

Chapter 10

Botswana's e-Government Development Trajectory: The Experience of Local Authorities

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ABSTRACT

Effective development of e-Government takes place when there is a balance between the supply side (interventions towards promotion of e-Government) and the demand side (consumers' willingness to engage in e-Government). Botswana presents a case where e-Government is nearly rhetorical despite the major interventions that are being put in place to accelerate its development. Meaningful proliferation of e-Government can be achieved if there is universal (global) adoption of ICTs by citizens and businesses in their interaction with the government departments. Although there are some applications which potential e-Government consumers can use to interact with the government departments, this facility is not universally accessible to most citizens, especially at the community (and village) level. This chapter highlights the experience of local authorities in Botswana towards promoting the use of e-Government in a bid to bring it to the doorsteps of the people. This conceptual chapter discusses the experience of local authorities in Botswana in promoting the use of e-Government to bring it to the doorstep of the people. It highlights how the country's e-Government interventions at the local authority level are intertwined with the national efforts, and discusses what strategies are in place to encourage global citizen and businesses' utilization of e-Government applications. Further, the chapter posits that there is a huge chance that e-Government will succeed in Botswana if concerted efforts are amalgamated towards its development.

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INTRODUCTION

There has been a lot of interest generated of late in e-Government research. This has been supported with the wider adoption of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) by individuals and in the public sector delivery value chains. Arising from the New Public Administration (NPA) school of thought, e-Government has now become a buzz word for policy makers and administrators because of the potential it holds for enabling public organizations to yield the benefits and opportunities that come with global utilization of ICTs in government business processes. The 'metamorphosis' in the public service delivery platforms has brought about many opportunities which have transformed into efficiency and effectiveness of public sector institutions. Both in the developed and developing world contexts, many studies have investigated the impact of the use of ICTs in public service delivery frameworks and have posited that their positive returns have been grandiose and well documented in literature (Basu, 2004; Wong & Welch, 2004; Ifinedo, 2006; Kumar & Best, 2006; Mutula & Mostert, 2010; Nkwe, 2012). E-Government has direct positive impacts on the individuals, businesses and the government itself. On the part of the government, e-Government facilitates effective information management practices within public service delivery platforms culminating into improved service delivery (Bekkers and Homburg, 2007).

For individuals, interaction with government online produces e-Participation, where they transact business with government and participate in the activities of governance. This increases citizens' trust in their government, and consequently improves their loyalty to the government (Coursey and Norris, 2008). For businesses, improved transparency and accountability provided by e-Government can actually create an environment conducive to business ventures and even attract foreign investors (Nkwe, 2012).

Over the past years, there have been rapid advancements in ICTs the world over, and their increasing adoption has changed the ways in which organisations and businesses operate – public and private enterprises alike. In the public sector arena, their adoption and implementation has brought about rapid development of e-Government. E-Government has been defined by UNESCO (2005) as “the use of Information and Communication Technologies to promote more efficient and effective government, and make it (the government) more accessible and accountable to the citizens”. The World Bank elaborates the definition further to acknowledge that the “technologies... have the ability to transform relations with citizens, businesses, and other arms of government” (World Bank, 2003).

Further conceptualizations and definitions of e-Government have emerged: It is not only the computerization of a government system or digitization of government information, it is not just a government website on the Internet (Basu, 2004) – it is a deliberate undertaking by government to improve their infrastructure, policies, and legislation to support the requirements of e-Government. Hence, the World Bank further postulates that it “is a process that requires planning, sustained dedication of resources and political will” of the government because the benefits of cost savings and service improvements are not automatic (World Bank, 2003). Thus, e-Government has a promise to revitalize the public service, overhauling its management and repositioning it for improved transparency, accountability and efficiency. Most countries, including those in Southern African, have been motivated to implement e-Government so as to amass the benefits of e-Government such as reduction of operational and administrative costs, as well as the provision of a relevant and timely service to both citizens and businesses.

Given the above, it is not surprising that Botswana should also jump onto the bandwagon of implementing e-Government so that it is able to reap the said benefits. Although Botswana has put

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