

Chapter 42

An Assessment of E–Government in a West African Country: The Case of Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Governments around the world are using e-government to improve their modes of governance and the delivery of public services to citizens. Similarly, almost all countries are assessed and ranked by international organizations (such as the United Nations) on their level of e-government development. This paper examines Nigeria's e-government development rankings in light of the government's efforts to develop the country's infrastructure and human capital. While Nigeria is one of the richest country in Africa and has the one of the fastest growing ICT market in the continent, it is ranked low in Africa and globally in terms of e-government provision of public services to its citizens. The analysis suggests that more efforts should be made by the government to address the barriers to effective deployment of e-government initiatives in Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

Several countries have realized the importance of adopting e-government strategies as a means of improving the delivery of government services. The United Nations describes e-government as the use of internet technology for exchanging information; providing services; and transacting with citizens, businesses, and other arms of government (UN E-government Survey, 2012; 2010). Additionally,

the World Bank states that e-government is the use of information communication technology (ICT) to transform government by making it more accessible, effective, and accountable to its citizens (World Bank, 2008; InfoDev, 2003; Ifinedo, 2006). ICT comprises of the use of technologies, such as, the internet to improve the services, functions, and processes of governance. Thus, e-government can be a mechanism that involves the citizenry and the state, where the importance

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of citizen input in policy formulation and implementation is recognized and valued. Among the main objectives of e-government are the following: restructuring of administrative functions and processes; reducing and overcoming barriers to coordination and cooperation within the public administration; and the monitoring of government performance (Agunloye, 2010; Ifinedo, 2006). Thus, e-government engenders transparency and accountability, creates room for speedy information dissemination, and fosters greater citizens' participation and improved services in public administration.

Almost all countries in the world have embraced one form of e-government or another. However, while developed countries have incorporated sophisticated services in their e-government models, developing countries, most of which are in Africa, are just beginning to realize the importance of such a concept in governance. Particularly for developing countries, adoption of e-government initiatives is important because it has the potential to promote civic engagement by enabling the public to interact with government officials, and increase transparency whereby the opportunities for corruption are reduced, and there are greater opportunities for development (Asogwa, 2011; Ifinedo, 2006).

According to UN E-Government Survey (2012, 2010), governments around the world are at various stages of e-government development and implementation. However, it seems that the African region lags behind other regions of the world in terms of e-government indicators. In recent years, most African countries have been motivated to adopt e-government even while confronting a myriad of challenges, from poor infrastructure to relatively low levels of literacy and high corruption (Kaaya, 2009; Eytayo, 2008). In Nigeria, these challenges are compounded by the fact that it is the most populous country in Africa (with 170 million people), with a lack of basic infrastructures (water, electricity, roads, etc.) and a high rate of corruption. In addition, Nigeria

is faced with the "digital divide", whereby there is significant gap between the limited few who have access to modern ICT and those who do not. This means that for e-government to succeed in Nigeria, the government must work towards universal access to ICT by addressing the issue of the digital divide amongst others.

Against this backdrop, this paper examines the progress made by the Nigerian government towards effective e-government implementation. This paper examines the efforts of the Nigerian government as it tries to create a suitable environment for effective e-government implementation, and identifies deficiencies with respect to Nigeria's ranking in Africa and globally. Insights into how some of the deficiencies can be addressed are discussed. The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: Section 2 presents the background of the study. In Section 3, the methodology of the study is presented. Section 4 presents the theoretical overview which serves as a lens through which the study is based. Section 5 presents the challenges and benefits of e-government for Nigeria. Section 6 discusses the various initiatives of the Nigerian government towards e-government implementation. In Section 7, Nigeria's e-government ranking is examined and benchmarked against some West African countries, as well as across Africa and globally. Section 8 discusses the findings of the study, while Section 9 concludes the paper.

2. BACKGROUND

Nigeria, a country located in West Africa became independent in 1960 after years of colonization by the United Kingdom. Table 1 presents summary information for Nigeria. Nigeria has had several military coups (six were successful and there were several unsuccessful attempts (Ifinedo, 2006; Azeez et al., 2012; Ezeani, 2010). The country returned for the fourth time in its history to democratic rule in 1999, and has been embracing e-government as a tool for political, social and

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