

CITIZEN IDENTIFICATION SYSTEM OF IRAQ: CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS IN ENABLING E-GOVERNMENT SERVICES

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ABSTRACT. The e-government undertaking of Iraq has been launched since 2003 with the help of the government of Italy. One of the initiatives in the undertaking is to address the pressing need of an improved identification system for its citizen. The criticality of having the system in place is expressed by having the initiative appearing at rank number two in the top ten lists of critical e-government projects. It is desired that the identification system is implemented using of a single database that reduces forgery and would allow the application to work across multiple Ministries. The transparency of this solution would achieve high levels of integrity for the government. It was estimated that the system will be completed in 2009-2010. However, at the point of this paper writing, the system is still not in place. This paper focuses on the challenges and barriers faced in the implementation of the identification system in Iraq. The challenges and barriers are identified based on the aspects of political, technology, ICT skill, connectivity and electricity.

Keywords: ID system, e-government, database, challenges and barriers

INTRODUCTION

The term electronic government (e-government) is used to describe the “use of information technology to support government operations, engage citizens, and provide government services” (Martinus, 2010). The availability of the Internet for public usage gave rise to the use of the term ‘e-government’ which refers to the use of ICT to support the handling of information and delivery of services to the citizens and the business via online. Undoubtedly, the Internet is the most pervasive technological advancement that can be leveraged by almost every establishment (Kamil, 2012). Iraq’s government and its citizens are no exception.

Based on the UN e-government services index, Iraq ranks at number over 193 states (UNITED NATIONS, 2012). The poor rank can be attributed to the instability of the country following the 2003 invasion of Iraq which was later become known as Iraq war. Taken the situation resulting from the war, many of the Iraq development plan have come to a halt. Although the need to institute an effective and efficient e-government for Iraq is high on the country’s agenda, the situations and challenges that may hinder the progress must first be thoroughly understood.

In the delivery of services to its citizen, a government must have in place a system which enables identification of citizens which in turn helps establishes the identity of citizens who qualify for a certain service. In the case of Iraq, the identification of individual citizen is in a dire need for improvement.

The government legislated residency law in Iraq (Iraq Nationality Law 1972 number 65) is challenged following a restriction for Iraqi to travel abroad in 1980. Following that, the Directorate of Passports was disengaged from the Public Security Directorate whilst the General Nationality Directorate was merged with the General Civil Status Directorate in one directorate called titled The Public Directorate of Nationality and Civil Status.

The aim of this merge was to issue the unified Food Ration Card (a form of identification which identifies the head of a family and the family members; the identification is for the purpose of food rationing). Following the invasion of 2003 and the collapse of the previous regime, the Directorates of Passports and Residency were attached again with the Nationality Directorate and named General Nationality Directorate (GND) (Ministry of interior - Iraq, 2012).

The operation and information handling at GND heavily relies on manual and paper-based processes. The manual paper based system is plagued by many disadvantages. Among them are: takes up a lot of physical storage which also lead to difficulty in ensuring its security and confidentiality; has limited mobility; easily damaged whilst difficult to back-up; sharing among multiple ministries would be tedious and messy. The following Figure 1 states the situation.



Figure 1. Illustrating The Condition Of Documentation Of The National Identification In Iraq

A way forward in the improvement of the Iraq citizen identification card is to implement a single database to reduce forgery and would allow the application to ‘work across multiple Ministries’. The transparency of this solution would achieve high levels of integrity for the government (Martinus, 2010). By addressing the identification problem, the chance for better e-government services would certainly be improved. Recognizing the importance, the citizen identification project appears as the number two in the top-ten list of critical e-government agenda. The estimated time spent on the development of such project (i.e. single database) is twenty four to thirty months. (Martinus, 2010)

AIM OF THIS PAPER

This paper aims to inform its reader of the need for Iraq to improve its citizen identification system. The improvement of the identification system is crucial in enabling the delivery of services by the government. Taken the poor situation following the Iraq was, the importance of the system can no longer be denied.

This paper is organized in 2 distinct parts: The first part sets up a list of objectives that directs the development of the identification system. The second part identifies the challenges and barriers in accomplishing the objectives in Part 1; the challenges and barriers are presented based on four angles: political, technological, people, and infrastructure.

OBJECTIVE OF THE CITIZEN IDENTIFICATION SYSTEM

The research has identified the following objectives as what is desired by the Iraq government by having a national identification for its individual citizen (Ministry of interior - Iraq, 2012). The objectives are:

National Database. The identification system shall be a single unified national database which includes all Iraqi who have the status of citizen and all residents who have obtained legal status.

Unique Identity. The identification system shall accord each and every Iraqi citizen and legal resident a national identification number which is unique and that the identification number shall serve as a key for record relationships within the Unified Database.

Difficult to be forged. The identification system must have control characteristics which will make forgery (or counterfeit) very difficult. This may be achieved through installation of the more modern high technology based identification system.

Transformation from old to proposed. Acknowledging that the implementation of an improved system is not an easy task as well as costly, the identification system must be carefully phased or evolved from the current manual from Civil Registry system into the more modern and improved electronic/technology based system.

Multi-purpose. The identification system shall also serve as identification for other purposes within Iraq such as driver's license and hospital identity card. The national ID shall also serve as the basis for passport issuance.

