Engaging people through e-participation

3.1. Introduction

While e-participation is still an evolving concept, there is vast evidence that e-participation technologies expand opportunities for civic engagement, including increased possibilities for people to participate in decision-making processes and service delivery to make societies more inclusive. It helps connect "citizens with one another and with their elected representatives" (Macintosh, 2006). E-participation can be defined "as the process of engaging citizens through ICTs in policy, decision-making, and service design and delivery in order to make it participatory, inclusive, and deliberative" (UNDESA, 2013).

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) call for participatory decision-making. Participatory policies and practices have expanded all over the world thanks to the use of e-information provision, e-consultation and e-decision-making. While developed countries still lead in global e-participation rankings, developing countries are also advancing and narrowing the gap, for example, in information provision. But countries are at different levels and the results of e-participation vary. In addition, these positive trends do not affect all people and societies equally. For more than 40 per cent of the world's population who lack access to the Internet, these innovative approaches are unavailable.

This chapter explores how e-participation can help promote more inclusive societies. It also provides a global and regional analysis of e-participation trends and offers an overview of existing e-participation models. It looks at the interdependence between e-information, e-consultation and e-decision-making by highlighting concrete examples from different regions. Challenges and opportunities of e-participation are also presented by examining the results relative to each level of e-participation. Innovative ways to mobilize people's ideas, as well as mobilize financial resources are also examined, including crowdsourcing and crowdfunding.

3.2. E-participation in support of sustainable development

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development encourages governments worldwide to ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels (Target 16.7). It also acknowledges that partnerships and all stakeholders will play an important role in promoting inclusive development. The UN General Assembly recognized "the potential of e-government in promoting transparency, accountability, efficiency and citizen engagement in public service delivery" (UN General Assembly Resolution 69/327, 2015c).

Photo credit: Infographic by DPADM

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Chapter 3

In recent years, e-government has enabled enhanced public participation in government decisions in ways that were unthinkable in the past. The use of ICTs and the increased availability of open and innovative channels of communication between government and citizens, including social media, has made e-participation more widespread and pervasive than ever before. It allows people to interact more frequently with officials on an increasing host of issues. Today, ICTs allow the general population and non-governmental organizations "to collaborate in the design of public services and participate in their delivery to provide more coherent and integrated solutions to complex challenges" (OECD, 2014). In other words, e-participation goes beyond merely requesting people to provide their views about decisions and services proposed by the government. It mobilizes and shapes action.

Inclusive societies, environmental sustainability, and shared economic development "depend critically on effective governance capacities at national, local and municipal levels, including political commitment and leadership"; they also depend on the "legal and economic empowerment of people, especially those most excluded, and of their civil society organizations, to participate effectively in national and local decision-making" (UNDESA, 2012a).

Engaging people in decision-making is essential for the pursuit of sustainable development for a number of reasons. First, greater engagement and participation in policy-making has an intrinsic value in terms of deepening democracy and making governance more responsive and transparent.

Second, it can help realign national development strategies to meet the SDGs. In order to ensure economic growth while preserving the planet, greater participation is needed, for example on how taxes should be spent and on what services should be provided and where. In fact, engaging citizens in such processes, both at national and local levels, is instrumental to collectively deciding how to implement the SDGs, as well as redefining the missions of the State and of public administration. This is vital to ensure that people have a sense of shared ownership of the SDGs, as well as trust in their governments.

Third, people's participation in policy decisions leads to more informed strategies for poverty eradication and more inclusive societies by helping design targeted services, particularly for vulnerable groups (see Chapter 4). More targeted and inclusive e-services and e-participation can help empower women and youth and address the many challenges faced by vulnerable groups, including older persons and persons with disabilities. For example, the principle behind the current concept of "MyGov",[1] is to help provide personalized services to the people and to extend e-participation opportunities in decision-making, which in turn, helps to increase people's trust in government. In many instances, government portals provide a secure myGov individual account that allows people to access a range of government services with one username and password, all in one place. At the same time, it is critical to devise specific mechanisms and processes to include poor and vulnerable groups in decision-making at all levels.

Fourth, people's participation in policy decisions can promote effectiveness of public policy and service delivery. It can contribute resources to development efforts and cut unnecessary expenditure, since greater understanding of people's needs encourages innovative partnerships among government, businesses, academia, NGOs and the general population.

Fifth, participatory decision-making can mobilize new resources, capacities and ideas. In the past, the general public was seen as passive recipients of services and governments were the main providers of "solutions", today we witness a shift in how services are conceptualized, managed and delivered. Given the opportunity to actively participate in service delivery, people can contribute distinctive resources in terms of time, effort, ideas and expertise. As

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[1] "Mygov" is a feature available on some national government web portals. It provides people with the possibility to select and save personalized services based on their individual needs.

they co-create public value through their own ideas and talents, people's participation and collaboration in service delivery promotes innovation for environmental sustainability, inclusive economic growth and social development.

The 2016 Survey reaffirms a growing positive trend in the relationship between people and governments towards more pro-active, people-oriented public administrations and towards a stronger focus on policy decisions that better reflect people's needs. There is a growing trend to transform the very nature of the relationship between the general population and public authorities. This shift is from the current people-centric model, whereby governments know and anticipate people's and businesses' needs, towards a people-driven model, whereby citizens and businesses determine their own needs independently from authorities and find solutions in partnership with governments. The vast networking opportunities opened up by new media channels are replacing the traditional 'upon-request' participation model (i.e. people are asked to participate when public authorities ask them to do so) with an 'on-demand' dimension whereby citizens do not wait for an invitation to contribute, but rather do so independently according to their own needs. This trend is already resulting in some countries in a shift of the role of government from service provider to solution enabler. There is a shift from a "government-to-you" approach to a "government-with-you" approach focusing on collaboration within and outside government. This is associated with an ever-increasing demand by recipients of public services to participate in public affairs, and the need to 'co-produce' policy and services. Government can also be thought of as an innovation platform that links different stakeholders and partners.

This shift in approach may have a significant positive impact on progress towards the SDGs globally and nationally. Member States have highlighted that the last decade's considerable increases in connectivity, use, creation and innovation have created new tools to drive poverty eradication and economic, social and environmental betterment. Fixed and wireless broadband, mobile Internet, smartphones and tablets, cloud computing, open data, social media and Big Data were only in their early stages in 2005, and are now understood to be significant enablers of sustainable development (UNDESA, 2015). In effect, all SDGs can benefit from the application of ICTs as long as they deepen and expand participation opportunities for all regardless of location and social status. At least four targets of Goal 1[2] "End poverty in all its forms everywhere" can directly benefit from the application of e-participation technologies that support mutual collaboration and coproduction, and increasingly, from crowdfunding mechanisms as well.

3.2.1. E-participation opportunities in developing countries

The priorities of the 2030 Agenda are closely aligned with the Agenda 2063 adopted by the African Union.[3] In this document, the issue of public participation, alongside poverty reduction, is put forward as central to the continent's transformation. Agenda 2063 includes three closely interrelated and important "Aspirations" that can benefit from, and be supported by e-participation. The first focuses on "A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development" that sees Africa in 20 years as a continent free of poverty. This shall be achieved, inter alia, through science and technology-driven innovation. The second Aspiration focuses on "An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law". It speaks to the commitment of Africa to strive towards democratic

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[2]   `See following four targets out of five of Goal 1: 1.2. By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions ; 1.3 Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable 1.4 By 2030, ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance 1.5 By 2030, build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters

[3]   Note: See additional information at http://agenda2063.au.int/en/sites/default/files/06%20The%20Vision%20for%202063_.pdf.

governance, capable institutions and transformative leadership at all levels. The third Aspiration envisages an Africa whose development is driven by people, enabling all to be actively involved in decision-making at every aspect of development, including social, economic, political and environmental. Women and youth are fully engaged and empowered to play their rightful role in all spheres of life. The African Agenda 2063 also contains references and goals to improve ICT infrastructure that – when delivered – would provide the much needed tools for expanding e-participation communication channels and spaces. Several examples from African countries highlight the potential of e-participation for sustainable development, and the overarching goal of eradicating poverty. For example, Box 3.1 describes a case of successful public participation in monitoring pro-poor policies in the field of waste management, which is directly linked with Target 1.3 of Goal 1.

Box 3.1. Mozambique: Engaging citizens in Maputo to monitor waste management services via web and SMS

The Service Monitoring System or Monitoria Participativa Maputo (MOPA) is designed to support marginalized and under-served populations in overcoming barriers to entry in the urban services sector. The system is based on a software platform, Ntxuva, which is designed to collect information from people via SMS, a mobile app, and a web portal; a voice interface in local languages is used to enhance access by less educated, poorer populations. Members of the public can dial *553# or access the www.mopa.co.mz website and use a computer, smartphone or ordinary cell phone (via SMS) to report failure to empty waste bins, illegal dumping or inappropriate burning of garbage. The project involves people in the process of monitoring the quality of solid waste management services, especially when contracted to third parties (with the support of the World Bank and other bilateral donors). The system provides visualizations and statistics originated from public information about urban services. The system also promotes engagement among the local software development/innovation community. Users can add photos, comments and other clarifications for quick intervention by the city council. The Municipal Directorate of Hygiene and Cemeteries (DMSO), with the help of the municipal districts, manages and monitors the information.

The effectiveness of pro-poor policies is intrinsically linked to the level of participation of those affected by such policies. Wider use of digital technologies with more participation opportunities, for example through well-designed and purposeful online discussions, are the most widely used form of participation and are held on numerous digital networks locally, nationally and internationally. Using digitally enabled discussions in a meaningful way can help to achieve the poverty reduction targets of Goal 1. Its impact on reaching the poorest of the poor needs to be carefully assessed.

Addressing the special needs of vulnerable groups, as envisaged by the SDGs, requires collaboration in the design and delivery of public services, which have become increasingly digital. Technological approaches to open digital mapping, which require participation of many volunteers, will be important for implementing Targets of Goal 1 on "Ending poverty in all its forms everywhere" and Goal 11 on "Making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable".

Creating digital maps of vulnerable and poor communities using for example OpenStreetMap (OSM)[4] instruments, has become an important e-participation tool when coupled with the benefits of open data. OSM – or Wikipedia of Maps – is a free and open map database of the entire world based on crowdsourcing principles.[5] This e-tool is participatory since the very success of OSM fully depends on the pro-active engagement of people in the highly collaborative process of mapping. Data are collected and uploaded by many thousands of active volunteers from all over the world and are licensed for re-use and re-distribution by anyone.

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4   Note: See more at http://www.openstreetmap.org.
5   Note: See more at http://groundtruth.in/2014/03/25/open-community-collaborative-data-for-land-rights-and-tenure.

Such open mapping becomes indispensible in disaster response as was the case in 2010 Haiti earthquake, where OSM became the base map for the response. More recently, over 1,000 contributors helped map millions of features and damage points hit by Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines for use by humanitarian and aid organizations. The work of the organization Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team (HOT) illustrates the case of OSM for disaster response. For example in Indonesia, HOT collaborated with a large number of actors, including students and authorities, to collect data in OSM for disaster preparedness risk models.

Box 3.2 depicts two cases from Africa where the participatory potential of open mapping technologies has been valuable, in the context of the SDGs on poverty, availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation, infrastructure industrialization and innovation, cities and human settlements, and terrestrial ecosystems, forests, desertification, land degradation and biodiversity (General Assembly, 2015b).

