

Chapter 5**Citizen empowerment
and inclusion**

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E-government can be used by governments to empower and include citizens. Individuals and their democratic governance systems as a whole stand to benefit from better access to information and services, and from more opportunities for their voices to be heard by decision makers. The United Nations E-Government Survey assesses citizen empowerment and inclusion by reviewing channels for online participation in public affairs. The area of online services that opens up channels for online participation in public affairs is termed ‘e-participation’. Given special attention by Survey, it is measured using an index that isolates Internet-based consultative and decision-making mechanisms. A country’s strength in e-participation is measured against three benchmarks:

- Does the national government publish information on items under consideration?
- Are there ways for the public to engage in consultations with policy makers, government officials and one another?
- Can citizens directly influence decisions, for example by voting online or using a mobile telephone?

Countries that have been actively developing participatory features fare better in e-participation rankings.

5.1 Progress in e-participation

The provision of online services, as described above, provides a transformative platform for the public sphere. It intersects with the process of social communication where opinions are expressed, synthesized and coalesced. There are many types of public spheres operating across many different platforms, including the traditional mass media of television, radio and newspapers. The Internet is transformative because it allows anyone to be a publisher. This changes the power relationships in the public sphere in profound ways. It affords political leaders new routes to power. It affords citizens new ways to have their say. Even the voices of the marginalized can now be heard making the public sphere increasingly rich and diverse.¹

5.1.1 About e-participation

Many governments are engaging citizens for feedback via their websites. The majority of sites have polls or surveys or feedback buttons, but this is just the tip of the iceberg. Web 2.0 (and Web 3.0 in the near future) will provide citizens with an avenue for direct impact on how government operates. E-participation goes well beyond e-voting; it changes the dynamics between government and citizens. Web 2.0 and social networking tools have created an environment that politicians and decision-makers must adjust to and incorporate in their daily work. In the United States, for example, more than 2 million followers subscribe to the Twitter feed of President Barack Obama. Politicians have been inclined to embrace and encourage the use of these e-participation and e-tools. They are providing information directly to citizens, which may help citizens to have a better understanding of their politicians. E-participation is one of the key assessments of the current e-government survey. It reflects on how well governments are keeping citizens at the centre of e-services.

Many governments have enhanced their national and ministerial websites to incorporate interactive tools to strengthen citizen e-participation. As citizens are empowered, they create a different relationship with their respective governments, characterized by enhanced effectiveness, as government are able to respond to the needs of citizens in a more direct manner. The e-participation

index is indicative on how governments create an environment in which citizens can be more active and supportive of their governments.

Citizens express their views in environments they feel are acceptable. The 2010 Survey assesses how governments are interacting with citizens using popular Web 2.0 tools such as blogs, chat rooms and SMS as well as communication technologies such as Facebook, Twitter and other social networking tools.

Web 2.0 and social networking tools have empowered citizens to become more active in expressing their views on many issues, especially on issues concerning environment, health, education and other areas of government policy. Citizens use Web 2.0 and social networking tools to galvanize other like-minded citizens to share ideas and to develop collaborative approaches in tackling the issues that are important to them. Politicians and other decision-makers need to tap into this wealth of information and knowledge in order to be more responsive to their constituents.

As more and more people create their own blogs and issue-based social networking groups, they are becoming power-brokers in influencing governmental policies. Today, many citizens are interested in the views of bloggers and those of other members of their social networking groups. This new-found power and influence is contributing to higher standards of transparency in government.

The United Nations E-Government Survey recognizes the importance of e-participation in all its aspects ranging from e-information, e-consultation to e-decision-making. Politicians and political decision makers represent the voice of citizens within government. Now these politicians and decision makers are soliciting information and knowledge from the constituents online and in real-time, seeking to respond more efficiently to their constituents.

