

The road to improvement: governance indicators and socio-economic outcomes

A PFMConnect Study Report by David Fellows & John Leonardo



1. Introduction

In this study we look across a series of governance and outcome evaluation systems to assess the evidence for consistency within and between the two.

The main intention is to understand the extent to which progress in one field mirrors progress in others and consider what this may suggest about the drivers of the relationships observed, identifying any areas requiring further research.

Our work is based on the World Bank Governance Indicators ([WBGI](#)s) and a set of key Socio-economic Outcome Indicators (SEOIs) derived from the World Health Organisation ([WHO](#)) & United Nations Development Programme ([UNDP](#)) data sets. Data for 2004 (2005 for Health) and 2021 was derived from the 176 countries for which all necessary data was available. This is intended to provide a reasonable timespan and data sample for

such an exercise. The one exception to this approach is in Table 5 (examining the relationship between female & male Expected Years of Schooling and GNIPc) where data from only 163 of the 176 counties is available.

Technical Note

Regression analysis is used throughout this study to determine the closeness of fit between the data being compared. For this we use Pearson coefficients (shown in the tables below) and r^2 values. Given that we are interrogating data based on social behaviour we take a 'satisfactory' r^2 value as being of between 0.4 and 0.5. This range is equivalent to Pearson coefficients of approximately 0.64 and 0.72. We therefore regard Pearson coefficients above 0.72 as 'good' and below 0.64 as 'unsatisfactory'. All the correlations in this study exhibit P values < 5%. The results are coloured in the tables below, as follows: ■■■■; ■■■■; ■■■■; and ■■■■.

2. World Bank Governance Indicators (WBGIs)

The WBGIs have 6 aspects: Voice and Accountability; Political Stability and absence of violence/terrorism; Government Effectiveness; Regulatory Quality; Rule of Law; and Control of Corruption (abbreviated in the tables below). In Tables 1 & 2 we examine the internal consistency of these data sets for the two chosen points in time (2004 and 2021).

Table 1: Correlations between WBGIs using 2004 data						
	V&A	Pol Stab	Govt Eff	Reg Qual	R of L	C of C
V&A	1.000	.673	.847	.862	.874	.822
Pol Stab	.673	1.000	.683	.684	.792	.753
Govt Eff	.847	.683	1.000	.936	.936	.936
Reg Qual	.862	.684	.936	1.000	.920	.891
R of L	.874	.792	.936	.920	1.000	.945
C of C	.822	.753	.936	.891	.945	1.000

Table 2: Correlations between WBGIs using 2021 data						
	V&A	Pol Stab	Govt Eff	Reg Qual	R of L	C of C
V&A	1.000	.724	.686	.739	.785	.772
Pol Stab	.724	1.000	.734	.703	.799	.764
Govt Eff	.686	.734	1.000	.937	.935	.903
Reg Qual	.739	.703	.937	1.000	.928	.887
R of L	.785	.799	.935	.928	1.000	.938
C of C	.772	.764	.903	.887	.938	1.000

All elements of the WBGIs correlate well internally across the data sets for both periods. For 2004 data (Table1) Political Stability achieved the lowest performance with ‘satisfactory’ correlations across three variables (Voice and Accountability, Government Effectiveness; Regulatory Quality). For 2021 (Table 2) Political Stability had just one ‘satisfactory’ result (Regulatory Quality) with another ‘satisfactory’ result being obtained between Voice and Accountability and Government Effectiveness. All other results for both periods were ‘good’.

3. WHO and UNDP Socio-Economic Outcome Indicators (SEOIs)

The five key SEOIs chosen for this exercise cover a wide spectrum of personal and community development activities:

Health; Human Development[1]; Life Expectancy; Expected Years of Schooling; and Gross National Income per capita. The Health indicator is compiled by the World Health Organisation and the others by the United Nations Development Programme. In Tables 3 & 4 we examine the internal consistency of these data sets for the two chosen points in time (2004 and 2021).