Box 3.2. Creating new models to engage people through media and community mapping

Nairobi, Kenya. Maps are created collectively by volunteer mappers, who are young community members living and working in disadvantaged areas, such as the slums of Nairobi. By surveying communities, they create new public information and lay out pathways, clinics, water points and markets with the goal of sharing that information as much as possible in the community, thereby creating an essential social and economic resource. In addition to providing useful information to the local government, volunteers acquire new professional skills in the field of cartography and Geographical Information Systems (GIS).

Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania. Since some parts of the city are prone to frequent flooding, many homes end up being abandoned and become fertile breeding ground for disease. The location of such homes was gathered for a community mapping excercise in Tanzania through OpenStreetMap (OSM) technologies. In August 2015, Dar es Salaam – especially Tandale – faced a rare cholera outbreak. The OSM-based maps helped in the response to the outbreak by identifying the most affected areas, locating victims, and providing other critically important information about water points and sanitation.

Source: http://ramani-huria.org/ focus-wards/ tandale/; https://hotosm.org/ updates/ 2015-09 23_community_map-ping_has_ long_lasting_ impact_in_tandale_dar_ es_salaam_tanzania

Experience, coming from many different countries, proves that communities, small and large, are becoming smarter in adopting digital policies. Moreover, digital information produced and disseminated in a collective and participatory manner, with the use of relevant technologies, has become an essential economic resource in its own right. Such an approach has led to new business models and more income generation for entire communities. It would be impossible to successfully achieve Goal 5 "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" without effective participation of women (Target 5.5). New media technologies, along with technological skill and access will only become more critical.

Another model of collaborative participation is a "Living Lab approach" to promote local ICT-based innovations. A Living Lab is a real-life Public-Private-People Partnership (PPPP) for people-driven open innovation[6] wherein users and producers of public services co-create and co-design innovations. Living Labs are imbedded at the local level, which allows for identifying and empowering local talent. They take "research and development out of the laboratory and into the real world, engaging stakeholders, citizens and end-users in the collaborative design of new services" (Jarmo Eskelinen et al. 2015). The success of such partnerships is partly due to the improved acceptance of jointly designed and produced services. These new approaches

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[6]   Note: See more at http://www.openlivinglabs.eu/.

have found a responsive ground in Africa. AfriLabs is a pan-African network of technology innovation in 20 countries created with the mission to serve their communities through knowledge sharing and partnerships. Some of the new ICT development clusters include: iHub and NaiLab in Kenya, Hive CoLab and AppLab in Uganda, Activspaces in Cameroon and Kinu in Tanzania.

The success of Living Labs and other such coproduction schemes entirely depends on people's engagement and their entrepreneurial creativity, supported by local authorities and other stakeholders. Therefore, such initiatives can be instrumental to the implementation of Goal 8 "Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all."

3.3.   Global and regional trends of e-participation

3.3.1.   E-participation concepts and features assessed in the Survey

As in previous Surveys, the 2016 Survey's E-Participation Index (EPI) measures e-participation according to a three-level model of participation that includes: (i) e-information – provision of information on the Internet, (ii) e-consultation – organizing public consultations online, and (iii) e-decision-making – involving citizens directly in decision processes. The Survey assesses the availability of e-participation tools on national government portals for each of the above uses. Table 3.1 summarizes the main e-participation features assessed in the 2016 Survey. New questions were introduced in 2016 to assess the participation of vulnerable groups through provision of targeted information, including in open formats, on policies, budget, and legal documents.

Table 3.1.   Summary of assessed e-participation features

• Availability of sources of archived information (policies, budget, legal documents, budgets, etc.); use of digital channels (including mobile devices/platforms) and open data technologies in the areas of education, health, finance, social welfare, labour, environment.
• Availability of online information on citizens' rights to access government information (such as Freedom of Information Act or Access to Information Act)
• Evidence about government partnership/collaboration with third parties (civil society, private sector) to provide services
• Evidence about free access to government online services through the main portal, kiosks, community centres, post offices, libraries, public spaces or free WiFi
• Availability of open datasets (in machine-readable non-proprietary formats), related policies/ guidance
• Evidence about collaborative co-production, crowdfunding
• Evidence about engaging citizens in consultation/communication to improve online/ mobile services and raise citizens' satisfaction with them
• Evidence about engaging citizens in consultation/communication on education, health, finance, social welfare, labour, environment
• Availability of "personal data protection" legislation online
• Evidence about opportunities for the public to propose new open datasets to be available online
• Availability of e-participation policies/mission statements
• Availability of public procurement notifications and tender results online
• Availability of online tools (on the national portal) to seek public opinion and other input in raw (non-deliberative) form policy formation
• Evidence about decisions made that included the results of consultation with citizens online in the area of education, health, finance, social welfare, labour, environment
• Evidence about governments' publishing the outcomes of policy consultations online

E-participation is enabled by three key conditions: (i) explicit focus on official policies, decisions and governance practices to ensure that they respond to people's needs; (ii) explicit focus on the means of interaction – people should be connected to communication channels in order to express themselves and communicate both among themselves as equal peers and with public authorities as equal partners; (OECD, 2001; Macintosh, 2006) and (iii) explicit focus on the content of the interaction process between citizens and government (OECD, 2001) to ensure the quality and legitimacy of e-participation outcomes.

There are different degrees of e-participation that move from more "passive" to "active" engagement (UNDESA, 2014). Active participation can be defined as "a relationship based on partnership with government in which citizens actively engage in defining the process and content of policy-making" (OECD, 2001). This definition captures the essence of public participation, both offline and online. People can be involved in public decisions and service delivery in many different ways and degrees. People can be informed of government decisions and availability of services, they can be consulted about certain decisions, or they can be asked to take part in decisions; again with varying degrees of involvement. For example, the Digital Agenda for Europe 2020 defines e-participation as an activity that "helps people engage in politics and policy-making and makes the decision-making processes easier to understand, thanks to Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)".[7] The European e-Government Action Plan 2011-2015 titled "Harnessing ICT to promote smart, sustainable & innovative Government"[8] directly links e-participation with policy-making. The EU Member States are encouraged to use ICT-based governance and policy modelling tools for involving citizens and businesses in public consultations and debates to make policies smarter, well-focused and adaptive for greater cost-effectiveness and impact.

Other e-participation concepts follow the above mentioned three level-based approach with some variation. For example, the Inform-Consult-Empower approach places special emphasis on the reduction of technological, social, organisational, cultural, and political barriers (Lee et al, 2011). This model, which highlights the importance of active participation at all levels, is based on the availability of technological tools. It characterizes e-participation along three different levels: (i) e-enabling via informing, especially those who require special support to gain access to the right of information, (ii) e-engaging via consulting with citizens to enable deeper contributions and to support deliberative debate on policy issues, and (iii) e-empowering via supporting active participation and facilitating bottom-up ideas to influence the political agenda (Macintosh, 2004).

These models have one thing in common: they start with information provision, followed by public consultations, and end at the level where e-participation truly impacts on decision-making. In real life, however, these levels co-exist and overlap, forming numerous interactions between governments and people related to the prevailing socio-cultural and regulatory contexts of each country.

The existence of specific e-participation tools does not always imply that people's opinions and inputs will automatically be translated into actual policies. E-petition, for instance, is a stand-alone e-participation tool that is institutionalized and widely used by many people around the world. However, e-petitions are not typically preceded or accompanied by public consultations, at least on the same government-run website.[9] As a good practice, legislators will formally debate and consider those petitions that have been signed by a certain number of people.[10] Yet, such formal consideration of people's preferences does not necessarily translate into policy decisions.[11] Therefore, there is a broader and serious challenge when engaging

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[7]   Note: See more at https://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/en/eparticipation, page 7.

[8]   Note: See at http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:0743:FIN:EN:PDF.

[9]   Note: The German Parliament's e-petition system provides the public with an opportunity to discuss the initiated e-petitions online – https://epetitionen.bundestag.de/epet/petuebersicht/mz.nc.html. In contrast, for example, this cannot be done on the website of the British Parliament.

[10]   Note: For example, by 100,000 as in the UK and Russia or 1,000,000 for EU-wide initiatives.

[11]   Note: For example, in Austria, a petition regarding financial issues of the nation was discussed by the Parliament but eventually rejected. http://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXV/SPET/SPET_00007/imfname_352653.pdf.

with petitioners. According to the findings of a report on e-petitions by the United Kingdom's Hansard Society, this tool is used more as a way to attract the attention of the public and the media, rather than to understand public opinion more deeply.[12] Nonetheless, e-petitions and the associated public debates can also be seen as an important entry point for a two-way dialogue with the public.

Likewise, the level of participation in e-decision-making does not always presume literally the direct enactment of policies and decisions. It greatly depends on the type of tool being used as well as on the intention of those using that particular e-participation tool. In the case of e-voting, where people choose political parties and candidates during elections or vote on referenda by utilizing online platforms, the inputs of citizens are translated into immediate tangible outcomes.

Overall, there is no one-size-fits all in the implementation of this concept, since each country has its own peculiar characteristics in terms of participation culture and preferred means of interaction between people and public authorities.

3.3.2.   Global and regional rankings

According to the 2016 Survey (see Table 3.2.), the United Kingdom is ranked as global leader on the e-participation index while Japan and Australia share second place. Morocco, Estonia, Singapore and the United States have maintained high positions among the group of Top 25 countries, which according to both 2014 and 2016 Surveys include almost exclusively high-income countries.[13] China, Mexico, Montenegro and Serbia – have moved to the Top 25 performers from the Top 50 performers in the last two years. By utilizing online public consultations, they have consolidated and maintained their already solid rankings. The other countries in the Top 50 represent a more diverse group of upper and lower middle income countries, including such newcomers as Bulgaria, Mauritius, Vietnam, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Uzbekistan.

Table 3.2.   Top 50 performers in e-participation in 2016

Rank	Country	Rank	Country
1	United Kingdom	27	Germany
2	Japan	27	Norway
2	Australia	27	India
4	Republic of Korea	27	Sweden
5	Netherlands	32	Chile
5	New Zealand	32	United Arab Emirates
7	Spain	32	Bahrain
8	Singapore	32	Ukraine
8	Canada	34	Russian Federation
8	Italy	37	Brazil
8	Finland	37	Slovenia
12	France	39	Uruguay
12	United States of America	39	Mongolia
14	Austria	39	Ireland
14	Mexico	39	Saudi Arabia
14	Poland	43	Tunisia

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[12]   Note : See in "E–petitions: a collaborative system". Third Report of Session 2014–15: Published on 4 December 2014 by authority of the House of Commons, Procedure Committee. London: The Stationery Office (page 17).
[13]   See methodology on definition of income.

Rank	Country	Rank	Country
17	Israel	43	Luxemburg
17	Morocco	43	Vietnam
17	Lithuania	43	Bulgaria
17	Montenegro	47	Malaysia
17	Serbia	47	Uzbekistan
22	Estonia	47	Azerbaijan
22	China	50	Portugal
22	Denmark	50	Sri Lanka
25	Malta	50	Republic of Moldova
25	Croatia	50	Mauritius
27	Colombia	50	Iceland

To illustrate a recent programme that helped the People's Republic of China move up in ranking, Box 3.3 presents a case of public consultation on environmental issues, managed by the country's Ministry of Environmental Protection.

