Right on time – understanding eGovernment in developing countries

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Many, if not most, developing countries today engage in Electronic Government (eGovernment) projects. There are big hopes, not just modernizing government and making it more effective and efficient, but also eGovernment is expected to drive the general development towards the information society, both by examples of good practice and by major investment. However, many sources claim project failure rate is high. Reasons are found in many places, but it is reasonable to summarize them by saying that project goals are too ambitious given existing production capacity. Hence there is need to find ways of choosing and defining projects in a way that meets the conditions in the country and sector where they are going to be implemented. To do so, this paper presents two tools, a checklist and a maturity model, for assessing the preconditions for eGovernment projects in developing countries. The underlying data sources are threefold: e-government readiness indexes, project experiences and assessments of social and political conditions. The checklist matches requirements for successful eGovernment against supply and demand side factors, hence providing a guide in choosing which of projects to initiate and which to avoid. The maturity model supports in mapping projects on a wider development agenda, hence helping avoiding dead ends such as investing in unused technology, supporting dysfunctional processes with ICT (Information and Communication Technology) instead of first redesigning them and then putting in ICT in support for the new and better processes etc. In particular, the tools show the close relation between eGovernment and other development agendas, for example education, investment policies or telecom (de)regulation – without alignment with such programmes, eGovernment is likely to fail. The two tools help making factors pertinent to success and failure more explicit and hence improve decision making.