

# Communication technologies

Technology



Administration and management are fundamental to achieving future effective public service delivery. For example the OECD report indicates that e-government is not only about business but significantly about transformation of the structures, operations and processes of government to meet the e-government imperative. This will have a fundamental impact on how services are delivered, how policies are developed and how public administrations operate (OECD Report 2003: 17).

Undoubtedly, ICTs have a huge impact on government and its administrative processes. It changes governmental ways of interacting with its citizens. It helps to find new ways for citizens to participate and 'gives rise to more transparent and accountable government processes' (Gasco, 2003: 7). Moreover, Fountain argues that it has affected government initiatives in terms of organizational change because technologies and innovations impact on the bureaucracy, thus reshaping coordination, control and processes within the public sector.

Although, a solid core of hierarchy will continue to exist in information-based organizations, Fountain adds that '[T]he control apparatus that required multiple layers in the chain of command has been greatly simplified, however, with gains in accountability, through information technology' (Fountain, 2002: 131). Riley gives an example of a Green Paper released in November 1996 was followed in 1999 by the 'Modernizing Government Initiative', the implementation strategy not only 'for the integration of IT in government and for the delivery of services but for the actual modernization of government itself' (Riley, 2001: 10).

Modernization of Government is a key step towards the development of communication methods with citizens. It is also about joined-up and integrated government with modern techniques and a long-term programme to create better functioning citizens-oriented government (Riley, 2001). Indeed Modernization of Government is a very important step as improvement of internal operations and interactions, the advantages of advanced technologies, easing work loads and reducing human errors, enables increased efficiency of public service delivery.

All these changes are leading to more citizen-oriented government with improved services and an increase in the degree of satisfaction amongst the citizens. In 2000 the US government implemented an e-survey asked information officers in the 50 states and 38 major federal agencies about the effectiveness and efficiency of e-government. The results were quite encouraging: Eighty-six percent agreed that e-government improved service delivery; eighty three percent talked about government becoming more efficient; sixty three percent suggested that it helped to reduce the costs (GAO, 2001).

ICTs also affect all state actors, including the legislative system. Furthermore it changes the relationship with international actors in an era of globalization and the emergence of an electronic environment. Thus Brown suggests that in this kind of environment governments have an access to each other as well as to their respective citizens. This may include transnational public institutions and private Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) (Brown, 2005).

As for observing changes and improvements West suggests that it is appropriate to look to short-term changes that give hints about long-term changes, thus providing policy-makers with information on how they are getting closer to achieving particular goals and outcomes. West's research assesses changes within the past three years and concludes that government has partially failed to use all the potential of ICTs for substantial transformation in service delivery.

However, West considers ICTs have the prospect of becoming a tool to enhance democratic responsiveness (West, 2004). It is most likely that the impact of ICTs on the public service delivery will continue to be positive improving the quality of public services whilst enhancing democracy and transparency. Mechling argues that the bureaucratic barriers already mentioned will, step by step, become flatter and more customer oriented. He suggests that: Services will become integrated and customized, with rich self-service options.

Fees rather than taxes will be used more extensively to raise revenues and coordinate production and consumption (Mechling, 2002: 155). In sum the ICTs may be used as a facilitator of the improvement process of public service delivery. In order to execute successfully and manage this transition all possible barriers should be taken into consideration for further planned development and perspectives. The next section will focus on the barriers and difficulties to overcome.