In the context of this Survey, the e-decision-making level is closely linked to e-consultation as the Survey assesses whether there is evidence of any decision made based on relevant online consultations. Public consultations, in the form of online deliberations, are a popular way of coordinating the formation of opinion among citizens for further decision-making processes by government.

Box 3.3.   People's Republic of China: Electronic participation in environmental governance

On the Chinese government's Ministry of Environmental Protection website, people can participate in public affairs by providing opinions on government document drafts. Among all issues, the government seeks the most opinions on "the environmental protection of cities," which reflects the government's commitment to encouraging more people to participate in decision-making about such priority items.

Source: http://english. mep.gov.cn

The top performing countries according to the E-Participation Index (EPI), utilize different approaches that allow the public to influence official decisions. The United Kingdom's engagement strategy has focused on maximizing openness and transparency in information provision in general,[14] and especially in relation to policy formulation.[15] Virtually all policy documents proposed by the government are published on Gov.uk.[16] Almost three thousand policy documents[17] were already deliberated with the public's participation or are in the process of consultation (open for both substantive and technical discussion).

At the phase of consultation, concerned individuals and organizations usually provide their inputs privately so that other participants cannot view their comments. However, at the phase of publishing the consultation results online, such inputs are usually included in the public outcome document. By doing so, the government can respond to comments and inform people of how these inputs will influence the originally proposed policies.

The Austrian government, for example, has created a directory of online consultations to inform people of the topics that are open for inputs.[18] Estonia goes further by using a

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[14]   Note: With as many as 83,885 publications were made public on https://www.gov.uk/government/publications (as of 9 November 2015)
[15]   Note: There were 443 broad categories of government policies available for public scrutiny (as of 9 November 2015)
[16]   Note: https://www.gov.uk/government/policies, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications?publication_filter_option=consultations -
[17]   Note: 2,876 documents as of 9 November 2015.
[18]   Note: http://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXV/BI/BI_00002/index.shtml#tab-Zustimmungserklaerungen.

specialized portal, namely Osale.ee, to coordinate public inputs for policy debate. In doing so, the portal is linked to another web-based information system[19] that collects policy proposals for inter-agency coordination and subsequent presentation to the government. By using these systems, everyone can participate in public consultations online and monitor the progress of the submitted policy drafts.

The above examples are presented to demonstrate, firstly, that different approaches exist to implement e-participation activities; secondly, that such approaches depend on local contexts and circumstances; and thirdly, that while analytically it is important to distinguish between the three levels of e-participation, in practice these levels are interdependent and policy-making e-tools are effectively imbedded in public consultations. To progress in e-decision-making would inevitably mean advancing e-consultation, while doing so would require effective e-information.

Table 3.3 ranks countries according to the E-Participation Index (EPI) value, divided into four categories ranging from Low EPI (below 0.25) to Very High (over 0.75).

Comprehensive information about services delivered by the government (see Boxes 3.3 and 3.4) is key to making progress on e-participation and moving from lower to higher EPI categories since it allows people to express their opinion on salient public policies.

Box 3.4.   Uzbekistan: Improving communal and housing services online

Source: http://e-kommu-nal.uz/ru

This Uzbek Government website addresses issues related to the insufficient number of people paying for communal and housing services. While the reasons may vary for such underpayments, one of the key reasons is the lack of information about how much to pay and for what services. This site provides full information on these issues and includes, for example, a handy tariff calculator to check how much to pay and whether the bills are correct. There is an important feedback mechanism – a discussion forum where people can report problems they encounter in daily life. Government officials are charged with responding to queries and later informing the person who wrote about the solution. As of 10 December 2015, Uzbek people had sent 4,641messages, of which 67% were reported as being fully addressed.

Even though Europe's 43 countries constitute just 22% of the 193 member states surveyed, as many as 26 European countries account for half of the Top 50 best performers in EPI, followed by Asia (representing 28% of 193 UN member states) and the Americas (13% of 193 UN member states) (see Figure 3.1). Africa's 54 countries have a smaller presence in the Top 50 EPI performers accounting for only 6% of countries in that group. As compared to 2014, five more European countries joined the group of the Top 50. As far as sub-regional progress is concerned, Southern Europe has been the most successful in leaping towards the group of best performing countries: Croatia, Montenegro Serbia, and Slovenia.

Tanzania has made the strongest progress in e-consultation reaching 63% out of 100% points possible. Box 3.5 here below describes how Tanzania has shared knowledge via online consultations. While there is progress in Africa regarding e-participation activities (as demonstrated in section 3.3.2), more resources, technologies, and capacities, and robust national policies encouraging the use of public engagement e-tools would be needed to accelerate progress. Morocco and Tunisia are the two countries in the African group in the Top 50, with eight more countries part of the 51- 100 Group: South Africa, Rwanda, Uganda, Cape Verde, and Ghana. Strong progress was also made by Azerbaijan (Western Asia), Ukraine (Eastern Europe), and Uzbekistan (Central Asia) as they entered the Top 50.

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19   Note: http://eelnoud.valitsus.ee/main#kL7ntnrp.

Table 3.3.   Countries grouped by E-Participation Index (EPI) in alphabetical order

Very High OSI (More than 0.75)	High OSI (Between 0.50 and 0.75)		Middle OSI (Between 0.25 and 0.50)		Low OSI (Less than 0.25)
Australia	Albania	Portugal	Afghanistan	Saint Vincent and the	Algeria
Austria	Argentina	Qatar	Andorra	Grenadines	Antigua and Barbuda
Bahrain	Armenia	Republic of Moldova	Angola	Samoa	Benin
Canada	Azerbaijan	Romania	Bahamas	Senegal	Burkina Faso
Chile	Bangladesh	Saudi Arabia	Barbados	Seychelles	Burundi
China	Belarus	Slovakia	Belize	Sudan	Cambodia
Colombia	Belgium	Slovenia	Bhutan	Suriname	Cameroon
Croatia	Bolivia	South Africa	Botswana	Swaziland	Central African Republic
Denmark	Bosnia and	Sri Lanka	Brunei	Syrian Arab Republic	Chad
Estonia	Herzegovina	Switzerland	Darussalam	Timor-Leste	Comoros
Finland	Brazil	Thailand	Cape Verde	Togo	Congo
France	Bulgaria	The former Yugoslav	Cuba	Tonga	Côte d'Ivoire
Germany	Costa Rica	Republic of Macedonia	Dominican Republic	Trinidad and	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
India	Cyprus	Tunisia	Egypt	Tobago	Democratic Republic of the Congo
Israel	Czech Republic	Turkey	Ethiopia	Uganda	Djibouti
Italy	Ecuador	United Republic of Tanzania	Fiji	Venezuela	Dominica
Japan	El Salvador	Uruguay	Ghana	Zambia	Equatorial Guinea
Lithuania	Georgia	Uzbekistan	Grenada	Zimbabwe	Eritrea
Malta	Greece	Viet Nam	Guyana		Gabon
Mexico	Guatemala		Honduras		Gambia
Montenegro	Iceland		Hungary		Guinea
Morocco	Ireland		Indonesia		Guinea-Bissau
Netherlands	Kazakhstan		Iraq		Haiti
New Zealand	Kenya		Jamaica		Iran (Islamic Republic of)
Norway	Kuwait		Jordan		Lesotho
Poland	Kyrgyzstan		Kiribati		Libya
Republic of Korea	Latvia		Lao People's Democratic Republic		
Russian Federation	Liechtenstein		Lebanon		
Serbia	Luxembourg		Liberia		
Singapore	Malaysia				
Spain	Mauritius				
Sweden	Mongolia				
Ukraine	Nepal				
United Arab Emirates	Oman				
United Kingdom	Paraguay				
United States	Peru				
	Philippines				

Figure 3.1.   Distribution of Top 50 countries in e-participation, by region (compared with the regions' percentage among all surveyed 193 countries)
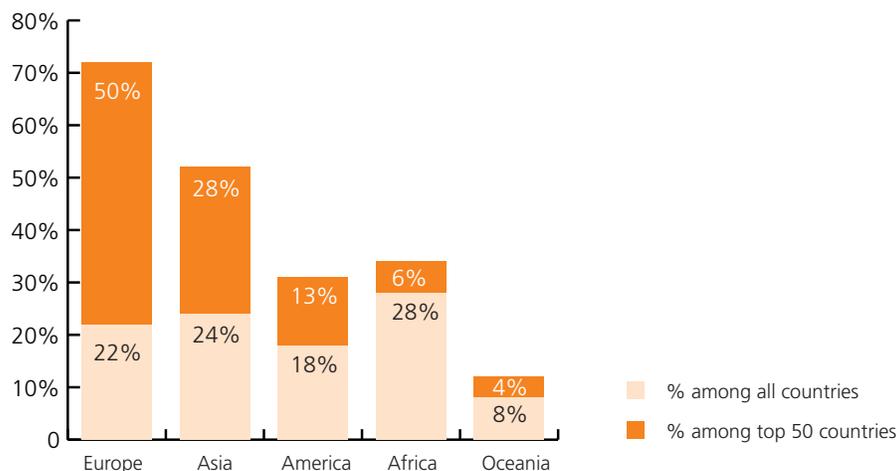
Box 3.5.   Tanzania: Partnership for shaping policymaking through online consultations

Tanzania Knowledge Network (TAKNET) promotes knowledge and information sharing on various aspects of social and economic development of national interest to stimulate discussions by informing individuals about current development issues. Both the general public and experts take part in these discussions, which result in consensus building on policy issues of concern to Tanzanian society. Summaries of discussions covering the outcome of a particular topic are produced by moderators, which include recommendations and statements of best practices, and are shared with policymakers and the public. TAKNET is a joint initiative of the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania, United Nations and the Economic and Social Research Foundation.

Source: http://www.taknet.or.tz/home.asp; http://www.taknet.or.tz/

All the countries that exhibited significant advances in their e-participation ranking have expanded their e-consultation activities, namely: from 5% to 74% in Azerbaijan, from 27% to 84% in Ukraine, and from 18% to 58% in the case of Uzbekistan. This was also coupled with moderate progress in e-information. Continued progress in the provision of public information still remains fundamental for progress in e-participation.

Table 3.4 provides the list of countries that have advanced 25 or more positions in the EPI ranking. Some of them include Small Island Developing States (SIDS), as well as other developing countries. The changes of EPI among these countries depend on a number of factors. For example, even though in 2008 Zambia was officially recognized as a country with no online presence, its leadership has focused in recent years on e-government development. Mexico has introduced some interactive channels like online web forums and feedback forms to encourage public engagement. Denmark has continued to develop e-participation mechanisms. For instance, the portal for citizens named "borger.dk" functions as a national debate and voting platform enabling different parts of society to participate in debates and votes. Moreover, it hosts blog services to create opportunities for foreigners to participate in the public life of the people of Denmark (Obi, 2010).

