

Chapter 17

Rhetoric vs. Realities in Implementation of E-Government Master Plan in Nepal

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ABSTRACT

This study discusses different facets of implementation of e-government in Nepal. With the background theoretical information about e-government in general, the Nepalese case of e-government initiatives is discussed with a specific focus on the “e-government Master Plan.” Important pillars of any e-government initiatives, namely infrastructure, human resources, institutions, and policy and legal aspects are looked into from the perspective of feasibility of e-government implementation in Nepal. While doing so, Heeks’s e-government success/failure model has been taken into consideration accounting for different dimensions, namely information, technology, process, objectives and values, staffing and skills, management systems and structures, and other resources, which are responsible to create design reality gap thereby jeopardizing the success of e-government projects. This study is the first in the Nepalese perspective, which tries to analyze the constraints in e-government implementation resulted from shortcomings in infrastructure, human resources, institutions, and policy and legal aspects. The authors believe that failure of e-GMP to achieve targeted objectives by the end of 2011 can also be attributed to these factors. The insights inferred can be useful in facilitating a smoother implementation of the master plan related to e-government.

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INTRODUCTION

It is widely accepted that governments in the developing countries in general and the least developed countries in particular are costing too much and delivering too little. There is also a common belief that those governments are not responsive or accountable to the people to the extent they are supposed to be. The use of ICT, in this context, for the purpose of transforming conventional government to e-government has largely been accepted as one of the remedies of these problems. E-government not only simplifies and improves processes of governance, but also networks itself with citizens and business communities. It is, therefore, acknowledged as a powerful tool to ensure effective and affordable service delivery to its different stakeholders, namely, government organizations, business people and common citizens.

There is a tendency of pursuing e-government in narrow sense, i.e., providing limited services to the people online, especially in developing and the least developed countries. Making service online, therefore, is one of the prerequisites today for good governance, but it can't be a luxury any more. While integrating ICT in development process, some developing countries have achieved significant progress. Such progress has remained in the form of rapid economic development, improved administrative efficiency and greater opportunities for participation by the citizens in the affairs of government. E-Government these days is accepted as one of the fundamental rights of the citizen. e-Government needs to be understood, therefore, as much more substantial transformation than only e-Service delivery. It incorporates public sector, as well as the private institutions, people and processes. It is obviously not only about technology; it is about reinventing the way in which governments interact with citizens, governmental agencies, businesses, employees, and other stakeholders. It is about enhancing democratic processes and also about

using new ideas to make lives easier for the citizen by transforming government processes, enabling economic development, and renewing the role of government itself in society (Lofsted, 2005).

Nepal, one of the least developed countries in the world, is also trying to have e-government in place, but without having concerted efforts. Specifically, for the last decade or so Nepal has been making effort in the development of ICT sector thereby promoting e-government through different plans, policies and programmatic interventions. Those efforts have remained shallow not bringing any encouraging result either because of institutional rigidity and inefficiency or because of not having concerted serious efforts towards this end. The implementation of e-Government Master Plan (e-GMP) (2007-2011) of Nepal was a hope to materialize the dream of e-government into reality. However, the deadline for its implementation (2011) is already over without achieving anything substantial. Against this backdrop, the purpose of this paper is to provide a foundation for future research in the field of e-government in Nepal. This paper is an attempt to analyze different hindering factors related to four important pillars of e-government, namely infrastructure, human resources, institutional aspects and policy and legal dimensions. In doing so, we have discussed different factors responsible to create design reality gap as proposed by Heeks (2004) in his e-Government success/failure model, namely information, technology, processes, objectives and values, staffing and skills, management systems and structures and other resources. E-Government Master Plan (e-GMP) of Nepal is presented as a case study in this regard to show that different factors mentioned above create a design reality gap thereby causing dismally low progress in the implementation of e-government in general and e-GMP in particular. Different research papers, which have been written previously on e-government in Nepal have not dealt with these factors from the perspective of implementation of e-GMP.

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