

e-GOV ASIA 2006

Panel Discussion on e-Government: the UNCRD UNDP Capacity Building of Asia Pacific e-Government Project

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**Rama Gardens Hotel and Resort
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Opening Statement

by

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Distinguished Guests, e-Government Case Study Authors, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the UNDP Asia Pacific Development Information Programme, I am pleased to welcome you all to this Panel Discussion on e-Government., which will focus on some preliminary research outcomes of an ongoing, joint research initiative between United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD) and UNDP.

I think it is safe to say that most of us in this room believe that having access to government information and being able to communicate in a two way manner with our respective governments, are increasingly becoming necessary for all human beings irrespective of wealth and status of the individual. Acquiring knowledge about government policies and knowing how to access basic public services are steps on the development ladder that should be available for every human being.

Unfortunately, studies of poverty in Asia and the Pacific reveal that Government services often fail to reach the poor in rural and remote areas and when services are provided the quality is often inadequate to make a difference for poor people's lives. This is a challenge of huge dimensions as 60 percent of Asia's population lives in rural and remote areas and the majority of them are poor without access to reliable public services. These facts make it extremely difficult to imagine how it will be possible for the international community and the nation States in Asia Pacific to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, as agreed by all UN member States in the year 2000 at the UN Millennium Summit. The reasons for this are many and complex, including how governance is working in the Asia Pacific region, and often relate to lack of accountability, lack of transparency, and lack of commitment in making services work for poor and marginalised citizens.

ICTs alone cannot ensure bad governance is turned into good governance. This depends on a host of factors. But this entire 'eGOV ASIA 2006' Conference is indicative of the fact that ICTs are increasingly being recognised as a way for government's to strengthen good governance, and its underlying processes of creating accountability, transparency and effectiveness, by putting people at the centre of public service delivery.

And we are experiencing increasing evidence that if implemented strategically, e-governance can not only improve governance but it can also be a tool to empower citizens by enabling them to participate in the decision-making processes of governments.

UNDP-APDIP believes that e-governance is an important priority for both developing and developed countries in Asia Pacific, but we also believe that the focus on the poorer segments of society needs to be strengthened in a way that e-government initiatives to a larger extent are targeted towards the disadvantaged rather than the urban elite.

Sharing this belief with our sister organisation, the United Nations Centre for Regional Development, we have launched a joint project with the objective of documenting and analysing existing e-government initiatives in 12 selected countries in Asia and the Pacific. The aim is to find ways and means of improving the capacity and impact of e-government initiatives, especially for poor and marginalized citizens. In selecting the participating countries we wanted to ensure that the many different experiences and diverse strategies, as well as best practices in these countries, could be shared with other countries in the region, either because their national e-government strategies contained some unique features or because they had innovative grassroots experiences. So far, the result is 20 insightful case studies authored by the distinguished panel that is with us here this afternoon.

In each of the 12 participating countries, one author represents the government's perspective and the other that of civil society. These past two days, in a parallel workshop involving the entire research team, this dynamism between public and civil society sector perspectives has enabled us to further focus the dialogue and debate on the way forward for people-centered, pro-poor e-government in Asia Pacific. A richness of issues has been on the agenda, and by attending this live panel discussion today you as an audience will get first hand insight into some of the main lessons being drawn for the way forward. We hope for your active engagement in the debate.

In closing, a sincere thank you to you all for taking the time to be here with us today, to the organisers of eGOV ASIA 2006 Conference, the Centre for Science, Development and Media Studies in India, for making this gathering possible, and to the Thai Government represented by the Ministry of ICT, for providing this platform for sharing of good practices for citizen's inclusive eGovernment in Asia and the Pacific. Enjoy the debate.

Thank You.