

Toward U-Government in Japan

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INTRODUCTION

Japan is set to move forward to developing a broadband and ubiquitous network society as envisioned under the concept of an advanced information society. And the successful implementation of e-government in Japan will serve as the foundation to achieving this goal. How does e-government affect the government itself, the business sector and the citizens? According to a 2005 user survey by the Institute of E-Government, the two main benefits of e-government are improved accessibility to information and transaction, and greater accountability from the government.

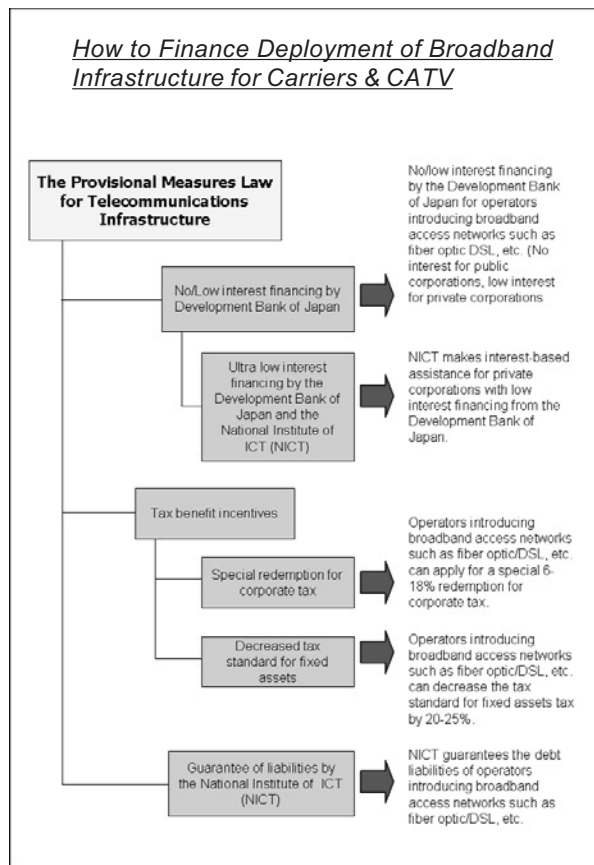
To administer e-government in the country, the role of public sector and computerizations in various government agencies were taken into consideration. However, if computerization is limited to central government, this is of limited benefit to citizens. Thus, for communication between citizens and government, there is a need to go mainly through local government, not the central government directly. There is also a need to refer to e-municipality or e-local government, considering it of equal importance to e-government.

It is also important to take into account issues against some aspects of an information society, but being overly anxious about them causes obstacles to promoting e-government. These issues include information security problems, lack of unified management of agencies and the risk of socio-economic digital divide. As such, one of the problems that every country has to face in promoting e-government is the legal system, embedded in every democratic government. Computerization and informatization of the government is, in one respect, an effective administrative and fiscal reform, but requires legal mandates. Thus, reforms in the legal system, including regulation system, are inevitably called for.

BACKGROUND

Needless to say, Japan is unique in its history, culture, demographic profile, state of IT development and govern-

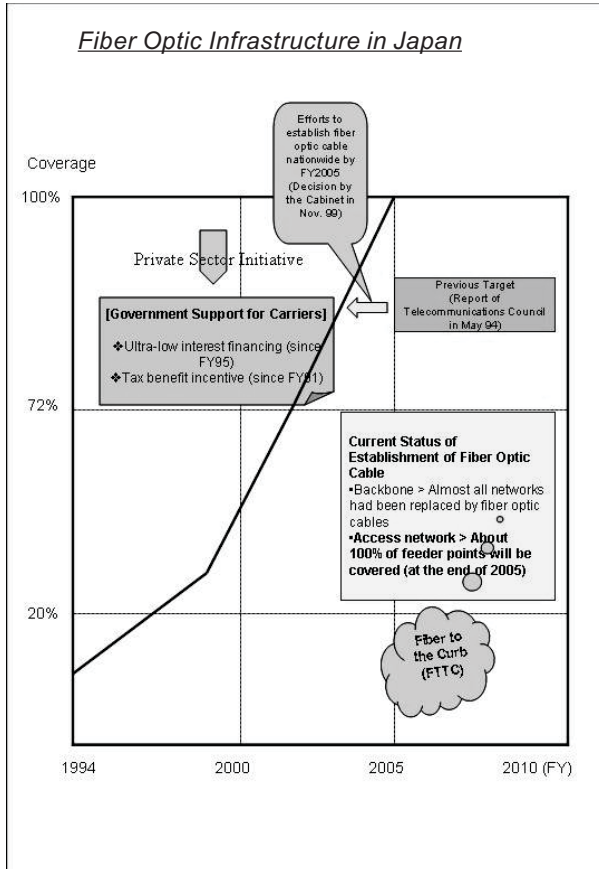
Figure 1. How to finance deployment of broadband infrastructure for carriers and CATV. Japan encourages the private sector by providing various incentives such as no/low-interest financing by the Development Bank of Japan, tax benefits and guarantee of liability by the National Institute of ICT (NICT).



