An E-Government Approach for Bridging the Participation Gap in Achieving Participatory Good Governance

Waheduzzaman, College of Business, Victoria University, Footscray Park Campus, VIC, Australia

Shah Jahan Miah, College of Business, Victoria University, Footscray Park Campus, C, Australia

ABSTRACT

Electronic Government (e-Government) has been considered as an essential strategy for many governments in their efforts to ensure qualities of participatory good governance. Various e-Government applications have been recognised as effective methods of enhancing governance qualities, such as accountability, transparency, collaboration and trust. However, previous studies that focused on participatory good governance are so far limited, especially in bringing an e-Government solution strategy using a bottom-up approach. Using a qualitative case study, this paper identifies a participation gap in achieving participatory good governance and aims to address this gap through an e-Government approach in rural sector of a developing country. The outcomes of the study demonstrate that e-Government strategy can play a significant role to address the participation-gap in implementing qualities of good governance.

Keywords: Applications, Citizen’s Participation, E-Government, Good Governance, Governance Qualities, Rural Sectors of a Developing Country

1. INTRODUCTION

Citizens’ participation has been recognised as a critical element in achieving qualities of good governance across the nations (Johnson, 2001; Cornwall, 2004; Lange, 2008; Aulich, 2009). Participatory governing system is thus characterised as a bottom-up approach which enables citizens to play required roles in government processes (Servaes & Liu, 2007). Collaborative decisions in such government systems provide more appropriate outcomes and the highest use of public services, which enhances economic growth (Shah & Shah, 2006), sustainable local development (Parker & Serrano, 2000) and alleviating poverty (World Bank, 2006), especially in the developing country context. Like other developing countries, the Government

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of Bangladesh takes several initiatives through transformations in the governing systems, particularly in the local government systems to ensure citizens’ participation (As-Saber, Hossain, & Srivastava, 2007; Sarker, 2006; Siddiqui, 2005). Recently, Information Communication Technology (ICT) has been added to these initiatives to enhance active citizens’ participation.

Over the past few years many developing countries around the world have initiated various ICT enabled transformational activities in governments. The use of ICT enhances direct participation of local people and makes the public service delivery system more transparent and accessible to local people, which consequently help to make pro-people decisions (Best and Krueger, 2005). However, researchers argue that all actors, responsible for ensuring citizens’ participation, are required to have a clear idea of ICT applications adaptation (Kanat & Ozkan, 2009) and about their roles in achieving new governance (Hope, 2009; Jones, Hackney, & Irani, 2007). In fact, different interdependent actors such as government officials, elected officials, private sector groups and citizens, who are responsible for ensuring effectiveness of collaboration, need to forgo the conventional top-down approach of engaging citizens (Calahan, 2007; Holzer & Kloby, 2005; Sobol, 2008). A pro-people mindset and willingness to engage local citizens in government processes are essential in order to make successful participatory process. A bottom-up approach, that is, citizen-oriented governing system thus seems paramount to achieve greater adaptation of e-Government.

The e-Government application in the dimension of G2C (government to citizen) can be defined as a prime approach to implement citizen-oriented governing systems. In our context we position our research area by recognising the influence of formal political process of enhancing citizen’s electronic participation. Saebo, Rose and Flak (2008) describe electronic participation as an ultimate process that is associated with some form of political deliberation or decision making, and it is also suggested that citizen’s participation can take place within the formal political process: for instance voting. In our study we highlight the formal government process of public service delivery in Bangladesh, without making any change in the process, but promise to enhance the entire service delivery viewpoint through the use of electronic means.

Considering the aforementioned context, a question appears that how could direct citizens’ participation be ensured effectively for good governance especially in the context of public service delivery in Bangladesh. This study explores the question through identifying theoretical issues and then addresses the issues through empirical investigations that will offer a G2C e-Government strategy. Six aid-assisted projects in local governments in Bangladesh as case studies are explored to examine how local citizens do participate in public service delivery. Based on the case study findings, this study introduces a pilot system that represents a collaborative process of the interacting roles to elevate citizen’s participation.

This article is organised as follows. The next section presents a background of the issues of people participation in our target context. The section after that includes data collection details. The fourth section describes analytical findings on our empirical case study. The fifth section presents the proposed e-Government strategy followed by an overall discussion and conclusion.

2. STUDY BACKGROUND

2.1. Citizens’ Participation

In developing countries, the slogan of ‘direct citizen’s participation’ has been ushered into public service delivery and development programs since the end of the 1990s by the international aid agencies (Azmat, Alam, & Coghill, 2009; Khwaja, 2004). Local government institutions and local citizens have been urged to work together to ensure maximum use of local funds and achieve pro-people development. To this end, Gaventa (2004) argues that
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