Table 3: Correlations between key outcome indicators using 2004 data					
	Health*	HDI	Life Exp	Exp Yrs Sch	GNIpc
Health*	1.000	.938	.873	.880	.670
HDI	.938	1.000	.907	.918	.739
Life Exp	.873	.907	1.000	.776	.637
Est Yrs Sch	.880	.918	.776	1.000	.587
GNIpc	.670	.739	.637	.587	1.000

*Health data for 2005, the nearest year available

Table 4: Correlations between key outcome indicators using 2021 data					
	Health	HDI	Life Exp	Exp Yrs Sch	GNIpc
Health*	1.000	.926	.862	.835	.737
HDI	.926	1.000	.906	.900	.828
Life Exp	.862	.906	1.000	.789	.764
Est Yrs Sch	.835	.900	.789	1.000	.694
GNIpc	.737	.828	.764	.694	1.000

Each of the SEOIs correlate well internally across the two data sets for both periods. For 2004/5 (Table 3) GNIpc was rated 'unsatisfactory' against Expected Years of Schooling and 'satisfactory' against Health and Life Expectancy although in 2021 (Table 4) this performance improved to 'satisfactory' for Expected Years of Schooling and 'good' for Health and Life Expectancy. All other results for both periods were 'good'.

4. Focus on female and male years of schooling

There is much work that we could do at both a broad and granular level with respect to both WBGI and SEOIs but for the moment we have chosen to examine the relationship between Expected Years of Schooling for females and males (EYS(f)/EYS(m)) and Gross National Income per capita for females and males (GNIpc(f)/GNIpc(m)) for 2004 and 2021 (Table 5). In doing this we use the same UNDP data source as for the material in section 3 above.

Table 5: Correlations between Estimated Years of Schooling and GNI per capita				
	2004		2021	
	EYS(f)	EYS(m)	EYS(f)	EYS(m)
GNIpc(f)	.674	-----	.717	-----
GNIpc(m)	-----	.600	-----	.701

Table 5 includes only 163 of the 176 countries used in the other tables as data for the remaining 13 countries is unavailable for these indicators

A recent [IMF Blog](#) stresses the importance of female participation in the labour market to improve the economic output of emerging and developing economies. Table 5 demonstrates that female schooling correlates well with female income generation. The lower correlation values for males could indicate that there are more diverse routes for males into economic activity making education a slightly more important route for the earning power of women although the male correlation improved from unsatisfactory to satisfactory between the two study periods, seemingly indicating an increased relevance of education to male earning capacity.

5. Examining the relationship between WBGIs and Outcomes

We next examined the relationships between WBGIs and SE0Is by correlating the WBGIs from section 2 and the SE0Is from section 3.

WBGIs	Health*	HDI	Life Exp	Exp Yrs Sch	GNIpc
V&A	.669	.681	.600	.653	.523
Pol Stab	.537	.576	.493	.555	.533
Gov Eff	.782	.811	.718	.739	.753
Reg Qual	.767	.791	.693	.714	.730
R of L	.723	.765	.686	.704	.702
C of C	.734	.752	.659	.704	.737

*Health data for 2005, the nearest year available

WBGIs	Health	HDI	Life Exp	Exp Yrs Sch	GNIpc
V&A	.509	.583	.529	.587	.496
Pol Stab	.546	.631	.568	.569	.561
Gov Eff	.738	.828	.771	.730	.825
Reg Qual	.716	.811	.733	.735	.826
R of L	.653	.770	.717	.695	.789
C of C	.632	.725	.677	.670	.771

The analysis in Tables 6 & 7 demonstrates that four of the WBGIs (Government Effectiveness, Regulatory Quality, Rule of Law, Control of Corruption – termed here the ‘key’ WBGIs) correlate well with all the SE0Is included in this study for both the 2004/5 and 2021 data sets. For 2004/5 fourteen of these ‘key WBI’ correlations are ‘good’ and six are

