

Chapter 5

Convergence Based E–Government & Governance Policies for Developing Countries

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ABSTRACT

Information technologies play an important role in government since they collect, control and manage extensive information flows. As part of modernization, e-government has become an essential administrative reform. This chapter elucidates the difference between e-government and e-governance and how they translate into policy differences through specific examples. It describes a convergence model of digital governance to address the challenges faced by developing countries such as India, Sri Lanka, Chile and Philippines. It concludes by offering policy suggestions that emerge from examining creative solutions used by governments in developing countries, such as public-private partnerships that harness phenomena like brain circulation to overcome resource and technical constraints.

INTRODUCTION

Information technologies play an important role in government since governments collect, control and manage extensive information flows. As part of modernization, e-government has become an essential administrative reform. Many governments have invested in e-government (Moon, Welch, & Wong, 2006) and a lot is expected of these initiatives. According to the United Nations (2003a), e-government can be a facilitator of socio-economic

development, as the proper use of information technology ‘offers an immense potential to bridge inter- and intra-state socio economic disparities, reduce poverty, and further the goals of development worldwide’ (p. 182). It has been argued that e-government applications have the potential to increase the quality of bureaucratic processes and reduce corruption (Bhatnagar, 2003). Innovations in information and communication technologies (ICTs) have prompted visions of creating channels of interactive communication between citizens and their governments (Grossman, 1995). This is particularly true in developing countries where

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providing access to technology and bridging the digital divide are seen as imperative for growth. While governments have spent money in implementing many e-government initiatives, there is limited examination of whether or how new ICTs serve to strengthen governance and deepen democracy in a developing country.

Secondly e-government, defined as the use of digital technologies by governments to interact with citizens, other governments and organizations of all kinds, is a broad term. When defined in this expansive manner, rapid evolution of new forms of information technologies demand that there be a comprehensive e-government policy that allows citizens to use computers, mobile phones and any other devices they might have to interact with their governments. Traditionally, governments have defined e-government as computer and internet based interfaces. Given the fact that there are more mobile phone users than Internet users in many developing countries, there is great potential for providing government services through 'm-government' applications. With the development of third generation cell phones, the distinction between Internet and broadband wireless is blurring and citizens will expect to connect to their governments in a variety of modes and platforms. In terms of ICT policies, most governments have differences in how they regulate mobile phone services and Internet services. In planning their e-government initiatives, developing countries that are just starting to formulate their e-government policies should consider a convergence based model for their e-government policies and practices.

There is also a need to differentiate between e-government and e-governance, though they are often used interchangeably. The term government usually refers to formal institutions of the nation-state, and processes that are used to maintain order and facilitate collective action within a geographical boundary (Stoker, 1998a). Governance is a broader and more inclusive term that includes the relationship between government and state agen-

cies on the one hand and communities and social groups on the other (Stren & Polese, 2000). When the use of digital technologies relates to providing government services to citizens, such as access to government information, bill and tax payment and complaint services, it is 'e-government'. The opportunity provided by newer technologies for citizens to provide inputs and participate in identifying issues of importance, provide feedback about project implementation, and evaluation of results constitutes 'e-governance'.

This chapter will elucidate these issues in greater detail by drawing on examples of initiatives in developing countries such as India, Sri Lanka, Chile and Philippines. It will conclude by offering some policy suggestions by examining the challenges developing countries face and some creative solutions used by governments in developing countries through public-private collaborations, and harnessing new opportunities such as brain circulation, where a limited number of experienced citizens who return from abroad use their political skills to tap into institutionalized assets and contribute to e-government initiatives.

BACKGROUND

Government, Governance and the Role of Information Technology

Government reform and governance have been prominent in World Bank (Kaufmann, Kraay & Mastruzzi, 2008) and United Nations (2008) prescriptions to developing countries on strategies to minimize corruption, increase political stability and government effectiveness. Throughout the 1990s, the New Public Management paradigm, which emphasized the use of ICTs, was used to introduce modern business management methods into public administration (Dunleavy, Margetts, Bastow, & Tinkler, 2006) While this was problematic as highlighted by Fountain (2001), it was nevertheless influential in articulating e-government

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