



International Conference on e-Government and Administrative Simplification

Statement by

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Excellencies,
Distinguished speakers and participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to address you at this important conference on such a critical topic.

At the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), Division for Public Administration and Development Management (DPADM), we are firm believers in the power of e-transformation--for the whole of the government and well-being of all citizens.

As servants who support the governance needs of Member States, we are also conscious that the information age brings with it the indispensable need to overhaul, not only the **practice**, but also the very **concept** of public administration.

Today, there is no doubt that ICT-enabled public administration and e-government are the way of the future.

That is why I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to the OECD-Korea and the Government of Brunei Darussalam for organizing this international conference on *E-government and Administrative Simplification*, and also for bringing together such an illustrious audience.

Today, I also feel privileged to have the opportunity to present you the findings of the United Nations E-government Survey 2010 recently launched.

The Survey is a widely quoted research publication that evaluates countries of the 192 UN Member States in terms of their performance in ICT-supported and citizen-centric public service delivery.

This year's Survey specifically focuses on the global financial and economic crisis. As Stanford economist, Paul Romer says: "A crisis is a terrible thing to waste." According to

the Survey's findings, e-government can be considered as the long-sought catalyst for turning the *cons* of the crisis into a sea change of *pros* for public administration.

In particular, this year's Survey highlights three main findings that are glaring examples of where e-government is going: (i) the necessity for the right i-perspective, (ii) the necessity for a clear i-roadmap, and (iii) the necessity for the appropriate i-tools.

Picture e-government as a productive and growing tree; imagine the right i-perspective as the roots of the tree, the clear i-roadmap as its trunk, and the appropriate i-tools as its many branches.

Once the tree is solidly grounded in soil and grows stronger, the expected **fruits** would be effective and legitimate governance for all.

These three factors tell us a great deal about the *effective and efficient strategies for e-government building* in the twenty-first century.

Let me start by saying a few words on the first finding which is the necessity for the right i-perspective.

It was not long ago that e-government was deemed synonymous with a technology-led digitalisation of government. A standard recipe at that time for e-government looked like the following:

- Governments hired consultants to create a plethora of static websites for ministries and agencies.
- These websites, left unconnected to each other, were built around the specific function of the concerned government entity as opposed to citizen needs.
- Then, layers of technology were coated onto these government structures and functions.
- Finally, the first-time information online was not maintained and kept current through regular updates.

With time and experience, governments have come to appreciate that e-government entails new approaches to almost every aspect of public governance — the front-end service delivery, the back-end organizational structures and institutional underpinnings, and the human and financial resources.

The right e-perspective requires governments to move to **Complete Cultural Change (CCC)** from the **Traditional Technology Topping (TTT)** approach, with **Interoperability (IO)** serving as the transitional phase.

The move starts with having **a vision**, and then implementing that vision with a **mission** plan.

The vision is **holistic**. It entails an organic reform of the whole-of-government as guided by the citizens' needs. Citizens are both the recipients and the owners of the CCC vision.

The mission is **strategic**. It encompasses:

- **long-term change** instead of quick wins—*meaning* building trust in government and ICT-enabled transformation as a priority
- **line-of-sight connectivity** among all government activities, products and services, while relentlessly pursuing results—*meaning* horizontal and vertical government coordination and results-based management
- **mixed service provision**—meaning a **public**, **private** and **people** partnerships approach to public service delivery

So far, most governments, particularly in the developed and middle-income countries, seem to have made the leap from the **Traditional Technology Topping** approach (TTT) to the more dynamic and connected **Interoperability (IO)** approach.

The evidence comes from the UN E-government Survey, which categorizes a country's e-government readiness according to four developmental phases: connected, transactional, enhanced information and emerging information services, in a descending order of progress.

Consider a global summary on overall e-government development: out of 192 Member States: 189 (98 per cent) countries provide public services online; 36 countries (19 per cent) are in the "emerging information services" category; 95 countries (49 per cent) in the "enhanced information services" category; 49 countries (26 per cent) are listed in the second highest category of "transactional services"; and only 12 countries (6 per cent) are ranked in the highest category of "connected e-government services."

