GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2012

THE INTERNET AND CORRUPTION
Transparency and accountability online

Global Information Society Watch

2012

APC   **H*i*vos**
people unlimited

Global Information Society Watch 2012

PAKISTAN

FAILURES OF GOVERNANCE...
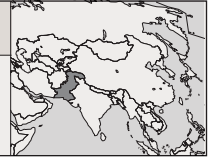
Bytes for All Pakistan
Shahzad Ahmad and Faheem Zafar
www.bytesforall.pk

Introduction

Political crises, corruption, extremism, the war on terror, hostility with neighbouring countries and an immature democracy witnessed by the repeated imposition of martial law are the major reasons why Pakistan is lagging behind in almost all socio-economic development indicators on the Human Development Index, including health, security, education, poverty, income and gender equality.[1]

Yet in many ways Pakistan offers an insightful study on e-governance and its implementation in a developing country – most importantly, given the rapid expansion of information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure in the country over the last decade. In 2000, there were 2.3 telephone subscribers per 100 inhabitants; the number increased to 11.9 per 100 inhabitants in 2005, and then to an impressive 72.1 per 100 in May 2012.[2] According to the latest statistics there are approximately 29 million internet users in Pakistan, with a 15.5% internet penetration rate in the country.[3] And as this report shows, corruption and mismanagement were key elements in the failure of setting up a successful e-government system.

Policy and political background

Governance is one of the major areas where Pakistani governments have struggled, largely due to the incompetency of lawmakers and massive corruption in the bureaucracy. Even the thought of interacting with a government department is a nightmare for an ordinary citizen in Pakistan.

Pakistan's performance in implementation of e-government development infrastructure is not satisfactory. According to the United Nations E-Government Survey 2012, Pakistan was ranked 131st in 2008 in the world e-government development index and fell even further to 146th in 2010 and 156th in 2012.[4]

At the same time, young people have found a new platform to interact, express their opinions and raise different concerns by using internet-based technologies. Approximately 65% of Pakistan's population is under the age of 25,[5] and as the internet becomes a popular medium for a large chunk of the Pakistani population, attempts by the government to control it are also intensifying. Censoring/filtering the internet is typically done by authorities using different, vague excuses such as "national security", "religion" and "morality".

E-Government Directorate of Pakistan: The story of a failure

Providing good governance was always one of the most visible shortcomings of successive governments in Pakistan. As the use of ICTs witnessed a boom over the last decade, the government tried to use it as a remedy for its governance worries. A specialised department called the Electronic Government Directorate (EGD)[6] was set up in 2002 under the supervision of the Ministry of Information Technology. The basic task of this department was to improve people-to-government interaction and make it convenient for citizens to contact, obtain information from, and provide feedback to the government.

Under the broad function of making people-to-government interaction more convenient by using technology, there were many steps which were proposed to give the EGD a direction and a proper vision to achieve its goals. Some of the important functions were:[7]

- Development of e-government projects

- Preparation and implementation of federal level e-government projects approved by the Ministry of Information Technology

- Introduction and supervision of the standards, blueprint and guidelines for e-governance

- Reduction in the cost of service to citizens by providing government information to the public through a government portal

1   hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/PAK.html

2   www.pta.gov.pk/index.php?Itemid=599

3   www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm#pk

4   unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/un-dpadm/unpano48590.pdf

5   www.pakboi.gov.pk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=128&Itemid=55

6   www.e-government.gov.pk

7   Arfeen, M. I. (2004) *Impact of E-Governance on the Economy of Pakistan - The Revolutionary Plan*. www.pide.org.pk/pdf/psde%20 19agm/irfanullah%20arfeen.pdf

- Making all the forms of the departments, agencies and ministries of the government available to access and to submit online

- Giving citizens easy access to information on jobs, tenders and official gazette notifications, amongst other things

- Ensuring the availability of complete, correct and up-to-date information about ministries, departments and officials, including their contact information and qualifications

- Making it possible for citizens to use ICTs for the payment of utility bills and taxes

- The development of transparency in government-public interactions

- Improving the productivity of government employees by automating the routine functions of the government

- Making the process of interacting with government officials more responsive and less time consuming for citizens

- Enhancing the skills of government employees through training to enable the quick adoption of IT (all government officials are to be made IT literate)

- The use of ICTs to link government ministries/divisions/departments

- Facilitating the conversion of all official communication to email.

