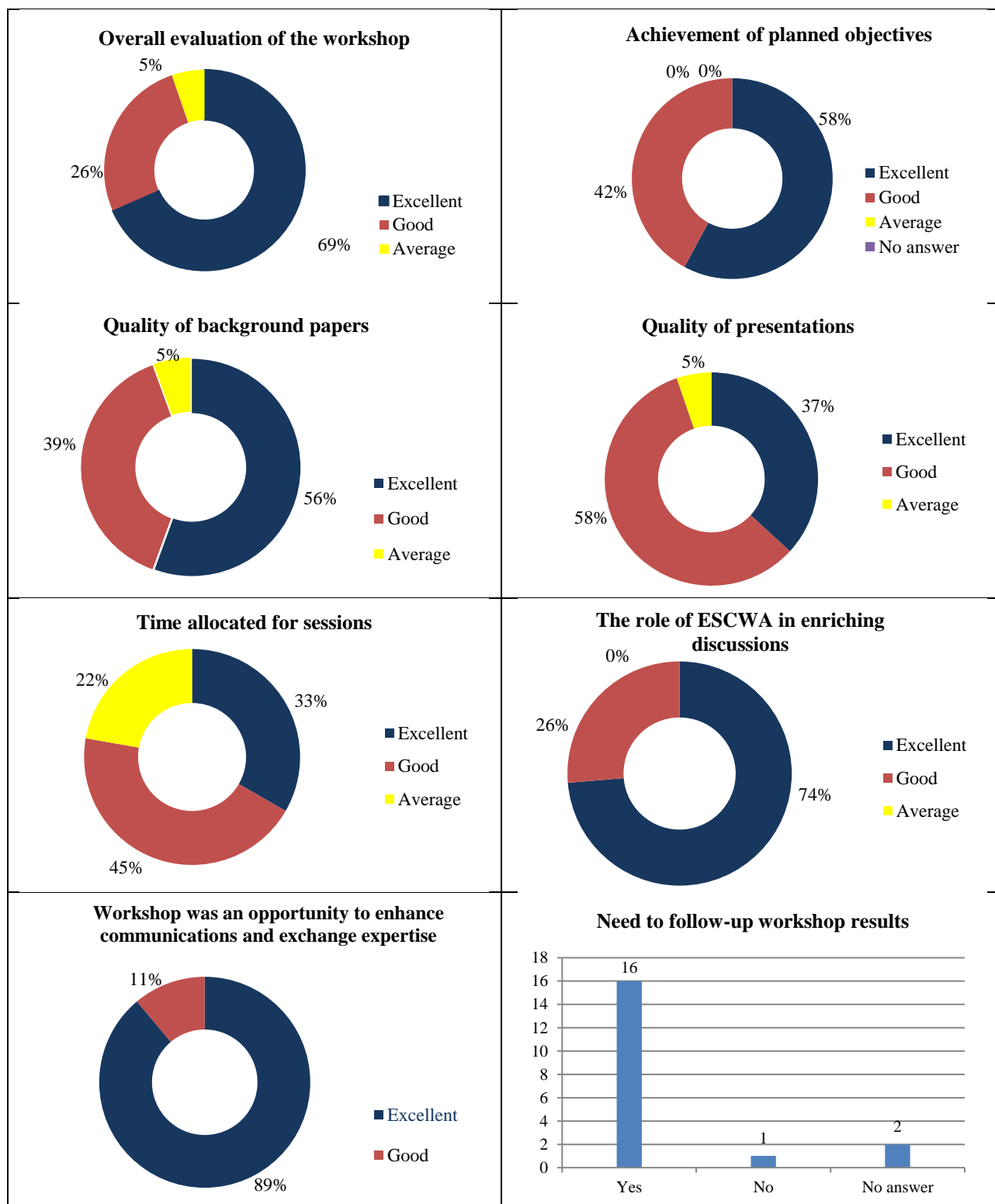
D. EVALUATION

41. An evaluation was carried out to assess the technical, administrative and overall value of the meeting (see figure). Below are selected highlights.

- The overall quality of the workshop was rated good to excellent by 95 per cent of respondents;
- All respondents thought that the meeting met its objectives in an excellent/good manner,
- 95 per cent of respondents rated the quality of background papers as excellent/good;
- The quality of presentations was rated excellent by 37 per cent and good by 58 per cent of respondents;

- 78 per cent of respondents thought the time allocated to the sessions was excellent/good;
- The role of ESCWA in enriching discussions was rated excellent by 74 per cent and good by 26 per cent of respondents.

Evaluation results



LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

A. EXPERTS AND COUNTRY REPRESENTATIVES

Bahrain

Mr. Zakareya Ahmad Al Khaja
Acting Deputy Chief Executive Officer Electronic
Transformation
Information and eGovernment Authority
E-mail: zahmed@iga.gov.bh

Denmark

Mr. Jeremy Millard
Senior Consultant, Policies & Business Analysis
Danish Technological Institute
E-mail: jeremy.millard@3mg.org

Egypt

Mr. Mohamad Abdel Ghani
Central Agency for Public Mobilization
and Statistics

Mr. Ashraf Abdel Wahab
Corporate Affairs Manager
Microsoft
E-mail: asab@microsoft.com

Mr. Saleh Abdelrahman
Deputy Minister
Ministry of Planning, Monitoring and
Administrative Reform
E-mail: Saleh.Abelrahman@ad.gov.eg

