

# An Evaluation of Fiji's E-Government Status: Assessed According to UN Report on Benchmarking E-Government Progress

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## ABSTRACT

The e-Government Project in Fiji started in the year 2007. eGov as it is commonly referred to in Fiji was introduced as a means to improve economic development by providing Fiji government services online to businesses, citizens and government employees. The Fiji e-Government project covers the following aspects, which are the eGov consulting, applications, data centre, government info-communications, infrastructure, ICT Competency Development and Training. Since 2007, many e-Government applications have been developed and rolled out, with various degrees of awareness and acceptance by users. You will still find a queue of citizens waiting in frustration at government ministries and departments for information and services.

Among the many promises of the digital revolution is its potential to strengthen democracy and make governments more responsive to the needs of their citizens. E-government is the use of information and communications technologies (ICT) to transform government by making it more accessible, effective and accountable. E-government includes: providing greater access to government information; promoting civic engagement by enabling the public to interact with government officials; making government more accountable by making its operations more transparent and thus reducing the opportunities for corruption; and providing development opportunities, especially benefiting rural and traditionally underserved communities.

In this research paper, I am going to look at Fiji's e-Government status and evaluate it against the e-Government Benchmarking that is used by the United Nations [UN]. The UN Report on Benchmarking e-Government Progress evaluates the following 5 sequential stages for a country: Stage 1. "Emerging" – an official government online presence is established; Stage 2. "Transactional" – users can actually pay for services and other transactions online; Stage 3. "Interactive" – users can download forms, e-mail government officials and interact via the web; Stage 4. "Enhanced" – government sites increase – information becomes more dynamic; Stage 5. "Seamless" – full integration of e-services across administrative boundaries.

**Keywords:** e-Government, e-Governance, Evaluating e-Government Services, Fiji's e-Government Status, e-Services

## 1. INTRODUCTION

E-government is now a central theme in information society at all levels: local, national, regional and even global. It can be defined as a transformation of public-sector internal and external relationships through use of information and communication technology (ICT) to promote greater accountability of the Government, increase efficiency and cost-effectiveness and create a greater constituency participation. Countries of the Asian and Pacific region engage in e-government, as they provide cost-effective government-related information via Web sites and most have already developed a national e-government strategy (often as part of an ICT strategy plan).

For all Governments, e-government is a fundamental complement to the successful implementation of a range of other government policy targets. E-government is clearly linked to the international competitiveness of an economy and is a fundamental driver of economic growth along with monetary, fiscal, labour and trade policies. E-government pushes the limits of traditional government, changing the way in which government functions and fosters a culture that makes the customer and citizen central to everything it does. It involves building an integrated, enabling infrastructure that can meet the requirements of today's environment, while being readily adaptable to new and innovative developments.

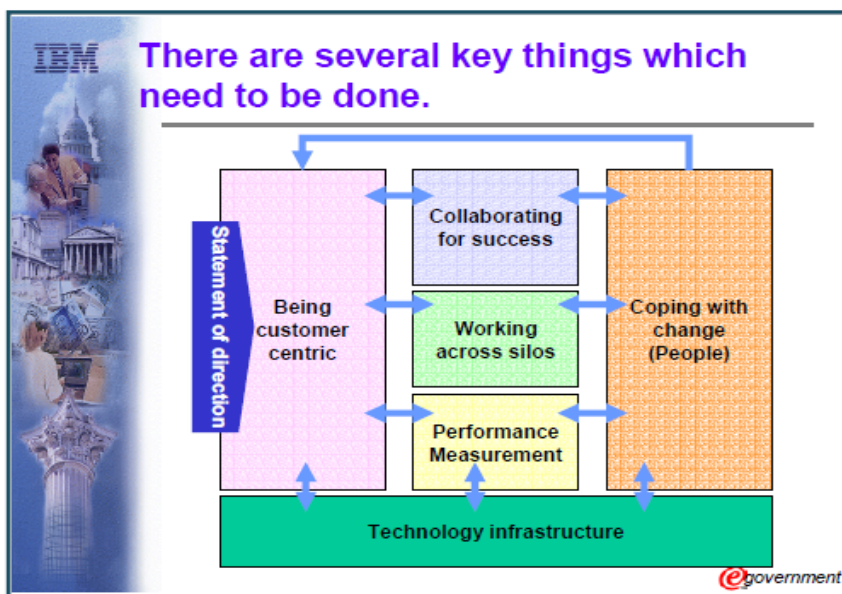
While the benefits of e-government are growing, there remains a need for a better understanding of the impact and role of e-government. Owing to the tremendous resources required in implementing e-government, the sharing of knowledge and experience could help developing countries in the region to reduce costs and limit unnecessary mistakes. However, there is a need to define an e-government agenda, and give priorities and specific recommendations on how best to move e-government forward.