There is a growing global trend towards listening to citizen's voices and engaging their participation. This trend is likely to continue and expand in the next few years and beyond. Citizens are employing more e-participation tools. Politicians and decision-makers seem to be inclined to listen to the citizens. Although this movement is primarily taking hold in high-income countries, middle-income

countries are not far behind. Governments are now creating portals on social networking sites in order to reach out to citizens and promote their programmes, messages and policies. Citizens using e-participation tools have influenced several major presidential elections in recent years.

E-participation goes well beyond presidential and parliamentary elections; it is the empowerment of citizens to have an open dialogue with government. In densely populated countries, one sees e-participation working at the local levels, where district and village leaders are able to communicate with their constituency by using different e-tools. In smaller countries, e-participation can take place at the national level, where decision-makers can have direct access to citizens.

5.1.2 How governments rank in e-participation

The e-participation index shows how governments performed in 2010 compared to 2008. The 2010 Survey included a comprehensive review of how governments are including citizens in their decision-making process, how governments are providing information and knowledge, and how governments are consulting citizens to obtain feedback and opinions.

The best performing e-participation countries as expressed in the e-participation index are listed in table 5.1. The e-participation index combines the cumulative scores from the national portals plus the scores for the citizen-empowerment.

The Republic of Korea leads the e-participation index, followed by Australia, Spain and New Zealand. More than one third of the countries in the top 35 list are new and, notably, the majority are middle-income countries. Since 2008, a number of middle-income countries have revamped their websites to obtain more feedback and start the dialogue process with citizens.

‘Best practices’ were noted in Chile, Croatia, Cyprus and Mongolia. The countries placed more emphasis on obtaining feedback and inputs from citizens and also included more e-participation tools such as blogs, discussion forum, social networking sites, polls and citizen feedback.

Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan stand out for embracing the concept of e-participation. Their

Table 5.1 **Top 20 countries in e-participation**

Rank	Country	2010 e-participation index value	2010 rank	2008 rank	Change +/(-)
1	Republic of Korea	1.0000	1	2	1
2	Australia	0.9143	2	5	3
3	Spain	0.8286	3	34	31
4	New Zealand	0.7714	4	6	2
4	United Kingdom	0.7714	4	25	21
6	Japan	0.7571	6	11	5
6	United States	0.7571	6	1	(5)
8	Canada	0.7286	8	11	3
9	Estonia	0.6857	9	8	(1)
9	Singapore	0.6857	9	10	1
11	Bahrain	0.6714	11	36	25
12	Malaysia	0.6571	12	41	29
13	Denmark	0.6429	13	3	(10)
14	Germany	0.6143	14	74	60
15	France	0.6000	15	3	(12)
16	Netherlands	0.6000	15	16	1
17	Belgium	0.5857	17	28	11
18	Kazakhstan	0.5571	18	98	80
19	Lithuania	0.5286	19	20	1
20	Slovenia	0.5143	20	55	35

national portals allow citizens to initiate their own proposals, which the government reviews in the decision-making process. Citizens receive an acknowledgement that their inputs on e-deliberations or e-opinions have been received. The national portals allow discussion via social networking tools and they also post past forum debates. Their senior officials respond directly to the opinions from the online forums.

Figure 5.1 **Geographic distribution of best performing countries in e-participation**

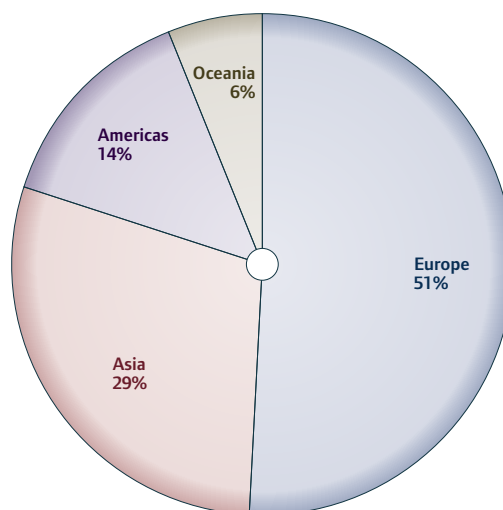


Figure 5.1 is a graphical presentation of table 5.1. The European continues to dominate the top list with almost 50 percent of the countries from the region appearing in the list. The Asian region is next with a little over 30 percent followed by the Americas and Oceania. There were no African countries in the top 35.