'satisfactory'. For 2021 fifteen of these correlations are 'good' and five are 'satisfactory'. Government Effectiveness is 'good' across all five SE0Is for both years. Political Stability appears at first sight to be the most consistently problematic across the two sets of correlations although all its correlations for the 2021 data set show improved Pearson coefficients for 2021 and one is borderline unsatisfactory. Voice and Accountability declines from three satisfactory and two unsatisfactory results for 2004/5 to five unsatisfactory results in 2021

6. The World Justice Programme – an approach to analysing performance standards

[The World Justice Project, Rule of Law Index](#) provides an accessible level of analysis of key governance characteristics (eg: absence of judicial corruption; accessibility and affordability of civil redress; effective criminal investigations) that assists consideration of their potential contribution to service improvement. The Rule of Law Index is not unique but it is impressive exemplar for the presentation of governance data.

The addition of organisational efficiency indicators within this framework could prove useful.

7. Discussion

Evidence from the internal analysis of World Bank Governance Indicators (Tables 1 & 2) and SEOIs (Tables 3 & 4) suggests that when one indicator from either of these data sets is executed well then the whole data set tends to be executed well and vice versa. The exception to this is the relationship between Expected Years of Schooling and GNI per capita in the 2004 data set (Table 3), although the 2021 result proves 'satisfactory' (Table 4).

'Key WBGIs' are mostly concerned with administrative and policy development tasks usually requiring broadly similar skill sets. Experiences in this field can be shared through regular contact in business meetings and client department project work.

Socio-economic activities are highly diverse in comparison to the tasks represented by the WBGIs. These activities are often highly customer-facing and require input from staff having many different backgrounds who do not often collaborate or even meet one another across service boundaries. The possibility of common levels of good or poor performance between socio-economic activities seems remote unless good standards of service performance are compared and developed across Government. The prevalence of satisfactory and good correlations amongst this data set seems particularly worthy of further consideration

The results of cross correlations between the 'key WBGIs' and the 'SEOIs' suggest that the 'key WBGIs' represent those activities that seem the most likely contributors to good socio-economic performance. In comparison, the WBGI 'outliers' (Voice & Accountability and Political Stability), although clearly preferable characteristics in their own right when realised to a high standard, do not seem to offer a consistent

influence on good socio-economic public service delivery.

It could be argued that rather than the WBGIs driving the SEOIs, these data sets are driven by common factors such as national wealth, strength of democracy, uniformity of income distribution within the population or the quality of leadership at administrative or political level. So far we have established no such links and direct national leadership impact on a multitude of service delivery points seems improbable.

We note that the World Justice Project, Rule of Law Index offers an analytical format that could be applied to both governance and service performance. It could help equip individuals, community groups and governments to improve service outcomes at various levels.

Finally, female secondary education has many advantages but the particular advantage this study seems to suggest is that the education of females improves the wealth they generate. This result offers clear support for the economic arguments in favour of female education.

8. Conclusions

The outcomes from this study suggest that:

- WBGIs and SEOIs each have strong internal consistency of performance. From this it could be inferred that well

organised administrations are likely to be well organised at a general level rather than as a series of independent activities. The issue is more remarkable in terms of SEOIs given that WBGIs could be regarded as mainly dependent on similar skill sets whereas this seems less likely in the case of SEOIs.

- The degree of compatibility between the four 'key' WBGIs and the SEOIs used in this study suggest that the 'key' governance indicators tend to influence the quality of service outcomes. Good governance, therefore, would seem to improve the quality of services, poor governance having an opposite effect.
- Our findings suggest that national leaders should consider the improvement of governance as a contribution to the improvement of service outcomes. The World Justice Project, Rule of Law Index provides an analytical format that could help in this process.
- The correspondence between female Expected Years of Schooling and female GNIpc provides powerful support for female education on economic grounds alone, confirming opinions already expressed by others.

PFMConnect is a public financial management consultancy with a particular interest in the use of digital communication to support learning and sharing expertise amongst the international development community.

