



Government Services Reform & Modernization Program (GSR) E-Government Strategy

General Framework for E-Government Initiative
in the Syrian Arab Republic

The State is at the service of people, and its institutions protect the fundamental rights of citizens, develop their lives and support grassroots organizations to be able to develop themselves.

The Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic

"Talking about the administrative development... leads us to talking about corruption ... in spite of efforts to reduce and control it.. we still need successful mechanisms to combat corruption. Accountability status alone is not enough in spite of its necessity ... so, what is the actual solution? ... The actual solution to combat corruption is in administration, because administrative development ... and expanding the use of modern technology ... are complementary mechanisms to accountability.

In administration.. if there is a truly serious administration... automation... and mechanisms for evaluation and selection... all of these mechanisms, if available, will give the results we desire."

Excerpts from the inaugural speech of Mr. President of the Syrian Arab Republic – 2007

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1. Introduction

With the increasing of social and development burdens on the government administration, particularly in:

- Limited resources of the Treasury;

- Increased number of citizens and their needs, and the necessity to provide them with better and more services;
 - Striving for achieving social development targets;
 - Needs of economic sectors in face of challenges of regional and international competition;
 - The ability to achieve adequate rates of economic development;
 - The ability to compete at the regional level;
 - Enabling the public administration to play a more effective role in the relationship with the growing number of civil society organizations (CSOs) (social, developmental, charitable, cultural, scientific..etc.);
 - Dealing with the private sector and its requirements; and
 - The need to keep pace with technological and information development,
- the need to activate the role of government administration has become clear. Launching E-Government Initiative in Syria is the main tool to achieve this.

2. E-Government Initiative in Syria

The National Strategy for ICT, which was approved by the Government in 2004, included launching the " E-Government National Initiative" aiming to promote the automation of government institutions within the scope of a comprehensive program of administrative reform that enhances the direction of providing services for citizen and social and economic institutions, and increases effectiveness and productivity of government institutions through optimally using ICT.

MOCT has signed a memorandum of understanding with UNDP GSR to prepare for the E-Government Initiative. The memorandum goals include:

- ❖ Listing the government frequent services provided by ministries, and setting their priorities according to the possibility of benefiting from ICT in their implementation.
- ❖ Studying the current status according to the e-readiness documents available in Syria with regard to the infrastructure, human resources and others, and providing clear indicators of the current status which allows comparison between Syria and other countries regionally and globally.
- ❖ Developing a strategy and a vision for E-Government Initiative, including compensating the lack of legislation, raising e-readiness and developing a standard formula for interoperability between different e-government systems, which permits to avoid central solutions, allows the various ministries to work independently, and accelerates the pace of progress towards governmental e-services. This strategy must take into account building the capacity and technical and leadership skills to limit the resistance to change, as well as strengthen cooperation between private and public sectors.

2.1. The importance of developing a strategy for E-Government Initiative

The importance of developing a strategy in preparation for the launch of E-government Initiative originates from the following factors:

- ❖ Develop sound policies and effective administrative frameworks from the beginning to ensure the proper start of the Initiative;
- ❖ Optimum utilization of government investments in the use of ICT to develop the government work;
- ❖ Develop mechanisms for coordination among different government agencies upon launching ICT projects;
- ❖ Ensure effective management for the cost of operating and investment of information systems in government;
- ❖ Develop an integrated plan to promote the successes achieved by some guiding initiatives in order to build information systems able to respond to the expected volumes of work in terms of performance and continuity;
- ❖ Direct information investments to achieve real economic development targets, rather than merely achieve information targets;
- ❖ Lay the necessary foundations for integration among government information systems in a modern way to ensure improving the government performance.

2.2. The strategic goals of the E-Government Initiative

In general, the E-Government Initiative seeks to achieve the following three goals:

- ❖ Increase and develop the efficiency of government management, as well as streamline its procedures and reduce its cost of work. This goal benefits the government management, because it results in reducing the financial and time waste in the administrative work, then enables the government administration to provide better services at the same cost, or provide the existing services at a lower cost.
- ❖ Increase the effectiveness of government services. This goal helps the beneficiaries (citizens, business, public employees and CSOs) by providing quality, inclusive and interactive services adequate to the costumers' wishes and needs in shorter time.
- ❖ Support social and economic development. This goal benefits society as a whole by building a transparent and participatory relationship between the government and beneficiaries and promoting the concepts of governmental responsibility in a manner that enables all components of society to achieve the objectives of economic and social development.