In Paraguay, there has been a drive to increase transparency in public management and open up new spaces for participation, including through virtual forums or bottom-up mechanisms of direct democracy. The strategic framework for e-government implementation was established by the Barbados Government in 2006 and has since continuously adjusted its strategy to cope

with the emerging challenges in service delivery. Bulgaria has also made significant progress by aligning its e-government strategy with the Digital Agenda for Europe.[20]

Table 3.4.   Countries that have advanced more than 25 positions in the 2016 EPI ranking

Country	Jumps	Ranking in 2016	Ranking in 2014
Saint Kitts and Nevis	25	133	158
Zambia	25	118	143
Austria	26	14	40
Solomon Islands	26	146	172
Angola	28	101	129
Guinea-Bissau	29	157	186
Azerbaijan	30	47	77
Suriname	30	122	152
Ethiopia	31	91	122
Liberia	31	127	158
Mexico	31	14	45
Denmark	32	22	54
Montenegro	32	17	49
Monaco	37	127	164
Bosnia and Herzegovina	40	89	129
Papua New Guinea	43	149	192
Ukraine	45	32	77
Czech Republic	46	76	122
Malta	46	25	71
Slovenia	47	37	84
Afghanistan	48	104	152
Iraq	48	104	152
Paraguay	50	72	122
Poland	51	14	65
Togo	53	111	164
Liechtenstein	57	60	117
Nicaragua	57	107	164
Barbados	60	104	164
Uganda	61	91	152
Serbia	64	17	81
Brunei Darussalam	65	114	179
Syrian Arab Republic	66	98	164
Cape Verde	67	97	164
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	69	65	134
Croatia	72	25	97
Guatemala	77	60	137
Bulgaria	79	43	122

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[20]   Note: http://www.coe.int/t/dgap/localdemocracy/CDDG/Budapest/Contribution-Bulgaria.pdf)

Looking at income levels, two out of three countries among the top 50 performers are high income countries. No low income country features among the top 50 performers (Figure 3.2). However, having a lower income does not prevent a country from making progress in engaging people via online public consultation and deliberation tools, as is demonstrated above. Doing this and using social media does not require substantial financial resources.

Figure 3.2.   Distribution of Top 50 countries in e-participation, by income level (compared with the regions' percentage among all surveyed 193 countries)
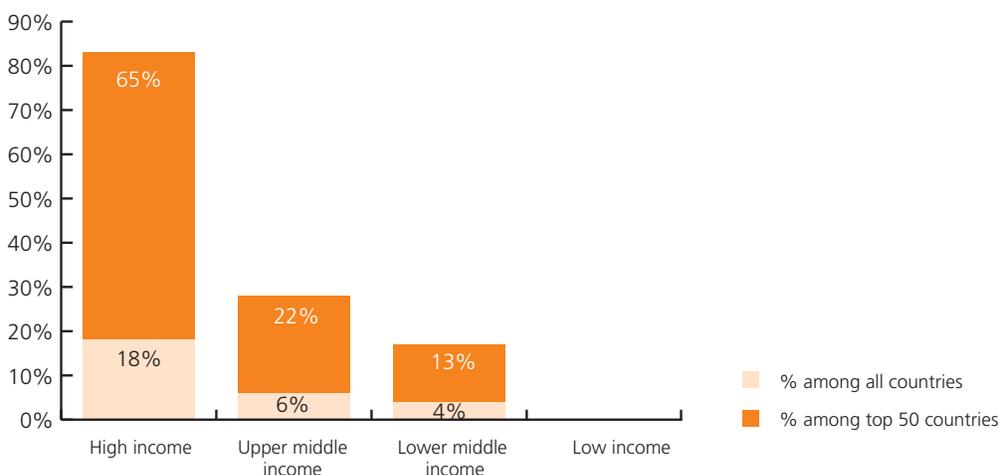
3.4.   Trends by levels and sectors of e-participation

The most common e-participation tools and activities include but are not limited to (Panopoulou, Tambouris and Tarabanis, 2009):

• Information provision online, including Open Government Data

• E-campaigning, e-petitioning

• Coproduction and collaborative e-environments, including innovation spaces, hackathons, crowdfunding

• Public policy discourses, including crowdsourcing, online consultation and deliberation, argument mapping

• E-polling, e-voting

The success of the deployment of e-participation tools depends not only on how supportive the overall regulatory environment is, but also on whether governments enforce the actual use of e-participation tools by undertaking adequate measures to institutionalize civic engagement into organizational practices. Likewise, the effectiveness of such policies and technologies strongly depends on whether people are willing to be more active and engaged by using these tools, and whether they have the necessary digital skills and know-how to use them effectively. These new forms of engagement between government and people leave behind those who do not have access to the internet. It is essential to improve access to ICTs, especially broadband networks and services, and to bridge the digital divide in order to fulfill the potential of e-participation (see Chapter 4).
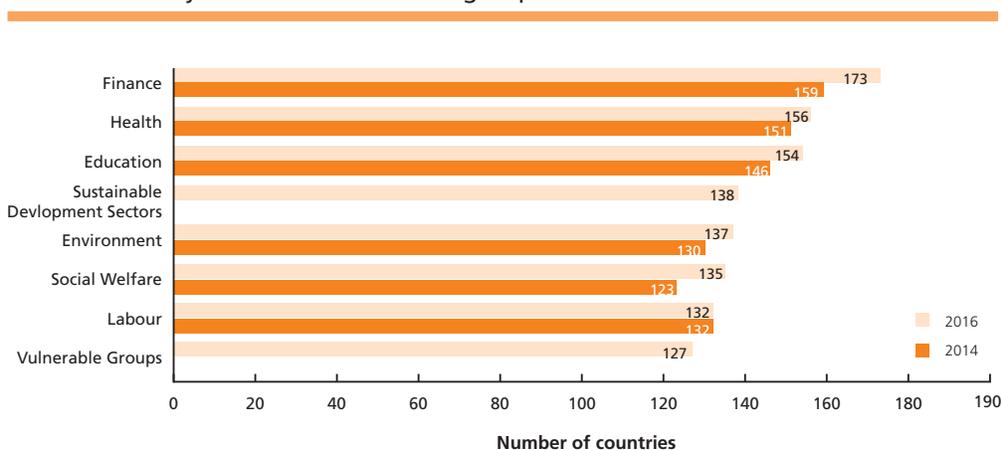
3.4.1. E-information

The first level of e-participation is e-information. Governments provide people with information via ICT channels in order to help them make informed choices at the next stage of consultation. E-information is critical because without access to publicly held information, participation cannot be evidence-based, fully relevant, or significant. Therefore, as outlined in Chapter 2, the right to access information is a pre-requisite for effective e-participation.

As many as 183 countries (95%) post information on the Internet in key areas such as education, health, finance, environment, social protection, and labour. Only nine countries[21] do not share such information (versus 22 countries that did not provide access to archived information on the six surveyed sectors two years earlier). The level of countries' income generally does not affect governments' ability to share some basic public sector information online. However, it influences their ability to provide specialized information and data.

The use of mobile technologies to access archived information is not yet a widespread practice. Less than one-third of countries (32%) provide an opportunity to subscribe to updates or alerts via e-mail or SMS-subscription about labour-related information. At the same time, almost half of them (47%) do so in the field of finance. The use of open government data technologies is better advanced than the use of mobile applications and platforms. More than half of the 183 countries publish open government data sets online and two-thirds release data on education and finance (Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3.   Number of countries offering archived information in 2014 and 2016, by sector and vulnerable groups


There has been progress in providing access to archived information in all of the above sectors with the exception of labour. Progress has been the greatest in finance, health, and education. As many as nine in ten countries now provide access to policies, documents and decisions in the field of finance, whereas only two in three indicate that they offer information in the field of social development (social welfare, labour, vulnerable groups[22]). Fewer opportunities exist to access public sector information about environmental protection. The provision of information targeting vulnerable and disadvantaged groups is the least advanced field.

Access to information held by public authorities in the field of environmental protection has become a normative requirement and civil right under the Aarhus Convention (UNECE, 1998). Figures 3.4 and 3.5 show that access to environmental information varies by both income and region.

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[21]   Note: Central African Republic, Comoros, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Eritrea, Nauru, Palau, Somalia, South Sudan and Tuvalu; and six countries – Congo, Djibouti, Gabon, Guinea, Mauritania, Sao Tome and Principe – share information in only one sector.

[22]   Vulnerable groups include children, elderly people, people with disabilities, migrant workers, minority groups and refugees.

Figure 3.4. Number of countries with and without access to archived information on the environment in 2014 and 2016, by income

Countries without access to archived environmental information

Countries offering access to archived environmental information
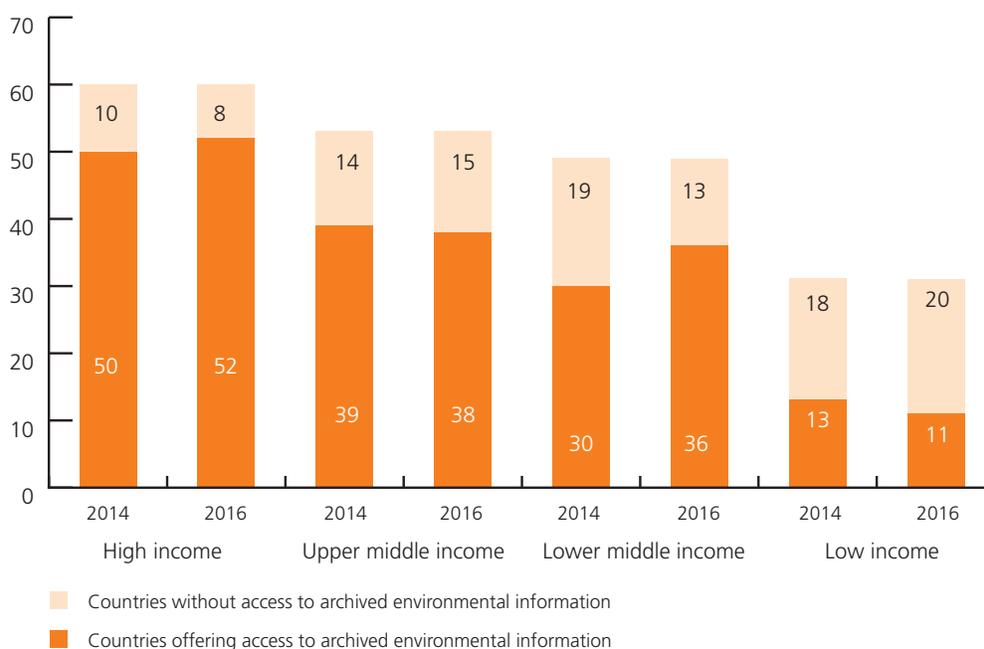
Higher income countries remain more advanced in regards to informing the public about the state of the environment; however, the lower-middle income group showed the most progress, up from 30 to 36 out of a total of 49 countries that form this income group. One-third of lower-middle income countries upload open datasets on the environment. This is in contrast with the low-income group, which has slightly regressed since the last Survey.

