Chapter 1
Community Practices to Improve E-Governance at the Grass Roots

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Wide use of information technologies has lead governments across the globe to adopt the new nature of governance system for their citizens, businesses and within the government structure. Governance systems nowadays do not only enclave simply the dissemination of government regulations and directives to their stakeholders, but also target to improve their knowledge and capacity. At the threshold, by putting the information technologies as a thrust sector for many years and with well adopted e-governance framework, several countries have achieved remarkable success. However, many of them despite diversified efforts could not put into the track mainstreaming electronic format of the governance system. This research feel that to improve the governance system, inclusion of grass roots participants are necessary and nurturing of community practices targeting to raise their knowledge and skills through an adoptive e-governance framework would enhance the process. As a case study, it put forwards a case from UNDP, including hints on similar other cases.

BACKGROUND

This chapter, as a case study would like to put forward a pioneering programme of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) that acted as catalytic factor in many developing countries initiating from 1992. Many of projects under this programme, namely the sustainable development networking programme (SDNP) lead the country´s information technology sector and eventually act as a positive contributor towards improvement of the government infrastructure. However, the theme of the chapter has been focused to a broader lens of community development approach that has been termed as community practice, which this chapter would like to showcase as an effective way to improve the grass roots e-governance.

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In doing so, the chapter has tried to define different facets of the title focusing utilization of information and communication technologies (ICTs) at the initial part of this section. Subsequently, it tries to involve different accepted methods of community practices that are being applied to improve the e-government structure at the outer peripheries of the government structure. To support the argument, it will put forward a framework for e-governance augmenting community practices leading to local level governance improvement. Furthermore, it will try to designate products, processes or services that surround the concurrent development actors or may direct the agencies and parties involved in this process. Finally, it will illustrate the case of SDNP Bangladesh (SDNBD) that existed during 1998-2006 as a project and later on transformed into a not-for-profit entity since January 2007. However, as an enhancer of argument or justification or simple exemplification, the chapter will enlighten its readers with similar projects and programmes that existed earlier in various formats or currently running in other countries enhancing the governance systems.

According to Shaffer & Anundsen (1993:10), a community is a dynamic entity that emerges when a group of people participate in common practices, depend on each other, identify themselves as part of something larger than the sum of their individual relationships, and commit themselves for a long term relationship to improve their well-being. This relates to another pertinent term that requires commitment from the community participant to be part of the development process of a nation, which is community development. Spergel (1987) referred to community development as a premeditated intervention into the social network among people and organizations to facilitate social problem solving and improve patterns of service delivery. This definition was updated by Harrison (1995:556) as the process of working with communities to help them recognize how they can improve community life and welfare both in the present and in the future. NASW (2006a; b; c) and Petter, Byrnes & Choi (2002) further emphasizes both the achievement of specific goals and the development of less tangible qualitative aspects of social life in a community, such as the improvement of their leadership capabilities, especially the ability to take adequate decision by their own.

Author would like to redefine the term, in association with the Wiki, as a community building one should consider approaches to be applied through community practices and basic academic disciplines should incorporate knowledge and ideas (through interactive interactions) of civic leaders, civil societies, community participants, professionals and researchers to improve various aspects of local communities. Community development seeks to empower individuals and groups of people by providing with necessary skills to prompt necessary changes in their own communities[1]. These skills could range from enhancement of civic knowledge, understanding of basic laws and governance system, validation of national identity (national consensus or voting), and knowledge on establishing small entrepreneurship to tax proclamation, land registration, vehicle registration or obtaining driving license, requesting national identity cards or certificate, birth or death certificate, loan acquisition, and so on.

In recent years, governments, and non-government agencies including development partners and research institutions are actively involved in promoting e-governance through utilization of information and communication technologies and using the diversified applications of ICTs in enhancing the livelihood activities at community level. However, in spite of placing ICT as high priority in many countries, much of the efforts to raise the magnitude of governance at the community level remain unattended. During the evolution of Internet in early nineties of the last century, many developing and under-developed countries were in high enthusiasm to include ICT in their national manifestos, and advocate about introducing ICTs in every aspect of the social process. A recent research[2] reveals that almost 840billions