Introducing a New e-Governance Framework in the Commonwealth: From Theory to Practice

Tania Gessi
Devindra Ramnarine
John Wilkins

Abstract
The public sector, academia and the international community have been preoccupied with good governance in developing countries since announcement of the Millennium Development Goals. Optimisation of governance models has featured prominently in public sector development. Globalisation and the information society gave rise to e-governance. Governments worldwide are investing increasingly in information and communication technologies (ICTs) across a range of applications. The by-product of e-government, in addition to being seen as a global project of technology transfer, is public sector reform, achieved by improving government processes that connect citizens and support interactions within broader society.

The literature recognises that strong e-leadership and stakeholder cooperation are key to the success of e-government initiatives. However, the literature specific to e-leadership is sparse and patchy. This paper addresses this gap by presenting empirical evidence gathered via pan-Commonwealth case studies and surveys. A central finding is that e-leaders develop unique skill sets. Their vision is of a kind of ‘ICT socialism’, coupled with strategic business acumen.

This paper also introduces an innovative e-governance framework developed under the Commonwealth Connects initiative. It is grounded in tools for e-leadership, business practice, strategic gap analysis and multi-stakeholder partnerships that seek to improve governance practices through ICTs. Commonwealth Connects itself is a pragmatic example of shared governance built on mutual trust and interdependence. The experience and collaborative methodology are inspiring Commonwealth practitioners to bridge the digital divide.

Tania Gessi, Devindra Ramnarine and John Wilkins are with the Governance and Institutional Development Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat www.thecommonwealth.org. The support of the Governance and Institutional Development Division and the contributions of Commonwealth colleagues are gratefully acknowledged. The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent Commonwealth Secretariat policy.
1.0 Introduction

“It must be considered that there is nothing more difficult to carry out, no more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to handle, than to initiate a new order of things.”

(Machiavelli, 1513: 21)

In the last two decades, the issues of good governance, public sector reform and e-governance have been significant drivers of change, engaging the public service in large-scale transformation, often with mixed results. It is important to examine the outcomes of these initiatives and to extract lessons learnt and best practices from the experience. This is of particular interest and importance to Commonwealth developing countries that seek to maximise the impact of limited resources available for national development and reform.

It is recognised that governance issues in developing countries have been at the forefront of donors’ and international agencies’ developmental agenda. One definition of governance proposed by the World Bank is “the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources for development” and equates good governance in developing countries with sound development management. (Stanforth, 2006: 2) Consistent with the Bank’s mandate, good governance focuses on the aspects of government that affect economic development. Reform programmes have usually followed this restricted interpretation of good governance and, not surprisingly, have had less impact than intended. The lack of profound changes in the local political context and in the incentives for change management adds to this problem.

Changing the way government operates so that it delivers the right services for its citizens means adopting a new development paradigm that appreciates local circumstances and the specific historical, political and social context. Public sector reform in developing countries has focused until recently on strengthening administrative and policy capacity, on making the
government more open and accountable and on reducing the costs of public administration. In the last two decades, however, public sector reform followed prescriptive and paternalistic policies adopted by major international donors, ultimately failing to institute the desired changes in the public sector.

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) can facilitate improved service delivery and more efficient internal operations. The transformational capabilities of ICTs in e-governance can impact many crosscutting dimensions of society, including those articulated in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). ICTs can create new opportunities for the marginalised and the vulnerable of society but do not represent a panacea for all development problems. ICTs are sufficiently versatile to allow for the transfer of transformational information and knowledge to urban and remote areas, reaching the poor and traditionally neglected segments of society. Knowledge can empower and better equip people to make choices and challenge the status quo. This can stimulate demand for change to which the public sector must respond.

The next five parts of this paper consider the impact on public sector development of strategic pressures related to e-governance. The first part outlines the obligations implicit in achieving good governance. The second part observes the phenomenon of increasing external and internal demand for public sector reform. The third part overviews the e-governance agenda driven by ICTs. The fourth part introduces a new e-governance framework and explains its four tools: e-leadership, business practice, strategic gap analysis and multi-stakeholder partnerships. This part also profiles Commonwealth Connects as a case example of applying the framework in practice. The fifth part draws together key learning about this relatively new domain and points to areas for future enquiry.
2.0 Good Governance

The United Nations defines the essence of governance as: “[…] the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented).” United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP)

Governance also exists at the corporate, local, national and international levels. Government’s responsibility for public service delivery and good governance makes it a major stakeholder. The delivery of public services in rural areas may involve landlords, cooperatives, NGOs, research institutes, religious leaders and the military, among others. In urban areas, on the other hand, the media, lobbyists, international donors and multinational corporations can play an additional role in influencing the decision-making process. The practice of governance is inherently complex because it embraces many players at many levels.

