

Chapter 16

E-Government Development in Botswana: The Role of Libraries

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ABSTRACT

Botswana is in the process of developing and implementing e-Government for its population in an effort to enhance and improve service delivery. In order to achieve that, a significant number of interventions have been put in place on both the supply and demand sides of e-Government. Using literature and document review, this conceptual chapter highlights the major interventions in place to encourage development of e-Government. Specifically, the chapter explores the role of libraries in cementing the use and growth of e-Government in Botswana. The chapter posits that libraries have a cardinal role to play in successful implementation of e-Government, and must therefore be taken into serious account.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Although decades behind developed countries in the implementation of e-Government, African countries, and Botswana in particular, are in the process of providing e-Government services to their citizenry. For Botswana, this has been in the making since the MAITLAMO ICT policy was formulated in 2004. The policy clearly stipulated what needed to be in place for e-Government to work, namely, good ICT infrastructure; cyber laws to address cybercrime; ensuring access to the technology so that e-Government access does not become another elitist service; and skills to

use the technology (Maitlamo, 2004). However, even with these conditions in place, literature has revealed that although many countries have implemented e-Government services, uptake or use of these has been less than expected.

The OECD report on Government at a Glance (2009) found a discrepancy between the large amounts of e-Government services available and the use of these services in Europe – a phenomenon that led OECD to adopt the theme of user-centered approaches as opposed to government centered approaches to providing e-Government services. It is therefore imperative for developing countries such as Botswana to adopt user-centered

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approaches in a bid to determine the likelihood of successful implementation of e-Government.

The findings of the OECD report led to articulation of six new initiatives in e-Government that must be taken into account to achieve a demand-driven e-Government rather than a supply driven e-Government (UN, 2012). These include: user take up and training; accessibility of Internet or mobile connectivity to all; accessibility to services to vulnerable groups; multichannel service provision; whole of government and one stop service production – more will be said about these at a later stage.

This chapter focuses on e-Government and its requirements and will interrogate how ready Botswana is in terms of: infrastructure; legislation and policy; access and skills on the part of the population; it will also consider the readiness (or not) of public libraries to facilitate access and use of e-Government for communities that they serve. In short, the chapter will provide a consideration of what a user-centered approach to providing e-Government entails and explore to what extent the Botswana project has considered the user-centered approach in designing its e-Government project. The questions to be considered will include:

- What is e-Government readiness;
- The status of e-Government in Africa;
- The status of e-Government in Botswana;
- Issues of access, needs and skills in Botswana;
- What role for public libraries in e-Government.

What is E-Government?

E-Government has been an evolutionary process that began with the widespread use of IT (mainframe computers) by governments and their agencies to make the processing of massive data more efficient. Thus one saw governments and agencies implementing payroll systems and other financial transactions. The developments of

communications technologies and desktop computers brought home the fact that entities could move beyond centralized processing to distributed processing. IT was used primarily to improve back office activities and make clerical functions more efficient (Zuboff, 1998, quoted in Yildiz, 2007).

A number of scholars have indicated that there is no one agreed upon definition of e-Government (Moon 2002; Yildiz, 2007; Nkwe, 2012). As such a plethora of definitions of e-Government abound. However, they all focus on the use of information communication technology by governments to deliver and receive information, goods and services to and from its constituencies. E-Government can be defined broadly as well as in a narrow sense (Fang, 2002). In the narrow sense, e-Government is seen as government activities communicated via communications technology to various entities such as different levels of government, businesses, and citizen communities.

In the broader sense e-Government is seen as part of a process of transformation of government towards more efficient and effective service and information provision, enhancing participation by constituents in government activities; transforming internal and external relationships through technology (Gartner, quoted in Fang, 2002). E-Government is described as a complex change effort that requires that governments change and transform their ways, methods of operation, activities, and even attitudes to enable access and service to citizens, businesses and other branches of government on a continuous basis and at any distance or locale.

Yildiz (2007) provides definitions from a few scholars: such as UN and ASPA (2002) - that e-government is simply the use of the Internet and the World Wide Web (WWW) to provide government information, services and expertise; that e-Government is a relationship between government and its customers and suppliers via electronic means (Means and Schneider, 2000); e-Government is also defined as the use of technology, especially Web-based applications to enhance access to

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