Chapter 99

Towards an Interactive E-Government System in Sub-Saharan Africa:
Prospects and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

Governments worldwide, including those in Africa, are embracing the promises and prospects of electronic service delivery (or e-government). In particular, countries in Sub-Saharan Africa are moving towards adopting system-wide Integrated Communication Technology (ICT) and Enterprise Content Management (ECM) systems to support Electronic Government (EG) services. There are reasons to believe that Africa stands at the threshold of a new experience in this century, but there are also considerable challenges ahead. This chapter examines some of the prospects and challenges of the continent's adoption of Electronic Government. The discussion focuses on the rationale and characteristics of e-government in Africa, as well as its strengths and weaknesses, with particular reference to two countries in the region – Ghana and Kenya. The chapter concludes with a synopsis of some of the key issues as well as salient lessons to highlight the broader future challenges and prospects of e-government in Africa.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the prospects and challenges of adopting system-wide Integrated Communication Technology (ICT) and Enterprise Content Management (ECM) systems to support Electronic Government (EG) services in developing countries, with a specific focus on sub-Saharan Africa. The context of this chapter is a belief that Africa stands at the threshold of a new political and economic experience in this century, as evidenced by its thriving and rapidly growing urban centres, six of the world's 10 fastest-growing countries, and rapid deployment and adoption of Integrated

Communications Technologies (ICT). From the arts to modern social media and entrepreneurship, new industries are emerging on the continent (BBC Special Report, 2012; Conteh & Wylie 2007) at unprecedented rates that have sparked confidence and optimism in the prospect for this dynamic continent.

Positive indicators point to Africa being on a path to taking a more prominent place in the global economy, with an increasingly business-friendly climate, and a private sector that is increasingly attracting new investment as capital inflows have overtaken foreign aid inflows to the continent (Economic Commission for Africa, 2010). The latent capacity in the continent is evidenced by this land mass containing 55 nations, a population of over a billion people, and home to six of the world's ten fastest growing economies. The rate of economic growth in Africa is projected to reach 7 percent by 2015 and is now approaching that of Asia's during the high-noon of the "tiger economies" (United Nations Development Program, 2008), which leads economic experts to believe that Africa is on the brink of an economic takeoff, not unlike China 30 years ago, and India 20 years ago. African governments are also increasingly recognizing and embracing market solutions, with the promotion of local entrepreneurship to develop economic growth and activity. However, given the belief that economic prosperity is preceded by the development and adoption of inclusive government institutions, which was significantly lacking in sub-Saharan Africa, we believe the question is whether Africa will leverage these emerging potentials and opportunities in their respective populations through the development and adoption of eGovernment to promote inclusive government practices and institutions.

We argue in this chapter that international and national investment dollars are attracted to societies that have inclusive government institutions that engage their citizens in democratic and civic discourse and activities. While the availability of ICT technologies to support and deliver eGovernment applications is more accessible to these developing countries than ever in the past, African countries could achieve a higher level of civil society by marrying these inclusive government practices and institutions with ICT technologies that are available on both the institution and citizen levels. Of course, underlying the success of any e-Government initiatives is a sustained investment in ICT infrastructures, which have become the prerequisite of broad-based development in the 21st century just as the railway was to Europe and North America in the 19th century, and colonized countries in the early to mid-twentieth century. Africa's prospects in the present century could be significantly enhanced by the nature of the continent's adoption of Integrated Communication Technology (ICT) and Enterprise Content Management (ECM) systems in support of Electronic Government (EG) services.

The world is becoming increasingly digitized. From 2000 to 2011, the number of individuals who access the Internet has grown by 480.4% worldwide, with close to 80% of the citizens in the industrialized world currently accessing the Internet (Internet World Stats, 2011). As individuals become more accustomed to this in their private lives, they have begun to look to their government for a similar level of technological competency. Governments worldwide, including the governments in developing countries, are in turn embracing the promises and prospects of electronic service delivery (or e-government).

Numerous authors have made the case for the improvement of public service delivery through effective use of e-government applications (Coe, Paquet, & Roy 2001, Daniel & Ward, 2006, Janssen, Kars, & Fleur van Veenstra, 2007). ICT and ECM systems will enhance not only the transparency, efficiency and effectiveness of public management in Africa, but it will also democratize public policy as citizens gain increasing access to critical information about social and economic policies (Timonen, O'Donnell, & Humphreys, 2003). E-government will also expand the forum

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