

SEADGov

*South and East Africa
Digital Governance Forum*

Introduction

Digital governance initiatives, strategies, and policies have a widely recognized potential to promote the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, namely SDG 16 calling for effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels in the framework of peaceful and inclusive societies. Over the past two decades, the area evolved from a straight use of technology in public administration to a multidisciplinary understanding of governance and an integrative, holistic view of administrative processes. Its aim expanded to cover the transformation of the relationships between government, citizens, communities, and all societal and economic dynamics.

Although an enormous progress in this area has been observed in many regions in the world, however, most regions, such as Africa, still face several challenges at two levels:

- a) The planning and strategic level (e.g. accurate analysis and assessment of needs and initiatives; weak strategic planning at different levels; lack of suitable monitoring mechanisms), and
- b) The technical and operating level (e.g. weak infrastructure; insufficient funding; weak institutional articulation; lack of focused and advanced human capacity and training).

Another critical issue is that of partnerships and collaborative efforts. Encouraging countries in the region to partner and work together is equally challenging, hence there is always a need to seek ways to promote such partnerships for digital development.

Objectives

UNU-EGOV, the United Nations University Operational Unit in Policy-driven Electronic Governance, UN ECA, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, and UN DESA, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, challenge South and East African countries to launch a South and East Africa Forum on Digital Governance (SEADGov Forum) aiming at joining together officials and governmental agencies in the region to

- share experiences and best practices,
- foster synergies and
- promote the design and assessment of regional and national strategies for digital governance and citizen empowerment in South and East Africa.

It is envisaged that the Forum will play a relevant role in articulating digital governance

development initiatives at different levels and voicing this cause at the international arena.

To achieve these objectives the Forum will join

- formal representatives of each country for the Digital Governance area,
- experts from South and East Africa governmental agencies for digital transformation and governance,
- experts from academia, international agencies, and organizations active in digital governance in the region.

A similar initiative was launched in 2023 for West Africa, with a first meeting organized by the Government of The Gambia, UN ECA, and UNU-EGOV in Banjul, in September 2023. A Digital Governance Forum for Central Asia will be launched in Astana, Kazakhstan, through the Ministry of Digital Development, Innovations, and Aerospace Industry, and will be organized till the end of 2024, co-organized by UNU-EGOV and the Government of Kazakhstan.

Launching the SEADGov Forum (30 Sep - 2 Oct 2024, in Pretoria)

The SEADGov Forum launching event will take place in Pretoria, on 30 September and 1 October 2024, organized back-to-back to the International Conference on Theory and Practice of Electronic Governance (ICEGOV 2024), one of the major international events gathering specialists, academics, and practitioners worldwide in digital governance.

The event targets Government and high-level Public Administration officials from South and East African countries, with a specific emphasis on the Agencies or Ministries in charge of digitalization of the public sector and Public Administration in each country. As a general aim, the Forum will launch a permanent, but flexible, cooperation mechanism to harness digital governance mechanisms and new technologies for promoting sustainable development and more inclusive societies.

Therefore, the event will

- promote a high-level analysis, debate, and experience sharing on the progress, limitations, and challenges to digital governance in South and East Africa.
- launch a permanent forum to foster synergies and regional cooperation, as well as shape the path to accelerate South and East African governments' digital transformation.

Organization

The SEADGov Forum Launching Event, jointly organized by UN ECA, UN DESA, and UNU- EGOV seeks direct involvement of the Digital Governance ministries or public agencies of all countries in the region.

UN ECA and UN DESA will financially support the travel and accommodation expenses of one official delegate per each one of the 22 countries in the regions. UNU-EGOV will offer a free registration for ICEGOV to the same delegates.

The event is a two-day meeting, preceded by a preparation day joining together the panel moderators and the organizing team. The possibility is open for country delegates to participate subsequently in ICEGOV 2024.