## Key Elements of e-Government Transformations

Braim, S. (2004) Government Programmes Executive for IBM Asia Pacific, suggested that many Governments were not working as well as they could. He said, governments should aim for customer-centric use of e-government, and transformation rather than automation. E-government had traditionally been pushed from the supply side, from governments out. However, Governments could use technology, skills development and organizational transformation to also improve the way the market worked for them. Correspondingly, it must also be focused on customer needs and the demand side.

Braim, S. (2004) emphasized integration and said e-government had impacted on all levels of government. Successful economies were those where a central coordinating agency had been formed to oversee the shift to e-Government. If there was not a uniform approach, e-government was destined to failure. E-government could have effects on policy and programmes objectives through:

- Improved services, e.g. customer satisfaction, burden reduction and savings
- Enhanced economic development
- Improved policy formulation
- Redefined communities
- Increased operational efficiency
- Enhanced citizen participation



Furthermore, e-government could be used as an anchor to drive transformation across the public and private sector and as a tool to drive foreign investment and economic development. It was important not to over-emphasize the role of technology – technology was often a large part of cost, and only a small part of success. To ensure success, Braim said the following needed to be done as in Figure 1 on the left:

- Become customer-centric
- Learn how to cope with change
- Develop technical infrastructure
- Collaborate for success
- Work across silos, break down traditional, hierarchical structures
- Develop performance measures

Figure 1. Key elements for transforming Governments

All of those elements were necessary for transforming the Government. The technological infrastructure was the base upon which other changes could be made. For overall transformation in the Government those issues needed to be examined in the context of one another.

## Integrating Government Services

Braim, S. (2004) Government Programmes Executive for IBM Asia Pacific, focused on open computing, integration and privacy challenges faced by e-government. He defined “ondemand e-government” as a government whose business processes – integrated end-to-end across the government departments and with key partners, suppliers and citizens – could respond with speed and agility to any citizen demand, changing political or economic dynamic, or external threat.

The biggest challenge to e-government was providing a single integrated portal across all levels of government. Integration focused on speed, agility, responsiveness to customer and supplier needs and demands. Integration was only one element, however, also necessary were vision, leadership, and skills. Integrated e-government needed to be:

- (a) Responsive in real time;
- (b) Moved from fixed to variable cost structure, i.e. on-demand fashion;
- (c) Focused on what was core to governing; and
- (d) Resilient around the world, around the clock – 24-hour government.

Integration of internal government services allowed government to focus on the core goals of governing. Access to government content and transactions should be through an integrated gateway, which enabled the users' Integrating government services

### Turning Objectives into Actions – The 5 Stages of e-Government

Meduri, P. (2004), the Public Sector Business Development Division of Microsoft Asia Pacific and Greater China, focused on building a roadmap for e-government. Meduri, P. (2004), said there were many stages involved in implementing e-government, with the complexity often much greater than that appears in Figure 2 below.