Figure 5.2 Government interactions with citizens

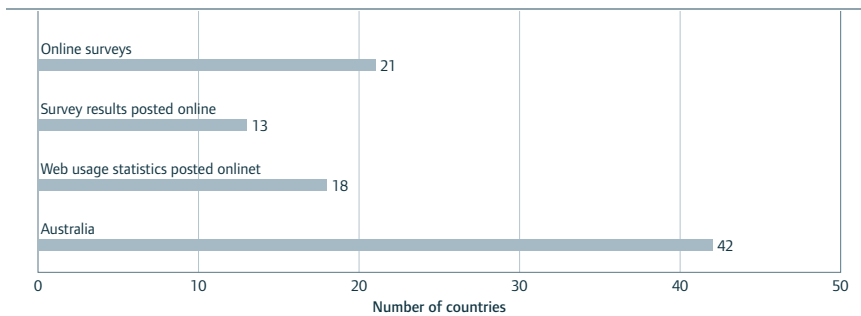


Figure 5.3 Countries with high points for connected services

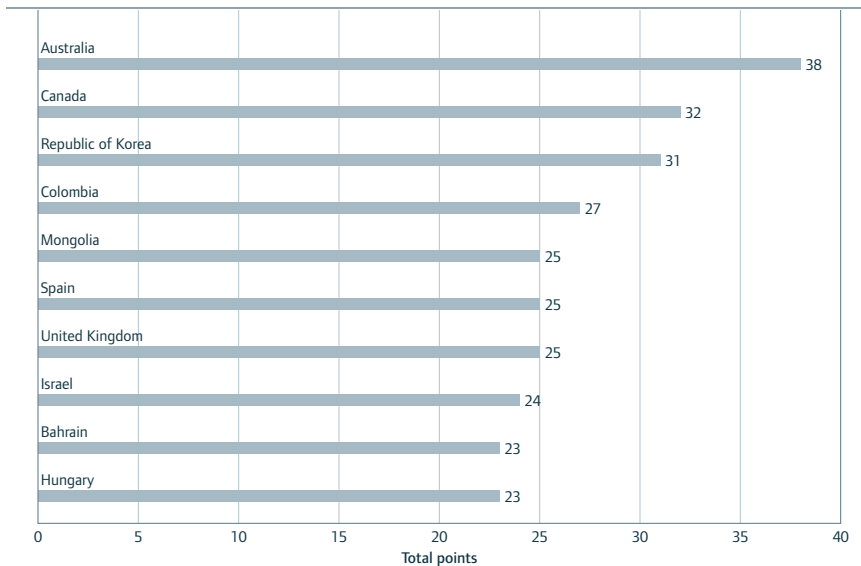
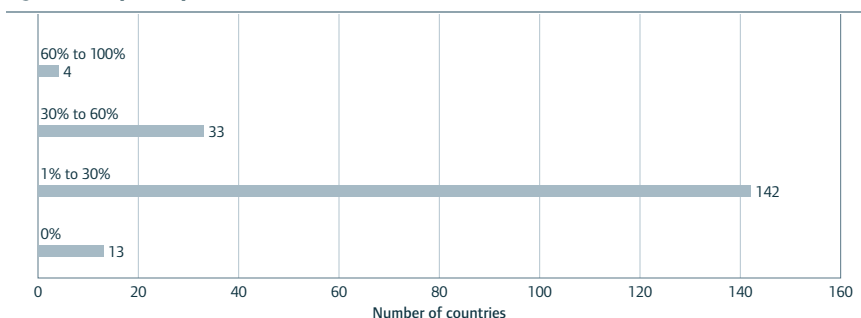


Figure 5.4 E-participation utilization levels



What is the level of interaction between government and citizens? How does government track citizen usage of its websites? Figure 5.2 is about government interactions with citizens. It also shows the number of countries that have created a secure network for citizens to participate. As figure 5.2 indicates, a very limited number of countries carry out surveys and report the results online.

