Chapter 1

E-Government Initiatives in Kurdistan Region of Iraq: A Citizen-Centric Approach

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ABSTRACT

In the past decade, most countries have embraced new technologies in an effort to improve the way they offer public services to citizens. Some do so in order to improve the channels through which they communicate and interact with their citizens, while others do so to improve the efficiency of delivery of services; and as a result, introduce savings in the utilization of resources that could also be used in creating new value adding initiatives. This chapter looks at the opportunities provided by e-government initiatives, and also discusses the importance of citizens’ involvement in e-government system development, with particular emphasis on Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). Here, the authors investigate how citizen’s participation affects the success or failure of e-government systems. They attempt to identify factors that could impact the use of such systems and look at ways to encourage stakeholders’ engagement in the development process as a means to improve the services provision. In the end, the chapter also looks at the potential for initiating a program to deliver enhanced government services and social inclusion that embraces electronic communication media within regional governments in developing countries such as KRI.

INTRODUCTION

In the last decade and half, many developing countries have been trying to improve their government services delivery through the adoption and use of Information Communication Technologies (ICT). However, most tend to copy the models used by Western countries, with an aim to introduce e-government services. In adopting these models, the governments expect savings through improved efficiency and a drive for modernization across the country or State. Research has shown that, there
are two areas of focus in terms of e-government advocates and their expectations, in developing countries (Shareef, et al. 2010b; Al Hujran, and Chatfield, 2008). Those on the supply side have concentrated on achieving cost savings, while also improving the effectiveness and efficiency in service provision. This group is faced with many challenges such as, the institutions / Agency’s complexity, lack of capacity building, ICT infrastructure, financial and budget resources (Norris 2005; Clark 2003). Meanwhile, those on the demand side or the public inclusion paradigm; have raised the question of accessibility and its vital role in inclusivity, to ensure that, the resulting digitized services are worthwhile. This is the group that is also affected by different barriers such as, the digital divide amongst societies and nations, insufficient expectation in terms of services and information finding, lack of social justice, system acceptance, lack of transparency and, lack of trust in government (Farrington, 2005; Rohleder and Jupp 2004; Swartz 2004; Shetty 2003).

In recent years, digital inclusion has attracted broad interest by government institutions and civic society organizations. In order to engage citizens in e-government, there must be transparency and trustworthiness in the services and systems provided. In this context, the issues of access and use of Internet have grown into vital objectives for public and educational policies of many developing countries. Government officials have recognized that promoting the use of Internet also involves the dissemination within and application to government services. However, there are various factors that affect the use of e-government services such as, accessibility, trustworthiness, security, the digital divide, public awareness, mainstreaming, level of education, public acceptance, legal framework, political, culture, attitudes, and privacy issues. This chapter discusses the Kurdistan regional government initiative, and exploring the role of new technologies in rebuilding services and providing efficiency in a country that survived turbulent social, political and economical challenges during various wars in Iraq. The relationship between government institutions and the public is investigated through analysis of the factors that lead to the failure of high profile e-government projects in developing countries. Also, we will look at the effect that a sound strategic plan for citizen participation in e-government systems development can have.

**SOCIETY INCLUSION AND E-GOVERNMENT**

E-government has provided a great drive to move forward with delivery of more efficient and superior quality services, effective financial resource, and enhanced relationship between stakeholders and government (Fang, 2002). The advancement of the Internet as a service channel made many people to believe that the Internet would replace all other service channels such as telephone, letter writing (conventional mail system), face-to-face communication, etc., or render them obsolete. However, all these other channels still exist and the use of Internet in many cases has not led to obstacles in the usage of other service channels; in fact, it has been complementary (Shareef, et al. 2010a; Pieterson and Dijk, 2002). Galal-Edeen et al. (2008) explained the use of multi-channels for service provision, and argues about a gap between a government’s preferred channel of communication and the channels that the citizens prefer. They also discuss the criteria for evaluation of multi-channel delivery from the citizen’s perspective in improving the citizen’s participation in government. The evaluation is based on use of different types of channels which the users prefer and is influenced by their circumstances.

Governmental organisations are increasingly being challenged to provide more citizen-oriented services; and the citizens can be served through multi-channels such as face to face, Web-based, telephone call centers, and others (Shareef, et al. 2010a; Janssen and Wagenaar 2002). In order to