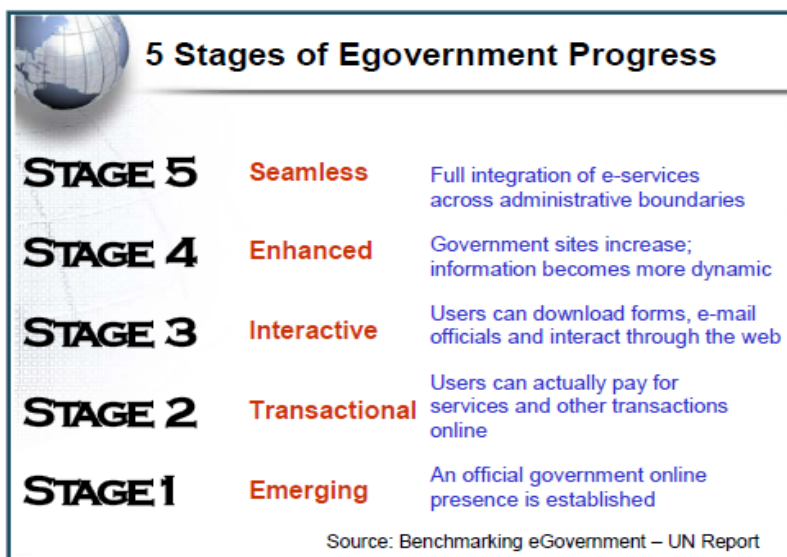


Figure 2: The 5 Stages of e-Government Progress

The levers for change were public service and technology. He stated that those levers were a big BET (Figure 3).

Much of the technology was already in place, and what was often lacking was a partner ecosystem – it was not building new systems but making effective use of what was already there that was most important. The political climate was also critical to making e-government happen, as were the economic and social conditions.

He stated that to transform ideas into action required addressing issues such as: digital inclusion, integrating e-government to core government missions, interoperability frameworks.

Lessons learned thus far include:

- It was important to integrate e-government into core government missions such as rural participation and education
  - Interoperability frameworks and mechanisms should adopt a common standard for technology to allow them to work
  - Improving internal efficiencies might enrich the work of employees
  - Indigenous innovation
  - Public-private partnerships
  - Digital inclusion
  - Outreach and resourcing models (helping communicate the message)
- Several challenges for the establishment of a roadmap for implementation existed.

Those included the following:

- Establishing the value within the context of all the other things that government was tasked to do
- Blending new and existing technology
- Limited resources



Figure 3: Levers of Change – the big BET

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The process of globalization may very well entail both a reduction of income disparities among countries, and increasing income inequalities within countries. If this is so, for many countries, addressing the Digital Divide issue will be as much an external as an internal battle. On both fronts, e-government will be a powerful tool to help all types of economies (developed, developing and in transition) to bring the benefits of the emerging global information society to the largest possible part of their respective populations.

Direct effects of e-government include cost effectiveness in government and public operations, significant savings in areas such as public procurement, tax collection and customs operations, with better and continuous contacts with citizens, especially those living in remote or less densely populated areas. Indirect effects are no less important, and include greater transparency and accountability in public decisions, powerful ways to fight corruption, the ability to stimulate the emergence of local e-cultures, and the strengthening of democracy – Lanvin, B. (2002) *infoDev Program Manager The E-Government Handbook For Developing Countries*, The World Bank.

Among the many promises of the digital revolution is its potential to empower individuals and communities and make governments more efficient, transparent, accountable and responsive to the needs of their citizens. E-government initiatives have proliferated in both developed and developing countries in recent years. As developing country policy makers and citizens seek to harness the power of ICT as tools of effective governance, there is an urgent need for a comprehensive overview of "what we know" about e-government initiatives and the conditions for their success, and for practical guidance to policy makers as they seek to develop such initiatives. Source: e-Government: *A Knowledge Map and Toolkit* from the Information for Development Program <[www.infoDev.org](http://www.infoDev.org)>

The Knowledge Map is designed to provide an in-depth review and assessment of the resources available on e-government and their adequacy to meet the needs of developing country policy makers and practitioners. The Toolkit builds upon the Knowledge Map by providing practical guidance to policy makers and other key stakeholders on how to design and implement e-government initiatives at the national and local level. It is designed to be useful to a broad range of possible users, with a particular attention to cross-cutting issues and the challenges of cross-agency integration and systematic approaches to e-government.

