Preface

Although still considered to be in the nascent stage, e-Government has leapfrogged other novel applications such as e-Commerce and e-Learning following the dot.com evolution in as far as attracting researchers’ and practitioners’ interest is concerned. This can be evidenced by the increase in the number of publications that have appeared in journals of high repute aiming to investigate the diverse aspects of e-Government. With regards to implementation front, the number of countries the world over that have jumped onto the bandwagon of implementing e-Government attests to the importance of e-Government in improving public service delivery. Integration of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) into the public service delivery platforms has a lot of contextual issues that need to be addressed if e-Government were to be successfully implemented.

Successful implementation of e-Government has a myriad of advantages regarding different tenets of the socio-economic hierarchy. For example, on the part of citizens, e-Government enables them to participate or be in tune with decision-making as they can access government information ubiquitously. It also enables citizens to pervasively access e-Government information and services without the need to visit a physical government office. Further, e-Government enables citizens to access public services at a reduced cost and allows them to participate in decision-making processes regardless of their socio-economic standing (i.e. governance inclusiveness). On the part of the government, among other benefits, e-Government ensures that public services are delivered to the citizens and businesses at a reduced cost, increases the levels of efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery, government departments and line ministries can easily and timely integrate information into their decision-making processes, and there are increased chances that corruption which has a detrimental effect on public service delivery is mitigated.

Despite the pronounced advantages, if e-Government is not implemented carefully, it may translate into a sizable number of disadvantages such as the corrosion of local culture in environments where culture influences behavior and livelihoods of individuals. This can be achieved because citizens may have access to cyber space and therefore may be susceptible to pornography, psychological or emotional bullying in social networking sites, and other negative vices. E-Government implementation may culminate into foregoing other socio-economic developmental programs whose opportunity cost would be too high to bear. Also, e-Government leads to massive retrenchments of most of the public service workforce, thereby translating into an increased unemployment rate. Further, full-scale e-Government implementation may mean that those citizens hit by the digital divide may be more secluded (e-Exclusion) from the governance value chains because of their lack of access to ICTs. It is thus evident that lack of a careful contextually-aware e-Government design culminates into pronounced negatives that may mask the whole purpose of e-Government and inclusive governance.
Preface

In order to amass the different advantages of e-Government, it is important that there are pre-requisites put in place to promote the establishment of an enabling or conducive environment for successful development of e-Government. Such an environment needs to consider the multi-dimensional aspects of e-Government such as the need to put in equilibrium the demand and supply of e-Government interventions, the managerial (non-technical) and technical requirements, the people aspect, citizens’ buy-in, organizational and institutional e-Government readiness, etc. The establishment of an enabling environment calls for massive investments in providing the socio-technical infrastructure and managerial team which comes at a cost. This entails that there are stakeholders, be it the government or the private sector, who expect a return on their investments. For the part of the government, the return expected is negligible as governments look at e-Government as a socio-good for increased e-Inclusiveness of its citizens in the decision-making platforms, providing requisite and ready access to government information, reduced cost in public service provision, increased efficiency and effectiveness, etc. if the major stakeholder is a private entity, the scenario is different as these require tangible returns in terms of financial gain. This brings into perspective the question of funding models of e-Government and ultimately the design models used in the design of e-Government implementation consoles. It is for this reason that some of the chapters in this book touch on conceptual frameworks and models that can be used to guide e-Government research and implementation.

Given the aforementioned advantages emanating from successful e-Government implementation, many countries from both the developing and developed world contexts have jumped onto the bandwagon to implement e-Government. The implementation of e-Government has been motivated, in most of the cases, out of the desire to keep up with the Joneses. If this is the case, countries find themselves implementing e-Government without a clearly and carefully-thought implementation strategy designed with due reference to the contextual characteristics of the local area. This ultimately leads into the ultimate failure of e-Government. It is thus without saying that there is need for an indispensable reference book which provides cases of e-Government design and development from both the developed and developed world contexts.

The different contextual issues that need to be considered when designing e-Government implementation programs call for sharing of experiences in endeavors to consider the different contextual issues in both the developed and developing world contexts. The cognition of the fact that “context needs to be referenced and incorporated into e-Government designs” may not be adequate for designing responsive e-Government programs in different contextual settings. For this reason, this book intends to share experiences from the designing or implementation of e-Government worldwide. The chapters in the book show a geographical spread spanning from USA, Africa, Europe, South America and Asia – representing both the developing and developed world contexts.

The first chapter by Kelvin Bwalya and Stephen Mutula charts the current trends and prospects in e-Government research at different hierarchical arrangements. The chapter brings out the key and emerging issues in e-Government both from the technical and non-technical perspective. It outlines the key stakeholders and infrastructure needed for effervescent e-Government development. The chapter opines that e-Government presents technology as an enabler for responsive and ubiquitous public service delivery.

The second chapter by Bongani discusses the usefulness of e-Government in facilitating an environment for electronic democracy and effervescent socio-economic development. The chapter probes the challenges faced (especially in the Zimbabwe context) with regards to asymmetric public information, institutionalization and diffusion efforts in aligning e-Government to overall public service delivery.
The chapter ends by concluding that the inherent challenges faced in infusing e-Government into overall public service delivery platforms is not a technology issue but goes down to institutionalization and perception of individual users.

Merwin et al. explore the opportunities and challenges of using Web 2.0 as an e-Government platform and explore the concept of communication opportunity divide in Chapter 3. The chapter explores the challenges that non-English speakers experience in attempting to access e-Government content on Web 2.0 platforms since most of these platforms are entirely in English. Recommendations are given on how language challenges can be overcome in multilingual communities to achieve universal access to public services through e-Government Web 2.0 platforms.

