

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. What is e-Government ?

Today, governments in both developed and developing nations are following the 'new economy' transformation of manufacturing and service industries, which turned the customer from 'product taker' to 'product maker'. Governments move away from the bureaucratic organisation around agencies operating like 'stove pipes', and streamline their functions according to the needs of the citizens. At the same time, governments strive to dramatically improve their internal efficiency and effectiveness - the costs and quality of *governance*.

Information Technology (IT) plays the role of a key enabler of this modernisation of government. It allows offering both individual citizens and companies the opportunity to interact (even to conduct business) with government 7 days a week and 24 hours a day, and to do so using different means of communication: desktop and handheld computers, telephones and cellphones, self-service kiosks and ATM's. On the other hand, IT brings endless possibilities for improving the internal operational and support functions within the realm of government.

Thus, an electronic ('e-') government initiative must address at least three major issues:

### 1.1.1. E-governance

- the application of IT to intra-governmental operations, including the interaction between central, provincial and local government. This includes paperless messaging and reporting, electronic document management and archiving, integrated systems for finance, asset and human resource management (including training), as well as systems for real-time collaboration and project management, conferencing, decision support and executive information.

### 1.1.2. E-services (*delivery and feedback*)

- the application of IT to transform the delivery of public services from 'standing in line' to online: anytime, anywhere, by any means, and in *interactive* mode. The services affected include general information and regulations, education and culture, health consulting and telemedicine, benefits, taxation etc. The new delivery vehicles also offer the opportunity to let people participate in government, by collecting direct and immediate public input in respect of policy issues, specific projects, service delivery problems, cases of corruption etc.

### 1.1.3. E-business

- the application of IT to operations performed by government in the manner of business-to-business transactions and other contractual relations. An obvious example is the procurement of goods and services by government: e-

*procurement* covers the steps from electronic tender to electronic payment. More cases become available for IT application with the spread of outsourcing and the development of public-private partnerships.

## **1.2. Making it Happen**

A comprehensive e-government effort is a mammoth task even for developed countries with huge government resources, good telecommunication infrastructure, cheap and fast access to the Internet, affordable computers and appliances, and appropriate legislation already in place. E-Government requires both strategic and in-depth planning, major co-ordination and consolidation of government IT projects and resources, process re-engineering, introduction of new business models and public-private partnerships. Last, but not least, it depends critically on the development of skills – not only in IT proper, but also in customer relationship management and even marketing.

Evolving the e-government initiative requires systematic and methodical approach, informed by clear understanding of the objectives, affordable scale and interdependencies of issues. For example, no meaningful development in e-services and e-business can take place without advancement in the area of e-governance. And even conducting transactions (such as accepting tax returns or receiving electronic applications for services) is now considered 'no-brainer' by experienced governments. Not one ambitious agency has wasted time and money trying to create its own Internet portal, only to learn what unfortunate 'dot-com' companies have already discovered: that "You can build it, but they [in this case, the citizens] won't necessarily come".

It is important, therefore, first and foremost to put in place a policy framework which:

- spells out the e-government vision;
- defines clearly how progress is to be measured, in other words, what benefits are to be achieved in the process;
- sets priorities by identifying focus areas for immediate attention;
- defines the generic prerequisites (in areas like human resources, research, legislation etc) that must be in place for advancements in the key areas to succeed, and
- gives specific recommendations on how to deliver results in each focus area.

The e-government vision was presented in section 1.1 . The other major areas of the policy framework are discussed in detail in the ensuing chapters.

### 1.3. Extensive Consultations

This document was produced by the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) after a long consultative process. Diverse stakeholders have contributed on issues of relevance with the view of achieving the major e-government objectives in a harmonised manner and within a reasonable time frame. This document should also guide further discussions and inputs into the continuing process of consultations, necessary to formulate a broad, inclusive policy framework for the adoption of e-government strategies.

The **first phase** of the consultation process kicked off in June 1999, when the first public meeting was held at SITA in Pretoria under the banner of IT Policy for Government process, chaired by Dr Stephen S. Mncube from the Development Bank of South Africa. The public meetings were attended by a broad range of stakeholders from the private sector, community organisations, and the public service, many of whom later participated in four task teams. The process culminated in a set of recommendations, presented in May 2000, that formed the basis for the second phase of consultations.

The **second phase** of the consultation process used the report by the Steering Committee of the IT Policy for Government process to consult the government departments to seek further direction. This was done in an IT workshop held at the ABSA Conference Centre in Montana on 28-29 July 2000. The workshop culminated in an IT Policy discussion paper that was produced through an inter-departmental effort.

The **third phase** of the consultation process began in early October 2000, when the Government IT Officers (GITO -- the IT heads from all national departments and the nine provinces) Council considered the second phase draft. The GITO Council refined several issues reflected in the body of the document and adopted positions on some of the issues.

The **fourth phase** took place on 23-24 October 2000 in Magaliesburg through an Electronic Government seminar. The inputs from this seminar were used by the GITO Council to produce this particular e-Government Policy Framework, which is being submitted to Cabinet for consultation.

The **fifth** and final **phase** involved soliciting inputs from Ministers and Directors General of different departments through a written invitation in November 2000. The inputs received were considered in the final document.

Implementation thereafter will take various forms, either as rules and regulations, policy directives or legislation governing the deployment and use of information technology within the entire public service. All role-players will also prepare their IT strategies within the policy framework, and include these in their annual Business Plans for the coming financial year.