Chapter 80
Realigning Governance:
From E–Government to E–Democracy for Social and Economic Development

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ABSTRACT

This chapter posits that Governance realignment from e-Government to e-Democracy constitutes a critical context for social and economic development in both developed and developing countries. E-Government and e-Democracy are not new phenomena in most developed countries and some developing countries in Asia and Africa. However, the degrees of political and economic variations between developed and developing countries poses a serious challenge to the efforts towards realignment of governance for social and economic development attainment. The findings in this chapter are that social and economic development lie at the intersection of e-Government and e-Democracy processes of governance realignment. Asymmetry in institutionalisation, and diffusion of e-Democracy amongst countries is widely attributed to economic and political variations in these countries. Unless these differences are skillfully identified and accommodated as such into the development and use models, e-Democracy efforts will not help achieve social and economic development goals, particularly those of developing countries.

INTRODUCTION

According to Bekkers and Homburg (2007) digital democracy, e-participation, and greater civic engagement have subsequently been labelled myths of e-government; unlikely to occur without broader changes in the culture of government to be more open, receptive and responsive to civil society views.

As written by Freeman & Quirke (2013),

The concept of e-Government has remained so dynamic and of late has seen the prospects of e-government being idealised as heralding in a new era of democratic involvement, with opportunities for unmediated discussions, direct participation and representation, and greater transparency and accountability through political openness (Coleman and Blumler, 2009; Eggers, 2005; Wong and Welch, 2004). It is argued, however, that governments have placed little emphasis on

the development of online practices that enable civic contributions to impact decision-making, instead prioritising information dissemination and service delivery features (O'Toole 2009; Jimenez, Mossberger and Wu, 2012, Cullen, 2006; Jensen, 200). The rapid influx of digital technologies has created immense opportunities for new forms of government–citizen communication. However, it should not be assumed that online government applications will transform democratic structures and practices as rapidly (Seifert, 2006). Keane (2009) suggests that the current form of post-representative democracy has been in development for over 60 years, with this gradual shift the result of increased public involvement in political processes through the introduction of new communication technologies and practices.

This chapter highlights that while e-democracy is a slower process than first anticipated, this does not undermine its capacity to facilitate democratic reform that is foundational to social and economic development. Governments that recognise the technological impact on the paradigm shift in democracy are able to use information and communication technologies (ICTs) to address and adapt to increasing external pressures and broadening understandings of political representation and participation (Freeman, J., & Quirke, S. (2013)).

Implemented well, e-Government enables all citizens, enterprises and organizations to carry out their business with government more easily, more quickly and at lower cost (Reding, 2006). Differing characteristics of local environments, both infrastructural and socio-economic, have created a significant level of variation in the acceptance and growth of e-government in different regions of the world (Rothschild and Stiglitz, 1976). This chapter posits that a transformed e-Government to e-Democracy constitutes a critical context for so-

cial and economic development in both developed and developing countries. The chapter also suggests that transformed or realigned e-Government, encompasses more than just technology, that is; it attempts to highlight the social and economic implications of changes that have occurred in recent years as a result of the transparency and accountability of government and how software usage can influence digital inclusion, trust and privacy and possible strategies to eliminate the digital divide by encouraging greater public and commercial use and re-use of government information through putting government data on the Web. In addition to leveraging economic development, transformed e-Government also helps to stream line government services to more social based values of inclusion and citizens' participation, accessibility and power relationship ratios (Ngwenya, 2013). This is the essence of democracy.

The main objectives of this chapter are; to explore the role of transformed e-Government into e-Democracy, in social and economic development in both developed and developing countries with particular emphasis on developing countries. To explore the effects of e-Democracy on e-Government initiatives, to explore the effects of transformed e-Government on social and economic development, and to advance the knowledge that social and economic development is successfully attained at the intersection of e-Government and e-Democracy.

In the next section, the chapter discusses literature on e-Government aspects and e-Democracy. The section also covers issues of importance in realigning governance from e-Government to e-Democracy, social and economic development. This is done, and based on comprehensive literature review and the explorative and interpretivist research conventions used in this study. Finally, the conclusions are drawn and the chapter ends with the focus of the study, the study`s major highlights and suggestions for future research.

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