Emerging in 2011 from decades of isolation, Myanmar is undergoing an economic, social, and political renovation. With a young population, fertile lands, a plentiful endowment of natural resources, and a strategic location in Southeast Asia, its government can lay the foundations for a prosperous future.

The economic agenda is ambitious with immediate focus on growth and poverty reduction. Notwithstanding fast progress, however, much remains in the areas of macroeconomic policy, trade, investment, and small- and medium-sized enterprise development to complete the transition to a market economy.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) reengaged Myanmar in 2012. Understandably, it targets inclusive growth, access and connectivity, and human and institutional capacities. The third thrust is at one with the need to enhance systemic development in core sectors, and of course underpins the first two; besides, a skilled workforce is necessary for sustained growth and poverty reduction.

ICT FOR DEVELOPMENT

Information and communication technology (ICT) powers new value chains and impacts entire industries. In view of that, the Ministry of Science and Technology is implementing an ICT master plan covering 2011–2015. This is the country’s second such plan following that of 2005–2010, which helped raise Myanmar’s telephone density from 1% to 5.4%—still very low, two-thirds of which from mobile lines. The latest plan addresses much the same five areas as the first: ICT infrastructure, ICT industry, ICT human resource development, e-education, and ICT legislation. But, a key ingredient is missing: only 8,000–10,000 students graduate in computing-related degrees each year. Ways must be found to boost this number, just as the education system must be reformed to equip Myanmar’s workforce with the ICT skills needed in the emerging global knowledge-based economy. Toward this, persistent gaps in access, quality and relevance, and system efficiency in ICT academic institutions must be addressed.

Beyond factor productivity, ICT can concretize e-governance initiatives for enhanced access to and delivery of (mostly web-based) government information and services. E-governance is a potent enabler of administrative performance by effective, transparent, and accountable institutions and encourages the participation of citizens—all essential if Myanmar is to assure a prosperous future.

In view of that, the government wants to streamline government-to-citizens (G2C), government-to-business (G2B), government-to-government (G2G), and government-to-employees (G2E) processes. An interministerial task force—headed by a senior minister in the Office of the President—has been established to ramp up administrative performance, beginning with electricity, investment, telecommunications, and trade. This is long-term work, as the indicative e-governance maturity model shown in Table 1 suggests.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Governance</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Stage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presenting</td>
<td>Display information in the information space.</td>
<td>Information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assimilating</td>
<td>Blend processes and services in the information space with those in the real world.</td>
<td>Interaction, Integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reforming</td>
<td>Revise processes and services in the real world to match information space requirements, fitting for efficiency.</td>
<td>Transaction, Streamlining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morphing</td>
<td>Change the shape and scope of processes and services in the information space and the real world, fitting for effectiveness.</td>
<td>Participation, Transformation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e-Governance</td>
<td>Manage processes and services in the information space and the real world synchronously, imbedding citizen-induced changes in reconfigurable processes and services.</td>
<td>Involvement, Process Management</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ENABLING DIGITAL GOVERNMENT TO SERVE PEOPLE

ADB’s assistance to Myanmar is timely; there is wide appreciation of how critical e-governance is to inclusive growth and poverty reduction; all stakeholders want to establish an e-government enabling environment and accelerate the take-up of applications that transform public services. Even so, ICT infrastructure is nascent and low ICT capacity threatens to curtail the country’s ambitions. Here, therefore, the three mutually reinforcing outputs from ADB’s assistance stand to make their signal methodological contribution to the desired outcome: unified planning and execution, capacity and capability building, and incentivized guidance for new G2C, G2B, G2G, and G2E systems and services can help Myanmar leapfrog stages of e-governance maturity. For instance:  

- **Masterplanning.** E-governance actions are being prioritized by the government. These actions flesh out an integrated e-governance framework for ministry-specific e-governance application systems, common and shared ICT components across ministries, skills development, institutional strengthening, policy development, and countrywide e-governance organization.

- **Enhancing.** The strategies considered include incorporating professional certifications into the undergraduate ICT curricula of the four universities covered, establishing incubation centers within the universities, and pursuing international accreditation and recognition. The curricula can also integrate training in contemporary ICT platforms and languages. Other actions for sustainability aim to tighten interactions with the local ICT industry.

- **Demonstrating.** Speech recognition and speech biometrics in the human–computer interface discipline have been identified for demonstration in Yangon Technological University. Knowledge gained in voice-based technology can help populations where ICT usage and adoption are constrained.

Related Link


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