

Promoting Citizen Participation in e-Government

< From the Korean Experience in e-Participation >

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E-Government has emerged as an important tool for government reforms. It is a global trend, with many countries actively pursuing e-government strategies. However, despite real-world advances in e-Government, citizen participation is lagging. This paper asserts that e-government will develop through a quality transformation from a convergence of service and efficiency that expands upon the foundation of citizen participation. Based on this logical hypothesis, imminent issues that need to be addressed by future e-governments are identified. To provide a meaningful backdrop for the discussions, Korea's e-Government progress is detailed. And in conclusion, policy measures that are essential in transforming theoretical possibilities of e-government into reality are proposed.

It is the author's hope that the results from the Korean experience will be of practical help to countries pursuing e-Government, while providing theoretical support on important issues concerning e-Governments of the world and in doing so, facilitate advances in e-Government towards the next level.

1. Introduction

We are living in a knowledge-based society where information and knowledge are the source of power. Some commonly used words or phrases to describe a knowledge-based society are a 'shortening of distance and time' and 'improved productivity and diversity,' with the common element being change. The present and the future presuppose change, without which the survival and the development of governments, businesses and citizens in general cannot be guaranteed. Change is no longer an option but a vital dynamic of the future.

Government innovation is the attempt to solve the problems it faces by undergoing an optimal change or transformation. To this effect, the government has the responsibility to make sure changes in organizations and functions are smooth and natural. At present, the nations of the world are expending considerable efforts into realizing e-government with the intent of improving government management systems and providing high quality services to the customers i.e. the people. Much of the research on the subject illustrates the definitive role e-government plays in government innovations.

Since the introduction of the concept of e-government, it has developed and progressed in a diverse manner, keeping pace with the various situations arising from the social, economical, technical and environment of the times. The concept of e-government, beginning with an emphasis on improving efficiency and progressing towards a more customer-centric effort, is now being recast to include the transition towards a participatory government that seeks to realize e-democracy.

¹UNPAN's 2003 report, however, found that "many decision-makers and researchers still concentrate one-sidedly on the provision of electronic services and regard participation as an unnecessary complexity cost factor". Accordingly, Trechel² found that "e-access is by far the most dominant e-technique being pursued while e-consultation and e-forums are noticeably lagging"(Alexander, 2003). These findings all point to a situation where despite incredible advances in e-government concepts actual citizen participation is lower than expected.

The purpose of this paper is neither to discuss e-government or government innovation nor attempt to present new theories on these matters. On the basis of theoretical and experiential assumptions that e-government progresses towards e-democracy, rather this paper intends to: a) investigate the gap that exists between expectations and reality in citizen participation; and, b) identify issues that require attention in overcoming the gap. Recognized for its success this area, case studies of Korea are analyzed and used as a basis to propose methods to expand citizen participation in e-government.

¹ UNPAN: *How to Evaluate E-Government? Different Methodologies and Methods* (Marcin Sakowiz)

² *Evaluation of the use of new technologies in order to facilitate democracy in Europe* (Alexander H. Trechel, 2003)

2. Government Innovation and e-Government

1) Government Innovation and Change

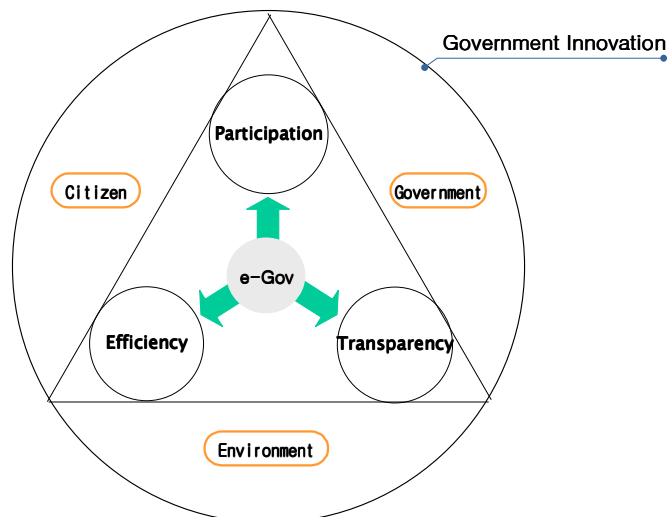
The backdrop to which a country will carry out government innovations derive from the potentially perilous position that a country finds itself in, at a particular time or situation.

