Chapter 112
E–Government Strategies in Sub–Saharan Africa:
Failures and Successes

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ABSTRACT

E-government if well implemented has the potential to reduce administrative bureaucracy and enhance development and service delivery. This chapter discusses strategies of e-government implementation in Sub-Saharan Africa and the implications for good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, accountability, integrity, and transparency. E-government in Sub-Saharan Africa is being undertaken in different administrative contexts and rationalities such as the need for reform, efficiency, and citizen-focus. An e-government implementation approach that facilitates and engenders the sharing of best practices, experiences, methods, and standards while reducing turnaround times and cost in project delivery would be desirable. This chapter is underpinned by UN e-government framework.

INTRODUCTION

There are several definitions of e-government in literature. Ngulube (2007) cited twelve different definitions of e-government underlining the fact the concept has many interdisciplinary homes and is also still in the embryonic stages of development. The United Nations (UN E-government Survey 2010) defines e-government as a means of enhancing the capacity of the public sector, together with citizens, to address particular development issues. From this perspective, e-government aims at strengthening the performance of government and public administration with the ultimate goal of achieving economic and social development (Anttiroiko & Malkia, 2006). Heeks (2004) defines e-government as online government or Internet-based government. He however acknowledges, that technologies such as the telephone, fax, short message service (SMS), multimedia messaging service (MMS), wireless networks, Bluetooth, television and radio-based delivery of government services

can be deployed for e-government purposes. Curin, Sommer and Vis-Sommer (2003) acknowledging the role played by any form of information technology in governance defines e-government as the use of any and all forms of ICT by governments and their agents to enhance operations; the delivery of public information and services; citizen engagement and public participation; and the very process of governance. The World Bank (2007) on its part perceives e-government as the use by government agencies of information technologies (such as wide area networks, the Internet and mobile computing) that have the ability to transform relations with citizens, businesses, and other arms of government. In spite of the variety of e-government definitions proffered in literature, the term has become firmly integrated in the lingual Franca of diverse academic disciplines such as the humanities, social sciences, the arts, information technology, management and more. This article adopts the definition by the World Bank (2007) as a result of its suitability.

E-government implementation has become the focus of many governments the world over as a result of many factors. In the first place, there is a growing amount of need on governments for social inclusivity, enhanced service delivery and to a very large extent, these have catalyzed e-government projects in both developed and developing world. Secondly, the pressure for governments to demonstrate accountability, transparency and integrity in their operations has given impetus to the growth of e-government (Gillwald and Esselar, 2004). Farelo and Morris (2005) state that innovation in service delivery and customer focus are some of the prime motivations in e-government implementation. Besides, the public as a result of democracy, civil rights and globalization have continued to clamor for enhanced service delivery and these have been instrumental for e-government growth (Themistocleous and Sarikas, 2005). All said and done, e-government is aimed at enhancing quality service delivery to citizens. In his regard, Lenk (2002, 2004) state that the main focus of

e-government in any part of the world is the reorganization of service processes and citizen services. Schuppan (2009) from the technical as well as the service perspectives underlines e-government's basic organizational principles which include: multichannel distribution, the separation between front and back offices, and process reorganization. These principles provide the basis for governments to provide public services via the Internet independently of space and time. These principles also enable governments to undertake changes in the underlying processes, decision-making structures, and procedures, using ICT to raise the overall efficiency, effectiveness, and legitimization of administrative structures and decisions. Akther, Onishi & Kidokoro (2007) assert that e-government has the potential to reduce administrative and development problems associated with Sub-Saharan Africa. Similarly, the UN E-government Survey (2012) shows that e-government in Sub-Saharan Africa is at a formative stage with traces of strong political will to driving the vision. However, critical challenges remain on issues such as corruption, human resource development, lack of policy and legal framework, interventions, monitoring and evaluation. Consequently, one of the key priorities for e-government in Sub-Saharan Africa should be setting up the processes and services necessary for state activities under appropriate legal and policy framework.

E-GOVERNMENT LEVELS

There are several models of e-government levels. The UN E-Government Survey (2008) provides five levels. At the first stage of e-government (known as Emerging), a government's online presence mainly consists of a web page and/or an official website; links to ministries or departments of education, health, social welfare, labour and finance may or may not exist. Much of the information is static and there is little interaction

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