Given the importance of developing a strategy for the E-Government Initiative, we have divided the work into three stages in accordance with the model shown in Figure 1. Preparatory stage aims to develop guidelines for the strategy and get national consensus on the goals, themes and stage of the Initiative, so as to ensure its success and achievement of its goals, and enable all stakeholders to contribute to the formulation of the strategy. During the stages of its development, the strategy document reflects a means for ideas development and exchange between stakeholders and decision makers, as it gets reviewed through their notes to reach concurrence on the methodology to be adopted in order to implement it. It is planned to include the full version of the strategy, which is expected to be completed at the end of 2010, in the Eleventh Five-Year Plan (FYP); and then its final document will become a road map for decision makers with regard to the programs and projects it covers. The interim document will be submitted to the Cabinet to approve what has been accomplished, assign the government agencies to complete the detailed documentation and develop the operational frameworks that will allow launching the projects and businesses related to the first stage. The final document,

however, is preferably to be adopted by the Parliament when included within the documents of the 11th FYP. Figure (1) shows the time frame of the Initiative.

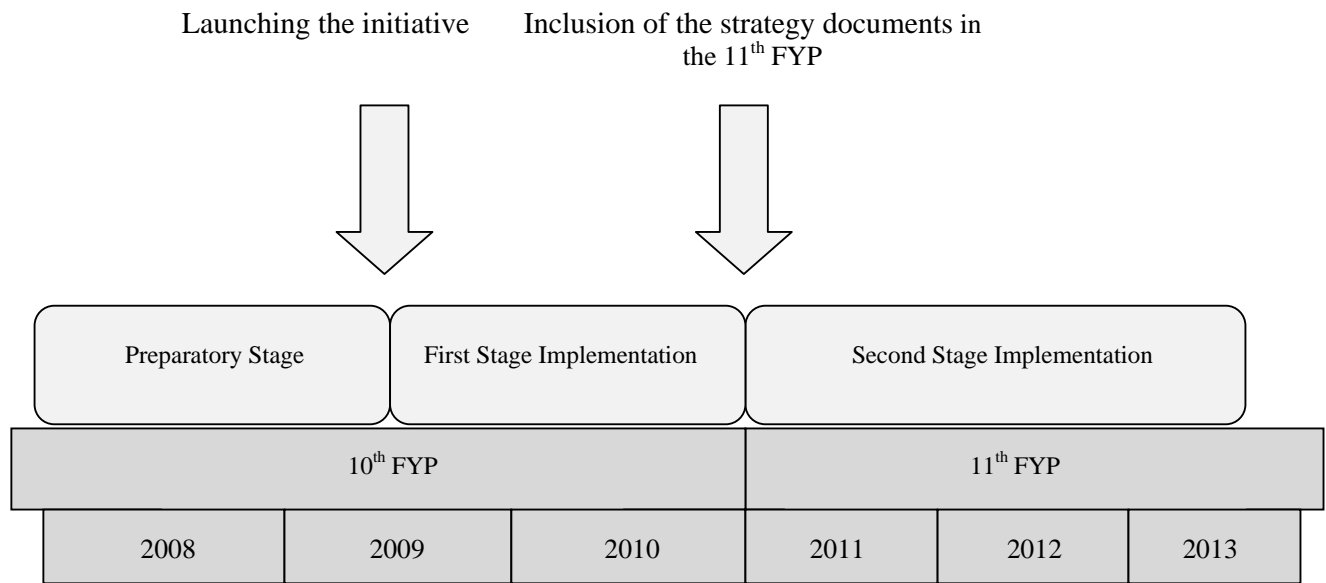


Figure 1: Time framework of the E-Government Initiative

2.3. Syrian approach for E-Government Initiative

Directions of E-Government Initiatives of different countries are similar, however, they vary in degree and pace of change to be achieved, which is related to the local particularity and resources that can be appropriated. Thus, the speed of achieving the goals of the Initiative should take into account the results of status evaluating and the available resources so as to ensure achieving the goals of the strategy. Therefore, the Syrian proposed Initiative has adopted an approach compatible with the limited resources countries, so that building will be accomplished in accordance with the methodology of "Think big, start small, scale fast", according to the model shown in figure (2).¹

