A Review of E-government Services in Nigeria

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Abstract

Government and public sector managers worldwide have, within the last decade, come to the realization that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is a viable tool that can help them achieve their aims: to deliver efficient and cost effective services to its citizenry, clients and partners. To this end, governments in most developed and developing countries of the world are at different stages of adoption and implementation of their chosen e-government policies and initiatives in a bid to reform their public sector and improve on its services deliveries, as is the case with Nigeria. The present case will review literature on e-government services and applications available to the public in Nigeria. Adoption of e-government applications and services for public to access government information, documents, resources and for archiving has transformed traditional government services' delivery in countries in Europe and America and some developing countries in Africa with attendant implications for governments and citizens in developing countries.

The methodology will be a review of related literature and will draw up conclusions from the literature to propose a plan for e-government services in Nigeria. The mission of the study is to jumpstart a national discourse on the phenomenon of use of ICT to transform internal and external relationships through operations and expectations about performance of government and to define related concepts and viewpoints. This will be achieved by giving a clear and better understanding of why and how Nigerian citizens use e-government services. By highlighting the contemporary issue of e-government services in Nigeria, this case will be focusing on the growing area of e-governance and ICT in service delivery in Nigeria.

Keywords: E-government; Information and Communication Technology; Electronic government services; Nigeria.

Introduction

There has suddenly been an escalation of e-government initiatives across sub-saharan Africa, as has been the case in other parts of the world even much earlier. The success of these initiatives in Africa, Nigeria in particular, is another issue. E-government is the use of information technology to support government operations, engage citizens and provide government services. E-government is the use of information technology to provide citizens and organizations with more convenient access to government information and services and to provide delivery of public services to citizens, business partners, and those working in the public sector. E-government incorporates four key elements that, when combined, create a unified process: e-services, e-commerce, e-democracy, and e-management (Sudhai, 2003). The World Bank defines e-government as t*he use of information and communication technologies to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, transparency and accountability of governance.* National eGovernment Strategies Limited, *Nigeria (NeGst) describes e-governance as deploying ICT tools and processes for efficient administration and*

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enhanced revenue generation for better governance. Emergence of e-government was signaled by the initial part of implementation of "computerization" of public offices, enabling them by building their capacity for better service delivery and bringing in good governance using technology as a catalyst. The second part was provision of citizen-centric services through digital media like developing interactive government portals. Dada (2006) says e-government is a lot more than mere computerization of government services. It is more of a belief in the ability of technology to transform relations between the government and the governed and bring improvements in governance. The countries with remarkable e-governance initiatives are New Zealand, Canada and Singapore. The evolution of this concept of e-government is traceable to the United States which was especially driven by the 1998 Government Paperwork Elimination Act and by President Clinton's December 17, 1999, Memorandum on E-Government, which ordered the top 500 forms used by citizens to be placed online by December 2000. The memorandum also directed agencies to construct a secure e-government infrastructure (Wikipedia).

The aim of e-government and its spin-offs, E-Democracy, E-Participation, E-Procurement, E-Health, E-Learning, E-Transportation, E-tax and a range of other "E-s", according to Bertot, Jaeger and McClure (2008), is basically to engage citizenry in government in a user-centered manner, and also to develop quality government services and delivery systems that are efficient and effective. The authors also suggest that the concept can be user-centred, citizen centred. In the Southern African case, countries such as Mauritius, South Africa, Mozambique, Botswana and Namibia have started putting in place institutional and regulatory frameworks solely dedicated for the advancement of e-government adoption (UN e-govt. report, 2008). According to Hecks (2008) benefits of e-government include improving government processes-eAdministration, connecting Citizens-eCitizens and eServices; building external

interactions- eSociety. Efficient and effective e-government suggests that governments will gain economies of scale, reduce costs, and provide technology-enabled user services. From review of literature, there appears no question as to whether the state is not better placed to use the medium of information and communication technology (ICT) to fast-track service delivery to the citizens, given the resources - both human and capital - at its disposal, particularly when the provision of these services will not only give satisfaction to the citizenry and people doing business with the state, but will also generate tremendous income for the state by way of taxes, fees and levies paid for these services. This is without saying anything about blocking the drains in government revenue drive.

This review seeks to explore efforts in academic work on the issue of e-government in Nigeria, as we have much literature on Botswana, Zambia and South Africa. The initiative and development of e-government (e-Gov) in Nigeria is a kind of national strategy and systemic engineering. As a way to locate its progress, the review of literature on the subject as a prelude to further studies and evaluation of e-gov platforms, websites, and service capabilities is critical and meaningful for their further development deeply. The purpose of this paper is also to provide an outline of reasons for the failure of e-government in Nigeria, giving a study of what went wrong with the country's initiatives on the concept. According to Bertot, Jaeger and McClure (2008), a key issue is that citizen-centered e-government implies that governments know what citizens want from e-government. They want to meet citizens' expectations and needs, and actively seek to discover what citizens want from e-government. The situation in Nigeria will be reviewed alongside this perspective. The use of ICT by government for external relations with citizens will be emphasized to highlight the advantages of e-interactions with the public to foster good relationships, transparency, legitimacy and bring government closer to the governed. It will also highlight the government agencies such as the

NITDA in driving governments' ICT implementation strategy. Governance in Nigeria is a three-tier structured approach, namely; Federal, State and Local governments, and e-government services will be reviewed alongside this approach.

