Chapter 52
Implications of e-Government in Botswana in the Realm of e-Participation: Case of Francistown

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ABSTRACT

Countries the world over have drawn e-Government interventions placing much emphasis on erecting affluent ICT infrastructures, institutional, legal, and regulatory frameworks. However, most of these interventions lack carefully-drawn e-Government awareness strategies, which translates into most of these interventions being typically unknown by the general public and causing low e-Participation. This chapter presents the novel interventions that are being authored towards robust e-Government development for Botswana where e-Government development is at the very intial stages. Using exploratory and empirical study of Francistown and surrounding rural areas, the chapter presents a critical analysis of the state of e-Government preparedness and further presents the current status of e-Government adoption in Botswana. This study establishes that whilst many e-Government strategies are being authored in Botswana, the e-Participation component has not been adequately considered in drawing the different e-Government interventions. This is negatively impacting on the overall anticipated value prepositions for e-Government implementation.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-1740-7.ch052

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INTRODUCTION

Governments throughout the world are mandated with decision-making, managing the different national resources and coordinating the socio-economic business processes on behalf of the general citizenry. Recently, there has been a paradigm shift where this decision-making, management and coordination is done with input from citizens, businesses, and the civil society at large. This participatory governance is being made possible with the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), a phenomenon called electronic government (e-Government). There have generally been no commonly-agreed upon definition of e-Government and several authors have attempted to define it strictly with reference to their domains. Although e-Government is often defined as "online government" or "Internet-based government", many non-Internet "electronic government" technologies such as telephone, fax, short message service (SMS), multimedia messaging service (MMS), wireless networks, Bluetooth, television and radio-based delivery of government services can be used in the context of e-Government (Antiroiko and Malkia, 2006; Heeks, 2004; Ngulube, 2007). Implementation of e-Government centers on the use of ICT, provision of an efficient public service, and promotion of participatory/responsive decision/policy-making. E-Government facilitates the reaping of maximum advantage and value out of ICTs to support socio-economical and political development with a view to improve the quality of public services, and provide an avenue for citizens to interact with government institutions and processes in a democratic, transparent and equitable manner (Ngulube, 2007).

It cannot be overemphasized that proper use of e-Government applications offers a plethora of socio-economic development opportunities. Fuller utilization (applying for government services such as passports, accessing policy and law documents, taking advantage of interactive platforms and forums to communicate with political leaders, accessing government services anywhere, anytime, etc.) of e-Government may potentially create value on the part of the citizen. This entails that citizens can collaboratively participate in decision/policy making through the use of ICTs (e-Participation). Further, implementation of e-Government enables citizens and businesses to access information and services (such as accessing business opportunities in the public sector, utilization of e-Procurement channels, etc.) in a faster and efficient manner. This may change people's general perception on government which has been that governments are complex, mammoth bureaucratic establishments with a set of information silos that erect barriers to access of information and make the provision of services cumbersome and frustrating (Coleman, 2006).

Apart from the general benefits of e-Government mentioned above, it is a well known fact that it can also result in huge cost savings to governments, businesses, and citizens alike; increase transparency and reduce corrupt activities in public service delivery. e-Government has the potential to reduce the cost of providing efficient public services as demonstrated in the following cases: a) with a total volume of over US$44bn transactions done over the G2B Korean e-Government platform[1], a total of US$4.5bn cost savings were realised in 2006; b) in India, US$3.6bn worth of e-Procurement transactions were done using the Indian e-Government platform, resulting into cost savings of over US$238.2mln in 2005, c) in Brazil, 51% savings in transaction costs and 25.5.% reduction in prices were realised during a period from the year 2000 to 2006, and d) in Romania, 650000 electronic auctions were done between the year 2002 and 2006 inclusive, resulting into cost savings of over US$178mln. Not only in cost savings, e-Government may also reduce corruption levels as presented in a large portion of e-Government literature in an anecdotal perspective. However, several concrete cases have demonstrated that e-Government does contribute to the reduction of

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