The most integrated one-stop-shop government portals are found in the Republic of Korea, United States, Canada, United Kingdom and Australia.¹

Next consider national portals with links to ministries: 61 per cent of national portals contain links to more than 10 ministry websites. By simply going to their country's national homepage, citizens can access the ministry websites of their choice. Similarly, 67 per cent of national portals have links to other public sector services and slightly over 50 per cent of national portals have site maps, which make it easy for citizens to find and navigate through the information of interest.

Still 26% of national portals are segregated from ministry websites, which might not even exist in some countries, particularly in the least developed countries.

Finally, at the other end of the spectrum, countries with no online presence include the Central African Republic, Somalia and Swaziland.²

¹ UN E-government Survey 2010, p.4.

² *Ibid.* , p.79.

Interoperability, therefore, is improving but it is still a work in progress for many countries.

The second finding that comes out of the UN E-government Survey is the necessity to adopt a clear i-roadmap.

Today, many governments have the right i-perspective: they understand the need to move from TTT to IO and then to CCC. The “*what*” is clear, but there are questions on the “*how*”. Clear roadmaps might help in understanding the how question.

Particularly, let me mention two concept models already put into practice in a number of developed and developing countries. Both of these models put the citizen in the driver’s seat.

- One is the **restructuring model**.

In this model, all services from every single part of government are combined in a **single organization**, which then establishes direct contact with citizens across **multiple channels**—face-to-face, contact centre, web—with staff and budget transferred from concerned agencies.

The restructuring model makes it easier for citizens to locate information, services and products.

- A second solution developed by CS Transform, a UK-based consultancy group, is the **intermediary model**.

In this model, cross-government virtual service delivery nodes act as change agents inside government agencies and pursue the single goal of improving citizen-centric service provision.

The intermediary model makes it easier for citizens to locate relevant service providers and mitigates the risk of a potential single point of failure in government operations.

Many governments have started thinking about the right vision statement and the mission plan for their citizens through i-transformation. Some of them have also started tinkering with the available roadmaps out there and customizing them according to their specific needs.

Turning again to the UN E-government Survey for evidence, we see that the countries with the best online service ratings adopt one or the other method. Among the top performers, the United States and Canada favour the restructuring model, as opposed to other high performers such as the UK and Australia, which follow the intermediary model.

I must, therefore, emphasize that there is no perfect model. Every country can choose the model that best suits its needs and custom and design it according to its objectives.

Thirdly, appropriate i-tools are crucial for building efficient and effective e-government.

Let me briefly mention four of them:

- **The first i-tool is citizen-centric policy products.**

This refers to government documents, decisions, rules and regulations (formal and informal) that promote and ensure accessibility, speed, navigability and content.

It seeks to bring clarity to the maze of standards for creating low-cost, high-quality and targeted products and services for citizens.

It revolves around constant citizen feedback and satisfaction.

- **The second is open communication channels.**

This refers to comprehensive stakeholder engagement in e-government processes—from design and planning to implementation and scaling.

It seeks to create a one-stop-shop through multi-channel integration frameworks instead of hierarchically organized bureaucratic stovepipes.

It revolves around audience-specific and up-to-date communication methods including the efficient use of multimedia and social media features.

- **The third is strategic business management techniques.**

This refers to inter-organizational linkages unified around one vision and one mission.

It seeks to create a results-based performance culture that strengthens the institutional capacity of the government as a whole.

It revolves around the consolidation of i-institutions along with the constant training of e-savvy personnel.

- **The fourth is effective operational standards.**

This refers to the rationalization of day-to-day operating standards adhered to during IT infrastructure upgrades.

It seeks to minimize technological incompatibilities, information security vulnerabilities and the resulting data security breaches that occur in the wake of infrastructure upgrades.

It revolves around harnessing the *technological* factors with *human* capital to quickly respond to citizen needs and demands.

