

Paving the Road towards Pro-poor e-Governance: Findings and Observations from Asia-Pacific Case Studies

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1. Introduction

This paper summarizes the proceedings of an UNDP-APDIP¹ and UNCRD² workshop titled: Paving the Road towards Pro-poor e-Governance, held in Bangkok from 26-27 April 2006. Twenty papers from 12 countries of the Asia and Pacific region were presented at the workshop. From each country, two kinds of perspectives were presented—one from the Government written by a senior Government functionary and the other from the civil society. The cross section of countries represented a wide range in terms of their e-Government readiness and actual degree of ICT use in the public sector. For example Japan, Korea and Hong Kong are very high on most e-readiness rankings and have a large number of e-Government applications. On the other hand, Pakistan and Mongolia may be considered at the lower end of e-readiness index with few country wide applications (see table 1 for a profile of the countries). The mix of countries included large countries such as India and China and small island countries like Sri Lanka and Pacific Islands Countries. A list of country wise papers is included in Annexure I.

2. e-Government Status in Asia Pacific

The papers indicated that some form of e-Government is happening in all countries. Some countries like Sri Lanka reported plans for country wide e-Development programs encompassing ICT sector development and e-Government as a major components. India and Cambodia have a National program on the anvil for development of e-Government. Other countries which do not have national programs, none the less reported several e-Government applications that have been built in different sectors. However, taking an overview it would be fair to say that most of the developing countries from the Asia Pacific Region are just embarking on e-Government. In the developing countries of the region, less than 10 % of all agencies and departments have been computerized for delivery of services³. Thus it could be

¹ United Nations Development Programme's – Asia Pacific Development Information Programme

² United Nations Centre for Regional Development

³ For example, Andhra Pradesh in India is considered to be one of the leading States in implementing e-Government projects. AP has implemented CARD (registration of properties), FAST (Motor vehicle registration and driving licenses) and computerization of land records in all the offices that were providing these services manually in the State. However, there are several dozen departments where computerized service delivery is yet to be implemented on a large scale. Similarly, out of the more than 100 municipalities only a few offer computerized service delivery. E-Seva (single window service centers for utility and other tax payments) has reached municipal towns but is yet to reach any significant proportion of rural population. The SmartGov application for a paperless secretariat is also partially operational within the secretariat and has not yet reached district offices. eProcurement is perhaps the widest scale application covering all departments. It is therefore fair to conclude that overall only 10% of the total potential e-Government application has been tapped. (See profile of IT projects in AP at <http://www.apit.gov.in/egovproject.pdf>)

concluded that elaborate programs have been designed but limited progress has been achieved in implementation.

Most authors mention that a large number of web sites of Government agencies and departments publish information. Very few of these websites allow transactions. Most of the published information is static in nature and is not always kept up to date as was reported by the paper from China. The paper highlights that there is a lack of awareness about the web sites amongst citizen resulting in very low usage. Similar conclusions can be drawn for other countries indicating that the planning for e-Government is supply driven⁴. There is a lack of concern about understanding the demand or making efforts to catalyze the demand.

The focus of most of the applications is on internal efficiency rather than service delivery. The few projects that focus on service delivery are confined to licenses and taxes. Choice of application is mostly urban focused. Needs of poor have not been specifically targeted. Countries like India where some states have made considerable progress in electronic delivery of services to urban populations face the following challenges in implementing pro-poor e-Governance: a) to bring clarity to the objectives of pro-poor targeting, b) to ensure delivery of public services in rural areas, c) to balance standardization and localization, d) to leverage private sector and build PPPs to serve rural areas, e) to make independent impact assessment of what has worked. Moreover there is a lack internal capacity in e-Governance project conceptualization and implementation.

It is surprising, that given the low penetration of Internet in most of the countries, the popular delivery model is through a Portal. Few countries other than India have created common service centers in urban areas where operators working with computer terminals, deliver on line services to clients. Even illiterate and poor citizens are able to benefit from such applications⁵.

Many countries have experimented with telecenters as a delivery mechanism in rural areas. However, many of the telecenters that have been created are not piping in Government services. This may be due to a lack of computerization in Government agencies or a lack of coordination between Government agencies and the private owners of telecenters. Most telecenter projects are in a pilot stage. Furthermore there has been limited scaling up of telecenters and therefore only a minuscule of the rural population has been covered by such centers⁶.