In 2001, the U.S Bush administration announced 'The President's Management Agenda', in which 5 government-wide initiatives were outlined. These initiatives include strategic management of human capital, competitive sourcing, improved financial performance, expanded electronic government and budget and performance integration. In 1999, recognizing the need for a government for the people, United Kingdom put forth 3 aims and 5 key commitments for modernizing the government as part of an effort to innovate the government. Similarly, Korea is also fully aware that the changing times and the people are demanding decentralization, autonomy and digitalization. To meet these demands, Korea is implementing government innovations by building a people-oriented government management structure.

Subsequently, government innovation can be defined as the effort by a government to find an optimal solution to problems it faces by undergoing a change within itself. Although various political, social and economical environmental factors affect government innovation, looking from an administrative point of view, transparency, efficiency and participation are the three axes that support government innovations.

2) Government Innovation through e-Government

ICT is a value-neutral tool that is characterized by a 2-way flow of information along with improvements in cost and speed of information delivery. As such, ICT in and of itself does not play a significant role. However, when coupled with other elements such as customers and services, ICT transforms itself into a living organic enabler that is capable of inducing meaningful changes in digitalization and e-government. E-government built upon these premises not only allows for information sharing and communications, but also improves accessibility of public administration related information to citizens and companies, improves efficiency and transparency of government operations and induces organizational changes. Accordingly, ICT is closely associated with government innovation.



< E-Government as a tool for government innovation >

It is no wonder then that countries of the world are utilizing e-government as a strategic tool for innovations in government and in services to the people. In the United States, the Clinton administration strived to “reinvent government through information technology”. And in a similar approach the Bush administration is focusing on 5 government-wide initiatives, which provide for e-government implementation. United Kingdom is also implementing an e-government strategy with the aim of providing full on-line government services by the year 2005. Likewise, Korea is working to build a world’s best open e-government that will bring innovations in government operations while providing high quality services.

