APEC: E-Governance a Defining Factor in Structural Reform

E-Governance is critical to the ability of an economy to improve government efficiency and transparency, an APEC Economic Committee workshop concluded at the annual forum in Lima, Peru. Committee Chair Professor Bob Buckle, stated “several economies have attempted to revitalize their public administration and make it more proactive, efficient, transparent and especially more service orientated. One of the most commonly employed tools used to accomplish this is introducing innovations in the way governments mobilize, display and utilize ICT.

Buckle continued: “Yet, while studies indicate that governments are moving forward in e-Government development around the world, progress is slow and often disparate. Within the APEC region, the differences between member economies rank among the top 35 of the world while others require further work to improve their readiness.”

The workshop considered the experience of several economies, including Chinese Taipei whose economy is ranked first in e-Governance for several years. Citizens benefit from online services from payment of tax to marriage registration. Business opportunities have been extended through the Internet and government offices are virtually paperless, reported the Minister of Research, Development and Evaluation. “In the future citizens will even be able to receive notices of outstanding fees – just like having a personal secretary. Apart from efficiency and timeliness, e-Government goes further an actually enables good governance by engaging the public and actually allows government to interact with citizens.

Also discussed at the meeting were e-Administration for Better Accountability, e-Services for Better Efficiency and Transparency, and e-Participation for Better Policy Making.

ITU Establishes Global Cybersecurity Center in Malaysia

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Global Cybersecurity Agenda (GCA), will have its global headquarters in Cyberjaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. An agreement has been signed with the International Multilateral Partnership Against Cyber-Terrorism (IMPACT), for state-of-the-art facilities. The agreement is in line with the decision of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) to build security and confidence in the use of ICT. The Summit also called for the coordination of multi-stakeholder implementation of information exchange, creation of knowledge, sharing of best practices, and assistance in developing public/private partnerships.

The collaboration with ITU and IMPACT is aimed at building synergies to provide: (1) real-time analysis, aggregation and dissemination of global cyber threat information, (2) early warning system and emergency response to global cyber threats, and (3) training and skills development on the technical, legal and policy aspects of cybersecurity. The IMPACT center is being readied on a 7-acre estate near Kuala Lumpur with an infrastructure built over 58,000 square feet.

The GCA is an ITU framework for international cooperation for governments, international law enforcement authorities, the private sector, international organizations and civil society to make cyberspace more secure in an increasingly networked information society. The international effort is focused on strengthening five areas: (1) legal framework, (2) technical measures, (3) organizational structures, (4) capacity building, and (5) international cooperation.

While the GCA will be housed at the IMPACT Center, ITU will have a ‘virtual showcase’ in Geneva of the early warning system, crisis management and real-time analysis of global cyber threats. Other activities of GCA include training and skills development, se-
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security assurance, and international cooperation will be conducted under the auspices of GCA.

Broadband Rapidly Expands in OECD Countries

The number of broadband subscribers in the OECD reached 251 million in mid-2008, an increase of 14% from June 2007, according to OECD statistics. This growth increased broadband penetration rates to 21.3 subscriptions per 100 inhabitants, up from 20% in December 2007.

Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland, Iceland, Sweden, Korea and Finland lead the OECD with broadband penetration well above the OECD average, each surpassing the 30 subscribers per 100 inhabitant threshold.

The strongest per-capita subscriber growth over the year was in Luxembourg and Germany. Each country added more than 5 subscribers per 100 inhabitants during the past year. On average, the OECD area increased 2.7 subscribers per 100 inhabitants over the year.

The United States is the largest broadband market in the OECD with 75 million subscribers. US broadband subscribers consistently represent 30% of all connections in the OECD.

Consumer Buying Patterns Move Into Online Purchases Using Mobile

The results of a recent study indicate a shift in consumers buying patterns – from traditional retail and catalog shopping, to purchasing goods online and with mobile devices. Some 40% of participants in the research conducted by JJ CoHosting concludes that Internet and mobile shopping have now replaced other shopping means, confirming an emerging trend that mobile devices are becoming the new storefront. According to the survey, 60% of respondents planned to spend up to $200.00 on goods and services via mobile devices online during the 2008 Christmas season, compared to 45% who will purchase the same amount in retail stores.

