

# THE DIGITAL SPRINTERS: THE CASE OF UAE

“ THE UAE COULD UNLOCK AN ADDITIONAL USD286 BILLION OF ECONOMIC IMPACT FOR 2030 THROUGH SUPPORTIVE POLICIES THAT ENABLE FULL UTILIZATION OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES. ”

Globally, there has been a large increase in policy focus on the digital transformation of economy, society and government. This has led to significant uptakes in internet penetration (as evidenced by rising internet use). For example, from 2010 until 2018 the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has successfully brought an additional 30 percent of its population online.<sup>1</sup> Initiatives likely to have contributed to this include the UAE government's "Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030" strategy created in 2007 which has committed investment into the telecommunications infrastructure to create a strong foundation for increased internet penetration.<sup>2</sup> Going forward however, more than providing access to the internet may likely be required to fully leverage digital technologies for economic development. The UAE could capture a potential annual (year-on-year) economic impact of up to **USD286 billion in 2030** through supportive policy that enables full utilization of digital

technologies.<sup>3</sup> Given the need to rebuild economies following the impact of COVID-19, the importance of capturing this potential digital dividend becomes ever more crucial. This research by economic strategy firm AlphaBeta (commissioned by Google) aims to understand how emerging economies can fully take advantage of digital technologies to achieve gains in economic development. The report focuses on 16 important emerging economies (which we dub the "Digital Sprinters"). These economies are Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Egypt, Israel, Kenya, Mexico, Nigeria, Peru, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Russia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and Ukraine. Together, these "Digital Sprinters" account for 13 percent of GDP, 16 percent of population and 19 percent of internet users globally.

Based on this research, a number of insights across the Digital Sprinters emerged, that are of relevance to the UAE and are summarized in this document.<sup>4</sup>

1. Based on World Bank, World Development Indicators.

2. Oxford Business Group, "Structural change under way to benefit Abu Dhabi's new knowledge economy". Available at: <https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/overview/smart-cookie-innovative-ict-solutions-are-set-cut-costs-and-transform-government-services>

3. These estimates refer to the value generated by 39 technology applications across 10 sectors in 2030, quantified based on a "Full adoption" scenario (i.e. 100 percent adoption). This implies that these ten sectors will become "Digital leaders" with significant leap-frogging. A "Full adoption" scenario is unlikely to be realistic but useful as a thought experiment and to frame the total opportunity.

Estimates do not represent GDP or market size (revenue), but rather a combination of economic impacts such as productivity gains, increased revenues and cost savings. The relevant technology applications by sector and their sources of value (e.g. reduced wastage in production, enhanced consumer offerings) were identified based on a detailed review of the academic literature. The exact sizing methodology is unique to each of the 39 technology applications, but estimates use a series of international and country-specific case studies for each technology application to quantify estimates. Across the 39 estimations economic indicators sourced from international organizations such as the World Bank, International Labor Organization, OECD and national statistics offices were used.

Detailed data sources and estimation methodologies for each of the 39 applications are listed in the Appendix to the main report, linked here <https://alphabeta.com/our-research/the-digital-sprinters-capturing-a-us34-trillion-through-innovative-public-policy/>

4. This research was prepared by AlphaBeta for Google. All information in this summary and the main report was derived from AlphaBeta analysis using both proprietary and publicly available research, data and information. Google does not endorse any estimates.

If the transition from digital penetration to economic growth could be fully leveraged, digital technologies could transform economic development in the UAE.

The research identifies eight groups of digital technologies with significant potential to enhance economic development. In the hypothetical scenario where applications based on the eight digital technologies in ten sectors are fully adopted, the combined annual economic impact in the UAE could reach up to **USD286 billion in 2030**, which is about 52 percent of the country's estimated GDP in 2030 (see Exhibit 1). About 38 percent of the **potential benefits of digital technologies accrue to traditional sectors, namely resources, infrastructure, and agriculture.**

12 policy levers linked to four strategic imperatives are crucial to go beyond digital penetration and capture the digital benefits linked to economic development.

A review of impactful, innovative and practical digital policies identified a number of important levers for capturing the digital-led economic development opportunity (see Exhibit 2).

While it is unlikely that all 12 policy levers will be applicable to the UAE context, a number of innovative policy levers could be considered.

#### **POLICY LEVEL 1:**

##### **COOPERATE ON STANDARDS**

Standards are crucial to not only ensure some minimum safeguards for safety and security, but also to ease the ability to transact. For example, adopting international legal security standards not only assists governments in the development of their own security frameworks, but also provides comfort and reassurance to organizations. Further, it decreases the barriers for domestic firms to export their operations abroad, as their security standards are likely to already comply with international markets.

