

e-GOVERNMENT: AN ESSENTIAL ICT TOOL IN NIGERIA GOVERNANCE

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ABSTRACT

e-Government is an essential tool of the present information and communication technologies (ICTs) that improves the economy and means of achieving sustainable development in developed and developing countries in which Nigeria is one. Nigeria is among the rapid growing ICT market in Africa and despite its benefits, is ranked low in the adoption/utilization of e-government due to some barriers such as resistance from healthcare professionals, poor infrastructure, and low technical expertise among others.

As the digital economy blooms and affects virtually all sectors, it is imperative to consider its application to harness development in Nigeria. This paper looks at the potential of engaging and deriving benefits from the utilization of e-government for sustainable development. It presents recent estimates of some developing countries in operation and also delves into the opportunities and the challenges inherent when engaged in the policy. Finally, it identifies the important areas and highlights the need to support Nigeria in achieving robust services.

Keywords: e-Government, Sustainable Development, ICT.

1. INTRODUCTION

e-Government is a pivot towards achieving sustainable development in a country because: it creates an avenue where citizens can relate with the government at all levels (Federal, State and Local), participate in governance using information and communication technology (ICT), and also improves government efficiency. Nigeria as a developing country is nowhere close to the use of e-Government let alone being tagged as a country that has achieved sustainable development. A number of factors (e-government gap) responsible for this to mention a few include; lack of transparency between the government and its citizens and businesses, corruption, lack of accountability, strict hierarchical (leadership) roles, rule and mandate type of management principle, and so on. The way out of these challenges faced by Nigeria is to adopt e-Government policy through the utilization of ICT tools and mechanisms to refurbish and re-engineer the public sector (government at all levels), by changing its processes (both internal and external) and its relationships with citizens and its business community. The outcome of application of e-Government in Nigeria will bring a synergy between the government and all her citizens (employees, tax payers, voters, suppliers, business investors and customers, etc.) thereby providing improved services, enriched knowledge and reliable information in order to at least tend towards sustainable development even if it is not totally achieved.

2. e-GOVERNMENT

The goal of e-Government is to provide the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) based support for the efficient interaction and the better delivery of service for the citizens, business and governing bodies [7, 9]. From the design point of view, e-Government is the citizen centric approach to provide government service, as it increases the citizen's participation and visibility [12]. Suffice to say that e-government application of ICT tools can reinvent the public sector by transforming its internal and external way of doing things and its interrelationships with customers and the business community. One can say that e-Government framework is made up of:

- Transformation areas (internal, external, relational);
- Users, customers, actors and their interrelationships (citizens, businesses, government organizations, employees)
- E-government application domains (e-services, e-democracy, e-administration).

2.1 Transformation Areas

Transformation areas of e-government consist of the internal, external and relational areas.

The internal areas will use ICT to enhance and harness the effectiveness and efficiency of the internal processes and functions of the government by interrelating with different departments and agencies. This will fast-track the flow of information among the different departments, lower processing time, paper workload, and eliminating long, inefficient approval procedures.

The external areas use ICT to present opportunities and possibilities for transparency among citizens and businesses. This is achievable due to access to a wide range of information generated and collected by government which will lead to partnership and collaboration among different governmental institutions [3].

The relational area uses ICT to make elementary transformations in the relationships between the citizens and the state, and between the states in the nation (which includes the implications for the democratic process and structures of government). Integration of services can be vertical and/or horizontal in order for the diverse government agencies to assist citizens and other stakeholders obtain seamless services [13].

2.2 Users, Customers, Actors and their Interrelationships

The citizens of a country are the users of e-government, the customers are the stakeholders or business owners, the actors are the public servants and the government. The interrelationship that exists among them is such that the government (actors) implements e-government, which is then adopted and used by the citizens and the stakeholders (customers).

2.3 e-Government Application Domains

e-Government application domains include the following:

- Government-to-Citizens: The mode of relationship is through the websites where the citizens of a country can get and download information about the government. Information such as public holidays, briefs etc. can be sought on the websites.
- Government-to-business: This domain enjoys the benefits of e-government in that it reduces costs and barriers of interaction with the government. This interaction also reduces the time of filings of applications for environmental permits and business transactions.
- Government-to-Government: This is the non-commercial interaction (online) between Government organizations, departments and authorities. This domain is responsible for establishing secured interaction among government agencies, efficient web-based delivery, application of e-commerce for more efficient government transactions and activities, digital democracy, to mention a few.
- Government-to-Employees: This is a mode where employees interact online with different government units. This domain will also enable employees to carry out their duties in a paperless form, utilize the e-learning platform, access information about benefits, compensation, learning/training opportunities, and civil rights and laws. Other service in this domain is the use of software for maintaining and protecting personal information and records of employees [13].

