The role of technological and non-technological innovation in the response to the COVID-19 crisis in the Republic of Azerbaijan

Distinguished colleagues, dear meeting participants,

I would like to thank organizers for this opportunity. I represent the State Agency for Public Service and Social Innovations under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan government agency which is carrying out the unified management of the “ASAN” service centers.

ASAN Service was established upon the initiative of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan back in 2012 as an integral part of the reforms in the sphere of public administration. It is the Azerbaijani model for rendering public and private services from one-single window. Over 320 services are rendered in ASAN Service Centers. including birth, death and marriage registration; identity cards; passports; driver licenses; real estate records; immigrant status and other civic services. At the same time, functional support services, including banking, insurance, legal support, translation and other services are rendered at the center. Citizens can benefit from various public and private services in one center (single administrative building) at the same time entering through only one door.

Up until today, the services have been rendered to citizens based on more than 37 million applications. The satisfaction rate of citizens is more than 99%. There are 20 ASAN Service centers throughout the country.

Today, “ASAN Service” is popular in the region and beyond as the winner of the UN Public Service Award in the category of “Improving the Delivery of Public Services”. ASAN Service has also been successful in the field of digitalization and electronic services. Therefore due to the advancements in the area of e-services and digitalization - ASAN Service received UN award for developing public services through digital governance.

ASAN Service has been in the forefront of the fight against COVID-19 with its smart solutions and innovations. It has introduced special electronic permission systems both for individual citizens and organizations. It has received positive feedback of the public in Azerbaijan and attracted the interest of our partners abroad. ASAN has shared its successful experience on various international platforms. At the same time, according to the information provided, the electronic permit system has been approved and researched by a number of countries (Uzbekistan, United Arab Emirates, Kazakhstan, Belarus, including Astana Hub).
Access to public services in Azerbaijan has been ensured through the ASAN Service Centers. Moreover, during the fight against COVID-19 followed by several safety restrictions, access to public services was further strengthened through the introduction of technical means and innovations. ASAN Service Centers were capable to demonstrate adaptive work style and to render all the services with due respect to the safety distance and sanitary/hygienic standards, as implied by the emergency constraints.

In the meantime, the activities are advancing to apply the experience of ASAN in 7 countries – Afghanistan, Indonesia, Morocco, Uganda, Uzbekistan, Montenegro, Turkey and within the members of 2 international organizations – ISESCO and UCLG-Africa (United Cities and Local Governments of Africa).

One of the ASAN’s recent initiatives was the Global Web Forum on “Governments’ agile response to COVID-19”. Forum was another successful step toward deeper and coordinated partnership in response to the pandemic. The Forum has truly raised the bar for importance of partnership among stakeholders across all aspects of fighting COVID-19. Distinguished speakers discussed many important areas for governments during pandemic, including citizen-centric, sustainable and digital recovery plans.

Innoland is an innovation center created with a goal to support the establishment of startup ecosystem and encourage innovation development of private sector in Azerbaijan. Mission: establish a role model and empower entrepreneurs with the tools and community to grow and master their innovative businesses. Stimulate innovative entrepreneurial spirit and startup ecosystem.

The Azerbaijani Tech Diaspora has been established by the initiative of Azerbaijani working for innovative technology companies worldwide. The main goal of Tech Diaspora is to strengthen the relationship between Azerbaijanis that operate in the field of innovative technology industries and to ensure the relationships and joint activities between them.

“Azerbaijan Innovation House” was established on February 19, 2020 in Silicon Valley by INNOLAND Incubation and Accreditation Center. “Azerbaijan Innovation House” connects the startup ecosystem of Azerbaijan with Silicon Valley and helps Azerbaijani startups to expand their products and services to the American market, get into the acceleration program in Silicon Valley as well as raise investment in the US. Another function of “Azerbaijan Innovation House” is to strengthen relationship with Azerbaijani “Tech Diaspora” in Silicon Valley and to help them contribute to the Azerbaijani innovation ecosystem.

The Government of Azerbaijan has taken a series of measures to address the consequences of the critical situation caused by COVID-19. The aim was to reduce the negative results and mitigating the impact on citizens and businesses.
In the medical field, necessary medical equipment and means were urgently imported, and in parallel, the shortage of medical resources was solved by accelerating local production. Mass testing was carried out within the framework of close cooperation with the World Health Organization. Azerbaijan got one of the highest ranking per capita in the number of carried tests. Disinfection was carried out across the country, and 10 modular hospitals were built. One of them has already been inaugurated.

In the socio-economic field, support package worth to more than $2 billion, has been allocated for assisting social groups in Azerbaijan during the pandemic. Financial support was provided to enterprises and companies affected by COVID-19. The Government immediately identified a list of socially vulnerable groups and provided financial support for several months. All these measures have ensured the agility of management.

As a result, Azerbaijan has been one of the least affected countries by the pandemic. Agile management, adoptive decision-making and efficient implementation thereof, have laid the foundation for Azerbaijan to be among the countries with low losses.

During the pandemic we all witnessed the necessity of sound public administration, especially transparent, accessible and responsible public service delivery. Thus, in emergency cases, such as fight against COVID-19, provision of unhindered and unimpeded access to public services becomes exceptionally vital.

We are facing an unprecedented global challenge. Only coordinated, multistakeholder action by businesses, governments, and international organizations can mitigate the impact of this crisis and pave the way toward recovery. Deep partnership and dialogue across regions will help to pave the way to economic recovery and provide sustainable and digital new normal.

Thank you for your attention.