Ms. Enas Ahmed Abdul Zaher
Manager, Technical Office
National Management Institute
E-mail: enzaher@nmi.gov.eg

Mr. Saleh Al-Sheikh
Deputy Minister for Administrative Reform
Ministry of Planning, Monitoring
and Administrative Reform

Ms. Nivine Dakrore
Director of Technical Office - Advisor to the
Minister
Ministry of Planning, Monitoring and
Administrative Reform

Ms. Nagwa Elshenawi
Undersecretary for Communication and
Information Technology
Ministry of Communication and Information
Technology
E-mail: nagwash@mcit.gov.eg

Mr. Khaled Foda
Director of Communications and Information
Technology-Economic Affairs Sector
League of Arab States
E-mail: khaled.foda@las.int

Mr. Mostafa Ghali
Advisor to the Minister
Ministry of Education

Mr. Karim Hamza
Regional Advisor
Lattanzio Group
E-mail: khamza@vub.ac.be
hamza@lattanziogroup.eu

Mr. Azzam Irmeili
Consultant
Arab Administrative Development Organization
E-mail: airmeili@arado.org

Ms. Ghada Labib
Prime Minister's Advisor for Follow-up
and Information Systems
Cabinet of Ministers
E-mail: ghada.labib@cabinet.gov.eg

Mr. Slaheddine Maaref
Senior expert in Information and Communications
Technology
International Telecommunication Union Arab
Regional office

Ms. Hayat Megahed
General Manager of Projects
National Institute of Management
E-mail: himegahed@ad.gov.eg

Egypt (continued)

Ms. Mai Mostafa Awad
Assistant Lecturer
Institute of National Planning
E-mail: mai.awad@inp.edu.eg

Mr. Khaled Nassif
Ministry of Finance

Mr. Hisham Salem
Deputy Director
Government Services Development Program
Ministry of Planning, Monitoring
and Administrative Reform
E-mail: hmsalem@ad.gov.eg

Mr. Mahmoud Sakr
Head of Academy
Academy of Scientific Research and Technology
E-mail: msakr@asrt.sci.eg

Mr. Ahmad Kamal Shabaan
Director
E-service Development and E-Government
Ministry of State for Administrative Development
E-mail: akamal@ad.gov.eg

Ms. Rasha Tantawy
Head of Entrepreneurship & Business Support
TIEC/ITIDA
E-mail: rtanatwy@tiec.gov.eg

Mr. Ramzy Wahba
Sustainability Consultant
(Affiliated with) Allied Professionals Technology
E-mail: rwahba@sd-sys.com

Greece

Mr. Dimitrios Gkouskos
Assistant Professor in Design, Development
and Management of Digital Communication
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens
E-mail: gouscos@media.uoa.gr

Jordan

Mr. Abdalfattah Alnsour
Director
Institute of Public Administration
E-mail: AbedALFatah.Nsour@IPA.GOV.JO

Ms. Nesreen Harahsheh
Acting Head of Information and Communications
Technology Policies and Strategies Department
Ministry of Information and Communications
Technology
E-mail: nesreen.harahsheh@moict.gov.jo

Lebanon

Mr. Wassim Hajjar
Judge and Head of the IT Unit
Ministry of justice
E-mail: wassim.hajjar@justice.gov.lb

Morocco

Mr. Nouredine Lasfar
Head of Division of Information Technology
and Digital Trust
Ministry of Industry, Trade and Digital Economy
E-mail: nlasfar@mcinet.gov.ma

State of Palestine

Mr. Jamal Abu Shanab
General Director of ICT
General Personnel Council
E-mail: info@gpc.gov.ps

Saudi Arabia

Mr. Awadh Alharbi
Expert in building and managing innovation
and innovation
Saudi Quality Council
E-mail: awadsefari@gmail.com

Sudan

Mr. Mohamad Abdelrahim Yassin
Director
National Information Center
E-mail: bushrasarah14@gmail.com

Mr. Mohamad ElSheikh
General Director of Systems and Application
National Information Center
E-mail: mohd45628@hotmail.com

Mr. Zuhair Fadel Abjar
Undersecretary
Ministry of Science and Communications
E-mail: info@mcit.gov.sd

Syrian Arab Republic

Mr. Ahmad Bassel Alkheshi
Director
National Information Centre
E-mail: balkheshi@gmail.com

Ms. Rania Bou Saad
Director of Information and Administrative
Development
Ministry of Communication and Technology
E-mail: rbousaad@moct.gov.sy

Tunisia

Mr. Mohamed Ben Amor
Secretary General
Arab Information and Communication
Technology Organization
E-mail: mohamed.benamor@aicto.org

Ms. Rim Garnaoui
Deputy Director
eGov Unit, Presidency of the Government
E-mail: rim.garnaoui@pm.gov.tn

United Arab Emirates

Ms. Nourhan Ahmed
Senior Consultant
Mohamed Bin Rashid Centre for Government
Innovation
E-mail: nourhan.ahmed@pmo.gov.ae

Yemen

Mr. Abdo Yaseen
General Manager of International Cooperation
National Information Center
E-mail: nic@yemen.net.ye

B. UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA (ESCWA)

Ms. Lize Denner
Associate IT Officer, Innovation Section,
Technology for Development Division
E-mail: denner@un.org

Ms. Manal Tabbara
Technology for Development Division
E-mail: tabbaram@un.org

Ms. Nibal Idlebi
Chief, Innovation Section, Technology for
Development Division
E-mail: idlebi@un.org