Figure 5.3 shows the best-performing countries with the largest number of aggregate points for connected services. Australia had the highest connected score in 2010, followed by Canada and the Republic of Korea. The top 10 countries are evenly distributed with 50 percent coming from developing and developed regions.

The quality of e-participation in government websites is shown in table 5.2. The e-participation section of the survey was strengthened for the 2010 Survey by adding more questions to the survey instrument. As a result, countries generally scored lower. Also, more countries have some aspects of e-participation on their websites, with seven additional countries receiving scores above zero for participation. More specifically, 20 countries received scores of zero for e-participation in 2008, while this figure has been reduced to 13 countries in 2010. In addition, as the threshold for the e-participation section was elevated due to changes in the survey instrument introduced in 2010, fewer countries could receive scores above the 60 percent of the maximum points.

Figure 5.4 shows the breakdown of countries and their respective e-participation range. There was a slight increase from the 30 percent to 60 percent range and a slight decrease in the over 60 percent range in the 2010 Survey.

E-information

The assessment of e-information determines if governments are providing the kind of information that encourages and empowers citizen participation. This includes online publishing of e-participation policies, a calendar of online discussion forums, and electronic notification tools to alert citizens who want to participate.

Australia scored the highest on the e-information assessment in the 2010 Survey. Japan, Mexico and the Republic of Korea tied for second place. Of all

countries surveyed, 88 percent have some information about e-participation on their national portals.

How many countries have information about inclusiveness and e-participation on their national websites? Table 5.3 suggests that governments are encouraging citizens by providing information that invites them to be active and to participate. These governments also provide the necessary e-tools to do so.

Table 5.3 **Information about e-inclusiveness and e-participation**

Feature	Number of countries	Percent
Site provides information about inclusiveness in e-government	49	26
Site provides information about e-participation	39	20

The following countries provide citizens with an updated calendar of events on e-participation that allows people to plan ahead of time if they want to participate: Australia, Belize, Cyprus, Egypt, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Libya, Mauritania, Mexico, Pakistan, Peru, Spain and Uruguay. Only 7 percent of the countries surveyed have this option. This represents a slight increase from the 2008 Survey where only 5 percent of the countries surveyed had this option.

Citizen charters or service-level statements are becoming more popular as governments begin to treat citizens as customers. Very few countries had this option in the 2008 Survey. Table 5.4 suggests that governments are now letting the citizens know what is required of the government when citizens are making requests online. Citizens can now hold governments accountable for failing to meet the benchmarks within these charters or service level statements.

Table 5.4 **Interaction with citizens**

Feature	Number of countries	Percent
Citizen charter or service level statement	41	21
Facility for citizen feedback	76	40
Information about employment opportunities	66	34

E-consultation

Governments are starting, albeit slowly, to use interactive tools to conduct dialogue and receive feedback and inputs from citizens with online survey beginning to gain importance. More

