

Development in Brief



No. 19, 30 October 2013

E-Governance Helps Overcome Development Bottlenecks

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The eagerly awaited report by the High Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the composition of the post-2015 development agenda was cause for celebration for champions of good governance: an independent governance target has been proposed for the first time – “*Ensure Good Governance and Effective Institutions*”. While insufficient governance has long been recognized as a development bottleneck, the topic has gained increased importance with the formulation of an independent target, and will accordingly move into the focus of development cooperation. The wake-up call is coming at exactly the right time.

Opportunity for new forms of good governance

Today, three quarters of the world's population use a mobile phone, according to the World Bank. The spread of broadband technology is also forging ahead. The increasing availability of information and communication technology (ICT) in developing and emerging economies opens new avenues for the improvement of good governance. Good Governance moves towards electronic governance, or E-Governance for short, with a broad range of applications.

E-Governance makes it possible to markedly improve the efficiency and performance of public administration, which most noticeably offers development opportunities for low income countries. Additional revenues from tax administration and significant cost savings in the provision of public services can lead to improvements and extensions of government services offered to citizens (particularly for the poor) and the business community in the long term. Automatic data comparison with other databases using a so called “data warehouse” will provide new opportunities to detect corruption and tax evasion.

Ghana's integrated customs clearing portal has facilitated not just a significant shortening of turnaround times but has also contributed to an unexpected increase in customs revenue of around 50% during the first year of introduction.

Decentralisation as well as the introduction of electronic social insurance and land registry systems as well as credit agencies or public registries offer further significant potential. India is currently conducting the world's largest biometric identification programme; 400 million citizens already possess a personal, universally accepted ID which makes it easier for them to exercise their civil rights and facilitates easier access to public and private services.

Additionally, automation provides the potential for increased transparency in public administration, accountability and control of corruption (E-Accountability). Brazil publishes the earnings of public employees as well as the finances of the public administration on its own transparency portals.

From a citizen's perspective, E-Governance can provide a wider coverage of people's needs and increase satisfaction of the population with public services. Furthermore, the participation opportunities for citizens are improved through the integration of civil society into the governmental decision-making process. Citizen participation in planning, progress review and assessment of public services and infrastructure measures are made possible through ICT and social media (public accessibility and participation). Such “crowd-sourcing”, the internet-based outsourcing of services and functions to the citizens themselves, can improve the provision of services especially in countries with weak governmental structures.

In Egypt, citizen initiatives are already using this method to fight corruption, control traffic and match volunteers with projects requiring personnel.

Implementation risks

Despite the huge potential of E-Governance, there are a range of implementation risks to consider. A prerequisite for the success of E-Governance projects is clear ownership by the partner government and high-level political support (leadership). However there are also significant differences in the availability and use of online capabilities (the “digital divide”), which can stand in the way of widespread use of the system and may increase the risk of underrepresentation of the poor. Additionally; questions on IT security, data protection, freedom of opinion and democratic control in relation to the creation and use of electronic systems must be addressed. The same systems that facilitate public participation and information could also be misused to manipulate public opinion.

E-Governance and post-2015 targets

Should the governance target mentioned in the introduction of this article be incorporated into a post-2015 agenda, it could considerably boost the use of E-Governance measures. The proposed indicators such as universal access to a legally valid identity document (Indicator 10a) and to independent media (Indicator 10b), the protection of public participation in political processes (10c) as well as the public right to access official information and data (10d) and effective corruption controls (10e) can be achieved much more efficiently and extensively, as well as at a lower cost, through the integration of electronic processes.

Potential for development cooperation

The systematic and democratically controlled use of electronic governance systems offers significant opportunities to low-income countries to increase the provision of government services. In addition, it can facilitate improved and equitable access to essential public services and thus benefit especially poor citizens.

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