Summary of Side event Building back smarter and more sustainable cities through the United for Smart Sustainable Cities Initiative

3 May 2023, 13:15 – 14:45 EST

Background on the event (one paragraph)

Technological advancements hold the potential to drive digital transformation in cities especially in the context of smart city transformation, predicated on the adoption of an inhabitant-oriented approach. In general, economic growth, social cohesion, and environmental protection are intrinsically linked to the smartness aspect of cities, highlighting that the use of emerging technologies can impact nearly urban functions in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically to make cities safe, resilient, inclusive, and sustainable.

For transitioning to a people-centred digital future for cities and communities, international standards such as the ones developed by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) can play a critical role in ensuring interconnectivity and interoperability of technologies, facilitate the adoption of emerging technologies and foster digital transformation in line with the SDGs. These advantages of leveraging ITU's international standards are well elucidated in the ITU Brochure – Building a People-Centered Digital Future for Cities and Communities.

In the context of smart city development, the traditional procurement methods may be ill equipped to effectively evaluate vendor requirements in keeping with technological innovations. To overcome this challenge, the United for Smart Sustainable Cities (U4SSC) developed a series of guidelines provide cities with the adequate tools to adopt more sustainable procurement practices to ensure that cities steer clear of integrating outdated technologies, while understanding the evolving vendor landscape in this domain in order to build more smart and sustainable cities for the future.

This Episode was organized together with the Permanent Mission of Austria to the UN, under the remit of the Digital Transformation Webinar Series.

Key Issues discussed (5- 8 bullet points)

- Public procurement for aspiring smart cities is one of the most critical yet underleveraged areas of public policy, governance, transparency, and accountability.
- Procurement for smart cities is often conducted in line with requirements of bureaucracies instead of inhabitants of the cities.
- Every city is at a different level of smartness and sustainability. Therefore, cities undergoing digital transformation need to have an effective tool to monitor their progress in relation to international instruments such as the SDGs. The U4SSC KPIs are an ideal policy tool through which cities can collect data and measure their performance in view of the SDGs.

- Coordination of smart city projects at the national and regional-level continues to remain a challenge, especially in terms of alignment of targets and stakeholder mapping. U4SSC-Hubs play a key role in fostering knowledge exchange, especially in the context of supporting region-specific cooperation between the public and private sectors to support the establishment of Smart Cities, build effective partnerships and foster the adoption of ITU-T Standards, U4SSC-KPI along with the dissemination of other key U4SSC deliverables.
- Gender mainstreaming needs to form a part of the urban planning mechanism for smart cities to ensure that the needs and interests women and girls are adequately met.
- Data-driven and open approaches to public procurement for smart cities are essential for facilitating accessibility to technology-centric services in transitioning smart cities to cater to different sections of society.

Key recommendations for action (5 - 6 bullet points)

- Initiatives like the U4SSC can play a pathbreaking role in ensuring that the global smart city dialogue is open to all relevant stakeholder and takes into account recent technological innovations surrounding the digital transformation process.
- Over 150 cities including Pully have already implemented the U4SSC KPIs to ascertain their progress towards their smart city goals. These KPIs are based on Recommendation ITU-T Y.4903 – "Key performance indicators for smart sustainable cities to assess the achievement of sustainable development goals". As the incidence of adoption of digital technologies across the world is on the rise, ITU-T standards can serve as the means for guiding the integration of such technologies into various sectors. Additionally, tools such as the U4SSC KPIs can help cities perform self-assessment to monitor their progress towards their individual smart city goals without pitting cities against each other as no two cities in the world are identical.
- The new U4SSC deliverable on Procurement guidelines for smart sustainable cities procurement provides practical steps for the digital data and technology buying cycle - planning, informing the market, evaluation, and managing delivery within the smart city space.
- The first U4SSC Hub was established in Austria, hosted at the Austrian Economic Centre. Since its establishment, this Hub has served as a mechanism for creating strong collaborative networks for driving region and country specific smart city dialogue, while supporting the implementation of smart city projects and raising awareness on the important of ITU-T international standards. To foster region-specific smart city conversations, other countries are also invited to consider the establishment of U4SSC-Hubs.
- A multi-stakeholder approach is imperative when considering the adoption of an operational model for smart procurement across various smart city portfolios.
- For urban stakeholders aiming to build the cities of tomorrow, the Toolkit on Digital Transformation for People-Oriented Cities and Communities are an ideal one-stop guide for