#### **POLICY LEVEL 3:**

##### **CREATE ONE STOP-SHOPS FOR OPEN DATA**

Open data—machine-readable data that is made available to others—has generated a great deal of excitement around the world for its potential to drive innovation through Research and Development (R&D) in the private and academic sectors. One of the key complexities of using existing open data is that it can be housed in multiple locations. Having a single portal to access information can play a crucial role in disseminating data. Singapore, for example, operates an Open Data Resources portal that provides access to an array of government data from over 70 public agencies, direct developer support and special sub-portals for niche data from government entities.<sup>6</sup>

#### **POLICY LEVEL 2:**

##### **DEVELOP DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION (INNOVATION) CENTERS AND MODEL (LEARNING) FACTORIES**

These refer to physical places where entrepreneurs, business owners, researchers and innovators can come to try their hands at new technologies and digital applications. Often such places also provide training and skills development. For example, Turkey has rolled out digital transformation centers where MSMEs can receive experimental training and consultancy services in real production environments.<sup>5</sup> Successfully implementing such initiatives requires strong industry engagement to ensure they see the benefits of the collaboration, adopting a rigorous approach to identifying the key technologies and sectors to focus (not neglecting traditional sectors such as textile manufacturing), and ensuring there are clear frameworks governing the use of the intellectual property generated.

#### **POLICY LEVEL 4:**

##### **ESTABLISH PLATFORMS TO INTERACT AND CROWD-SOURCE INNOVATION**

Innovations to improve government services can come from anyone and anywhere; governments should engage and empower citizens to participate in this process. One such example is Bangladesh's "Innovation for All (a2i)" fund. The fund provides financing for low-cost, user-centric, home-grown innovations to leverage digital innovation to solve policy problems.<sup>7</sup> Projects have included initiatives to improve livestock information in real-time, a mobile app to promote good agricultural practices, and digitizing government services (e.g. driving license).

#### **POLICY LEVEL 5:**

##### **IMPLEMENT TARGETED TRAININGS, SOCIALIZATION AND BEHAVIORAL LEVERS FOR TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION**

Targeted training initiatives can be effective at exposing MSMEs to new sector-relevant digital technologies and convince them to adopt emerging digital technologies. Successfully implementing such training and behavioral influence programs requires a strong understanding of key barriers that MSMEs face with technology adoption and understanding how to incorporate behavioral "nudges" and other actions to address them. The flexibility of delivery mechanisms is crucial (e.g. on-site training, online learning) as MSMEs are likely to struggle with finding the time to attend these trainings.

**TO BE CONTINUED ON PAGE 4**

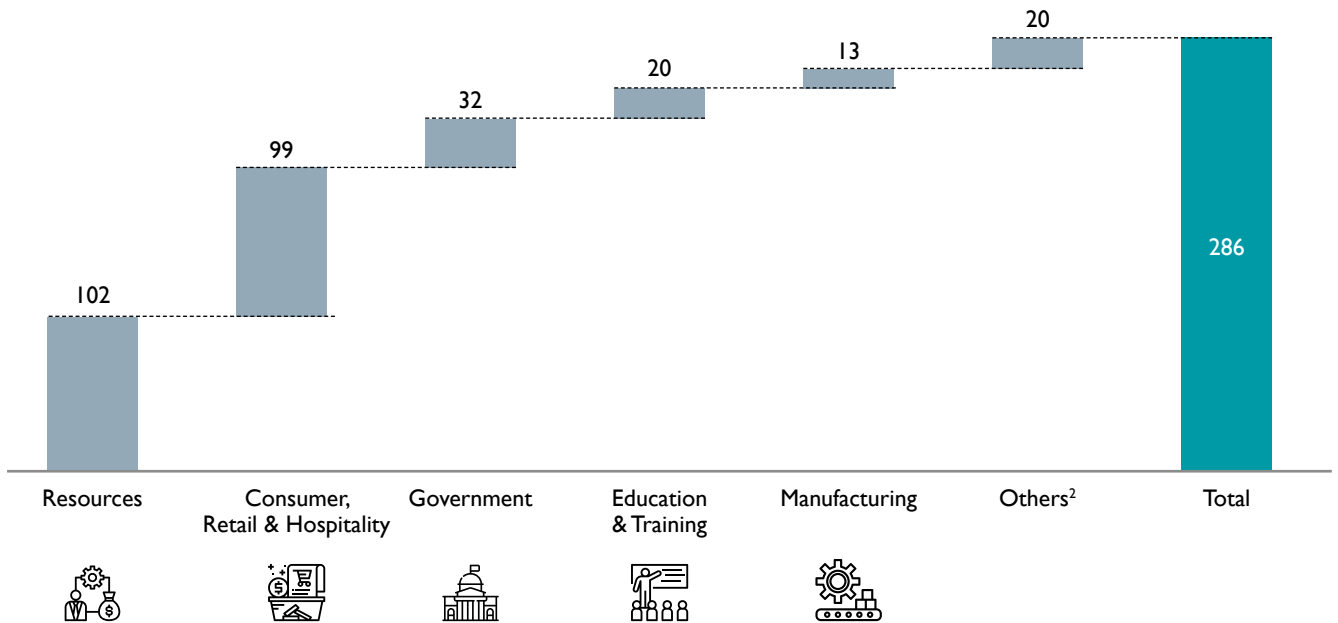
5. Gunes and Sahin (2018), "Turkey to establish digital transformation centers", Anadolu Agency. Available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/economy/turkey-to-establish-digital-transformation-centers/1258349>