In order to tap into this new source of revenue, it will be necessary for vendors to get their products ready for the mobile experience and to make sure that users, with their best available mobile functions, can complete a transaction on the site. Mobile sites are an extension of existing company offerings but can stand alone as well. The mobile sites can be sourced from the same database presently in use to make their management easy.

There are many different mobile devices, the report notes, and today there is not a true standard. With this in mind, mobile shopping sites need to meet the restrictions and limitations of different mobile devices. The real task is to make the site user friendly for the mobile user and at the same time create a site that still inspires them to purchase.

There are continuing concerns, however over the security of mobile e-Commerce. Legislation was adopted by the U.S. Congress in 2008 to address some of the major concerns in the Electronic Signatures in Global and National Commerce. American companies are collaborating to push a public key infrastructure solution to financial institutions. The E-Sign Act became effective in October 2008 states that electronic financial transactions between a consumer and a merchant – typically a content provider – will be legally bound with digital signatures. Digital signature signatures authenticate users that enter into contractual agreements via electronic means, through wired devices of Internet-enabled wireless devices.
Charting the Direction of Indonesia’s Government ICT Strategy

“Currently, ICT is on the top of the agenda for the Indonesian government. Technology can serve as a critical enabler for poverty reduction, and for the achievement of our Millennium Development Goals,” according to Kemal Stamboel, Vice Chairman, Executive Team, Indonesia National ICT Council. The following are his comments made in a recent interview:

“ICT has the potential to create earning opportunities and jobs for the country, improve the delivery of and access to basic services in healthcare and education, facilitate information sharing and knowledge creation, and increase the transparency, accountability and effectiveness of government, business and civil society.

“Our strategic intent is to focus on ICT Development Roadmaps such as the Palapa Ring Fiber Optic Domestic Backbone Project, e-Procurement implementation, National Single Window, e-Education Implementation, National Identification Number (NIN), Affordable Computer, Legal Software Implementation and Internet Socialization Campaign.

“But we cannot deliver these through our own efforts. The government hopes to see more of the private sector involved in the development of ICT in Indonesia. The private sector is the key to sustainable growth and the Indonesian government is highly committed to protecting the interests of good-willing investors, and to facilitate mutual business-to-business arrangements in order to develop critical entry point and to develop profitable business cases.

“We want to realize mutually beneficial ICT initiatives for the businesses and population at large. I understand that the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) is neither an industry-led nor a government-led initiative, it is a mechanism whereby all stakeholders can have a voice and contribute throughout all stages of the policymaking process as well as in implementation and evaluation.

“The effectiveness of ICT in a society can only be attained if there are skilled human resources available to use the technology. With this in mind, human resource development with respect to citizens’ capabilities of using ICT is a crucial component in the effective integration of ICT into society.

“Through our ICT Policy, the government seeks to build an ICT-driven nation revolving around the idea of a knowledge-based society. I firmly believe that the ICT Policy will allow the development of ICT infrastructure hence improving citizen’s access to information.

“This access to information, whatever its source, will be a critical springboard to develop human resources with ICT knowledge, thus boosting the economy of our country, organizations, and families.

“With the increasing need for inspired and inspiring employees and leaders, and the constant demand to be innovative, cutting-edge and different, it is obvious that the arts and business partnerships are here to stay. The future holds many exciting examples that will prove that two can work together not only to further each other’s goals but also for the benefit of society at large.

“Policies and regulations change very quickly. It is therefore important for foreign companies to keep themselves updated. Last year’s knowledge might not be valid this year. It is also important to have connections with those who know the systems and are capable of speeding up the process.

“Public and private sectors may explore several models such as government-to-government, industry-to-industry, and government-to-industry partnerships for developing the ICT industry. The government will provide full support to encourage the process.” Source: www.futuregov.net.

APEC Makes Progress on Regional Economic Integration

Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) trade officials meeting in Lima, Peru during November, 2008 considered a forward work plan for 2009 which will help promote regional economic integration. Apart from examining the options and long-term prospects for a Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP), trade officials considered steps to take so that they can achieve meaningful progress on regional economic integration.

