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Summary Consultation

Using Technology to Connect Citizens and Governments

https://www.globaldevhub.org/techcitizensgovernment

Globally, trust in government has steadily deteriorated over the last years. Communication can build trust, and technology has significant potential for changing how citizens and governments communicate. Particularly, digital technology presents a powerful opportunity for changing how the citizen experiences the state and for building trust between citizens and governments by addressing the concerns of fairness as well as concerns of performance.

By restructuring flows of information, digital technology can help governments to make its processes become transparent and encourage a better understanding of what is being done to deliver public goods to its citizens having a two-way conversation. Equally, well designed and relevant information can empower citizens to speak up, amplify their collective voice, and change the quality and how fast governments respond. It can also provide government institutions with valuable information about what their citizens need and want and how to best deliver services and information. In doing so, the strategic use of digital technology can increase citizen's trust and social cohesion, strengthening the social contract between state and citizens.

In the face of this growing mistrust among the citizenry, this consultation focused on understand what the role of technology is, through the following questions:

1. Does technology have a role to play in building citizen's trust in local governments? How can local governments effectively use technology to build trust with their citizens?
2. What have been the success factors in the examples where technology has contributed to building trust between governments and citizens?
3. What are the opportunities, challenges and risks of governments engaging with citizens through technology?

The consultation was opened to online discussion from 20 November 2019 to 17 December 2019. There was a rich engagement, with 86 members and over 120 comments. Some of the main insights are described below.

There was general agreement that technology has the potential to play a fundamental role in building citizen's trust in local governments. Participants also highlighted technology as potential enhancer of government action across of all of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Technology should be implemented considering the different groups' users. Local governments can effectively use technology to share public information, increase transparency and accountability, and fight corruption. One mechanism to encourage citizen's participation is online consultations. This is especially valuable for those citizens that live in further areas, considering also that it should be ensure better connectivity in remote villages.

In terms of how local governments can effectively employ technology to build trust with their citizens, many suggestions and examples were shared. These were mostly based around the creation of local, communicative web sites/social platforms, the use of satellites images to demonstrate how basic services are or may not be reaching communities and territories. Some cases included the Ministry of Health´s citizen health watch app (E-nabız) and the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality's Culture and Arts app, as positive examples of what local government can do for their citizens. Another example was a very interesting participation model developed by the city of Helsinki, where the transparency of City operations is improved through the use of open data, to increase a range of opportunities for citizen to participate and influence.

One of the success factors mentioned in the consultation was taking into account public participation during the technological development. This involves including citizens and civil society and, on the other hand, local government staff, particularly in the process of planning, development, and deployment. A key element to consider is the diversity of users and provide training to those people who cannot use the new communication technologies. On this issue it was also mentioned the importance for individual citizens and other stakeholders to be actively involved in shaping the overall parameters of digital systems - i.e. what technology is used for and on what terms, as opposed to being just users. Another issue that was highlighted was the need for oversight (including citizen oversight) to prevent misuses.

Another success factor was the establishment of E-government services and government investments in technology to expand a local, national or regional economy (i.e. investments in agriculture or space technology), as good examples where governments have utilized tech to improve citizen services, the economy and therefore trust. Another great case shared was on the building of partnerships, scoping and exploring of appropriate public-private partnership models by engaging with Mobile Operators and or Google in Uganda. Development partners' increased investments in ICT-Led innovations for local service delivery and citizen participation, must be explored. Partnerships with NGOs operating at community level built.

Empowering vulnerable groups is a key opportunity. At the same time, it was mentioned several times to consider citizens and communities who don't know how and where to use such technology. It is important to take into account the challenges related to vulnerable groups such as the lack of knowledge using technology and no internet access in remote areas.
Some of the comprehensive insights were related to the challenges and possible solutions of empowering vulnerable groups particularly post-conflict, fragile and low-capacity country contexts. The idea of recognizing the importance of mixing traditional (e.g community radio) and new ICT-Led innovations and strategies for improving citizen participation, local service delivery and ultimately build

citizens trust in local governments was a good reminder not to only consider new technology solutions. Solutions or technology discussed were AI, facial recognition, https://www.wikinetix.com, #tagcoding handbooks, and better 4G networks enabling open sources for education.

Another challenge, a possible one of the main risks in the use of technology is the dissemination of fake news and misinformation, particularly in social media and official platforms. One way that this can be addressed mentioned in the consultation is by providing learning skills in the use of the ICTs in community development, particularly to reduce the flows of fake news.

It was highlighted that Technology, though very much needed, has often worked as a double-edged sword when it comes to ensuring equal human rights. Therefore, there is an urgent need to develop national and international standards, as well as regulatory systems related to new technologies. This will serve in guaranteeing equal, secure and inclusive access to information for all, but also, and importantly, monitoring and reporting on the quality and accuracy of the information that could be provided by local government platforms, social networks (included those led by local political parties), in order to avoid a misuse of technology.

The use of drones for public services of government highlighted both the risks to citizen trust (security services) and the potential opportunities for solutions (infrastructure maintenance). The discussion detailed all the current legal and policy barriers currently faced in Mexico.

Finally, threats the right to privacy, the risk of security breaches in digitalized systems, technology´s potential to deepen inequality and the scope for information manipulation were mentioned among the main risks related to technology-based state-citizen interfaces. An opportunity that came up in various interventions was the potential for technology to enable new and more effective forms of participation, thus increasing the legitimacy of public decision making.