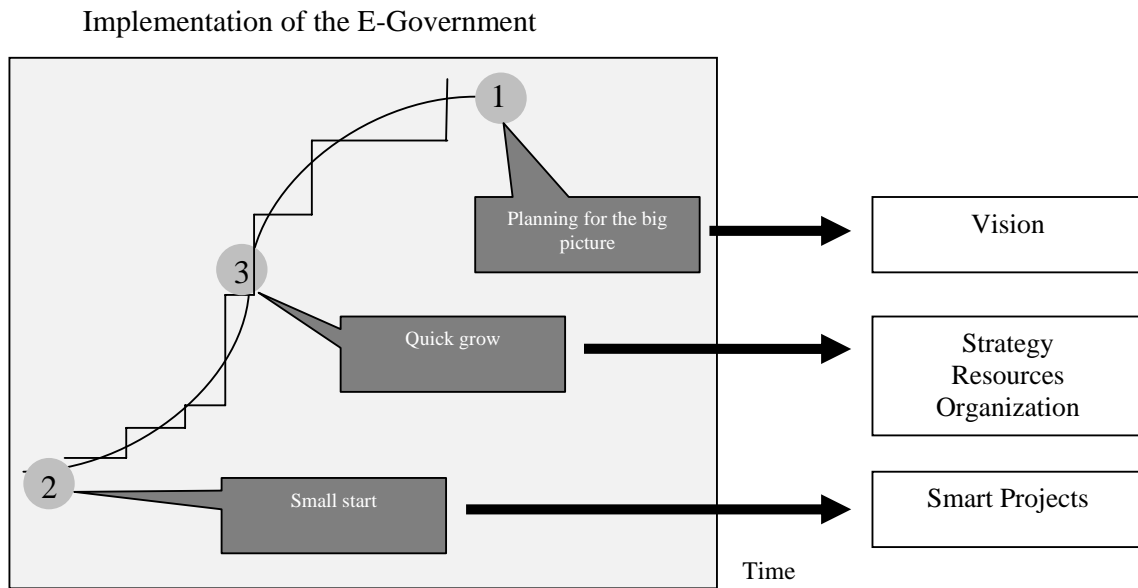


Figure 2: Model of implementation of E-Government Initiative

Planning for the big picture requires accurately identifying the e.gov Initiative's vision and goals, followed by working on the projects that do not require substantial funding and have big chances of success (high priority projects). This helps guarantee "Quick Wins" that lead to mobilize actor's support and contribution to help the achievement of the Initiative's goals. The rapid growth, however, requires the provision of all required resources, and disclosure and treatment of all bottlenecks in a timely manner which will require the provision of strategic planning mechanisms necessary to implement the projects in line with the vision and strategic goals. This ensures not to put large investments in projects found later do not effectively contribute to the achievement of the strategy goals, and not risk the loss of resources allocated for the Initiative. This is why providing effective tools to identify priorities (on the one hand) and effective mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation is so important. In addition, a flexible concept for policies development, linked to the interim results, should also be adopted to ensure taking into account policies results at each stage when formulating next stage policies,

¹ Approach to implement e-governance (Anderson Consulting), E-Governance and Developing Countries, Michiel Backus

in addition to the adoption of some key initiatives that allow increasing the possibility of overall success.

In consistency with the said direction, the work plan for the first stage (2009 - 2010) will have two tracks: the implementation of some pilot projects, and projects with high priority in each ministry, in addition to implementation of projects related to basic services and some projects related to readiness, and some common services. The second stage (2011 - 2013) will have a number of relatively large projects in the fields where satisfactory results have been achieved in the first stage. This will be determined by the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

2.4. The general framework of the Initiative

In accordance with the framework of the memorandum of understanding signed between MOCT and GSR, they both have prepared a set of documents necessary to launch the Initiative. The detailed documents are to be completed as soon as the Initiative is launched formally after the adoption of these documents by the Cabinet. Then, the necessary resources will be allocated to implement the planned first stage in conjunction with the preparation of the detailed documents necessary for the second stage, which will be included in the documentation of the 11th FYP. Figure 3 shows the actions that have been executed, and those that will be executed in each stage.

