Tallinn
e-Governance
Conference
2017

eGA
e-governance academy

15
YEARS
Empowering
e-governance
around the world

Summary of Tallinn e-Governance Conference 2017

By Ivar Tallo, founder of eGA

Tallinn e-Governance Conference 2017 celebrated e-Governance Academy's 15th anniversary. The conference brought together leading e-Governance experts, decision makers, donors and civil society groups from 115 countries. Central topic of discussions this year was Transfer of e-governance knowledge with special emphasis on ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific) countries.

During its 15 years of existence, eGA has learned by experience that the only way to achieve meaningful and sustainable long-term results in developing e-governance is through developing the practical skills and experiences of local experts

The conference set out to explore how countries have managed to build their domestic and regional e-governance know-how over the past years, what are the lessons learned and best practices and what are the ongoing and future projects for developing local and regional centres of excellence.

Opening session

The conference was opened by the President of the Republic of Estonia, H.E. Mrs. Kersti Kaljulaid who in a refreshing way provided a human touch to how our society is developing with the constant technological innovation. The African Union Commissioner Doctor Amani Abou-Zeid reminded us of the roots of humanity and connected this with the reawakening of African countries and how they are planning their next steps. Doctor Gomes, the Secretary General of ACP countries provided his perspective on the development ideas and enthusiastically summed up the whole conference at the end as well.

The session was concluded by the Director General of DG DEVCO (Development Cooperation) of the European Commission Mr Stefano Manservisi. He addressed the emerging European consensus for development and illustrated the change taking place with short historical tour back some dozen years when it was

impossible in the Development Cooperation talks to address the usage of Information and Communication Technologies. It was seen as a luxury and not as a serious undertaking. He stated that „now we are in the situation whereby we are reshaping the strategy and introducing digital technology as a key enabler for development. We need to provide access throughout Africa and should involve the private sector to this end. We need to connect Africa in order of not leaving her behind."

It contributed significantly to the discussions that speakers at this high level session addressed the topics not just from written notes but also from their personal experience.

Panel: International cooperation for building up national e-governance expertise

More and more countries are looking at e-governance as a tool to improve efficiency and transparency of government, boost economic growth and make life better for the citizens. The participants reflected again in their personal experience which was summed up by one participant, Mr. Hoa Binh Adjemian from the EU Delegation in Armenia as a „we moment" that donors should not be disengaged and just providing the funding but rather try to understand the dynamics of the countries they support. Only then the results match the money spent.

Everybody agreed that there is no one model to follow or impose from afar because local needs might not be what decision makers in Brussels, Stockholm or Washington see as important. Many development support projects have been focused on technology development but the problem has been the sustainability of these undertakings.

Instead, if we look at technology as an enabler and not as a goal, we can concentrate on the key improvements that help us to introduce better governance. The subsequent panels did just that and though it is difficult to sum them up, I think that e-governance infrastructure development, something eGA has used as a frame to address the different topics, is the best way to generalize the way forward.

e-Governance infrastructure concentrates on four themes or building blocks:

- **access**
- **digital data**
- **digital identity**
- **interoperability**

All four are necessary preconditions for digital service provision and they were addressed by different participants of the conference. The European Commission representatives stressed the importance of access in the context of Africa.

Panel: Building Sustainable Digital Identity

Led by Stephanie de Labriolle, the panel addressed digital identity questions from the point of view of the Secure Identity Alliance. There are more than 1 billion people without documented identity today and presentations of the panel showed that it is not only functionally good to have the digital identity but actually, identity can be seen as a right of people according to the United Nations documents. The panel illustrated the theoretical with practical examples of how in Jamaica, traditional postman system was combined with technology to smoothly introduce digital identity.

Case studies

The late afternoon session on May 30 was a collection of success stories from around the world, with stress on questions of interoperability and change management. Namibia, Mozambique and Cape Verde reflected on the road they have taken and it was interesting that countries so far from each other and from Estonia still in one way or another were influenced by Estonian examples and openness of access to the lessons Estonia has provided.

Once-Only Principle

The second day of the conference started with two very cool presentations. Mr. Luukas Ilves made building e-governance downright sexy by providing live examples of the benefits and how to calculate them which is must know topic for all those, helping decision makers. The first session itself as well as the subsequent parallel session was devoted to an advanced principle of e-services

provision, called „once only", and meaning a self-declared obligation of asking a citizen only once about his/her data, prefilling the necessary fields with information a service provider needs to make the decision from pre-existing databases.

The European Commission offical Mr Serge Novaretti addressed the issue with an uncharacteristically (for EC officials) bold statement that „we are facing a new kind of revolution…" changing the mindsets of how services are delivered. And bold changes are waiting indeed, from open data to consolidation of services and reaping the benefits from all investments in public sector IT.

DG Connect thinks that we are developing toward the vision of a single digital gateway that would combine all the elements of the e-governance infrastructure and offer seamless services from all walks of life. To this end, we now need a Digital Citizen Charter as a guide of rights of citizens entering digital public administration.

ICT in the service of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

This high level panel featured distinguished ministers from three ACP countries and senior expert from UNDP:

- Hon. Mrs Catherine Hughes, M.P, Minister of Public Telecommunications, Guyana
- H.E. Mr Arouna Modibo Touré, Minister of Digital Economy and Communications, Mali
- H.E. Hon Mrs. Ursula Owusu-Ekuful, Minister for Communications, Ghana
- Ms Minerva Novero-Belec, UNDP

Ms Novero-Belec from UNDP provided a global perspective on the SDG-s and introduced an approach how ICT-s will assist governments to reach the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

In the panel discussion the following key points were raised:
The first enabler is connectivity, both international connection and access to internet in the country. The key issues are both physical access and affordable price.

The second issue, raised by the panellists, is the governments' capacity to handle e-government issues. The e-government development brings to the table legal, organizational and services re-engineering issues and there is often a lack of competent staff, able to deal with those challenges. Also, it was mentioned that governments often focus only on one or another solution and do not consider the broader picture. This leads to isolated sectoral solutions and does not encourage exchanging and reusing available information.

The third mentioned issue is services' development. E-government technologies allow to re-engineer public services, but a usual bottleneck is the limited awareness of government officials about the new possibilities. To overcome this challenge, both trainings and political leadership is needed.

Conclusion

The overall impression of the conference was that a lot of topics were covered and in some areas there is a clear consensus emerging of how to start building e-governance infrastructure, what are the success factors and ow to achieve sustainability.

At the same time, a lot of topics were either very scantly covered or not covered at all, most prominently missing was the impact of social networks on e-governance. If people are in social networks (and they are), the government should be there too, otherwise the social networks will develop into alternative governments. They already decide on censorship matters, people organise collective actions there and can gather funds. But yes, these topics will be waiting participants at the Tallinn e-Governance conference 2018!