Session Descriptions

Session 1: Opportunities and Challenges in Developing, Assessing and Monitoring Digital Governance Progress in South and East Africa: Drivers, Realities, and Common Concerns

Digital transformation is rapidly advancing in South and East Africa, bringing both opportunities and challenges. While countries in the region have made strides in areas like e-government and data governance, they still face hurdles such as limited digital infrastructure, digital literacy gaps, and outdated regulations. The COVID-19 pandemic further underscored the urgent need for strong digital governance frameworks to maintain service continuity.

[The Global Digital Compact \(GDC\)](#) offers a valuable framework to address these challenges. By focusing on objectives like closing digital divides, expanding digital economy inclusion, fostering a safe digital space, advancing equitable data governance, and improving AI governance, the GDC provides a roadmap for shaping regional progress.

This session will explore the drivers and challenges of digital governance in the region, using the GDC as a guide for aligning efforts with global standards.

Session Flow:

1. Introduction (10 minutes): Moderator's opening remarks and participant introduction
2. Keynote Speakers (25 minutes): Moderator opens the floor for discussion on the following questions:
 - **GDC objective 1: Closing Digital Divides**
What key strategies can be implemented to close all digital divides, ensuring that marginalized communities benefit from digital transformation and accelerating progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals?
 - **GDC objective 2: Expanding Inclusion in the Digital Economy**

How can we expand inclusion and ensure equitable access to the benefits of the digital economy, particularly for underserved populations?

- **GDC objective 3: Fostering a Safe and Inclusive Digital Space**

What steps can be taken to foster a digital space that is inclusive, open, safe, and secure, while respecting, protecting, and promoting human rights?

- **GDC objective 4: Equitable Data Governance**

How can we advance responsible, equitable, and interoperable data governance frameworks that protect user rights and promote transparency and accountability?

- **GDC objective 5: International Governance of AI**

What approaches should be adopted to enhance the international governance of Artificial Intelligence to ensure its development benefits humanity, and how can we address the ethical, social, and regulatory challenges associated with AI?

3. Discussion: (40 minutes) Moderator opens the floor

4. Moderator summarizing key messages (15 minutes)

Session 2: People-centered Digital Governance Strategies

The session will focus on the role, design and implementation of national, local and sectoral Digital Governance strategies to build people-centered government ecosystems that are more efficient in terms of public service delivery, more participatory for citizens and communities, more transparent and scrutinized, and even more proactive.

The session will start with a presentation of a very recent UNU-Habitat report on “Global Assessment of Responsible AI in cities” which provides a number of recommendations to leverage AI for people-centered cities. The report is co-authored by UNU-EGOV and will be presented by a member of the corresponding research team, Dr Tupokigwe Isagah. This will introduce the focus on people-centered strategies.

Then, the session will continue with a presentation by Dr Delfina Soares on the *Design of People-centered Digital Governance Strategies*, based on UNU-EGOV extensive experience, followed by a round table addressing the following questions:

1. Current and anticipated impact of strategic planning informing the diverse national and regional strategies that have been put forward for the last five years in South and East Africa. What success stories are there? What good practices can be identified? What problems and challenges arise?
2. It is all agreed that regional cooperation in the design, implementation, and monitoring of digital governance strategies is very conducive to successful development. What do you

think are the most critical obstacles for regional cooperation in the Southeast African region?

3. There is an essential and important role and achievements of the global efforts of regional and international organizations like the African Union, the UN, the World Bank, etc. through its digital transformation development. Can you elaborate on priorities such as digital infrastructure and accessibility, as a prerequisite to drive Africa's development, and inclusive growth?

Session 3: Local Online Service Index (LOSI) of the United Nations E-Government Survey

This session will explore strategies to strengthen local capacities for digitization, with a focus on advancing Sustainable Development Goal 11. The discussion will emphasize the importance of equipping local governments with the knowledge and technical support needed to enhance their ability to deliver inclusive online public services.