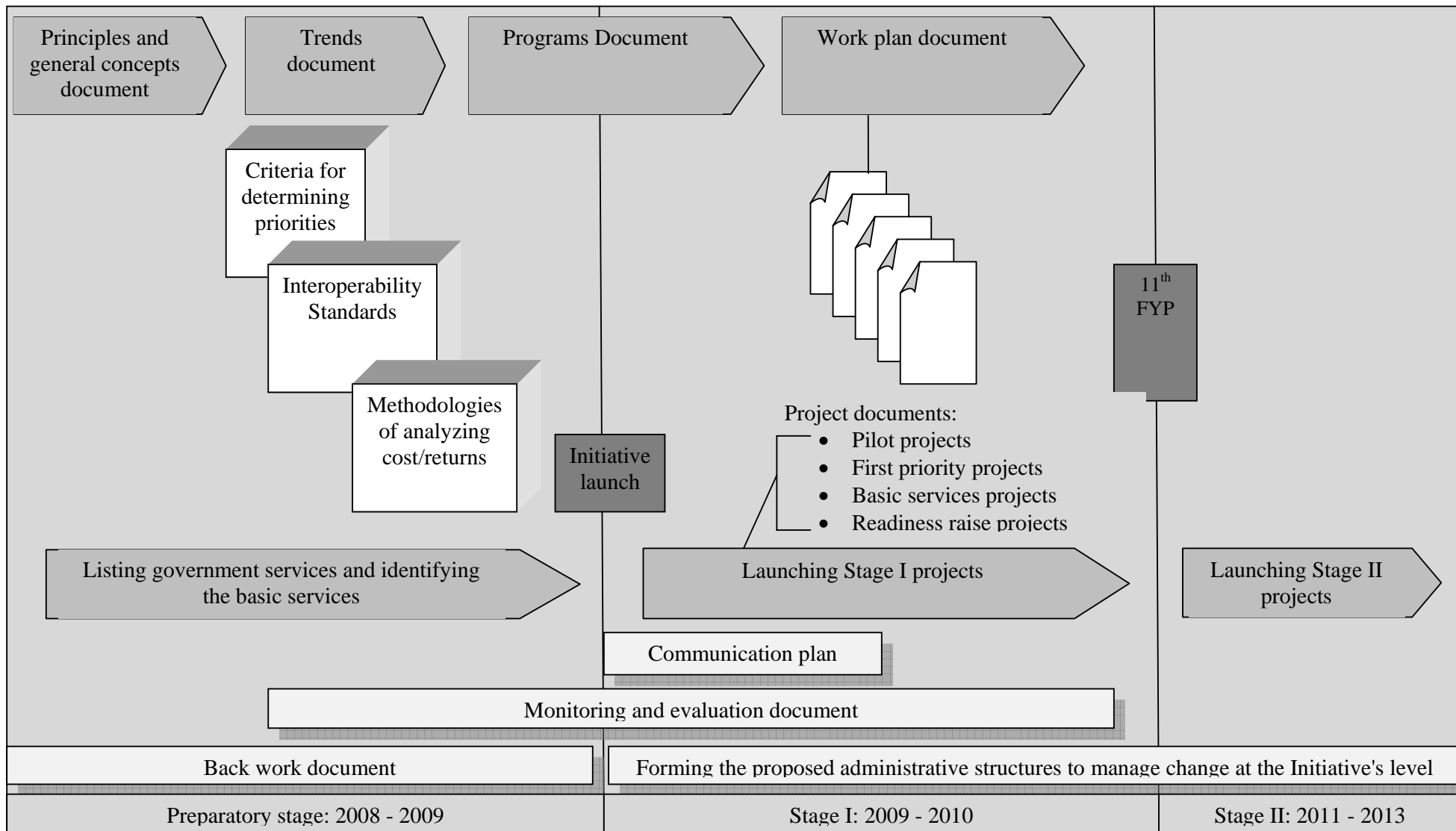


Figure 3: The general framework for E-Government Initiative

3. E-Government Strategy documents

The E-Government Strategy documents include the following topics: vision, strategic goals and priorities, work plan (programs and projects), framework of monitoring and evaluation, the adopted management model, and mechanisms of preparing feasibility studies. The Strategy is considered a road map for achieving the proposed goals, and takes into account results of evaluating the enabling environment in Syria with regard to the following frameworks: The political framework, legislative and regulatory framework, institutional framework, the human and cultural conditions, communication environment, financial conditions, technological infrastructure, data and information systems. E-Government Strategy in Syria is formulated according to a set of objective documentation. During the preparatory stage for launching E-Government Initiative, policy documents, some documents on planning and strategic management, and a set of supporting documents were prepared, while the sponsors for each of the Strategy's three strategic themes undertake completing the rest of the documents during the 2009 to 2010 stage. The Strategy in its final form includes the set of documents which will be shown later. In table (1), we find a list of documents relating to E-Government Strategy, with an indication of the status of each of these documents.

3.1. Policies documents

3.1.1. Basics and general concepts document

This document contains the principles and general concepts related to the e-government, and provides reference theoretical information that contributes to the standardization of concepts, terminology and platforms that will be built upon with regard to the E-Government Initiative's importance, implementation stages and methods of classification. The document also shows the best practices at each stage, and provides a concise explanation of some of the concepts associated with e-government, such as the structure of e-government and interoperability among government agencies.

3.1.2. Trends document

Trends document includes SWOT analysis of the current situation, and suggests an approach for E-Government Initiative in Syria that deals with regulatory, temporal and technical frameworks, sets goals for different stages of the Initiative, identifies the strategic themes, and indicates the objectives to be achieved in each theme, and sponsors for each strategic theme.

3.2. Strategic planning and management documents

3.2.1. Programs document

The document poses the necessary interventions to enable the E-Government Strategy to achieve its goals for each strategic theme specified in the trends document. It also develops a work plan at the level of programs that must be implemented in each strategic theme previously identified, and identifies the desired goals for each program. The document also presents a detailed vision for the management mechanisms necessary to implement the

strategy (monitoring and evaluation, institutional model, funding sources, mechanisms of communication).

3.2.2. Work plan document

Work plan includes description of projects attached to each of the strategy programs, including: project title, project implementing partner, project stakeholders, project duration, estimated budget, project goals, potential linkages with other projects and other information necessary to describe the project.

