eGovernment for Development
Success/Failure Case Study No.16

Electronic Birth Registration in Rajshahi, Bangladesh

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Application
The electronic Birth Registration Information System (BRIS) was introduced on a pilot basis in Rajshahi City Corporation (RCC), one of the oldest municipalities in Bangladesh. BRIS is based on a distributed application architecture, with four clients and one server connected via a local area network.

Application Description
BRIS, as its name suggests, registers births electronically, providing a basic citizen identity, and building this with other data into a population database that can be shared with other public agencies. For example, the Department of Health uses the system to help ensure immunisation of all children, with vaccination lists provided for health workers and immunisation schedules provided for parents on the basis of registration data. The system could also be used to assist with the process of school enrolment. BRIS works in Bengali, although it can also generate certificates and reports in English.

Application Purpose
Birth registration is seen as a fundamental right for all children, and is part of the mandate of RCC. Since RCC was established as a municipal entity, registration has been carried out (for example in a major campaign during the 1997 Child Rights week). However, this data was all registered manually. Thus, a simple query such as the number of girls registered took a very long time to answer, since all register books had to be searched and separate tally sheets prepared. The manual process was subject to delays and, in transferring data, errors, duplications and inconsistencies arose. The electronic system was therefore proposed, with financial assistance from Unicef Bangladesh.

Stakeholders
Under the manual system, government agencies for immigration, elections, education, statistics, and health services were all undertaking separate registration activities. Those agencies, together with local government (i.e. RCC) all form potential stakeholders in an integrated birth registration system. At present, the main stakeholders in BRIS are the health and the statistics agencies of government, and RCC.
Impact: Costs and Benefits
BRIS has removed duplication and redundancy from birth/registration records through centralised storage of data. It has automated searching, sorting, processing and reporting tasks (such as those associated with immunisation) and very significantly reduced the time taken for such tasks. Error rates have also been reduced, with a combined ID number and barcoding system. A CD-ROM of BRIS data has been created; as well as providing backup would also allow transfer and reuse of registration data outside the LAN system. Both registration and immunisation rates have increased since the introduction of the system. The direct costs of system development were less than US$20,000, and operational costs are around US$200 per month.

Evaluation: Failure or Success?
This is a pilot project that has been running since April 2001 with any major interruptions. So far, the system can be deemed to be largely successful in its restricted LAN format. There are plans to move shortly to a Web-based system that will potentially draw in a much broader range of agencies to share data.

Enablers/Critical Success Factors
1. 1. Encouraging and motivating young talents. Public managers are often inefficient and also unwilling to change, bound by rigid structures and lengthy, monolithic bureaucratic processes. Involving and encouraging younger members of staff, who are dynamic and willing to accept change, has been the key critical success factor in the BRIS project
2. 2. Motivate senior officials. There is a good deal of corruption, and a lack of concern for citizens among senior public officials and politicians in Bangladesh, making it very hard to work with them. In the BRIS case, though, proper motivational factors were used that helped avoid such problems. The Mayor of RCC was honoured by representing RCC at a Special UN Session on Child Rights held in New York. His related commitment to the project influenced its sustainability. Ward Commissioners were motivated to support the project because of the perceived benefits to their chances of being re-elected.
3. 3. Citizen participation. Thanks to spread of satellite TV and the Internet in Bangladesh, citizens are becoming more informed about ICTs and about the potential to improve public services. This has created a pressure from citizens on elected officials to improve the quality and efficiency of services. Citizens have participated, through representatives, in the BRIS system, which has also helped to sustain the project.

Constraints/Challenges
1. 1. Resistance. Widespread poverty in Bangladesh has been a driver to corruption in both public and private sectors as individuals seek bribes in order to maintain their livelihoods. Such practices are widely accepted in the country. Systems like BRIS are a threat to corrupt activities: they remove duplicated activities and they increase access to information. Thus any roll-out beyond the pilot phase and location may be resisted.
2. **Procurement problems.** Red tape has meant there are long delays in the ordering of even quite basic spare parts for the system. Corruption can also affect the purchase of equipment for systems like BRIS.

3. **Lack of skills.** There is a severe lack of IT skills within the Bangladesh public sector. The problem is exacerbated because many appointments are made on the basis of seniority or political involvement. As a result, many 'IT professionals' are not properly qualified to design or maintain information systems.

**Recommendations**

1. 1. **Start small but anticipate the bigger picture of integration.** This project has started with quite a small pilot, but has always borne in mind the big picture of future integration, seeing electronic IDs as a building block for much broader joined-up government activity.

2. 2. **Think about changing structures and processes.** More significant gains in efficiency and effectiveness in government can often come not from relying on high technology, but more from changing government structures and processes. eGovernment projects should therefore look at this as much as at the technology.

3. 3. **Find the creative innovators.** Supporting those who are innovative and creative – in this case a group of young staff – can be a key to success.

**Further Information**

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**Case Details**

*Author Data Sources/Role:* Project Management and Design Role.
