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Empowering people through e-governance

SPIDER supports democracy in Mozambique

Mozambique has no central register of its population nor does each citizen have a unique personal number. There are various ID documents issued (i.e. election card, military card, health card, driver license, passports) by various agencies belonging to different ministries, and for each type of document/card, separate and non-linked numbering is applied.

Since December 2006, SPIDER supports a pilot project in Mozambique that will enable a more efficient and effective public administration. In addition to benefitting the individual who needs to access social services, the project promotes democracy through the availability of correct voting registers, and access to public services. In 2008, the project successfully completed testing integrations and interoperability with the rest of the e-government. Initially, 1000 ID cards with smart card functionalities will be distributed in three provinces. The project also includes activities for adjusting the legal framework for a full-scale system, and capacity building. Other international donors have already indicated an interest in assuming the cost of a full-scale national implementation.

E-governance

Poverty is not only about inadequate socio-economic development, but includes broader aspects such as opportunities and people's ability to influence, at the individual level, decisions that affect their lives.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can support democracy and human rights by expanding citizens' opportunities to participate in political decision-making, by providing citizens with access to information, and facilitating dissemination of information, as well as enabling social coordination and mobilization.

A better informed citizenry who can put pressure on national institutions to be accountable and responsive to citizens' needs and priorities is a fundamental component of a functioning democracy. ICT can also improve the public sector's coordination capacity and service delivery by employing user-friendly administrative systems and appropriate Knowledge Management systems. Lastly, ICT has a real potential to increase transparency in governance and expose and prevent corrupt practices.

Governance, public administration and civic participation

ICT can be an important tool for enhancing democracy and governance efforts by supporting the collection, storage and analysis of information within government structures and public service. Safe and user-friendly computer systems can effectively support most tasks performed by the public administration. In addition, ICT is a cost effective tool for activities such as planning and conducting elections, and for distributing information such as where to register for upcoming elections, ongoing vaccination campaigns, the introduction of new identification cards, or changes in tax and revenue systems. Even in places where access to ICT is limited due to infrastructural inadequacies, ICT can make an impact when com-

bined with radio and/or television broadcasts, or even print media, though access may be indirect. Good governance is a prerequisite for sustainable poverty reduction.

ICT, democracy and civic participation

Over the past years, the proliferation of cheap mobile end-user devices has provided fundamentally new opportunities for citizens to take part in information production and worldwide dissemination. The monopoly on large scale information production and dissemination, long enjoyed by mass media channels and governments, is irrevocably a thing of the past. Consequently, ICT can help citizens to surpass government controlled information and communication and gain access to international support systems.

Citizens all over the world are jumping at the opportunity to document their concerns and they use new technology to disseminate the information as well as mobilize a response.

Mobile technology is being used as a tool for civil society actors and individuals engaged in democracy and human rights in a variety of settings. Recent post-election protests from Iran successfully used ICT not only as a tool for civic participation and coordination of protests, but as a means to raise international attention.

Empowered citizenry the best way to fight corruption

Corruption regardless of level - from the wholesale of state assets by corrupt government officials to petty corruption among public servants - hampers development. Corruption falls disproportionately on the poorer members of society and hinders them from competing for scarce resources and inadequately funded services.

The poor are frequently portrayed as helpless in the face of corruption, but civil society organizations in developing countries are gearing up to launch transparency as an key component in empowering poor people. Research shows that ICT can and in some places already does effectively obstruct corrupt practices. By making government information, processes and procedures transparent through e-government and depersonalized do-it-yourself e-services, citizens become empowered and less likely to fall prey to public officials' illegal financial demands.

ICT can support the fight against corruption by allowing people to share information about corrupt practices; by collaboratively gathering evidence of corrupt activities; or by anonymous online whistle-blowing through sites such as Wikileaks.org, a platform for whistleblowers to expose sensitive documents and a research tool for journalists.

The Swedish Program for ICT in Developing Regions, SPIDER, was constituted in 2004. The mission is to assist developing countries with promotion and deployment of ICTs for combating the digital divide and reducing poverty, in line with the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). SPIDER is governed by a board with representatives from senior management of Swedish Universities and private companies.

Read more at www.spidercenter.org



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Read more on e-governance

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