Table 5.2 **Quality of e-participation websites of selected countries**

Range	Country				Score (%)
		E-information	E-consultation	E-decision making	Total
Over 60%	Republic of Korea	87.50	78.79	75.00	78.95
	Australia	100.00	60.61	68.75	68.42
	Kazakhstan	87.50	66.67	62.50	68.42
	Bahrain	75.00	66.67	56.25	64.91
30-60%	Spain	75.00	63.64	37.50	57.89
	Kyrgyzstan	50.00	63.64	31.25	52.63
	Mongolia	62.50	54.55	43.75	52.63
	Israel	50.00	51.52	50.00	50.88
	New Zealand	50.00	54.55	43.75	50.88
	United Kingdom of Great Britain	50.00	60.61	31.25	50.88
	Japan	87.50	39.39	50.00	49.12
	United States of America	50.00	54.55	37.50	49.12
	Canada	75.00	36.36	50.00	45.61
	China	37.50	39.39	62.50	45.61
	Colombia	75.00	39.39	43.75	45.61
	Mexico	87.50	51.52	12.50	45.61
	Slovenia	50.00	45.45	43.75	45.61
	Chile	75.00	39.39	31.25	42.11
	Cyprus	50.00	30.30	62.50	42.11
	Estonia	50.00	42.42	31.25	40.35
Singapore	50.00	48.48	18.75	40.35	
Under 30%	Belarus	37.50	33.33	18.75	29.82
	France	37.50	36.36	12.50	29.82
	Netherlands	75.00	18.18	31.25	29.82
	Belgium	62.50	12.12	43.75	28.07
	Kenya	37.50	33.33	12.50	28.07
	Kuwait	75.00	21.21	18.75	28.07
	Turkey	37.50	18.18	37.50	26.32

governments are embedding surveys within their portals and websites in order to capture the citizen's view. The United States is leading the field in this category with most government websites being mandated to have a customer satisfaction survey to gauge the sentiments of citizens. Table 5.5 identifies a number of interactive tools now in use.

Table 5.5 **Interactive tools used by governments**

Payment type	Number of countries	Percent
Online polls	30	16
Online surveys or feedback forms	55	29
Chat rooms or instant messaging	11	6
Web logs	20	10
List services or newsgroups	16	8
Other interactive tools	33	17

The assessment of e-consultation considers the means used to solicit citizen opinion, feedback and input through online polls, chat rooms, instant

Box 5.1 Citizen engagement in economic crisis response

At this time of economic crisis, citizens have also been very active in following what governments are doing with taxpayer dollars. Of the 54 countries that had committed public funds to addressing the financial and economic crisis as of October 2009,² 49 of them have created websites geared to providing information on fiscal stimulus measures and other forms of support to the economy. However, citizen engagement seems to follow the same old patterns. Only nine governments give citizens a say in how taxpayer dollars are spent using online tools.

Observation	Number of countries	Percent of total
Commitment of public funds to addressing the financial and economic crisis	54	100
Government website provides information on financial and budgetary measures linked to the crisis	49	91
Government website give citizens a say on how funds are spent using online tools	9	17

messaging, blogs, etc. The Republic of Korea scored the highest in the e-consultation section, with Bahrain and Kazakhstan tied for second. Seventy-nine percent of the countries surveyed in 2010 have some aspect of e-consultation.

The use of Web 2.0 tools on government portals and websites is still at its infancy stage, with a small number of countries providing this service to its citizens. The number of government sites with online discussion forums rose slightly in 2010.

Feedback forms or online surveys are more commonly used online polls in ministry websites. The ministries of labour tend to use online polling more than other ministries, while the websites of ministries of social services have more feedback mechanisms. Figure 5.5 illustrates the use of e-consultation tools to gather public opinion.

E-decision making

The e-decision making component of the Survey assesses the extent to which countries are committed to empowering citizens to be involved and

are committed to taking into account the citizen’s view when making policy decisions. The Republic of Korea leads in the e-decision making assessment, followed by Australia and Kazakhstan.

Only 9 percent of countries surveyed allow for e-petitions to be submitted to government for consideration from their national and ministry websites. The United Kingdom is one of the leaders, with features that allow citizens to sign their petitions and send them directly to the Prime Minister’s Office. E-petition was reviewed as a separate item in the 2010 Survey, whereas in 2008 it was grouped with other electronic tools.