The notion of good governance is fundamental to the integrity of the Commonwealth Secretariat’s (ComSec) 2004-2008 Strategic Plan. It makes a strong commitment to democracy and to more equitable sharing of the benefits of globalisation. ComSec recognises that development and democracy must be mutually reinforcing. It is dedicated to making democracy work better for pro-poor development while reaffirming its determination to help attain the MDGs. ComSec’s Governance and Institutional Development Division (GIDD) facilitates public sector transformation, through improving service delivery, to achieve good governance.

The United Nations (UN ESCAP) elaborates, claiming that good governance is built on principles such as participation, the rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, consensus, equity, inclusiveness, effectiveness, efficiency and accountability. Failing to pursue these principles can amount to bad governance and lead to failed states, which contribute to socially and economically unsustainable societies. Bad governance often produces ineffective central
government with illegitimate mandates, incoherent policies and unstable and incapacitated institutions, which ultimately result in unsustainable economies, unfair societies and public discontent. Good governance, on the other hand, helps minimise corruption, values the views of minorities and gives voice in decision making to the most vulnerable in society. An ethic of good governance helps government become more responsive to its citizens’ present and future needs.

In many developing Commonwealth countries, governments are costly, deliver poor service and are not sufficiently accountable or responsive to citizens. Governance reforms through public sector modernisation, which is integral to GIDD’s work, try to address these shortcomings. Notions of e-governance have emerged to assist with improving government processes, connecting citizens and integrating society. The expected outcome is a participatory, fair, accountable, transparent and efficient society. There is substantial cumulative pressure from the good governance agenda of governments and international agencies that drives public sector reform in developing Commonwealth countries.

3.0 Public Sector Reform

“The challenge to government is to move away from opportunistic reform toward more strategic reform: developing a clear vision, building a constituency, devising tactics to achieve results, and communicating this vision and the anticipated results.”

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2001: 2)

Individuals and organisations, prior to adopting new modes of operation, tend to resist change. There are many reasons for this resistance, including a reaction to the loss of control over what is known and familiar. Change can be categorised as ‘adaptive change’, involving a low degree of potential resistance; ‘innovative change’, entailing a more complex type of potential resistance; and ‘radical change’, that has a high degree of complexity and potential resistance. Many public
sector reform efforts fall into ‘innovative’ or ‘radical’ change, requiring a high degree of innovation and flexibility, which in turn are associated with an increased risk of failure. As most governments are ill-equipped to confront the challenges of managing risk, many public sector reforms have failed to achieve intended outcomes.

Until recently, public sector reform focused on policy capacity strengthening, institutional restructuring, administrative capacity building and public service downsizing. It was often aligned with paternalistic policies adopted by the World Bank and other international development agencies. They assumed that reform problems could be fully specified in advance and that solutions could be fully defined at the outset and implemented on a predictable timetable over a fixed period. Donors favoured a formulaic and mechanistic approach that featured quantitative targets that on the surface appeared easy to manage. This technocratic approach ignored the fact that reform is a complex and dynamic social and political process, driven by human behaviour and local circumstances. Public sector reform is a long and challenging process that requires public servants to fundamentally change the way they regard their mission, their jobs and their interactions with citizens. It relies heavily on cultural change in the public service.

Ideally, reform is implemented in the context of a country’s national development plan that envisions a public sector aligned with and supportive of national socio-economic goals. In the last decade, public sector reform has had to respond to the introduction of national ICT strategies. ICTs can facilitate strategic change, both nationally and within the public sector. The integration of a national ICT strategy within public sector reform involves not only streamlining the public service structure but also redefining its cultural and political framework. This is a radical type of change, requiring a substantial level of readjustment.

People adapt more readily to changes that are crafted incrementally around the public service without being imposed and with the right amount of coordination. The idea of crafting
change strategies entails a significant degree of ad hoc decision making. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to managing the change required. This underscores the growing complexity in adopting accepted models of change.

