Chapter 66
E–Government Issues in Developing Countries:
An Analysis from a Digital Divide, E–Skills, and Civil Conflict Theory Approach

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ABSTRACT

Electronic government, or e-Government, is the practice of providing public services to citizens, businesses, and other government agencies where government services can be accessed through the Internet, mobile phone, fax, mail, telephone, and personal visits (MGAHA, 2005). Developing countries, utilizing the late comer advantage, are mimicking trends of paperless governments with the expectations to reap the same benefits enjoyed by developed countries. However, e-Government initiatives have not always been successful in developing countries. According to the study conducted by Heeks (2003), the rate of e-Government success in developing countries was only 15 percent. The authors believe that such failures are mainly due to certain unique social, economic, technological, and environmental challenges faced by e-Government in developing countries. For example, some major issues include digital divide, political instability, and skills-related issues. However, the research dealing with these problems is limited. Therefore, in this chapter, the authors discuss these challenges.

INTRODUCTION

E-Government development and implementation initiatives face a number of external and internal challenges that can impact on the structure, operation, and culture of public administration (Snellen, 2000). These challenges span from technological, economic, and organizational issues to social, political, cultural, and even legal issues (Carter & May, 2001; Chen, Chen, Huang, & Ching, 2006; R. B. Heeks, 2003; Ndou, 2004). Chen et al. (2006) described the challenges faced by developing countries (DCs) as: economic--low economic growth and productivity; technical--no technical staff or outsourcing ability; infrastructural--no national informational infrastructure, low Internet access for citizens and employees; and illiteracy: insufficient knowledge and skills of citizens and employees to use the Internet. Developing countries also face ethical issues in which they must strike a balance between e-Government investment and the basic needs of citizens; multicultural and multilingual issues along with matters of poverty, obtaining the trust of the citizens, lack of backbone infrastructure, and unequal access (Mukabeta Maumbe, Owei, & Alexander, 2008) must be addressed prior to e-Government implementation. According to a U.S. General Accounting Office report (2001) the challenges faced by e-Government can be categorized as (1) sustaining committed executive leadership, (2) building effective e-Government business cases, (3) maintaining a citizen focus, (4) protecting personal privacy, (5) implementing appropriate security controls, (6) maintaining electronic records, (7) maintaining a robust technical infrastructure, (8) addressing IT human capital concerns, and (9) ensuring uniform service to the public. Similarly, Jaeger and Thompson (2003) pointed out that educating citizens about the value of e-Government, providing consistent and reliable electricity, telecommunications, and Internet access, and addressing issues of language and communication are crucial for e-Government (Jaeger & Thompson, 2003).

In addition, there are certain unique challenges faced by e-Government that have not been explored adequately, such as *civil conflict, violence, e-skills,* and *digital divide*, particularly in developing countries." Understanding the complex nature of these societal issues is crucial for delivering e-Government services (G.F. Khan, J. Moon, J.J. Rho, & H. Zo, 2010; Khan, Moon, Swar, Zo, & Rho, forthcoming). Thus in this chapter, we will address the following questions:

What is the current status of e-Government research from the perspective of developing countries?

How can societal challenges such as digital divide, civil conflict, and violence affect e-Government adoption, particularly in developing countries?

What kinds of skills are needed by consumers (i.e. citizens, public, and private sector employees) to effectively consume the e-Government services provided to them?

The questions raised above are based on the conceptual framework shown in Figure 1. As shown in the Figure 1, section 2 serves as a base for analyzing E-Government literature pertaining to developing countries (DCs). The findings discussed in this section are mainly derived from our previous research; where we analyzed 145 articles from 7 core EG journals to investigate E-Government literature pertaining to developing countries (Khan, Moon, Park, Swar, & Rho, 2011). Some critical issues identified in section 2 are further explored in sections 3 and 4, respectively.

In section 3, we the discussion is limited to certain crucial societal challenges faced by e-Government that have been widely ignored and undermined by researchers as well as practitioners. Particularly, we will be discussing civil conflict,

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