



## Editorial

# Implementing Sustainable Development Goals with Digital Government – Aspiration-capacity gap



Tomasz Janowski

Faculty of Management and Economics, Gdańsk University of Technology, ul. Traugutta 79, 80-233 Gdańsk, Poland  
 Faculty of Business and Globalization, Danube University Krems, Dr. Karl Dorrek Straße 30, 3500 Krems, Austria

## ARTICLE INFO

## Keywords:

Public administration  
 Public governance  
 Development management  
 Digital technology  
 Digital Government  
 Digital Government Evolution  
 Digital Government capacity  
 Sustainable Development Goals

## ABSTRACT

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent a commitment by all United Nations Member States to pursue development efforts, including ending poverty and hunger, promoting well-being and education, reducing inequalities, fostering peace, and protecting the planet. Member States and their governments are supposed to take ownership of the SDGs, strengthen the implementation means, and improve public governance as both the means and the end to development. Their capacity to undertake these tasks is critical for implementing SDGs. This editorial develops three lines of arguments: 1) that the Member States should strengthen the SDG implementation by building Digital Government capacity; 2) that according to the Digitization, Transformation, Engagement and Contextualization stages of the Digital Government Evolution model, 87% of the 169 SDG targets require Digital Government capacity at the highest Contextualization stage; and 3) that less than 31% of the Member States reached this stage and 55% did not advance beyond the lowest Digitization stage. The editorial concludes that Digital Government should play a key role in the implementation of the SDGs but, at present, the gap between aspiration (SDGs) and capacity (Digital Government) is affecting more than 69% of the Member States. Understanding and eventually addressing this gap requires further research efforts and adaptation of research results to different national circumstances and policy contexts.

© 2016 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

Approved by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) as part of the September 2015 Resolution A/RES/70/1 “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (UNGA, 2015), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are an outcome of the inter-governmental process initiated at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012 (UNGA, 2012). The goals were proposed by the UNGA’s Open Working Group, which includes representation from 70 countries. The proposal followed and complemented various initiatives undertaken by the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General, such as the UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda (UNSTT, 2012) or the High-Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (HLP, 2013); by the United Nations Development Group – a consortium of UN agencies created to enhance the performance of development activities on the national level, which organized 88 national consultations, 11 thematic consultations, global online conversation [www.worldwewant2015.org](http://www.worldwewant2015.org) and the online survey [www.myworld2015.org](http://www.myworld2015.org) (UNDG, 2013); and by other contributors such as the Sustainable Development Solutions Network – a network of scientists and development practitioners (SDSN, 2014) or the UN Global Compact (UNGC, 2013).

Part of the process described above is learning from the strengths and weaknesses of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) framework (UNGA, 2000), to which the SDGs framework serves as a natural continuation and upgrade. This learning resulted in sharply different design decisions for both frameworks, as shown in Table 1.

In particular, SDGs have a strong focus on the means of implementation (Risse, 2016), which include: finance, capacity building, trade, policy, institutional coherence, multi-stakeholder partnerships, data, monitoring and accountability, as well as public governance and technology (UNGA, 2015, p. 25–27). A number of targets under SDG16 “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels” (UNGA, 2015, p. 25) and SDG17 “Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development” (UNGA, 2015, p. 26) focus directly on the means of implementation. They “are key to realizing our Agenda and are of equal importance with the other Goals and targets” (UNGA, 2015, p. 28). In addition to the means of implementation targets, the SDG framework also extends the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development first established under the MDGs framework to include national and local authorities, the private sector, civil society, academia, etc. The framework also emphasizes national planning and regular progress reviews on the national level, complemented by voluntary reviews through the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable

E-mail address: [tomasz.janowski@zie.pg.gda.pl](mailto:tomasz.janowski@zie.pg.gda.pl).

Development (HLPF) – a central platform for overseeing the follow up and review of SDGs on the global level under the auspices of the UNGA and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) (UNGA, 2015, p. 11). According to the latest HLPF review, many countries “nationalized” “targets for the 2030 Agenda in their national strategies and plans, including financing strategies and institutional mechanisms” (ECOSOC, 2016, p. 3).

This article focuses on public governance and digital technology as key implementation means for SDGs. Following the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), by public governance we mean “formal and informal arrangements that determine how public decisions are made and how public actions are carried out” (OECD, 2011, p. 2). The synthesis of 60 national reports submitted to the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, pointed out that “Strengthening institutions and governance systems and building capacities for collaboration and coordination at all levels” (UNDESA and UNDP, 2012, p. 5) is one of the key priorities for advancing sustainable development. Public governance as implementation means is covered under the entire SDG16 including the target 16.6 “Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels” (UNGA, 2015, p. 25). Technology is present throughout the SDG portfolio, with 14 targets covering the issues of access, performance improvements and innovation support, including three technology-specific targets under SDG17 (UN, 2016). According to the Global Sustainable Development Report 2016, “Understanding the role of technology for SDGs is critical because technology has greatly shaped society, economy and environment and vice versa. In fact, technology, society and institutions co-evolve. Hence, technology progress requires institutional adaptations and may be constrained by social issues” (UN, 2016, p. 16). Such socially-sensitive “institutional adaptations” are anticipated in the *Digital Government Evolution model* (Janowski, 2015).