I would like to provide you with an example for each one of the i-tools I have noted above.

Citizen-centric policy products refers to governments connecting to citizens and then, in turn, citizens guiding government actions and the provision of services through citizen charters, offline and online consultation and feedback mechanisms, surveys, weblogs, newsgroups, and so on and so forth.

It is also about governments offering more open data that provides citizens with information on issues of interest such as the environment, security, health and finance. Moreover, open data allows citizens to monitor government operations and to create positive value-added products.

An example of open communication channels are RSS feeds of national portals jumped from 10 per cent in the 2008 Survey to 35 per cent in the 2010 Survey. This means that more national portals are releasing information to individual subscribers. National portals supporting audio and video content also jumped from 38 per cent in 2008 to 49 per cent in 2010.

For strategic business management, examples come from the Republic of Korea, Singapore and Canada, where the national portals integrate a single online system referred to as ePeople or eCitizens for all e-services offered by all government agencies. Performance is constantly monitored and periodically evaluated through real time customer satisfaction tools, including petitions, proposals and interactive policy discussions.

Finally, for effective standard operations, an example comes from the exponential increase in the government's use of mobile technology for providing services.

In 2008, only 14 national portals offered mobile services. In 2010, that number has jumped to 25. In this case, Singapore spearheads development of mobile-services for her citizens. Not only has the number of such services been increased to more than 500, but also the quality of them has been dramatically improved moving from text-based to fully internet-based services.

All this is due to the rise in mobile phone subscriptions worldwide.

In brief, successful e-government is more than choosing the right technology; it is also about considering the

- appropriate business models;
- institutional and regulatory frameworks;

- organizational capacity and coordination;
- political, social, environmental and cultural channels of communication; and the
- required human and financial resources.

Achieving the internationally agreed development goals (IADGs), including the Millennium Development Goals require paying attention to the caveats in the process of building effective and efficient e-government strategies.

This is because the right i-perspective, a clear i-roadmap and appropriate i-tools increase the likelihood of building efficient and effective e-government strategies. But they do not guarantee it.

The key to success lies in the following caveats.

The first caveat is to understand that the process of building e-government is continuous and iterative. The project never ends to evolve as long as citizens' needs and wants change. There is, thus, a constant requirement for governments to empower citizens to personalize information and services.

The second caveat is to elevate public trust to a strategic advantage. All actions must be explicitly and directly geared to building, maintaining and strengthening trust in e-government.

The third caveat is inclusiveness. All citizens, including the poor, the vulnerable and the marginalized, should be made the co-owners of this process of trust-building. Citizens do not stand on the sidelines anymore; they are at the centre of progress and development.

The United Nations E-government Survey shows that countries with the strongest e-government ratings are also those that spend a great deal of time and effort in building e-government according to the precepts listed above.

In this regard, the Republic of Korea is the top performer in 2010, followed by the United States and Canada. And in South-Eastern Asia, Singapore is at the top, followed by Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam.

E-government has come a long way from the informatization of government data to interoperability, then to organizational change, and now to a cultural shift in the way the whole of government works.

Of course, this does not mean that e-government comes worry-free. It has and creates its own challenges that governments must constantly face and respond.

Given restraints of time and scope, I cannot go into the details of these challenges. Yet, suffice it to say that all governments must take the necessary measures to effectively

manage concerns such as online security, resistance to change, lack of skills and funding, data protection laws, and the digital divide, just to name a few.

Each one of these measures and their associated challenges can be considered as a crisis in their own right, hence the relevance of the maxim “not wasting any crisis.” When faced with them, those governments, which can morph challenges into windows of opportunity, are those that are going to move forward in the information age.

When I say “move forward,” I mean to a stage where government services are at par and competing with those of markets.

Given the right i-perspective, a clear i-roadmap and the appropriate i-tools with constant attention to caveats and challenges, e-government could reshape the way we think about the government and what we expect from it.

In this transformational wave, e-government would also certainly remodel how we perceive ourselves and act as citizens.

Thank you.