

Chapter 11

Implementing ICT for Governance in a Post–Conflict Nation: A Case Study of Afghanistan

Monis Aziz
IBM, India

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an insight into the various challenges faced by a post-conflict nation like Afghanistan and suggest implementation of e-Governance. It explores various ICT tools and techniques that can help and assist government officials, leaders, stakeholders and decision-makers adopt appropriate governance systems and state building mechanisms as part of post-conflict reconstruction efforts. The chapter helps to identify the various ways in which post-conflict reconstruction issues can be dealt by using the best practices linked with ICT functional feasibility and implementation; and identify the specific challenges that a post-conflict country has to overcome with regard to e-Governance project formulation and implementation. Despite the specificity of each country, lessons highlighted in this chapter show that a sound mix of policies based on universally shared values, experience and the proper use of management systems and tools are crucial for every country emerging from conflict.

INTRODUCTION

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) as a term encompasses the range of

technologies that are used for gathering, storing, retrieving, processing, analyzing, and transmitting information that are essential to prosper in a globalized economy.

The immense growth seen in the field of information and knowledge has led to a new rationale

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for the function of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) in diverse societies. These technologies are now recognized as tools not only for training, but also for progressive social change, the strengthening of human intellectual capacity and defining modern lifestyles. Over the last two decades, a country's ability to create, select, adapt, use and profit from knowledge has become increasingly important to sustain its economic growth and improve living standards. ICTs can provide individuals with the skills and knowledge they need to cope with the global changes and with the challenges arising in various areas of daily life, combined with opportunities of lifelong learning.

The challenges that countries in crises and post-conflict situations face are complex, multifaceted and vary due to the variety of different historical root causes of conflict and the different political, social and geographical contexts. Strategies to address these challenges and effectively support a country on the path of recovery, development and durable peace are therefore diverse. What works in one country does not necessarily work in another country. However, there are some universally shared values, principles and key elements that have been found to be *sine qua non* for sustainable peace which comprises of focused and committed leadership, security, solid government structures providing basic services, building people's trust and legitimacy, information dissemination, sound civic dialogue, mediation and community participation (UN DESA Discussion Paper – GPAB/REGOPA Cluster - Governance Strategy for Post Conflict Reconstruction, Sustainable Peace and Development, page 3, 2007).

Quantifying the impact of ICT is very difficult, though there is little doubt that ICTs act as catalysts for social and economic development. Evidence remains largely anecdotal, and the link between ICT deployment and reconstruction and development remains to be quantitatively verified.

Experiences from recent post-conflict developments in the Balkans, Afghanistan, and Iraq

have repeatedly demonstrated that ICT activities supporting stabilization, reconstruction, and development operations in an affected nation can be problematic. These activities suffer from a lack of adequate understanding of the post-conflict nation's information culture and the ICT business culture. There is a lack of clear mapping of responding stakeholder organizations' roles and responsibilities. Program development, project coordination, information sharing, and ICT implementation are largely uncoordinated and non-standard activities. No agreed-upon architecture or plan is in place for the post-conflict nation's ICT reconstruction (Wentz et al, 2008)

Post-conflict states do not prioritize ICT as a reconstruction and development priority equal to infrastructural projects like roads, power, and water. Or even as an enabler of cross-sectoral reconstruction and development. As a consequence, there is no framework to make investment decisions and track ICT-related reconstruction and development progress by the senior leadership. The situation on the ground also complicates the challenges of failed-state interventions in all regards, including ICT. Civil and military responders usually encounter spoilers interfering with the intervening forces; buildings requiring reconstruction; roads, power, water, telecommunications, healthcare, and education systems disrupted or dysfunctional; absence of a functioning government as well as laws, regulations, and enforcement mechanisms; refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) requiring humanitarian assistance; widespread unemployment and poverty; and a shortage of leaders, managers, administrators, and technical personnel with 21st century information and ICT management, operations, and technical skills.

If we observe real world experiences, we see that ICT can be (and is being) used to generate social, economic, cultural, and political changes. But, as noted earlier, it is difficult to quantify the impact of ICT initiatives and separate the influence of ICT from that of other factors, such as civil security stability, governance, or economic growth.

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