By and large papers did not offer a critical review of e-Governance plans and strategies in their countries. Most papers presented a supply side view of e-Government—how many agencies have computerized or how many web sites have been developed. A systematic

⁴ Implementing e-Government Services in East Africa: Assessing Status through Content Analysis of Government Websites, Janet Kaaya, Department of Information Studies University of California Los Angeles, USA, EJEG, 2,1, <http://www.ejeg.com/volume-2/volume2-issue-1/v2-i1-papers.htm> (last modified September 2005)

⁵ Subhash Bhatnagar, eGovernment from vision to implementation, A practical guide with case studies, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2004, pp29-30.

⁶ IIM Ahmedabad, India: Social E-Applications Venture Fund, <http://www.iimahd.ernet.in/egov/ifip/april2004/SERVEFund.pdf>

analysis of use and impact was not reported. However, even the limited supply side view indicates that the needs of the poor, rural populations and vulnerable groups have been largely ignored by e-Government planners.

3. e-Government Outcomes for Vulnerable Groups

Although, the impact of e-Government has not been assessed in a systematic way in most countries, some reports indicate that direct cost of access to service by clients does get reduced. Clients also experience greater convenience but the impact on transparency and corruption has been marginal⁷.

Different countries have varying definition of who is vulnerable? In fact most authors have not attempted to provide a definition of the vulnerable groups in their country. However, for most developing countries, rural populations and poor have been treated as vulnerable. Some countries like India, Pakistan, Thailand and Cambodia have varying proportion of their populations as illiterates-and such groups are considered vulnerable.

The vulnerability of these groups stems primarily from their poverty. Their inability to afford access to any sort of computing equipment further denies them an opportunity to use ICTs to improve their circumstances.

Insufficient exploration of “who are the vulnerable” has resulted in limited discussion in the papers. There is no identification of traditionally vulnerable groups (such as the rural and urban poor, indigenous people, marginalized groups, etc.) and emerging vulnerable groups (migrants, refugees, those affected by economic crisis, disasters, etc.). Also, the links between vulnerable identified by government programmes for poverty reduction and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are insufficient in the discussion.

In more developed countries other types of vulnerability such as old age, physical handicap, and IT illiteracy have been identified. Although some papers describe projects/initiatives designed to impact the poor/vulnerable, the overall assessment is that services to the un-served population have not expanded and the basket of services for the poor has not enlarged through implementation of e-Government applications.

As a result there is weak evidence of impact on social and economic well being of poor. Also there is limited evidence that poor have got empowered by acquiring the ability to influence policy or actions of the Government that affect them. This is primarily so because of the lack of efforts and not due to the ineffectiveness of the efforts.

Most countries have not used any participatory approaches in the design of their e-Government programs/projects to elicit the needs of the vulnerable groups and as a

⁷ Bhatnagar S.C., Access to Information Report: E-Government, Global Corruption report 2003, Hodess, Inowlocki and Wolfe (Ed), Profile Books Ltd, London, 2003. <http://www.globalcorruptionreport.org/> and Jonathan Caseley, Public Sector Reform and Corruption: CARD facade in Andhra Pradesh, Economic and Political Weekly, 39, (11), 2004.

consequence most of the projects do not focus on the needs of the poor. Most authors recognize that the needs of vulnerable groups could be different in terms of access points for service, content, and the nature of interface.

Some projects/initiatives designed to impact the poor/vulnerable are reported below as these experiments reflect the potential that exists to use ICTs for improving the lives of vulnerable groups.

4. Reported Experiments/Initiatives focused on the vulnerable/poor

4.1 Community involvement in Mie Prefecture

The paper presented an interesting account of the use of electronic bulletin board as an e-democracy conference room in a prefecture in Japan. It would be interesting to know the profile of “regulars” who were the core of the participating groups and if the vulnerable groups such as old and handicapped or the relatively poor got involved. What actions if any were taken to encourage the involvement of such groups? Some of the issues highlighted by the paper are:

- ICT can only act as a facilitator, provided that the citizens are motivated to become engaged in civic affairs. In many societies this motivation does not exist because of historic reasons, a feudal culture or illiteracy and poverty.
- Need for intermittent face to face contact in promoting electronic discussion.
- How can discussion be made to result in action?
- Role of a moderator for raising issues, screening content and steering the discussion to be constructive and not slanderous.

4.2 SMS and Democratic Governance in the Philippines.

The paper discussed the use of mobile phones and SMS as a tool for empowerment and promoting democratic principles in the Philippines. The strengths and weakness of SMS as a medium for promoting e-democracy were identified. Many anecdotal examples of the use of SMS for mobilizing public opinion; collecting feedback; and for delivery of information were provided.

