

Changing Governance, Improving Lives

Learn about government innovations the United Nations recently honored for making bureaucratic processes more relevant, encouraging participation in decision making, and improving living conditions in many parts of the world.

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Background

Many citizens around the world have little faith in their governments, but that may soon change. On June 23, United Nations Public Service Day, the United Nations honored eight government innovations that are making bureaucratic processes more relevant, encouraging participation in decision making, and improving living conditions in many parts of the world.

Innovation is not often associated with governance and public servants, which is one reason public service officials from different regions of the world came together at the United Nations in New York this summer. All had one thing in common: they are part of change, change that is improving living conditions, enhancing service delivery, and making governments more citizen-centric. It may sound miraculous, but this change is often one person's vision of generating a more enabling and facilitating environment for citizens.

United Nations Public Service Awards Program

The United Nations Public Service Awards program honors institutional efforts to cost-effectively design and expand services to citizens. It also promotes participation in the design of services for alleviating poverty, one of eight global objectives world leaders agreed upon in 2000, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The United Nations widely disseminated information about the awards, including eligibility criteria and methods of nomination, to all member states, partner

agencies, and relevant regional and national institutions. Nominations for the awards by and large come from governments; government departments and agencies; universities, national schools, and institutes of public administration; private-public partnerships; and professional associations. Organizations such as the International Institute of Administrative Sciences and the American Society for Public Administration were invited to nominate candidates for the various categories of awards. The Global Online Network on Public Administration and Finance (www.unpan.org) served as a medium for transmitting information about the awards to its various stakeholders.

The 2005 United Nations Public Service Awards were given in three categories: improving transparency, accountability, and responsiveness; improving the delivery of services; and application of Internet and communication technologies. The winners were from the developing and the developed world, demonstrating that enhancing government systems is a high priority around the globe. Due care was taken to ensure fairness while taking into account economic and social conditions of each country and region, and the experts who made the selection were confident that the eight recipients from six countries exemplified the best practices in public administration. After the rigorous process of selection—from an overwhelming 215 nominations—Canada,

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India, Mexico, Morocco, Singapore, and Spain walked away with awards for 2005. These awardees have much in common in spite of the country-specific nature of governance.

Improving Transparency, Accountability, and Responsiveness

In the category of improving transparency, accountability, and responsiveness in public service, the two winners were Canada's Vancouver Agreement and India's Bhagidari.

Vancouver, Canada

Vancouver's downtown Eastside, once a vibrant commercial and entertainment district, was completely paralyzed, economically and socially, by 1990. The reason was a public health crisis stemming from rampant drug use and dealing on the district's main streets. The governments of Canada, British Columbia, and Vancouver recognized that a sustainable solution to the problems required relationship-building and participation of the local community and business partners.

Through continuous, collaborative effort, the "Vancouver Agreement" was drawn up, establishing an environment that completely shifted the local administration of public services. This positive collaborative model was based on innovative partnerships between twelve government agencies and non-governmental organizations at the federal, provincial, and city levels. The agreement resulted in commercial redevelopment, environmental construction of scenic pathways and green spaces to draw people into the community, the first legally supervised injection site, two affordable housing pilot projects, and a mobile access project offering respite and safety from violence for sex workers.



Canada receives an award for the Vancouver Agreement.

Delhi, India

In India, the government of the national capital territory of Delhi sought to change a continuing pattern—the lack of public participation in formulating or evaluating government policies—which often result in administrative processes working in isolation and having little impact on citizens' lives. In 2000, to bring people into government decision making, the government of Delhi decided to involve all stakeholders in the transformation of Delhi into a world-class capital city. It initiated Bhagidari, meaning "partnership," a citizen-government venture with an innovative approach to governance.



An award is given to India for the Bhagidari Cell.