Figure 3.5. Number of countries with and without access to archived information on the environment in 2014 and 2016, by region

Countries without access to archived environmental information

Countries offering access to archived environmental information
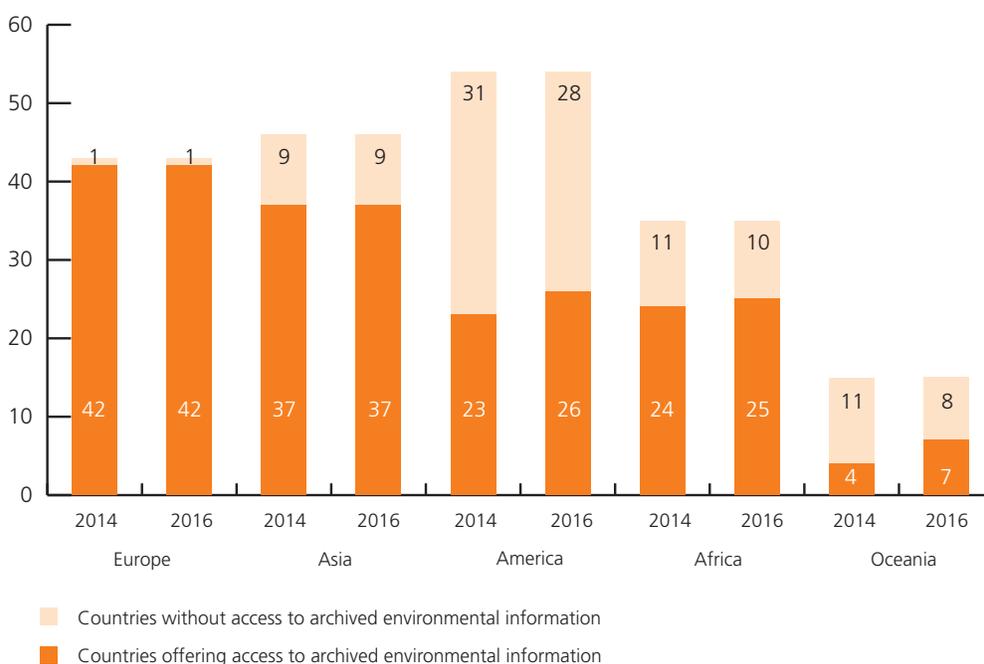
High- and upper-middle-income European and some Asian countries are in the lead, but the number of countries offering environmental information on the web has not increased in these regions. Meanwhile, the number of countries on the African continent and in Oceania providing such information online has increased from 23 to 25 and 4 to 7 respectively. This represents a significant effort given the high level of poverty in Africa in particular.
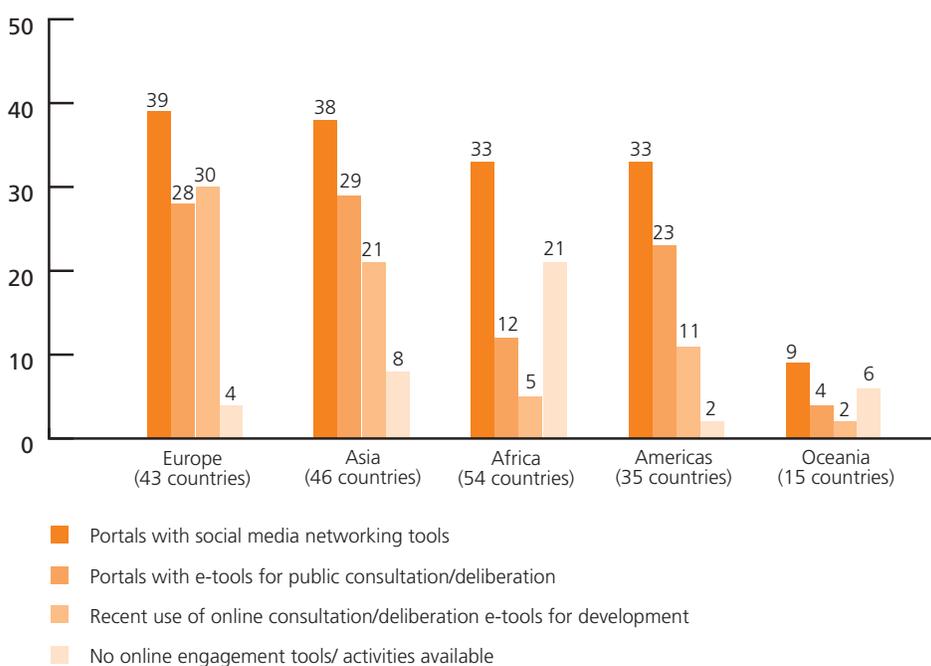
Overall, the gap between wealthier and less affluent counties is thus still substantial. This is evidenced by the fact that while 95% of the European countries share information online, only 48% countries from Africa and 33% from Oceania do so. Government portals refer to Freedom of Information laws in 38 out of the 43 European countries surveyed compared to only 14 out of 54 African countries.

3.4.2. E-consultation

The second level of the e-participation model is e-consultation. It means that people are consulted on a particular policy, service or project. Consultation however, does not mean that government has an obligation to use the inputs received in its policies or services. Rather, it can leverage the information received in order to better respond to the public's sentiments on a particular subject.

The interactive qualities of social media are essential for networked collaboration and conducting consultations that can reach desired constituencies that may otherwise not be reachable. Social media is easily accessible these days and does not cost much more than paying for internet connectivity and hiring a content manager. To benefit from such opportunity, many governments have established pages on social media to promote interactive networking and communication with the public. This is particularly important for those countries that do not have a dedicated portal for public consultation and deliberation online. The rise of social media has accelerated e-consultation progress – today, as many as 152 countries out of 193 (four out of five) offer social networking features, such as the "Like" button, on their national portals (i.e. there are links to, for example, Facebook, Twitter, Sina Weibo (in China), Odnoklassniki/VK in the Russian-speaking countries, etc.) As evidenced by Figure 3.6, there

Figure 3.6.　Number of countries with online engagement tools on national portals and their usage, by region

- ■ Portals with social media networking tools
- ■ Portals with e-tools for public consultation/deliberation
- ■ Recent use of online consultation/deliberation e-tools for development
- ■ No online engagement tools/ activities available

is no gap among the regions, which might be another manifestation of social media driven public engagement as a key trend of e-consultation. While Figure 3.6 shows that all regions offer social networking tools for public participation, the Survey does not provide information about their effectiveness.

Figure 3.7 shows that the availability of social media tools on national web sites and portals is becoming a routine practice for many countries, regardless of their income and development status. Yet the national portals in countries with higher income, as a rule, offer more opportunities for networking via social media.

Figure 3.7.   Countries offering social media networking tools on national portals, by income

Number of countries without social media networking tools on national portals

Number of countries with social media networking tools on national portals
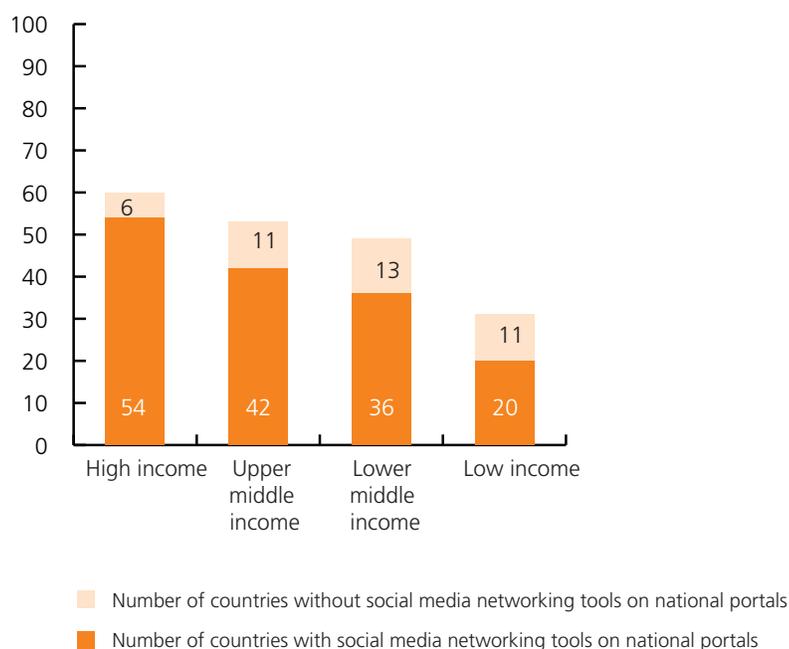
Social media and e-tools in governance, such as online forums, polls, voting tools and petition tools provide opportunities to conduct online consultations on development issues. Since 2014, the number of countries that have adopted online consultations with citizens in key sectors has almost doubled (see Figure 3.8).

Issues related to environmental protection, education and health have been most often discussed online, with less debate regarding social welfare and employment. This mirrors the same pattern of social protection and labour services lagging behind that was seen in the provision of public information. Overall, the number of countries with web-based functionality that allows, on one hand, measuring people's satisfaction of online services and, on the other, seeking people's comments to improve public e-services provided by the government has been stable since the past Survey: 23% and 64% respectively in 2016 compared to 20% and 68% in 2014. The rise of e-consultation is an important sign of people engaging in a more active two-way interaction mode. It is a "reactive" form of consultation that takes place through comment seeking and satisfaction surveys, typically for assessing the up-take of e-services. Boxes 3.6 and 3.7 highlight the social media strategy of Morocco and Tunisia.

Figure 3.8.   Number of countries undertaking online consultations in 2014 and 2016, by sector

Number of countries
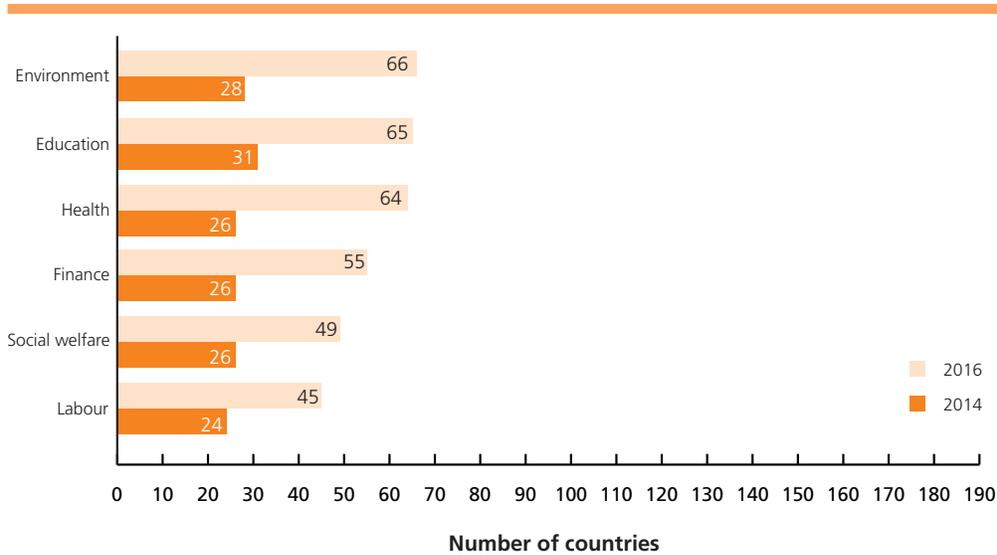
Box 3.6.   Morocco: e-consultation for sustainable development policy

Regional Development Models of the Southern Provinces

The objective of this open debate-forum, organized by the Economic, Social and Environmental Council of Morocco, is to expand participation and collect contributions from researchers and the public for a new model of integrated and sustainable development. It focuses on the administrative regions of Boujdour-Sakia, Laâyoune- Al Hamra, Oued, Ed-Dahab-Lagouira, and that of Guelmim-Es Smara and is designed to support them in fulfilling their aspirations to create more jobs and wealth.

Source: http://fr.almou-badaralakoum.ma/category/provinces-du-sud

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Box 3.7.   Tunisia: e-consultation on vocational training policy

The goal of the website of the National Agency for Employment and Self-Employment (Ministry of Vocational Training and Employment) is to provide an opportunity for people to ask questions and make suggestions concerning professional education. There is also a possibility to discuss issues on the Ministry's Facebook page.

