

# **NEW WINE IN OLD WINE SKIN: AN EXPLORATION OF MAJOR CONSTRAINTS TO E-GOVERNMENT IMPLEMENTATION IN NIGERIA**

*Edward Omeire Msc*

Federal University of Technology Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria

*Charles Omeire Msc*

Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Abia State, Nigeria

---

## **Abstract**

The past two decades has seen a growing zeal among African governments in embracing e-government. This is chiefly because e-government has been peddled by development pundits as having the potential to stimulate economic growth, build institutional capacity, increase citizen participation and democratize political space. Many governments across Africa are now deploying ICTs to transform relationships between governments, their citizens and other stake holders. However, despite the opportunities e-government offers, they also introduce new challenges. These challenges are linked to some institutional and native contradictions within the African milieu. This paper explores major constraints surrounding implementation of e-government in Nigeria. The authors conclude that e-government is beyond new technology. It includes cultural attitudes, human, environmental and political factors and these factors must be adequately dealt with before the full benefit of e-government will be maximized.

---

**Keywords:** ICT, e-government, Development, Citizen Participation

## **Introduction**

In recent times, there has been a new proclivity towards public sector reform around the world. This trend is primarily driven by citizens, who are placing new demands on their governments in the area of efficiency, accountability, transparency and better service delivery. Today, globally, the success of any government is increasingly benchmarked based on social inclusion and citizens participation in governance.

Driven by this global trend, many countries around the world are revitalizing their public sector to make it more efficient and citizen centric by

deploying new and emerging technologies for accelerated service delivery to citizens. Within this milieu, ICTs have been recognized as an effective tool that can help government reinvent itself, run cheaply, faster, better and produce new outcome (Heeks,1999) .

Although, traditionally ICTs have been used in business and other fields, government around the world are beginning to embrace and deploy ICTs in public domain because they have come to realize that ICT is a useful tool that can enable public agencies to change from routine-based, command-and-control organizations that are inwardly focused on administration to knowledge-based, networked, learning organizations that are externally focused on service (OECD 2005).

This new approach of is what has become known as e-government. e-Government in a nutshell refers to the use of information and communication technologies by government to transform its internal and external relationships. It could also be defined as a mean of ensuring coordinated information sharing process to achieve transparency, precision and accountability in government establishment (ITU. 2006).

ICTs integration in government has widely been advocated by scholars and development agencies as a means to obtain efficiency, accountability, and transparency in governance (Stanforth, 2007). Such arguments have led many African governments, including Nigeria, to undertake various e-government initiatives to prop up development. Since its introduction, there have been a number of e- government initiatives that dots the African landscape. Some of these projects though driven considerably by outside stakeholders and with exterior motives are nevertheless, fostering public sector reform and improving how government conducts her business, although with some major challenges (Heeks, 2002).

### **Defining E-Government**

E-government conotes different things to different people. To some people e-government is viewed in terms degitilization and arquisition of computers by goverment. Other observers define e-government more narrowlly in terms of government conducting her services online. While there is no universal definition of e-government, it is noteworthy to consider some definition from notable agencies and experts.

According to the United Nations (2008), e-government can be described as utilising the internet and the world-wide-web for delivering government information and services to citizens.

The OECD (2003) defines e-government as “the use of information and communication technologies, and particularly the internet, as a tool to achieve better government”. In this description, the internet is defined as a requirement and a possible medium for e-government. It also emphasises

that ICT and the internet should be viewed as tools for better government, not as goals to be achieved in their own right.

The World Bank (2001) defines e-Government as the government owned or operated systems of information and communication technologies that transform relations with citizens, the private sector and/or other government agencies so as to promote citizens' empowerment, improve service delivery, strengthen accountability, increase transparency, or improve government efficiency. This definition stresses that ICT, the internet and mobile computing are e-government tools.

African governments are not left behind in this issue. Having understood and realized the role of e- government to development agenda. The 4th African Development Forum (ADF IV, 2004) has outlined the role of e-government as thus: an important innovation for enhancing good governance and strengthening the democratic process and can also facilitate access to information, freedom of expression, greater equity, efficiency, productivity, growth and social inclusion.

