Chapter 3
E–Government's Role in Poverty Alleviation:
Case Study of South Africa

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Governments the world over are increasingly implementing e-government systems as part of public sector reforms to enhance good governance and service delivery. This chapter reviews successful e-government projects in South Africa. E-governance is seen as a panacea to country's several challenges of service delivery, poverty, inequality, democracy, respect for human rights, and corruption. The South African government understands the urgency of addressing poverty and improving service delivery to majority of citizens who were marginalized during white majority rule. Most of South Africa's black majority, for example, lives in poverty compared to their white counterparts. To address these imbalances, projects are guided by the principle of public service for all under the brand Batho Pele (meaning people first). Some e-government projects in South Africa have borne fruits; they empowered people to overcome development obstacles, have helped fight poverty, and uplift the socio-economic and living standards of citizens. The challenges facing the e-government projects include high costs of broadband access, diversity of languages that need to be converted to the language of the Internet, red tape and bureaucratic system, as well as financial sustainability and the use of top down design approaches in projects with little or no initial user involvement.

INTRODUCTION

E-government is the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to improve the activities of public sector organizations (Heeks, 2002). It is aimed at enabling public administration to optimize its internal and external functions, facilitate social governance processes or objectives, such as information for political participation, consultation and consensus-seeking among governments, public servants, politicians and citizens (Sheridan and Riley, 2006). On the other hand, the term e-governance, is simply not a noun of e-government, but is used to describe an advanced form of e-government where instead of citizens being merely the recipient of government services, there is some engagement between the government and its people (Sheridan and Riley, 2006). Whether one uses the term e-government or e-governance as some people do, the focus is on enhancing service delivery by simplifying bureaucratic procedures, promoting efficiency, facilitating transparency, improving information sharing, innovation of service, and greater citizen empowerment.

There are different levels of government. Government-to-Citizens (G2C) is a form of government that includes all the interactions between a government and its citizens that can take place electronically with the aim of offering citizens faster, more responsive, more convenient and less complicated means to public services. Government-to-Business (G2B) refers to e-commerce in which government sells to businesses or provides them with services, as well as businesses selling products and services to government. The objective of G2B is to enable businesses to interact, transact and communicate with government online, with greater speed and convenience. Government-to-Employees (G2E) includes activities and services between government units and their employees aimed at developing and cultivating IT capabilities among government employees to deliver efficient and cost-effective services. Finally, Government-to-Government (G2G) interaction refers to activities between government ministries and/or departments. G2G may also involve government dealing with governments in other jurisdictions (Abissath, 2007).

Governments the world over, are increasingly implementing e-government systems as part of public sector reforms aimed at enhancing good governance and service delivery. Traditional-based government systems are characterized by transactions that involve manual physical filing systems which are burdened by enormous movements of correspondence, duplication of files, wastage of paper, difficulty in accessing information in files, and loss of data and general inefficiency of operations. Through e-government, governments want to provide efficient service delivery by integrating services and reduction of red-tape. Beck, Wigand and König (2003) observe that governments are implementing e-government systems, to obtain efficiency gains, improve service delivery to citizens and force governments to be-

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