

Topic : 'e-People' – One Stop Online System for Communication with People

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Background and History of e-People

Anti-Corruption and Civil Rights Commission of Korea, the ACRC, is operating "e-People" system which deals with civil complaints, proposals, and policy participation in a comprehensive and systematic way. e-People is Kukmin-Sinmoongo in Korean. Sinmoongo refers to a large drum hang outside palace during the Joseon Dynasty. In 1401 A.D, Taejong, the 3rd King of the Joseon Dynasty hang the drum to let the people hit the drum when they had complaints. When people hit the drum, the King listened to their complaints in person. At that time, people were supposed to appeal their complaints to the regional government offices they belonged to. However, not all the complaints were resolved at those regional offices. In that case, people could appeal their unresolved complaints by beating the "Sinmoongo" drum letting the king listen to their petition, directly to help them.

e-People is a modern version of Shinmoongo based on IT technology. e-People was introduced to resolve inconveniencies arising from complex administrative process and to strengthen communication between the government and people. Before e-People was invented, people found it difficult to file a complaint because they did not know exactly which administrative agency would handle their complaint. Administrative agencies also had to endure waste of time in processing complaints because they had to refer complaints that they could not or were not supposed to handle to other agencies via mail and other means. Meanwhile, when the government tried to push forward with a new policy, it had to unilaterally promote the policy to the public because there was no means of two-way communication with the public. The goal of e-People is to stay away from government-led policy implementation and to strengthen two-way communication between people and the government.

With e-People, civil petition handling systems in 7 central administrative agencies were integrated in 2005. Currently, all central government agencies (58), local governments (245), offices of education (208), overseas diplomatic offices(172) and 70% of the 321 public organizations in Korea are using e-People and more and more organizations will use the system.

Functions of e-People

e-People is a one-stop communication platform that has a variety of functions. Using e-People, anyone who experienced inconveniencies caused by administrative agencies can file petitions. Those who have a good idea regarding a government policy can make a suggestion on e-People. People can also use e-People to participate in government policies. E-People can also be used by those who want to expose public interest violations and who report improper government budget spending or suggest measures to reduce waste thereof.

The detailed description of e-People's three major functions, complaint handling, receiving public suggestion and encouraging public participation in government policies, are as follows.

First function is complaint-handling. When a person files a civil complaint with the e-People system, the system automatically designates the most proper agency to handle the complaint. Then, the selected agency addresses the complaint within the statutory period and notifies the result to the complainant. People may ask for additional measures from the administrative agency in charge if they are not satisfied with the results. In addition, if the complaint requires several agencies to be addressed, these agencies can jointly work on the issue online. When the complaint is not properly received, if not often enough, the designated agencies can forward or refer the complaint to a proper competent agency on line in real time. The complainant can also state their satisfaction level with respects to the result on e-People, and then the ACRC uses the statement to evaluate and announce how each public agency handles complaints.

In case where a citizen files a grievance related to issues infringing on people's rights and interests due to passive or inappropriate administrative system, the ACRC which is Ombudsman of Korea investigates and handles the case.

Foreigners living in Korea can also use e-People to file a complaint. Currently, the number of foreign residents in Korea is over one million. This number includes short-term residents, married immigrants, foreign workers and students. To help them file complaints without language problem, "e-people" started the foreign language service in English, Chinese and Japanese in June 2008. 14 foreign languages are now available in filing complaints, such as Vietnamese, Mongolian, Indonesian, Thai, Uzbek, Cambodian and Bengali.

e-People's second function is receiving various opinions and proposals from both civilians and public officials. If they have a good idea that could improve government services, they can submit their proposals through e-People. Based on data on evaluations conducted every year, outstanding proposals are selected and adopted as a policy, and awards are presented to the proposers.

The third function is to enable the public to participate in government policy. This function provides an online discussion forum where stake holders, experts and the general public can freely suggest their opinions on major policies, enactment and revision of laws. In order to contribute to the efforts to make government that communicating with the public, each organization is using e-People to carry out discussions and surveys on their policies, promotes their policies and collect public opinions.

Operation and Achievements of 'e-People'

As e-People's functions and organizations using the system have increased and more and more people have recognized its conveniences, the number of petitions, suggestions and public participations received on e-People in 2015 increased to 1.9 million, 130,000 and 38million, respectively, which was five-fold, nine-fold and 75 fold increase from 2005 when it was introduced.

As e-People enabled online collaboration among government agencies, the quality of complaints handling service and administrative efficiency have been enhanced. The average complaint-handling period was reduced as well; the average handling time for general complaints fell from 7.8 days to 4.1 days from 2006 to 2015, while combined complaints down from 14.4 to 6.1 days over the same period, improving the quality of public service in handling civil complaints. Also, people's satisfaction level and the number of people who would like to use e-People are on the rise.

Since the e-People was set up in 2005, it has received awards or been selected as a leading example as many as 5 times in various international competitions. Particularly, in 2011, it won an excellence award in the UN Public Service Award, which is a prestigious award to promote the importance of public governance to both the public organizations and the public in the world.

Future direction of e-People

Using 'e-People', the ACRC will continue to resolve and root out grievance-causing factors and expand communication channel for people.

First, based on analysis of massive civil petition information, people's voice will be swiftly reflected into government policies, thereby better protecting people's rights and interests and making more and more people feel the enhancement of government policies.

The ACRC is now building citizen participation platform where people from various walks of life collect their wisdom and resolve problems. This citizen participation platform is a forum for communication between the public and private sector, where diverse opinion are shared and agenda is determined by votes from large number of people, alternatives are came up with through consultation between experts and the government. This system, which will replace e-people, will become a next-generation customized administrative platform that provides services that people need.