

E-GOVERNMENT IN AFRICA

Strengthening it through European Co-Operation

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Abstract: E-government remains the most efficient way in recent times to get on course government - citizen interaction programmes. Many European and Asian countries have standardized their e-government practices and certainly have their citizens using these facilities at ease. But the reverse is the case in Africa. Though some African countries have taken steps towards e-government practices, the process cannot be compared to that of Asia and Europe, since African citizens are yet to relate with the government through this medium in an effective manner. This paper X-rays e-government practices in Africa, with a case study of the state, regional, and national governments in Nigeria. It also focuses attention at other African countries. This paper gathered its sources of information from a sample online questionnaire on IT personnel in government which we posted through www.afreel.com. I also used my experience as IT personnel in the service of with a state government in Nigeria. The problems are highlighted and solutions proffered in a possible African - European countries co-operation.

1 INTRODUCTION

E-government continues to witness most African countries as newcomers to an online service delivery system by government to its citizens, which have today become a global standard for governments. In its recent seventh annual survey (2007) of 198 government websites around the world carried out by Brown University, African countries dominate bottom of the table on the web survey, while Asian countries (South Korea, Singapore and Taiwan) occupied the first 3 spots. United States and Great Britain followed as 4th and 5th respectively (West, Darell M. 2007).

The first 20 ranking is dominated by European countries and indeed the entire survey, which is an index for a steady progress of electronic services delivery and good practices and understanding of e-government by European countries. Though significant progress is being made by some African countries with an acknowledgement to the contributions of *New Partnership for African Initiative* NEPAD in this regards, a lot of constraints impede this project by these few Africa countries, while others still have a long way to go. While the national governments in Africa are recording

significant progress, the states (regional) and the local governments are partially if not totally (in some cases) far from implementing e-government. The states and the local governments are those governments that are very close to the citizens and have its policies and programmes directly influencing to the people. E-government becomes very important at this level to offering its citizens the opportunity to participate in the process of governance. The 2007 European E-Government Awards report (EUROPA, 2007), the city of Amsterdam in the Netherlands, and the Besançon from France picked up one of the prestigious awards among others. The case in Africa shows the reverse. The first ever 2007 Technology in Government in Africa (TIGA) Awards sponsored by the UN Economic Commission for Africa and the Canadian Government (ECA, 2007), showed no award to city governments, rather only to the national governments with Angola and Rwanda taking the lead. At the National level of government, there is a steady work and in an e-direction, but in the other tiers of governments, so much is yet to be done especially in the last tier of government (the local or city governments).

A good frame work of e-government in Europe has aided and encouraged different levels of

governments to consider it as the best form of service delivery to its citizenry. While other level of government benefit from the information technology (IT) infrastructures set up by their national governments to establish a firm position on e-government, others use the established IT framework to get there. This happens to be the bedrock of a firm e-government practice among European countries. The result of the survey I carried out online among IT and non IT staff of government in Nigeria and other African countries like Ghana, indicates that the IT framework used by the national governments in Africa, setup by NEPAD as a guide on IT are not strictly followed by other tiers of the government..

2 THE PRACTICE IN AFRICA

To start with, we will take a detailed look at the mode of e-government operation in Nigeria, while also surveying Africa as a whole. In Nigeria, most practices of the government as regards (e) electronics is for information. Efficient and effective e-government practices is yet to be implemented to reflect some elements of interactions to enhance a government-to-government or government to citizens or government to commerce interactions as e-government is more about government responsibilities to its citizens. This is an area that government has not done well in Africa. All the State own their personal websites, but non integrate service delivery, though some governments are beginning to look inwards. All these websites at the states or regional levels as indicated by the survey carried out are for information purpose, showcasing its potentials to the world. So far, very negligible number of local governments has been able to have a presence on the internet. This therefore makes it difficult to access information about the activities of Nigerian local governments.

In the area of interaction with the citizens, the Federal Capital Territory and Lagos States compared to the country itself have made head-way in the establishments of the Tax and Land Allocation online system respectively. These are 2 states out of 36 in the entire country. The winning project of Angola "Projecto Portal do Governo" aims at bringing all government PUBLIC INFORMATION and SERVICES under one platform and made available to it citizen on the Internet, and Kenya is devising a system to automate Secondary School placement and examination results (ECA, 2007)

among other African countries are done at the national level of government. Though many EU countries have gone far in projects of this nature, the states and local government who run similar systems at their level of governance have no plans for e-solutions for its citizens. For instance the survey result shows that in Nigeria, while the national examination body have gone electronic, having registration and checking of results done online, no state operating junior exams has done so. Nigeria only makes a good progress in the academic sector with university-to- student and Examination body-to-candidates interactions. This opens the doors for students/examination candidates to access their records online. The Nigeria Immigration Services also offer online Passport acquisition and renewal through its web portal. Talking about online transaction, it is the business sector that has put in a focused step like the banks offering online transaction. This means that e-business has moved ahead of e-government in Africa. The case of Nigeria is similar to that of other African nations. Ghana for instance is yet to extend its e-government services to its district assemblies (Manuh, T. (Feb. 03), while East African countries are yet to actually implement e-government properly (Tanzania e Secretariat, 2001).

