

Chapter 22

Experiences of the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) in the Promotion of E–Governance in Latin America

Nestor Zapata

Main Advisor of the PROA/GTZ Project, EL Salvador

Christof Kuechemann

Resident Director of the GTZ, El Salvador

ABSTRACT

The GTZ has developed numerous projects in the good governance sector and in some of those projects; it has incorporated actions promoting the use of ICT, as a manner of strengthening transparency levels, citizen participation and public management efficiency.

In this document, we will describe three experiences currently under development and that had their origin with the accompaniment of GTZ projects. Two of the cases occur in El Salvador, Central America, and one in Chile.

The realities of these countries are very diverse, because of the level of access of their populations to Internet. Chile shows a growth in its access to Internet that goes from 18.4% in 2000 to 48% in 2008 (PUC, 2009), while in El Salvador it barely reaches 16% in 2009 (MINEC, 2009).

Although the three cases that we describe have not been evaluated in their impact, they turn out to be valuable, specially because they show that countries with scarce resources can likewise face this type of initiatives successfully, providing a signal of commitment with a more efficient and specially more transparent government.

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INTRODUCTION

“Governance refers to the exercising of political, economic and administrative authority in the management of a country’s affairs, including the expression on the part of citizens of their interests and the exercising of their legal rights and obligations. Electronic governance can be understood as the capacity of this governance through electronic means, of providing a dissemination process of efficient, fast and transparent information for the public and other agencies, and to develop efficient administrative activities on the part of the government” (UNESCO, 2004).

Based on this concept, the efforts for the promotion of good governance in developing countries must include the offer of assistance for the construction of new management styles, new forms of discussion and making decisions about policies or investments. Innovative forms of citizen participation must also be promoted, as well as for the delivery of information and for the provision of services.

Electronic governance refers to the use of ICTs by the public sector with the objective of improving the supply of information and services. In this manner, it is sought to encourage the participation of citizens in the decision-making process, thus promoting a more responsible, transparent and efficient government.

The Digital Strategy 2007–2012 of the Chilean government promotes the widespread implementation of access to Internet and the reduction of the so-called “technology gap” (MINEC, 2007). With this objective, the South American nation expects to generate the conditions for the digital services offered by the state to be accessible for most of the population. This case shows that the promotion of e-governance must not be reduced to the incorporation of digital procedures, because if the majority of the population does not have Internet access, this type of efforts can increase the inequalities existing in society.

The access to Internet of the population is, then, an essential condition for e-governance measures to produce positive effects. Therefore, the cases of institutions that generate portals, mechanisms for the exchange of information or even digitize their procedures cannot be successful if they are not part of a policy for the reduction of the digital gap. However, these actions can be a good start to encourage that policy of a more comprehensive nature.

In the case of El Salvador, such a policy for the promotion of Internet access is still under construction; however, there are already numerous efforts of the public sector to make the information about their processes more accessible to the public.

In this context, one of the priority areas of work of the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) has been the sector of State and Democracy, in which numerous projects towards the modernization of State, decentralization, democratic participation, transparency and probity have been conducted.

Here, like in other sectors, GTZ focuses on capacity building, thus helping to generate favorable and stable conditions for a more efficient exercise of the democratic system, to directly benefit the citizen’s quality of life. This approach translates into a development and/or adaptation of instruments, tools and effective procedures that are feasible and sustainable in order to achieve a more efficient management of the State’s affairs, but also includes the building of a management culture for public affairs based on values like sustainability, equity, transparency, participation and accountability.

The three experiences that we will describe below are related to the topic of territorial planning, urban development and housing. They try to respond to the problematic associated with a disordered use of the territory, inequity in the territorial distribution of employment, housing, services and life conditions in general that have equally promoted such serious effects in all Latin America as the abandonment of zones with agricultural potential, deterioration of the environ-

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