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[\[1\]](#) The Human Development (HDI) subset used in this study is a composite index developed by the UNDP that consists of: Life Expectancy, Expected Years of Schooling, GNIpc (all show separately here) plus Estimated Mean Years of Schooling.

Levelling-up White Paper

commentary: Time to deliver

By David Fellows



The [WP](#) sets out a decade long programme of UK public service development for the whole of the UK. It is presented under four headings:

- Empowering Local Leaders and Communities (extending combined authorities and mayoral capacity to secure local economic and physical improvement)
- Improving Productivity, Pay, Jobs and Living Standards (promoting innovation and growth in areas of low productivity and limited job opportunities including new institutes of technology, upgrading local transport and road maintenance)
- Spreading Opportunities and Improving Public Services (school, hospital and institutes of technology developments)

- Restoring Local Pride (home energy improvement schemes, community development and neighbourhood appearance)

The WP makes clear that funding for these activities, some of which are already in progress, is to be delivered through 26 different funding mechanisms (some references imply there may be more).

It has been argued that the need for levelling-up is based on a post-war bias in public funding toward London and the South East reaching up to Oxford and Cambridge. This geography is variously referred to as 'The Golden Triangle' or 'The Greater South East'. I and others have remarked on this bias over the past few years, including the right of centre think tank 'Onward' that has produced a series of very useful studies. There can be little doubt that the Golden Triangle has received project funding from Government on less demanding standards than has been applied elsewhere and on a very regular basis. It is clear that the quantum of funding awarded to this area, augmented by its frequent selection as the preferred location for flagship initiatives, could not have failed to provide it with an enviable diversity of employment, huge economic impetus, and considerable prosperity compared to that of the outlying regions.

I would argue that over the past 30 years it became accepted thinking that the scientific, medical, technological and financial service developments within The Golden Triangle would carry the rest of the country and that the regions were heading towards inevitable decline. The banking crisis of 2007-8 may have accelerated this situation but I suggest that this assumption was implicit decades earlier. The apprenticeship programmes and regional development initiatives that were launched in this period had neither the funding, the

richness of concept nor the facilitating heft to do much more than provide token comfort despite the best efforts of some ministers involved.

The WP demonstrates that UK regions outside the Golden Triangle have below average gross disposable income and productivity levels compared to the UK as a whole. In addition, the UK's second-tier cities lag both other countries' second-tier cities, and the UK's national average, suggesting a significant under-performance to their potential.

Strikingly the WP not only demonstrates that the Golden Triangle has been afforded a huge economic advantage over the rest of the UK but that this is so baked-in that massive infrastructure developments currently in train will ensure that this advantage inevitably increases over the next decade. Despite the levelling -up funding earmarked for the regions the WP indicates that during this period on current standing London will receive 58% of the UK's development funding, with the Golden Triangle receiving over 61% in total. In summary, the reported sums are, as follows:

Levelling-up Quantified Provision To-date					
Region	Empowering Local Leaders £m	Productivity, Jobs, Pay £m	Spreading Opportunity £m	Restoring Local Pride £m	Total £m
London	121	92,660	322 + 5H	318	93,421 +5H
South East	148	1,497	405 + 6H /1IT	21	2,071 +6H/1IT
East	1,498	971	292 + 5H /1IT	28	2,789 +5H/1IT
Greater SE total	1,767	95,128	1,019	367	98,281 +16H/2IT
Yorks & Humber	2,735	3,491	251 + 1H	486	6,963 +1H
North East	1,420	1,477	110 + 2H /1IT	20	3,027 +2H/1IT
North West	2,666	5,152	360 + 5H /3IT	165	8,343 +5H/3IT
West Midlands	1,765	2,365	289 +3IT	816	5,235 +3IT
East Midlands	612	845	251	26	1,734
South West	1,367	1,701	229 +11H /3IT	76	3,373 +11H/3IT
Rest of Eng total	10,565	15,031	1,490	1,589	28,675 +22Hs/11IT
N. Ireland	16,347	2,020	-	84	18,451
Scotland	6,100	2,676	-	195	8,971
Wales	3,290	1,589	-	168	5,047
Grand total	38,069	116,444	2,509	2,403	159,425

This summary presents the costed regional data contained in the final pages of the WP plus the numbers of new hospitals (H) and institutes of technology (IT). The WP summary also includes other uncoded references to schemes that apply broadly to all local areas, including: additional police, Kickstart jobs, the furlough retention scheme, new apprenticeships and giga broadband coverage.

