



UNDESA

I. e-Government Readiness Assessment Survey

Introduction and Methodology

What is e-Government and Why is it Important

E-government, the application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) within public administration to optimise its internal and external functions, provides government, the citizen and business with a set of tools that can potentially transform the way in which interactions take place, services are delivered, knowledge is utilized, policy is developed and implemented, citizens participate in governance, and public administration reform and good governance goals are met.

The strategic and well conceived use of ICTs in government can result in a more inclusive, effective, efficient, transparent, accountable and “people centered” public administration. Moreover, they can serve as a vehicle for meeting the Millennium Development Goals across sectors such as governance, economic development, health, education, the environment and many others. Indeed, the Millennium Declaration provides an overarching framework within which e-government development can be pursued. Ultimately, though, e-government should be measured against the benchmark of value creation. Does e-government create public value and is it meaningful?

Types of e-government applications that seek to add value to government operations and relations with the public include:

- *Access to Publicly Owned Information and Knowledge* (e.g. studies, research and other public documents and records, contents of public libraries and archives)
- *Access to Information about Government Activities and their Impact* (e.g. government budget and programmes, evaluations, etc)
- *Supply of Deliberative Resources* (e.g. on-line citizen development programmes and tools, user-friendly, timely provision of politically significant information)
- *Enhanced and Streamlined e-Government Services* (e.g. registration, licensing, ownership titles, ID-cards, e-registries)
- *Transactions with Government* (e.g. e-taxation, payment of dues, fees and fines, e-procurement)
- *Connectivity with the Government for Dialogue, Participation and Decision-Making* (e.g. citizens’ networks empowered to voice opinion and come up with proposals in the

contexts of attentive and responsive government mechanisms, e-polling, online town halls)

- *Networked Government* (e.g. government and public able to interact in a more seamless fashion, more multidisciplinary policy development and implementation, integrated government services)

However, while the benefits of e-government are in theory numerous, global experience to date indicates that they remain much more elusive in reality. Indeed, the failure rate of e-government projects has been estimated somewhere between 60-80%. This very telling statistic points to the need for more sound approaches to e-government development that take advantage of lessons learned globally, but very much reflect local realities and priorities. To these ends, a number of factors - objectives, infrastructure, legislation and regulatory environment, organizational and back-office reengineering, human resources, among others - should be considered and together form an approach to e-government development that is at once as comprehensive as possible but also organic, sustainable and most important, meaningful.

For additional resources on e-Government, please see the UNDESA website at < <http://www.unpan.org/dpepa-kmb.asp>>.

Why we Measure e-Government Readiness

Wherever possible, it is recommended that programmes for more comprehensive and sustainable e-government development begins with a vision, strategy and action plan. In other cases, e-government may develop on a more ad hoc basis. Regardless of the process, an important tool to initiate e-government programmes and applications in a sound manner is the e-government readiness assessment.

An e-government readiness assessment is meant to serve as an advisory tool and aims at:

- Raising awareness as to the bottom line motivations and capacities that have to be in place in order to assure a reasonable basis for success in the e-government development process;
- usefully describing the environment in which e-government development will occur and confirming the viability of application of e-government approaches;
- pinpointing the "weak links" in this environment - for remedial action and, in this way, enhancing the chances for eventual success of e-government development;
- in extreme cases, advising against application of e-government approaches in a given public administration, as its given level or in a given organizational part of it;
- informing broad or sectoral e-government strategy and action plan development;
- providing a monitoring and evaluation tool.

Yet, there are limits to e-government readiness assessments. They generally have a brief shelf life in a rapidly changing environment and thus, it is recommended that they are undertaken when countries are prepared to follow an assessment with immediate or near term action. In this context, e-government readiness assessments should also be undertaken on a regular basis. Capacity at the national level should be built towards these ends.

