ICT: A New Approach of Transparency and Promoting Anti-Corruption

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Abstract

ICTs can basically reduce corruption by promoting good governance, strengthening reform-oriented initiatives, reducing potential for corrupt behaviors, enhancing relationships between government employees and citizens, allowing for citizen tracking of activities, and by monitoring and controlling behaviors of government employees. There are wide ranges of nation's modules with various technology infrastructures which have created numerous procurement, tracking, anti-corruption, and other systems that can assist national and state governments engage in transparent government activities. Moreover, the systems of ICT will open government to citizen scrutiny, thereby resulting in reducing corruption.

Introduction

Transparency and the right to access government information are now internationally regarded as essential to democratic participation, trust in government, prevention of corruption, informed decision-making, accuracy of government information, and provision of information to the public, companies, and journalists, among other essential functions in society. Government transparency generally occurs through one of four primary channels, proactive dissemination by the government; release of requested materials by the government; public meetings; and leaks from whistleblowers (Anderson, 2009). Countries that embrace transparency tend to produce more information than other governments and are more likely to share this information. More than 30 countries have even established a national-level, centralized anti-corruption agency (Bhatnagar, 2003).

Transparency ultimately serves to keep government honest-"Good government must be seen to be done". In terms of international practices in transparency, the internet has greatly resulted in reducing the cost of collecting, distributing, and accessing government information. As a result of these capacities, recent years have seen trends toward using e-government for greater access of information and for promotion of transparency, accountability, and anti-corruption goals (Brown and Cloke, 2003). However, all efforts to promote openness and reduce corruption are heavily shaped by the cultural milieu of a nation, ranging from societal attitudes toward the value of information to level of identification by citizens with the government and from viability of an independent press to information policies enacted by the government (Fukiyama, 2001). Traditionally, there are three types of anti-corruption approaches:

1) Administrative reform: Administrative reforms are the most commonly used approaches, primarily through the enhancement of the quality of government bureaucracies to ensure that a watchdog agency or structure exists to officially monitor government behavior. Another common element of administrative reform is the creation of merit based hiring and promotion for government positions, which feature formalized rules of conduct,

accountability, and responsibility, sometimes learned from corporate approaches.

2) Law enforcement: Law enforcement approaches often compliment administrative reforms to ensure that an appropriate system for punishing corruption is in place. While administrative reform lowers opportunities to take bribes, law enforcement greatly increases the potential costs and punishments for taking bribes. The law enforcement approach has also been used without administrative reforms in some transitional nations where the persons in power have resisted transparency efforts.

3) Social change: The social change approach is based in the idea of reform through social empowerment of citizens by allowing them to participate in institutional reform movements and by cultivating a civil, law-based society as a long-term deterrent to corruption. By changing cultural attitudes that have been accepting of corruption, citizens can ultimately protect themselves from corruption.

In each of these areas, the provision of information to citizens and the ability of citizens to monitor the activities of the government play an important role, both key areas in which e-government and other ICTs can be used to battle corruption. The influence of culture often makes social change, which is the largest challenge for openness and anti-corruption initiatives.

ICTs and Transparency Initiatives

ICTs have offered a new approach in creating transparency and promoting anti-corruption. Many nations worldwide along with transparent laws have directly tied the implementation of these laws to the implementation of ICT-based initiatives, often through e-government (Heeks, 1998). To successfully reduce corruption, however, ICT-enabled initiatives generally must move from increasing information access to ensuring rules are transparent and applied to building abilities to track the decisions and actions of government employees. Many governments envision the use of ICTs as a means to promote efficiency and transparency at the same time. ICTs in general show promise as an effective means of reducing corruption, but social attitudes can decrease the effectiveness of ICTs as an anti-corruption tool (Relly and Sabharwal, 2009).

Various case studies and statistical analyses indicate that ICTs hold a great deal of potential for – and are already demonstrating benefits in – anti-corruption, particularly by enhancing the effectiveness of internal and managerial control over corrupt behaviors and by promoting government accountability and transparency. By analyzing changes between 1996 and 2006 corruption data through ICT-enabled e-government initiatives, one study concluded that "implementing e-government significantly reduces corruption, even after controlling for any propensity for corrupt governments to be more or less aggressive in adopting e-government initiatives".

Nations across the Americas, Asia, and Europe have all claimed successes in reducing corruption through e-government. One of the most widely studied anti-corruption e-government initiatives is the Seoul Metropolitan Government's Online Procedures Enhancement for civil applications (OPEN) system, launched in 1999 with multiple distinct anti-corruption measures embedded into the functions of the system. The OPEN system was part of a widespread government and corporate initiative to transform Korean government. Prior to the launch of OPEN, the government of Seoul was renowned for its levels of corruption, with the government officials who processed applications and petitions able to decide the order in which they would process materials, forcing citizen to pay "express fees" to get their materials processed. As such, the premise of OPEN was to reduce the number of places that government officials and citizens interacted directly. OPEN initially included the 54 government services where corruption had been deemed most likely to occur, with citizens able to look up the status of their materials and the relevant government officials online. The OPEN system itself continually checks for delays in processing, and government officials and departments which also provide reasons for such delays. Studies have credited OPEN with reducing corruption and increasing transparency, especially in terms of the regulation of the activities of government employees. The success of the system has also dramatically changed perceptions of the residents of Seoul about corruption (Hung, *et al.,* 2009).

