E-GOVERNMENT FOR ETHNIC MINORITIES IN VIETNAM

Nguyen Manh Hung

E-Government in Vietnam has wide-spread implementation over the country by enormous initiatives and programs by Government from central to local offices. That has led to big advancement of E-Government Index for last 3 years from 2015, the point of issue of Government Resolution No. 36a/NQ-CP on E-Government. Even that, the situation of E-Government in Vietnam has shown up many problems, barriers to catch up international level, especially many challenges are facing up with ethnic minority’s peoples and areas. The paper is arming to short review on E-Government concept and current situation and ending with a proposal of specific E-Literacy Model for remote, poor ethnic minority’s areas, that would be bring more opportunities for successes of E-Government.

Key words: E-Government; ethnic minority; E-Literacy.

Concept of E-Government

Among the many promises of the digital revolution is its potential to strengthen democracy and make governments more responsive to the needs of their citizens.

There are many understandings and definitions on term E-Government so far at numerous studies on this popular topic and field of investigations for some decades recently.

World Bank (2002) has defined E-government is the use of information and communications technologies (ICT) to transform government by making it more accessible, effective and accountable. More detailed is a notion by the same World Bank (2015):

“E-Government” refers to the use by government agencies of information technologies (such as Wide Area Networks, the Internet, and mobile computing) that have the ability to transform relations with citizens, businesses, and other arms of government. These technologies can serve a variety of different ends: better delivery of government services to citizens, improved interactions with business and industry, citizen empowerment through access to information, or more efficient government management. The resulting benefits can be less corruption, increased transparency, greater convenience, revenue growth, and/or cost reductions.

Broadly defined by Gartner (2000): “E-government is the continuous optimization of service delivery, constituency participation and governance by transforming internal and external relationships through technology, the Internet and new media”

In order to expanding the use of the Internet and computer resources in order to deliver Government services, consistent with the reform principles I outlined on July 10, 2002, for a citizen-centered, results-oriented, and market-based Government, US President George W. Bush signs H.R. 2458, The E-Government Act of 2002, that has defining: ‘electronic Government’ means the use by the Government of web-based Internet applications and other information technologies, combined with processes that implement these technologies, to—“(A) enhance the access to and delivery of Government information and services to the public, other agencies, and other Government entities; or“(B) bring about improvements in Government operations that may include effectiveness, efficiency, service quality, or transformation (US, 2002).

Thus, among these understandings of E-Government, there are some common aspects that make contents of E-Government:

• providing greater access to government information;
• promoting civic engagement by enabling the public to interact with government officials;
• making government more accountable by making its operations more transparent and thus
reducing the opportunities for corruption; and
• providing development opportunities, especially benefiting rural and traditionally underserved communities (World Bank, 2002).

The last is addressed to a connection between E-Government and ethnic minorities, which still have been social-economic under-development due to lacks of government information and interaction for accessing to public funds and resources. These areas are typical of opaque operations, inequality and corruption.

The current situation of E-Government in Vietnam and Ethnic Minority’s Areas

One among most important milestones for E-Government in Vietnam is an issue of Government Resolution No. 36a/2015/NQ-CP on Electronic Government. From this time to now we have achieved a big advancement of E-Government. At the time of this Resolution, 2014, the E-Government Development Index – EGDI of Vietnam is 0.38 and ranked 99 in the world, and 2016\textsuperscript{th} EGDI is 0.5143 (and ranking is advanced by 10 to 89, and has belonged to group of countries with high-EGDI (from 0.5 to 0.75)\textsuperscript{1}.

The statistical figures show that improvement of E-Government relatively affects as important contribution to an increase of economic success of the country, i.e. Vietnam GDP and GNI per capita by USD in 2016 is increased from 2014 by 8.8% and 7.9% appropriately. This achievement of economy has a considerable contribution of E-Government implementation, due to the EGDI 9.3% increase from 2014 to 2016\textsuperscript{2}.