It is clearly early time to address the psychosocial impact of the pandemic, and so social impact

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Some particularly welcome features of the proposals

I welcome the decade long timeframe adopted in the WP although several decades will probably be required to evidence sustainable improvements. I also applaud the commitment to adopting a rigorous approach to performance measurement and transparency that will test the delivery and effectiveness of the programme and help create a system of accountability. This task must be seen as the starting point for a process of continuous learning and improvement.

Overall the WP provides an astonishingly honest account of the need for fundamental change to the way the UK perceives itself politically, economically and administratively. A cohesive alignment of special talent at political and administrative levels is now required to take advantage of this impressive start.

A generally supportive approach by the commentariat would be extremely helpful but the Government should assume that it must bear the weight of public messaging to build understanding and participation in a development process that is bound to have both highlights and disappointments.

Some suggestions

There are many aspects of the WP that seem to demand refinement and in some cases radical revision, as would be expected given the extensive nature of the Government's vision, including:

- **Setting the scene.** There is some bewilderment expressed in the opening chapter of the WP as to how the UK came to experience such powerful and persistent disparities between areas of the country compared to experiences elsewhere. In places there tends to be an argument that these disparities are equally felt across the UK, including London. Frankly, I can only attribute London's internal disparities to an astonishing failure of sophistication by those responsible for guiding the immense power of the London economy. I feel that the professed astonishment should have been at least partly mitigated by an explanation of the bias in public policy and that has favoured the Golden Triangle for so long.

This acknowledgement can be inferred but should be more evident.

It is important for society at large, politicians (national and local) and civil servants to understand that past preferment must cease, that a line has been drawn.

- **Digestibility.** There appears to be considerable overlap between the four programme aspects and given that the coverage of the overall programme is so extensive there is a good case for dividing it operationally into two distinct segments.

1. Driving regional business growth through: innovation and product development leading to improved productivity and business expansion; improved communication, and shared learning within the business community; more extensive linkages between the business community, universities and other relevant institutions (existing and new); and closer working between Government, local government and other business support organisations (see my previous paper on these issues[\[1\]](#)); and
2. Providing a fairer distribution of public services reflecting other local needs and conditions throughout the UK. There will be inevitable overlaps between these two aspects of the WP not least relating to infrastructure but it is important to identify and design specific initiatives around the predominant drivers if public money is to be spent effectively and in a timely manner. It must also be understood that success in (1) will reduce the imbalances in health, social and environmental outcomes relevant to (2) and without success in (1) investment in (2) will be dissipated.

Transparency and review will undoubtedly raise many issues causing constant refinement to the approach and this is to be welcomed as and when it occurs.

- **The funding programme nightmare.** The WP demonstrates the confusion of funding sources that besets any attempt to make change across a broad, interrelated swathe of UK public service. In theory the approach places all funding proposals for the whole country on a level playing field but we know that the level playing field is warped and ignored at will. It is a system by which administrators play a game which only they can ever hope to understand and importantly it acts as a protection against criticism of their decisions. What really needs attention are the outcomes and the way in which performance targets are set. The more complex the system the less honest the results. Adopt simpler, more flexible funding mechanisms with clearer performance metrics and an emphasis on the often forgotten outcomes.
- **A democratic sea change.** The prominence given to executive mayors tends more to a sea change than a refinement. At present elected mayors and city regions have limited powers with mayors acting as local convenors. The WP proposes some significant additional funding being available that should assist their powers of persuasion (depending on the fine details of the 'Empowering Leaders' funding). It is, however, interesting that levelling-up discussion is usually conducted in the context of regional development, as reflected in the WP summary but the detail on the ground and in the Empowerment section concern much smaller areas.

