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Why is digital transformation a focus for us, and why did we believe that the Portfolio Sketch process could be a good starting point to systemically explore this space?

Digital transformation is a key focus for UNDP Turkmenistan as we recognize its potential to sectors like governance, education, and healthcare. However, past efforts have often been fragmented, with isolated projects lacking a cohesive strategy. To address this, we adopted the Digital Transformation Portfolio Sketch, a tool co-developed by UNDP's Innovation team and the Chief Digital Office (CDO). This tool enabled us to map Turkmenistan's digital ecosystem, identify key needs and strategic entry points, that will allow us to build a coherent portfolio of interventions that is aligned with national priorities. By adopting a systemic approach, we aim to move beyond piecemeal efforts and create synergies between digital initiatives, ensuring more sustainable, impactful, and coordinated digital transformation across the country.

The Digital Transformation Sketch Process: Engaging and Collaborating with Internal and External Partners

From June to September 2024, the UNDP Turkmenistan Country Office (CO) embarked on a Sketch Process to unpack the country's most pressing development challenges across health, governance, and the environment sectors. This structured process allowed ample time for brainstorming, collaboration, and refining ideas with both internal and external stakeholders. The participants were selected to ensure a wide array of expertise. The Turkmenistan CO teams, with their deep knowledge of local needs in health, governance, and the environment, played a central role in shaping the focus areas. The IRH Innovation Team provided critical expertise in digital transformation, with specialists such as Andreas Pawelke, Aditi Soni, Anshuman Mruthunjaya and Yaera Chung guiding the process. Additionally, the Chief Digital Office team contributed their strategic insights into digital platforms, ensuring the use of the latest digital tools for effective collaboration. This inclusive approach, blending internal expertise with external consultations, allowed the team to discuss and address, multidimensional development challenges in Turkmenistan through a complexity-informed strategic approach and a learning and collaboration mindset.

Learnings from the Digital Transformation Sketch Process: Rethinking Digitalization in Turkmenistan

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The Sketch Process provided valuable insights into the country's digital transformation needs, highlighting key challenges such as low digital literacy, fragmented e-government services, and insufficient digital infrastructure, especially in rural areas.

The team also discovered the distinction between digitalization and digital transformation, recognizing that true transformation requires systemic change, not just technological adoption. By mapping and consulting with stakeholders and prioritizing needs, the UNDP CO team learned that strengthening digital literacy, fostering innovation through public-private partnerships, and improving digital skills are critical for driving economic and social development of the country. This process has redefined the team's role in supporting Turkmenistan's digital future, emphasizing a holistic, multi-stakeholder approach that aligns with national strategies and fosters inclusive, sustainable growth.

Linking the Sketch Process to Future UNDP Projects

This process will significantly enhance the work of UNDP Turkmenistan by helping to transition from individual digitalization efforts to a more holistic, portfolio-based approach to digital transformation. By moving beyond individual projects, the team will now focus on developing an integrated strategy that aligns multiple initiatives around a common intent, ensuring a more systemic and sustainable impact. Lessons across various topics like e-government services, digital literacy, and public-private partnerships will inform upcoming initiatives, particularly in these areas tailored to the country context. Furthermore, the insights gained into community engagement and digital skills development will strengthen digital social innovation projects, such as digital health and education programs. Ultimately, the outcomes from this process will help UNDP tailor its digital transformation efforts to local contexts, ensuring more effective, sustainable, and regionally relevant solutions that foster long-term development and inclusive growth, and greater community engagement.

Conclusion and Next Steps: Strengthening the Digital Strategy and Building Internal Capacities

The Sketch Process in Turkmenistan has been a transformative journey for the UNDP Country Office), not only by enhancing understanding of the country's digital transformation needs but also by providing the tools and frameworks to move away from single-point solutions and projects towards an interconnected portfolio of learning options to drive meaningful change.

The insights from the Digital Sketch Process have laid the groundwork for refining the UNDP Country Office's digital strategy in Turkmenistan. The next steps will focus on ensuring that these insights are translated into action. First, we will consult internally and with stakeholders and align on the strategic direction for the digital transformation work. Following this, we will identify key stakeholders—including government entities, the private sector, and civil society—to build collaborative partnerships that will move the work forward. We will also prepare a presentation or narrative to communicate the initial research, entry points for collaboration, and priority areas to stakeholders, ensuring a shared understanding and buy-in.

With the necessary partnerships and support, we will proceed with applying UNDP's portfolio approach to integrate individual initiatives into a cohesive strategy aligned with national goals and aimed at sustainable, inclusive growth. We will continue investing in processes like the   Digital Fitness Program (DFP), to enhance our staff's capacities as well as work as a country office towards further capacity development of both government stakeholders and local communities equipping them with the skills and knowledge necessary to drive and sustain digital transformation.

The Digital Sketch process has enhanced the internal capacity of the UNDP CO team, equipping staff with a deeper understanding of portfolio thinking, systems dynamics, and the complexities of digital transformation. This strengthened internal capacity will support Turkmenistan's digital agenda. The lessons learned from the Digital Sketch Process will continue to guide the development of future digital strategies, fostering a culture of innovation and adaptability within the UNDP CO.

Ultimately, the process has empowered the team to take a more proactive, integrated, and informed approach to digital transformation, positioning UNDP as a key enabler of sustainable development through digital innovation.