

Chapter 1

Challenges En–Route towards E–Governance in Small Developing Island Nations of the South Pacific: The Case of Papua New Guinea

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ABSTRACT

Papua New Guinea is hampered by many factors pertaining to institutions, socio-economic, technological, legal-political factors amongst others. E-governance though is seen as a new mantra having the potential of solving immense problems from service delivery, is still many a times constrained in its capacity to yield benefits. So, what are the hurdles that Papua New Guinea faces given its contextual setting is the main research objective of this paper. This objective is achieved through a quantitative methodological framework using structured questionnaires in which a sample of 189 respondents was interviewed. The findings of this research highlight that in PNG the following barriers were cited: lack of project management, inadequate technological/data and legal infrastructure, difficulty in change management, insufficient time and money, lack of requisite competencies, improper communication environment, lack of internal will and finally the dominance of external pressure.

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INTRODUCTION

The uptake of e-governance initiatives around the globe have resulted as a consequence of the immense pressure by citizens/populace at large combined with the capabilities achieved through the use of Information and Communication Technology. E-governance is a new mantra for governments globally to meet citizens' expectations. But is e-governance the complete solution? Is it in any way impacted/constrained by factors which can be considered as the barriers/challenges which may limit countries from fully benefitting from the envisaged benefits? To answer this question, this research is conducted in small islands of the Pacific, namely Papua New Guinea. Papua New Guinea is located in Oceania group of islands including the eastern half of the island of New Guinea between the Coral Sea and the South Pacific Ocean, east of Indonesia. Its approximate population is 5,795,887¹.

In the case of PNG, Lahari's (2004) research highlights that the ICT industry is rapidly changing but the government is slow in making attempts to measure ICT in PNG. The challenge for PNG now is the issue of the demand and supply of ICT services/products and the access to these services still needs to be officially understood and accepted by the PNG government. Stanley's (2008) research pinpoints that while Telikom PNG is trying to deliver on its promise to the citizens, it is the role of the government in ensuring that competition law requirements as stated (under the competition law) must be complied with. Barker (2008) has highlighted the following key recommendations for PNG:

1. Connectivity is required between mobile phone networks and it should be affordable;
2. ICT policy formulation must be rational, transparent and participatory;
3. ICT policy should be forward-looking, enabling technological conversion;
4. Multiple gateways are required;
5. The regulatory environment must be transparent and independent;
6. Improved rural livelihoods should be the main focus ensuring access to mobile and internet including for education and banking and this should be affordable by all; and
7. Community service obligations must be fulfilled.

With regard to the overall picture, there is a need for research to identify key problems faced by Papua New Guinea citizens in accessing services and identify the way forward through policy recommendations.

Research from Gartner reports that ICT spending continues to ascend in the emerging regions of Asia-Pacific, Latin America, as well as Europe at the pace far outperforming that of the industrial world. It says that emerging regions will

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