Examples of several agencies that have either WAP-enabled their web sites or can deal with SMS messages were provided. Data on the uptake of a few of the services is provided. The traffic through SMS needs to be seen in the context of the size of the population that can send SMS (with access to mobile phones or PCs). SMS traffic needs to be compared with other channels such as letters by snail mail, SMS, phone to call centers, IVRS, e-mail, websites and walk in to Government offices for major applications or agencies with public dealings.

Similar examples in other countries show that use of different media in combination (TV live shows and SMS call in) can be a powerful means of opinion polls, and collecting feedback on important issues. The power of mobilization can have its potential negative impact if used for destructive purposes (promoting racial hatred and riots).

Analysis of the profile of citizens with whom SMS is popular can reveal if only young people use SMS or such technologies can also provide a voice to vulnerable sections.

Some analysis of the unique conditions in Philippines that make the use of SMS so popular amongst citizens and the factors that lead to trust and credibility of SMS as a means of conveying information can help other countries to promote the use of SMS.

4.3 Role of NGOs in IT literacy of elderly in Hong Kong

The paper highlighted the problem of digital exclusion even in high income countries. It describes a digital inclusion program that was designed to take care of economic sustainability of projects initiated by NGOs. The main strategy adopted was to ride on the international agenda of World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) to push for local changes. That was a multi-step approach: to bring to the government's attention the global agenda of building a more inclusive information society, to urge for local response to the global WSIS agenda, and to suggest solutions. Following the WSIS declaration, NGOs in Hong Kong were keen to run digital inclusion programs. NGOs have a close connection to the needs in the community and the necessary skills to conduct programs but are usually constrained by inadequate funding. They required a flexible and supportive funding source for digital inclusion initiatives. The paper describes the setting up of a fund for NGO projects through a partnership of the Government and the corporate sector and also the support in administering the fund through its first tranche.

4.4 Rural Telecenters in India, Sri Lanka and Mongolia

Papers from India, Sri Lanka, Mongolia and Fiji discuss various plans for setting up telecenters in rural areas. Government of India has announced a new policy for creating 100,000 rural Computerized Service Centers (available on Ministry of IT web site). Sri Lanka has used a least cost subsidy approach to identify partners from NGOs to set up telecenters. Not all telecenter projects have been successful in the past. The reasons cited for failure in Mongolia include capacity, management, and budgets. The paper from Fiji identifies the high costs that need to be incurred for opening telecenters in remote islands.

One of the critical issues is the economic viability of rural telecenters. Given that the real cost of obtaining services in far off places is in any case large for remote locations, some part of the cost can be recovered through a user fee. The real issue is to determine the services that are in demand.

Some evidence is presented from the pre e-Lanka programs on the challenges of attracting adult population to rural telecenters and creating an appetite for information and knowledge amongst the poor. It has similarly been reported that many telecenters in India have no takers for Internet use that is offered. They survive because of local applications such as training, digital photography and entertainment (viewing CDs).

In general there has been neglect of content in the design of many programs. One type of content that is valuable is the access to Government services. In Sri Lanka it is presumed that

e-Government services will get developed and could be piped into the rural areas. However experience of private network orchestrators like Drishtee in India shows that Government is a difficult partner when it comes to delivery of services through private channels.

4.5 Promoting rural e-commerce in Thailand and interviews for migrant workers in China

Thailand has taken many initiatives to focus on the poor. A centralized data base profiling poverty will allow centralized planning for poverty alleviation. The efficacy of centralized planning can be questioned in the light of experience from other countries like India, which are trying to provide computerize decision support to decentralized planning that will require use of local data bases⁸. An interesting initiative (called OTOP) for promoting e-Commerce in rural areas of Thailand has not been very successful in the absence of other inputs such as design and the lack of logistic facilities to move products to markets. Other interventions are sometimes necessary to exploit the full potential of ICT. The temptation to use technology based interactive communication to project the achievements of the Government, rather than to understand the needs of the poor is also highlighted by the Thailand paper. The use of Video Conference technology to conduct interviews of migrant workers in China is an innovative idea that saves travel costs and prevents wage loss of poor migrant workers. The Chinese example illustrates a pragmatic approach of seeking a technology solution for an existing social problem rather than a technology looking for a problem to solve.

4.6 Computerization of land records in India and Pakistan and reduction in rents in registration in Cambodia

Computerization of land records can directly benefit the poor as has been illustrated through a pilot in Pakistan. A similar application called Bhoomi implemented on a much wider scale in Karnataka has also resulted in many direct benefits. However, further research is needed to establish if there has been any second order impact⁹. For example, there are contradictory reports about impact on corruption for Bhoomi.

