

Chapter 17

Enabling Instruments for Digital Access and e-Government in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

The concept of e-Government sub-assumes that of digital access to activities of public and private sector organisations. Explicitly, digital access includes improving government processes, connecting citizens, and building external interactions. Following the formation of the inclusive government as determined by the Global Political Agreement (GPA), Zimbabwe established the Ministry of Information Communication Technology whose mission is to promote the deployment and use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to intensify national competitiveness and growth. Driving the digital access and e-Government agenda in Zimbabwe is a Modernisation Unit within the Office of the President and Cabinet and the Ministry of Information Communication Technology guided by “Zimconnect,” the e-Government framework, and other enabling instruments. Particular attention is paid to instruments that enable digital access and e-Government in Zimbabwe. The chapter attempts to contextualise digital access and e-Government, outlines e-Government policy objectives and constraints, explains the e-Government framework, including “Zimconnect” and others, and concludes with a section on strategies for enabling digital access and e-Government with a special focus on the possible role of library and information services.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines and critically analyses enabling instruments for digital access and e-Government in Zimbabwe. E-Government as a

concept sub-assumes digital access to activities of public and private sector organisations. Digital access includes the improvement of government processes, connecting citizens and building external interactions.

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The deployment of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and e-Government in Zimbabwe goes back to the early 1970s when the Central Computing Services (CCS) provided ICT services to the public services. Following this, was the adoption of the Integrated Results Based Management System (IRBMS) in 2005, which is underpinned by e-Government as an integral component (COMESA e-Government Web Portal, 2012).

Following the formation of the Inclusive Government in 2009 as determined by the Global Political Agreement (GPA) of 2008, Zimbabwe established the Ministry of Information Communication Technology whose mission is to promote the deployment and use of ICTs in order to intensify national competitiveness and growth. The digital access and e-Government agenda in the country is driven by a Modernisation Unit within the Office of the President and Cabinet and the Ministry of Information Communication Technology, guided by 'Zimconnect', which is the e-Government framework; and, other enabling instruments (COMESA e-Government Web Portal). Zimconnect is a response by the Government to connect with the people and vice-versa.

In 2005, the Government of Zimbabwe together with the National Economic Consultative Forum (NECF) embarked on an e-readiness survey to appropriately inform the intent to deploy ICTs in the country (Mhlanga, 2006). This e-readiness survey eventually became the basis for the "national ICT policy and the e-strategy to provide a roadmap towards a knowledge society" (Mhlanga, 2006, p. 1). A knowledge society is one in which knowledge assumes the core function of driving economic growth (Hikwa, 2010, p.1).

Specifically, the objectives of this chapter are to contextualise digital access and e-Government; outline e-Government policy objectives and constraints; critically analyse the e-Government framework; and, to spell out strategies for enabling digital access and e-Government in Zimbabwe.

BACKGROUND

The desire for digital access and e-Government is steeped in the modern-day thrust and trajectory towards building sustainable knowledge-based economies. "A knowledge-based economy is one in which knowledge assumes the core function of driving economic growth" (Hikwa, 2010, p.1). This simple definition can further be articulated in a continuum shown in Figure 1.

Some scholars have simply referred to a knowledge-based economy as a knowledge society. Nevertheless, no matter the varied definitions of a knowledge society, emerging is a general consensus that sustenance of such a society is very much reliant on digital access and e-Government.

Digital access and e-Government are recently emerging terms and therefore mired in the difficulty of the lack of a precise taxonomy to universally describe them. However, in the context of this chapter, the definitions used establish the perspectives in which they are understood and employed.

Digital access is assumed to mean and/or imply continued deployment of ICTs to enable usability of digital resources. Such resources usually retain their authenticity, accuracy and functionality, usually associated with their original form and access to them. E-Government is much broader than digital access since it assumes a wider interaction between a government and citizens, government and commerce, government and employees, government and/or governments or agencies (Jeong, 2007). The implied digital interaction comprises governance, ICT, business process re-engineering and e-citizen at all levels of government, that is city, district, province, national and international (Jeong, 2007). This can be summarised into an e-Government delivery models as shown in Figure 2.

To support the above, Ntiro (2000) defines e-Government as the use of ICTs in improving the activities of public sector organisations. It includes all digital ICTs and public sector activities. For

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