

Chapter 21

Developments of e-Government in Sri Lanka: Opportunities and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

This chapter investigates the status of e-Government development, explores the opportunities created for citizens and government, and identifies the challenges for an effective implementation of e-Government in Sri Lanka. The study reveals that the dissemination of public information online, the provision of call centre services, and the establishment of tele-centres in rural areas have generally improved the well-being of citizens. It further shows that the development of information and communication technology infrastructure and the taking of the human resource capacity building initiative in public organizations have had a positive impact on the performance of public organizations. The study, however, reveals that the continuous development of e-Government in Sri Lanka is troubled by the uneven access of rural citizens to e-Government services, the low e-Readiness of citizens, the delay in implementing major e-Government projects, and the insufficient funding for successfully implementing all the e-Government initiatives.

INTRODUCTION

Electronic government (e-Government) is commonly referred to as the delivery of government information and services through the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) (Akman, et al., 2005; Horan & Abhichandani, 2006). It can be approached from different perspectives including e-Citizens and e-Services, e-Administration, and e-Society. E-Citizens and e-Services focus on developing the relationship between government and citizens by improving public service delivery, encouraging the participation of citizens in government, and informing citizens about governmental activities (Heeks, 2002; Ndou, 2004). E-Administration aims to improve public processes by cutting costs, linking processes and public organizations, empowering public employees, and improving transparency and accountability in government (Heeks, 2002). E-Society tries to develop the relationship between government, businesses, and societies (Heeks, 2002) through improving the interaction between government and business and building the social and economic capacity of a civil society (Heeks, 2002).

Significant benefits are promised from the rapid development of e-Government worldwide. Such benefits include providing quality public services to citizens, improving organizational effectiveness, increasing transparency and accountability in government (UNDESA, 2008), improving the quality of life, reducing the communication and information cost, bridging the digital divide, and encouraging the participation of citizens in government (Jaeger & Thompson, 2003; Akman, et al., 2005). As a result, e-Government is widely considered as the new way for governments to improve their performance in developing countries (Dada, 2006).

There is no exception in the development of e-Government in Sri Lanka (Hanna, 2007; Karunasena & Deng, 2010a). In 2002, the government of Sri Lanka officially launched the e-Sri

Lanka initiative with the assistance of World Bank (ICTA, 2005; Hanna, 2007; Hanna, 2008). Under the umbrella of the e-Sri Lanka initiative, the re-engineering government program is proposed for reforming the public sector to provide citizens with transparent, effective, efficient public services and to improve the quality of the life of citizens (ICTA, 2010a). Numerous e-Government projects were initiated—leading to the rapid development of e-Government in Sri Lanka. A recent study reveals that Sri Lanka is the first runner-up in the South Asian region in e-Government development (UNDESA, 2008). The Network Readiness Index (NRI) shows that Sri Lanka is at the 72nd position worldwide concerning e-Government development in 2009/2010, which is 14 positions up from 2006 (Mia & Dutta, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010). There is, however, a lack of studies assessing the status and the future of the e-Government development in Sri Lanka.

To fill this gap, this chapter aims to assess the progress made concerning development of e-Government in Sri Lanka. It investigates the opportunities generated for both citizens and government and identifies the challenges that Sri Lanka comes across as a developing country in its pursuit of implementing various e-Government projects. It is assumed that this study will eventually serve as a lesson on the various aspects of e-Government being investigated to other countries, especially those in the developing world context.

RESEARCH METHOD

The objective of this study is to evaluate the progress of e-Government development in Sri Lanka, to explore the opportunities generated through e-Government, and to identify the challenges that Sri Lanka faces in the implementation of e-Government projects. To fulfill these objectives, several research questions have been formulated as follows:

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