Despite of big advance in E-Government by the indexing, we are relatively at low level in comparison with advanced countries, i.e. Vietnam EGDI is only 56% of the index of 1\textsuperscript{st} ranked country – UK, and especially low by TII (Telecommunication Infrastructure Index) is 45.4% appropriately.

Regarding situation of E-Government in ethnic minority’s areas of Vietnam, the picture is much worse.

According to report on Vietnam ICT index 2016 by Ministry of Information and Communication, those indexes of this report that relevant to 3 elements of EGDI (i.e. Telecommunication Infrastructure Index - TII, Human Capital Index-HCI, Online Service Index-OSI) are low for provinces of main ethnic minority’s areas (Northern mountainous, Central highland and West-southern Delta’s Areas).

The below table shows the matching between 3 indexes of EGDI and Vietnam ICT indexes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions of EGDI</th>
<th>Vietnam ICT indexes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Telecommunication Infrastructure Index (TII) is an arithmetic average based of following indicators: - Mobile-cellular subscriptions (per 100) - Individuals using the Internet (% population) - Fixed (wired)-broadband subscriptions (per 100) - Wireless broadband subscriptions (per 100)</td>
<td>Social ICT Infrastructure is an arithmetic average based of following indicators: - Mobile-cellular subscriptions (per 100) - Fixed-telephone subscriptions (per 100) - Individuals using the Internet (% population) - Fixed (wired)-broadband subscriptions (per 100) - Wireless broadband subscriptions (per 100) - Households using the Internet (% Households using POS (%) - Enterprises using Internet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Human Capital Index (HCI) consists of four components: - Adult literacy rate - The combined primary, secondary and tertiary gross enrolment ratio - Expected years of schooling - Average years of schooling.</td>
<td>The Social Human Capital Infrastructure Index consists of 4 components: - Adult literacy (reading, writing skills) rate (% population) - The combined primary, secondary and tertiary gross enrolment rate (%) - The rate (%) of schools teaching IT - The rate(%) of tertiary teaching IT.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Service Index (OSI) based on websites including the national portal, e-services portal and e-participation portal, as well as the websites of the related ministries of education, labor, social services, health, finance and environment.</td>
<td>Public Online Service Index is based on following components: - The benchmark of POS at each level 1, 2, 3, 4 appropriately - The aggregation of POS all level</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on similarity of those Indexes of Vietnam ICT and EGDI, following table will represent the situation of E-Government of provinces of 3 ethnic minority’s areas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Rate of Ethnic Minorities population</th>
<th>STII</th>
<th>SHCI</th>
<th>POSI</th>
<th>Aggregation Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ist rank province</td>
<td>Đà Nẵng</td>
<td>0.7477</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Mountainous Area</td>
<td>Bắc Kan</td>
<td>86.63%</td>
<td>0.2395</td>
<td>0.5187</td>
<td>0.2738</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cao Bằng</td>
<td>94.24%</td>
<td>0.2151</td>
<td>0.5156</td>
<td>0.2559</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Điện Biên</td>
<td>81.58%</td>
<td>0.1872</td>
<td>0.1667</td>
<td>0.3929</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hà Giang</td>
<td>86.75%</td>
<td>0.232</td>
<td>0.7324</td>
<td>0.7425</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lai Châu</td>
<td>84.72%</td>
<td>0.1809</td>
<td>0.7195</td>
<td>0.369</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lào Cai</td>
<td>65.42%</td>
<td>0.3521</td>
<td>0.9025</td>
<td>0.5687</td>
<td>0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sơn La</td>
<td>82.39%</td>
<td>0.165</td>
<td>0.6876</td>
<td>0.1285</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Highland Area</td>
<td>Đắk Lắk</td>
<td>33.00%</td>
<td>0.182</td>
<td>0.4782</td>
<td>0.337</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Đắk Nông</td>
<td>32.07%</td>
<td>0.2186</td>
<td>0.6062</td>
<td>0.2559</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gia Lai</td>
<td>44.02%</td>
<td>0.2349</td>
<td>0.8794</td>
<td>0.4992</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kon Tum</td>
<td>53.23%</td>
<td>0.0918</td>
<td>0.7388</td>
<td>0.2212</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West-Southern Area</td>
<td>Sóc Trăng</td>
<td>35.76%</td>
<td>0.2809</td>
<td>0.8227</td>
<td>0.2443</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trà Vinh</td>
<td>32.44%</td>
<td>0.1518</td>
<td>0.6615</td>
<td>0.4405</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\textsuperscript{1} United Nations. UN E-Government Survey 2016.

