SESSION REVIEW:

'Community Service Frameworks: What are the steps to Smart and Connected Communities?'

17th May 2011

Introduction: Explore and Learn With Your Peers

This collaborative effort—led by the World Bank, Cisco, and the Urban Age Institute—is designed to engage government officials, private sector organizations, international development agencies, academics and non-government organizations in a video-based, collaborative process of planning and critical thinking about *how best to design and develop 21st century sustainable urban areas and cities*. The aim is to convene a global community of peers, to debate and learn from some of the leading thinking around innovative urban projects.

Session Overview – 'Community Service Frameworks'

If we believe the hype, **connected urban information systems** can yield lower costs of service provision, and social utility too. Technically, we are reaching the point where it's possible to join information on urban services, infrastructure, public transport and other utilities- and allow each of the systems to talk to each other to improve efficiency and performance. But now that we have the technical capability, **what are the concrete steps needed** to achieve those objectives? What **planning and implementation** would cities need to undertake? And what **components of such a program** are most **cost-effective for lower-income and smaller cities**? Moreover, what makes sense at **different stages of development**?

Led by Industry Experts

These questions were explored from the perspectives from some leading thinkers on urban systems, from several city administrations, World Bank, Cisco and city networks.
Introductory remarks were made by three persons (each one for a maximum of five minutes):

- Gordon Falconer – Director, Urban Innovation - Cisco
- Deepak Bhatia – E-Governance, ICT Anchor - World Bank
- Prof. Srinivas Chary – Administrative Staff College of India (ASCI), and Urban Resource Link (URL) initiative

The moderator was Gordon Feller, Board Member, Urban Age Institute and Director, Urban Innovation, Cisco Systems

Over 30 attendees globally in 7 locations:
San Jose, CA
New York, NY
Washington, DC
London, UK
Amsterdam, Netherlands
New Delhi, India
Hyderabad, India

Summary of the main discussion points:

Gordon Falconer, Cisco Systems:
What is stopping the rapid adoption and implementation of better city solutions based on technology? We think it is the complexity of how cities are operated, financed, regulated & planned, combined with the dispersion of good ideas. It's like having a library with no bookshelves or index system. So let's start with objectives of the city, then look at indicators (such as GCIF), then look at physical parts of the city (utilities, transport, real estate, city services), and look at best practices & policy examples for each of those. In all of this, we need to bring some common taxonomy to the discussion.

Questions and discussion from participants:

- Even in this model we're still approaching cities with distinct sectors, but would it be better to approach them instead from the perspective of people who run the cities, and from the perspective of citizens too?
- Should we be talking about incremental improvements (as planners now do, after the modernist errors in their history) or disruptive change (as IT and systems engineers would prefer)?
- Do we even yet know what we're striving for? Look at a medical analogy, where the human body has been understood through a series of diagnostic tests on blood pressure etc. Can we think of similar indicators for cities?
- Can we think about historical examples where cities have achieved step-changes in performance through better use of data? Improvements of law enforcement might be one, using better data on crime.
- Is cataloguing the best way to organize knowledge? Look at how Yahoo was built on cataloguing the web, but then Google eclipsed Yahoo by using an algorithm to measure popularity of webpages instead.

Deepak Bhatia, World Bank:
For 'Connected citizens' we can look to Singapore's mGov for better services delivery, SeeClickFix for feedback mechanisms, and South Korea's 'virtual soapboxes'—all of which have been astonishingly successful. For 'Transformational technologies', we see the success of Open311, and India's eGov foundation which focuses on 'quick wins'. Also City-Go-Around which sees cities opening up their data for use by other apps. In summary, it's not only about information dissemination but also about citizen engagement. So let's first look at 'what are the different processes that the city engages in?' and then look at 'what are the common datasets which are required?—for citizens, for property, for assets.'

Questions and discussion from participants:

- Let's be wary about applying an 'enterprise model' to cities—you can't decide things in a neat hierarchy in cities. A city manager can't decide everything for themselves. So can we design a sandbox instead?—some basic infrastructure like broadband, or open data, which cities aren't deploying themselves?
- How can we replicate the examples of success given above in other cities? There's a danger of them being singularities. So let's return to the key question of the session: 'What are the concrete steps to implement these initiatives? What are the missing links?' For example, how come eGov Foundation got stuck and wasn't successfully implemented in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, or Delhi?

- Also, notice how in smaller cities there simply isn't government capacity to manage IT consultants to implement these kind of solutions. That is a key constraint.

Prof. Srinivas Chary, Administrative Staff College of India (ASCI):
Some of the key challenges and issues to work through;

1. Different agencies with overlapping responsibilities in cities speak different languages. The challenge gets even more complicated between different towns. So how to reach a common lexicon to combine data systems?
2. There is a skillgap for IT managers in cities—there is no position for that in most cities: most are hired on a piecemeal basis and don't have the capacity to manage large external consultants for change management.
3. Even after developing a great data system, where is the data—and how do we make sure it's reliable? Many cities invest large sums of money in the system but retain weak data collection systems, e.g. Mumbai. In another example, IBNet says Hyderabad's water reliability is 10 hours a day, but in reality it is 2 hours every second day.
4. Large resources are required to implement all this, but most cities outside the largest ones don't have the financial capacity to do so.
5. Huge knowledge gaps exist: cities don't know how to get the right technologies or even the right Terms of Reference to design them.
6. How to move from 'know how' to 'do how'?—first is the information system, but translating this to a real outcome requires handholding support.
7. There is no good example, in India at least, of ICT solutions really benefiting *the poor* in a city. So how can we keep that better in mind? Not setting up IT kiosks for the elite, but addressing the real problems experienced by the poor.

Questions and discussion from participants:

- Look at the difference in contexts: in the developed world it's about getting IT systems in different departments to talk to each other, but in India there might not be the systems in existence in the first place. And moreover different cities are going in totally different directions, each forging their own unilateral path.
- Very interesting to look at the UID (Universal ID) project in India, to register 600 million poorer Indians for better access to services. They might revolutionise the way services are delivered to target populations, but haven't yet thought about using it to capture information on the *needs* of beneficiaries.

Thanks to all participants!—we will convene again on June 15th to discuss *'Opening Urban Data: Platforms for Service Creation and Decision Making.'*