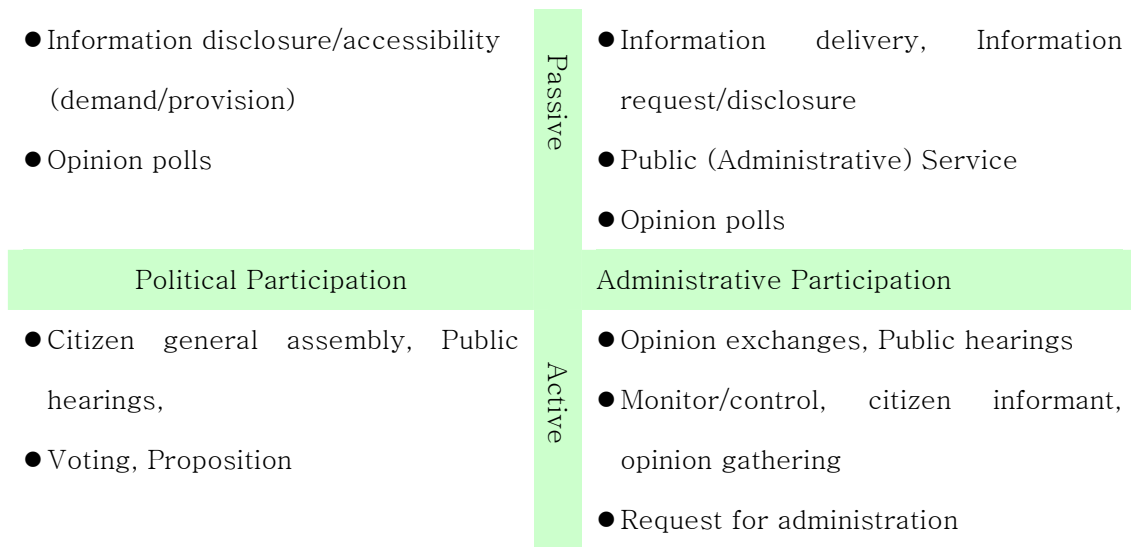
3. Participatory e-Government

1) Citizen participation

Citizen participation has long been a subject of active discussions in the field of political and administrative sciences. It is often defined as a citizen action that influences or seeks to influence policy decisions (*Nagel, 1987*) or as an action that incorporates the demands and values of citizens into public administration services (*Zimmerman, 1986*).

Citizen participation can be classified into 2 categories; political participation such as voting in elections or getting involved in political proceeding and administrative participation such as demanding for or keeping a close watch on administrative operations. This paper limits its discussions to administrative participation and defines citizen participation as a citizen activity that seeks to receive administrative service benefits through administrative participation or from e-government. Particularly, the term e-participation will be used to refer to citizen participation regarding e-government in general.

This definition of citizen participation can be further divided into 2 categories according to the will of the people wishing to influence policy decisions; passive participation which includes simple one-way information delivery or request for information and active participation which includes formation of a consensus on specific issues, monitoring administrative activities and administrative requests.



< Citizen Participation Activity >

If the theory that the degree of citizen participation is determined by the cost and benefit of participation (*Richardson, 1983*) is applied, then in the period preceding widespread digitalization, citizen participation was necessarily low and relatively limited in nature. Participation cost refers to the cost of gathering information needed for participation such as participation subject, method and procedures, cost in seizing the opportunity, and cost of operations from actual participation. Benefit of participation is a measure of how much has changed due to participation. In other words, participation cost was high and the benefit resulting from participation was low.

2) e-Government development model

The term, e-government was first introduced in 1993 by the U.S NPR¹. Since then, many countries of the world have conducted various researches and developed diverse e-government concepts and theories, taking into account changes in social, economical and technical environments (National Computerization Agency of Korea). The NPR,

¹ NPR: National Performance Review

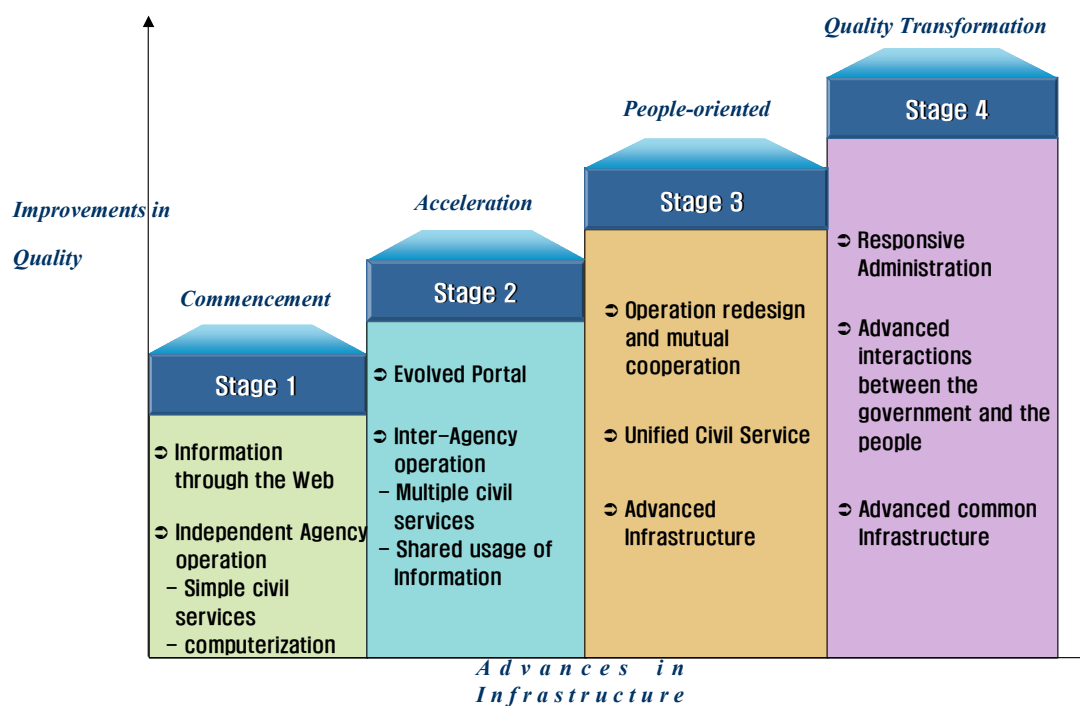
when first mentioning the term, e-government, focused on cost-effectiveness to “make the government work better and cost less”. And in a 1997 report “*Access America: Reengineering through Information Technology*” the NPR outlined e-government strategies in relation with innovation concepts. Furthermore, in a U.K 1998 report “*Information technology and the people*”, e-government concept was extended to encompass improvements in the efficiency of services to the customer – comprising of the people and private companies – increased transparency of government operations and the realization of a participatory democracy.