Kumar, Bhasker, Butt and Persaud (2007) find two academic models on the e-government discourse. First, Warkentin et al. (2002) propose a conceptual model of e-government adoption with citizen trust as the underlying catalyst for adoption. Other variables in this conceptual model are perceived risk, perceived behavioural control, perceived usefulness, and perceived ease of use. Second, the model proposed by Gilbert and Balestrini (2004) combines attitude -based and service -quality -based approaches. A dependent variable to this model is a willingness to use e-government services. Independent variables are perceived barriers and perceived relative benefits. Perceived barriers consist of confidentiality, ease of use, safety, reliability, visual appeal, and enjoyment. Perceived relative benefits include time, cost, personalization, convenience, control, and avoidance of personal interaction. The former will guide this review.

E-Government in Nigeria: Problems and Prospects

A review of literature by Avgerou and Walsham (2000) finds, rather sadly, that even though some successful stories of e-government exist in developing countries, "frustrating stories of systems which failed …are more frequent". According to Ikhemuemhe (2003), "the Federal Government of Nigeria has embarked on the construction of a government portal on the internet. This is to facilitate the development of government-to-government, government-to-commerce, and commerce-to-government interactions on the web..." Recognition and initial comments on e-government came from the political leadership in Nigeria and were represented in the comments of then Vice-President Atiku Abubakar in 2008 that the federal Government of Nigeria planned to commence e-government in that year. Atiku was quoted to have said this at the launch of the Bureau of Public Enterprises (BPE) website in Abuja that "the Federal Government recognised the role of Information Technology (IT) in modern business and public administration and was therefore prepared to squarely face the challenges..." (allafrica.com). The strategy of the Nigerian government was to concentrate on putting in place new incentives, levers and institutional structures to make sure this transformation includes new funding and sharpened financial incentives to promote electronic service delivery, and the creation of a government incubator to develop new service ideas. The e-government project of the Federal Government was being anchored by the Federal Office of Statistics (FOS) but had setbacks in its inception (Ikhemuemhe, 2003). However, much before this time, state governments in Nigeria began to launch websites. Executive governance in Nigeria is by three tiers – Federal, State and Local.

According to (Daily Champion Newspapers, 2004) Bayelsa, a state government in Nigeria had taken steps to enthrone electronic government (e-government), among other activities in the state, by launching its official website - www.bayelsagov.com., that of Lagos State, Nigeria, Land policy and management in Nigeria with particular reference to Lagos State of Nigeria, the socio-economic importance of land to citizen and the state, administrative and bureaucratic bottlenecks in smooth administration, documentation, and perfection of land business in Lagos State have also being tackled by e-governance. A major reason for embankment on e-government initiatives early on in its deployment in Nigeria was, according to Ikhemuemhe (2003), a determination to cut the bureaucracy that attended government business in the country. The Federal Government set to launch an e-government initiative which would take government transaction online.

According to Daily Sun Newspapers (2004), the Federal Government of Nigeria has a

National IT policy to bring the benefits of IT to all sectors, including, but not limited to, government, law and general development. An in-depth review shows that there does not appear to be any law in force permitting or denying electronic filings or forms/documents. A UN e-government report of 2008 concludes that it appears such filings are very rare, if existent at all, in Nigeria. However, the government has set up the Nigerian Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA), a specialized agency for the realization of the National IT policy. The government is touted as having a formal e-government agenda. The supervising body of e-government in the country, NITDA, is currently under the Ministry of Technology, but a NITDA bill was presented to the National Assembly in November 2005, presumably to give NITDA independent legal authority (Ajayi, 2003) To complete NITDA, the Federal Government is also part of a Private-Public Partnership of a Tripartite Joint Venture registered as "National eGovernment Strategies Limited" (NeGSt), which is comprised of the government (5%), a consortium of banks (15%) and strategic partners (80%). The mandate of NeGSt is to create a practical strategy and single architecture to guide the evolution of digital government solutions with consistent standards (Institute for e-Government). Thereafter, a Computer Security and Critical Infrastructure Protection Act was proposed by the Nigerian Cybercrime Working Group (NCWG), a part of the Office of the National Security Adviser in Abuja (Ibekwe, 2008). Such law does not appear to be in force—it is not clear whether such law has even been submitted to the National Assembly.

From the aforementioned, there appears to be lots of legal and other loopholes in the e-government project in Nigeria. In summing this up, the Center for Democracy and Technology instructed the law firm of Weil, Gotshal & Manges on a pro-bono basis to survey publicly available information on the e-government policy and laws of 30 developing countries, in a report titled "Preliminary e-Government Policy, Law and Regulation Survey Report". This survey was intended to give a general overview of the e-government situation in Nigeria based on research from information available at the time of writing. The report largely finds that Nigeria does not have existing laws to manage e-government. The closest that Nigeria has to a regulatory document, is as relates to telecommunications, Nigeria, a law entitled the "Nigerian Communications Act, 2003, which calls for the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) to design a system which, amongst other things, shall promote the widespread availability and usage of network services and applications services throughout Nigeria by encouraging the installation of network facilities and the provision for network services and applications services to institutions and in un-served, underserved areas or for underserved groups within the community. The report finds that there is neither law regarding privacy protection of government records nor any laws permitting tenders for government contracts to be posted online, etc as found in other parts of the world.

Implications and Conclusion

From the above review of literature there are loopholes in the legal framework for e-government in Nigeria. Above all, there are limited academic writings on this subject with reference to Nigeria. Much of what exists are newspaper articles and speeches from top political leaders in the country. There is no literature on empirical findings on citizens' views, satisfaction and requirements for better e-government services. Pensioners from across the country still throng to Abuja, the country's capital, for manual verification exercises, etc that e-government in other countries take care of, and more. Even though at present some activities of government seem to include services such as use of ICT for payment of tax, immigration issues, procurement of online forms and e-registration and the like, there are no attendant policy drives, legal framework and direction. There is need for NITDA and other supervising authorities to assess the state

of e-government in the country. There is no doubt that the public service in Nigeria is still paper based and use of ICT in government very problematic and frustrating for citizens and public servants alike.

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