Through the Bhagidari Cell, networks of local groups, such as resident welfare associations, market and trade associations, industrial associations and non-governmental organizations, have emerged as new, collective decision-making actors. The initiative has grown from 20 citizen groups in 2000 to more than 1,600 today, representing about three million people. These networks discuss problems hampering effective delivery of civic services with government representatives and then produce joint workable solutions to improve their environment and quality of life. As a result, mutually accepted schemes pertaining to civic needs like water supply, sanitation, school system, power supply, urban transport, environmental protection, and people's security have been developed and implemented, leading to vast improvements in public service that benefit all citizens.

Improving the Delivery of Services

The general public worldwide often has little faith in government processes, and corruption and drawn-out bureaucratic processes are the norm. Improving government delivery of services goes a long way in restoring the confidence of citizens, and this is the second category of the United Nations Public Service Awards. Public institutions from Mexico, Morocco, and Spain were the winners in this group.

Mexico

Water, one of the fundamental needs of all citizens, was in short supply in the state of Mexico, the most populous region of the country. A serious water shortage had developed into a critical issue due to over-exploitation of the water-bearing strata. To address this crisis, the *Secretaría de Agua, obra Pública e Infraestructura para el Desarrollo* was created to coordinate and monitor the state's hydraulic policy. This initiative led to the development of the *Programa Hidraulico Integral del Estado*, which takes a first-time look at the problem in the long term and determines the water policy in the area for the next twenty-five years. More immediately, the secretariat has successfully increased and improved daily water supply to the population of the state.

The initiative now serves 13.6 million people—with an emphasis on equitable, high-quality, sustained service. Due to the continued efforts of the secretariat, an additional 1.9 million have access to potable water and its quality is guaranteed by 1,812 testing systems. In addition, the initiative has provided millions with the benefit of a new sewage system. The integral hydraulic program, the only one in Mexico, has created an innovative formula, which has enabled the department to improve service delivery, accomplishing 217 public works at the speed of one per week. They have also installed 961 kilometers of pipelines and constructed 151 systems for potable water. The program has initiated the construction of a macro-circuit for the distribution of potable water across 123 kilometres for 2.1 million citizens. A knowledgeable staff certified for hydraulic works has increased efficiency and organizes awareness contests and exhibitions to educate students on the care of water.

Morocco

In Morocco, a different challenge ushered in better service delivery. The need was for increasing the efficiency of commercial networks. In a hypercompetitive, liberalized environment, companies involved in exports

from Morocco needed to reduce costs and delays of supplies and enhance the competitiveness of domestic firms. The government-sponsored Autonomous Establishment of Exports Control and Coordination started improving the delivery of services, coordinating export activities, and providing technical inspections of Moroccan fruit and vegetables, free of cost. The department works to guarantee the conformity of Moroccan products with international requirements and aims to improve export management through measures that adapt exported products qualitatively and quantitatively to various importing market constraints. The department's activities have been strengthened by a personnel policy characterized by the recruitment of highly skilled employees such as engineers and technicians.

The benefits of this state intervention have been many. By having the Moroccan firms themselves handle quality control, rather than three regional delegations waiting for products to arrive, the new decentralized system now deals with 100 percent of the exports. This has reduced the cost of supplies, enhanced competitiveness, and considerably improved the transparency, accountability, and responsiveness of the whole Moroccan fruit and vegetable export process.

Castile and Leon, Spain

Sheer need frequently drives innovation. Castile and Leon is the second largest region in Europe, with a population of 2.5 million, representing 9 provinces and 2,249 municipalities. The area's vision of the future was conceptualized into the Modernization Programme, designed to use human capital as the main force for involving citizens. This initiative saw the need for everyone in this vast geographical region to be involved in its administration, build a consensus, and maintain a continuous dialogue among all the interest groups.

This modernization program became a reality through the creation of a new service—the Public Employment Service—winner of an award in the improving service category. The service is responsible for training and promoting employment as well as mediation in the job market. It unifies the region, allowing the community to reach its employment goals. Staff members undertake job market research, provide personalized services for job seekers, and match applicants with job profiles that align with the person's experience and career goals. One of the main factors behind this initiative's success has been the internal integration of personnel, incorporating a teamwork culture and associating all interest groups in knowledge management. The modernization program is currently being implemented

throughout the region of Castile and Leon in forty-three employment offices.

