

Chapter 57

E-Government in Less Developed Countries

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, e-Government has been the favourable theme for numerous studies and reports. Yet, there is a lack of systematic evidence regarding the key challenges for the e-Government implementation in less developed countries. Consequently, This chapter is devoted to a comprehensive review of literature relevant to shed light on the e-Government in less developed countries, its importance, and finally the effect of the e-Government on the government activities. It also discusses some applications which have been tried by a number of less developed countries and the results they have achieved.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, different governments have seized the opportunities provided by information and communication technology as the ideal way to rethink and reformulate their administrative works. This restructuring concentrates not only on the internal aspects involved, but also on those related to the interaction between government and other organizations, social groups and citizens.

Governments all around the world are using new technologies to provide people with more convenient access to information and services without their having to waste time standing in a

line. Never before have so much timely and accurate data and information been so readily available for people from so many sources. Customers can serve the World Wide Web and/or exchange e-mail message with other Internet user from their homes or offices. Digital economy, digital society and e-government are combined together to form what is called the digital world. Everybody is playing catch-up with this e-society and jumping into it before he is left behind. This issue facing people in general and Kuwaiti people in particular, is not the shortage of information anymore, but how to retrieve, trust and use the retrieved information. In general, Kuwaiti people may be quickly

divided into two segments, those who have the knowledge and skills to use Internet and those who do ill-equipped. All of them are trying to be ready for the digital society, knowing it will be imposed on them.

E-GOVERNMENT IN LESS DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

Undoubtedly, ICT offers increased opportunities for economic development and plays a crucial role in rapid economic change, productive capacity improvements and international competitiveness enhancement for developing countries. ICT is an important tool to address some of the key barriers and challenges for entering the global economy and for future growth potential. It can transform old challenges and create unprecedented possibilities for sustainable economic development, just as it has done for businesses in the industrial world. Moreover, ICTs offer the potential not just to collect, store, process and diffuse enormous quantities of information at minimal cost, but also to network, interact and communicate across the world (Crede & Mansell, 1998).

Undoubtedly, ICT represents a big problem for developing countries – the problem of deepen the digital divide and to further marginalize them with the networking revolution. Without sufficient use of the ICT for competing and entering the global network, countries will suffer pivotal disadvantages in form of information poverty that could further widen the gap in economic status and competitiveness. Information and communication technologies, undoubtedly, have, and will, continue to wield radical influences on most aspects of public and private intercourse, including government and governance.

Recognizing the power of ICTs, many developing countries, assisted by international organizations for development, have started building and encouraging e-strategies and initiatives to address a wide range of economic, social, tech-

nological, infrastructural, legal and educational issues. Consequently, e-Government initiatives have flourished in many developing countries such as Singapore, Brazil, India, Chile, UAE, Egypt, Kuwait etc., reaping the advantages and opportunities of ICT and the knowledge economy for collaboration, networking, better services, efficiency and effectiveness. However, many other initiatives have failed. Heeks, for example, found that more than one-third of initiatives are total failures (e.g. the failure of decision support systems in East Africa); further, half can be considered to be partial failures (e.g. the partial failure of management information systems in Eastern Europe); and roughly one seventh are successes (Heeks, 2003).

A pioneer e-Government study carried out by the American Society for Public Administration (UNPA & ASPA, 2001) aimed to categorize the progress made by developed and developing countries in developing an online presence on a five stages scale: Emerging stage; Enhanced stage; Interactive stage; Transactional stage and Seamless stage. The results of this study revealed that nearly all 32 countries at the Emerging Presence level were among the world's least developed nations, characterized by static and insufficient information that is infrequently updated, few interactive features, and non-existent online services. There were, however, several cases of developing countries that were at the Enhanced Presence stage and Interactive Presence stage, demonstrating their predisposition for e-Government success. The Transactional stage and in particular the Seamless stage were seen as very distant points for both developed and developing countries, with a few exceptions (Singapore, UK, etc.) (UNPA & ASPA, 2001). The prevalence of stages 1 and 2 among developing countries can be explained by the fact that the adaptive challenges of e-Government go far beyond technology: they call for organizational structures and skills, new leadership forms, and the transformation of public-private relationships (Allen et al., 2001).

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