

# MODERN CIVICS

Countries across the Middle East and North Africa join forces on e-government projects.

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In today's fast-paced world, the old methods of bureaucratic paperwork and centralized operations are quickly becoming obsolete. By going electronic, governments are discovering they can not only provide services in a more convenient and effective way, but also give citizens a greater voice in the decision-making process.

Recognizing the shift, the Good Governance for Development (GfD) Initiative in the Middle East and North Africa has identified e-government as a priority reform area. Through GfD, a number of countries in the region, such as the United Arab Emirates, Morocco, Egypt and Jordan, have started to develop and implement e-government policies and projects.

The goal is to address one of the most common complaints raised by the business community and citizens: the quantity and complexity of government formalities and paperwork. By simplifying administrative tasks through the use of technology, the e-government projects may prove to be an important tool in promoting transparency and accountability, as well as improving competitiveness.

## Collaborating Across Countries

Cooperation on e-government issues is often carried out through visits and workshops. Still, each country has its own structure, legislative regulations and required services, so e-government maturity varies throughout the region.

Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt are among the most advanced. Egypt, for example, first launched its e-government program in 2001 and currently offers a portal that lets citizens, investors and businesspeople engage in a multitude of services, ranging from paying traffic tickets to replacing identification cards. The government has also linked its national databases for social and economic development.

In the intermediate category, Qatar has an attractive, well-organized government website. And Bahrain offers a solid portfolio of services, but lacks interactive features.

Morocco and Tunisia are still in the beginner phase, while Sudan, Syria, Iraq and Algeria are in the trainee category.

## All Across the Land

As with many projects, the main issue for project managers working on e-government initiatives is understanding the requirements, needs and wants of the customer base. But in this case, project managers trying to satisfy an entire nation. To implement online governmental services that address the broad spectrum of needs, project managers must be able to analyze the requirements of people at different social levels and varying lifestyles.

Despite the challenges, there are many rewards. E-government projects are usually implemented as an ongoing program, which means continual improvement and development opportunities for project managers.

Given the nature of e-government initiatives, an IT background will prove to be very helpful for project managers who want to get involved. Yet because these projects generally address services in all areas of society, the wider the range of the project manager's experience, the better.

But the biggest gains for nations across the Middle East and North Africa as may come from working together across borders. By capitalizing on each other's experiences, countries can achieve more for less. *PM*

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