Table 5.6 **Web 2.0 tools used in e-decision-making**

Feature	Number of countries	Percent
Online discussion forums	32	17
Archive of past discussion forums	27	14
Government officials respond to citizen input	16	8
Government officials moderate e-consultations	8	4
Online petitions	17	9
Online voting	17	9

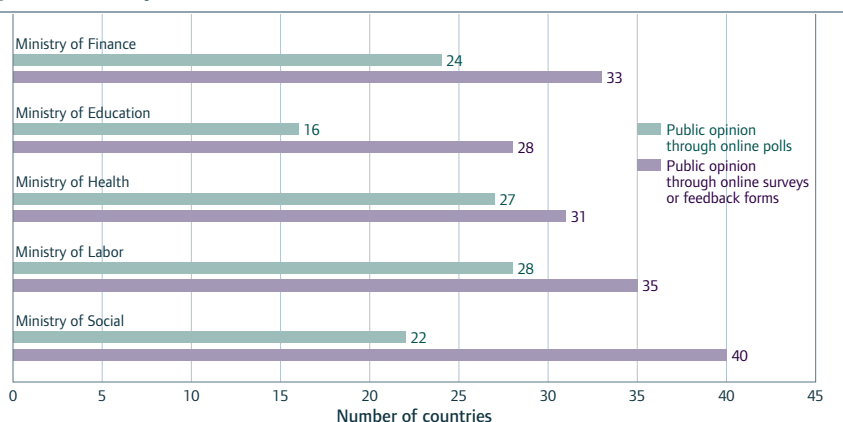
The percentage of countries with government officials responding to citizen feedback is slightly higher in 2010 than it was in 2008. For the most part, government officials at the local levels have a higher level of response to citizen feedback. As in the past, the 2010 Survey only captures data at the national level. It does not include any data on e-government at the local level. Table 5.6 looks at the range of Web 2.0 tools used in e-decision-making.

5.2 Questions of access and diversity

5.2.1 The digital divide and inclusive e-government

There is some debate about how fast the digital gap is expanding, but there is no question that it is expanding. As the population continues to grow in developing countries, outpacing that of developed countries, more and more people will be joining the group of digital ‘have-nots’ unless governments work together to dramatically expand access to information and knowledge. One of the most critical e-government challenges facing many governments today is how to bridge the digital divide.

Figure 5.5 **Ministry websites with e-consultation features**



Even in developed countries, many elderly people, low-income individuals and families, and minorities are outside the realm of the digital society. In order for e-government to be inclusive, it must reach out to all segments of the population with e-services that meet the needs of the digitally disadvantaged.

In developing countries, expanding access to information and knowledge includes these basic steps:

- Increasing the number of Internet users and personal computer usage;
- Increasing the broadband capacity to allow for greater use of mobile devices for e-government;
- Developing content that citizens find important and useful;
- Improving education levels, so that citizens are able to use the information and knowledge provided; and
- Encouraging citizen participation.

Governments should take into account language, culture, content, accessibility and alternate delivery methods in e-services to all segments of the population.

Inclusive planning with citizens prior to the implementation and delivery of services is critical to the success of most e-services. Top-down approaches do not always work. Segments of society that are consulted are more likely to use the e-services when they are operational. Outreach early on allows governments to take time to communicate with the beneficiaries of the service prior to its development.

Another aspect of inclusive e-government is service personalization. Personalized and user-driven services should meet and reinforce shared expectations and principles of social justice as well as personal and public value, so they must also be genuinely universal and available to all.³

Inclusive e-government means using a variety of interfaces such as voice, touch-screen and other modalities in the future. The use of multi-channel systems is also important, not only personal computers and the Internet, but also mobile devices, telephone, digital TV, kiosks, etc. Thus, the technology should also result in simplicity, flexibility and choice, with any complex systems hidden to users.⁴

Box 5.2 Singapore's REACH

Singapore: Government policies and issues

The Government of Singapore assigned the REACH portal as the main online platform for e-engagement on public policies and issues. To encourage online engagement with citizens, ministries and agencies use REACH for announcements and feedback exercises such as the annual budget and rallies for May Day and National Day. A dedicated micro-site provides details of the consultation exercise as well as information on budget-related issues. Citizens post their feedback and suggestions on the micro-site's discussion threads and, in addition, citizens not online are involved in the feedback exercise through a series of face-to-face dialogues.