Taxes and government contracts are the major areas where e-government has been as a clear and successful solution to corruption problems in many nations, including India, by putting rural property records online has greatly increased the speed at which the records are accessed and updated, while simultaneously removing opportunities for local officials to accept bribes as had previously been rampant. The Bhoomi electronic land record system in Karnataka, India, was estimated to have saved 7 million farmers 1.32 million working days in

waiting time and Rs. 806 million in bribes to local officials in its first several years. The Philippines Department of Budget and Management in Philippines established an e-procurement system of government agencies to use to allow public bidding on government contracts to both prevent price fixing and allow public accountability (Johnson, 1998; Klitgaard, 1998).

In India, there are several state initiatives initiated to deliver public e-services through ICT by associating with different state and central departments. Chandigarh Sampark centres introduced by Department of IT along with Chandigarh Administration have 75 e-services of various departments under one roof to be delivered to the citizens in a hassle free manner. It is one of the most functional and famous initiative delivering public services through electronic mode which has resulted in the reduction of corruption (Piotrowski, 2007). The services are provided through face to face direct interaction of citizens and the officials at the Sampark centres appointed by the Department of IT, Chandigarh to provide time bound services. The service delivery time in minimum 5 days and maximum is 15 days, depending upon the service the citizen opts to avail. Sampark centers have set an example to other states in order to bring the public e-services delivery to the citizens at their door step. Therefore, this initiative has proved as an anti corruption and time bound service delivery system for its citizens and resulted in transparency, efficient and reliable service delivery system (Meagher, 2005; Wescott, 2001). The citizens are far more satisfied with the excellence of Sampark.

Potential Barriers to ICT enabling Transparency

ICT-enabled initiatives as transparency and anti-corruption tools do not guarantee widespread success in all nations that implement them, however. New ICTs have not always led to breakthroughs in transparency or anti-corruption. ICTs historically have sometimes been successful in identifying and removing corruption, but they have also created new means and opportunities for corrupt behaviors. New ICTs can even reduce competition in corrupt behaviors, privileging government officials who know how to operate the ICTs. Oftentimes, the same ICT can produce widely divergent results in different nations and cultures. Specifically in terms of e-government, a strong social determinant of the success of e-government projects is the acceptance of the initiative by government officials. The success of ICT-enabled initiatives as anti-corruption strategy depends on issues of implementation, education, and culture, among others.

The success also depends on the acceptance of ICTs among citizens. Though governments have a strong preference for delivering services via the Internet and other technologies as a means of boosting cost-efficiency, citizens in many places still show a strong preference for in person or phone-based interactions with government representatives when they have questions or are seeking services, though individuals with higher levels of education are typically more open to using online interactions with government. Some studies have suggested that trust in e-government can be built through increased responsiveness to user needs and inquiries and through increased transparency, but such efforts are thus far limited.

Certain issues with citizen over the acceptance of ICT-enabled services are specific to the government. Developed governments are generally better equipped to pursue initiatives, often because they have greater financial, technical, or personnel capacities available for technology-enabled projects. In many developing countries, support for e-government and ICT enabled services implementation is countered by various forms of resistance to the idea of e-government and ICT-enabled initiatives. The success of government initiatives is dependent on managerial leadership and political support within the local government.

Though still early in terms of measuring the full impact of ICT enabled initiatives in terms of transparency and anti-corruption, there are a number of indications that ICTs can promote transparency and battle corruption by:

- providing information on government rules and citizen rights;
- providing information about government decisions and actions;
- promoting monitoring of government actions and expenditures;
- disseminating information on government performance;
- opening government processes, like land records, applications for licenses, and status of tax payments;
- identifying elected officials and civil servants under investigation for corruption and fraudulent activities; and
- disclosing of assets and investments of elected officials and civil servants.

Using ICTs to promote transparency can create a sustained culture of transparency. In terms of information access generally, results thus far are mixed.

Filtering of Internet content by governments is an example in which the amount of information accessible has changed significantly in some countries with divergent reactions of the public.

Coinciding with technology access is the need for users to be able to understand and use the technologies through which transparency tools are available. The digital divide is long documented and broadly defined as the gap between those who have access to technologies and those who do not. However, there are in fact multiple divides that can exist, of which access to the ICTs is but one. Embedded within the divide are such issues as:

• Technology literacy—the ability to understand and use technologies;
• Usability—the design of technologies in such ways that are intuitive and allow users to engage in the content embedded within the technology;
• Accessibility—the ability of persons with disabilities to be able to access the content through adaptive technologies (in fact, some mobile technologies such as the iPhone are completely inaccessible to persons with visual impairments due to the touch screen design which lacks a tactile keyboard); and
• Functionality—the design of the technologies to include features (e.g., search, e-government service tracking; accountability measures, etc.) that users desire.
Thus, it is important to both use technologies that are widely deployed to provide a broad base of technology access, but there is also often a substantial need to provide training, and engage in usability, functionality, and accessibility testing to ensure the broadest ability to participate in e-government services and resources.

Conclusion

The combination of e-government, social media, Web-enabled technologies, mobile technologies, transparency policy initiatives, and citizen desire for open and transparent government are fomenting a new age of opportunity that has the potential to create open, transparent, efficient, effective, and user-centered ICT-enabled services. Moreover, governments, development agencies and organizations, and citizen groups are increasingly linking investment, governance, and support to the creation of more open and transparent government. It is rare that there is such an alignment of policy, technology, practice, and citizen demand exists—all of which bode well for the creation of technology-enabled government that instills the trust of citizens in government. The challenges, however, are also real. But the challenges are less technological.

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