Chapter 4
A Snapshot Overview of the Digital Divide:
e-Inclusion and e-Government in the Zambian Context

Kelvin Joseph Bwalya
University of Botswana, Botswana & University of Johannesburg, South Africa

Tanya Du Plessis
University of Johannesburg, South Africa

Chris Rensleigh
University of Johannesburg, South Africa

ABSTRACT

It can arguably be stated that the digital divide, e-Inclusion, and successful e-Government development are inseparable. The concept of e-Inclusion is an a priori phenomenon to understanding the concept of the digital divide. This chapter provides a theoretical background on the linkages of information access, the digital divide, e-Inclusion, and e-Government. This exploratory study aims to discuss the intricacies of the digital divide and present a snapshot discussion of initiatives taken in Zambia to bridge the divide in the context of e-Government. The discussion presents the likelihood of the realisation of e-Government inclusion in the Zambian context and how this can impact e-Government development in its totality. From the discussion, it is evident that e-Government depends on multi-dimensional factors (such as individual and institutional e-Readiness, relevance of e-Government applications, local culture, propensity to change, and managerial and technical capabilities) to succeed, and this entails that any robust e-Government strategy should incorporate a multivariate approach in its design.

INTRODUCTION

The motivation of e-Government implementation can be traced back to the exemplar performance of e-Commerce in the public sector. With this in mind, governments and other stakeholders of e-Government saw the importance of implementing e-Government in expectation of increases in efficiency, productivity improvements, and cost savings similar to those that have been experienced in the private sector (Stamoulis, et al., 2001; Clark, 2003; Tassabehji, 2005). This importance cannot be over-emphasised as will be discussed in this chapter.

There are many factors that have prompted individual countries to implement e-Government. Many researchers have outlined the ultimate need for governments to implement e-Government by detailing the many benefits that come with successful e-Government implementation. E-Government not only provides a platform through which the citizens and different businesses can get in touch with the government, but also enables them to participate in decision making on issues of national importance (Bwalya & Healy, 2010). In addition, it reduces the cost of public service delivery, encourages and enables participatory democracy and social inclusion (where citizens, regardless of their socio-economic status, may participate in decision making and will keep abreast of government information and policies), reduces corruption, and facilitates an efficient public service delivery system (Bwalya & Healy, 2010; Navarra & Cornford, 2003; Heek, 2004; Kumar & Best, 2006). Service delivery improvement in e-Government is brought about by its provision of a platform where different departments can network and integrate their services by mainstreaming ICTs in their business value chains (Ngulube, 2007). Further, other countries are motivated to implement e-Government out of their desire to belong to the social club of countries that have implemented e-Government in their public service delivery value chains (Iqbal & Seo, 2008).

Not only promoting civic engagement, Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) in the framework of e-Government can also facilitate government to business or civil society engagement by augmenting the capacity of different e-Government stakeholders to work as organised networks (Hamel, 2010; Norris, 2001; Sutinen & Tedre, 2010). For example, Infonet, created by the Social Development Network of East Africa, and FarmSubsidy.org, a non-profit project in Sweden, have been built on the principle of freedom of information (TTC, 2009).

Despite the aforementioned benefits, successful e-Government implementation is still a complex phenomenon influenced by a multi-dimensional set of factors. This entails that for these benefits to be amassed; there is need that a robust e-Government strategy be designed with due reference to the contextual environment in which e-Government will be implemented. Not only that, the different intrinsic factors such as individual factors (Perceived Usefulness [PU] and Perceived Ease Of Use [PEOU], ICT skill levels), and organisational factors (resistance to change, mainstreaming ICTs into various organisations's business value chains, technological buy-ins) should be addressed.

For most of the emerging countries, especially those in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), there are many principal e-Government challenges that prevent its proliferation. This is because preliminary requirements to effective e-Government implementation are not evident in most of the cases (Ngulube, 2007). Some of the key challenges are the lack of basic ICT skills on the part of government employees and citizens who may want to engage (adopt and use) in e-Government applications, lack of appropriate ICT backbone infrastructure especially in the rural areas, lack of political will, and inadequate legal and regulatory frameworks.

Another contentious issue that has been negatively impacting e-Government uptake has been the digital divide (in its various forms). It is common knowledge that differences in information

Related Content

Emerging Cybersecurity Threats in the Eye of E-Governance in the Current Era
Saira Muzafar, Mamoona Humayunand Syed Jawad Hussain (2022). *Cybersecurity Measures for E-Government Frameworks (pp. 43-60).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/emerging-cybersecurity-threats-in-the-eye-of-e-governance-in-the-current-era/302720

Natural Language Processing and Psychology in e-Government Services: Evaluation of a Crime Reporting and Interviewing System
Alicia Iriberri (2015). *International Journal of Electronic Government Research (pp. 1-17).*
www.irma-international.org/article/natural-language-processing-and-psychology-in-e-government-services/126942

E-Governance in India: From Policy to Reality, a Case Study of Chhattisgarh Online Information System for Citizen Empowerment (Choice) Project of Chhattisgarh State of India
Malathi Subramanianand Anupama Saxena (2008). *International Journal of Electronic Government Research (pp. 12-26).*
www.irma-international.org/article/governance-india-policy-reality-case/2048

Virtual Policy Networks
K. McNutt (2007). *Encyclopedia of Digital Government (pp. 1606-1610).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/virtual-policy-networks/11721

E-Governance in India: From Policy to Reality, a Case Study of Chhattisgarh Online Information System for Citizen Empowerment (Choice) Project of Chhattisgarh State of India
Malathi Subramanianand Anupama Saxena (2008). *International Journal of Electronic Government Research (pp. 12-26).*
www.irma-international.org/article/governance-india-policy-reality-case/2048