These were the main proposed functions and guidelines for the EGD project. Mentioning these functions is important to see how well the EGD has managed to deliver on its promises.

To further enhance the performance of the EGD, the government developed a five-year e-government plan in 2005.[8] The plan targeted different areas of e-governance, including the development of basic infrastructure to link all government departments and ministries with the federal government's data centre, the development and implementation of standard software for internal communication, human resource, budget, and project management, document/file management, and for collaboration with the Ministry of Information Technology and other divisions. Other areas of work included developing agency-specific applications, e-services for citizens, developing an EGD framework and the creation of a productive and progressive environment to get the desired results.

The EGD's performance

After all these fancy promises, agendas and plans, the EGD's performance was never translated into something concrete on the ground in the shape of an e-governance infrastructure in Pakistan. Mismanagement, corruption and the lack of a sound footing and proper vision haunted the EGD from the very beginning.[9]

The management of the EGD compiled a list of 40 projects as a priority under the umbrella of introducing e-governance in government departments and ministries by digitalising the data and centralising the official databases, and creating a network between departments in order to get rid of the complex file culture. An amount of PKR 2.5 billion (USD 26 million) was allocated for these projects, but only PKR 1.14 billion (USD 11 million) was used in the following six years until June 2008.[10] What the EGD achieved was that it created the websites for all the government ministries and departments – but there was no effort from its side to keep them functional. Email addresses, phone numbers, names and titles of officials are mostly outdated or wrong.[11] The very purpose of e-government is to facilitate the citizens' convenient interaction with government officials and departments, but this purpose was largely ignored, and just developing a website for a government department was considered enough to serve the purpose of the EGD.

To understand more about what exactly triggered this failure of the EGD to deliver, let's take a look at the Special Audit Report on the EGD: the report says that the funds allocated to the EGD were used inefficiently. For example, under the Federal Government Data Centre and Internet Programme, PKR 223 million (USD 2.3 million) out of PKR 493 million (USD 5 million) were spent on laying down fibre optic cable and other hardware equipment. The audit report says: "Huge expenditure has been incurred on laying fibre optic cables and procurement of hardware, which was not being utilised effectively."[12] The report further says: "Several projects were initiated, which either could not be completed or the infrastructure deployed was under-utilised. Consequently, government offices

8   unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/apcity/unpano37732.pdf

9   Bukhari, I. (2011) Electronic governance project fails to deliver, *Pakistan Today*, 10 June. www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2011/06/10/news/national/electronic-governance-project-fails-to-deliver

10 Auditor-General of Pakistan (2011) *Special Audit Report on the Electronic Government Directorate (EGD)*.

11 Attaa, A. (2010) Why Government Websites are Big #Fail, *ProPakistani*, 30 April. propakistani.pk/2010/04/30/why-government-websites-are-big-fail

12 Bukhari, I. (2011) op. cit.

have not leveraged information and communication technology effectively."[13]

Leakages, lack of stakeholders' involvement and control failures made implementation of the project objectives difficult for the EGD. The Special Audit Report further says: "Stakeholders were not adequately involved in project implementation despite the fact that such involvement was critical to the awareness, ownership and sustainability of automation initiatives."[14]

Another instance of mismanagement and potentially even corruption concerned the project for the chief commissioner's office, where PKR 80.4 million (USD 840,000) was allocated for the project, but only PKR 63 million (USD 660,000) was spent by June 2008 – at which point only two out of the 33 envisaged modules had so far been developed.[15]

The report also revealed that an expenditure of PKR 2.91 million (USD 300,000) was incurred due to a delay in a contract. The EGD had given the contract to the second-lowest bidder after the first-ranked bidder declined to supply at the quoted price. The prolonged delay resulted in the expiration of the bid's validity, which caused a loss of PKR 2.91 million (the difference between the first and second lowest bidders).[16]

Other reasons for the failure of the EGD

The case of the EGD's failure is a perfect example of how a lack of proper planning and vision can destroy an initiative which is otherwise very manageable – and is a practical attempt to use the country's booming ICT infrastructure to improve the government's ability to serve people.