CURRENT STATUS OF IDENTIFICATION SYSTEM

The barrier to the successful implementation of e-government in Iraq is due to the poor citizen identification system. To serve the citizen the service provider must first know who they are serving. There must be some sort of systems to identify who they are. As of current situation, Iraq does not have proper identification documentation of its citizen.

Presently there is only one database which is owned by the Ministry of Trade which was developed more than 22 years ago with help from the United Nation oil-for-food program during the 1990s (Gardiner, 2004). This database has two main purposes, first is to identify recipient for monthly ration of food and the second purpose is for voting. The identification recognizes family and not individual citizen. As such, each identify card carries the name of the head of family and list of the family member. The unique key for each identity record is the family unique number.

At present, in under the e-government initiative, the proposed identification by the Government Interoperability Framework (GIF) version 0.9 in 17/12/2011 has determined the citizen schema as shown in the following Table 1.

Table 1. The Citizen Data Schema

	Civil Affairs ID		Address – City
	Citizenship Certificate ID		Mother’s Name – 2 parts
	Resident Card ID		Gender
	Ration Card ID		Birth Date
	Name – 3 parts / 4 parts		Place of Birth
	Marital Status		Biometrics –Photograph
	Name of Spouse		Biometric – Fingerprint
	Address – House No		Biometrics – Iris
	Address - Street Name		Still Alive
	Address - own/Village		

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

In this study, we have identified the challenges and barriers faced in implementation of identification system in terms of political, technology, ICT staff, connectively and electricity. These challenges and barriers are then mapped onto the situation in Iraq in its e-government project in relation to the aspects of the political, technology, ICT staff, connectively and electricity. All aspects are discussed in separate sections below.

Political

In a recent survey, it is found that Iraq and Somalia are only 2 countries from the whole Arab region that does not have electronic citizen identification system in place (Hani, 2012).

Iraq, since 2003 has suffered political incompatibility and instability. Such situation is reflected in its performance of the government in providing services at all government agencies. The fundamental requirement in enabling the electronic service delivery is the citizen identification system. Although, the importance is acknowledged (evidence by having the citizen identification initiative appears as the number two in the top ten list of critical e-government project), the progress in the system implementation has yet to be at par with the importance. It was estimated that the system be completed in 2009-2010. However, at the point of this paper writing, the system is still not in place.

Technology

Some issues in terms of technical infrastructure are instability of infrastructure, political influence, corruption, and poor resource management (Al-dabbagh, 2011). In Iraq, the IT infrastructure is very poor, in addition to the lack of IT experience and competency of the government employees. There is also a lack of inter-ministerial communication with poor e-awareness index even within the government and among the IT managers.

Furthermore, there is improper government coordination within the IT sector which has left the sector without a concrete entity to look after its growth and reconstruction (Ignaish, 2008). Additionally, policies to govern information diffusion and information sharing are absent. Despite the lengthy process of ICT capacity building, the e-governance strategy has not yet been developed (Al-dabbagh, 2011).

People

Both the political and civil situation in Iraq is not stable enough that it affects the smooth transition from one part to another, in addition to the discontinuity of the stakeholders and the lack of skilled personnel to manage the e-government project.

People play an instrumental role in the success of any e-government project (Al-dabbagh, 2011). However, in the case of Iraq it is a big challenge in getting the people to be on board of the project. This is because Iraq has yet to address the issue of the great digital divide: the gap between the people who are privileged to have access to the internet and those who do not. Those deprived of the access will fall behind in the acquisition of the essential computer skills and the information that can provide economic opportunities. Thus, may not have a good share of the benefits that e-government has to offer (Takeoka, & Alhujran, 2009).

E-literacy refers to the knowledge and ability to use computers and technology efficiently. Those who do not possess e-literacy are unable to make use of information and communication technologies because they are not computer literate. With the digital revolution, there is a very real danger that the world will be divided into the "information rich" and the "information poor" and e-government has the potential of either equalizing access to the government and its services or increasing the barriers to participation (Wang, 2010).

Infrastructure

One of the biggest losses following the Iraq war is the damage to its infrastructure. Challenges lies in the implementation of Communication lines and electricity supply:

Connectivity. Iraq doesn't have online connection between the agencies. The internet is very slow and limited usage and it doesn't support from the government it is under privet sector. There is not law to organization used the internet connection. Additionally, the other types of connection for example the fax, telephone, and so on. Iraq after the war 2003 lost its infrastructure and does not get any develop or improvement

Electricity. The electricity in Iraq big challenge stops all the projects that need the power to run. The electricity in Iraq after the war 2003 until now not enough for the needs. The total hours of the electricity in Iraq less than 12 hours per a day. Most agencies used power electricity generator. The large barriers to implement the citizen identification system is does not have enough electricity power.

CONCLUSIONS

It is very discouraging for Iraq to be a rich country but falls short in according its people with a good citizen identification system. The (political, technology, people, and infrastructure) challenges faced in developing the system must be addresses to bring Iraq out of the debilitating situation brought by the war. The concern at the slow progress rate of the project has carved a motivation to undertake research in this area. It is hoped that by having good citizen identification system in place, the access to the e-government services would be enabled.

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