6. See Smart Nation Singapore – Resources – Open Data Resources. Available at: <https://www.smartnation.sg/resources/open-data-resources>

7. A2i "Innovation Lab is changing the scenario," Available at: <https://a2i.gov.bd/innovation-lab/>

## EXHIBIT 1: THE VALUE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

## POTENTIAL ANNUAL ECONOMIC IMPACT IN THE FULL ADOPTION SCENARIO

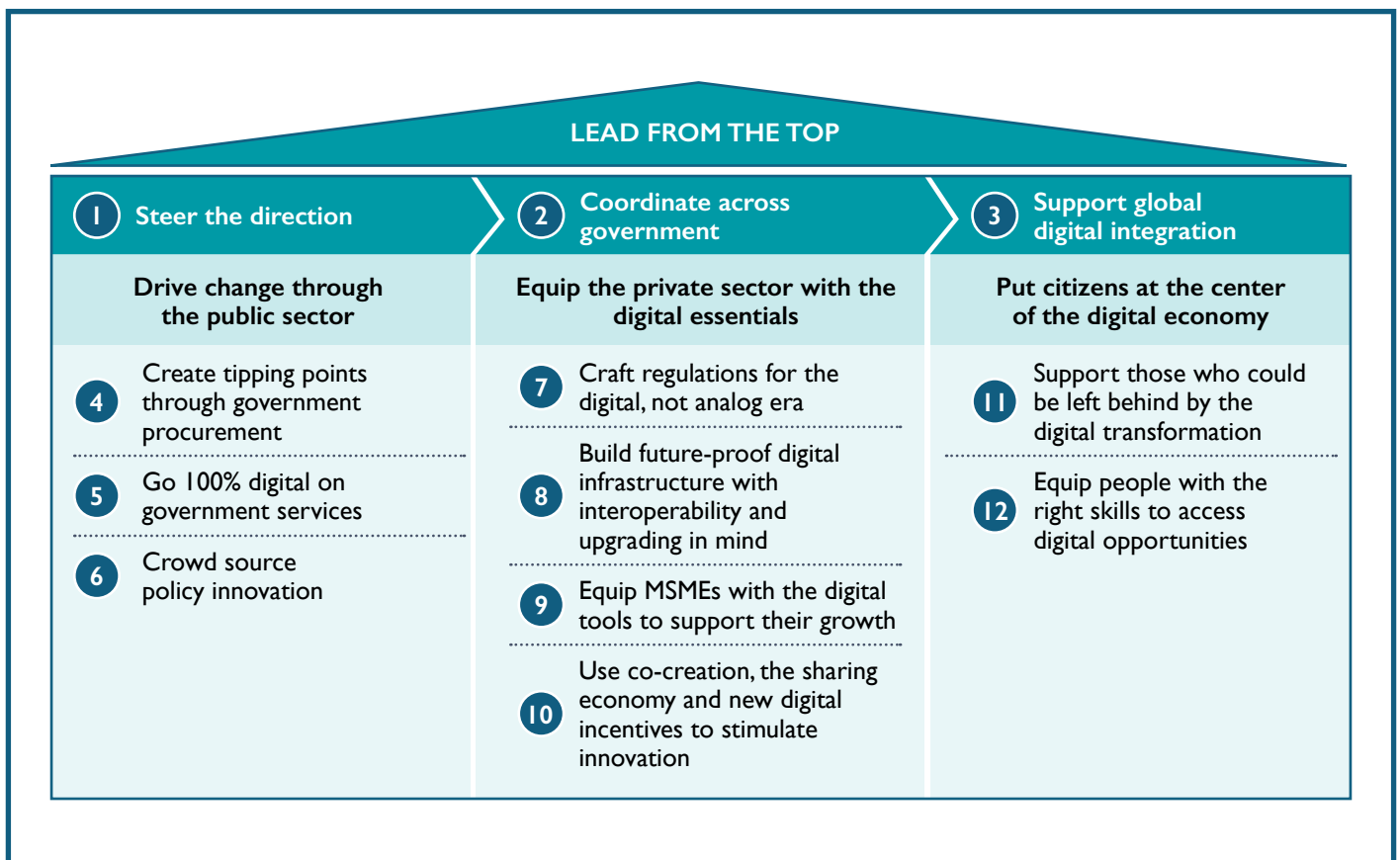
USD BILLION, 2030 (HIGH-END ESTIMATES)<sup>1</sup>

1. These estimates do not represent GDP or market size (revenue), but rather economic impact, including GDP increments, productivity gains, cost savings, time savings, increased revenues, increased wages and increased tax collection.

