Chapter II
The Development of National ICT Policy in Kenya:
The Influence of Regional Institutions and Key Stakeholders

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ABSTRACT

The role that information and communication technologies (ICT) could play in socio-economic development has been recognized by governments worldwide. The most important starting point in most countries is a national ICT policy. In many developing countries, ICT policy development has increasingly become a participatory process. This is largely as a result of implementing policy reforms, with a strong emphasis on governance systems. This chapter is a case study of the development of national information and communication technology policy in Kenya, the influences of regional institutions and their products, and the role of the private sector and civil society. The chapter is based on a study that was carried out by reviewing existing relevant documents and by interviewing key persons involved in national and regional ICT policy in Kenya. The chapter also presents the challenges, conclusions, recommendations, and future research directions based on the case.

INTRODUCTION

The role that information and communication technologies (ICTs) could play in socio-economic development has been recognized by governments worldwide. These technologies have been seen as harbingers of prosperity as they can help guarantee access to global markets, enhance wealth creation and generation of high quality employment, enable direct foreign investment and e-commerce, and allow process innovation (new ways of doing old things), which increases productivity and creates new value added and may generate innovative socio-economic activities (new ways of doing new things). In addition, ICT represents a new factor of production, along with land, labour, and capital, which can lead to socio-economic restructuring. Finally, with smaller, faster, and cheaper ICT, the cost-to-performance ratio of its application has declined considerably, thereby raising productivity. In summary, ICTs have come to be regarded as the engines of the new or digital economy and have

been key in creating a new world order of digital *haves* and *have nots*, commonly referred to as the *digital divide.*

As a result of the realization of the potential impact of ICT on socio-economic growth, the development of national ICT policies has been high on the agenda of many developing nations for the last one to two decades. In most developing countries, ICT policy development has been a new phenomenon, with many countries often grappling in the dark on the process and its outcomes. In practice, most countries have relied on the experiences and outcomes of other countries. They also have relied on recommended frameworks and models by regional bodies. Some of the United Nations agencies (such as UNECA and UNESCO), and other bilateral agencies, have committed considerable funding on work on national information and ICT policies.

This chapter is a case study of the development of national information and communication technology policy in Kenya, the influences of regional institutions and their products, and the role of the private sector and civil society. The chapter is based on a study that was carried out by reviewing existing relevant documents, and by interviewing key persons involved in national and regional ICT policy in Kenya. The chapter also presents the challenges, conclusions, recommendations, and future research directions based on the case.

BACKGROUND

This background section briefly describes key models that have been used or may be used to explain the policy process. Throughout the chapter, the author takes an interactive political perspective of the policy process. The section ends with an outline of the major stakeholders who should participate in a national ICT policy process and their roles in the process.

There are many models to explain the policy process. The most dominant in the last three decades has been the linear model, based on the traditional breakdown of process into stages. It assumes that policy process consists of various stages: agenda setting, policy formulation, implementation, evalu-

ation, and so forth (DeLeon, 1999). This model has been criticized for a number of weaknesses. Key among these is that the separation of policy formulation and policy implementation enables policy makers to escape responsibility and that a policy decision (the outcome of policy formulation) is inadequate to bring about policy change. In other words, the key weakness, like all other stage models, is the separation of process into distinct and separable stages.

Alternative models have been proposed to address some of the key weaknesses of the linear model. Key among these is the interactive model, which views all the stages of the policy process as interactive rather than linear. For example, Thomas and Grindle (1990) view policy change will always lead to a reaction. There will always be resistance by those who are against it or those who will not benefit from its implementation. This resistance leads to a pressure for change, which can be exercised at any stage of the policy process. This can, in turn, result in the alteration or even reversal of the policy. The interactive model can be extended further by viewing the interaction from different perspectives. The most popular is the political perspective. It assumes that actors in the policy process, whether individuals or groups, have ideas and interests, and that policy outcomes are shaped by a process of interactions in which actors mobilize their sources of power to pursue their ideas and interests. For example, a government will not support a policy outcome that may remove it from power or make it loose votes.

Other more sophisticated perspectives can be used to understand the policy process, its outcomes in terms of policy decisions and the context in which this takes place. One such perspective is Giddens' (1984) social theory, which has been extensively used in the information systems literature. Giddens' social theory has the following key ideas (summarized and paraphrased for clarity):

- **Human beings are knowledgeable agents:** The traditional *objectivism* fails to appreciate the complexity of social action produced by actors operating with knowledge and understanding as part of their consciousness. The extent of people's knowledge of the world is bordered

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