Chapter 18
E-Government in Central Africa: Issues and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

In the 21st century, e-government has become of prime importance in every country. This has prompted many governments, whether developed or developing, to plan and develop digital technology through which government services could be provided. The growing importance of application of e-government stems from the fact that ICT has the capability of promoting transparency, improving public service delivery, removing corruption, and providing better governance. This chapter is based on a literature review of the data, information, and papers relating to e-government in Central Africa and looks into the issues and challenges to the successful implementation of e-government initiatives in these countries on a wider perspective. The results show that ICT policies, ICT infrastructure, Internet access, connectivity, and the digital divide are among the most common issues in the successful implementation of e-government initiatives in Central African countries.

INTRODUCTION

In the era of ICT, e-government is becoming of prime importance in every country. This has prompted many governments, whether developed or developing to plan and develop digital technology through which government services could be provided. The growing importance of application of e-government stems from the fact that ICT has the capability of promoting transparency, improving public service delivery, removing corruption, and providing better governance. The development of science and technology is helping in the wider application of e-government for the public service delivery in the least developing countries of Africa. The governments are formulating ICT Policies and laws for the infrastructural development and wider internet access so that public services through e-government could be provided in a transparent and responsive manner.

The reason for the sudden rise in e-government practices in the contemporary world is due to the fact that e-government systems have the capability of promoting better governance (OECD, 2003). e-Government helps in achieving greater efficiency in government performance by raising service

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performance, and service delivery, by eliminating inefficient processes and reducing bottlenecks and red tape in the service delivery process as much as possible (Mutula, 2008). The interest in e-governance is based on a reality: ICTs have advanced considerably, including in Africa, and have broken through to social and political life. In view of the numerous advantages offered by these technologies (speed, cost reduction, wider reach), they are now crucial for the work of the public sector, for civil society organizations and for governments, which use them for intra-governmental communication and for providing services and communicating with citizens (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2009).

E-Government can be defined as the “use of information and communication technologies to offer citizens and businesses the opportunity to interact and conduct business with government by using different electronic media such as telephone touch pad, fax, smart cards, self-service kiosks, e-mail / Internet, and EDI” (Almarabeh and AbuAli, 2010: 30). In its simplest form, it is the application of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to deliver public services (Holmes, 2001). To this effect, e-government can be viewed as the administration, rules, regulations and frameworks organized by a government for service delivery as well as to communicate, co-ordinate and integrate processes within itself (Almarabeh and AbuAli, 2010).

**E-GOVERNMENT IN CENTRAL AFRICAN COUNTRIES**

Africa has regions: Eastern Africa, Western Africa, Northern Africa, and Southern Africa, besides Central Africa, North-East Africa, North-West Africa, South-East Africa, and South-West Africa. Basically Central Africa includes Burundi, the Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Rwanda, but as per United Nations, Central Africa is known as Middle Africa. Middle Africa includes Angola, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and Sao Tome Principe. South Sudan, since its independence in 2011, has been included in the Middle Africa. There are many Central African countries, but due to limited time and place, only two countries—Angola and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)—are being discussed briefly regarding e-government development, applications and challenges.

**Angola**

According to an analysis by Leadership Business Consulting\(^1\) of data from various “e-Government Survey” reports produced by the United Nations, Angola rose 31 positions in the worldwide e-Government ranking. In terms of Africa, Angola is among the 15 highest-ranked African countries, and should be in the top 10 next year and the top 5 within five years, according to Leadership Business Consulting. In terms of the SADC\(^2\), this new assessment puts Angola among the organisation’s most developed countries, with the same consultant expecting it to be in the top 3 in a year and a half. Angola’s ranking, according to the same report, is due to the design and implementation of Information Society and e-Government Action Plans, the launch of the Government Portal, the reinforced features and content of various institutional websites, access to the reports, database and forms of the Ministry of Finance’s website, and the new “one-stop-shop” concept of the Ministry of Public Administration, Employment, and Social Security’s website.

Since 2011, the Government of Angola worked on one of Africa’s most ambitious e-governance schemes for development. According to the action plan developed and formulated by the government, the project includes mapping the identity and identification of all citizens to enroll all Angolans into a database of digital identities, a long-term plan, which could be a landmark for revolution