

Digital Citizen Participation for Good Governance

Citizen participation is crucial for governments that aim to be inclusive, accountable, transparent and responsive. The proliferation of digital technologies offers the opportunity to improve the quality and frequency of citizen participation in governance issues while reducing costs and increasing the production and dissemination of real-time data. This Co-Praxis reflects on concepts, enabling conditions, success factors and challenges of using digital technologies to promote the participation of citizens in government decision-making.

JUST GOVERNANCE GROUP (JGG) EXPERIENCE WITH DIGITAL CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

JGG has noted the increased use of digital technology to enhance citizen participation in governance during evaluations or research for clients on electoral processes, e-government initiatives, anti-corruption efforts and consultation in public policy development. Through this Co-Praxis we seek to learn more about the use of digital technology for citizen participation in different contexts.

KEY CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS

DIGITAL CITIZEN PARTICIPATION refers to the use of new media or interactive media, digital information and communication technologies (ICT) to create communication channels between citizens and the government. Digital citizen participation contributes to good governance when such communication promotes transparent, accountable, inclusive, consensus-oriented and rules-based government decision-making and when government service delivery is responsive and effective. Digital citizen participation in governance issues may be initiated by citizens or governments, and may occur in the form of consultation, advocacy, awareness raising, political mobilization and social monitoring.

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Examples of digital technologies for citizen participation

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY	PURPOSE	EXAMPLES
Crowdsourced mapping through SMS, e-mail and social media	Electoral monitoring	Ushahidi in Kenya, Monitoring Election Violence in Sri Lanka and <i>Cuidemos el Voto</i> in Mexico
Web interfaces and SMS	Budget monitoring	Budget Tracking Tool in Kenya, and <i>Dinero y Política</i> in Argentina
Social media (Speak2twitt), YouTube, Skype and blogs	Awareness raising and political mobilization	The Arab Spring
SMS, e-mail and interactive mapping (openstreetmap)	Public service feedback	Kiirti in India, Map Kiberia and Huduma in Kenya
Web interfaces with built-in hotlines/ help desks	Corruption reporting	Ipaidabribe in India, and Magyarleaks in Hungary
SMS with poll questions	Consultations	U-report in various developing countries, and Ciudad Democrática in Brazil
SMS and blogs	Engaging with political leaders	Adote un Vereador in Brazil and Mzalendo in Kenya

Examples of digital technologies from JGG network consultants' countries

CITIZEN – GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION.

In Peru, citizen digital participation has been integrated in open government and electronic government efforts. For example, digital technologies have facilitated prompt citizen consultation on public policy issues by government agencies. Such technology is also used by regional and municipal governments in Peru to allow citizens to easily consult local government and to directly monitor progress on public works, as well as the implementation of participatory and results-based budgets. In Guatemala, digital technologies are being used by citizen groups as a human rights monitoring tool. Information and complaints on government programs related to health, education, elections and security is disseminated through mobile telephone applications.

CITIZEN ELECTORAL MONITORING. In Guatemala and Turkey, digital technology is used by volunteer networks to verify and communicate results. An electoral civil society monitoring network in Guatemala uses a “quick count”

methodology to communicate and compare preliminary results with official results. In Turkey, the NGO *Vote and Beyond* recruits volunteers to monitor, virtually or physically, polling station data. At least three volunteers track and upload the same polling station results to an online system to strengthen data validity and transparency. Citizens monitoring are particularly useful to smaller political parties that lack sophisticated systems to monitor data and promptly oppose official results, if necessary. In the last presidential election, at least 50,000 citizens volunteers participated after receiving virtual or online training from *Vote and Beyond*.

WORKERS' RIGHTS MOBILE APP. The Fair Labor Association, based in the United States, has piloted a mobile application for workers in countries such as Turkey in order to disseminate information on workers' rights and receive complaints on working conditions.