Source: http://www.em-ploi.nat.tn/fo/en/global.php? page=106; http://www.emploi.gov.tn/tn/; https://www.facebook.com/MFPE.GOV.TN/

The accelerated progress of e-consultation mirrors the current state of e-participation in general. However, the deployment of e-consultation tools – either via social media or specifically dedicated online deliberation instruments – is only the first step towards wider and more meaningful public engagement. The next step is to ensure that such tools make sure that truly participatory policymaking and public consultation e-tools are applied at all stages of the policy-making life-cycle. Another critical issue is to ensure that the benefits of e-participation work for the common good. This would require creating an environment of trust so that people using e-consultation tools see themselves as equal partners of the government working toward better policy development.

At the moment, many online consultation and deliberation tools are not used to their full potential, as people may not know about them, lack access or do not feel confident using them. Meaningful participation consumes people's time and effort and is therefore a public resource to be used carefully. In this regard, public authorities would need to demonstrate that they take such consultations seriously, as well as recognize people's contributions in an open and transparent manner. A best practice comes from the Gov.uk portal of the Government of the United Kingdom. Its home page invites the visitor to look at policies, check announcements and publications and engage in consultations; the site is also presented in a simple and accessible manner. By clicking, for example, on the "Consultations" button, visitors can select a policy topic proposed by the government, express an opinion and read the consultation's outcome when it closes, along with the government's position towards contributions provided by the public.[23]

3.4.3. E-decision-making

E-decision-making – the third level of the e-participation model – remains a serious challenge. E-decision-making refers to a process in which people provide their own inputs into decision-making processes. Two examples are: (i) direct e-voting via secure systems and (ii) identifying preferred (popular) options and proposals by rating them through social media's "Like/Dislike" or "plus/minus" functions. While policy-making is the logical pinnacle of the preceding public engagement activities, information provision and consultations are equally valuable participation forms in their own right.[24] Recently, policy discourse has gained special attention as new software tools are creating complex and sophisticated systems of deliberation online.

The Survey's findings provide evidence that progress in participatory decision-making is closely linked with progress in public consultation. Discussing policies and decisions with the public is becoming an increasingly common practice, as described above. The portal Gov.uk interlinks all three e-participation domains into one process. Publishing policy drafts – also supplying other relevant documents and information – for public consultation (e-information) allows for constructive and informed feedback. The Government then publishes it position on the feedback received from the public and explains any changes in the proposed policy options taken as a result of consultation by highlighting what has been taken into account and what has not and why. Such a holistic approach to e-participation expands the scope and meaning of participatory decision-making.

However, only 38 countries out of 193 Member States (20%) indicate that e-consultation outcomes have resulted in new policy decisions, regulation or service, according to the 2016 Survey. More countries (53) have used online consultations tools in at least one thematic area of development even though these consultations have not necessarily resulted in an actual change or the adoption of new regulation. Figure 3.9 shows that there has been a significant expansion of decision-related consultations, with education, health and environment in the lead, while the area of employment is lagging behind.

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[23]   Note: See more here https://www.gov.uk/government/get-involved.
[24]   Note: The term 'e-participation' was used alongside 'e-engagement' and 'e-consultation'; see, for example: Promise and Problems of e-Democracy: Challenges of Online Citizen Engagement. Paris: OECD, 2003.

Figure 3.9.   Number of countries using online consultations on policy decisions in 2014 and 2016, by sector
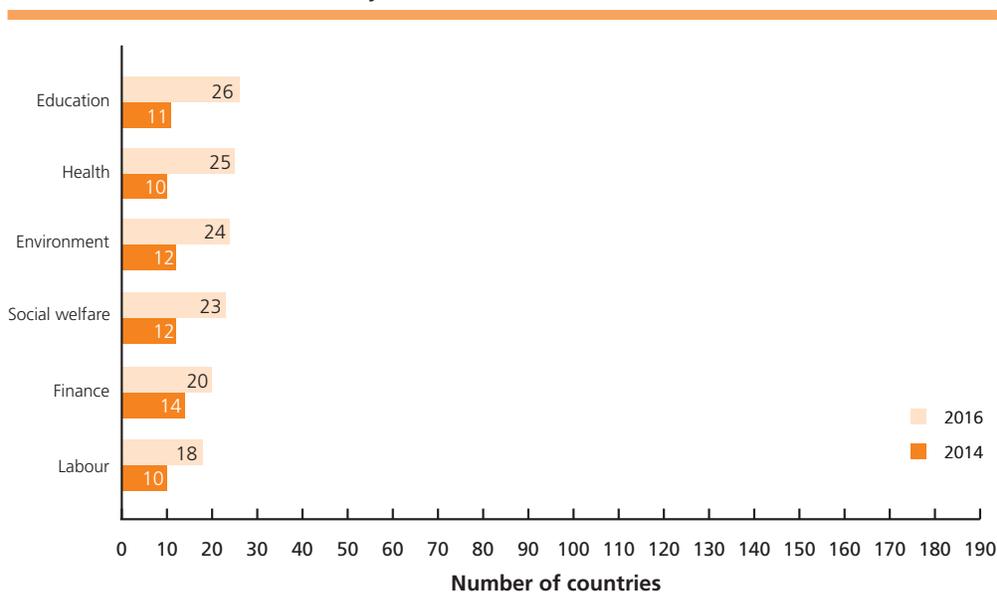
At the same time, these data also indicate that only one country out of ten actually made decisions following consultations with the public about development priorities. Despite the growing practice of online consultations, most consultations are not yet sufficiently institutionalized in policymaking processes. In many instances, it is not clear how well online public debate was planned and executed, which objective it pursued and what the outcome was. Further, the feedback of the public was often scarce and infrequent. Much ongoing online consultation and deliberation is still ad-hoc and in its infancy, with plenty of untapped potential.

To unlock this potential, firstly, public authorities should have a clear e-participation strategy which strikes a balance among the e-information, e-consultation, and e-decision-making domains. This obviously includes ensuring that the necessary e-tools are available. Secondly, there should be clarity with regard to the targeted population groups and regional audiences, complemented by explanations about the consultation and decision-making procedures to be used. Thirdly, public authorities should have clear rules and procedures in place to process the received contributions. They should have sufficient analytical capacity to review them and a process to report back to the public about the outcome of the consultation and its impact on policymaking. At the moment, as mentioned, only 41% of all surveyed countries have formulated their e-participation mission statements and placed them on national portals; and just 27% announced upcoming e-participation activities.

3.5.   Challenges and opportunities of e-participation

The traditional fields of citizen participation have been effectively re-invented over the past two decades. The public and private spheres are also fundamentally changing with the advent of new ICTs, including social media. Many governments across the globe continue transforming how they engage with people by deploying new public engagement e-tools to expand and create new opportunities for potentially much deeper and wider participation. The European eParticipaiton Summary report points out "… there is a surge of grass-root, often single issue engagement in policy making… supported, and in fact driven forward, by new ICT tools" (European Commission, 2009). However, mainstreaming such e-tools into governance processes and explaining their benefits to people could pose a challenge for institutional policy making. There are a number of challenges in developing strategies to implement e-participation activities.

First, countries wishing to embark in e-participation practices need to first analyse and have a clear vision of the purpose of engaging people and what public participation tools are best suited to achieve expected results. They also need to reach out to all groups in society, including vulnerable groups. Once there is a clear understanding of the broader issues of public participation, both in terms of opportunities and challenges, then different digital technologies can be explored to fit the specific needs of a country.

Second, to ensure the effectiveness and impact of e-participation initiatives, policy-making processes should be open and inclusive and appropriate regulatory and legal frameworks should be in place. Citizens' participation in political, civic and cultural activities is important to promoting inclusion (UNDESA, 2016). "ICT can help improve governance by providing information and helping coordinate the demands of those striving for more inclusive institutions. Clearly though, ICT usage translates into meaningful change only if broad segments of society mobilize and organize in order to effect such change" (UNDESA, 2016)

Third, there is a strong need to reignite among public officials a service-oriented mentality i.e. to build or upgrade human resources capacity in this particular area. This requires a shift in the organizational culture of the public sector; one that embraces change and welcomes participation of all people. It also requires digital literacy of public officials and new skills to deal with e-tools for participation, including social media. In fact, it is not enough to place the tools on the national portal if the inputs received are not fully used because of a lack of capacity.

Fourth, countries that are willing to embrace digital technologies to implement participation in its different forms and manifestations should be prepared to anticipate and be equipped for the inevitable emergence of new challenges that are likely to arise with its adoption. There is in fact growing evidence –both from developed and developing countries– that viewing digital technology as a mere tool becomes increasingly problematic as "... once new technologies are introduced to solve old problems, the problems themselves change"(Bach and Stark, 2003). This leads to the next challenge.

Fifth, promoting effective citizen participation requires creating multiple entry points, spaces and online and offline channels to (re)connect the networked civil society with the traditionally organized hierarchies of governing institutions. The ubiquity of networked relationships creates "new modes of democratic accountability and expectations for civic efficacy", which also requires adaptation, change and innovation in the way that governments interact with people and all stakeholders.[25]

Sixth, digital literacy of people and quality access to ICTs is very important to ensure the full potential of e-participation. "While the growth of Internet users in developing countries is robust, with an increase of about 10 per cent in 2015, only 35 per cent of people in developing countries are estimated to be using the Internet, as compared with 82 per cent of people in developed countries" (UNDESA, 2015b: p. 16). This is truly the "new frontier" of e-participation.

Seventh, there has to be the political will and the processes and workflows to ensure that consultations contribute to decision-making.

As shown in Figure 3.10, e-decision-making, perhaps the most challenging aspect of public participation (as discussed above), rose substantially among the top 25 countries in EPI, from 36% in 2014 to 62% in 2016. Such a breakthrough over just two years is an indication of the fact that the entire e-participation paradigm is becoming more mature, at least in some countries. This comes after many years of focusing primarily on information provision

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[25] Note: Coleman, Stephen The Internet as a Space for Policy Deliberation pp 149-179 The argumentative turn revisited edited by Frank Fischer and Herbert Gottweis 2012 Duke University Press Books, p.152, 169.

(e-information level), which technically, is easier to implement. At the same time, it also shows that the practice of e-decision-making has expanded so much that it is becoming an important part of the policy-making cycle rather than an ad-hoc experiment.

The very notion of policy making has expanded well beyond the boundaries of decisions taken solely by governments. Now it also seeks to support the process through which people form an opinion as they deliberate on common positions using, for example, technologies of collective moderation and preferential voting within the 'liquid feedback/democracy[26] concept to ensure maximum transparency of the decision-making process. The traditional meaning of decision making, as a government-only-run-business within the constraints of public administration processes, is being transformed into an open and complex process of collaboration and decision-shaping realized both between authorities and people, and increasingly among the latter as well.

