

Chapter 16

Development of E-Governance in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

Evolution of e-Governance concept in Sri Lanka can be traced back to 1983 because the Government of Sri Lanka for the first time recognized its obligation for ICT development by creating the National Computer Policy of 1983. The Information and Communication Technology Act No. 27 of 2003 came into existence in 2003 and the Information and Communication Technology Agency of Sri Lanka was established. In 2004, “e-Sri Lanka Development Project” was initiated. It included information infrastructure building, improvement of human resources in ICT, citizen-specific service delivery, creating a modern government using ICT for social and economic development, and endorsing Sri Lanka as a destination for ICT. The e-Sri Lanka initiative expects to use ICT to develop the economy of Sri Lanka by reducing poverty and thus improving the quality of life of its citizens. Presently, the government makes an effort in realizing this vision through six programme strategy schemes. This is explored in this chapter.

INTRODUCTION

The definition of e-Governance is influenced by various factors and dimensions. The word “electronic” in the term e-Governance indicates that the governance is driven by electronic technology. Therefore, e-Governance is government services among three areas, i.e. government to citizen, business and other governments utilizing information technology, communications and various individual systems. It may also incorporate

internal aspects of government processes such as back office functions and internal interactions (Saugata and Masud, 2007). Although there are no boundaries in e-Governance, it can be stated that it can enable efficient, convenient and transparent services for a country and its citizens. Therefore the major beneficiaries of e-Governance are primarily citizens, businesses other interest groups and the government itself (Garson, 2006).

In a plight towards outreach to all citizens in society, many governments are exploring more

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novel and responsive methods of interacting with and providing services to citizens. This new facet of service delivery termed as e-Governance is now reaching the more underdeveloped areas of the world with expansions in 3G and HSPA AND HASPA+ technologies that enable faster communication via the internet. In the most recent past, government websites used to only represent informative services but now they are migrating into an era where their purpose is to formulate relationships and actively engage with citizens, and other public and private organisations, establishing a culture of empowerment through engagement. Government institutions are slowly becoming more trustworthy and friendly to the people they serve taking away the previous perceptions of heightened bureaucracy. Utilising the capacity of the World Wide Web, governments are using websites to become more approachable and transparent to the communities (Bhatnagar 2003). The uptake of such endeavours by governments and the use of ICT can be regarded as their insight to the potential of ICT in communication and development.

On a global scale most governments began e-governance in the mid 1990s as method to rectify issues of administrative segments of the government itself and to use technology intensively to change the modes of operation in the system (Hague and Loader 1999) for higher accountability through transparency (Bhatnagar 2003). Most developing countries have a large digital divide which exists in the educated who can afford access to technology and information and the poor uneducated who do not (Basu, 2004)

Evolution of the E-Governance in Sri Lanka

In 2009, the Government of Sri Lanka introduced the following vision for the maxim use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for the development of the government sector:

To enable a more efficient and effective government and enhance government service access to create a more citizen centric government by adopting ICT (ICTA, 2009: 1)

However, the evolution of e-Governance concept in Sri Lanka extends its history to 1983 because the Government of Sri Lanka first acknowledged the necessity for ICT development by way of the National Computer Policy (COMPOL) of 1983. In this regard, the Natural Resources, Energy and Science Authority of Sri Lanka (NA-RESA) firstly took the initiative of formulating the National Computer Policy. Subsequently, the recognition of the COMPOL by the government paved the way to the founding of the Computer and Information Technology Council of Sri Lanka (CINTEC), which was named later as the Council for Information Technology - by a Parliamentary Act No. 10 of 1984, to function directly under the then President.

The most effective impact on the development of the e-Governance came with the establishment of the Information and Communication Technology Agency of Sri Lanka (ICTA) in July 2003 with the Information and Communication Technology Act No. 27 of 2003, (ICT Act). The CTA was recognized as the legal successor to CINTEC and regarded as the apex ICT institution which is currently performing under the Presidential Secretariat. The above mentioned Act empowered the ICTA to develop and deploy approaches and programmes in both Government and private sectors. This has steered programmes and policies on ICT, which are currently exemplified in the “e-Sri Lanka Development Project” which can be regarded as an important milestone of the development of e-governance in Sri Lanka. This project which was initiated during the period 2002-2005, intended to take the dividends of ICT to all sections of Sri Lankan society and thereby improve the socio economic development. This effort created a conducive environment where

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