3 SURVEY CONDUCTED/ FINDINGS

I posted an online questionnaire on the Internet through www.afreel.com to survey the number of IT personnel in various local (city), state governments and the federal government in Nigeria that have undergone enough IT training to support e-government. I also surveyed how many local and state governments in Nigeria with a population of over hundred million people that actually delivers any form of service to its citizens using e-government. From the survey, 1052 people participated. 820 (77.94%) of this number were government staff across Africa with majority from Nigeria. Of the government personnel, 670 (81.7%) of the respondents believe that majority of African population are computer illiterates who do not know not how useful the Internet can be to them or even worse, how to use the computer. 960 (91.3%) of the entire respondents believe that the government have not done enough to eradicate computer illiteracy among its citizens. 422 (51.5%) of government staff respondents admitted having failed and abandoned

good ICT projects in their organizations. Of these 422 respondents, 416 (98.6%) of respondents believe the lack of political will and understanding of the leaders is responsible for abandoning this projects. 811 (98.9%) of government staff respondents agree that training of government IT personnel and gaining experiences from more advanced nations on e-government can help move African nations forward on the practice. While using the survey in the course of this work, it was discovered that more impact would be created if the EU countries can assist African nations especially the lower tiers of government to come on board in the implementation of e-government.

Also from the survey, it was discovered that out of 36 states in Nigeria, non except Lagos and Abuja actually delivers any form of service to its citizens through the Internet. Almost all the states do own a website, some state governments own websites without the country's top level domain name. Most states see the website only as showcasing its potentials to the world, while others just count the website as an achievement of its administration. Most of the state's websites are not updated regularly. 543 (66.2%) of government staff respondents noted that IT personnel of the government in most of the tiers of government are not capable of manning the e-government setup. The same 66.2% also said that their various states and local (city) governments actually delivered no service(s) to the public via their portal except information only. So they advocated in the survey for more regular training from successful e-government countries.

1. With the countries winning (TIGA) Awards, it will be very impossible to create an impact among citizen with the existence of a large gap in the digital divide among Africans. About 80% of Africans have no access to IT facilities and steady power according to majority of the respondents who participated in the survey. Therefore using E-Government to touch them will be an up hill task. These and more were some of the issues we observed as a problem of e-government practices in Nigeria/Africa.

2. The survey also shows that many states in Nigeria are yet to make up plans for electronic service delivery. Some respondents pointed out that it is only Akwa Ibom and Lagos states out of 36 states have actually commenced work in this direction by setting up committee to actualize e-government.

3. 90% of respondents considers lack of power as a major setback to starting e government in Nigeria

4. 60% of respondents view the limited vision of African leaders and political instabilities as also disturbing the practice of e-government in Africa.

5. 81% of respondents feel a possible co-operation between an African and European country could become a yard stick for success in Africa. Majority of respondents also saw lack of competent and trained personnel in government as a bane to success in e-government in Africa.

4 THE EXPECTED E-GOVERNMENT PRACTICES IN AFRICA

The practices of e-government in Africa should be able to move further from where it is today, to that of enhancing services delivery to its citizenry. African government at different levels should establish an e-government portal to reflect.

Online Payment Solution/ Tax Payments

Some Information Technology companies in collaboration with banks in Africa now offer electronic payment in local currencies, but this payment solution is yet to gain acceptance as Africans are so comfortable in counting physical cash. Government need to come in here by enlightening the citizens on the benefits of electronic funds and also enforcing its usage by also using it to pay for services. Every citizen and corporate bodies should be able to pay their tax online and at their convenience. The system also should be able to carryout transfer of the funds from the payer to the government accounts.

Online Land Allocation

Application for Certificate of Occupancy (C of O) should no more be a matter of people making journey to the capital to apply and pay for C of O when they can as well do it at their homes or various offices. At a government business portal, such application and payment should be made.

Visa Application

Nationals from other nations visiting Africa should be able to apply for visa online for proper documentation.

- Government - Citizen Interaction

The government should be able to communicate with its citizens concerning its policies and also have its citizens react to its policies and contribute to the governance. Every member of a constituency should be able to reach out to its parliamentarian at will through a government portal.

5 PROBLEMS MILITATING AGAINST E-GOVERNMENT PRACTICES IN AFRICA

From the findings, e-government practices in Africa can thrive well if the following impediments could be addressed:

Reliable Power Supply

Interrupted power supply is a very big bane to success of e-government in Africa. Power supply installations are so obsolete and blackout could last for weeks if not months in a stretch. This becomes a big set back for any meaningful progress so long as ICT is concern.