3.2.3. Documents of the projects

For each project contained in the work plan, a project document containing all the technical and organizational details and the financial and human resources for the project should be developed.

3.3. Supporting documents

3.3.1. Monitoring and evaluation framework document

It includes a mechanism to monitor work progress on different levels of the Initiative (the strategic theme, the program, and the project). The mechanism should be able to follow-up performance at the level of each ministry and institution in order to achieve competition among the various ministries. Monitoring and evaluation are key components of the process of implementing the Initiative in Syria. This is connected to the outlook towards the Syrian E-Government Strategy as it is not an end in itself, but a guiding mechanism for programs and projects because the Strategy calls each ministry to describe and implement its own projects, and ensure that the outputs of such projects contribute to achieving the goals of the Initiative.

3.3.2. The document on the priorities for providing government services electronically

This document contains mechanisms for determining to what extent an institution is ready to provide all its services electronically, in addition to the expected impact of such providing. This mechanism allows ministries to begin identifying high-priority projects, and then develop their annual plans related to the e-government according to bases that ensure the highest possible success rates after taking into account the various factors that prove the feasibility of the proposed project.

3.3.3. Document on Interoperability Standards

This document represents a set of governmental standards and guidelines necessary to achieve interoperability among government agencies on the one hand and between them and their services beneficiaries (individuals, companies and CSOs) on the other hand. Referred to as SyGIF (Syrian Government Interoperability Framework), this document contains a set of standards divided into two groups: the first is the technical group, which is related to the technical issues of connecting and linking different informatics systems, while the second is

the Symantec group which aims to standardize structures and implications of governmental data and information.

3.3.4. Macroeconomic analysis document

It includes a study of the anticipated impacts of the E-Government Strategy on the macroeconomics. It also presents a model to calculate the cost/benefit in the e-government projects, and identifies ways of assessing the benefits (non physical) in such egov projects.

3.3.5. Communication Strategy document

It includes ways of communicating with stakeholders. This requires a public relations campaign to promote the steps, projects and achievements of the Strategy.

3.3.6. Back working document

It includes a description of the methodology followed; a presentation for sources of information adopted; and the results of listings and questionnaires implemented or depended on. This document will be developed gradually with the progress of work. This includes the gradual addition of information on new activities, or an amendment to the current document if necessary.

	Planned	Interim document	Final document
Policy documents			
Basics and general concepts document			X
Trends document			X
Strategic planning and management documents			
Programs document		X	
Work Plan document	X		
Projects documents	X		
Supporting documents			
Monitoring and evaluation framework document		X	
The document on the priorities for providing government services electronically			X
Document on Interoperability Standards		X	
Macroeconomic analysis document		X	
Communication Strategy document	X		
Back working document		X	

Table 1: Status of Strategy's various documents

4. Development of Strategy documents during the preparatory stage of the Initiative

Achieving the said goals of the Initiative requires several years, in addition to the need for concerted efforts and allocating relatively substantial resources. Therefore, this Initiative cannot start without a preparatory stage that paves the way to carry out the detailed work later, ensures coordination and guidance of existing works in the various ministries, and allows the completion of some high priority projects and raising readiness projects, until the launch of the final version of the Strategy document within the 11th FYP. Figure (4) shows the steps used to reach the current version of the Strategy.