\textsuperscript{2} World Bank. World Development Indicators.
E-Government Implementation Challenges

As per shown in e-government practice of countries, there were many challenges for the deployment of e-government and services for a kind of remote, mountainous peoples and minority groups, especially Technology Constraints; Accessibility of e-Services; Language Barriers; Low ICT literacy rate.

Challenges of data access and usage

Availability of disaggregated data will be essential to help measure progress made in improving the situation of the various segments of the population, including the remote, mountainous and ethnic minorities. It is also critical to shape more cohesive and inclusive policies, particularly to lift people out of poverty. Access to public information is a vital first step in promoting people’s empowerment and citizen engagement in public policy decision-making processes to “leave no one behind”. Access to public information is essential for democratic governance and social inclusion. Access to the Internet is crucial in order for people to be able to obtain online government information.

Digital Divide

Class, race, ethnicity, geography and other factors could lead to groups of people being disenfranchised. For ethnic minority’s peoples, content must be provided in more than one language or dialect. E-government must also address the needs of those who are illiterate.

The digital divide is the gap between people who have access to the Internet and those who do not. Those without access cannot learn essential computer skills, cannot access information that can provide economic opportunities, and cannot share in the benefits of e-government.

E-Literacy

Despite the Internet’s democratizing potential, it has been recognized from the outset of the digital revolution that there is a very real danger that the world will be divided into the “information rich” and the “information poor.” E-government has the potential of either equalizing access to government and its services or increasing the barriers to participation of ethnic minority groups, which are more tended to be information poorest.

Governments must make sure that those who are already educated or have Internet access are not the only ones who benefit from e-government. Such a disparity would only increase the problems of social and economic injustice, which e-government is meant to address.

E-literacy Recommendations

• Ensure that content is in local languages and that interfaces are easy to use.
• Develop applications that use speech or pictures in addition to, or instead of, written text.
• Include an educational component in e-government projects.
• Provide aids at access points who can train citizens in basic computer skills.
• Create programs that include traditional media, like radio programs or newspaper columns, where citizens can learn about e-government.
• Special attention should be given to ethnic minority groups difficult to integrate.

Proposal Study: E-Literacy Model for Ethnic Minority’s Peoples

The hereby proposed E-Literacy Model consists of community-based programs in which engaging entrepreneurs team up with government to bring Internet-based government services to remote villages of ethnic minority’s areas.

Even the most remote, poor and illiterate parts can effectively utilize e-government through readily available and affordable technologies, benefiting those who are in dire need of government services and bridging the digital divide.

More detailed, the E-Literacy Model uses portable government kiosks run as commercial enterprises. The key to the system is portability; it uses laptop computers or smart TV with Internet access via wireless modems. The content is building upon specific characters of each ethnic minority together a consideration with local culture and habit. The content has to be in at least 2 languages (i.e. Vietnamese and ethnic minority), and uses more than text media, including video/audio clips with streaming technology.

These kiosks offer access to information and services, from the latest crop or animal prices to links to government offices where people can conduct transactions online instead of having to travel for days from their villages to district or province’s government offices.

In term of human resource perspective, the model is using combine human resources from province’s offices and local core resources, the last would be form the team consists of local ethnic staff and volunteers from students and...
youth organization. They are trained to be a core cadres for the program.

Conclusion

Despite of big advancement in E-Government programs in Vietnam so far, there a lot of problems, barriers and challenges for success deployment the government initiatives and services, especially for ethnic minority peoples over the country. The special model of E-Literacy is essential for remote and poor ethnic minority’s areas. The model with careful consideration and comprehensive design will bring big opportunities for more successes of E-Government implementation for ethnic minority’s peoples.

REFERENCE


