Chapter 8.7
# Challenges and Policy Imperatives for E–Government in Africa

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## INTRODUCTION

Government is a system of social control under which the right to make laws, and the right to enforce them, is vested in a particular group in society. Organizationally, governments may be classified into parliamentary or presidential systems, depending on the relationship between executive and legislature. Government may also be classified according to the distribution of power at different levels. It may be unitary—that is, with the central government controlling local affairs—or it may be federated or confederated, according to the degree of autonomy of local government. When this system of social control is being implemented to a large extent on the platform of information and communication technology (ICT), then we have an electronic government (e-government).

E-government refers to the provision of online public services to citizens and businesses. Services for citizens include registration to government services, such as health care, education or employment benefits. For businesses, e-government services can take the form of online alerts for public procurements or funding opportunities as well as information and support on applicable legislation in a given sector. E-government is widely viewed as an extraordinary opportunity for administrations to cut down their costs, speed up procedures and, therefore, increase their efficiency and reactivity. No doubt, e-government has grown in the past decade worldwide. Its efforts can vary from Web portals to online license renewals to experimentation with online voting. E-government is generally recognized as a means of making government more efficient while allowing it to be more responsive to customer needs (Jeffery, 2005).

The growth in e-government has been rapid. For example, in the United States, the percentage of local governments with Web sites increased from 8.7% in 1995 to more than 80.0% in 2000 (Holden, Norris, & Fletcher, 2003). Advances in

ICT are helping to make the growth in e-government a global phenomenon. A United Nations report shows that governments around the world are moving towards higher levels of e-government to better serve their citizens (UN-ASPA, 2002).

In Africa, e-government is not yet widespread. However, some African countries have embarked on e-government initiatives and have recorded varying degrees of success. This article aims at reviewing some of these initiatives and ultimately recommends the way forward in terms of policy issues and strategies that African governments must put in place for their e-government projects and initiatives to be worthwhile.

## BACKGROUND

There is no unique, agreed definition of e-government. The term is being used extensively nowadays to refer to the use of ICT by government agencies. It is the application of ICT to improve efficiency and effectiveness, create transparency and accountability of informational and transactional exchanges within government, between governments and government agencies at national, state and local levels (G2G), citizens (G2C) and businesses (G2B) (Heeks, 2001a). According to

Abet Open University (2004), G2C, G2B and G2G e-government is all about government agencies working together to use technology so that they can better provide individuals and businesses with government services and information. Much of it is about: establishing common standards across government; delivering services more effectively; and providing ways for government agencies to work together, all using the best technologies available.

Put differently, e-government refers to the use by government agencies of information technologies (such as Wide Area Networks, the Internet and mobile computing) that have the ability to transform relations with citizens, businesses and other arms of government. These technologies can serve a variety of different ends: better delivery of government services to citizens, improved interactions with business and industry, citizen empowerment through access to information, or more efficient government management. The resulting benefits can be less corruption, increased transparency, greater convenience, revenue growth and/or cost reductions (Abet Open University, 2004).

According to Heeks (2001b), e-government is the use of ICTs to improve the activities of public sector organizations. He holds that all digital ICTs

*Figure 1. Domains of e-government initiatives (Source: Heeks, 2001b)*
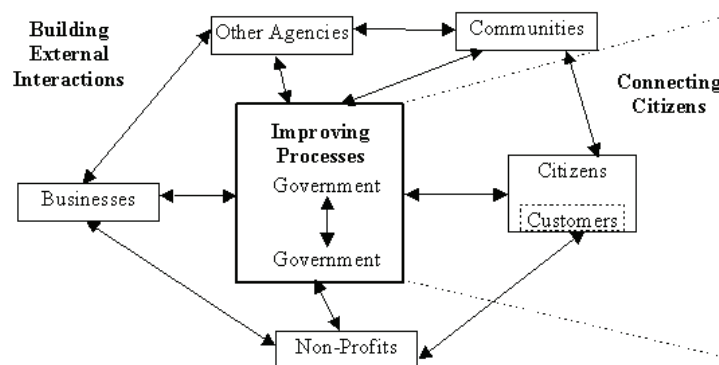
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