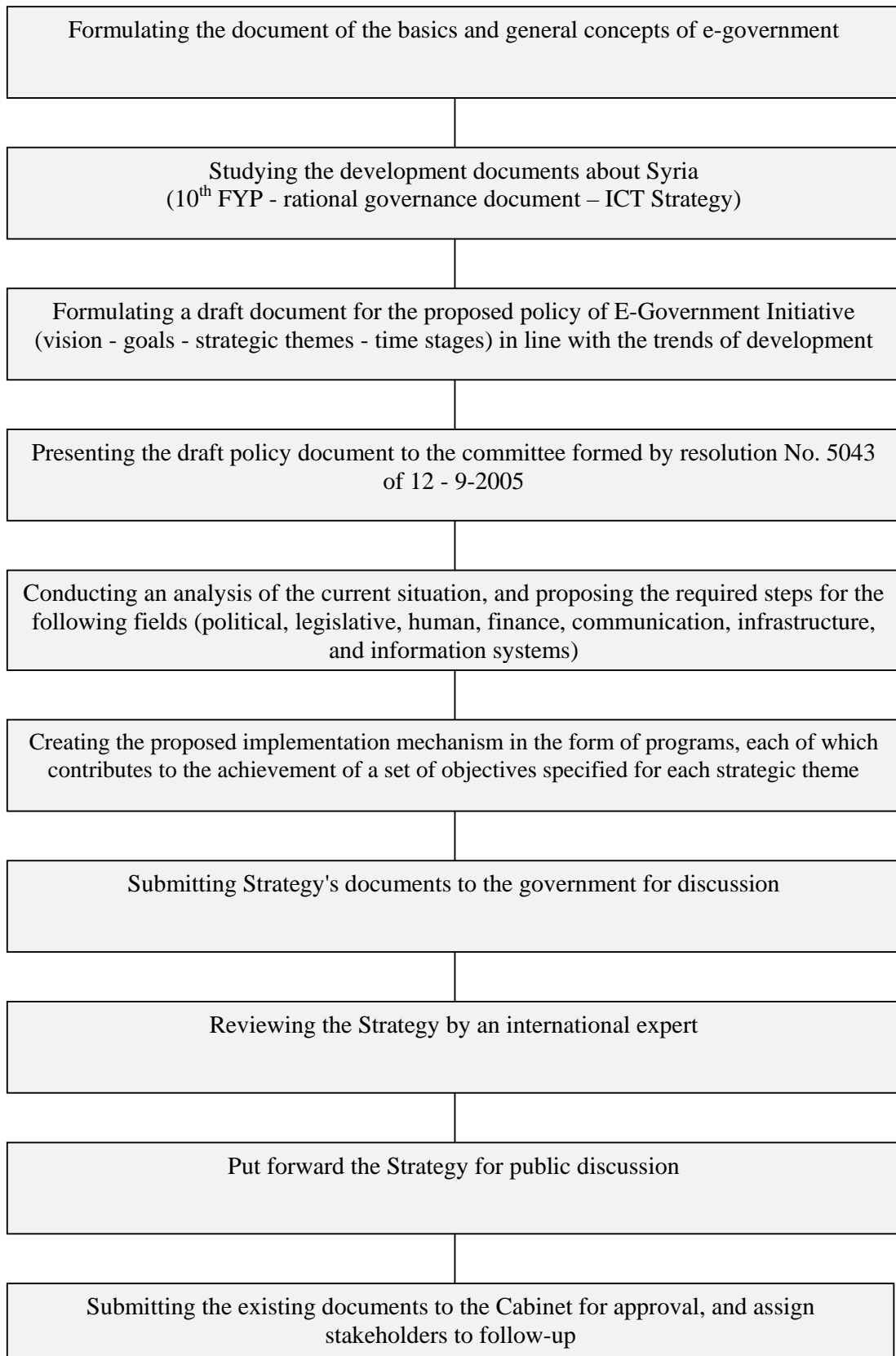


Figure 4: Stages of Strategy documents development during the preparatory stage of the Initiative

4.1. Mechanisms of policy development associated with the stages

Although the first stage of Strategy implementation is based on two tracks, the first of which is related to the provision of services with high priority, and the other to the provision of some basic services, assessment of policy results will play a major role in the development of second stage policy in accordance with the mechanism shown in Figure 5. The successful implementation of some basic services will play a role in raising the priority of a wide range of services in the various ministries, and the same applies to the success of projects of raising readiness in infrastructure, which will be implemented in the first stage. Therefore, each ministry should assume drafting the detailed work plan for the services to be provided during the second stage (at the level of programs and projects) in light of the capability of the first stage to achieve the numerical goals, provided that the process of coordination is done at the central level.