Figure 3.10.   Percentage of e-participation levels within the top 25 countries in 2014 and 2016
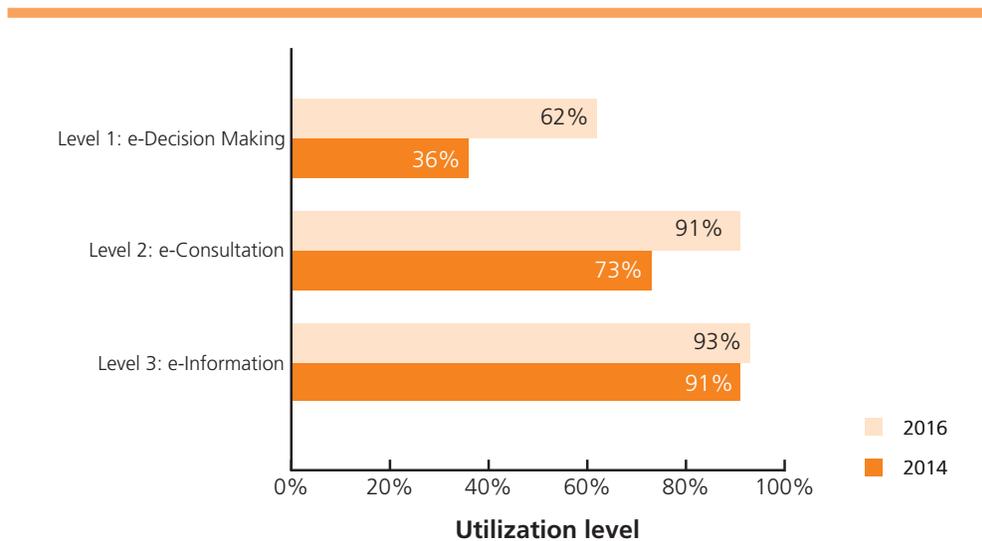
As the lines between information provision, public consultation and policymaking become less visible, there is a need to increasingly consider all three e-participation levels at once, instead of one after the other. Yet, e-decision-making is still visibly below the 90% mark which was achieved in the areas of e-consultation and e-information. E-consultation has seen remarkable growth in 2016 topping 91% from 73% in 2014. E-information has achieved a maturity stage at the level of over 90%. Accelerated progress in the field of e-decision-making is facilitated, to a large extent, by the continued rise of e-consultation activities. E-consultation can be viewed as the main feature of overall e-participation progress, as shown by the top 25 countries. Public consultations on policy options and documents have become both the backbone and driver of e-participation.

3.5.1.   E-participation divides

To obtain deeper insights into existing divides among countries, four main ranking groups may be formed according to countries' individual rankings (Table 3.5). Group 1 can be considered the best performers (Very High EPI level); this Group contains 31 countries, with ranking between 0.75 and 1 in the EPI. The second Group, i.e. High EPI, contains 59 countries, with

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26   Note: LiquidFeedback.org 'embeds a deliberative process where proposals are voted on, supported, debated and written in a collaborative way; alternative options are voted on with the Schultze algorithm. Liquid Feedback was born to support democratic deliberation within political movements (e.g., German Pirate Party) and experimented with as a way to gather ideas from the public; it is extensively practiced, for example, in Italy, De Cindio, F. and Stortone S. (2013). Experimenting liquid feedback for online deliberation in civic contexts. Electronic Participation, Springer, 147–158.

rankings between 0.50 to 0.75. The third Group, i.e. Middle EPI, consists of 52 countries with ranking between 0.25 to 0.50; and the fourth Group, i.e. Low EPI, contains 51 countries that rank from 0 to 0.25 in the EPI.

Table 3.5.   Countries grouped by EPI levels in 2016

Group 1	Very high EPI: 0.75-1	31 countries
Group 2	High EPI: 0.50-0.75	59 countries
Group 3	Middle EPI: 0.25-0.50	52 countries
Group 4	Low EPI: 0-0.25	51 countries

Figure 3.11 illustrates the extent to which countries have used public participation e-tools for the purposes of information provision, citizen consultation and decision-making grouped by four EPI levels (percentages indicate to which extent such tools were available at each of the three e-participation stages).

Figure 3.11.   Percentage of countries by EPI level that use public participation tools
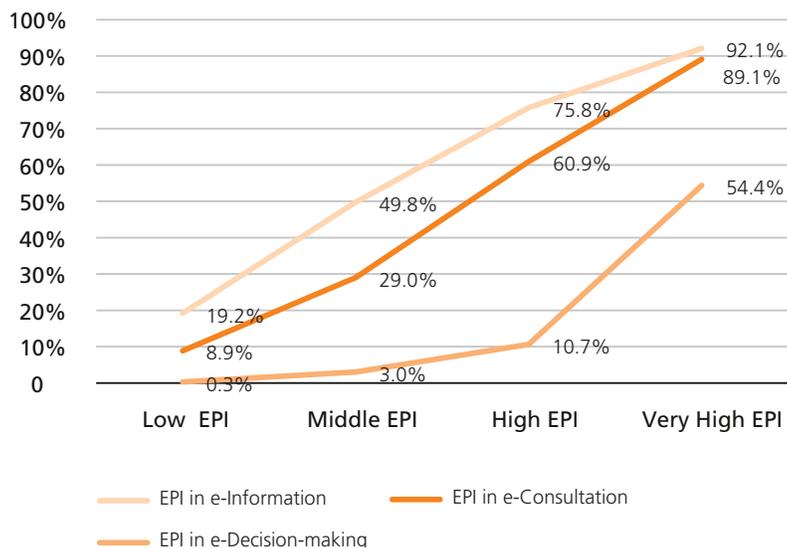
The findings show that the widest gaps are within the groups with Middle and High EPIs, especially between e-consultation and e-decision-making. In contrast, the groups with Low and Very High EPI levels are more homogenous, although disparities are more visible in the former with regard to the gap between e-consultation and e-decision-making. This data provides important insights into possible forward-looking strategies that could help close the existing gaps.

In general, to start advancing in e-participation requires progress in e-information. This should be followed by strong advancement in e-consultation. This typically leads to the High EPI group. For example, moving from Group 4 with Low EPI to Group 3 (Middle EPI) would require prioritizing e-information and e-consultation instruments so as to reach the utilization levels of 50% and 30% respectively; whereas entering Group 2 (High EPI) would require making sustainable progress in the field of e-decision-making. Joining Group 1 of Very High EPI implies the need for continued focus on deploying e-tools aimed at engaging people in policymaking. It also requires maintaining steady progress in e-information and e-consultation, while reaching at least 50% of the maximum performance level feasible in e-decision-making. Overall, it is generally easier – relatively speaking – to make progress at the e-information

stage by uploading public information online, particularly by using Open Government Data approaches and technologies. E-consultation and e-decision-making are more challenging. Yet at the same time, they are also critical to bridging e-participation divides and ensuring more inclusive societies. Again, the digital divide between countries at various development levels is a major concern.

3.5.2.   Innovative partnerships, crowdsourcing, and crowdfunding

According to the 2016 Survey, a number of countries provide online services in partnerships with civil society and/or the private sector. In Europe, 36 countries have adopted innovative partnerships, 32 countries have done so in Asia and 28 in the Americas. There are also now 8 countries with innovative partnerships in Oceania and 23 in Africa (see Figure 3.12).

Figure 3.12.   Number of countries providing online services in partnership with civil society or private sector, by region

Number of countries providing services through partnership
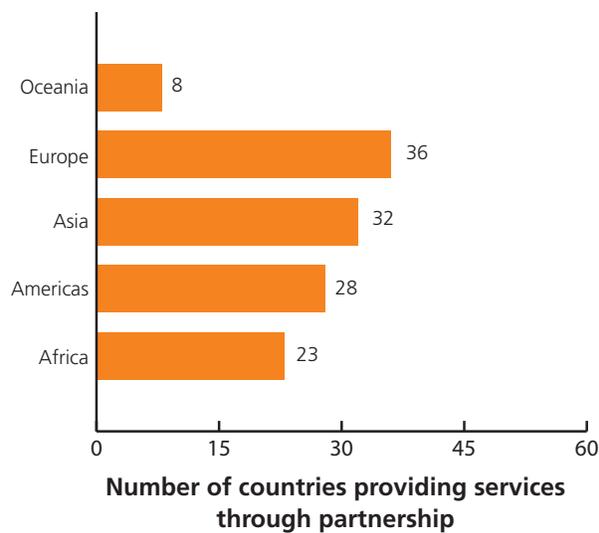
Innovative Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) have emerged as models for the provision of public services and social entitlements in areas such as education, health and environmental sustainability. Recent advances in technology, connectivity, collaboration tools, as well as improvements in management practices in both the public and private sectors, may significantly contribute to the development of PPPs. "The private sector can be a valuable partner for Governments that can in turn provide regulatory systems which are transaprent and just" (UNDESA, 2015). There is also increasing awareness among the business sector that profit is possible while undertaking socially beneficial programmes. Some companies have started to rethink their business models by turning social and global development issues into business opportunities.

Such initiatives are taking place in different parts of the world. For example in India, e-Mitra is a project that was undertaken by the government of the State of Rajasthan and local service providers. Its goal was to deliver e-government services (e.g., forms, birth certificates, information) to Indian people via dedicated centres and kiosks. In Egypt, the Egypt Smart Village is a technology park/Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) between Egypt's Ministry of Information and Communication Technology and a private consortium designed to remove obstacles for ICT firms that want to invest in the country (Witters, Marom and Steinert, 2012). The collaborative production of services via social networking and interactive web-based tools enable people to play a more active role in the design and production of public services within the context of Public-Private-People Partnerships (PPPP). The new European eGovernment Action Plan for

2016-2020 reiterates the principles of collaborative and participatory governance advocated by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), as well as the continued commitment to use digital technologies for open and consistent dialogue between the public and decision-makers.

The use of ICTs in government not only offers the opportunity to improve service delivery and citizen engagement, it can also help mobilize additional resources from both the public and private sectors, which enhances collaboration of stakeholders and innovation. Multi-stakeholder partnerships can harness the resources, knowledge and ingenuity of the private sector, civil society, the scientific community, academia, philanthropy and foundations, parliaments, local authorities, volunteers, and other stakeholders. This collective power is important to generate ideas, mobilize, and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources; complementing the efforts of governments; and supporting the achievement of the SDGs, in particular in developing countries (UN General Assembly, 2015a).

Leveraging the potential of ICT tools can thus supplement traditional forms of government financing, in responding to complex societal challenges. One way that ICTs can help governments in this endeavour is by utilizing crowdfunding, through social media networks, to attract funds that can support sustainable development projects and initiatives. Crowdfunding can be defined as a method of collecting many small contributions through an online platform to fund or capitalise a popular enterprise (Freeman, Nutting 2015). Crowdfunding allows citizens to fund projects they like through dedicated online platforms. In this way, crowdfunding is a form of alternative finance, which has emerged outside of the traditional financial system (Collins, Swart and Zhang, 2013).

The advent of crowdfunding provides developing countries with access to non-traditional funding mechanisms from the general public and even venture capital, as outlined in the World Bank's document "Crowdfunding's Potential for the Developing World." The Report estimates that crowdfunding could represent a $90 billion market as soon as twenty years from now, and it could be a significant factor in the developing world. According to this Report, the greatest potential lies in China, followed by the rest of East Asia, Central Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Middle East and North Africa region (World Bank, 2013). The private sector, civil society organizations and some governments are using crowdfunding as a tool to drive innovation, particularly in social development, by engaging people in projects where they may choose to invest their money. Initiatives such as Citizinvestor in the United States offer an example of how crowdfunding can be used to encourage public-private partnerships to achieve community goals and civic participation at the local level. South Africa is another country that focuses on leveraging crowdfunding to ensure social and economic development. In 2015, the South African Department of Arts and Culture and Thundafund.com, South Africa's leading crowdfunding platform for innovators and creatives, have become partners. The partnership aimed at bringing the 'Crowdfunding Creative Economy Development Programme' to the country.[27]

In the last ten years, crowdfunding has moved from supporting small ventures into supporting public services in crucial sectors, such as health and education, with financial contributions coming from the overall population. The potential of its use remains relatively high, as such financial resources remain largely untapped, especially in emerging economies. At the same time, caution is needed about properly utilising crowdfunding for public service delivery. Particularly as a tool to mobilize ideas and funds, crowdfunding poses challenges. First, social media has been successful in attracting funding for various non-governmetal projects (such

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[27] Note: A draft version for public consultation; accessed on 10 December 2015 at ropa.eu/smart-regulation/roadmaps/docs/2016_cnect_006_e_government_action_plan_en.pdf"http://ec.europa.eu/smart-regulation/roadmaps/docs/2016_cnect_006_e_government_action_plan_en.pdf.

as Kiva[28]), but it has not been extensively used by governments to meet the challenges of sustainable development. The second challenge of government crowdfunding relates to effective implementation, which requires adequate public policies and regulatory frameworks at all levels. Third, increased transparency and acountability of financial institutions, as well as oversight on how the funding is used, are essential for proper financial management and to avoid misuse of funds.