e-Government refers to government's use of ICTs to work more effectively, share information and deliver better services to the public. e-Government is essentially more about the process of government reform and resulting benefits than about the application of specific technological solutions or services. A well-planned e-government strategy can make leaps into building a more efficient, accountable and transparent government. If planned with representation from key stakeholders, e-government applications can rebuild citizen trust in government, promote economic growth by improving interface with business, and empower citizens to participate in advancing good governance. While e-government is not a panacea for the complex and deep-rooted problems of corruption, it cannot be ignored that ICTs possess the ability to contribute effectively towards any anti-corruption efforts. APDIP e-Note 8 of 2006 on *Fighting Corruption with e-Government Applications* looks at how e-government can help fight corruption. It gives two well-known examples from the Republic of Korea and India where e-government has successfully helped to fight corruption; and discusses the challenges in designing and implementing similar programmes. When e-government applications are used to fight corruption, it is critical that four key anti-corruption strategies – prevention; enforcement; access to information and empowerment; and capacity building are integrated in the design and implementation process.

Dogra, D. (2005), *Information and Communication Technologies [ICT]: Benchmarking E-Government Services to Citizens in India* states that the application of information and communication technologies (ICT) provides governments and citizens alike with a set of tools that can potentially transform the way that interactions take place, services are delivered, goals are met and above all relations are managed between government and citizens. With this background he attempted to measure e-government readiness benchmarking individual States' online presence by determining the provision of e-government applications and challenges of state e-government. Dogra benchmarked using the following:

- Informational Stage: e-Governance presence only on the web i.e. Citizen related information.
- Enhanced Stage: General information about the state including demographic, social and cultural.
- Emerging Stage: Provision of capturing public grievances and Information on employment opportunities
- Interactive Stage: The websites focus is on interactive exchange like provision of capturing public grievances, Billing status and value added services viz. agricultural prices, government registrations and licensing documentation.

Kaur, G. (2005) in *Framework for Analyzing E-Government and Assessment Criteria For Gauging Government Websites in Developing Countries* proposes a framework for analyzing e-government and developed a set of assessment indicators based on the elements of the framework for benchmarking government websites. His model helps to analyze different government websites from five perspectives. Both the elements of the framework and the links between them are important. The elements identify the components of the system and the links determine the effectiveness of the system. All the links in the framework are two way implying that all the elements should be in balance.

### 3. MEASURING E-GOVERNMENT SUCCESS

Three background papers on “Measuring the Success of e-Government” were presented during the Regional Workshop on Implementing e-Government in Bangkok, Thailand in 2004. The first ESCAP paper examined the various ways of measuring e-government performance mirroring those used for traditional public programmes. The second ESCAP paper reviewed the status, harmonization proposals and national good practices of measuring e-Government success from the point of view of national statistical systems. The final paper by an Economic Affairs Officer from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs presented the United Nations *Global e-Government Survey 2003*.

An Economic Affairs Officer of ESCAP said measurement issues were closely tied to marketing e-government success. He explored the commonalities and possible differences between e-government and traditional public programmes, in terms of their performance measurement aspects. In particular, a case was made for the use of financial and related metrics for quantitatively assessing e-government programmes and projects. While those metrics were routinely used by most Governments and the private sector as objective tools to prioritize *traditional* programmes and projects, e.g., for infrastructure projects, they were rarely used by governments in Asia and the Pacific for performance measurement of e-government. He stated that through the measurement of e-government, an indispensable management tool was provided, especially for resource allocation decisions and to communicate results. In addition it would allow Governments to identify constraints and barriers and also have a prerequisite for constituent centric e-government. E-government could be measured based on a hierarchical or logical framework or by process or attribute. Issues such as interoperability (national, international) and privacy also needed to be considered when measuring e-government.