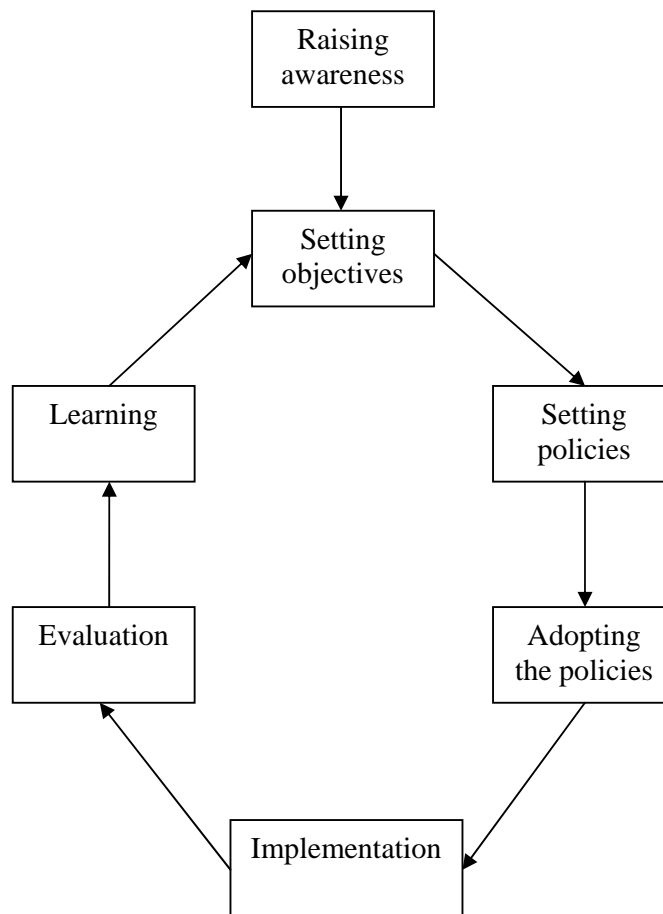


Figure 5: Policy development cycle²

² Stone 2001, Janssen et al 2004, HEEKS 2006

4.2. Services listing track and the basic services definition

Along with the first track based on starting with the high priority services in every ministry to launch some pilot projects and build on this success to launch relatively large-scale projects in the second stage, most developing countries, including Syria, have difficulty in accessing accurate information on needs, and still have challenges regarding the readiness of infrastructure and basic information systems³. Therefore, a parallel track has been proposed to provide some basic services whose electronic provision contributes to the creation of a broad change in the efficient delivery of the rest of government services. Such services have high rates of demand which makes the process of their electronic provision of a significant impact on the citizen and the government. The list of basic services will be adopted at the national level. Such adoption is deemed to be a governmental commitment to allocate the necessary funds and launch projects related to these services, which enable all ministries to take these plans into account during the developing of the priorities of the other services which, then, will have a priority in the implementation, and will be subject to special monitoring during the implementation process. Figure (6) shows the steps followed in the track of services listing.

³ Benchmarking e-Government: Improving the National and International Measurement, Evaluation and Comparison of e-Government, RICHARD HEEKS, 2006