2. Others include Agriculture & Food; Financial Services; Health; Infrastructure, and Mobility.

SOURCE: AlphaBeta analysis

## EXHIBIT 2: POLICIES TO CAPTURE THE VALUE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES



While it is unlikely that all 12 policy levers will be applicable to the UAE context, a number of innovative policy levers could be considered.

#### **POLICY LEVER 6:**

##### **CO-CREATE NEW PRODUCTS AND SERVICES WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR**

Governments and the private sector could work together to leverage their respective expertise to co-create mutually beneficial products. While such ventures can be highly mutually beneficial, they can also be difficult to implement. For starters, in many emerging economies, governments lack a culture that encourages cooperation with the private sector. Further, private sector players often lack trust in the government and regulatory uncertainty can be a significant barrier for cooperation. Clear guidelines on cooperation and avoidance of non-competitive lock in of supply of products and or services may then be required.

#### **POLICY LEVER 7:**

##### **LEVERAGE CLOUD COMPUTING FOR EFFICIENCY GAINS ACROSS THE GOVERNMENT**

Cloud technology, in particular cloud storage and cloud computing power, is an enabling technology that could be utilized for different applications. Cloud computing technologies across government could lead to significant efficiency gains and cost savings for governments' ICT budgets. In view of this the UAE's Telecommunications Regulatory Authority has endeavored to create and maintain a "Cloud First" policy and has started consultation in 2018 throughout government.<sup>8</sup>

#### **POLICY LEVER 8:**

##### **DIGITIZE PAYMENTS TO CREATE INCENTIVES FOR ADOPTION AND PLUG LEAKAGES**

Governments around the world are increasingly allowing for online and mobile payment methods for government services and distributions. Doing so can drive top-down adoption of FinTech products in the population which can reduce the cost of and handling carrying cash. It is also a direct channel for financial inclusion as individuals often have their first accounts within digital financial services such as mobile wallets. Finally, using digital payments allows for better tracking and more efficient collection of payments which can reduce leakages. One example is how Mexico introduced mandatory e-invoicing for all businesses in 2015, obligating businesses to issue electronic invoices to customers and retain digital records. The Monterrey Technology Institute estimates that this has led to growth in income tax collected, 6 percent for collections from businesses and 21 percent from individuals.<sup>9</sup>

#### **POLICY LEVER 9:**

##### **BE CLEAR ON WHO IS THE LEAD AGENCY IN EACH STRATEGY**

It is important that there are clear government agency leads for different aspects of the digital agenda. Some of the common success factors include clear leadership from the highest levels of government and finding ways for different departments to lead relevant elements. In Chile, the governmental organization Production Development Corporation (CORFO) leads the implementation of the national I4.0 strategy, known as the 'Programa Estrategico Industrias Inteligentes 2015-2025'. As part of this, CORFO undertakes all coordination efforts with different government bodies overseeing the different industry sectors prioritized for I4.0 implementation.<sup>10</sup>

#### **POLICY LEVER 10:**

##### **CREATE "TIPPING POINTS" THROUGH GOVERNMENT PROCUREMENT**

Many technologies provide economies of scale or network effects that only kick in once there is a sufficient number of users – or past the "tipping point". Governments can accelerate the uptake of technologies to reach tipping points faster by directly procuring technology through government tenders. There are a number of pitfalls to avoid. First, any procurement process should be conducted as transparent as possible and be based on rigorous analysis to understand the cost-benefit of technologies. Second, contracts should be flexible and time constrained and technology if possible modular, open source and interoperable in nature. Finally, not only the purpose of the technology but also capabilities of governments to leverage the technology should be considered and weighed against each other.

8. Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (2018), "Cloud First Policy Strategy". Available at: <https://www.tra.gov.ae/userfiles/assets/QqQuIA0SR5C.pdf>

9. OECD (2017), Technology tools to tackle tax evasion and tax fraud. Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/tax/crime/technology-tools-to-tackle-tax-evasion-and-tax-fraud.pdf>

10. UNIDO (2018), You say you want a revolution: Strategic Approaches to Industry 4.0 in Middle-Income Countries.

Available at: <https://www.unido.org/api/oltext/documents/download/10031392/unido-file-10031392>

FOR MORE DETAILED INFORMATION ON THE RESEARCH,  
PLEASE REFER TO THE FULL REPORT AT:

<https://alphabetabeta.com/our-research/the-digital-sprinters-capturing-a-us34-trillion-through-innovative-public-policy/>

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