An interesting issue that is raised in the Indian paper is that a system that is more transparent can be utilized by the powerful interests to get an unfair advantage. However, the paper needs to reflect whether the manual systems that have great asymmetry in information access built in, the powerful may find it easy to abuse in worse ways-not just knowing which land can be targeted but actually manipulating records without paying compensation.

The Cambodian paper presents interesting data on the extent of rent seeking in the manual system that existed prior to the Government Administrative Information System (GAIS) and a

⁸ Shirin madon and Bhatnagar SC, Institutionalising Decentralised Information Systems for Local Level Planning: Comparing approaches across two states in India, *Journal of Global Information Technology Management*, 3, 4, 2000, pp. 45-59.

Subhash Bhatnagar, e-Government in the Asia-Pacific Region: An Assessment of Issues and Strategies, <http://www.apdip.net/resources/governance/egovernance-egovernment/APDIP-eGovPaper-Subhash.pdf>

⁹ In contrast to the direct impact on costs and convenience, second order impacts result from the longer term usage of an eGovernance application. For example, in the case of Bhoomi, farm credit uptake could increase, or transactions in land sale and purchase could increase.

suggestion that rent seeking has gone down after the introduction of GAIS. Analysis of the features of the computerized system (transparency of data, reduction of gate keeping roles of civil servants, enforcing a queue discipline etc) that have helped in reducing corruption would be helpful. Experience of many e-Government applications in India indicates that rent seeking does not get reduced unless multi faceted reforms in other aspects of Government functioning are also introduced.

Collectively these examples indicate that ICT applications can be designed to deliver benefits to the poor (Pakistan, India, China, Thailand) and can also empower the citizens by promoting transparency and reducing corruption. There are many ways such as electronic bulletin boards and SMS through which participation can be facilitated. Creating economically viable telecenters in rural areas through NGO/private sector participation is a possible means of providing access to rural and isolated populations.

5. Challenges in Meeting the Needs of the Poor

There are some obvious challenges in building pro-poor e-Government. Many of these challenges were recognized in almost all the papers.

Infrastructure and connectivity

Most developing countries lack the necessary infrastructure to build computerized system and provide access to such systems via the Internet in rural and remote areas. Even the basic infrastructure of a stable electricity supply does not exist in rural/remote areas of most countries. Basic communication infrastructure such as access to telephony is also poor as is reflected in the table below. In the absence of telecommunication infrastructure, providing Internet access in rural areas becomes expensive.

By some estimates the cost of an Internet kiosk in a rural area is nearly twice the cost in urban areas because a rural kiosk needs a power back up as well as a satellite connection for communication besides the computing equipment¹⁰. Some of the countries are experimenting with new technologies which can lower the costs of providing access in rural areas. Even if Internet access is provided, it is unlikely to be broadband, limiting the kind of applications that can be supported. The experience of some countries suggests that the problem is one of the last mile. Many countries like India have invested in large networks using optical fiber which connect the semi urban towns but do not reach the villages.

Language and illiteracy

In addition to the problems of infrastructure, there are problems of illiteracy that need to be overcome. Applications have to be designed for use by illiterate people or even if people are literate (as in Sri Lanka) to provide a local language interface. Use of devices such as touch screens can further multiply the costs. Building content in local languages can also be an expensive proposition. In general there is a lack of IT literacy. This requires that most on line services need to be offered through an intermediary (operator) who can understand the need

¹⁰ Hani Shakeel, Michael Best, Bruno Miller, Sam Weber, Comparing Urban and Rural Telecenters Costs, EJISDC (2001) 4, 2, 1-13, <http://www.is.cityu.edu.hk/research/ejisdc/vol4/v4r2.pdf>

of the illiterate client, operate the computer to service the need and often interpret the output if the need is informational.

Human Capacity

Another big challenge is the human capacity within Governments to perform some of the critical tasks that are essential for building successful e-Government applications. These include conceptualizing the application scope and scale, process reengineering, architecting the solutions, software development, maintenance of hardware/software, and training.

Inadequate attention is paid to the need for inter-sectoral linkages for improved performance of e-government initiatives through sharing of information and joint strategies for poverty reduction and achieving the MDGs.

For example, the key challenges identified in the adaptation of the e-government initiatives in Mongolia, especially for poor and vulnerable groups, are citizen participation, human development and security issues, and the digital divide. Citizen participation is still low, due to a lack of initiative, and due to the inertia left behind by a command-administrative system. The low population density, financial constraints and underdeveloped communication networks has added barriers to participation, while there exists a poor understanding of democracy and human rights.