It is useful to reflect on an observation\(^1\) made in April 2006 by a Caribbean cabinet secretary that the Westminster constitutional model, while still relevant in the region, is often in direct opposition to the typical Caribbean constitution and local context. Fundamental changes in the public sector that have a constitutional basis require development of an in situ model that reflects the uniqueness of the cultural mix and local conditions. If disparities can be pinpointed at such a deep and fundamental level, then it becomes clearer why the complexity of change needed to support public sector reform grows when governance models are transferred from developed to developing countries.

### 4.0 e-Governance

In many developing countries, the early introduction of ICTs in public service delivery consisted of the simple digital translation of existing services. There was minimal change and no real value added. e-Governance has evolved dramatically, even in Commonwealth developing countries. It encompasses e-democracy, e-government and e-business.

e-Governance has also progressively acquired more complex functionalities. e-Governance is evolving from e-transactions towards supporting the critical high-level functions of public management, improved communication between different parts of government and enabling partnerships between different stakeholders, ultimately resulting in ‘networked government’.

A government so structured enables joined up working relationships between different parts of government, providing new, efficient and convenient ways for citizens and businesses to

---

\(^1\) CONSULTATIVE MEETING FOR CARIBBEAN CABINET SECRETARIES AND HEADS OF PUBLIC SERVICE ON THE PUBLIC SERVICE IN A CHANGING CARIBBEAN, MARLBOROUGH HOUSE, LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM, 18-20 APRIL 2006.
communicate with government and to receive services. Its functions encompass design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of public policies and programmes, development of legislation and high-level decision making on complex social problems. It requires close collaboration among the disparate stakeholders, within and outside government. In most developing Commonwealth countries, e-governance is limited to the transfer of government transactions online, without achieving the full potential of networked government.

The various e-activities, e-products and e-services need to be placed within a broader framework of government. Besides the increased number of partnerships between governments and third party delivery channels, the notion of the State is changing, in that “… the transformation of the State’s status encompasses changes in three separate dimensions … the growing emerging of non-state actors, transnational corporations (TNCs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Increasingly, the State has to share its power with these non-state actors.” (Finger et al, 2006: 38) The emergence of supranational levels, such as the European Union, and sub-national levels, such as local government, subverts the traditional notion of state power being exercised from a single central point. The State’s main functions of rule making, service delivery and regulation are being executed increasingly at different levels and by different actors. These trends complicate and challenge the evolution and effectiveness of e-governance initiatives. Heeks (2004: 95) reports that a good deal of e-government-for-development projects fail, either totally (35%) or partially (50%).

The decentralisation of power to increasingly engage citizens in the decision-making process enables government to embrace a type of ‘ICT socialism’. It entails collective ownership of the outcomes of any government decision that forges a bond of trust between government and its citizens. ICTs enable the proactive participation of citizens in government matters, achieving a more transparent, more participatory and fairer society.
Effective e-governance requires negotiation, coordination, networking and regulation of ICTs. Relations among different ICT stakeholders need to be managed to achieve fairness, accountability, transparency and efficiency in service delivery. To realise better governance using ICTs, it is crucial to have superior e-leaders. Seifert & Bonham (2003: 5) notes, “Without strong political leadership few e-government initiatives will be funded or implemented.” O’Neill (2003) postulates that, “The quality of e-leadership at all levels within an organisation, and the competency with which it uses technology, are crucial factors in determining whether an organisation will survive and thrive in the global economy.” Without effective e-leadership, ICTs may only achieve short-term, low-impact efficiency goals that simply digitise existing processes with little value added. Effective e-governance is more likely when ICTs are managed strategically. The public sector is under constant pressure to exploit modern enabling technologies to improve internal operations and the quality of service delivery.