3. BENEFITS OF IMPLEMENTING e-GOVERNMENT IN NIGERIA

It is no longer a gainsay that ICT is a tool that offers and will still offer more opportunities for economic and sustainable development but, developing countries like Nigeria is currently bearing consequences of failure or limited use of e-Government. The adoption, measures, use and benefits are the same for both developed and developing countries. which means that e-Government is possible in Nigeria too. The following are the benefits of implementing and utilizing e-government in Nigeria:

3.1 Capacity Enhancement

Incorporating ICT into the public service will foster a proper arrangement of internal administrations, easy and fast flow of information and transactions that will in turn increase the capacity of the government. The use of intranet will also facilitate access to, better decision making, and interrelationships across various departments through the sharing of databases. Consistent capacity enhancement from generation to generation will lead to an e-Government policy that is sustainable.

3.2 Cost Reduction and Efficiency Boosting

Costs of carrying out formal processes and transactions can be drastically reduced through the use of electronic means in carrying out the same processes or transactions. Efficiency can also be attained and boosted by allowing data and file sharing across departments thereby eliminating errors from manual processes and reducing processing times [13]. Money that would have been spent on the long processes of transactions can be diverted to something better.

3.3 Transparency and Accountability in Government

Advances in ICT technology can also promote the course of freedom. Democracy is strengthened by access to knowledge. The sharing of ideas made possible through the Internet, mobile - phones, satellite TV, and other connections both within a country as well as to the rest of the World can have a powerful impact on how people relate to their government and what they expect from it [15].

E-government will enable citizens to participate in decision making through forums, seminars or online measures because a transparent and accountable government will definitely achieve a sustainable development.

Citizens would be able to make suggestions and recommendations about the political affairs and other issues of the government. The use of websites for information sourcing will also aid transparency in the sense that citizens, business owners and stakeholders can log on to websites to gain awareness on whatever information (policies and rules of government) they need unlike in the past where one would need to go to government offices to seek information.

3.4 Better Quality of Service Delivery

In public service, service delivery is extremely slow as files and documents are carried from one place to another. In the setting up of businesses, the business owners are always engaged in movement to different offices in order to sign certain forms in lieu of their business registrations and set up. These procedures are slow, long and time consuming. With e-government, these services and procedures would be put online and thereby results to better service delivery in terms of accessibility, time and content.

3.5 Network Creation and Community

The functions and processes of e-government utilize a network approach to bring together technologies, skills, knowledge and information that cut across the boundaries of different governmental agencies. The synergy, integration and interrelationships across the different governmental agencies can either be a vertical or horizontal one which in turn leads to collaboration and creation of a large network community. Citizens and businesses would be given opportunities to participate in forums and other decision-making platforms thereby creating and building a community. It will also lead to an improved decision-making. The creation and building of the network and community at large will foster an improved decision-making process. When citizens participate in government and political issues, they would be able to share their knowledge, ideas and opinions and this would in turn build their trust in and improve the existing relationships between the government and the citizens. The appropriate use of shared data and information by all governmental agencies and departments offers the possibility to make quick decisions thus to serve the community better. However improvements in the speed and quality of decision making depend greatly on the willingness of governments to be empowered with new information, the capability of staff to process the large amount of information, the prevailing cultural values as well as the motivation of governments to shift from a hierarchical public administration model to a flexible, less centralized model [13]

4. e-GOVERNMENT CHALLENGES IN NIGERIA

Despite the government investing hugely in ICT to realize the objectives of e-government, minimal progress has been achieved. The lack of massive success can be attributed to infrastructural challenge, power failure, digital divide, low ICT literacy level, theft and vandalization of ICT equipment, privacy and security [1].

4.1 Infrastructural Challenge

The development, affordability and acquisition of basic infrastructure to capture the advantages of new technologies and communications tools is essential for implementing e-government.

- **High Cost of ICT Services:** The cost of internet usage in Nigeria should be reduced so that majority of the populace can afford it and the people for whom the government is going online for will be able to benefit from it [13,5]. Different access methods, such as remote access by mobile phones, tablets, Wi-Fi (wireless fidelity), satellite receivers, etc., need to be taken into consideration by governments to ensure that all members of the community are served irrespective of their financial and physical capabilities [13]. On the other hand, the level of internet usage in Nigeria is not encouraging due to low level of penetration most especially in the rural areas where education is low [1].
- **Lack of Investment in ICT:** The Nigeria's public service is still lagging in owning and using basic ICT infrastructure for her activities. In some offices, there are still no computers let alone skilled staff for its operation and hence the way things are done still follow the normal traditional way (engaging in a lot of paper work) e-governance would have reduced drastically [10].
- **Erratic Power Supply:** Also is the fact that Nigeria suffers erratic power supply and this is a setback to e-government. In [8], it was observed that it is absolutely necessary for the government to make provision for the needed infrastructure in electricity power supply, internet connectivity, telecommunications and computer hardware, optical fiber cables, among others for the successful implementation of e-government. This implies that the successful implementation of the policy in the Nigerian public service is no small measure dependent on solving the erratic power supply problem, among others.

4.2 Lack of Human Capital Development

The following are the human capital development factors responsible for the setback of e-Government in Nigeria.