Although a complete review of e-government definitions is outside the scope of this paper however, the definitions presented above have one re-occurring theme, and that is the transformational aspect of e-government. Obviously, e-government presents African countries with copious prospects to resolve some of her inherent contradictions. E-Government proffers development prospects in these sectors: public sector reform, accountability, citizen engagement, tax system management and strengthening democracy. African governments need to develop policy frameworks, supported by political will to drive this process.

### **E-Government In Practice In Nigeria**

The Nigeria government has since 2001 taken noticeable steps to put the country on track in the area of ICT development and utilization in governance. In March 2001, the Nigeria government launched her National information technology Policy and thereafter began the implementation with the establishment of National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA).

Furthermore, the private sector in Nigeria was not left behind in ICT integration. In demonstration of government recognition of private sector as partner in progress a joint venture known as National e-Government Strategies Limited was formed. The ownership structure comprises of Government (5%), Consortium of banks (15%), and strategic partners(80%). This joint venture was mandated 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. The launching of the e-registration of teachers in

Nigeria in May 2006 was the first project undertaken by NeGst (Adeyemo, 2011). Before 2011 different agencies were responsible for various aspects of ICT development in Nigeria. But recently, 2011 Nigeria created a new Ministry of Communications Technology at the Federal level. The ministry is charged with the responsibility of co-ordinating ICT development, and drive the nation's e-government agenda.

It is noteworthy to state here that many government ministries and department now have websites even though most of this websites are simply information board which rarely gets updated. In addition, President Goodluck Jonathan and other public figures now use social media platforms such as facebook and twitter to interface with citizens especially the youths. Other noticeable e-government application in Nigeria includes Police dairy-a public radio phone in program where citizens can interact with police laying complaints or reporting on right abuse. Others includes, e-passport, Voters registration, tax payment, land registration and e payment.

### **Major constraints to e-government implementation in nigeria.**

Although the implementation of e-government has begun in Nigeria, e-government activity in Nigeria is still low. (Yusuf, 2006). There are profuse challenges impeding full implementation of e-government in Nigeria. In this section, we shall be highlighting some of the barriers to e-government implementation in Nigeria.

### **Low ict literacy rate**

One of the main factors affecting the roll out and success of e-government in a country is the level of human capacity. Although Nigeria is making measured progress in the area of Internet and PC penetration but the journey is still far. While there is much hype about ICT among the younger generation, overall the awareness among the citizens about ICTs is low.

Personal computers are still regarded as an elitist commodity. Consequently, there is no demand from citizens for e-government services. In fact, even when government services are delivered by electronic means Nigerian still prefer to access it manually. Low ICT literacy rate is a serious impediment for the adoption of E-Government in Nigeria as it hampers both the appreciation and appropriation of E-Government services. In order for citizens to maximize the full benefits of E-Government, beyond knowing how to read and write they also need to possess basic ICT literacy.

### **Lack of necessary regulatory/legal framework**

The IT regulatory framework in Nigeria has not yet been restructured to fully accommodate e-government. Within government cycle for instance, an e-mail has no official value and digital signature are not accepted.

(Garfinkel 2001). Again, There are no laws on electronic governance. Before seeking ICT solutions to problems of governance, appropriate policy design must be developed and set in place, in order to facilitate seamless information exchanges within government and between government, citizens and businesses. It is also required to create the economic conditions that will engender investment in ICTs infrastructures and services.

### **Poor ict infrastructure.**

The ICT infrastructure requirement for e government takeoff in Nigeria is still rudimentary. Nigeria had less than 500,000 fixed lines before 1999. Although the telecommunication landscape is steadily changing with the introduction of GSM services, which has increase accessibility and provided less demanding interfaces for people to connect. Yet much has to be done in this regard.

The cost of internet usage in Nigeria remains too high for a majority of the people. If the costs of internet usage are not brought down then the people for whom the government is going online for will not be able to benefit from it. (Backus, 2001; Ndou, 2004).

### **Corruption**

Corruption has had negative effect on laudable projects in Nigeria and e government is not an exception. Embezzlement of funds allocated for projects is a common feature among public officers. Many e-government initiatives fail or are abandoned due to outright embezzlement of fund by government officials. The failed National identity card project is a case in point.