5.0 A New e-Governance Framework

ComSec, through GIDD’s Public Sector Informatics programme, reviewed its observations and analyses of ICT case studies gathered in member country workshops and surveys during 2005/06. An initial e-governance framework emerged from this assessment and is portrayed in Figure 1. It offers valuable insights into managing the transition necessary to facilitate better governance and public sector modernisation in developing countries. It is believed that this e-governance framework is novel and has practical application for bridging the digital divide in the Commonwealth.
The e-Governance Framework

Figure 1
Its novelty stems from the framework’s mapping of the confluence of four elements integral to managing e-transitions. First, the framework sees e-leadership as the key to making strategic use of ICTs in e-governance initiatives and to assuring local commitment and ownership. Second, it emphasises good business practice based upon private sector tools for innovation. Third, it focuses on and creates popular pressure for reform through strategic gap analysis. And fourth, it features multi-stakeholder partnerships based on mutual trust and interdependence to build capacity.

The framework is about enabling change and redesigning roles and processes to achieve better governance. This means empowering citizens who access services and public servants who deliver services. It responds to good governance principles and practices, public sector reform and ICT innovations. ICTs crosscut citizens’ needs for better service and promote improved transparency, accountability and shared decision making. Deploying a set of interrelated planning tools facilitates strategic responses to intractable problems. The framework also recognises the need for strong monitoring and evaluation, with a feedback loop for corrective action. Citizens and stakeholders are expected to review governance improvements and to update their changing needs and demands. The combined use of these tools in the public sector increases the chances of successful strategic change management.

The framework is not meant to be exhaustive. Other tools could be added to the framework to elaborate the methodology. The purpose here is to present a simplified framework as a starting point for further enquiry and to test the framework as a working model. The following sections discuss the thinking behind the four tools and how the framework has been applied in practice.
5.1 e-Leadership

The first, and most important, tool is effective e-leadership. Accenture (2002: 15) suggests that e-leaders need to be pragmatic visionaries. They need to have the capacity to formulate a vision, to motivate others and to make clear the purpose and necessity for change. They also need to have the technical ability to manage the transition to e-government.

ComSec devised a questionnaire to test the following hypothesis: *A more effective e-leader will have an intimate knowledge of the nature and the scope of ICT and the potential impact that it has on a long-term national/organisational strategy, in addition to common leadership attributes.* Senior ICT and other government officials in 23 Commonwealth countries completed the questionnaire during 2005/06. Surveys excluded most Commonwealth developed countries (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, United Kingdom) that rank among the highest in the United Nations’ (2005) e-readiness index. Malta and Cyprus were middle income countries that took part in the surveys. They have become good performers in e-government, especially since joining the European Union, and rank 21 and 37, respectively. The surveys mostly included less developed countries. The highest ranked were Malaysia at 43 and South Africa at 58. The lowest ranking of 146 belonged to Mozambique.

Preliminary analysis suggests certain trends and essential attributes that are required of e-leaders. The surveys reaffirmed that many leaders have the right vision and theoretical knowledge. But in Africa, for example, many countries are not realising the full benefits of e-governance because of significant gaps or weaknesses in moving from vision to the implementation phase. e-Leaders need to adopt a strategy of ‘think big, start small, scale fast’ to effect manageable changes with short-term gains.

Leaders of e-projects are very different from conventional leaders in bureaucratic organisations. e-Leaders must be willing to collaborate, evolve and understand multiple
stakeholder perspectives and to tailor public sector reform to country-specific needs without losing sight of the broader vision. This notion of leader as collaborator and facilitator is most crucial in e-leadership. Traditional public institutions anchored in hierarchy and delegation are being replaced by more dynamic and slimmed down organisations built of energy and ideas. e-Leaders, by collaborating with different ministries, private concerns and NGOs, are the agents of this transition.

e-Leaders transcend this common understanding of collaboration. They are instrumental in achieving a state of ‘ICT socialism’, where hierarchical and paternalistic power structures are being diffused to integrate citizens’ needs and demands, bringing the State closer to the aspirations of the individual. The full integration of ICTs in the political arena and government extends ownership of the outcomes of public sector reform to citizens, enabling long-term sustainability and the evolution of a public sector that is responsive to people’s priorities.