The presentation by a Statistician of the Statistics Division of ESCAP reviewed significant experiences in measuring the “success” of e-Government. He said the development of e-government should be seen in the context of the information society as a whole. Measuring the success of e-government was a topic that had not yet received adequate attention by policymakers, researchers, practitioners, statisticians and other stakeholders. The term “e-government” itself had been defined in a variety of ways, leading to some confusion about its real meaning and the underlying concept. He defined e-government as enhanced government interaction at all levels using ICT. Interactions included all traditional interactions of government, plus those interactions that had become possible by virtue of technology advances. Good examples in measuring e-government included Japan, Canada, Hong Kong, China and Australia. In Hong Kong, China, in order to measure the demand side, the e-government coordinating office commissioned an opinion survey to obtain users feedback on the design of government web sites and the provision of e-services. In Australia, the Australian Bureau of Statistics designed surveys to measure adoption of ICT in society as a whole, but some of the questions in surveys were directed to measuring use of government online services, enabling them to measure the demand side for government. It also conducted a survey for measuring specific use of government web sites. The examples all had common elements in defining terms for measuring the success of e-government. A common factor was that public administrations fashioned implementation of e-government through plans and strategies they established for themselves, by setting principles and then more measurable targets for G2G and G2C/G2B interactions. However, there appeared to be different approaches in determining success, and thus, measuring those categories of interactions.

The final presentation by an Economic Affairs Officer, of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, explained why the United Nations *Global e-Government Survey 2003* was conducted and reported on its results. She said ICT and e-government measurement was required to: 1). track national progress, 2). identify disparities in access to ICT, 3). move towards an inclusive information society, and 4). international comparison. The survey was primarily issues-based and provided a measure of e-government initiatives within a long-term development setting. The conceptual framework of the Survey stemmed from the Millennium Development Goals in which there was a specific recommendation that ICT benefits be available to all. Therefore, the Survey followed the Goals, in particular those that referred to information technology. The survey focused on the issue of how *willing* and *ready* were Governments to employ the vast opportunities offered by e-government to improve the access and quality of basic economic and social services to the people and involve them in public policy-making via e-participation. Within that framework, the Survey contributed to the development efforts of the member States by focusing on the question: is e-government contributing to the socioeconomic uplift of the people? The Survey provided a benchmark to gauge member States’ comparative state of e-government readiness. The objectives of the Survey were to provide an appraisal of the use of e-government *as a tool* in the delivery of social services to the consumer and to provide a comparative assessment of the willingness and ability of governments to involve citizens in e-participation. The *Global e-Government Survey 2003* presented a comparative ranking of the countries of the world according to two primary indicators, (a) the state of e-readiness and (b) the extent of e-participation worldwide. The 2003 Survey showed that Governments had made rapid progress worldwide in embracing ICT technologies for e-government in the past years.

Source: Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (2004). *Implementing e-Government: Report of the Regional Workshop*. Asian Development Bank Institute – United Nations.

## 4. E-GOVERNMENT IN FIJI – EVALUATION AND STATUS

To prepare an Evaluation and Status Report of e-Government in Fiji, I am not going to use the “Measuring E-Government Success” criteria as mentioned in the earlier section by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Statisticians and Measuring Experts. Probably, I will use the above for another research paper once the full phase of Fiji’s e-Government Project has been realised and Fiji starts providing e-Government services to its full potential. Maybe in another 2-3 years, when the citizens of Fiji has fully embraced the use of e-Government services, then such measurements of success will be more practicable and appropriate.

For now, I am going to look at Fiji’s e-Government status and evaluate it against the e-Government Benchmarking that is used by the United Nations [UN]. The UN Report on Benchmarking e-Government Progress evaluates the following 5 sequential stages for a country: Stage 1. “Emerging” – an official government online presence is established; Stage 2. “Transactional” – users can actually pay for services and other transactions online; Stage 3. “Interactive” – users can download forms, e-mail government officials and interact via the web; Stage 4. “Enhanced” – government sites increase – information becomes more dynamic; Stage 5. “Seamless” – full integration of e-services across administrative boundaries.