Institute/Scholar	Development Stages (Growth Stages)
Venkatraman (1991)	① partial usage ② internal integration ③ operations redesign ④ operations redesign of related organizations ⑤ operations scope redesign
Kauver (1998)	① introduction of ICT ② government discloses information to the people ③ industrial society government ⇒ information society government (people-oriented government)
Gartner Group (2001)	① e-Service stage ② cooperative work government ③ knowledge country ④ competitive government
Deloitte Research (2001)	① provide information ② official 2-way transaction ③ multi-purpose portal ④ customer-oriented portal ⑤ grouping of common services ⑥ general integration and operational change
Accenture (2001)	① publish (passive/passive) ② interact (active/passive) ③ transact (active/active)
UNDPEPA & ASPA (2002)	① emergence stage ② enhancement stage ③ interaction stage ④ transaction stage ⑤ seamless stage

< Theories on e-Government Development Stages >

Along with these conceptual changes, the types and levels of government services have also progressed in stages. The above table illustrates e-government development stages formulated by major research institutes and scholars.

This paper is in agreement with the theory that e-government begins as an efficiency oriented government that computerizes operations of government agencies and provides simple civil services for the purpose of improving work efficiency, then progresses to become a service-oriented government that seeks to enhance customer satisfaction by linking operations of different agencies and finally develops towards a participatory government where the people can play a leading role in public administration proceedings. Based on this theory, the following development model is proposed.