Taking Africa as an example, the findings confirm that the ICT sector is underdeveloped in most African countries. In many cases where a national ICT plan is being implemented, public management and administrative systems do not respond effectively due to a lack of dedicated funding and expertise. Survey results indicate that countries require high-level representation in government to obtain political support and long-term commitment, together with the ability to develop a vision that is supported by multiple stakeholders. This is exemplified by Singapore’s experience as a leader of innovation. In developing nations, strong political will and leadership are essential to attract ICT investment due to basic problems with infrastructure, access, corruption and education. (Working Group on e-Government in the Developing World, 2002: 1)

Integrating ICTs within public sector reform often involves increasing transparency, accountability and public participation, none of which are easily supported by the bureaucracy. e-Leaders must be able to motivate and persuade government officials and to build political
support across government to create an enabling environment for change. A recent ComSec meeting² emphasised the role of the heads of the public service in communicating information to the public and developing sufficient knowledge of the scope of reform within the public service. A more transparent government, where knowledge is accessible by all, creates a bond of trust between government and citizens and fosters economic prosperity.

Another important finding was that e-leaders are capable of widening the scope of the national ICT plan by integrating cross-sectoral strategies. Three out of four respondents observed that the same people who produce the national strategic plan also develop the national ICT plan. This suggests good awareness of the cross-sectoral nature of ICTs. High-level government officials believe that future e-leaders, besides requiring technical know how, also have to be actively involved in developing public sector strategies. These officials see e-government as a reform process in itself and not merely as computerisation of government operations. The literature recognises that e-leaders need to be more than ICT consumers. They must be able to identify, utilise and integrate ICTs in the development agenda. The OECD (2003: 4) maintains that, “With the appropriate skills, leaders can help integrate the organisation’s IT strategy with the broader goals of the organisation.”

The surveys confirmed that e-leaders form multi-stakeholder partnerships to develop the national ICT plan. Experience shows that consultative methods that involve top decision makers yield better results on the ground and maximise policy impact. (International Institute for Communication and Development, 2004: 9) e-Leaders naturally pursue collaboration and cooperation among different stakeholders in multilateral relationships. In particular, they see the advantages of engaging business partners in developing the national ICT plan and of borrowing private sector tools to improve public services.

---

² CONSULTATIVE MEETING FOR CARIBBEAN CABINET SECRETARIES AND HEADS OF PUBLIC SERVICE ON THE PUBLIC SERVICE IN A CHANGING CARIBBEAN, MARLBOROUGH HOUSE, LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM, 18-20 APRIL 2006.
5.2 Business practice

The second tool concerns good business practice. In an age of globalisation, the State’s central power is being diffused through decentralisation, privatisation and subcontracting. There is growing competition for the supply of services among public organisations, private firms and not-for-profit agencies. In a society where citizens are demanding better service, the public service needs to adopt appropriate private sector tools to reengineer processes and reduce costs. In response, public administrations are developing a service culture where citizens are treated more like customers. (Koch & Hauknes, 2005)

Centrelink is Australia’s federal service agency responsible for ‘one stop shopping for government human services’. Its aim is to ‘present a single view of all government benefits to customers through a universal claims process’. The vision of Centrelink is to “provide exemplary service to the community by linking Australian government services and achieving best practice in service delivery”. (Vardon, 1998) The board of directors is a successful blend of government and private sector members. It has adopted a variety of private sector tools, including key performance indicators to ground organisational change and recognition and rewards for excellence in performance. It even pays an annual efficiency dividend to government as a measure of continuous improvement.

The public service can learn from the private sector about how to institutionalise personal incentives to encourage innovative e-government activity. The State of Andhra Pradesh, India uses crosscutting business tools to control the theft of electricity from government-owned supply companies and to improve revenue collection and accountability. A key part of the plan was reengineering business processes using a new management control system, called the customer analysis tool. The local context was characterised by limited commercialisation, deeply entrenched vested interests and politicised operations and management in the power sector.
Andhra Pradesh’s success in controlling electricity theft was, “… institutionalisation of new business processes by adopting modern technology, the improvement of management information systems and the introduction of new management control systems, in addition to changing the incentives of managers and staff by punishing collusion and poor performance”. (Bhatia & Gulati, 2004: 4)

Adopting a business practice approach means being more business like, not operating like a business. Business acumen allows the public service to replace outdated systems, to become more cost-effective, efficient and accountable and to standardise practices for quality and equity in service delivery. These are consistent with the needs of a national ICT plan.

5.3 Strategic gap analysis

The third tool is strategic gap analysis. Heeks (2001b: 5) asserts that, “Without internal ownership, e-governance initiatives may never be developed. Without external facilitation, e-governance initiatives may never be successfully implemented.” GIDD tailors its programmes and activities to demand-driven requests from member countries. This generally requires countries and regions to be fully aware of the issues to be addressed and to have a good idea of the solutions that should be pursued. The strategic gap analysis approach is fundamentally different. It first seeks to understand underlying political and social systems through direct interaction with countries and regional agencies that create desired changes.