### A Quick Look at What is Online?

At the time of this writing, [July 2009], the following Government Ministries, Departments, and Government subsidiaries/statutory bodies and authorities had a website and online presence:

#### Ministry Websites

- [Ministry of Agriculture](#)
- [Ministry of Commerce, Industry, Investment & Communication](#)
- [Ministry of Fijian Affairs, Culture & Heritage](#)
- [Ministry of Finance & National Planning](#)
- [Ministry of Information](#)
- [Ministry of Labour & Industrial Relations & Productivity](#)
- [Ministry of Public Enterprises & Public Sector Reform](#)
- [Ministry of Regional Development](#)
- [Ministry of Tourism](#)
- [Ministry of Transport & Civil Aviation](#)
- [Ministry of Youth, Employment Opportunities & Sports](#)
- [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, External Trade](#)
- [Ministry of Health](#)

#### Department Website

- [Department of Civil Aviation - Ministry of Transport & Civil Aviation](#)
- [Department of Culture & Heritage - Ministry of Fijian Affairs, Culture & Heritage](#)
- [Department of Government Shipping Services - Ministry of Transport & Civil Aviation](#)
- [Department of Immigration - Ministry of Home Affairs & Immigration](#)
- [Fiji Islands Maritime Safety Administration - Ministry of Transport & Civil Aviation](#)
- [Fisheries Department - Ministry of Fisheries & Forests](#)
- [Forests Department - Ministry of Fisheries & Forests](#)
- [Family Court](#)
- [Fiji Meteorological Services](#)
- [National Trade Measurement & Standards](#)
- [Republic of Fiji Military Forces](#)
- [Fiji Audio Visual Commission](#)
- [Fiji Law Reform Commission - Attorney General's Chambers](#)
- [Fiji Trade and Investment Bureau](#)
- [Fiji Visitors Bureau - Ministry of Tourism](#)
- [Land Transport Authority - Ministry of Transport & Civil Aviation](#)
- [Bureau of Statistics](#)
- [Mineral Resources Department - Ministry of Lands & Mineral Resources](#)
- [Native Land Trust Board \[NLTB\]](#)
- [Office of the Attorney General and Solicitor General](#)
- [Office of the Auditor Generals - Ministry of Finance & National Planning](#)



- [Parliament of Fiji](#)
- [Public Service Commission - Office of the Prime Minister](#)
- [Reserve Bank](#)
- [Transport Planning Unit - Ministry of Transport & Civil Aviation](#)
- [CHRIS - Ministry of Finance & National Planning](#)
- [Department of Energy & Rural Electrification - Ministry of Works & Energy](#)
- [Fiji Islands Revenue and Customs Authority](#)

#### e-Government Portal and Information Websites

- [Fiji eGovernment Portal - maintained by ITC Services](#)
- [Fiji Government Online - Ministry of Information & Media Relations](#)
- [3rd ACP Summit](#)
- [Fiji Islands - Legislation USP Law](#)

A quick survey of the above websites indicates that almost all government ministries, departments, statutory bodies and subsidiaries have a website and online presence. There are 13 government ministries websites, 28 department and statutory authority web sites, and 4 government portal and information websites. A total of 45 websites.

## 5. METHODOLOGY

To report on the status of e-Government in Fiji and evaluate the government web sites listed above to get an indication of the level and type of e-government services that they provide, I am going to use a matrix. The matrix as shown below will contain the names of ministries and departments in the first column and the next successive five columns will have the UN e-Government Benchmarking Stages of: 1). Emerging, 2). Transactional, 3). Interactive, 4). Enhanced, and 5). Seamless.