Discussion forums are separated into two segments. Posts initiated by REACH appear in 'REACH's Discussion Corner' and posts initiated by citizens appear in 'Your Discussion Corner'. Two thirds of all discussions are initiated by citizens. The online discussion forums are considered very effective in enabling the government to gauge sentiments on the ground.

Many citizens use the multi-lingual feature to post translations and to initiate translations.



<http://app.reach.gov.sg/reach/>

Box 5.3 E-participation in China

China: Netizens interact with Government officials

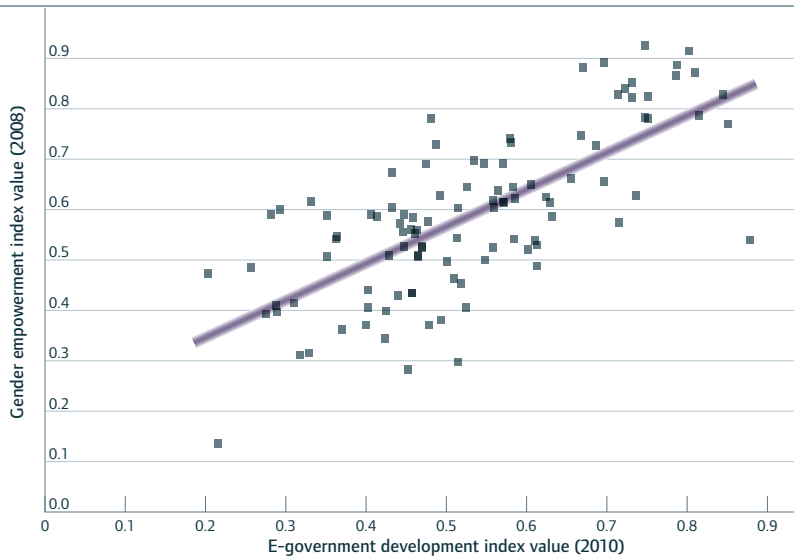
With increased Internet penetration in China and increasing citizenship awareness of the opportunities presented by e-participation in public affairs, the Government has been active in soliciting comments through online channels for consideration in decision-making. Drawing on ideas expressed in online discussion forums, senior government officials have revised, or in some cases eliminated, a number of administrative rules. The emerging trend of e-participation in China has been given a boost by top leaders, among them Premier Wen Jiabao who has held online chat sessions with the aim of soliciting ideas that could inform Government policy in advance of the annual meeting of the National People's Congress. E-participation has also been taken up at the working level by the State Bureau of Anti-Corruption. The agency has started to use Government discussion forums to interact with citizens and gather clues that might be relevant to corruption investigations.



<http://ask1.news.cn/>

Digital inclusion is not necessarily social inclusion. Social inclusion through the use of ICTs may occur when social actors use it to promote the quality of life in communities; to express local values and cultures; to enhance the political dynamics within communities, countries and regions; to advocate rights and social campaigns; to denounce injustices and to promote gender equality. The possibilities are endless, yet social inclusion requires consistent policy support from public administration

Figure 5.6 Gender empowerment and e-government development



frameworks. Giving a community with a piece of hardware and software means little. Socially inclusive use of ICTs requires comprehensive education on the use of ICTs to diverse groups including marginalized social or cultural groups, the disabled – and the largest group of all: women. It is a matter of promoting a change of mentality and a change in the way ICT is developed, produced and used.

5.2.2 Unequal benefits for women and men

Women will not have access or benefit equally with men to information and communication technologies, including the Internet, unless specific and targeted gender goals and strategies are implemented in ICT projects.⁵ If women are not directly targeted as beneficiaries of e-governance, they will not be able to access information on government services, health and other issues which they need to support their livelihoods and well-being; nor will they be

able to interact meaningfully with their governments or have a say in local governance forums and decision making. And unless specific efforts are made to meet women’s information needs, they will not find information that is relevant and useful.