Strategic gap analysis involves building partnerships from the outset, with a strong focus on localised action and on creating both broad and local ownership. Stakeholders are asked to get involved in the decision-making process and to commit to subsequent actions. A facilitated, bottom-up approach allows for meaningful input from local agents and multi-stakeholder ownership. Finger et al (2006: 38) comment that, “… it’s not about increasing passive participation […], it’s the ability to carry out a collective learning of some significance […],
create more horizontal processes, foster empowerment at the local level and learn from trial and error, all this linked with experience sharing.” Strategic gap analysis facilitates this perspective.

The process differs from previously adopted approaches by avoiding being prescriptive from the outset. It is a proactive, multi-stakeholder, inclusive process that adopts consultative methods to build broad ownership and consensus. Its methodology ultimately strikes a balance between meeting public demands and facilitating the input of external expertise. The strategic gap analysis approach is inherently consistent with the philosophy underpinning ‘ICT socialism’.

GIIDD arranged a workshop on strategic gap analysis for Africa in South Africa in June 2006. The methodology was jointly facilitated by two expert agencies, ComSec and PSTG Consulting, and by a regional body, NEPAD’s e-Africa Commission. The approach was designed to combine the intimate local knowledge and capability of regional bodies with the broader expertise and experience of international agencies. Together, they facilitated a group of 22 participants from eleven African countries through a logical and structured development process where country representatives decided themselves what was important and what e-governance activities should be pursued. Central to the discussion was an e-readiness assessment done for a sample of 20 African countries, which itself identified patterns, trends and issues that needed to be deliberated. Through facilitated discussion, the group collectively identified those areas where the e-Africa Commission could add strategic value. The approach was localised, obviated the one-size-fits-all ideology and led to the identification of local priorities and areas of focus to address the gaps identified in regional initiatives.

5.4 Multi-stakeholder partnerships

The fourth tool concerns integrated, multi-stakeholder partnerships. Bennis (1993: xxvii) suggests the possibilities: “Tomorrow’s organizations will be federations, networks, clusters, cross-functional teams, temporary systems, ad hoc task forces, lattices, modules, matrices,
almost anything but pyramids.” These virtual organisations answer the question of how to organise considerable resources to accomplish significant projects when the time and expense of acquiring and owning resources are not otherwise affordable. In the private sector, a virtual corporation can be a temporary network of independent suppliers, customers and competitors linked by ICTs to share skills, costs and access to markets. They depend on a federation of alliances tied together through ownership, contracts and agreements. Assignments are made based on need, partners are chosen for competence and reliability and incentives are negotiated to leverage results. A focus on greater interests, rather than authority, helps maintain organisational integrity.

Smith (1776) claimed that, “Social capital promotes greater coordination among individuals and between departments. Teamwork can enhance efficiency and quality in small companies as well as multinational corporations. Social capital within and beyond the firm improves morale and enhances productivity.” Social capital can be measured by the degree to which organisations collaborate and cooperate through mechanisms such as shared networks, norms, values and trust to achieve mutual benefits. Commonwealth countries have the advantage of sharing common networks and values. Networking can be across 53 member countries and with almost 100 separately constituted Commonwealth organisations. The value system includes good governance, gender equality, cultural diversity, freedom of expression, community security and stability and peaceful dispute resolution.

Governments are becoming more networked within, as well as across other governments, sectors and nations. Managing these relationships requires different aptitudes and collaborative approaches. Bridging the digital divide can contribute materially to fulfilling the vision of networked government. Across the Commonwealth, ICTs are instrumental in supporting horizontal management, citizen-focused service delivery, stakeholder consultation and global
partnerships. The challenge is to harness technology strategically by engaging all parties to produce desired systemic and societal benefits.

Crafting a successful multi-stakeholder partnership, besides being built on trust, is about reaching consensus among numerous actors. This means understanding their various interests, identifying mutual benefits, accommodating organisational, cultural and social differences and collectively gauging their individual competencies and resources for the implementation phase. Commonwealth Connects exemplifies a multi-stakeholder partnership for delivering the Commonwealth’s initiative on the digital divide in an environment of competing priorities.

