Enhancing national digital resilience with digital commons

What are digital commons?

- Digital commons, sometimes called open digital infrastructure, are shared information and knowledge resources such as data, software, and cultural content.
- They are produced and managed for collective use by multiple stakeholders, to be modified and redistributed as needed.
- They drive innovation and contribute to a robust SME ecosystem: Harvard researchers have estimated that without open source software (OSS) to power digital products and services, it would cost firms $8.8 trillion to develop this software from the ground up.

HOW CAN GOVERNMENTS BENEFIT FROM DIGITAL COMMONS?

1. Securing digital sovereignty

- When governments share public data with private software vendors, these data can be used in ways citizens did not consent to, or that are detrimental to the public interest. OSS helps governments be in control of who the data is shared with by providing open, reviewable code.
- When governments are involved in shaping open standards, political, legal, cultural and technical decisions are guided by norms and values that benefit all - not just industrial actors.
- The auditability of digital commons improves cybersecurity: faults can quickly be detected and corrected.

2. Investing for the future

- Adopting digital commons saves government money by making it possible to avoid software and service duplication as well as costly (and recurring) licence fees.
- Governments can conduct national digital audits to assess public service reliance on proprietary software, public service use of OSS, and what OSS solutions it would be useful for the public service to reuse or co-develop.
- Governments can also create open source program offices (OSPOs) in the public sector, as well as public sector software catalogues to foster reuse and co-creation.

3. Building trust

- When a government transparently releases open data and government applications code, the foundations for trust and accountability are laid.
- In an increasingly polarised world, the openness of digital commons brings people together by fostering cross-border knowledge transfers and collaborations.
- Digital commons allow governments to safely manage and safeguard open data and protect citizens' data privacy - see the Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team (HOT) for an example of how this can be done.

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