Surely a regional view is a more practical proposition. Does not the fragmentation of the regions for the purpose of economic development make them more obscure and complex to business, therefore, less inviting? Is this not why the Northern Power House and West Midlands engine were given such extensive catchment areas?

Post-war local government reform has been a nightmare and further attempts to impose nation-wide change is probably a step too far but regional mayors with extensive executive powers directed at economic regeneration could be highly beneficial to this agenda. They could work in collaboration with a system of local consultative councils that also had responsibility for community services. This would fit more the direction of travel than the current complexity of personnel, titles, powers and local exceptions. It would make the regions more comparable in scale to London and offer a simpler local structure on which the interactions between so many different parties must take place if this vital project is to be successful.

- **Departmentalism.** A similar point could be made about the civil service. Its model is pre-war, virtually nineteenth century, when individual departments maintained a near independent existence. Neither the Cabinet Office nor No 10 is really in charge. Combining these two central vehicles seems essential but it does not mean that they will necessarily have more coordinating power or have more rights of accountability over departments. The WP brilliantly shows the interconnectedness of a visionary, transformative programme. What it really needs is a civil service that can be coordinated and held to account internally in a managerial sense. It also needs ministers that are not temporary post-holders but seasoned political leaders in their field, expected to

serve a full parliamentary term and perhaps longer, who can become properly acquainted with their brief, their department and those in the wider world with whom their department does business.

- **Central meets local.** It is clear that local politicians want local control. Which politician doesn't want power you might say? But central politicians want local control too, why is this? Locals do know the lay of the land, have planning responsibilities and lots of people on the ground who provide useful support services. Even so, Government holds many of the cards, including special tax and loan schemes, huge Government spending programmes (both routine and research), better control over the shape of higher and further education than local decision-takers, primacy over regulation (and deregulation) and more influence over inward investment. Is the Government hedging against failure or does it assume that funding mechanisms and behind the scenes arm twisting will provide control without responsibility? The game as proposed is too big to be so coy.

There needs to be a more thorough discussion of what the Government will bring to the table and how it will be involved given the enormity of the proposition. Regional directors will simply not cut it for this scale of programming. For a programme of this complexity a minister and official of deputy permanent secretary level needs to be assigned to each region however the programmes are to be configured. They would work with regional leaders, use their clout inside Government and Whitehall and work in tandem with local politicians on deals with major business partners. This takes into account that business investors may need to be convinced that local and central decision-takers are united in their ambition and evidently willing to work together over the long-term with

mutual respect. More needs to be said on this in the next stage.

- **The private sector invitation.** Apart from seeking general private sector responses to the WP it could be helpful to invite thoughts on the feasibility of some specific issues: the deepening of business to business collaboration; the development of interrelated areas of expertise whether on a national or local basis; the development of local supply chains for specific products; and opportunities for the creation or advancement of distinctive regional business specialisms. Also thoughts on the means by which closer working relationships could be developed between business and the education sector including institutes of technology, further education colleges and university departments in order to drive innovation and knowledge transfer and the likely benefits from proposed changes. Specific comments could also be invited on new or improved ways in which the wider public sector could help facilitate such developments.
- **The London plan.** There needs to be a plan for aligning the development of the Golden Triangle with the development model for the regions to facilitate a viable public spending space and a more balance growth model. The pandemic increased the practice of home working but initial signs of this practice were evident in London long before. Nevertheless its acceleration has caused havoc to the business models of public and private service providers. This time consequences must be thought through. The social return, particularly to London, must be tangible and properly planned with any detrimental factors identified and mitigated wherever possible. To deny the need for this requirement is to

deny the intention to succeed.