Research shows that the percentage of women’s Internet use does not correlate directly with a country’s rate of Internet reach to its population.⁶ If women are not using it, who is? The typical Internet user in developing countries is a male under 35 who is urban based, speaks English and has a good education and income level. Although indicators to measure the ‘gender digital divide’ are few and far between, the United Nations E-Government Survey demonstrated its reality in 2005. Since the 1990s, ICT researchers studying the gender digital divide and working to develop policies to mitigate it have called for more gender-based indicators.

A few examples of ‘best practices’, albeit anecdotal, include women-run telecentres in South Africa, Uruguay and Zambia; use of mobile technologies in Egypt, India and Jamaica; political participation of women by provision of information on elections in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the United Republic of Tanzania; and national machineries on gender and ICTs in Malawi.

Despite a few positive examples, ICTs and the Internet in particular remain problematic. On one hand, this technology can be harnessed to promote development projects for women and girls, to combat human trafficking and to disseminate information among women’s groups. ICT can work as an organizing and development tool to promote gender equality. On the other hand, the Internet is widely used to disseminate pornography and violence against women. In the United Kingdom, a May 2006 survey by the Daily Mail found that more than 9 million men (almost 40 percent of the adult male population) as well as 1.4 million women logged on to websites containing pornography.⁸ In the United States, the Secure Computing Corporation estimated 420 million individual pornographic web pages in 2005, up from 14 million in 1998.⁹

In figure 5.6, the UNDP gender empowerment measure is compared with the e-government development index in the 2010 United Nations E-Government Survey.¹⁰ Overall, there is a link

Box 5.4 Women in rural India gain Internet access

Government centres for e-Seva (e-services) have been set up in rural areas across India. The e-Seva effort in West Godavari district, Andhra Pradesh, was initiated to introduce C2C (citizen-to-citizen) and C2G (citizen-to-government) services in rural areas, particularly to women. Internet kiosks or e-Seva centres at the block level were put under the control of women’s self-help groups. Over time, women became active users of the services and technologies offered at the centres, and the kiosks became an important interface for communication and transactions between the local administration and the community. The women managing the e-Seva centres have become information intermediaries and information leaders in their villages, with improved standing and increased influence as a result. Members of the e-Seva collective also travel from village to village with a portable receipt printer to provide utility payment services.⁷

between e-government development and gender empowerment although it would be wrong to conclude from this that gender-sensitive e-government policies are responsible. When telecommunication infrastructure and human capital are removed from the equation, the connection between e-government development and gender empowerment is found to be weak. This suggests that economic and social progress in general leads both to higher levels of e-government development and gender empowerment but that online public services as currently designed may not be contributing much to reduction of inequality between women and men.

Countries that wish to advance on gender equality goals may wish to explore the opportunities offered by e-government in general, and e-participation in particular, to reduce the gender gap.

For ICTs including the Internet, among the first steps are governmental policies addressing:

- Gender-conscious ICT policy development;
- Enactment of legal frameworks to promote ICTs for gender equality;
- Improved cross-jurisdictional coordination to promote gender equality across the actions of public administration institutions;

- Funding for gender equality initiatives using ICTs;
- Closer cooperation between electoral bodies and gender groups.

Information and communication technology, including the Internet, is a powerful enabler of development. It is realizing important efficiency and productivity gains when applied in the private sector, public sector management, health, and education programmes. ICTs are also connecting rural and remote populations to the global knowledge economy and supply chain.¹¹ Yet harnessing the power of the Internet for the good of all citizens is a goal that requires gender-specific action, in the same way that targeted action for gender equality is called for in the Millennium Development Goals.

The trend towards an increasing gender digital divide is alarming, as is and the tremendous difference between the volume of Internet content that denies women's rights in contrast to content that promotes them. These trends are particularly alarming when considering the array of internationally agreed development goals promoting gender equality. ■