| X. Ministry or Department | 1. Emerging "Online Presence" "About Information"  | 2. Transactional "User Pays" "Online Services"   | 3. Interactive "Download Forms" "Email Officials"   | 4. Enhanced "Dynamic Information" "Increase in Web Sites"  | 5. Seamless "Full Integration" "Internal – External"  |
|---------------------------|--|--|---|--|---|
| Agriculture               | detailed information: for farmers, exporters about crops, livestock farm mgmt info system application forms        | no user pay services<br>free market info<br>commodity prices<br>export protocols<br>import information         | download forms: produce license agricultural lease product import<br>contact us: online                 | market information: daily commodity prices rural farming scheme farming assistance quarantine information                  | not fully integrated:<br>- user cannot complete any transaction online<br>- user will need to visit office to pay fee, etc. |
| Immigration               | detailed information: immigration forms application forms immigration fees permit applications                     | no user pay services<br>all forms available<br>fee and permit info<br>no online services<br>passport app forms | download forms: passport app form visitors permit form work permit form<br>contact us: phone            | dynamic information: all immigration forms passport app form visitors permit form work permit form                         | not fully integrated:<br>- user cannot complete any transaction online<br>- user will need to visit office to pay fee, etc. |
| Land Transport            | detailed information: LTA forms available fees and charges details rules and regulations registrations & licensing | no user pay services<br>all forms available<br>public transports<br>office locations<br>no online services     | download forms: learners permit app drivers license app vehicle registration<br>contact us: online      | dynamic information: all LTA forms available PSV advertisements traffic sign explanations all LTA press releases           | not fully integrated:<br>- user cannot complete any transaction online<br>- user will need to visit office to pay fee, etc. |
| Revenue & Customs         | detailed information: PAYE tax tables income tax forms customs tariff rates income tax act                         | no user pay services<br>all forms available<br>tax agents info<br>customs agents info<br>business tax info     | download forms: income tax forms tax payer registration business registration<br>contact us: online     | dynamic information: all tax forms available legislations & regulations vacancies & publications tax clearance information | not fully integrated:<br>- user cannot complete any transaction online<br>- user will need to visit office to pay fee, etc. |
| Trade & Investment        | detailed information: online application form exporting from Fiji tax free incentives investing in Fiji            | user pay services: foreign investment registration certificate online application<br>online services           | download forms: foreign investment implemented projects industrial classification<br>contact us: online | dynamic information: all investment forms online export directory key information sites contact nearest office             | fully integrated:<br>"one stop shop"<br>online transactions<br>online payments<br>online certificates                       |

The above matrix is just a snapshot sample of some of the commonly used web sites that is accessed by the citizens of Fiji and non citizens as well for e-Government services. Out of the total of 45 web sites listed, 5 of them above have been analysed and reported under the respective type and level of e-Government service that they provide. The remaining 40 web sites have been analysed and evaluated in a similar manner, but have not been included because of space and page limitations of this paper.

A statistical table of the analysis is included under the Results Section of this paper, which reports on the status and evaluation of Fiji's e-Government services.

## **6. RESULTS - FINDINGS**

### **Stage 1: “Emerging” – An Official Government Online Presence is Established**

As mentioned earlier, almost all Fiji government ministries, departments, and statutory bodies have an official online presence. Most of the websites informs the user about the core functions of the ministry or department, its organisation structure, staff listing, office locations and phone contacts.

Fiji has achieved 100% Status of Stage 1.

### **Stage 2: “Transactional” – Users Can Actually Pay for Services and Other Transactions Online**

Apart from only one institution, namely, Fiji Trades and Investments Board, no other ministry or department offers any transactional service to its stakeholders. Almost all of them allow its clients and customers to download electronic versions of application forms in PDF format, however, completed application forms with the relevant documents and accompanying fees still need to be physically submitted to the relevant ministry or department for manual processing.

Fiji has achieved 2% Status of Stage 2.

### **Stage 3: “Interactive” – Users can Download Forms, E-mail Officials & Interact via the Web**

Most of the web sites are interactive and very informative. Users are able to download all the forms that are otherwise available from their ministries and departments. They also provide information on schedule of fees, relevant charges, licenses and lease that are applicable and payable with the downloaded forms. Ministries and departments also have links Rules and Regulations and the appropriate acts and legislations under which they operate. Many provide subsidiary information on how to fill forms and where to send them for complete processing. Sixty [60] % of web sites allow it users to use the online “contact us” form to request further information or to ask questions and some of them allow direct emailing for further information or enquiries. The remaining forty [40] % provide their phone numbers, physical and postal addresses under their “Contact Us:” link.

Fiji has achieved 100% Status of Stage 3.

### **Stage 4: “Enhanced” – Government Sites Increase – Information becomes more Dynamic**

Almost all government departments and ministries have a web site and online presence. The number of government web sites have increased to include all ministries and departments. The information provided by many of the websites are quite dynamic in the sense that almost all the information at all levels is provided on the site. A user would not have to physically visit or make a phone call to get any further information. Then again, some government web sites, after browsing through them leaves you with many questions than answers. These are what we called “brochure” web sites and only exist as a publicity front, but do not provide detailed information or any downloads.