Lack of Proper ICT infrastructure

Installed infrastructures are not measured to the capacity of users. Without estimation, ICT equipments like VSATs with small bandwidth installed to support an over populated users within an area. One major problem here are the installations by telecom operators who install equipments that under-carries the population. This results in over crowding of the network, which causes connectivity problem.

High IT Illiteracy Rate among Africans

According to the Internet usage and penetration rate statistics in the world (World Internet Stats, 2007), shows that in Africa (57 Countries) with 933, 448, 282 population in 2007 estimate for Africa, only 44, 319, 240 use Internet in Africa as at September 2007 with a penetration rate of 4.7% and a broadband Internet subscribers of 1, 097, 200 as compared to that of European Union countries (EU27) with a 2007 estimated population of 493, 119, 161, having 267, 458, 327 Internet users with a penetration rate of 54.2% and a broadband Internet subscribers of 87, 413, 669. This statistics shows that no matter the e-government services rendered by African Governments, if the IT illiteracy rate is not reduced by IT education and training, it will remain meaningless among the citizens.

Lack of Proper Framework to be followed by All Tiers of Government

There are no frame works or policy set by the government to guide all the tiers of government. This result in having every government experiment the e-government and mounting wrong infrastructures which makes them abandon the project of online service delivery.

Political Will by African Leaders

African leaders need to be properly educated on the benefits of e-governments, most of our leaders carryout e-government projects not to deliver services to the people, but to boast their political ego. This results in most of the projects being abandoned during or before installation. Again, most African leaders feel scared of opening their administrations to public scrutiny if they introduce e-government. This drives them away from e-projects.

Lack of Well Trained ICT Manpower in Government

IT practitioners are not really planned for in government. Those employed are for normal computer operation and training are not planned for them in e-government practices. ICTpractices changes on a more frequent basis. This is not taken into consideration in order to enhance updating and training of IT staff. This again makes the staff unable to offer support on any egovernment installation.

Lack of Private Sector Involvement in e-Government

Private sector firms who have the technical capabilities to support e-government don't really partner with government on this projects. Most of their proposal to handle this e-government system by the private sector rarely get a committed support from the government. Whereas most of the infrastructure mounted by the private sector could be used by the government in service delivery, some government prefers to go solo based on what they saw outside the country without expert support nor even using the existing private sector infrastructure and fails on the way. Therefore to a greater extent, Africa leaders hold the key to a successful implementation of this global governance in Africa.

6 SOME SOLUTIONS PROFFERED

1. Workshops for Africa Leaders of Different Levels of Government

There is a high need for workshops/seminars to be mounted for African political leaders by those successful e-government countries and private firms in Europe, to oriented African leaders on the actual practice of service delivery through e-government. Just as the Millennium Development Goal frame work is being shared globally, there should be a sharing of e-government frame between European countries and their African counterpart. Cross fertilization of ideas and input will strengthen the practice in Africa, and more lessons also learn in Europe.

With these workshops, the leaders themselves will in turn take over the re-orientation of its workforce and citizens on e-government management and service delivery respectively.

2. Establishing of Pilot Programme in e-Government between a State or Country in Europe and Africa

I propose for good practice, a possible co-operation between e-government practicing states in Europe and piloting states in Africa. Just as the USAID support in aids to Africa, a province in a European country can establish a linkage with an African country on e-government practices. This they will help bring up the e-gov. infrastructures and practices to come in line with what is obtainable in their states and the world. Since it is going to be a linkage programme, there will be enough interest and continuity from the African partners. This will help take the project in Africa to an international level.

3. Exchange and Training of IT Personnel

European countries should exchange IT personnel supporting e-government with African countries and also accept those to man the same projects in Africa for experience to be shared and acquired in African practice. Since Africa will be learning from their experience, there is a high need of this exchange to afford those personnel to be involved from Africa to get a first hand knowledge on the practice in Europe. Training during this exchange programme which will see European and African countries playing host to each other should be carried out at each point of the visit. Lasting practical lessons will be learnt at this level of the co-operation. This in a long way will move forward the e-government project in Africa.

4. Assess Infrastructures and Make Inputs

African infrastructures will have to be assessed to be sure that what they have are up to international acceptability. If the infrastructures in place are not to standard and future expansion not planned for, the whole project will remain where it is as at today.

7 CONCLUSIONS

Some African countries have moved a long way in the area of service delivery through the internet to its citizens while others are still a long way to go. The practice of e-government in Africa will change so much if the experience of the European countries could be tapped either by collaboration or training. If some European nations especially states and local (city) governments can initiate collaboration with their counterparts in Africa, a global standard will then be established in Africa. This paper therefore submits that governments at all levels, private sectors, and IT associations at all levels of governance; individuals can help standardize these e-government practices by initiating the moves to strengthen the practice Africa through this proposed co-operation or a joint Government – Government or Private Sector – Government initiative.

Lack of this service turn the people to war since the government cannot deliver satisfactory services to the people thereby threatening the world's stability. Therefore, European countries who have proved successful in this practice should establish a nation to nation or state to state partnership to bring all to the same level of e-government practice.

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