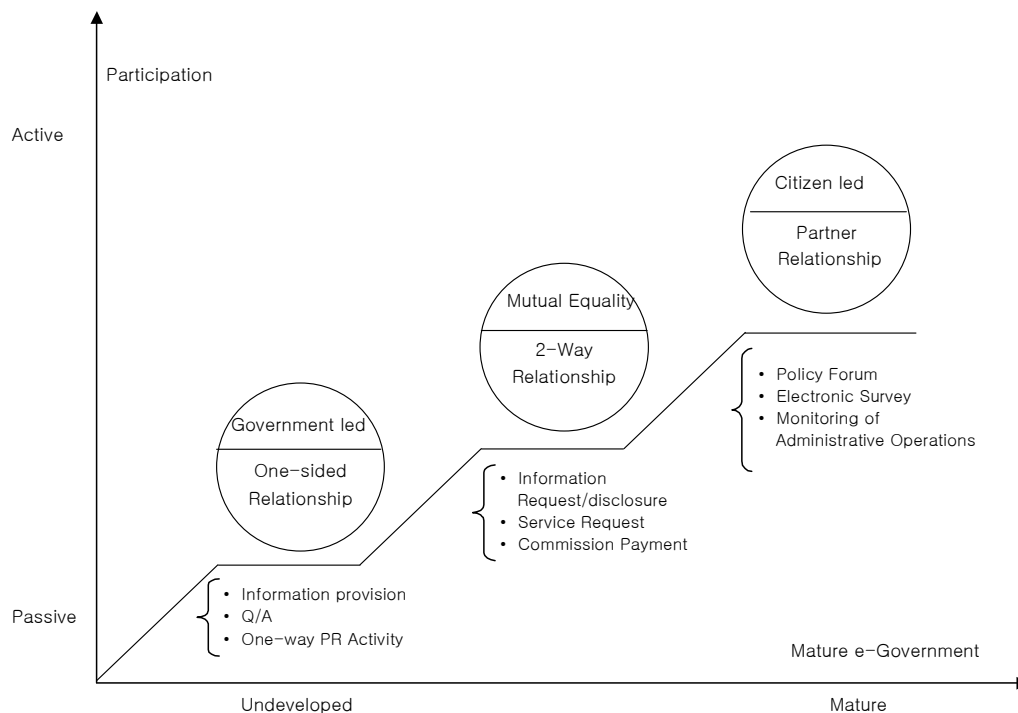


< e-Government Development Model >

The starting point for this model is the assumption that as the basis of e-government becomes stronger, the service and quality of public administration will also improve. In the early stage where the technological, physical and systematical base is weak, service is limited to the most simplistic ones. But as the infrastructure is expanded and services are linked, a citizen-oriented stage is reached where seamless integrated services that do away with boundaries between government agencies is possible. Ultimately, the wall between the government and the people disappears under a common infrastructure and e-government reaches a stage wherein citizens can take a leading role in interactions with the government.

3) Maturity of e-Government and citizen participation

As can be seen in the e-government development model, e-government progresses from an early stage of passive information access to a more active participation that integrates elements of e-democracy (Zimmerman 1986, Okot-Uma, 2001). The primary cause for this can be found in the transformation of the relationship between the government and the people brought upon by e-government. The relationship between the government and the people progresses from a one-way relationship where the government disseminates information on its own initiative or citizens access information upon their demand to a 2-way relationship of mutual feedback and finally to a partner relationship between the government and the people (*OECD, 2001*).



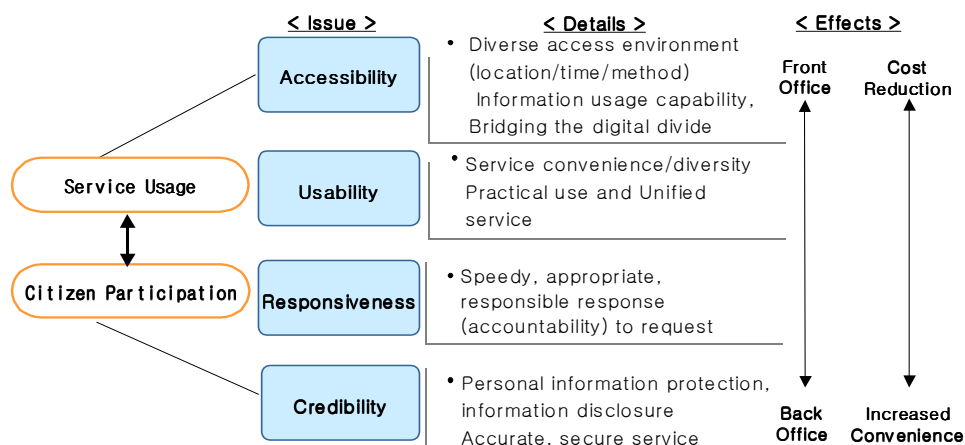
< Changes in Participation vs. e-Government Maturity >

In reality, tremendous reductions in costs related to information gathering and participation activities resulting from widespread adoption of the Internet and e-government as a universal social tool, illustrate the fact that an infrastructure for citizen participation is already in place. However, despite the positive expectations expressed by many scholars, increased civil servant workload and higher demand for expertise of citizens wanting to participate due to increased complexities in administrative process and a reluctance to provide private information are real-world obstacles. Ultimately, overcoming these obstacles that negatively impact cost and benefit of participation will advance the road towards a participatory e-Government.