Final thoughts

Is there really a need to do something this radical? In a sense the genie escaped the bottle at the last election when the memorable 'levelling-up' term was widely used to such good effect. The term cristalised the insistent need for change in the regions.

The possibility of diluting the concept must be tempting. There is no blueprint for success. Parallels with reforms in other countries can be drawn but practice is rarely transferrable at scale although lessons must always be sought and applied where possible. Beneficiaries of past preferment will inevitably express misgivings at the loss of their special place in Government affections and some will mount outright opposition to meaningful change.

Even so, this massive initiative is both necessary and appropriate to the present time, particularly in the context of the need to achieve post-pandemic renewal, demonstrate the full advantages of Brexit and deliver manifesto pledges. So the case for change can no longer be evaded. The programme must now be explained, developed, defended and executed with irresistible determination.

Since this was first written there have been two changes of PM. The current PM's position on this putative agenda is by no means clear. I suggest that there would be an immense feeling of betrayal in the regions if a decision was taken to effectively downplay the prospect of regional change that has

been created and a return to an economic model based on the greater South East. It could be seen as the denial of nationhood by the Conservative Party. The jury is out and the signs do not look encouraging.

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[\[1\]](#)

<https://blog-pfmconnect.com/levelling-up-opportunity-for-future-generations/>

Freedom is what you make of it



by David Fellows [\[1\]](#)

1. UK Governments can no longer claim that EU rules prevent necessary changes to improve the UK economy or the life prospects of UK citizens. The UK's decisions may have some tariff consequences but there is no EU veto or imperative that would lead us to doing those things that run counter to our best interests. After the deal was done in December the PM remarked "freedom is what you make of it". Surely this will be his epitaph but will it be a celebratory one?
2. The time is rapidly approaching when we must learn of the Government's detailed plans for fulfilling the PM's promise to level up the regions. We shall then see what effort and risks ministers and senior civil servants consider appropriate to honour the pact with those who made Brexit possible by changing allegiances at the last general election.
3. Challenges abound for all participants. Local

authorities, for instance, can offer valuable insights and assistance with delivery. Naturally they will want to put their own stamp on initiatives. In doing this some may make untenable demands, vilifying Government merely for political purposes. Making a start with the most constructive partners is surely important. An advance guard must be identified capable of identifying the route to success.

4. The adequacy of key public sector organisations must be considered. For instance, how is the private sector to be effectively incentivised to participate? Can the woeful state of skill training be improved and properly presented to those who could benefit? How are start-ups and small businesses to be supported in a practical manner? How should business regulation be simplified to encourage enterprise while maintaining British values? How and to what extent could universities be tasked to make a meaningful contribution with funding skewed to reflect support for local enterprise development? How is the huge heft of public procurement to be employed? Is this the moment to create regional investment institutions to support private enterprise and if so, in what form?
5. The private sector must be invited to make a major contribution to this agenda. Brexit has not shown the sector's representative bodies in a particularly constructive light. They must demonstrate a capacity to contribute or be circumvented. One way or another the sector must be encouraged to provide ideas and resources that are appropriate and of long-term benefit to regional development.
6. No one has 'the' answer. The public sector is diverse, resource hungry and often politically divided. The private sector is competitive, risk averse, self-interested. Representative bodies of all kinds have limited, common-denominator agendas. Consultancies tend to provide answers that they hope will lead to repeat

business. This is not a task to be resolved purely by conference or working group. The answer must be derived from an unruly discourse that generates ideas from a series of interactions across all issues involving many different organisations and individuals, producing contributions that are more revealing than manicured.