5.5 Modelling the framework – Commonwealth Connects

To mitigate increasing digital fragmentation, Commonwealth heads of government mandated the Commonwealth Action Programme for the Digital Divide (CAPDD) in 2002. CHOGM 2005 in Malta recognised that ICTs act as catalysts in creating new economic synergies to overcome the constraints of remoteness, small size and other obstacles to development. In August 2006, CAPDD was re-branded as Commonwealth Connects, with its own logo and website and with a renewed mandate to harness ICTs to benefit member countries that need them most. The programme is assessing national ICT strategic planning in member countries, providing concrete assistance for ICTs in the least developed countries and enabling them to enter the information age, fully equipped to compete effectively in the global marketplace. An International Partnership Summit, including a meeting of ICT ministers, is planned in New Delhi, India in the first quarter of 2007.

The website www.commonwealthconnects.net is a critical element in building a Commonwealth ICT collective using the power of technology to transform individual lives and entire communities. The programme is being delivered under the Steering Committee’s leadership through a multi-stakeholder partnership and a separate voluntary fund. ComSec
contributes secretariat support through GIDD in the form of research, administration, procurement, fund management, project management and communications.

**Commonwealth Connects Governance Structure**

![Governance Structure Diagram](image)

The governance structure for *Commonwealth Connects* is shown in Figure 2. The governance arrangements are innovative, inclusive and pragmatic. They exploit the strengths of an e-leader who is motivated and competent. They draw on the competencies of each agency and country to create synergies, to codify the experience gained into knowledge and to share this knowledge for the benefit of all in real time. The arrangements are lean and able to achieve private sector efficiencies. The administrative overhead on the Special Fund is minimal, and member countries are expected to derive excellent return on investment.

The mechanisms used to manage *Commonwealth Connects* model governance arrangements that embrace the four tools for managing e-transition. This was not always the case. The development phase from 2002 to 2005 had its fair share of challenges. However, through a process of innovation, experimentation and learning from international best practices, ComSec shepherded into place a leading-edge example of its emerging e-governance framework.
Multi-stakeholder Partnerships

*Commonwealth Connects*, as a multi-stakeholder partnership, is a product of the Commonwealth’s experience and way of working that is built on trust and a common sense of purpose. Current governance arrangements are designed to address implementation and coordination challenges that reduced the programme’s ability to deliver on its original mandate. A review of the work done during the period 2002-04 revealed that, although a great deal was done by lead agencies, the programme could deliver a lot more.

Implementation modalities built on teamwork and trust were not clearly defined in the 2002 CAPDD. The former coordinating committee felt that the programme needed to be refocused and put into a tight implementation mode to produce maximum benefits and value for money for member countries. This meant that lead agencies had to realign their strategies to achieve greater synergies and to avoid duplication of effort, despite the fact that each had its own charter, objectives, deliverables and management processes. A new approach had to be found to confirm that a revitalised programme was both possible and relevant. The process for moving forward had to be acceptable to all partners but, more importantly, acceptable to member countries. *Commonwealth Connects* capitalised on the core values that bind the Commonwealth together. Its constituents also fostered mutual trust based on shared information and experiences.

Most Commonwealth agencies that committed resources to address the digital divide were relatively small on a global scale and were unlikely to make a significant impact individually. The case for collaboration and coordination was obvious. A strategic coalition of seven independent Commonwealth organisations and four member countries was drawn into the newly formed Steering Committee. By its very nature, the Committee is a team of independent bodies that had to work through consensus to achieve progress. The members are expected to
assume various leadership roles in delivering the programme based on their specific expertise and experience.

**e-Leadership**

Managing this multi-stakeholder group, while trying to engage Commonwealth developing countries, required the skills of a special e-leader. This leader had to possess traditional leadership skills, as well as an intimate knowledge of ICT issues. The Commonwealth Secretary-General selected the Minister of Foreign Affairs from Malta to lead the Steering Committee in this effort. The Minister is an experienced lawyer on ICT matters and is well positioned to deliver on the *Commonwealth Connects* mandate with the Prime Minister of Malta as the Commonwealth Chair-in-Office.