4) Key issues for participatory e-Government

To build a true citizen-oriented participatory e-government, it is necessary to raise the quality of e-government in terms of process efficiency, service and participation.

This paper develops these issues in terms of accessibility, usability, responsiveness and credibility. These factors have a common relationship with service satisfaction and participation. Additionally, government internal work process (Back-Office) and the relationship between the government and the people (Front-Office) are also important factors, especially from the point of view of the people who are the recipients of the services. The cost and benefit of participation should also be considered in line with these factors.



< Issues of Participatory e-Government >

◇ Accessibility

Accessibility in e-government is not just restricted to elements of physical access such as time and location, but also encompasses aspects of universality and quality that arise from service usage. If equality in participation is also considered, then accessibility can also be thought of as a factor in bridging the digital divide. Therefore, accessibility is an important element in service satisfaction and citizen participation since it determines the cost of participation and the enjoyment of various benefits.

◇ Usability

The issue of usability arises from the process of using e-government services, and whether it is possible for anyone regardless of their capabilities to use the services in question in an appropriate manner. Usability is closely related to not only the range of services but also its content. Therefore, efforts to; increase user satisfaction through customer-centric services; expand service usage; strengthen integration and linkage of information systems; increase service conveniences; provide highly polished services and reduce discontinuities are necessary.

◇ Responsiveness

Responsiveness in public administration is a customer-oriented value that is associated with providing services that fit the values and demands of the customer. To put it differently, it is the measure of the output of citizen input into the policy decision system. A speedy and suitable

response to a request and timely updates are elements that impact responsiveness. Accountability of public servants can be increased by establishing a collaborative work system that coordinates the various interest and concerns arising from particular operations within or between departments and preventing overlapping work between government agencies by constructing a BRM that can clarify functional definitions of government operations as well as the relationship between different government functions.

◇ Credibility

Technological and service related factors affect credibility. Generally, citizens have concerns about personal data leaks that can come from information disclosures and system instabilities due to disasters or cyber crimes. They may also have complaints about inaccurate and inadequate results of services provided. A basic approach for increasing credibility involves two aspects – technology and service – in minimizing customer mistrust and dissatisfaction. With respect to technology, a system to protect sensitive information should be installed in order to enhance security and recovery of data. On the service-side, a system should be set up to continuously monitor complaints and listen to customer demands. Also, a legal framework for a response system needs to be established.

4. Korea's e-Government

1) Completion of e-Government infrastructure

Efforts to establish e-government by the Korean government began in earnest in the mid 80's. And by the mid 90's the focus had shifted to an efficiency-oriented e-government with major information of the country being put into databases and operations processing systems being developed in order to improve work efficiency. Shortly after the turn of the millennium, a nation-wide information super highway was built, becoming an important infrastructure for e-government. In conjunction, the government prepared a coherent implementation plan, and on that basis, was able to construct a service-oriented e-government by focusing its efforts into service improvements such as joint information usage between governmental agencies and linkage of operations. Particularly, the period leading up to the year 2002 was designated as an e-government infrastructure-provisioning period.

It was a time of impressive growths and Korea achieved the highest Internet penetration rate in the world (*OECD*) along with the 2nd highest e-government service level (*Brown University, 2002*). Nevertheless, in contrast with these positive results, many issues such as low levels of service usage, satisfaction index and participation emerged as factors that needed to be addressed.