Stimulating Weak Demand

The challenges that are recognized can in some measure be overcome with additional resources. However, there are many challenges that are not recognized. There are other forms of divide, such as gender, age, economic, regional which also need to be overcome. Providing services at the door step of populations with greater heterogeneity and geographically dispersed demand escalates costs.

In most rural/inaccessible areas, there are large pockets of semi-literate populations who have not yet had any experience of benefiting from access to knowledge and information. Nor can they conceptualize the benefits of electronic delivery of Government services. The demand for services therefore needs to be catalyzed as it is weak. An effort needs to be made to understand the latent needs.

In the face of a weak demand, building appropriate content with no market pull working is another challenge that is not recognized.

A large number of pilots have built telecenters to provide access to information and services in rural areas. Some of them have been successful in catalyzing and servicing the demand. However, few of these pilots have been scaled up. Finally it is the scale that can create an impact on the poor. The efforts needed to reform processes, manage change and scale up have been underestimated by e-Government planners.

The above challenges raise concerns that need to be addressed at the level of formulating national policies and strategies as well some challenges that must be addressed during project implementation.

6. Issues in National Policy /Strategy

Lack of Pro-poor e-Government strategy formulation

The primary concern is one of lack of focus of national e-Government strategies on policies on vulnerable groups-whether these are poor who can not afford to access services or those groups which are denied an opportunity to access because of some other barrier. As the Chinese paper indicated, the political profile of these groups will need to be raised for them to receive consideration from the policy makers.

However, even if the intent to serve the poor exists, the process of developing a national strategy needs to be such so that the interest of the vulnerable groups are represented and articulated. Often, the processes of strategy formulation are not participative. They are driven by the central IT departments/ministries. Sometimes other agencies and departments that are responsible for pro-poor programs may not even be formally consulted. There is less likelihood of consultation with the civil society-groups which work closely with the vulnerable sections and can articulate their needs. The extent to which the voice of the poor can be heard and addressed efficiently is a function of the level of democracy; freedom of speech; and commitment of the government to tackle digital divide. NGOs can be used to facilitate communication between the people and their government, provided that a genuine commitment exists at the political level to dialog with the NGOs. It is difficult to infer whether the current lack of consultation is a result of technocratic thinking or a lack of availability of suitable process of consultation.

Top-down versus Bottom-up

Perhaps it will be easier to target the poor and the vulnerable if the applications are developed at the local levels of Government. However, in many countries the development of e-Government strategy is top down from the national Government. For example, the Philippines paper discusses the strategy of development of ICT applications for local Government in the Philippines and debates the choice between a totally centralized specification, design, and implementation versus a completely decentralized process of development. It recommends a middle path of centrally defined standards and local development. A variety of middle paths have been explored by other countries. Therefore, keeping the balance between central coordination and agency ownership is an important issue when the programs are driven by central Governments as was also pointed out in the Thailand paper.

Appropriate Mix of Technologies

As the experience from Philippines and Mie Prefecture suggests, there are many different technologies that can be used to promote participation by the common citizens in the affairs of the Government. Therefore, national policies have to encourage an appropriate mix of media and technology for sharing information and community building. This may include SMS through cell phones, community radio, and the Internet.

Poor Implementation and lack of Public-Private-Civil Society Partnerships

Often the failure to impact the poor comes not from a lack of intent and strategy but from poor implementation. Institutionalizing national e-Government plans and designing

implementation mechanisms that will ensure the development of appropriate applications and make them sustainable should be seen as an important part of the strategy building process. There have been many challenges in scaling up successful pilot projects that have demonstrated pro-poor impact. The task is too large for the Government to handle on its own. A partnership between Government, civil society and private sector going is the best way to promote digital inclusion and pro-poor Government programs as was brought out in the Sri Lankan and Hong Kong papers. Private sector can bring in the investments and operational management expertise; Government can provide the enabling policies and bridging subsidies and the civil society can intermediate between the technology and illiterate populations by interpreting the needs and scouting for solutions. Governments need to develop pragmatic policies on providing subsidies to compensate for higher costs of taking ICTs to rural areas or vulnerable groups. However, subsidies are not required in all cases and private sector may well be able to provide access in those areas which have a strong rural economy. There are many ways to provide the subsidy on a competitive basis. Only in the most backward areas would a direct intervention by the Government may be needed.

Examples of Public-Private-Partnerships (PPPs) were cited from many countries such as India and Korea. For instance, the Korean government expanded e-literacy in rural areas by the means of PPP. Although, vested interests may prevent the success of a PPP, on balance many presenters recommended that Governments explore PPP in many areas of pro-poor e-Governance.

