

Chapter 12

The Ghana Community Network Services Ltd (GCNet): Implementation Challenges

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ABSTRACT

Clift (2006) confirms that, “The information-age, led by Internet content, software, technology, and connectivity, is changing society and the way we can best meet public challenges. E-democracy, e-Governance, and public net-work are three interrelated concepts that will help us map out our opportunity to more effectively participate, govern, and do public work.”

This chapter pays particular attention to the e-Governance concept example with emphasis on Ghana’s benchmark trade facilitation e-governance initiative, the GCNET, which has emboldened the government’s e-government programme. The reader has the benefit of knowing about the initiative’s genesis and implementation challenges including the obvious challenges of creation and displaying a will to change within the government- the provision of political will; overcoming the resistance to change, and creating an ICT- aware-citizenry. The question is whether this initiative has been an enabler, as ICT tools are meant to be, in positively developing Ghana’s trade facilitation process.

Views from some stake holders; attempts to improve the system and recommendations are also considered.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-60960-489-9.ch012

INTRODUCTION

As emphasized by Bertucci (2007),

“The Information age is having a dramatic impact on governance; governments worldwide are undergoing a re-engineering process known as ‘government reinvention’. The goal of such a process, in which ICTs are playing a key role, is to improve efficiency and to deliver more transparent, high quality government services to its citizens.....ICTs should therefore be used as a strategic instrument to help achieve the Millennium Development Goals and to implement the WSIS Plan of Action.

Public Sector reforms throughout the world embodying ICTs are part of an ongoing effort to build trust in defining the terms of social contract between the diverse groups that make up a society.”

He observed also, that the world community is concerned about, “the African continent... Because of its dire need of resources.”

Within the overall framework of governance reform, electronic-Governance initiatives are undertaken to serve some basic needs:

Firstly, it is to provide valuable information and services to citizens in a less cumbersome manner; secondly, the first aim leading to an accountable, efficient, cost-effective and transparent governance environment.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have therefore, been identified as keys to trade facilitation. Indeed, by adopting ICTs and reducing the complexity of international trade and minimizing the transaction costs, participants in international trade can save billions of dollars every year and benefit from an increased security and transparency in supply chains (UNECE(6b.), 2006).

ICTs may be applied to any of the trade processes or procedures, including the buying and selling process, the customs clearance process,

the payment process, and the transportation and logistics process.

Additionally, ICTs may play a pivotal role in dissemination and using trade information by traders and in promoting their products and services globally. The primary tools used are various portals or gateways that rely on Electronic Data Interchange.

The United Nations (2008) evaluates the application of Information and Communications Technologies by governments of the 192 UN member states and in its 2008 report released recently, Africa, in addition to the Caribbean, Central and South America and the Southern Asian Regions were missing from the list of top 35 countries. The West African region had the lowest regional index in the Survey. The region scored a 0.2110 in 2008 as compared with the world average of 0.4514. Cape Verde (0.4158) continues to lead the region, with Nigeria (0.3063) and Ghana (0.2997) taking the top three spots. It should be noted that the majority of the countries in this region continue to lag at the bottom because of low scores on the education, infrastructure and web measurement indices.

Mamosi (2007) notes how recent efforts by the African Training and Research Centre in Administration for Development to enhance “good governance” has led to the strengthening of institutional capacity of the African governance system, especially that of regional, central and local government institutions, to improve policy-making, coordination and delivery of public goods and services using information communication technologies.

This involves partnerships among stakeholders, complying with high standards of integrity, efficiency and effectiveness, transparency, accountability, and responding to the needs expressed by their constituencies.

The main strategic goals are to engage government as a catalytic force of social and economic development, empowering its institutions with ICT to work together with civil society and the

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