Chapter 1

E–Government Development in Africa: An Assessment of the Status of Sub–Regional Practice

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ABSTRACT

This chapter assesses the status of e-government practice in Africa. It identifies the best and least e-government states and developing sub-regions and the challenges. Data on e-government practice in Africa by the United Nations was extracted and used for measuring the e-government status of selected African states and their sub-regions. Eastern and Central African Sub-Regions were respectively the best and the least among the regions, while Morocco, South Africa, Kenya, Cape Verde, and Angola were the best e-government practicing states. The major impediments to e-government development were inadequately skilled ICT personnel and insufficient telecommunication infrastructure. Consequently, e-government development in many African states is likely to suffer terrible setbacks unless radical reformations are taken to address the issue of human resource underdevelopment and inadequate ICT infrastructure. Results of this survey could guide policy makers towards optimal manpower planning for effective ICT development.

INTRODUCTION

The advent of information and communication technologies ICTs has offered wide range of opportunities to transform traditional governance in many developed countries. It is making governments to migrate from traditional mode of governance to an emphasis on e-services to the citizens. These changes are consequently affecting the tools, methods, and formats in which services are delivered in many public and private offices.

In an African environment and many other developing countries, whenever governments, organizations, or persons are involved in the use of electronic devices to:
• Pass official circulars instead of paper print,
• Create website where information about the government is posted and updated regularly,
• Make the views of government available online to millions of citizens simultaneously,
• Transfer money to remote locations with just a click of mouse instead of the use of bullion vans,
• Pay or collect taxes and other fines online, and process traveling documents, identity cards, birth registration, and screens other documents, and so on,
• When citizens are involved in online democratic processes like online registration of voter’s card and e-voting during an election; involved in political debates and other democratic activities like radio links or teleconferencing,
• When citizens and other individuals within and outside a country’s territorial frontiers are able to simultaneously access government information online, in other parts of the world,
• Government websites are integrated with other governments in the world vis-a-vis the states, local governments, ministries, departments, corporations and other agencies;
• And other numerous e-services, then an e-government has emerged.

Electronic government is the creation of government website or portal where information and other internal processes about a government are posted. It is the use of ICTs to transform the internal and external operations of government so as to optimize government service delivery. Sudan (2005) in Asogwa & Asiegbu (2009), and Asogwa (2013) defines e-government as the use of ICTs by governments and her agencies to enhance the range and quality of government information and services provided to the citizens in an efficient, cost-effective and convenient manner. Kitaw (2006) saw it as “Internet-based public administration”, and the use of the Internet and other information technologies to enhance access to, and delivery of government goods and services to the public, and therefore bring about improvement in government operations. Electronic government targets at four webs of interrelationships: a. between a government and other governments within and outside a country’s territorial frontiers [G and G]; b. between government and the business community [G and B] around it in such areas like e-payment of taxes, e-registration, e-procurements and other transactions; c. between government and its citizens [G and c] such as in areas like the provision of government information and services to the public; and d. relationships between government and the workforce. This entails an online interaction between government and its workforce in such activities as e-learning, e-business, teleconferencing, and sharing of knowledge and information about the government itself, its policies, projects and programmes.

In this paper, e-government practice or online service implies the capacity of the government and the governed to employ ICT for the improvement of knowledge and information in the service of the public. The United Nations (2008) describes capacity to encompass financial, infrastructural, human capital, regulatory, administrative and systematic capability of the state. The UN global e-Government Readiness Report (2004) viewed it as the willingness of the state to provide information and knowledge for the empowerment of the citizens.

E-government initiative will provide a number of opportunities to improve governance in developing countries. Proponents of e-government have suggested many benefits that will result directly or indirectly from such initiatives. These may include: efficiency which can reduce errors and improve consistency of customers (Seifert, 2003). E-government advocates are of the pinion that reducing the amount of time spent on repetitive
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