The fourth chapter by Ayanso and Moyers explores the proliferation of social media in the public service. The chapter posits that social media presents opportunities where governments are able to actively engage with the public and monitor their existing services for continuous improvements. The chapter essentially explores existing as well as emerging platforms, applications, and tools that can be used by the public sector in various contextual settings and finally examines the critical challenges the public sector faces in integrating social media in its processes and services.

The fifth chapter by Eilu looks at opportunities presented mobile phones as voting platforms in the realm of e-Voting in the Uganda context. The chapter brings out the process that has been made so far in e-Voting and comments on the extent to which this impacts on advancing the overall principles of a democracy.

Terán, in chapter 6, introduces the concept of SmartParticipation as a concept for encouraging citizen’s participation in governance through Recommender Systems. This chapter extends the concept of using Web 2.0 platforms as e-Government platforms as introduced in Chapter 3, especially in a dynamic environment. The chapter specifically looks at how information overload on social networking sites can easily be avoided using Recommender Systems or other related technologies with overall goal of enhancing democracy and e-Government aspirations.

Chapter 7 by Olasina looks at the perceptions and aspirations of e-Government in Nigeria. The chapter presents cases which bring the contextual challenges and opportunities of using e-Government on a large scale in Nigeria. The chapter highlights the contemporary issues of e-Government adoption in Nigeria and suggests a link between the citizens’ negative perceptions and distrust of government in general and their hesitance and reluctance to embrace e-Government in particular.

Chapter 8 by Bwalya, Sebina and Zulu explores the alignment of Freedom of Information (FOI) to the overall e-Government design, especially in the context of Botswana. The chapter posits that the delay in adopting FOI in Botswana incapacitates the ability of state actors to exhibit acceptable levels of lucidity and ingenuity during their delivery of public services and in turn promotes a culture of sluggishness which serves to promote the current existing information asymmetry. The chapter concludes by asserting that the alignment of FOI to overall e-Government design will open avenues for emerging Open Government Partnerships (OGP) and to further develop a platform for the development of electronic democracy in the country.

Chapter 9 by Hussin discusses how Electronic Records (e-Records) Management can be aligned to e-Government design, with a key focus on Malaysia Judiciary. The chapter presents the current status of technology use in the court environment and highlights various international and national requirements and best practices of Electronic Records Management and Court Management to protect the reliability, accuracy, authenticity and the trustworthiness of electronic records as evidence.
In Chapter 10, Bwalya, Sebina and Zulu discuss the alignment of Knowledge Management (KM) and e-Records in the design of e-Government with a special focus on Botswana. This chapter is a direct follow-up of content discussed in Chapter 9 by Hussin. The chapter posits that while KM can positively contribute to the entrenchment of e-Government in the public sector of Botswana, the application of KM is still in its infancy as the concept has yet to take root in the public sector.

Chapter 11 by Carstens and Stockman focuses on how e-Government transparency and accountability can be achieved given the ubiquitous online environments. The chapter explores ways on how to better engage citizens in order to achieve the overall aspirations of e-Government.

Bwalya, in Chapter 12, discusses the different methodological approaches that are used in investigating the multi-dimensional aspects of e-Government in heterogeneous environments. The chapter intends to bring out the inherent entities with regards to measuring any aspects of e-Government and to also present a synoptic overview of the different methodological approaches have been utilised in both developed and less developed countries with regard to measuring e-Government.

Vasileios, Usoro and Dimitrios explore the use of social computing as a tool to improve the interactions between the government and other parties. The chapter proposes a conceptual model that will measure e-Government 2.0 adoption by combining known information technology theories.

In Chapter 14, Lee and Lai explore the concept of mobile government (m-Government) as an extension of e-Government where government information is accessed ubiquitously using mobile devices. This chapter examines an e-Government and m-Government Component Assessment Cube Framework for value assessment of both e-Government and m-Government information technology project implementations.

Chapter 15 by Leone and Biancofiore explores how cloud computing can be embedded in the design of e-Government applications. The chapter specifically looks at the Digital Agenda of Italy and how this is aligned to the overall policies of the European Union. On the basis of the benchmarking of the best practices, the chapter provides recommendations for effective implementation of Google Apps as a sustainable cloud computing solution to foster staff’s continuing professional and personal development in Italian municipalities.

In Chapter 16, Irene Bernhard explores five case studies of the implementation of contact centers in Swedish municipalities with a focus on incentives for inclusive e-Government. The chapter posits that the implementation of municipal contact centers can thus be seen as indicating incentives for local e-democracy and a step towards inclusive e-government, although there is still a need to go further in this direction.

Chapter 17 by Rodríguez Bolívar, Alcaide Muñoz and López Hernández analyze the research efforts and directions in the field of e-Government performed in developing countries as well as past experiences in the implementation of e-Government in developing countries to learn some lessons for improving future implementation of e-Government, which could help to achieve more transparent, participative and democratic societies.

The final chapter of this book, Chapter 18, by Sáez-Martín et al., analyzes the transparency achieved and the progress still needed to be made by Dominican Republic municipalities with regards to complying with the requirements of the law on public information management. The research results presented in this chapter highlight deficiencies in certain areas of online public information disclosure. There is no unanimity as to the area and the content in which more disclosure is still required and that population size, economic capacity and electoral turnout are all factors that affect the online dissemination of public information by local governments in the Dominican Republic.
We believe that this book is an indispensable and germane resource in e-Government research and provides insights into contemporary and future research endeavors.

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