**Business Practice**

The time to deliver is extremely short – before the 2007 CHOGM in Uganda. Private sector thinking and business practices had to be injected to accelerate the programme. The Special Fund was established in March 2006 to service the programme. A unique characteristic is the Fund’s ability to accept financial and non-financial contributions that are expected to be monetarised. The procurement process has been streamlined to utilise the Special Fund. *Commonwealth Connects* has been structured to be able to manage risks, as it involves a dynamic and flexible governance arrangement, which is responsive to change and performance. The Programme is pursuing the acquisition of a type of software that will allow monitoring and evaluation of its activities and improvement and consistency with the targets set. Private sponsorship also allows the integration of business practices into its governance structure for increased effectiveness and efficiency in the way it delivers its activities. This helps reduce bureaucratic practices, making actions speak louder than words. The small GIDD-based Secretariat follows good business practice to ensure prudence, probity and transparency in all operations.
Strategic Gap Analysis

The Steering Committee identified five new areas of focus where the Commonwealth has a clear comparative advantage and where it could impact global efforts through the MDGs and the World Summit on the Information Society. The five areas of focus are: (1) building policy and regulatory capacity; (2) modernising education and skills development; (3) entrepreneurship for poverty reduction; (4) promoting local access and connectivity; and (5) regional networking, local content and knowledge. These priorities represent areas of demand from member countries.

The Committee commissioned an assessment to confirm that these were citizens’ demands too. There were extensive consultations in Antigua, St. Kitts and Trinidad for the Caribbean region, in London for the NGO community, in Malta for the Mediterranean region and in Cameroon for the Africa region. The consultations produced a list of 62 projects as indicative demand for the programme. This evidence of member country demand was instrumental in obtaining the level of support necessary for the programme to be presented at CHOGM 2005.

The first project to be initiated is ‘Rebuilding after the Tsunami: Using ICTs for Change’. It will create a web-based platform to provide greater access to vital information and will encourage ongoing exchanges between numerous civil society organisations, governments and citizens. It will complement existing reconstruction efforts in India, Sri Lanka and other countries affected by the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. The programme is also funding a project to provide radio-based business training to help women in Cameroon engage professionally in micro enterprise and a project to donate refurbished computers from Caribbean governments and citizens to schools in other Commonwealth countries.

Strategic gap analysis will be institutionalised within the work of Commonwealth Connects, in particular, through national ICT strategic planning support by member countries.
6.0 Conclusion

Good governance is essential to achieving sustainable socio-economic development. Governments and public institutions are being pressured by internal and external forces to reform the public service. While ICTs do not represent a single solution to all development problems, they can make a valuable contribution and enable broader development strategies. Major advances in ICTs, combined with the rapid growth of global networks like the Internet, can reduce social and economic inequalities and enable local entrepreneurship and wealth creation.

A new e-governance framework has emerged from ComSec’s recent work in the Commonwealth. The framework focuses on making strategic use of ICTs to do a number of things for member countries and their governments. It can be a practical tool for leveraging local leadership and ownership, for innovating through good business practice, for pinpointing local needs through strategic gap analysis and for building capacity through multi-stakeholder partnerships. The power of the framework is in combining and customising these tools to manage e-transition, helping governments adapt ‘ICT socialism’ to local circumstances and needs.

*Commonwealth Connects* offers a working laboratory to test and refine the framework through constant application to real world problems. The empirical and anecdotal evidence suggests room for a new domain of enquiry into the effects of ICTs in public sector reform and on good governance. Although this is a work in progress, the early signs are encouraging and point to opportunities to refine the framework. There is scope to extend the path of research through results-based monitoring and evaluation. Research is required to assess issues like transparency and accountability, outcomes and impacts, cultural change and the role of political will in e-governance. As the domain matures, the framework is expected to evolve into a sustainable model for better e-governance. The Commonwealth can anticipate a smoother
transition to e-governance and accelerated progress in public sector modernisation in developing countries.

**Bibliography**

Abas, Sa Bali Bin (2005): Report by Director, Management Services Department, Prime Minister’s Office, New Zealand; presented at the Commonwealth Advanced Seminar: Leading Strategic Change in the Public Sector, Wellington, New Zealand, 21 February to 4 March 2005; (London: Commonwealth Secretariat).


University of Manchester; (Manchester: University of Manchester). Retrieved in January 2006 from


