# Chapter 35

# Prospects and Challenges of E–Government in Black Africa:
## A Comparative Study of Nigeria and Cameroon

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## ABSTRACT

*Most scholars' perspectives on e-government development in Africa have tended to be monolithic. This has been irrespective of the fact that African nations have been adopting relatively different approaches to e-governance. Though the dominant tendency among them has been to struggle to have a certain amount of web presence through the creation of e-government web portals, each African country has designed its own (customized) e-government initiatives. It will therefore be very interesting to explore the extent to which the prospects and challenges of e-governance in Africa have been varying across countries. This chapter attempts to fill this gap in knowledge through a comparative study of e-government implementation in Nigeria and Cameroon. The chapter is divided into three main parts. The first part provides a conceptual definition and a brief history of e-government. The second part explores the phenomena of ICTs and e-governance in Africa while the last part provides a comparative perspective on the implementation of e-government in Nigeria and Cameroon.*

## INTRODUCTION

The Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have unarguably come to assume a central position in all aspects of human endeavors. Societal development and human progress have, in many respects, become highly dependent on them. This has been to the extent that, almost all developing nations are today investing huge resources and contracting various forms of partnerships with global influential institutions to (fully) acquire and apply these technologies (UNO 2014). As argued by Ka-

risiddapa (2004), in order to achieve sustainable development, all nations – particularly the developing countries – must imperatively view the concept of ICT as "an essential knowledge". In the same line of argument, the *UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* enthuses that the proliferation of ICTs and global interconnectedness have great potential not only to accelerate human progress and to bridge the digital divide, but equally to "develop knowledge societies, as does scientific and technological innovation across areas as diverse as medicine and energy" (cited in United Nation Public Administration Network, 2016).

In view of all these prospects, ICTs have progressively been applied in socio-cultural, economic as well as political human endeavors. The application of ICTs in the political domain is vividly illustrated by the e-Government paradigm which has phenomenally become global and a clear imperative for sociopolitical and economic development. Like their western counterparts, most African nations have embraced this paradigm (electronic government) as an infallible elixir of some of their economic, social and political dilemmas. In effect, many of these African nations have progressively been regarding e-government as having the immense potential to (i) stimulate economic growth, (ii) democratize the political space and (iii) facilitate governance by enhancing institutional capacity and facilitating citizen participation in the policy-making process as well as by increasing transparency for better management of resources. According to many observers, ICTs have been massively appropriated by Black African countries as a tool to shape and transform relations between the government, the citizens and other major socio-political entities (Akunyili, 2010; Omeire & Omeire, 2014).

However, despite these prospects, the implementation of e-government initiatives in many Black African countries has most often faced varied and complex challenges. According to some recent studies, only about 15% of these initiatives are successes. Over 35% of them are complete failures while the remaining 50% are partial failures (Heeks 2008; Kenhago 2014). In the same line of argument, Abede and Dawit (2010) note that the use of ICTs to deliver e-government services in most African countries continues to be very minimal – compared to other parts of the world. This has largely been attributed to the fact that much of Africa continues to relatively be a "technological desert". Such a state of affairs has been facilitated by such factors as poor infrastructures, "insignificant" or low economic development, low literacy rate and a wide range of socio-cultural issues. As insightfully contended by both Afro-centric and Euro-centric scholars, most Black African countries' efforts towards e-governance are limited to a weak web presence, including few fully fledged e-government web portals. All these indexes tend to suggest that, although an amount of progress seems to have been made by African countries, "there is [still] a long way to go, to bridge not only the North–South divide when it comes to e-government services but also among the various sub-regions" (Abede & Dawit 2010, p.1). Africa continues to be rated among the last continents in terms of application of e-governance.

A critical look at the immense literature devoted to the prospects and challenges of e-governance in Africa reveals that, most researchers and authors tend to adopt either a purely nationalist perspective or a global/panoramic perspective on the issue. Most of them have a monolithic view on e-government paradigm in Africa; as they predominantly conceive the failures or/and successes of e-government initiatives to be somehow similar across African nations. However, it will be expedient to underline the fact that African nations have been adopting relatively – or slightly – different approaches to e-governance. Though the dominant tendency has been for them to attempt to have a certain amount of web presence through the creation of e-government web portals, each African country has designed its own (customized) e-Government initiatives. In tandem with this, the implementation of the paradigm has inevitably – and perhaps slightly – varied across countries. A clear indication of this reality is the fact that series of

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