Session Flow (120 minutes):

1. **Introduction to LOSI and 2024 Results** – UN DESA will present the latest findings and introduce the Local Online Service Index (LOSI). (10 minutes)
2. **Overview of the LOSI Network** – Learn about the LOSI Network, an initiative by UN DESA and UNU-EGOV to assess and improve local government portals. As urban populations grow, these portals play a crucial role in making cities more livable and responsive. The LOSI methodology, applied to the most populous cities in 193 UN Member States, aims to maximize reach and impact. Institutions with the capacity and resources are invited to partner with UN DESA and UNU-EGOV to expand LOSI's application within countries. (10 minutes)
3. **Introduction to the Local E-Government Toolkit** – Aligned with SDGs 9, 11, 16, and 17, this toolkit is designed to address common challenges in implementing effective local e-government. It offers comprehensive training modules on key aspects of the LOSI, including institutional frameworks, technology, participation, services, and content provision. Participants will gain practical insights into local government digitalization, measurement, and evaluation, as well as best practices for enhancing local e-government initiatives. (10 minutes)
4. **Application of LOSI** - Case studies showcasing how LOSI has been implemented in these countries. (20 minutes)
5. **Future Plans for Africa** – Discussing plans to apply LOSI in African countries, including Egypt, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Uganda. (20 minutes)
6. **Discussion:** (40 minutes) Moderator opens the floor

7. **Moderator summarizing** key messages (10 minutes)

To inform the forum and facilitate targeted discussions, we suggest participants respond to the following questions:

1. **Core Services:** What are the essential online services that local governments in your country should prioritize to meet the needs of citizens?
2. **Partnerships:** Does your country have established collaborations with organizations or agencies to promote local e-government? If so, please specify.
3. **Evaluation Framework:** Is there a system in place to assess the performance of local e-government initiatives in your country? If yes, please provide details.
4. **Language Accessibility:** What are the official languages in your country, and do local government websites cater to all language groups?
5. **Digital Divide:** What are the primary challenges hindering local e-government development in your country, such as digital literacy, infrastructure, or access to technology?
6. **Digital Identity:** Do local governments employ digital authentication methods for online service delivery? If so, please describe the system.
7. **Participation:** How do local government websites facilitate participation and engagement? Please provide examples of e-participation activities.
8. **Improvement Areas:** Based on your assessment, what are the key areas for improvement in local government websites within your country?
9. **LOSI Framework:** Has your country adopted the LOSI methodology to evaluate local e-government? Are you interested in participating in the LOSI Network?

By providing comprehensive and insightful responses to these questions, you will contribute to a productive discussion and help shape strategies for enhancing local e-government. Thank you in advance.

Session 4: Town Hall Session: Strengthening Regional Participation through International Cooperation in Digital Governance – Perspectives from Southeast Africa and Beyond

This session will explore the role of major international corporations active in the African region in enhancing regional cooperation and participation in digital governance. The discussion will focus on the practices of international and regional cooperation, with a particular emphasis on Southeast Africa and broader African contexts.

The session is designed in a Town Hall format to encourage an open and dynamic exchange of

ideas. It will feature prominent speakers from international organizations, alongside senior representatives from African countries, and a senior UN official, preferably from UNDESA. A key theme of the discussion will be the Global Digital Compact, contextualized to the African region.

Session 4 themes:

Regional cooperation

1. How to build strong cooperation among continent-based think-tank Fora Coordination
2. Political decisions, technical capabilities and human resources criteria that could work in promoting cooperation, Coordination or partnerships
3. A serious look at the primary enabler for regional cooperation: Financial Resources: Funding, Investment or crowdfunding?

Looking at digital governance in a different angle

1. Local government versus central government: Are they two or one?
2. Replace city governance with regional and sub regional digital governance? What about rural governance, tribal, and other habitat urban @models@?
3. Empowering the people: what effective strategies could be selected:

Priority challenges for digital Africa

1. New technologies: Do you think that AI can pave the way for other digital trends? Any potential competition to AI in the near future?
2. Impact of satellite data, drone's applications, intelligent analytics, expert digital governments and other innovative usage of technology for Sustainable Development?
3. Governments capabilities to sustain level of digital government progress: for example, how can a digital government sustain its successful improvement and not fall back when projects are completed?