7. The general public must also have an understanding and an opportunity to contribute to this agenda. The remaking of the regions and the consequent clarification of the opportunities for London and the South East are about reshaping opportunities for communities, families and individuals.
8. The task entails the rebalancing of the relationship between the wider London area and the regions. Ultimately the responsibility for a successful outcome of this immense task lies with Government. It should be approached with this clearly in mind. There must be both local and national ownership, public and private sector engagement. The national contribution is pivotal and should be recognised through branding and governance.
9. This may not seem the best time for such an adventure. The virus has caused serious economic and personal damage. Restrictions will continue for some time while huge expenditure has already been incurred. Some say that this is the time to recognise and reinforce what works, time to throw everything behind the pulling power of London and the South East. They caution against forsaking the golden goose. Of course this is a fallacy borne of anxiety when the currency is realism. London does not work nor do the regions. The one lacks liveability, the other lacks opportunity both need attention. It is time to face facts, there was never a golden age.
10. The digital technology had been slowly revealing our needs and suggesting options. Covid-19 has caused us to build on these developments, changing our attitudes and behaviour with astonishing speed. The Covid-19

experience has also provided Government with invaluable lessons about joined up working and the need to achieve steadfast alignment between messaging, planning and execution.

11. Things will never be quite the same again. It is time to embrace change, we just need to do it properly.

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World e-government coverage remains limited

E-Government Survey 2020

Digital Government in
the Decade of Action for
Sustainable Development

With addendum on COVID-19 Response

World e-government coverage remains limited according to the 2020 edition of the [United Nations E-Government Survey](#) which was released on 10 July 2020 (1). This is in spite of most countries and municipalities currently pursuing digital government strategies, many with innovative initiatives.

The 2020 ranking of the 193 UN Member States in terms of digital government – capturing the scope and quality of online services, status of telecommunication infrastructure and existing human capacity – is led by Denmark, the Republic of Korea, and Estonia, followed by Finland, Australia, Sweden, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, the United States of America, the Netherlands, Singapore, Iceland, Norway and Japan.

Among the least developed countries, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Cambodia have become leaders in digital government development, advancing from the middle to the high E-Government Development Index (EGDI) group in 2020. Mauritius, the Seychelles, and South Africa are leading the e-government ranking in Africa. Overall, 65 per cent of Member States are at the high or very high EGDI level.

In responding to the health emergency, governments have put in place new tools, such as dedicated COVID-19 information portals, hackathons, e-services for supply of medical goods, virtual medical appointments, self-diagnosis apps and e-permits for curfews. Many countries were quick to deploy tracking and tracing apps, and apps for working and learning from home.

Innovative digital government responses to COVID-19 include online dashboards in Canada and Australia to share information and track emergency responses. In China, chatbots are used to assess patients' risk of being infected. A community engagement app in Estonia allowed local governments to directly interact with their constituents, including through sharing COVID-19 information, posting photos and videos and even organizing virtual events. In Croatia, a "virtual doctor" is powered by artificial intelligence and developed by technology firms in cooperation with epidemiologists. In London, the use of cameras, sensors and AI algorithms, normally intended to control traffic, now measures distance between pedestrians to control social distance.

E-government progress still

hindered by digital divide

As a development tool, the E-Government Survey examines countries' strengths, challenges and opportunities, and informs policies and strategies. The 2020 edition found that progress has been made across all regions, even in the least developed countries. Over 22 per cent of countries were promoted to higher levels of e-government development.

Yet, despite the gains and major investments in e-government by many countries, the digital divide persists. Seven out of eight countries with low scores are in Africa and belong to the least developed countries group. The regional average index scores for countries in Africa are almost one third lower (at 0.3914) than the world average EGDI of 0.60.

Alongside these trends, the COVID-19 pandemic has now not only reinvigorated the role of digital government in its conventional delivery of public services and in ensuring business continuity, it has also brought about innovative ways in managing the crisis, such as in contact tracing, e-health, online learning, and remote working.

About the UN E-Government Survey

The UN E-Government Survey, published by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), is prepared over a two-year period following an established methodology. It looks at how digital government can facilitate integrated policies and services across 193 UN Member States. The Survey supports

countries' efforts to provide effective, accountable and inclusive digital services to all and to bridge the digital divide and leave no one behind.

(1) This blog is an amended version of the accompanying [UN press release](#)