Chapter VIII
ICT Challenges and Opportunities for Institutionalizing Democracy in Ghana: An Integrative Review of the Literature

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ABSTRACT

Several African countries have begun to introduce and implement Information and Communication Technology (ICT) policies. In the context of such developing countries, it is important to assess the nature of research focus on the ongoing ICT revolution and its potential to stimulate institutionalization of democracy in Africa. This chapter reviews and integrates literature by scholars focusing on ICT in Africa in general and more specifically on Ghana. The authors incorporate several key points in their discussion. First, they provide a summary of ICT trends and policies in Ghana and their emphasis on helping to institutionalize democracy and its related free market system. Next, they provide a description of some of the major challenges to institutionalizing democracy that scholars writing about ICT in Ghana have identified. In addition, the authors discuss several opportunities for enhancing democracy that scholars writing about ICT in Ghana have highlighted. Finally, they make a few general recommendations for mitigating the potential problems and enhancing the opportunities of the ICT revolution for Ghana as well as the entire African continent.
INTRODUCTION

The term “Information and Communication Technology” (ICT) refers to emerging technology revolving around the increasing availability and use of the Internet, personal and organization-wide computer systems that are faster, more powerful, smaller, and less expensive, and increasingly more accurate global wireless and satellite systems. The result of the ICT revolution is an increasing level of connectivity at a rapidly evolving pace, and the heightened possibility of fully-realized national and global connectivity.

There is a corresponding increase in research by Western scholars of the political and democratic governance implications of the ongoing digital revolution (Evans & Yen, 2005; Evans & Yen, 2006; Amoretti, 2006). Different researchers have emphasized different approaches such as depicting the potential e-governance process in Europe as having different stages (Layne & Lee, 2001) and typologies (Amoretti, 2006; Schelin, 2003), or involving the technology enactment process (Fountain, 2001). Nevertheless, these scholars all point to ICT as providing important means for political information, and for broad and mass participation in the governmental decision-making process (Amoretti, 2006).

A noted caveat of ICT is its provocation of a technological divide between more- and less-developed countries (Ifinedo, 2005). If unattended, this technological divide will continue to grow wider as time goes on (Singer et al, 2005). Evans & Yen (2006) notes that e-government in the United States is rapidly expanding and that the total information technology budget will exceed $48 billion in 2002. Referencing a 2003 United Nations Crossroads study, Evans & Yen (2006) compares and ranks global regions in terms of e-government readiness—Africa placed last. A similar study arrives at the same conclusion (Ifinedo, 2005). In essence, African countries have been identified as places where the digital divide is a potentially major and serious socio-economic threat (Wright, 2004).

However, several African countries have begun to introduce and implement ICT and its related policies (Haruna, 2003). Further, to the extent that ICT provides new ways of increased citizenry participation in governance, several major international organizations such as the World Bank, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and the United Nations have begun initiating reforms to help harness the potentially positive aspects of these new technologies for nation building and the democratization process in developing countries (Amoretti, 2007).

In the context of such developing countries, there has also been sustained research attention to the potential challenges and opportunities of technology for economic development with a wide range of publication outlets such as the Journal of Technology Transfer (established in 1975) and Information Technology for Development (established in 1990). Focusing more specifically on ICT, the online journal International Journal of Education and Development Using ICT was established in 2003 and has begun to play an equally pivotal role. It is heartening to note the substantial number of studies looking at different aspects of ICT revolution and its implications for developing countries. Indeed scholars focusing specifically on developing economies have both conceptually and empirically begun to examine ICT implications for increasing the democratization process (e.g. Narayan & Nerurkar, 2006; Mensah, 2005).

We have one important research question driving this essay: What are African scholars identifying as critical challenges and opportunities for ICT to enhance the democratization process in African countries? In answering this research inquiry, this chapter focuses specifically on Ghana, West Africa as a case study. This particular country is our focus because of the pioneering roles it has
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