Fiji has achieved a 100% Status of Stage 4.



## Stage 5: “Seamless” – Full Integration of E-Services across Administrative Boundaries

The progress of Stage 5 for Fiji is the same as progress in Stage 2. Apart from only one institution, namely, Fiji Trades and Investments Board, no other ministry or department offers any transactional service to its stakeholders. Therefore the services provided by Fiji government web sites is not fully integrated across administrative boundaries. There are no collaboration amongst government departments and ministries. My understanding of “collaboration” here would mean that they operate independently.

For example, if I am to get a passport made for myself at the Department of Immigration. If, one of the requirements is for a Police Clearance Certificate for the issue of a passport, then as a customer, I have to go and get a Police Clearance Certificate myself. The immigration department at the moment is unable to connect to the Police Department database and obtain the clearance automatically.

As, I have attended many e-government workshops and seminars in the past, I am aware of the Foreign Investment Registration Certificates that are processed online by Fiji Trades and Investments Board [FTIB] are done so after batching it through a couple of ministries and departments. Therefore the achievement of full integration of e-services across administrative boundaries is possible.

Fiji has achieved 2.0% Status of Stage 5.

## Fiji’s e-Government Services Benchmarking Status and Statistics

|  | 1.<br>Emerging<br>“Online Presence” | 2.<br>Transactional<br>“User Pays” | 3.<br>Interactive<br>“Download Forms” | 4.<br>Enhanced<br>“Dynamic Information” | 5.<br>Seamless<br>“Full Integration” |
|--|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| X.<br>Achievement<br>Status/Percentage | 100%                                | 2.0%                               | 100%                                  | 100%                                    | 2.0%                                 |

## 7. CONCLUSION

Overall Fiji’s e-Government services provision seems to be doing quite well, as almost all ministries and departments have a web site and online presence. All of the websites informs the user about the core functions of the ministry or department, its organisation structure, staff listing, office locations and phone contacts.

Almost all of them allow its clients and customers to download electronic versions of application forms in PDF format, however, completed application forms with the relevant documents and accompanying fees still need to be physically submitted to the relevant ministry or department for manual processing.

The number of government web sites have increased to include all ministries and departments. The information provided by many of the websites are quite dynamic in the sense that almost all the information at all levels is provided on the site. A user would not have to physically visit or make a phone call to get any further information.

As for the transactional services, there seems to be some reluctance both on the government side and on the citizens’ side to fully embrace the idea of e-commerce transactions and online exchange of money with each other. E-commerce transactions, which will allow a citizen to pay for the renewal of his driver’s license or pay for the issue of a passport on the ministries or department’s web site, will require secure transactions. These secure transactions are complex and tedious to incorporate into web sites and require the use of third party verification providers and commercial banks to verify the funds and transfer of funds from the citizen to government’s coffers. Many of the citizens do not have a Master Card or Visa Card [which is not easy to obtain] to enable them to carry out the necessary online transactions. Those that have are sceptical about using it online because of the number stories they hear about phishing and transactions hijacking.

It will take a good deal of effort from the government’s side to start incorporating e-commerce transactions as part of the services that they provide to their citizens. Incorporating e-commerce transactions might be the easier part of the implementation; streamlining their operations and training their civil servants to accommodate the “new system” of modus operandi will really take some effort. Financial operations and accounting systems will need to be reformed as well to accommodate and implement fully fledged e-government services. There is also a need to educate its citizens on the benefits of using online transactions and remove the fear of them being ripped off.

## NOTE

The author is a PhD Candidate at The University of the South Pacific. E-Government services are an integral part of his PhD Thesis. The author has also worked as an IT Advisor/Consultant for the Government of Fiji for over 5 years. The Government of Fiji's Information Technology and Computing Services, who is responsible for Fiji's e-Government Project had been consulted in the preparation of this research paper.

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