The proposals included plans for opening up trade and improving investment regimes. Laying out its objectives for 2009 the committee on Trade and Investment seeks to make progress on directions that were set out in the Minister’s Responses for Trade when they met earlier in 2008. “There are challenges as well as
benefits to negotiating large scale agreements. Work on regional economic integration is underway,” said Eliza-
beth Cheiliah, Chair of the APEC Committee on Trade and Investment. “We have been conducting analyses
of the provisions in the free trade agreements in light of a better understanding of the areas of convergence
and divergences in response to business concerns over the FTA spaghetti bowl.”

“We have come to understand that there are dif-
fering interpretations for rules of origin. Sometimes
these measures unnecessarily protect domestic indus-
tries from foreign competition. Examining on a se-
toral basis these preferential rules of origin will allow
us to seek common approaches within APEC. In addi-
tion, recognizing how domestic policies impact trade,
we have begun work on investment with the implemen-
tation of the Investment Facilitation Action Plan which
was endorsed by trade ministers.

“Huge benefits can accrue to producers and con-
sumers by encouraging efficient trade logistics. Throu-
gh a policy dialogue in 2009 we will better under-
stand the economic rationalization and welfare gains
that result from land, air and sea connections. While
progress was well received by the business community,
they asked that APEC officials continue to focus on ad-
dressing practical concerns that could improve global
commerce.

The APEC Business Advisory Council (ABAC) reit-
erated the belief that the FTAAP represents a practical
means to converge the various trade agreements that al-
ready exist in the region. A regional agreement would
advance trade and investment liberalization, helping
APEC economies to achieve their long-standing goal
for lowering tariff and non-tariff barriers,” according to
Mr. Juan Francisco Raffo, chair of ABAC.

He continued, “we urge APEC officials to simplify
processes so that doing business in the region is easier.
In particular, emphasis should be placed on improving
transparency in investment rules and decision-making.
We are pleased the model measures developed by the
APEC Committee on Trade and Investment, reflects
these concerns.

East African Community (EAC) Members to Draft
ICT Policy

Member states of the East African Community (EAC) have resolved to come up with a harmonized
Information Communication Technology (ICT) policy to promote regional integration to yield effective busi-
ness investment opportunities. Participants at the EAC National Workshop for ICT Policy review in Nairobi
understood it is important to prepare a common policy for its members: Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda
and Burundi.

“ICT Permanent Secretary Dr. Bitange Ndemo in an
opening statement said the community was looking
towards deepening political, social, economic and cul-
tural integration in order to improve quality of life of
people through increased competitiveness, value added
production, trade and investment. “As you already
know we have made a lot of progress towards inte-
gration of Customs Union in East Africa and our aim
when we bring the five particular countries together is
to establish a common market of at least 120 million
people.” The Permanent Secretary continued, “Once
the policy becomes synchronized East Africa residents
would enjoy the benefits of sending data across the bor-
ders without hitches, as the ultimate outcome of policy
would ensure a level playing field for member coun-
tries. As the stakeholders discuss on the harmonization
of the policy they needed to focus on issues such as mar-
et market structures and regulations effects a single market
on consumers, political, economic and social consid-
erations, institutional arrangements and prioritization
areas.”

Kenya’s Policy Review Framework, he said “was
centered on the importance of ICT policy environment,
interconnection costs, innovative technology and Fi-
nance. Open access, ICT and violence against women,
participation in the international bodies and ICT, and
the environment 9E-waste).” Ndemo announced that
the ICT Bill already has been published, was currently
under review, and told the EAC stakeholders that the
parliamentary committee on Information and Commu-
nication would invite them to discuss the bill in the
next three weeks. The bill covers e-Transactions and
broadcasting with a broadcasting law that would lead
to proper regulation of radio and television content. A
Freedom of Information Bill also has reached advanced
stages while the Government was also working on a
new bill on Data Protection not covered by the ICT
bill. It was pointed out that even though the region
has witnessed growth of the mobile industry there was
still limited improvement in broadband networks thus
killing opportunities for development. It was stated
that “universal access to ICT networks and services as
an indicator is still far from being a reality.”
ASEAN Innovation Center Formed in Singapore to Facilitate Data Storage

An ASEAN innovation center has been formed in Singapore to facilitate the development of data storage and management in the region. The estimated US$1.5 million center is launched by NetApp in partnership with the Infocomm Development Authority (IDA). It is designed as a showcase center for partners and customers from ASEAN to test applications from Microsoft, Oracle and Symantec on the latest storage technology infrastructure. IDA expects the center to promote strategic and partnerships between Singapore companies and other multinational corporations. Enterprises in the region are estimated to spend US$13.4 billion on IT services. More than 40% is expected to be used for data storage and management solutions.

