

Lebanon at early stage of developing information society, Yet..it is moving up- ESCWA

BEIRUT: “The UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia’s (ESCWA) said Lebanon is generally still at an early stage of maturity in building its information society.

ESCWA used four maturity levels for each aspect of the information society, whereby level 1 indicates the lowest level of maturity and level 4 shows the highest level of maturity.

Lebanon came in Maturity Level 2 in terms of the role of government and stakeholders in building the information society.

The report said Lebanon was awaiting the formal approval of e-Lebanon as the national ICT strategy, *which has been delayed due to the political situation in the country.*

It noted that Lebanon established in 2007 a national coordinating office, which launched, in cooperation with the Partnership for Lebanon, a number of national projects and initiatives, including community telecenters in disadvantaged areas and the National Broadband Strategy. Further, an e-government strategy drafted in 2002 was modernized and updated in 2008 based on a new situational assessment and includes clear and realistic goals. But it considered the pace of implementation of the nation’s ICT strategy to be “limited.”

Also, Lebanon is at Maturity Level 2 in terms of ICT infrastructure.

The survey said Lebanon was characterized by average penetration rates of fixed and mobile phone lines, **an encouraging environment for widespread use of telecom services by businesses and individuals, a national bandwidth/backbone for voice and data telecommunication** undergoing development, and sufficient Internet players in the market.

Further, Lebanon came in Maturity Level 2 in terms of access to information and knowledge. ESCWA said this maturity level is

characterized by a relatively **high Internet penetration rate and some development of public information**, in addition to limited access to public domain information, *sometimes due to censorship*. Additionally, **Lebanon is at Maturity Level 3 in terms ICT capacity-building.**

ESCWA considered that this maturity level is characterized by **widespread use of ICT in schools and universities, extensive IT literacy programs, and progress in research and development. It that noted Lebanon advanced one level, as it exhibited developments worthy of moving upward from Maturity Level 2.** “

Lebanon is on the path of Reform..The Know-How & Reality!

It is the hope of government to acquire the necessary technology that integrates the e-government systems of central and local government's .However, it actually real to say that it would take time for Lebanon to reap benefits from this technology's expertise.

“IT is just a tool for integrating the two levels of government and, therefore, enhancing administrative efficiency. What is more important is the reengineering of internal governance processes and preparing required institutional conditions (such as **Laws, Budget, Conflict management, Political and Administrative Reform** etc) for combining the two.” As one of the IT consultant to the government addressed the issue of Lebanon current situation.

The main drive behind the procurement reform in Lebanon is intended to direct executive departments and agencies to take specific and clear role in order to implement the principles of transparency, participation, and collaboration.

What Role Government Can Play?

Alternatively, in the public sector, auditing and transparency are designed to ensure and maintain that citizens, through Parliament and other governmental bodies preserve the confidence in the probity, regularity of financial transactions, and the attainment of best value from public expenditure.

In Lebanon, OMSAR, in conjunction with many Public Control Agencies, along with the valuable participation of the private sectors, are currently working on a revolutionary plan with its main objective are to:

- Strengthening the Inspectorate powers,
- The creation of new quality assurance agencies & widening the role of auditors,

- Introducing new standards of ethics and transparency,
- Creating new regulatory bodies,
- (In October 2008, the Lebanese Parliament has endorsed the UN Convention on Combating Corruption.)

Public Procurement Reform: Tensions, Challenges and the Road Ahead

- Public Procurement Tensions: stand of the Lebanese draft Law
- Key Policy and Institutional Decisions in the Lebanese draft Law
- Key Achievements
- Parallel Initiatives
- Conclusion

Public Procurement Tensions	The Draft Law
Conformance-Performance	Conformance based
Fairness vs. welfare	Fairness-orientation
Protection against “corporate rapacity” vs. trust in “corporate responsibility”	Clear shift into modern PPP though not touching on CSR
Substantive vs. procedural orientation	Procedural integrity orientation
“letter-of-the law” compliance versus “spirit-of-the law” ethics	Letter-of-the law compliance
Accountability-efficiency tradeoffs	Accountability paramount
Strategic/professional role vs. tactical and administrative and transactional function	Jump-start towards strategic/professional PP
Professionalization vs. bureaucratization of the procurement function	Jump-starting professionalization

Key Policy Decisions

• Competition, Equal Treatment and Transparency
• Conformance-based framework
• Limited domestic preference
• Special treatment for producers with special needs (disabilities)

Key Institutional Decisions

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decentralized procurement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthened internal control mechanisms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elimination of duplication in ex-ante control
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthened ex-post control by the Court of Accounts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of and support to cooperation with the private sector (outsourcing)

Achievements

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consolidation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E-procurement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wide and structured transparency
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appeal Mechanism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Standard Bidding Documents

Parallel Initiatives

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • e-commerce, e-transactions, e-signature, e-payment initiatives; • Conflict of Interest Law; • Whistleblower Protection Law; • Illicit Enrichment law; • Re-organization of the Court of Accounts draft law; and • Public Accountability Reform.

Conclusion

The overall purpose of this movement is to see that the informality, mutuality, and trust associated with old codes of behavior in both, the public and the private sectors, are to be eventually replaced with new codes emphasizing formal accountability, documentation, data, and transparency.

Jamal Abadeh

Procurement Officer

Office of the Minister of State for Administrative Reform (OMSAR) -UNDP