

Chapter 13

ICTs for Improved Service Delivery: A Case of Smart Switch Card of the Social Safety Nets Programs in Botswana

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ABSTRACT

In Botswana the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) smart switch card system, an offshoot of the Universal Electronic Payment System (UEPS), was recently introduced. It is a worldwide communication device that is digital in providing information to the users. In Botswana, it serves to administer food and basic needs offered to the vulnerable people as one of the pillars of development in terms of catering for the needy. Furthermore, it is used to empower orphans, destitute, and HIV/AIDS home-based patients in the Social Safety Nets (SSN) programs, replacing all the other strategies that were used previously. The previous program was a manual system whereby beneficiaries were getting their social grants through lining up at their district councils' office doorstep for attendants to use the roll call. The old system demanded commercial businesses to tender for supply of items to the vulnerable population, but it posed some challenges and frustrations to beneficiaries and the government.

The administration of SSN using ICT by the government of Botswana is a deliberate plan towards achieving the goals aligned to social justice and poverty reduction for social and economic development. The UEPS developed by NET 1 Technologies Inc. is used internationally to enhance the management and administration of Social Safety Nets. This form of ICT was explicitly selected for Botswana's program to counterbalance the challenges and further empower beneficiaries to access their basic needs baskets

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through the card. The card works equally and more like the banking system, sparing patients long drives and walking to obtain their social needs and medication. It also facilitates narrowing of the gap between the poor and the rich thus promoting equity in the society.

The adoption of ICT smart switch cards in Botswana as a new strategy is to offset the socio-economic constraints experienced by the vulnerable people in the society. This chapter provides background of UEPS ICT smart switch card, setting-the-stage, project overview, challenges, and further readings on similar themes related to ICT usage in the social program.

BACKGROUND

The Universal Electronic Payment system (UEPS) is an Information and Communication Technology (ICT) that was developed by NET 1 Technologies Inc International. Smart Switch Card (SSC) an offshoot of UEPS technology. The card is now used in several countries worldwide particularly developing nations. For example, the technology can be found in South Africa, Nigeria, Tanzania, Namibia, Vietnam, Columbia, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and the USA.

In Botswana, the NET 1 technologies an international organization has made a joint venture with Capricorn Investment Holdings (PTY) Limited to form a company named Smart Switch Card Botswana in 2006. The goal of the new company is to provide citizens with information and communication technology (ICT), namely, smart card. The technology is to help people access financial services, enable the purchasing of basic needs by the less privileged people. Its top management structure comprises of the director and the managing directors who are citizens of Botswana.

The smart switch card technology was introduced in Botswana in 2008 as a piloting project by the government through the Ministry of Local Government, Department of Social Services. The government saw the need to enhance the administration of social safety nets to the vulnerable people through the use of electronic card. According to the Department of Social Services of the Ministry of Local Government, currently, there are 96,000

poor people nationwide, approximately 5.6 percent of Botswana's 1.7 million people who are categorized as destitute, orphans and home-based patients. These are the "marginalized" people who exist because of several social factors in the society including the scourge of HIV/AIDS. The ICT smart switch card provides these vulnerable people with the means to access their basic needs through a quicker means like any other person in the society. The card also provides the government with means to obtain relevant data about distribution of basic needs to beneficiaries.

Smart Switch Card Botswana (2007) is suitable for use in different programs including healthcare, banking, pension programs, micro-finance, insurance and transportation programs. Smart Switch Card Botswana (2007) further stated that, this form of technology is used to provide affordable banking solutions for the underprivileged population in the society. It provides technologies that are within the means (inexpensive), helpful and effective as well as user-friendly to the poor.

Setting the Stage

The prevailing circumstances of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the incessant droughts and the consequent poverty and poor livelihoods in Botswana stress the need for digital technology intervention in order to sustain the welfare of the populace in the country. HIV/AIDS is a universal social problem taking its turn as the most dreadful disease that has adverse effect on social welfare of many people world wide (World Health Organization, 2009;

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