

Ecuador's Experience in E-Governance

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Santiago Reyes Mena

Informatic and Law Degree at Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain

INTRODUCTION

Countries in Latin America, nongovernmental organisms, private corporations, and international organisms are working on a preliminary phase to develop information communication technology (ICT) as well as national strategies to convert current weaknesses into opportunities for an information society (IS).

There are numerous initiatives which have promoted the introduction of IS and demonstrated significant progress and development in several countries. Latin American governments have begun elaborating a regional action plan, based upon the action plan resulting from the first World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), in Geneva during 2003. They have also participated on the second phase of the WSIS. Currently, these governments are defining an integrated strategy for Latin America, taking inventory of the different activities carried out and monitoring progress. Latin American governments are working to form a unified agreement which allows for social progress and sustained development in the Latin American and Caribbean regions.

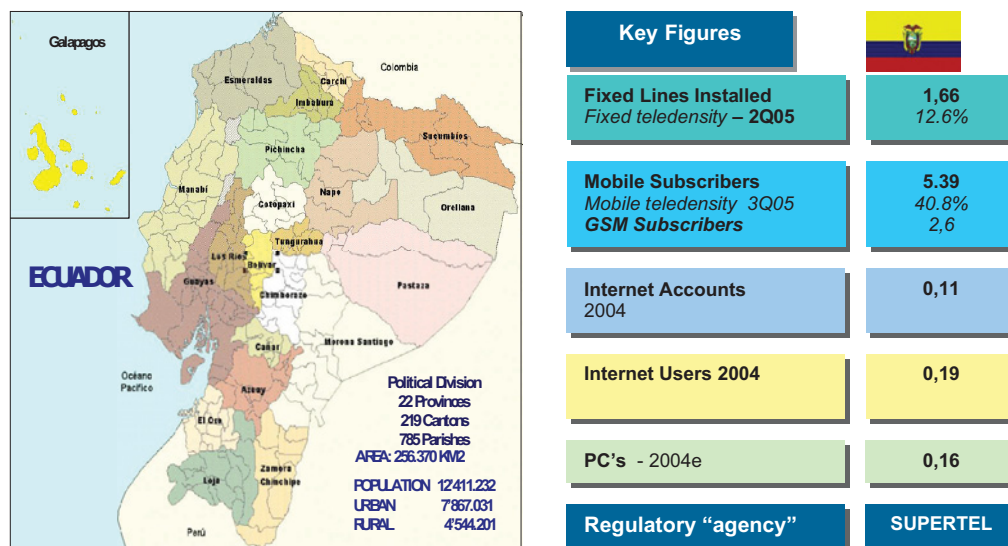
BACKGROUND: ECUADOR'S GOVERNANCE PROBLEMS

Ecuador has several different levels of government; the central government, sectional governments, and local governments. The central government is characterized by only minimal national planning, a huge social debt, and a large foreign debt. The sectional governments, which are pushing for decentralization and modernization, have a strong commitment to support local governments, due to their practical viewpoint. Democracy only returned to Ecuador in 1978, and has not yet completely consolidated. Thus, democracy is quite fragile in Ecuador.

There are several governance issues which are currently quite evident in Ecuador:

1. **Social:** There is significant social and economic inequality characterized by a high poverty rate, migration, illiteracy, lack of national identity, and limited access to health care and education. Another problem is the issue of Colombians displaced by guerrillas.

Figure 1.



2. **Political:** Presently, there is a governance crisis, characterized by a lack of political leadership, lack of political coordination, corruption on public management, mistrust in political groups, and a mistrust of government in general.
3. **Economic:** There is mismanagement of public funds and a crisis in the banking sector.

APPROACHES TO E-GOVERNANCE STRATEGY IN ECUADOR

The strategies of e-government in Ecuador must be implemented at each of the different levels of government.

The central government has a national plan designed for IS. A project presented to the Presidency of the Republic of Ecuador, called Government Unity of ICT (<http://www.presidencia.gov.ec>), proposes policies related to basic standards for transmission, management of digital documents, use of the Internet, digital equipment, and government regulations. In addition, recommendations are being made to government authorities for the elaboration of a national plan and policies related to ICT. The National Telecommunications Board—CONATEL (<http://www.conatel.gov.ec>)—has designed a proposal called the National Board of Connectivity, as an inter-institutional entity in charge of establishing and developing the National Agenda of Connectivity (<http://www.conectividad.gov.ec>) with central and sectional government. The Agenda has created programs such as e-government, governmental connectivity, governmental services online, Web pages for governmental institutions, information on government projects, Internet for everybody, e-education, e-health, and e-commerce.

The Presidency of the Republic has designed the governance and financial management systems to implement the project. The system of management for governance—SIGOB (<http://www.sigob.gov.ec>)—gives information support. The integrated system of financial management—SIGEF (<http://www.sigef.gov.ec>)—includes government accounting and thus, makes the nation's general budget accessible and transparent for every citizen.

Many government institutions have created their own Web sites, offering institutional information and consulting help such as the Central Bank of Ecuador (<http://www.bce.fin.ec>). Some institutions have incorporated systems to attend information requests such as the Superintendence of Corporations (<http://www.supercias.gov.ec>) and the Ecuadorian Social Security Institute (<http://www.iess.gov.ec>). There are also government organizations which carry out training and equipping programs and in departments such as the

Ministry of International Trade, Industry, and Fishing (<http://www.micip.gov.ec>), the Ministry of Education and Culture (<http://www.mec.gov.ec>), and the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (<http://www.tse.gov.ec>). The Supreme Electoral Tribunal Web site allows inquiry about the assigned voting place and electronic voting. The Internal Revenue Services Web site (<http://www.sri.gov.ec>) includes a security information system, tax return, and tax payment on the Internet, and will soon allow for the managing of electronic invoices. CONTRATANET (<http://www.contratanet.gov.ec>) contains public contract processes, and is an Internet information system, which is transparent, reliable, accessible, and innovative.

The National Congress (<http://www.congreso.gov.ec>) has designed a project called Legislative Information System (SIIL). Its objective is to provide legal data on laws presented and resolutions taken. SIIL allows searches for citizenship participation, publishing of legislative acts, Web searches to access legislative information, the establishment of the e-vote, and document digitalization.

The judicial branch of government also has a number of ICT projects (<http://www.justiciaecuador.gov.ec>). One project will set up the configuration of electronic formats of judicial decisions. Another project provides current information on the state of pending lawsuits available to the public and electronic notification.

Sectional Autonomous Government: Provinces and Municipalities, which depend financially on central government, are beginning to develop their own e-government strategies. Provincial Boards have their own informative Web sites. In particular, the Provincial Board of Pichincha (<http://www.pichincha.gov.ec>) is developing a program that will broaden ICT access for the poor and provide basic education to the rural population in that Province. This program is called “edufuturo” (<http://www.edufuturo.com>).

The Provincial Board of Guayas (<http://www.guayas.gov.ec>) community program called “telecentros”, and the Provincial Boards Association of Ecuador—CONCOPE (<http://www.concope.gov.ec>)—have designed an interactive platform to provide information flow between the different Provincial Boards of Ecuador.

Cities such as Quito (<http://www.quito.gov.ec>) and Guayaquil (<http://www.guayaquil.gov.ec>) have resources to implement the project and are developing electronic payment platforms, while at the same time fostering direct citizen participation at their Web sites. The Municipality Association of Ecuador—AME (<http://www.ame.gov.ec>)—has a project which integrates every municipality through a national information ICT Web site. Many municipalities in Ecuador participate on the Andean Web of cities which have connectivity

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