Lack of Proper Assessments

One aspect that gets ignored in most national plans is the need to assess impact of projects in a systematic way. Several e-Government projects were described in different papers including some that were designed to help the vulnerable groups. However, very few of the papers could shed any light on the usage of these applications and the impact on citizens. There is therefore no way for the policy makers to understand as to what works and what does not and to get any guidance on the nature of projects that should be taken up.

India is addressing some of the above issues through its National e-Governance Plan which aims to: a) implement mission mode projects in key departments (that focus on development or serve rural populations) with large public interface, b) to ensure that even the remote areas can benefit from ICT, c) to provide generic program components including capacity building and d) build a component on impact assessment. The training programs are mainly targeting e-government leaders, Chief Information Officers, Chief Technology Officers, internal users of ICT systems, external users, and people with general IT skills in the government. The skill areas for capacity building are financial management, process re-engineering, change management, technology management/leadership, and program/project management.

7. Project Implementation Level Issues

A Participatory Project Design

Just as it is important for the national strategies to be developed in a participative way so that applications are likely to have an impact on vulnerable groups can be given priority, the

design of such applications must also get developed using participatory approaches. A participatory design approach can ensure that access mechanisms, content, and interface are designed for the poor/vulnerable.

A Sustainability Strategy

Almost all authors mentioned sustainability of projects as a main concern. The 'level of participation of the poor'; 'capacity building / education'; 'commitment of government' are factors relevant to long term sustainability of pro-poor e-Governance initiatives. Some authors highlighted that government commitment has to be reflected in the form of 'well-structured' policies, reasonably defined, clear objectives, and carefully designed procedures to ensure proper use of public fund. There is also a need to balance the emphasis on budgetary controls for maintaining accountability with the need for flexibility to encourage innovations.

Economic viability of projects is important for long term sustainability. The design of each project must focus on activities that help generate income. These could be affordable user fees, commissions from delivery of priced services offered by the private sector and opportunities of earning advertising revenues. Involvement of private sector through Public Private Partnership is seen to be a means of ensuring sustainability.

Another factor that was seen to be critical for sustainability was coordination, especially amongst government departments. Often turf wars between departments delay projects that span different departments. In such situations there is a need to define an organizational mechanism with sufficient authority to enforce cross-departmental linkages and drive the design and implementation of such inter departmental e-government initiatives.

A Monitoring and Evaluation System

Each project needs to build a Monitoring and Evaluation System to track whether vulnerable groups use the application and benefit from it. Low usage of applications designed for the poor can often be traced to a lack of awareness about the existence of the system and the kinds of benefits it can deliver. For example an application for online issue of certificates and licenses must create awareness about the procedures, service standards in the new system, the fact that operators can not use discretion to expedite processing and therefore a bribe does not need to be paid, and the kind of information that can be demanded from service providers. It takes considerable time, resources to get such information across in rural areas. A conscious program of creating awareness has to be mounted. To create such awareness other media such as TV, radio, local language print media, and the private sector would need to be involved in a coordinated campaign.

8. The Way Forward

Past research has largely been descriptive. There has been a lack of critical examination of process of strategizing; choice of applications; process of design and implementation. Often a supply side view is taken. Outcome and impact on clients, agencies and society is not assessed. With hardly any project where impact has been assessed systematically, successes/failures have often been reported on the basis of anecdotal evidence. The workshop

papers presented many different perspectives on pro-poor e-Governance. The conclusions as have been reported in this paper point to an overall lack of serious concern for the poor and vulnerable in the design and implementation of e-Governance programs. There were many rich ideas that were presented but there was a certain lack of convergence in terms of the way forward.

Given that e-Governance and e-Government is in an early stage in many countries of the region, the way forward can at best define the first steps that can be taken. In the concluding sessions of the workshop the participants suggested the following steps.

- Each country should define as to which sections of the population constitute the vulnerable group that needs to be targeted. Their geographical spread needs to be mapped. Participatory approaches need to be used in developing e-Government programs and plans, so that the needs of the poor are well articulated and can be reflected in the choice of applications and their design.
- Existing national e-Government programs and e-Government projects should be audited in a systematic way to determine the potential and actual impact on poor and the vulnerable. A Tool Kit can be designed for the purpose of carrying out such an audit.
- Policy makers need to be sensitized to the fact that the digital divide will be further exacerbated unless e-Government specifically focuses on the poor and the vulnerable and that e-Government has the potential to deliver significant benefits to the vulnerable/poor.
- Capacity needs to be built for e-Government program designers to:
 - To promote participation by relevant stakeholder groups from civil society in formulating e-Government plans and strategies
 - Define policy frameworks that promote the use of different technologies that are relevant for the poor; provide incentive for creation of appropriate content, and create affordable and convenient access points
 - Make application choices that can potentially impact the poor/vulnerable
 - Create partnership with NGOs, media, and Private Sector in implementing pro-poor e-Governance
- Capacity needs to be built for project implementers to use participative methods in design and implementation of projects/applications focused on the poor/vulnerable.
- A large amount of training material (case studies, tool kits) needs to be created to support capacity building.
- There is considerable scope for regional cooperation in sharing telecommunication infrastructure for creating access points, build content and exchange best practices. Moreover regional and cross-border development issues such as HIV/AIDS, natural resources and disaster management, trade and transport, tourism etc are areas where regional e-government cooperation could be of significant mutual benefit. Mechanisms need to be evolved for developing such cooperation.