Given the recognition that public governance, digital technology and technology-enabled public governance are important means for SDG implementation, the main research question addressed in this article is “Is the Member States’ Digital Government capacity sufficient to support their efforts aimed at implementing SDGs?”. We address this question in terms of three sub-questions:

1. *Relevance Question* – “Is Digital Government capacity relevant for the Member States’ efforts aimed at implementing SDGs?”. In order to answer to this question we recall two sets of evidences: from the MDGs process that the root cause of many development failures is the failure of governance, e.g. violations of the rule of law, unsound public policies or mismanagement of public administrations (Millennium Project, 2006); and from the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) that technology, structured along different WSIS action lines, can support the achievement of the entire portfolio of the SDGs and their targets (WSIS, 2014). In particular, one of the WSIS action lines – C7 “ICT Applications” includes the applications of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in public governance.
2. *Aspiration Question* – “What is the adequate level of the Member States’ Digital Government capacity to support their efforts aimed at implementing SDGs?”. In order to answer this question we apply four stages proposed by the Digital Government evolution model – Digitization, Transformation, Engagement and Contextualization (Janowski, 2015) to determine the levels of Digital Government support required for different SDGs and their targets. The mapping exercise matches the logical characterization of different stages (Janowski, 2015) against the formulation of the SDGs and their targets (UNGA, 2015). The results are expressed in terms of percentages of targets requiring Digital Government capacity at different stages of the Digital Government evolution.

3. *Capacity Question* – “What are the current levels of the Member States’ Digital Government capacity to support their efforts aimed at implementing SDGs?”. To answer this question we rely on the latest edition of the United Nations e-Government Survey (UNDESA, 2016b), particularly its Online Service Index and e-Participation Index, to assess the levels of Digital Government capacity reached by the Member States according to the Digital Government evolution model. The Online Service Index is used as a proxy measure to establish which of the Member States reached the Transformation stage, while the e-Participation Index is used to establish which of the Member States reached the Engagement stage. The results are expressed in terms of percentages of the Member States that reached different stages of the Digital Government evolution.

In conclusion, the answer to the main research question relies upon the answers to the three sub-questions. The answer is expressed in terms of percentage of the Member States that reached the level of Digital Government capacity required for implementing SDGs. In addition, for those Member States that did not reach the required level, the answer also includes the gap between the current and the required levels.

The remainder of this article is organized as follows. Section 2 is the background section; it explores connections between SDGs and Digital Government. Section 3 is the theory section; it presents the Digital Government Evolution model as theoretical framework for the analysis conducted in this article. Section 4 is the methodology section; it explains research questions and methodological decisions on how these questions were addressed. Section 5 is the findings section; it presents the findings of the analysis for each of the research sub-questions including relevance (Section 5.1), aspiration (Section 5.2), capacity (Section 5.3) and aspiration-capacity gap (Section 5.4). The final Section 6 outlines conclusions and limitations of this research, and explains significance of the findings presented in this article.

## 2. Background: SDGs and Digital Government

An implicit goal of this article is to answer the auxiliary question “What is the state of research and policy literature on the connection between SDGs and Digital Government?”. The answer is that the literature concerning this connection is missing. In view of this, we examine below relevant writings on interconnections between SDGs and public governance, between SDGs and digital technology, and generally between sustainable development and Digital Government. We also plea for more focused research in this important area.

The recognition of the importance of governance and institutions to the sustainable development agenda is one of the key features of the SDGs framework, with one of the goals (SDG16) entirely devoted to this topic. SDG16 covers a wide space of issues including: reducing violence (targets 16.1 and 16.2); protecting the rule of law and providing access to justice (target 16.3); combating organized crime (target 16.4); fighting corruption (target 16.5); building effective, transparent and accountable institutions (target 16.6); practicing inclusive and participatory decision-making (target 16.7); ensuring participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance (target 16.8); providing access to information (target 16.10); and adopting non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development (target 16.b). SDG16 represents an ideal of an effective, accountable, responsive, inclusive and participatory public governance. As such, it is both a goal in itself and an implementation means for other goals.

Digital technology or Digital Government are not directly mentioned under any of the SDG16 targets but extensive literature exists concerning technology impact on the issues covered by the goal: police website support to victims of domestic violence (Westbrook, 2008) for targets 16.1 and 16.2; protection of the rule of law in digitized government (Kennedy & Scholl, 2016) for target 16.3; detecting fraud and other organized crime activities in ICT services (Kim, Lim, & Nah, 2013) for target 16.4; using e-government to curb corruption in government (Kim, 2014) for target 16.5; e-government impacting cultural attitudes about

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5110676>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5110676>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)