### **Lack of Committed Leadership**

One of the major hindrances to growth of e-government in Nigeria is the paucity of committed leadership with the capacity to articulate broad e-government vision and also galvanize the necessary resources needed to implement e-government in Nigeria. The role of committed leadership in e-government adoption and implementation can never be overemphasized. Committed leadership will guarantee vital stakeholder buy in, secure long term resource and ensure sustainability of e government project (infodev 2002).

We need Leaders with vision and political will to drive the process of institutional reform and put e-government in the front burner. Of all the constraint to e-government in Nigeria this is probably the most crucial. The shortage of senior government officials and politicians, who are willing or able to champion ICTs in government in Africa(Nigeria) acts as a serious constraint to e-government diffusion. (Udo and Edoho 2000).

### **Epileptic Power supply**

In Nigeria power outages are recurrent and the power sector operates far below its capacity. The current power generation in the country is put at about 4000MW. Nigeria electricity consumption per capita is 111 kWh, which is one of the lowest in sub-Saharan Africa. With very few Nigerian having access to electricity, and since there are yet no computers or ICT device that currently runs without electricity, it becomes very difficult for e government especially G2C to succeed in Nigeria.

### **Bureaucratic Bottlenecks.**

Above all, bureaucracy acts as the main impediment to e-Government in Nigeria. There seem to be deep rooted resistance to change among Nigerian civil servants regarding computerization. Many civil servants are afraid of computerization because they speciously think computerization of government activities will render some of them redundant. Even among the few who have embraced computerization incessant transfers within the service most times hampers e government activities. E-government cannot be achieved unless public servants who man government bureaucracy are hard-pressed to change.

### **Recomendations and Conclusion**

There is no doubt that the problems identified are great threats to the implementation of e-government in Nigeria.

It is of our opinion and recommendation that there is urgent need to develop telecommunication and other critical infrastructure necessary to support e-government development in Nigeria such as uninterrupted power supply in Nigeria. It is very important that these infrastructures are extended to rural areas and its product and services made more accessible and affordable to the rural poor so that they can benefit from e-government initiatives.

There is also the need for political Leaders to embrace and drive the process of public sector reform for accelerated service delivery to citizens through the use of information and communications technologies.

Moreover, if e-government must take root in Nigeria, combating corruption and changing the perception Nigeria civil servant about the value of ICT must be made a policy priority.

### **References:**

Adeyemo A.B. 2011, E-government Implementation in Nigeria: An assessment of Nigeria's global e-gov ranking, Journal of Internet and Information System Vol. 2(1), pp. 11-19.

- ADF IV (2004), Fourth African Development Forum, Governance for a Progressing Africa, 11-15th October 2004, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, [http://www.uneca.org/adf/adfiv/adf\\_4\\_report\\_final\\_sml.pdf](http://www.uneca.org/adf/adfiv/adf_4_report_final_sml.pdf).
- Ayo, C.K. and Ekong, U. (2008) e-Voting Implementation in Nigeria: Prospects and Challenges, Proceedings of the 8th European Conference on eGovernment 10-11 July 2008, Ecole Polytechnique, Lausanne, Switzerland.
- Backus, M. (2001). E-governance in developing countries. [Online]. IICD Research Brief, (1)
- Heeks, R (2002). *E-governance in Africa: Promise and Practice*, Manchester: Institute for Development Policy and Management, University of Manchester.
- InfoDev (2002) The E-Government Handbook For Developing Countries.
- ITU. 2006. *World ICT Development Report*. ITU: Geneva, Switzerland.
- Ndou, V. (2004), EGovernment for Developing Countries: Opportunities and Challenges, *Electronic Journal of Information Systems in Developing Countries*, Vol 18 (1) pp. 1-24.
- OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). 2005. *e-Government for Better Government*. Paris: OECD.
- Stanforth, C. (2007) Using actor-network to analyze e-government implementation in developing countries, *Information Technologies and International Development*.
- Udo G.J. and Edoho F.M. (2000) Information Technology Transfer To African Nations, *Journal of Technology Transfer*.
- Yusuf.O.(2006) Solutions for e-Government Development in Nigeria. Accenture EIU Government Research. High performance delivered.
- World Bank (2001) Issue Note: E-Government and the World Bank. November 5.