Creating Information Societies in Latin America with Young Men and Women

“It is essential to create, together with young men and women, ways of inhabiting the information society in Latin America,” so believes Gloria Bonder, Coordinator, Regional UNESCO Chair, Science and Technology in Latin America. “Since the early spread of ‘new’ information and communication technologies, it has become almost cliché to suggest that youth are key actors for the creation of the digital revolution. Youth are portrayed as the protagonists and the motivating force for ICTs promise: innovation, constant creativity, and ultimately, global economic and social progress.”

“Digital natives and the ‘e-generation’ are both terms that create the perception that youth is a relatively homogenous group and ignore the huge internal differences within the group. From the perspective of many older adults, youth are enowed with capabilities that seem unattainable for most adults. Today’s ‘digital immigrants’ are struggling to manage these tools.

Several discourses attest to the strength of this social imagry, from fictional and futurist discourses, to the media, the academy and even our daily language. If inclusion is the main goal, it is young men and to a lesser degree young women, who are the target of policies and programs. In Latin America, the gap among youth from different socioeconomic and geographical backgrounds have encouraged the development of a series of educational programs. Format and informal educational projects seek primarily – and in some cases exclusively – to increase young people’s access to computers and connectivity, while providing basic capacities for ICTs use. Large economic and human/social resources investments have been made in the region to achieve this goal. However, there are few assessments describing how the projects were planned and what their impact was on the lives of Latin American youth in terms of better economic and employment opportunities, increase social capital, broadening of networks and creation of knowledge.

By lacking appropriate tools to assess progress’ success, we run the risk of wasting our resources, and potentially frustrating young people’s expectations and those of the institutions that address their concerns. The author led a project that included the creation of a database on youth and ICT programs in Latin America, and an in-depth study of 12 ongoing or recently completed programs. She has prepared an article on Gender Equity in Latin American Youth’s Access To and Use of Internet Applied Research containing the perspectives of implicit representations and meanings that have supported programs implemented in 4 Latin American countries aimed at developing technological literacy for underprivileged youth. Source: the monthly magazine of ICT4D August 2008 www.i4donline.net.

Council of Europe Opens Data Protection Treaty to Non-European Countries

The Council of Europe Convention on Data Protection, for the first time since it was opened for signature in 1981, is inviting non-European countries with data protection laws to sign and ratify it. The Convention’s Consultative Committee recommended “that non-member states, with data protection legislation in accordance with Convention 108, should be allowed to accede to the Convention and it invited the Committee of Ministers to take note of this recommendation and
to consider any subsequent accession requests accord-
ingly.” The Committee of Ministers on July 2, 2008
“agreed to examine any accession request in the light
of this recommendation” and instructed the Secretariat
to disseminate information about the Convention.

Citizen-Centered e-
Government Presumes
Knowing What Citizens
Want

The promise of E-Government and a range of oth-
er E-s is to engage citizenry in government in a user-
centered manner, but also to develop quality govern-
ment services and delivery systems that are efficient and
effective. This was the theme of the ACM Internation-
al Conference on Digital Government Research held
in Montreal, http://portal.acm.org Speakers pointed out
that user-centered e-Government suggests that govern-
ments will gain economies of scale, reduce costs, and
provide technology-enabled user services. The extent
to which these goals of e-Government are mutually ex-
clusive is an issue that requires additional study, par-
ticularly research that focuses on the relationship be-
tween citizen-centered e-Government services and the
attainment of cost savings. A key issue is that citizen-
centered e-Government implies that governments know
what citizens want from e-Government, want to meet
citizen expectations and needs, and actively seek to
discover what citizens want from e-Government.