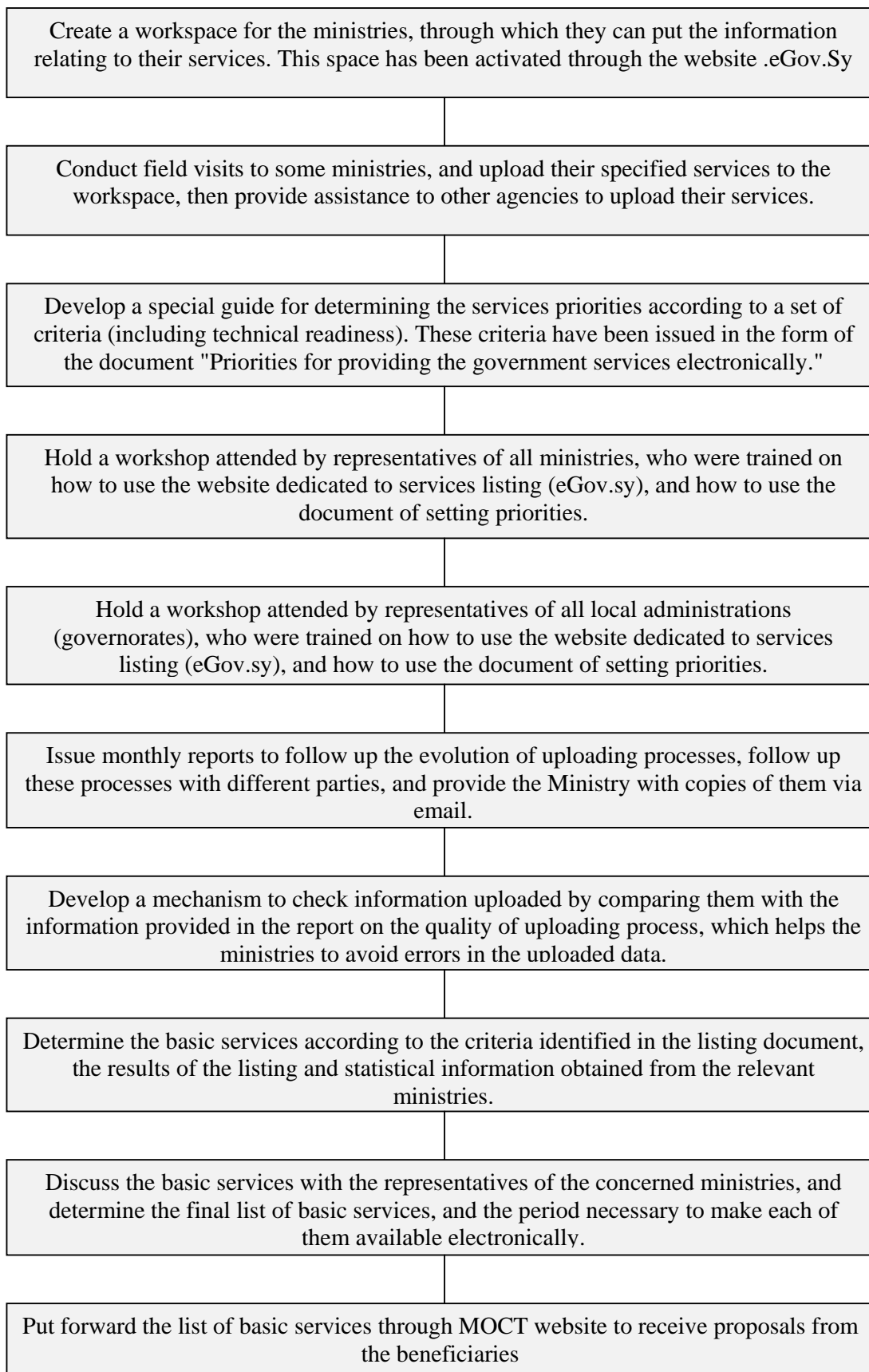


Figure 6: The steps followed for services listing

5. Steps that follow adoption of the current Strategy documents

After the adoption of the current documents of the Strategy, each Stakeholder of the strategic themes may be assigned to complete the detailed documents relating to the projects of its strategic theme, including adding the required updates to the programs document in light of its responsibility for achieving the strategic objectives of the concerned theme, provided that the executive team ensures the compatibility of programs in the various ministries. The three strategic themes are:

Sponsor	The strategic theme
The Steering Committee of the e-government	Providing the government services electronically
Prime Ministry	Development of the general management
MOCT	Setting up the enabling environment

In addition, the Steering Committee and the Executive team, which is the executive tool that contributes to coordinating and advancing work on the three strategic themes, will be established. Stated below is the structure that has been proposed in the Strategy documents which show the detailed tasks of the said sponsors.

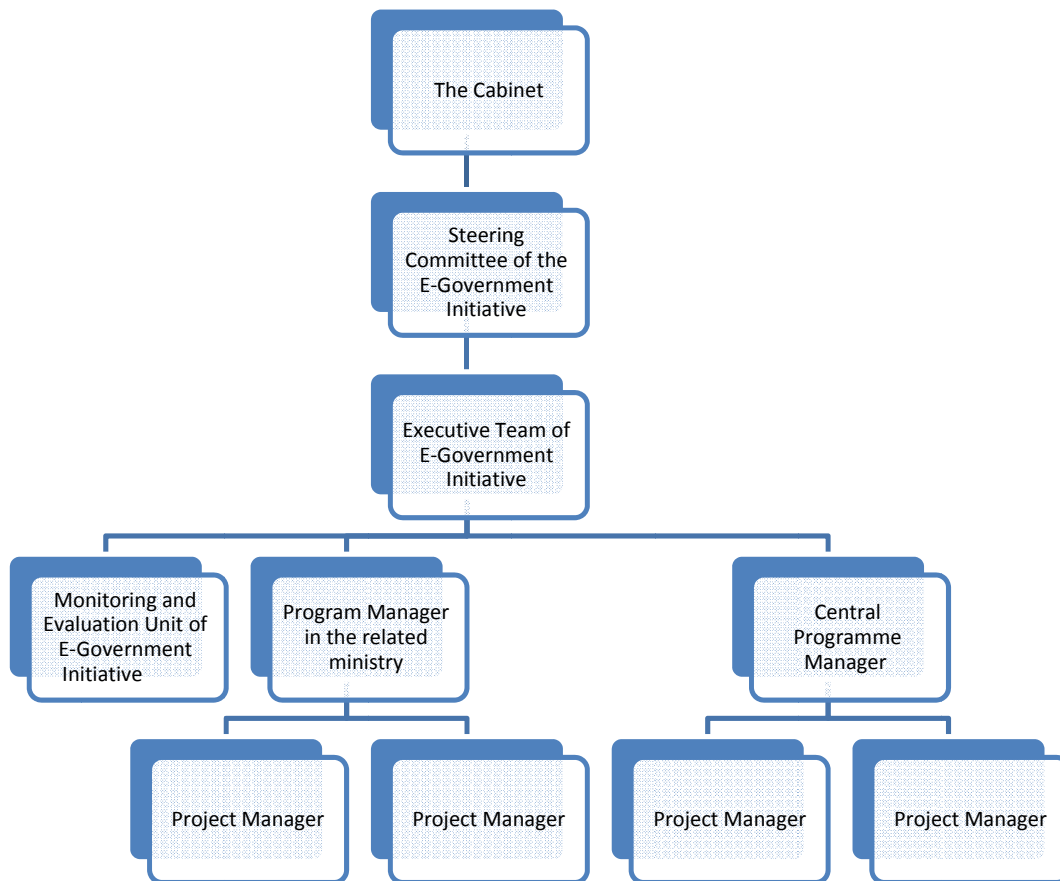


Figure 7: The proposed structure for the implementation of E-Government Initiative