

# E-Government Growth Barriers in Sub-Saharan Africa

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## INTRODUCTION

E-government, as described by the World Bank, is the use of information and communications technologies (ICT) to transform government by making it more accessible, effective, and accountable to its citizens (InfoDev, 2004). E-government involves the utilization of technologies such as the Internet to improve the services, functions, and processes of governance (Heeks, 1999, 2001, 2002; Moon, 2002). Although, the Internet is vitally important for the process, it has to be pointed out here that e-government is more than establishing a Web server and hosting government sites (Sanchez, Koh, Kappelman, & Prybutok, 2003; Sharma and Gupta, 2003). In fact, Heeks (2001) describes e-government as i-governance or *integrated governance*, a process that permits the integration of both the processing of information by people and the use of communication technologies in achieving the objectives of governance. The United Nations Division for Public Economics and Public Administration and the American Society for Public Administration (UNDPEPA/ASPA) state “E-government is about opportunity...to provide cost effective services to the private sector...to enhance governance through improved access to accurate information and transparent, responsive, and democratic institutions” (UNDPEPA/ASPA, 2003, p. 6).

Furthermore, e-government is indeed an emerging model involving the citizenry and the state in such a way that the importance of citizen’s input in policy formulation and implementation is recognized and valued (Breen, 2000). Wimmer and Traummuller (2001) contend that the main objectives of e-government should include the following: (1) restructuring administrative functions and processes; (2) reducing and overcoming barriers to coordination and cooperation within the public administration; and (3) the monitoring of government performance. Similarly, the World Bank (InfoDev, 2004) provides a guideline for developing countries with respect to developing e-government.

The body asserts that e-government initiatives should target the following:

- Promote civic engagement by enabling the public to interact with government officials and vice versa
- Promote accountable and transparent governments in which the opportunities for corruption are reduced
- Provide a greater access to government information and activities
- Provide development opportunities, especially the sorts that benefit rural and traditionally underserved communities

Advances in ICT over the past decade have accelerated the diffusion of e-government practices in both developed countries and developing countries (Accenture, 2004; InfoDev, 2004). According to the UNPAN (2005) e-government survey, almost all the governments in the world have embraced one form of e-government or another. It goes without saying that many developed countries have incorporated sophisticated services while other nations are just beginning to understand the importance of such a concept in governance (Accenture, 2004). A majority of countries in Africa fall into the latter category. The limited use of ICT in governance in the disadvantaged regions of the world, including Sub-Saharan Africa—this is the region of Africa excluding the northern part of the continent and the Republic of South Africa—has resulted in generally low rankings on the various indices used to compare e-government readiness across nations and regions (UNPAN, 2005). Indeed, the e-government readiness score for the whole of Africa is 0.253, which is below the world’s average of 0.415.

Surprisingly, a report states that “the most innovative uses of the Internet in governance are appearing in the developing world” (InfoDev, 2004, p. 8) despite the prevalence of chronic limiting factors in the develop-

ing parts of the world including Africa. Another piece of good news is that many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have started to make efforts to “catch-up” in terms of adopting and using ICT products (Kaaya, 2003; Lal, 1999; Thomas, LeBlanc, Mbarika, & Meso, 2004; UNECA, 2004; UNPAN, 2005). This wind of change may be attributable to the fact that many African governments are beginning to accept the notion that ICT use in general and for governance in particular could hasten socioeconomic and political development (see, Heeks, 2002; Ifinedo, 2005a, 2005b; Thomas et al., 2004). That said, while development reports and research studies have discussed the poor showings of Sub-Saharan African region with regard to e-government readiness, the study of the literature indicates that few commentators have written about the sorts of factors negating the growth of e-government initiatives in the region. This article aims at contributing to the literature in that respect as it develops a conceptual model that highlights the barriers to the growth of e-government in Sub-Saharan Africa. Nigeria, the most populous country in the region was chosen for illustration purposes. Additionally, Ifinedo (2005a, 2005b) and Ifinedo and Uwadia (2005) have discussed e-government progress in the country, and this present work serves to complement these previous efforts. Next, the conceptual framework is presented.

**THE BARRIERS TO THE GROWTH OF E-GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES**

The conceptual model illustrated by Figure 1 will guide the discourse regarding the barriers to e-government

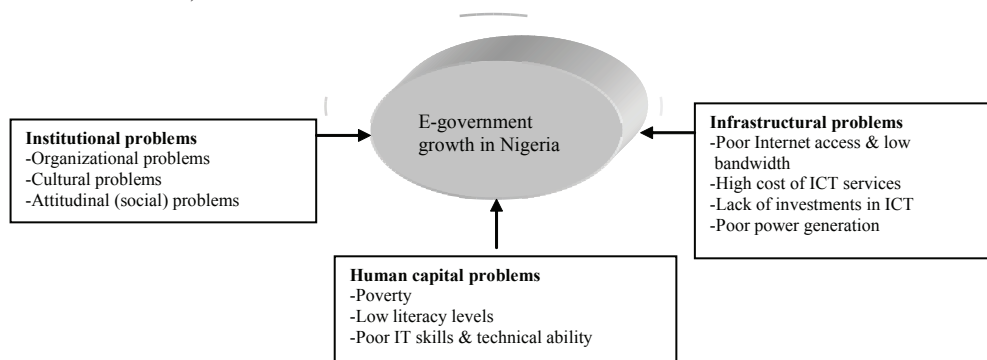
growth in Sub-Saharan Africa. As briefly noted earlier, this chapter considers perspectives from Nigeria. The framework draws from developmental reports of notable bodies such as the G8 DOT Force (2001), UN ICT Task Force (2004), and UNPAN (2005) that have described the barriers to ICT use in developing societies. These foregoing reports identified three broad categories of factors believed to be hampering the efforts of developing societies in making the most of ICT products for social and economic development. The three categories include the following: (1) infrastructural problems, that is, poor information and telecommunication technologies facilities; (2) institutional problems; and (3) human capital problems. For example, UNPAN (2005) listed poverty, low levels of literacy, lack of adequate infrastructure, high cost of ICT services, lack of investments, and poor institutional structures as some of the challenges for developing countries with respect to ICT use and adoption.

**Institutional Problems**

**Organizational Problems**

Effective communication and organizational skills are needed to maintain the vision, values, and aspirations of all stakeholders in an e-government initiative (Sharma & Gupta, 2003). This calls the role of government functionaries in Nigeria into question. Would they be sincere in implementing and managing the values of e-government properly? Do they understand the prerequisites for e-government? Will these functionaries not use ICTs for their own ends? The reality is that government agencies and officials in developing

*Figure 1. The conceptual model of the barriers facing e-government growth in Nigeria (Adapted from: G8 DOT Force, 2001; UNPAN, 2005)*



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