What we are Measuring

The UNDESA Survey is based on lessons learned from e-government development in the world, as well as other efforts to measure e-government readiness.¹ This approach of this survey focuses on three underlying concerns: the motivation and objectives in public sector reform and in pursuing e-Government, from both the government and public points of view; the enabling environment for both the government and the public to utilize e-Government; sustainability, or factors that should be present in order to ensure that e-government initiatives, which are not intended to be short term catalytic exercises, are able to continue, develop further and eventually lead to a networked government.

In this way, the survey seeks to emphasize the importance of ensuring that e-government development is more closely aligned with development and good governance goals and citizen needs, and that in addition to building the basic enabling environment, governments think about e-government development over the long term and ensure its viability.

Guided by these three underlying concerns, the survey also seeks to provide a more functional approach in measuring a country's or agency's ability to develop and implement e-government including: the physical infrastructure to be put in place; the human capacities which must be extended and fulfilled; the institutional requirements and services which over time must be delivered; the legal and regulatory aspects which are essential to the broadest utilization of e-government; and the organizational and cultural change which must be introduced.

In summary therefore, the criteria we have used for assessment of the state of e-government readiness in a country includes the following basic components:

1. Compelling Reasons for the Government to Develop and Implement e-Government
2. Compelling Reasons for the Public to Utilize e-Government
3. Ability of the Government to Initiate and Sustain e-Government
4. Ability of the Public to Begin and Continue to Utilize e-Government

¹ e-Government readiness surveys have been undertaken by the EU, UNESCO, Comnet-IT, ECLAC, and by nations on an individual basis (e.g. Jordan). This survey draws to some extent and builds on these surveys.

The survey is not measuring overall e-readiness, or the broader ICT environment in which e-government is introduced (other than collecting basic development and ICT indicators). Therefore, the e-government readiness assessment does not seek to reproduce, but is intended to complement these efforts. As such, some general factors (e.g. telecommunication liberalization) that are important to e-government, as they are to all e-applications, are not dealt with in this survey.

How we are Measuring e-Government Readiness

The UNDESA e-government readiness assessment methodology is structured around 3 surveys:

1. *Central Government Survey*: information of a general nature from a central ministry/ department e-government focal point.
2. *Agency/Department Survey*: specific information from ministries identified as those presently or most likely to go on-line, or those that would benefit most from going on-line.
3. *Civil Society/Private Sector Survey*: information from citizens, academia, SMEs, and other civil society or professional organizations pertaining to citizens, civil society and SME's awareness, use, needs and expectations with regard to the implementation of e-government.

In addition, there is an annex of basic development and ICT indicators that can be collected as desk research and used as background information. It is recommended that background information and hard data is collected in parallel with the conducting of the surveys.

While full assessment would be best informed by involving all three levels, i.e. central, departmental and civil society, the extent of the assessment is left to government discretion. Therefore, the above approach is structured as a menu from which governments can select the types of assessment they wish to pursue.

Methodological Notes

Conducting the Surveys

The UNDESA e-Government Readiness Assessment is addressed to the national level, more specifically a government's central unit or focal point responsible for e-government development, or in their absence, a relevant focal point from the office of the prime minister or a relevant ministry (e.g. dealing with ICT or Public Administration). The focal point may then administer the assessment and collect the necessary information from relevant departments

and ministries and civil society organizations. Alternatively, an “external” assessor may send surveys directly to government agencies and civil society organizations.

For the purpose of probing qualitative issues and other specific aspects of e-government more deeply and to assess intangible cultural and political dynamics, it is recommended that the surveys are followed, where possible, by interviews with policy makers, public officials responsible for e-government development and civil society beneficiaries.

Results Analysis

A number of methodologies may be employed in analyzing the results of the survey including check and balance between hard and soft data, cross-country comparison when surveys are conducted on a regional or sub-regional scale, cross-agency comparison, and consistency analysis through comparison of the central government, agency and civil society surveys. Analysis may also yield a snapshot of readiness at any given point in time, or if a range of hard and soft data is available or surveys are conducted periodically, analysis may show evidence of trends and effects of policy measures.

Finally, it is recommended that the results of the survey, background research and any interviews are presented in an analytical report that contains an overview of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, as well as recommendations on policy actions and possible next steps.