The Addis Ababa Action Agenda, highlights that "blended finance instruments including Public Private Partnerships (PPPs), serve to lower investment specific risks and incentivize additional private sector finance across key development sectors led by regional, national and sub-national government policies and priorities for sustainable development" (UN General Assembly, 2015a). It also emphasizes that for "harnessing the potential of blended finance instruments for sustainable development, careful consideration should be given to the appropriate structure and use of blended finance instruments, including …. Who should share risks and reward fairly, include clear accountability mechanisms and meet social and environmental standards" (UN General Assembly, 2015a).

According to the 2016 Survey, 33 countries have a government policy on crowdfunding (Figure 3.13 and 3.14). Europe is leading in government policies on crowdfunding with almost 30% of countries in the region with a government policy on crowdfunding. It is followed by Oceania, which is composed of 14 countries and has 21% of overall countries in the region with government policy on crowdfunding. This is followed by Asia and the Americas both with 17% of countries to have adopted such government policies. The leading role of Europe may be attributed to well-elaborated and widely implemented policies of co-creation and co-production. In Africa, 5.5% of countries have a crowdfunding policy with 3 governments out of 54 of the region.

Despite the fact that there is a large pool of resources in many developing countries, the

Figure 3.13.   Percentage of governments offering online policies on crowdfunding, by region

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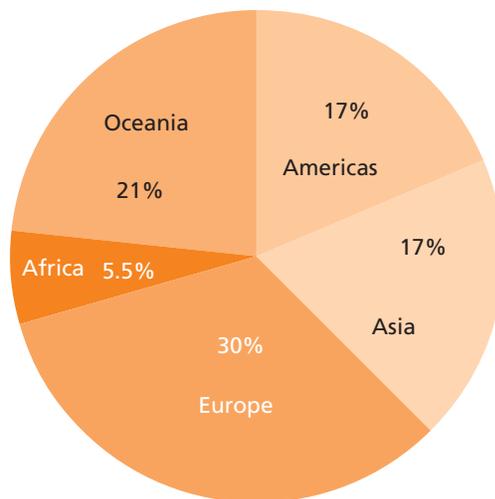
28   Note: Art of Crowdfunding for SA Artists, available at www.afai.org.za/art-crowdfundi

literature review highlights the fact that most of the lessons learnt on the initial applications of crowdfunding come from developed countries. The 2016 Survey shows that crowdfunding is still largely a developed-world phenomenon. Out of 193 countries total, 29 countries in the high and upper middle income groups have a government policy on crowdfunding. Only 4 countries have such a policy in the lower middle income tier, and no country has one in the low income group (see Figure 3.14).

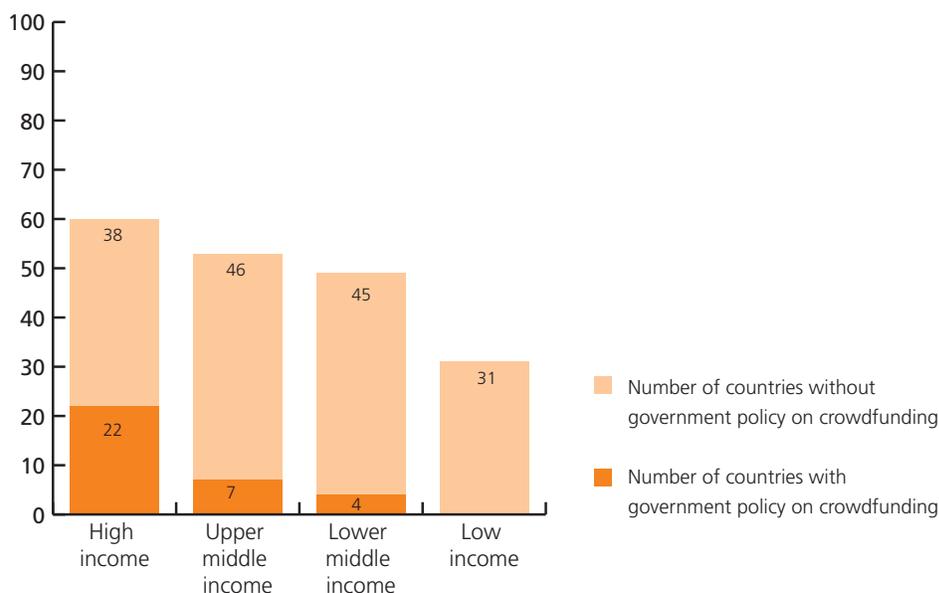Figure 3.14.   Government policy on crowdfunding, by income

Table 3.6.   Countries that have a government policy on crowdfunding, by region

Americas	Europe	Africa	Asia	Oceania
Argentina Canada Chile Uruguay United States of America	Austria Bosnia and Herzegovina Spain Denmark Finland France Germany Italy Netherlands Serbia Slovenia United Kingdom	Nigeria Seychelles South Africa	China India Iran (Islamic Republic of) Japan Lebanon Republic of Korea Singapore Sri Lanka	Australia New Zealand Samoa

3.5.3.   Measuring and evaluating civic participation and e-participation

Engagement and participation practices - both online and offline - help expand participatory governance and thus make sustainable development policies more people-centric and effective. Particularly important will be a better understanding of the factors that determine the level of preparedness for successful e-participation activities. Those should be measured, coded and widely shared. It is important to view e-participation holistically at every stage of the policy-making life-cycle, ranging from agenda setting to implementation to monitoring. Advancing e-participation in general will increasingly depend on progress made in devising participatory and democratic decision-making institutional frameworks and processes.

In order to assist Member States in assessing and strengthening the e-participation development process, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) has developed the Measurement and Evaluation Tool for Engagement and e-Participation – METEP, which was successfully tested in Azerbaijan (2013), Kazakhstan (2014), Kenya (2015) and Uzbekistan (2015). It is an interactive application designed to measure and qualitatively assess the level, performance and further development of civic engagement and participation through ICT use at national and local levels (see http://METEP.com). The tool can assist government officials, representatives from civil society, academia and the private sector to:

- raise awareness about e-participation benefits for public administrations, and the broader expert community interested in enhancing participatory and accountable governance;

- support and improve decision-making processes at national, regional and municipal levels by assisting respective authorities in better understanding the effectiveness of their efforts to engage with people as partners;

- develop practical roadmaps of well-targeted recommendations to widen and deepen e-participation policies and practices.

3.6. Conclusion

The traditional approach to public participation has been substantially re-thought over the past two decades. There has been new focus on adapting existing governance processes to the rising civic activism, which has been enabled by the benefits of networked interactive digital media. The 2016 Survey results point to the continued increase of e-participation activities across the globe. Such increase is driven, on the one hand, by the growing volume of government-held information supplied via digital channels, especially in open data formats; and on the other hand, by the strong uptake of e-consultation activities by public authorities at all levels, due to a steady rise in the use of social media's networking opportunities. The lessons learned from this Chapter can be summarized as follows:

- The 2016 Survey shows that, while the more affluent countries have the highest rankings – especially European countries that are among the Top 50 performers – many developing countries have made good progress in e-participation overall, especially lower-income developing countries. Lower income levels do not hamper posting basic public sector information online and using social networking for engaging with people on a broad range of development-related issues. Yet, income levels matter when it comes to developing more technically sophisticated specialized e-participation portals. African countries generate a lot of good practices by using low-cost (open code source) ready-made solutions that facilitate collaboration among people. As shown in section 3.3.2, the use of open digital maps for pro-poor community development has been especially successful.

- In general, the actual use of e-participation tools deployed by governments is not easy to measure and even more challenging to assess in quality terms. Equally difficult is evaluating the quality of feedback people provide to government and how best to structure its content to fit the procedural aspects of decision-making. Deeper insights are needed to meet these challenges and eventually raise the efficacy of public participation so that ordinary people can have greater control over the policies that affect their lives.

- Ultimately, e-participation highly depends on strong political commitment, collaborative leadership, vision and appropriate institutional frameworks that ensure structured ways of engaging people, and guarantee that inputs provided become a meaningful part of the policy-making process.

• There are different approaches for implementing e-participation activities depending on the local context. Accordingly, there is no one-size-fits-all solution applicable for every context and at each e-participation stage. Local needs and circumstances will impact the choice of e-tools, their design features and modes of access, target audiences, forms of citizen feedback and the way such information is processed by public administrations.

• Despite the importance of local contexts, all countries can make progress in participatory decision-making by partaking in the e-consultation domain. Various forms of online deliberation and collaborative actions are integral parts of the decision-making process. However, access to and use of ICTs is essential to increase people's empowerment, including vulnerable groups. Therefore, countries should aim at providing quality access to ICTs in order for societies to fully benefit from e-participation.

• As the Survey suggests, public participation will be inseparably intertwined with digital media and networks. On the one hand, a stronger and consistent effort is needed to better utilize, and include in national development strategies, the opportunities of increased communication and cooperation offered by new digital networks. On the other hand, there is a need to put in place e-participation policies and strategies t across key development sectors, both at national and local levels. This aims to maximize the use of existing e-participation tools, such as social media, and develop new easy-to-use civic engagement instruments dedicated to addressing specific development challenges. Enabling universal access to e-participation tools and increasing the capacity of governments at all levels to include the results of public participation into decision-making should become a strategic goal of public management innovation across the board.

• To accomplish the above objectives, e-participation will require capacity development and training programmes for government leaders, public officials and for civil society, including digital literacy for vulnerable groups, and those who represent them. However, while there has been progress in using digital media for online deliberation for participatory policymaking, the number of both developed and developing countries that do so regularly is still relatively small (for example, there are many more countries that merely contact and consult their citizens via social media or on national portals regarding non-policy issues such as the design and usefulness of the portal itself). There is significant evidence showing that e-participation technologies and related social practices can support the realization of many Sustainable Development Goals, especially those aimed at promoting pro-poor economic growth and social services. The focus on decision-making processes in key sustainable development areas should be substantially sharpened.

• But e-participation is not a panacea. Efforts to ensure transparent and accountable institutions that are focused on responding to the need of the people, are critical. As reiterated by the World Bank (World, Bank, 2016), public investment in digital technologies "in the absence of accountable institutions amplifies the voice of the elite, resulting in greater control". A major international effort is also needed to keep the Internet open and safe, and protect privacy. The 10 year review of the implementation of the World Summit on the Information Society signalled a commitment to continue addressing those concerns. It must be translated in concerted action at national and international levels. The divide between those who have access to the Internet and those who do not brings back the importance of reaching the targets of Agenda 2030 to strive toward providing universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020.