Poverty: The citizens for whom e-government is for should be comfortable to an extent. Presently in Nigeria, the masses are not free from poverty. This means that they would not be able to afford the procurement of tools that would make them participate in e-government.

Low literacy levels: Literacy levels of public servants should be raised in form of training or by allowing them go back to school in order to acquire knowledge and be fit in departments where they work.

Poor IT skills & technical ability: Nigerian universities should equip students and produce graduate who are skilled in ICT in order to match the country's ICT needs. Technical abilities of public servants should also be enhanced by enrolling them in professional trainings and other capacity building programmes.

4.3 Digital Divide

Digital divide is the gap between those with regular, effective access to digital and information technology and those lacking this access [6] although, the challenge of digital divide encompasses the access to technology hardware physically

and the required skills and resources needed for the judicious application of its use [10]. Some other factors responsible for the digital divide include physical disability, access to the contents and lack of ICT skills [6]. There is a widespread recognition that a digital divide exists between countries and individuals, and that understanding and addressing that divide is pivotal to the empowerment of citizens. Although the government has often seen e-Government services as one means of eroding the digital divide but addressing it is still limited.

4.4 Refusal to Change

It is noteworthy to mention that some public servants are too used to and comfortable with the traditional way of carrying out activities such as carrying of files from one place to another and working with many papers. Some factors responsible for this attitude of refusing to change are the fact that some public servants are not qualified and some of them are not computer literate [14].

5. NIGERIA'S READINESS FOR SUSTAINABLE e-GOVERNMENT

The United Nations E-government Index Survey of 2018 ranked Nigeria 143 out of a total of 193 countries in overall ranking, and 117 out of 193 in terms of e-participation ranking. The aforementioned figures shows the level of government commitment to building an ICT infrastructure and the willingness of the society to subscribe to such platform [16].

United Nations e-government report of 2014 suggested that the major components which can boost the growth of e-governance is for various governments to ensure that effective governance framework should be established in order to adequately support and manage a citizen-centered service delivery model. The governments of various member nations should also establish an ICT policy and e-government strategy which will strengthen political institutions and motivate public servants to improve their attitude to work [2]. This can and should be employed in Nigeria for sustainable development.

Nigeria had made several efforts in adopting e-government policy as demonstrated by a government agency in March 2001 - the Nigeria government launched her National information technology Policy and afterwards commenced the implementation by establishing the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) whose mandate is to create a practical strategy and single architecture to guide the evolution of digital government solution with consistent standards, operating platforms and application across agencies and government systems [4].

In 2004, the National e-governance Strategies Limited was created in order to enhance e-governance in Nigeria and also to oversee the national e-governance project. It is a partnership between NITDA and the private sector, whose goal is to implement the backbone of the Nigerian e-governance infrastructure.

In 2011, Nigeria created a new Ministry of Communications Technology at the Federal level, charged with the responsibility of co-coordinating ICT development, and driving the nation's e-government agenda [4].

Some other components of e-governance have already commenced in Nigeria e.g. the computerization resident permit by the Nigerian Immigration Service, Computerization of land and Certificate of Occupancy in the Federal Capital Territory Administration (FCTA).

The payroll of some organizations is also being computerized i.e. (IPPIS, e-Payment),

Online checking of West Africa Examination Council (WAEC), National Examination Council (NECO) and Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) result as well as National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) postings are part of real time and cost effective services which are part of e-government. There is still need to consolidate and spread it to other services that have not been incorporated as well as to the rural areas in Nigeria. NITDA maintained that e-governance reduces waste, saves time and encourages simple, moral, accountable, responsive and transparent conduct in the delivery of government services.

E-government activity in Nigeria is low despite the huge amount of resources that had been invested to its development. Most government websites are in the publish stage and a few government organizations are at the transact stage.

Like many other African nations, there are some clear problems which influence the implementation of e-government in Nigeria [11].

African Countries are far behind the rest of the world in e-government readiness. The major challenge for the e-government development in Africa according to United Nation report of 2012 remains the widespread of lack of adequate infrastructure and functional literacy. Despite recent expansion in mobile telephony; most countries in Africa remain at the tail end of the digital divide.

To an extent, Nigeria had made tremendous move but the factors militating against her full participation is as highlighted in section 4.0 of which failure to address them will not bring about a sustainable e-government.

6. CONCLUSION

The use of ICT for better governance cannot be under-estimated and its application domains had been looked into. The benefits Nigeria can derive from the implementation of e-Government were also highlighted and explained. Also, the factors militating against Nigeria's full adoption and participation of e-government were explained. The measures taken by Nigeria so far towards e-government readiness were also mentioned. Suffice to say that, e-Government is by the government, and for the users who are the citizens, business owners, employees and even the government. The synergy among them is such that one cannot exist without other otherwise, the purpose of e-Government would be defeated. One

can conclude that, with e-government, sustainable development can be achieved in Nigeria if and only if the factors affecting her from getting there can be removed or tackled to the barest minimum.

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Author's Brief Profile



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