

**Speech of Mr. Sami Al Basheer Al Morshid, ITU Director of the Telecommunication Development Bureau (BR) of the International Telecommunication Union
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Distinguished Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to be with you here today and launching two days debate on the subject so actual and important. Actual, because nowadays we are in the era of the information age; important because what is behind it, is a concern for all of us.

New technologies have the potential to make the promises of e-government real. That is the first fact.

E- government and democracy, together are one piece of the e-democracy puzzle. That is the second fact.

The third fact is that today, the politics and governance are going online around the world, no matter if it is online campaigning, lobbying or political news. However, citizens and e-citizens are the only people who will fully experienced this process.

Deepening citizen participation in democracy is vital to ensure that governments can accommodate the will of their people. This raises key questions that involve policies regarding:

- How citizens engage in e-Government? What kind of policies and procedures that support a dynamic system?
- Does it and how it affects their lives?
- How to display governments information in a manner that is easy for average citizens to understand and that increases significantly comprehension and engagement?
- How government staff and citizens are trained to properly acquire such skills as participation management; transformation participation into substance for policy inputs and development accreditation strategies for civil society?

These are only some of the challenges that we are facing nowadays in this subject.

Distinguished Colleagues,

We have to emphasize, that new technology is changing the balance of power. ICT enables a new model of citizenship, where the citizens are both better informed and more demanding. Thus, government and public administration have to learn to adapt to this new political behavior.

Moreover, they need to play a proactive role in the online world. By promoting and developing a new form of citizenship empowered by ICT, it is possible to successfully integrate the citizens into the democratic life and decision- making process.

That is why, better citizen engagement for development is such a key component of the WSIS Forum, and more particularly e- Government question.

To illustrate the value of this, let me cite just a few successful examples:

The main objective of the government portal in Angola is to bring all governmental public information and services under the same platform and to make them available to citizens via the internet. Angolans can thus find information on government programs, and are given the option to send their views and comments to the government. This portal has received the TIGA 2007 Award (Technology in Government Award) with the comment the portal has citizens' feedback on services built in it, thus providing opportunity for service improvements, which is the essence of e-government

Lokvani is an e-governance initiative which was designed and implemented by the combined efforts of the District Administration and the National Informatics Center in Sitapur (UP,India), a city which has an 88% rural population with a 38.86% literacy rate. The Lokvani system provides information on all vacancies in the district as well as downloadable application forms for job seekers. The Lokvani system has empowered the citizens by generating awareness towards their rights through a seamless flow of information, as the services offered by Lokvani encompass a wide range of government departments such as the Department of Public Grievances, the District Administration, the Development Department, etc. Lokvani has helped the local government monitor performance of its staff, providing also for the shortcoming of human resources in implementing different schemes of assistance and development.

The Philippine online service allows Filipinos to communicate their concerns to President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo (GMA) via SMS. About 28 million out of the 80 million Filipinos have cellular phones, each sending an average of seven text messages a day. Additionally, text messages currently outnumber voice calls 8 to 1 in the Philippines. That is why cellular phones have been identified as the preferred device for eParticipation in the Philippines. The Philippine online service, is a 'pioneer' in the use of SMS in government. It is used for complaints about government services, projects, and officials.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we all know, putting in place the technology is not enough. To better engage citizens for development through e-Government, we have to invest in a sound communication campaign,

designed to build awareness of this new opportunity and to inform and to educate citizens on how to use it.

Nowadays, modern technologies evolves rapidly; there is always a need to improve the services and implementing new technological solutions in it in order to better meet citizens expectations. What we cannot forget is that citizen engagement for development is fundamental for our times. Processes and technologies can directly engage the citizen with greater information and improve transparency, accountability and participation. It can strengthen planning and decision making process of all levels of government and improve transparency and the delivery of services.

However, for that we need full engagement of stakeholders at all levels. This is the essential foundations of good governance.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today we observed the dramatic increase in mobile telephony around the world which includes the developing nations. The devices themselves are becoming smarter and feature-rich with major advances coming to market each year. Social media platforms originally designed for personal use are now being embraced by national and local governments across the globe. Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, to name a few social networks all contain citizen engagement features and opportunities.

Nowadays, every single day we have a new technology. Every single day more citizens use the Internet around the world, applying it for different reasons. Finally, every single day another government adds a new online feature designed to create closer collaboration between government and citizens.

Distinguished colleagues,

I think we all recognize the tremendous benefits citizen engagement in e-government can bring – to governments themselves, to the people and businesses they serve- to all of us.

I deeply believe that only by demonstrating that participation in e-Government leads to better democratic outcomes- helping society develop and meet its political, social, economic and cultural goals- we are able to reach our goal.

I trust that engaging citizens more efficient in the e-Government, is another step towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals.

Thank you