Application of Internet and Communication Technologies

Canada

In today's digital world, it is only fitting that the third category of Public Service Awards recognizes successful application of Internet and communication technologies in government. In this e-government group, the Canadian government's effort to restore balance in the modern marketplace was one of the winners.

With thousands of businesses and products available, the challenge was getting complete and accurate information on what is being offered to the consumers in the world's second largest country. How could they cut across provincial, territorial, and federal boundaries to access services through a single window? The solution was the Canadian Consumer Information Gateway (CCIG), Canada's most extensive online source of inter-jurisdictional information for consumers, featuring information from more than 450 government and non-governmental organizational partners. The Web portal, based on pioneering multijurisdictional partnerships, can access more than 7,000 programs, services, and subjects. Consumers can now cut across geographical boundaries to access services through a single source. The Gateway provides a menu of relevant topics, access to timely highlights, and tools to help consumers save time and money and better protect themselves from fraud and deception.

The most powerful tool on the Gateway is the Consumer Complaint Courier—a bold transformation of the way government agencies handle consumer complaints. The courier guides consumers on filing com-



Canadian representatives display the award for the CCIG.

plaints with business links, relevant information, and connections to appropriate agencies. Equally important in a country that spans six time zones, the service is offered 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and in all locations.

Mexico

The Mexican government used technology to enhance transparency and accountability. It wanted a program that would yield multiple results: counter lack of accountability, improve transparency, enhance access to public services for millions of people, and make policies more citizen-centered. In 2001, it initiated a digital governance strategy to modernize the government. One of the main goals of this Good Government Agenda was to improve the transparency and efficiency of governance. The program adopted had four objectives: to satisfy the social necessities of the citizen, to convert the government into a competitive entity, to reconnect with the citizen and the private sector, and to collaborate to create a good government at all levels (federal, state, and local).

This initiative has enhanced efficiency and led to a more citizen-focused approach to service delivery. The program has integrated e-processing into government operations and enhanced access to services for millions of citizens through 1,200 direct services, including filing taxes, applying for passports, and receiving permits. The reengineering of the governmental process has brought about change, ensuring government accountability and participation of citizens.

Singapore

The government of Singapore, the final winner in this category, is using technology to achieve a positive business environment. In its quest to encourage private enterprise, the government was confronted with several core issues, including making the process of opening new businesses simpler, inexpensive, and less time-consuming. To foster a pro-enterprise environment for business in Singapore, it initiated the Online Application System for Integrated Services (OASIS) project, which provides an effective platform to purge bureaucratic inefficiencies in several government agencies. Extensive policy reviews were conducted and systems reengineered to reduce the average processing time for licenses from 3 weeks to 12.5 days. Coupled with the revised fee structures, savings accrued to businesses now exceed \$1.8 million per year.

The government then developed the Online Business Licensing Services (OBLs), an important milestone of OASIS. Through OBLs, 80 percent of all new businesses,



Singapore representatives show the award for OASIS.

about 30,000 enterprises annually, can apply online for one or more of the sixty-nine licenses commonly needed to start businesses, without resorting to offline means. Equally important, throughout the entire business-licensing process, entrepreneurs are only required to access this single portal for all their needs. As a natural extension of the online application service, the OBLIS allows applicants to complete license renewals, updates, and terminations online as of August 2005. The main factor

behind the success of OASIS was the simple concept of “many agencies—one government.”

Public Service Day

The United Nations Division for Public Administration and Development Management (DPADM) of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) is responsible for administering the awards and promoting Public Service Day. The division assists governments in strengthening policymaking and improving the efficiency of their governance systems by disseminating information, delivering technical assistance, and providing an international forum for the exchange of national experiences.

The awards initiative, gearing up for its fourth year in 2006, has become a pivotal tool in disseminating information on successful experiences and best practices in good governance aimed toward citizen satisfaction, development, and achievement of the MDGs. It has also enhanced the visibility and motivation of public servants around the world.

For more information on the United Nations DPADM, please visit www.unpan.org. ■

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