An observation of the negative aspects reveals that without improvements in work methods or full-scale redesign of operations, the e-Government's contributions towards government innovations were

dubious at best. Furthermore, information sharing and cooperation in the workplace were nearly absent due to insufficient cooperation between the various departments. Problems such as a perceived loss of vested rights and possible misuse or abuse of information were also coming into the public eye. Looking at the service aspect, 40% of the general population was found to not have had any experience with electronic civil services and the majority still conducted their transactions by direct visitation to government offices. As for the participation aspect, while the percentage of civil service applications related to e-government usage was 45%, with the exception of passive information searches, usage rate for more active public administration services was found to be at a very low level (*e-Government Usage Statistics Analysis, 2003*)

2) Objectives for the advancement of e-Government

Since its launch in 2003, the Participatory Government of Korea, in order to address these issues, expanded upon the foundation of e-Government and began work on building services to achieve a real people-oriented participatory e-government where service satisfaction can be maximized. With the aim of bringing about a transformation in the quality of e-government, the government of Korea has set forth the following basic objectives for improving transparency, efficiency and participation.

◇ Transparent Administration

Transparency is a central value in e-government and can be summarized by a conceptualization of processing all public administration services through e-government and a minimization of direct contact

between civil servants and civil service applicants. To materialize these concepts, the aim is to bring about extraordinary improvements in e-government services that would significantly lower government office visitations of civil service applicants.

To this effect, Korea has set specific objectives to be achieved by the year 2007. These objectives include offering 85% of all civil services electronically and increasing e-government usage to more than twice the current rate of 23% to 60% in order to reduce visitations of civil service applicant from the current 10 visits a year to less than 3 visits a year.

◇ Efficient Administration

The aim is to enable real-time processing of all administrative operations within the government to maximize efficiency. To achieve the goal of an efficient public administration that will do away with borders between government agencies, full digitalization and linking of partially digitized operations, mutual sharing of all government agencies' administrative information and consolidating scattered information resources becomes essential.

◇ Participatory Public Administration

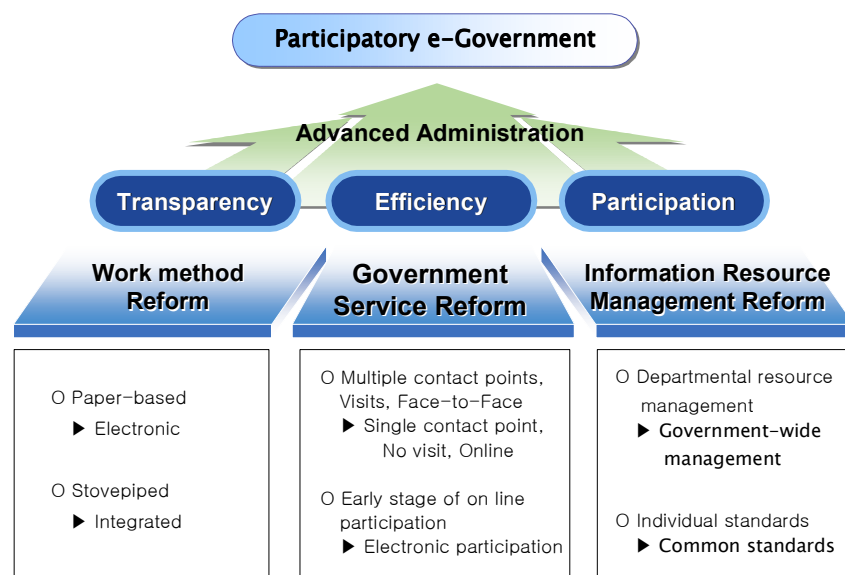
Realizing seamless e-government services by eliminating boundaries between government departments will result in the removal of the wall between the government and the people and lead to a more free and active citizen participation that will advance democracy.

Korea aims to advance democracy in public administration by boosting citizen participation from a public opinion survey level that it is at now to

a level of citizen-led real-world participation in policy making and raising the level of information disclosure from the current limited passive one to a more open and active level and by strengthening self-control mechanisms of private information.