ment structural problems, though the experiences of major developed countries are worth looking into. These include the development in member nations of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and International Telecommunication Union (ITU), wherein the author has an

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Figure 2. Fiber optic infrastructure in Japan. Carriers have been receiving support from the government, such as ultra-low interest financing (1995) and tax benefit incentives. Thus, as of 2005, almost 100% of feeder points have been covered by fiber-optic cables.



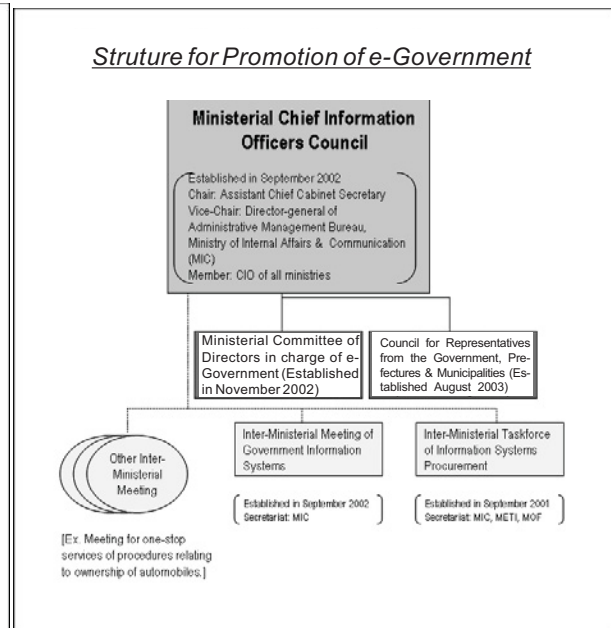
active involvement in the human resource development (HRD) sector for e-government.

To better understand the whole picture of a broadband/ubiquitous network society, it is necessary to recognize first the significance and issues of e-government, analyze the experiences and problems faced by other countries, and come up with new solutions toward the direction of e-democracy. That is, e-government is a vital key towards the success of an advanced information society.

FORMULATION OF STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN FOR E-GOVERNMENT

The government formulated the *ICT Basic Law*, the country's basic policy framework for information technol-

Figure 3. Structure for promotion of e-government. The Ministerial Chief Information Officers Council, established in 2002, is the highest decision-making body. The structure was created to effectively implement the e-Japan Strategy.



ogy (IT) strategies in November 2000. In compliance with this law, the *e-Japan Strategy* was announced in January 2001 to solve the digital divide, among many other issues. To effectively implement the strategy, the *IT Strategy Council* (see Figure 3) was established as the highest decision-making body. The council adopted goals to make Japan the world's most advanced IT nation within 5 years:

- to build an ultra high-speed Internet network and provide constant Internet access at the earliest date possible
- to establish rules on e-commerce
- to implement e-government
- to nurture high-quality human resources for the new era.

Under the e-Japan Strategy, priority policy areas were identified. Likewise, concrete goals were outlined, and agencies and institutions responsible for each policy initiatives were designated. These areas include:

- Establishment of ultra high-speed network infrastructure and drafting of competition policies.

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