The Prospects for eGovernment and eGovernance in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Case Study of Zambia

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ABSTRACT

eGovernance and eGovernment are critical tools for Good governance and economic development, and are therefore critical for Highly Indebted Poor Countries, a majority of which are in Sub-Saharan Africa. This article reviews literature in order to discuss the prospects of eGovernance and eGovernment in Sub-Saharan Countries, and chooses the nation of Zambia as an in-depth case study. Issues of investment climate, market structure, infrastructural capacity, social contexts and political and cultural resistance factors are identified as impediments but also key components (if well understood and tackled) for effective initiation and implementation of eGovernance and eGovernment projects.


INTRODUCTION

Good government and governance practices contribute to economic development and the spread of the benefits of growth to people in countries everywhere. Increasingly, societies are grasping the linkages between information, information technology, and economic growth (Krishna & Walsham, 2005; Bhatnagar, 2002). Flor (2001), for example, asserts, “We are now in the information age, where knowledge is a critical resource and information is a primary commodity. Information poor societies, therefore, also become the resource poor societies” (p. 4).

The digital age, moreover, has opened avenues for the enhancement of government’s traditional activities and the improvement of governmental efficiency through eGovernment. However, even as the world faces regional economic inequality, information communication technology (ICT) creates its own form of glaring inequality: the digital divide. Consequently, economically disenfranchised nations face
simultaneous challenges in the governance and the digital domains. Numerous people in developing countries do not have access to ICT and there is a large gap between the elite, who can afford the technology, and the poor who cannot (Basu, 2004). Table 1 below illustrates the digital divide at the global level. The overall availability of, and the general public’s access to, ICT are factors that help determine a country’s readiness for both eGovernment and eGovernance.

Given the critical role that technology (particularly ICT) plays in enhancing development; enhancing governance through transparency and increased participation to improving market and government efficiency through increased and easy access to information (Krishna & Walsham, 2005; Bhatnagar 2002), it is important to investigate the prospects of the development of eGovernance and eGovernment in countries that are striving to fight poverty and achieve development. While ICT enhances development, its adoption is influenced by several factors which span beyond the technology itself. For instance, governments in SSA, like in the developing world in general, are weighed down with government inefficiency and corruption, which can be mitigated by ICT through the delivery of information and services in an efficient and transparent way. At the same time, these challenges can create a bottleneck for the adoption of ICT or eGovernment models in general.

The success of eGovernment and eGovernment, therefore, entails among other things, the need for organizational change, political reform and a paradigm shift in the attitudes of the civil service towards citizens. These critical aspects together constitute the prerequisites for successful eGovernance and eGovernment.

This article is organized as follows: first we review and discuss the literature on eGovernment and eGovernance in Less Developed Countries LDCs in general, and proceed by detailing the benefits and opportunities, and challenges and opportunities of eGovernment and eGovernance in LDCs. Next, an overview of the Sub Saharan region is presented, followed by a detailed study methodology. We then present the case study of Zambia, and finally draw from the study our conclusions and identify the challenges and implications for the Sub-Saharan region.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>World Regions</th>
<th>Population (2006 Est.)</th>
<th>Population % of World</th>
<th>Internet Usage (Latest Data)</th>
<th>% Population (Penetration)</th>
<th>Usage % of World</th>
<th>Usage Growth 2000-2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>915,210,928</td>
<td>14.10%</td>
<td>23,649,000</td>
<td>2.60%</td>
<td>2.30%</td>
<td>423.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>3,667,774,066</td>
<td>56.40%</td>
<td>364,270,713</td>
<td>9.90%</td>
<td>35.60%</td>
<td>218.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>807,289,020</td>
<td>12.40%</td>
<td>291,600,898</td>
<td>36.10%</td>
<td>28.50%</td>
<td>177.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>190,084,161</td>
<td>2.90%</td>
<td>18,203,500</td>
<td>9.60%</td>
<td>1.80%</td>
<td>454.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>331,473,276</td>
<td>5.10%</td>
<td>227,303,680</td>
<td>68.60%</td>
<td>22.20%</td>
<td>110.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America/Caribbean</td>
<td>553,908,632</td>
<td>8.50%</td>
<td>79,962,809</td>
<td>14.40%</td>
<td>7.80%</td>
<td>342.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oceania/Australia</td>
<td>33,956,977</td>
<td>0.50%</td>
<td>17,872,707</td>
<td>52.60%</td>
<td>1.70%</td>
<td>134.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Total</td>
<td>6,499,697,060</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>1,022,863,307</td>
<td>15.70%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>183.40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Internet usage by region of the world (Source: Dada, D. (2006). The Failure of E-Government in Developing Countries: A Literature Review., p. 7).
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