3) Strategy and Direction of participatory e-government

In order to realize a citizen-oriented participatory e-government with enhanced transparency, efficiency and participation, the government has put forth innovations in work methods, government service innovations and information resource management innovation as basic directions for e-government implementation. Allowing for simultaneous advances in service quality and infrastructure construction, these directions are part of a strategy to achieve a transformation of quality in e-government.



< Objectives and direction of the Participatory Government >

The basic directions of e-Government act as principles in ensuring transparency, efficiency and participation, the 3 objectives of e-Government. These goals can be achieved by; improving document processing and work process flow; enhancing civil service application processing and methods of citizen participation; radical advances in resource management.

4) Undertaking to expand e-participation

◇ Work method reforms

This relates to improving document processing and work procedures of public servants. The focus is on electronic work process, widespread sharing of public administration information and service-oriented BRM. It is an initiative that will allow for cost-effective, transparent and speedy work process by; providing a single unified work procedure system; promoting online public administration process; establishing a knowledge-based government.

◇ Government service reforms

Transforming service process methods of citizens and businesses to be fully online by enhancing services and setting up a system for e-participation has the added benefit of improving the usability and responsiveness of e-government services. A system will be put in place where services directly connected to the lives of the people can be processed in real-time without the need to visit government offices, and in the event where a visit is required, provide a one-stop electronic service to citizens and businesses by considerably reducing requisite

documents. In addition, venues for participation including e-forum, public administration information disclosure and e-discussion will be expanded as a basis upon which to provide services that will advance e-Democracy.

◇ **Information resource management reforms**

The objective of information resource management is unified management and mutual linking of information resources that will enhance interoperability. In order to provide a stable foundation for e-government services, not only physical resources such as communication networks or computing environment but also human resources and operation organizations are targets for improvements. Additionally, as part of an effort to enhance the credibility of e-government, an information protection system is being built to prevent the theft or leakage of information.

5. Promoting Citizen Participation

The discussions of various theories and phenomena of the previous sections illustrated the possibilities of a participatory e-government based on e-participation as a model that the Korean government is ultimately striving for. In this section, the emphasis is on practical solutions to problems that are applicable to current environments. These problems, often times being subjective in nature are easy to overlook, especially when concentrating on objective physical theories or facts. Nevertheless, they have the potential to either become a large obstacle or an important source engine on the path towards e-government.

First, serious considerations need to be given to the feedback flow between citizens and government, in which citizen input in policy making is reflected in the government policy decision process to produce an output. When opinions proposed by citizens through e-government are not properly reflected whether directly or indirectly, citizens will feel left out of the loop and lose interest in the effectiveness of the policy in question. Furthermore, since citizens may react negatively to the input process, it raises concerns that the consistency of policies and efficiency of e-government will be seriously compromised. Thus, an effort to come to a rational agreement on policies is critical.

Second, although the birth of e-government had its basis in IT, the problems it faces are no longer solely IT related in nature, rather a host of amorphous factors including culture, citizen awareness and traditional practices act to increase complexity. Efforts at the policy level are required to bring these non-standard elements into a systematic

framework. A harmony of technology and policy on the road to e-government will lead to a short cut and hasten the integration of e-government into the lives of the people.

Third, problems regarding information gap or digital divide that can result from the increase of e-participation must be solved. This fundamental inequality inherent in an information society becomes a real problem when transferred into an e-government environment, as it raises the possibility of skewing policy decisions in favor of those who have power over information. For example, there is a real concern that low-income, elderly or handicapped citizens will be excluded from the policy decision process due to their inability to access and utilize information. A citizen-oriented e-government is at its core a government for the people and should thus allow for all citizens regardless of their social or educational background to participate and express their opinions in the policy decision process.

Fourth, a multi-faceted approach to promote citizen participation is needed. Along with the basic method of enhancing service satisfaction to stimulate participation, more aggressive measures such as active marketing through mass media or enhancing related legal framework should be implemented to encourage service usage.