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Contribution by

Brazil

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i) What is the role of digitalization during the coronavirus disease pandemic and during recovery in countries at different levels of development?

As part of the national response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Brazilian government has established a working group on Strategic Information Technology Actions within the scope of the Crisis Committee for Supervision and Monitoring of the Impacts of COVID-19. This working group focuses on coordinating the Strategic Actions of Information Technology in response to the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic in the country.

The working group's achievements include the digital transformation of 31 public services with the highest impact on the fight against COVID-19 within 3 months. The selection of services were done according to a prioritization process based on criteria such as greater demand (in order to avoid crowding of people in a face-to-face service), relevance to the society (maintenance of jobs or sustaining economic activities), and connection with the theme. It should be noted, though, that over 3 thousand services have already been digitalized, and that the number of people using the Brazilian government's online platform (Gov.br), has grown from 1.8 million to over 119 million with Digital ID since the outbreak of the pandemic.

Another point worth highlighting is the implementation of Emergency Aid (Auxílio Emergencial) program, which benefited around 118 million citizens (55.8% of the Brazilian population). In total, the federal government processed 150 million requests in a short period, while 67.9 million citizens received the benefit directly. On average, 40% of Brazilian households received the benefit. Information on the Emergency Aid was published in internet portal and an App for citizens to request the benefits was created. With this initiative, the Brazilian Government created in the space of one single month the largest digital database worldwide, with thirty million citizens bankrolled.

Proof-of-life initiative is also worth mentioning. Over 600 thousand pensioners and retirees have updated their status and proven they still eligible for the benefit using mobile and facial recognition technology. Considering that, approximately 30 million people are recipients of pension benefits in Brazil; this is the estimated scale of this initiative. Proof-of-Life has contributed to public trust and has enhanced the acceptance of digitalization throughout the population.

Going forward, digitalization is bound to play a major role in Brazil's post-pandemic recovery. The country's Digital Government Strategy for the period 2020-2022 is currently under review. Its updated version will strengthen digital government initiatives aimed at leveraging recovery, as well as optimizing service delivery and resource allocation. The Strategy's new goals aims to digitalize all public services, to implement a digital payment tool in all digital public services of the Federal government, and to define minimum cybersecurity standards to be applied in all digital channels and services.

This brief overview demonstrates that Brazil sees digital innovation and digital transformation as key tools in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the recovery process which must

ensue. Not only that, but we also acknowledge the link between digitalization and new business models and markets, as well as advancements in science and research systems.

At the same time, the Brazilian government is well aware that countries at different levels of development have varying experiences with digitalization. While digital transformation has helped millions worldwide face the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, it has also made clear – and even accentuated - both new and existing digital divides. Brazil has been actively engaged in bridging its own connectivity gaps and promoting a nationwide process of digital inclusion, but it recognizes that there is still work to be done, both at home and abroad.

ii) What have been the challenges faced in harnessing digital solutions to cope with the pandemic?

The main challenge Brazil has faced in harnessing digital solutions to cope with the pandemic has to do with nationwide connectivity. Brazil has a population of over 210 million people in a territory of 8.5 million square kilometers. While most of our population live in urban areas and have access to high-quality internet connections, there are still significant numbers of people, especially in rural areas, who do not fully enjoy the benefits of digital transformation.

To face this challenge, Brazil has put in place several initiatives aimed at expanding wired and wireless connectivity in the country. Significant investments were made in intercontinental connections, mainly through submarine cables linking Brazil to

Africa and Europe, not to mention a projected connection to Oceania and Asia. Such initiatives are paired with land infrastructure projects aimed at exploiting the full capacity of the aforementioned cables, not only by Brazil but also by our regional partners.

Besides, Brazil also held its spectrum auction in November 2021. Considered the largest such auction in Latin America, the initiative exceeded expectations, both in economic value and in infrastructure investments. Of the available spectrum, 85% were sold with offers totaling USD 3.36 billion, of which USD 7.9 billion will be invested in expanding Brazil's connectivity infrastructure.

iii) What are the lessons to be learned from policy responses?

Brazil's digital transformation efforts have accentuated the importance of digital skills in the governmental workplace. To meet that challenge, the Brazilian government has created a Digital Transformation Program to train public officials to help diffuse the culture of digitalization in different areas of the federal government.

Another important lesson has to do with user experience. For Brazil, digital government must be citizen-driven. Therefore, our digital government policies focus on users' needs and expectations, taking all feedback into account to provide better, more useful digital public services.

Data governance and safety also came to the fore when implementing digital government policies. In the case of Brazil, digital government is entirely compliant with the national data

protection legislation. We also have put in place protocols for data transparency and interoperability, which is invaluable for both accountability and ease of use.

iv) Moving forward, what is the role of international cooperation?

As a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, Brazil has intensified its efforts towards international cooperation in many fields directly related to digital government. Be it through bilateral arrangements with traditional and new partners or in regional and multilateral fora, Brazil is fully engaged in peer-learning and experience sharing.

Bilateral partnerships have proved particularly fruitful in the field of connectivity, in which it enabled the establishment of new high-capacity connections between Brazil and Europe and Africa. It has also helped increase dialogue among research institutions located in Brazil and some of our main regional and extra-regional partners. Besides, bilateral dialogues have also helped promote cooperation between specialized governmental agencies, with excellent results in skill development and data sharing.

In the region, Brazil has worked closely with its MERCOSUR partners to foster digital integration. It has also participated in the works of the Digital Agenda for Latin America and the Caribbean (eLAC-CEPAL), as well as those of the Network of E-Government Authorities of Latin America and the Caribbean (Red GEALC-OAS). We are glad to see that most governments in our region are engaged in digitally transforming themselves, in a way that enables their citizens to reap the benefits of new technologies and infrastructure.

Brazil has been equally engaged with broader multilateral fora, such as the United Nations (UN), the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and the G20. In those and other organizations,

Brazil cooperates with a wide range of partners both in political dialogues related to digital government and technical discussions regarding specific challenges faced by the international community in our shared efforts towards global interconnectedness.

As the world begins the process of recovering from COVID-19, Brazil understands that digitalization of public services is one of the subjects that could benefit the most from international cooperation. It can enable joint initiatives in sharing best practices, harmonizing standards, and infrastructure development. It can also be one of the main tools at our disposal to bridge the international digital divide.