After gathering some information from sources within the EGD, other reasons for the EGD's failure were given:

• The EGD started off with the promise of completing a lot of tasks to improve the interaction between government and citizens. While what the EGD needed to do was clearly established in its plans, the important part of how to achieve these plans was either very weak or missing.

• Due to a weak implementation strategy for the EDG's projects and tasks, the department was unable to secure a sound footing in the project from the start.

• Political interference in the matters of the EGD played a big role in its failure. The new appointments as chairman to the EGD made it difficult to have a constant flow in the policies and implementation of the EGD's projects.[17]

• The improper utilisation of funds remained a big issue. The main problem was not getting the money, but properly using it for the right projects with proper planning.

• A lack of technical know-how at the managerial level was another weakness which resulted in the failure of many of the EGD's projects. There was less emphasis on training of employees and managers and more on making them do tasks they were not trained to do.

• Contract-based employment was another issue which worsened the situation at the EGD. Most of the employees were hired on contracts and not as full-time employees. This policy resulted in making employees concerned about their job security and had a negative effect on their performance.

• The whole system of e-governance is to facilitate the citizens, but citizens were never involved in any kind of decision making regarding what kind of facilitation they wanted and how ICTs could best be used to interact with government departments and ministries.

Conclusion

The EGD was established to take advantage of ICT infrastructure in Pakistan. The boom in telecommunication services and expanding internet infrastructure was an ideal platform for a specialised department like the EGD to perform. But the failure of the EGD to implement a proper e-governance system is an important indicator of the damage that corruption and mismanagement can inflict.

The EGD initiated many projects; it was successful in providing nearly all ministries and government departments with an online platform in the shape of websites and portals. What went wrong was that these websites and portals were unable to achieve what they were supposed to achieve. The EGD considered its duty finished after providing a website to each ministry and government department, and completely ignored the real work of keeping those websites up to date and functional. Today, in Pakistan, citizens are still awaiting a proper website where they can contact government officials or get information regarding any government ministry or department.

13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
16 Auditor-General of Pakistan (2011) op. cit.

17 Transparency International Pakistan (2010) Minister suspends EGD chief for "illegal recruitments, fraud", 6 June. www.transparency.org.pk/news/newsdetail.php?nid=556

The EGD's failure was the result of many wrong-doings, which mainly include:

- Improper utilisation of funds due to corruption and negligence
- The lack of a sound operational foundation
- Political interference, which resulted in a constant change of management at the EGD
- Contractual weaknesses
- The lack of well-defined strategies to accomplish goals
- The absence of end users having a say in the planning phase.

Action steps

A few recommendations for the EGD:

- Transparency is very important for any department. The EGD suffered because of a misuse of funds. This shows how critical it is to have a proper system of checks and balances when it comes to managing finances.
- It is important to provide a sound footing to a department to ensure its effectiveness. A properly defined vision for the EGD with a proper structure and policies is the first step to turn it into a successful organisation.
- Providing goals and telling a department what they are supposed to do is important, but it is much more important to define proper strategies which will govern the functionality of a department. The vision was there for the EGD, but there was no strategy to successfully implement the projects and ultimately achieve the proposed goals. It is important to take this issue of strategy seriously.

- Political interference at the EGD impacted negatively on the progress of the department. To ensure the success of a department it is important that leadership provides constant support without changing its policies every few months due to a change in management for political reasons. There must not be any kind of political interference in the matters of the EGD.
- It is essential to involve the end users in the process of decision making by seeking their support and suggestions regarding improving the system and giving them a sense of ownership.
- Proper training of managers and employees of the EGD is essential. Placing the right person in the right job is important. The EGD suffered because of the lack of technical know-how of its employees. It is highly recommended that the organisation provide all the relevant training to employees and management to run the department more effectively. ▪