A variety of stake holders including Governments, civil society, private sector, academia and the multilateral development institutions will all have to play some part in making pro-poor e-Governance happen. International agencies like the UNDP and UNCRD can play an active doers role in some aspects and a facilitator/enabler role in other aspects. Having taken a pioneering role in organizing this workshop to focus attention on pro-poor e-Governance,

UNDP-APDIP and UNCRD need to carry the message further. Current e-government initiatives mainly focus on the efficiency of government services. The challenge in the future is to make sure that e-Government initiatives also target the poor. Guiding principles need to be identified to ensure the effectiveness in implementation of e-government initiatives targeting the poor.

The next section outlines some thoughts on the kinds of activities the UNDP-APDIP, UNDP country offices, and UNCRD could take up to mainstream the pro-poor concern in e-Governance strategies and help in building capacity within all stakeholders to design, implement and evaluate and monitor pro-poor e-Governance projects:

Build a community of professionals (policy makers, project implementers, academics, development practitioners) who can champion the need for pro-poor e-Governance. The community can be built around a rich web site that provides knowledge resources and promotes an off line dialog within the community. Periodic face-to-face workshops focused on specific tools, policy frameworks can catalyze the process of community building. The contents of the web site would cover: knowledge products: case studies; tool kits; papers; training material, announcement of training programs. Some of the questions on which knowledge products can focus are: What works and what does not? Where is the maximal potential for impacting the poor? What needs to be done for successful implementation? For creating knowledge products, UNDP can seed some research projects in the academic/research institutions.

Conduct sensitization workshops in collaboration with other agencies, Governments, academic institutions.

Conduct workshop for UNDP staff on mainstreaming e-Governance across a variety of developmental programs and projects to identify opportunities of pro-poor e-Governance

Work with Government agencies and training institutions to design training programs for Policy Makers on topics such as: auditing of National e-Governance Plans, enabling policies for rural telecom access, enabling framework for PPP. Similarly training programs for project managers of pro-poor e-Governance projects on: participatory design, critical success factors, choice of technologies, managing Public Private Partnerships and project management.

Training programs for civil society—on assessing demand for information and knowledge in rural areas and articulation of the demand.

There is need for work at both the regional and national level. From a regional level UNDP can do the tool kit, policy guidelines and the assessment methodology etc. Collaboration with agencies such as UNCRD with a wide reach in building capacity at the national and subnational levels must be used for further integration of poverty reduction and human security concerns into mainstream e-governance and e-government agenda and capacity building initiatives and wider dissemination. Also pilot initiatives could be initiated to be implemented at national level (possible by UNDP country offices with ministries, NGOs or

research institutions). During implementation there needs to be a dialog between the regional and national level in order for these pilots to be scalable/replicable. UNDP together with APDIP could play the role of ensuring that the pilots are designed, implemented, and evaluated utilizing the tool kit, policy guidelines, and assessment methodology developed for a pro-poor e-Governance and APDIP could ensure that the lessons learnt are disseminated.

Table 1: Comparative Data on Different Countries

Countries	Population (Million)	Per capita income in US \$	Population Density per square km	% Population Below Poverty	Literacy level %	Telecom Penetration %	Internet Penetration %	E-readiness score
Cambodia	15.01	2,000	70.6	40	73.6	0.25	0.3	NA
China	1,306.72	5,600	636	10	90.9	20.92	8.5	3.85
Fiji	0.85	5,900	48	25.5	92	12.35	7.1	NA
Hong Kong	7.05	34,200	6,317		93	55.51	69.2	8.32
India	1,112.22	3,100	328	25	61	4.63	4.5	4.17
Japan	128.39	29,400	337	NA	99.9	58.57	67.2	7.42
Mongolia	2.5	1,900	1.8		NA	5.17	0.1	7.73
Pakistan	163.98	2,200	202	32	48.7	2.66	2.1	2.74
Philippines	85.71	5,000	292	40	92.6	4.00	9.1	2.93
Sri Lanka	19.63	4,000	305	22	90.4	4.42	1.4	4.03
South Korea	50.63	19,200	491	4	97.9	47.24	67	3.8
Thailand	66.52	8,100	127	10	92.6	10.55	12.7	4.69