ENABLING CONDITIONS FOR DIGITAL CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN LITERATURE REVIEWED

WILLING AND CAPABLE CITIZENRY. The most basic condition that triggers the use of a digital technology for citizen participation is the presence of grassroots movements willing to make a change and a motivated citizenry engaged in civil society. A citizenry who is informed of their rights and technologically-literate is also essential.

ACCESS TO DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES. Digital citizen participation naturally emerges in contexts where internet and mobile telephony usage is high and costs are relatively low. Another important factor is an entrepreneurial technological environment that supplies the knowledge/resources at reasonable costs.

SUPPORTIVE REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS AND POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS. A regulatory framework that promotes free access to information, internet and ICTs in general, is crucial, and in the case of government-initiated dialogue, a buy-in from high level authorities is critical.

SUCCESS FACTORS

KEEP IT SIMPLE. Digital technologies should be easy to use and problem-driven, not tool-driven. This implies that the design should concentrate on solving users' governance concerns and not on the technology itself. Involving end users in the design process is a good practice. Digital technologies should be locally adapted to lower costs.

CONTEXT SPECIFIC. Digital technologies should be designed for all to use, and therefore, the local context matters. In linguistically diverse countries, or those with high illiteracy rates, using videos and images in social media instead of text will encourage people to use the technology.

PARTNERSHIPS. Partnerships with governments and the private sector to diversify funding streams, increase stakeholder's ownership and strengthen collaboration to respond to citizen's demands.

ESTABLISH MECHANISMS FOR RESPONSIVENESS.

A digital technology that requests feedback regarding government service delivery should have a system in place to acknowledge and respond to citizens' feedback. The service providers should also ensure that they have the capacity to act upon the volume of demands received. This is expected to increase participation.

CHALLENGES IN LITERATURE REVIEWED

DIGITAL DIVIDE. Certain demographic groups (e.g. males, wealthy, educated, and urban residents) are more likely to have access to ICT. This divide excludes certain populations from participation. In such cases, hybrid technologies (digital with older technologies) have been used to overcome this issue.

BARRIERS TO USE. Citizens were found not to use digital technologies when they are unaware of their existence, digitally illiterate, or when technologies are difficult to use, access, or trust. The latter was particularly the case in settings with data security risks (e.g. where SMS and e-mails interception had occurred).

LACK OF INCENTIVES. Empirical evidence concerning the contribution of digital technologies to good governance is required for governments to invest in it. Limited technological infrastructure, uncertain demand and financial risk associated with technology development, deters entrepreneurship. Finally, in government settings current employees' institutional incentives must change after the introduction of a new digital technology for it to work.

FALSE INFORMATION. Digital technologies that rely on user-contributed information (e.g. crowdsourcing and social media) should encompass data validation mechanisms to avoid the risk of false information.

JGG Reflections

JGG network consultants from Bolivia, Colombia, Guatemala, Peru, Turkey and Canada provided their reflections on the use of digital citizen participation for good governance based on their professional experience.

ENSURING EFFECTIVENESS AND SUSTAINABILITY.

The sustainability of the digital participation technologies for good governance requires both transparent government structures and civil society organizations and social networks that demand the use of these digital participation mechanisms. For mobile applications to effectively monitor child and forced labour or other serious labour standards, a robust complaint management system that adopts a tripartite approach involving participating companies, workers' associations and government labour ministries would be optimal. Such an approach requires incentives for businesses to participate.

ILLCIT USE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY. Risks to the transparent use of digital technologies exist, especially when technologies are not part of an official government program for democratic purposes: false information can be circulated or uploaded; participation is often anonymous, and some non-governmental platforms can be funded by powerful political and economic interests.

DISAGGREGATION TO PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY.

Gender disaggregation of information collected by digital technologies for good governance, including gender equality, hasn't kept pace with disaggregation of other data related to population, health, education, employment and the care economy. Technologies that collect and disaggregate by gender and other social characteristics would provide evidence of gender gaps to both state and civil society actors and provide evidence of the state's obligations, as duty bearers, to respond to their human rights commitments to advance gender equality.



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