Annexure I: List of Asia Pacific e-government case studies

No.	Country	Author	Title
1.	Cambodia	Dr. Leewood Phu , Secretary General, National Information & Communications Technology Development Authority (NiDA)	Cambodia: the Road to e-Governance
2.	China	Prof. Guo Liang, Research Center for Social Development, Chinese Academy of Social Science (CASS)	Under The Golden Shine : China's Efforts to Bridge Government and Citizens
3.		Dr. Yang Fengchun, Dean, Academy of e-Government, Peking University and Associate Professor, School of the Government, Peking University	The status of Vulnerable Groups in the Chinese e- Government Construction
4.	Fiji	Mr. John Budden, Economic Infrastructure Adviser, Pacific Island Forum Secretariat	e-Government in the Pacific (An opportunity for Regional Synergies?)
5.		Dr. Anand Chand, Senior Lecturer in Sociology Department, The University Of South Pacific	e-Government in the South Pacific: The Case Study of Fiji
6.	Hong Kong	Dr. John Y C Fung, Director, Information Technology Resource Centre, The Hong Kong Council of Social Service	The Digital Divide and the role of NGOs in empowerment of disadvantaged groups via ICT in Hong Kong
7.	India	Mr S.R. Das , Senior Director (Capacity Building), e- governance Division, Department of Information Technology, Government of India. Mr. R. Chandrashekhar, Joint Secretary , (e-governance) Department of IT, Gov. of India	Capacity Building for E-Governance in India
8.		Prof. Rahul De, Hewlett -Packard Chair Professor, Indian Institute of Management Bangalore	The Impact of Indian E-Government Initiatives: Issues of Poverty and Vulnerability Reduction, and Conflict
9.	Japan	Mr. Mamoru Murabayashi, Director General, Planning Bureau Mie Prefectural Government	Activities for e-Democracy in Mie Prefecture

9.	Mongolia	Mr. Shirbazar Sukhbaatar, Deputy Director, Policy and Planning Department of the Information and Communication Technology Authority Mr. Odgerel Ulziikhutag, Head of Division, Information and Communications Development Center of the ICT Authority	e-Government Challenges to Enhance Citizen Participation in Mongolia
10.		Ms. Lkhagvasuren Ariunaa CEO, Intec Co. Ltd	Mobilizing Communities for Participation in E-Government Initiatives for the Poor and Marginalized
11.	Pakistan	Mr. Muhammad Yahya Waliullah, Secretary, IT Department, Gov. of Sindh Mr. S.M. Raza, Project Director, e-Government, IT Department, Gov. of Sindh	Impact of E-government Programme on the Underprivileged in Sindh Province and Karachi City
12.		Mr. Muhammed Usman Qazi Fellow, LEAD International	Computerization of Land Records in Pakistan: A Comparative Analysis of Two Projects from a Human Security Perspective
13.	Philippines	Dr. Emmanuel C. Lallana, Commissioner, Commission on ICT, Office of the President	SMS and Democratic Governance in the Philippines
14.		Dr. Erwin A. Alampay, Assistant Professor, National College of Public Administration and Governance, University of the Philippines	Incorporating participation in the Philippines' e-LGU Project
15.	South Korea	Dr. Shin, Young-Jin Expert advisor for Min. Gov. Admin. & Home Affairs	e-Government and Universal Administrative Information Service
16.		Prof. Seang-Tae Kim, Professor of Public Administration Graduate School of Governance and President, Global e-Policy - e-Government Institute, Sungkyunkwan University	Converging e-Democracy and e-Government Model toward Evolutionary Model of e-Governance: The Case of South Korea
18.	Sri Lanka	Mr. Shoban Rainford, Programme Manager, M&E/ HR and Capacity Building, Information and Communication Technology Agency	E-Sri Lanka: An Integrated Approach to E-government Case Study
19.		Dr. Harsha Liyanage Consultant, International Advisor	NGO and Community Participation in Setting up the Nanasala for Targeting the poor and vulnerable and improving government accountability
20.	Thailand	Dr. Wichian Chutimaskul School of Information Technology, King Mongkut's University of Technology	ICT and e-Government for Poverty Alleviation and Eradication of the Disadvantaged Groups' problems: A case study of Thailand