

Chapter 41

The Level of E–Government Implementation: Case of Malawi

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents an analysis for level of e-government implementation in the context of a developing country. The purpose of the study is to understand the level of e-government implementation in Malawi focusing on examining websites for government ministries and departments. Quantitative and partly qualitative data is used to analyse seven websites for government ministries and departments. The results are compared with indicators for e-government implementation from international development agencies. The findings confirm that the level of e-government implementation is in the early stages of presence and interaction. In addition, the results show slow growth in e-government implementation because of limited integration of public services. The study provides insights that may be useful in improving the implementation of e-government.

INTRODUCTION

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are transforming the way government agencies engage with citizens, businesses and other governments. Governments in developed world are offering value-added services to citizens and businesses using ICT. Similarly, Governments in Sub-Saharan Africa are attempting to use ICT in delivery of some of the public services to citizens, business organisations and other governments (Bwalya, 2009; Dada, 2006; Wyld, 2004).

E-government also involves the way government manages information, deliver services to citizens, businesses and communities (Kumar, Mukerji, Butt & Persuad, 2007). In e-government, the focus is to deliver public services and promote citizen participation using ICT (Al-Nuaim, 2011).

The process of implementing e-government involves a sequence of activities and structures called phases (Gottschalk & Solli-Sarther, 2009). Many authors have identified phases in development of e-government differently. For instance, Siau and Long (2006) suggests six phases in

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implementation of e-government namely presence, interaction, transactions, transformation, seamless and e-democracy. Another model highlights four phases for e-government namely catalogue, transactions, vertical integration and horizontal integration (Layne & Lee, 2001). The six stage model is comprised of web presence, one-way interaction, two way interaction, transaction and integration (Al-Nuaim, 2011). It is possible that the different models for e-government implementation indicate variables which are attempting to demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses of e-government in the environments in which they are implemented. Thus, it is likely that different models may be ideal for understanding the process of e-government in specific contexts.

Interactions between government agents and different sectors of society using ICT promises effectiveness and efficiency of government activities, promoting citizen participation and improved communication between government and business organisations (Allen, Juillet, Pacquet & Roy, 2001; Parajuli, 2007). Governments in developing countries, like their counterparts in developed economies, are also implementing e-government to reap the benefits of using ICT in delivering public services (Kaaya, 2004). There is empirical evidence to suggest that successful implementation of e-government has been problematic in African countries (Dada, 2006; Heeks, 2003). Some of the challenges include the effect of digital divide, inadequate local content, issues of usability, lack of trust in e-government services, lack of government commitment to implement e-government etc. (Bwalya, 2009; Dada, 2006). Little progress has been made in implementing e-government resulting in failure to reap the benefits of using ICT in delivery of government services to the citizenry.

Governments in developing countries are faced with many challenges that are affecting their large part of the population such as lack of food security, pandemic diseases, lack of adequate infrastructure, limited access to clean water and

other basic needs resulting in extreme poverty. ICTs are perceived as a means of overcoming some of the challenges (Thompson & Walsham, 2010). Governments are willing to invest in ICTs. Nonetheless, the resources which may be used to invest in improving access to ICT and provide support to overcome social problems should be spent wisely without mistakes (Bollou & Ngwenyama, 2008; Dada, 2006; Yildiz, 2007). It is important that implementation of e-government is effective to maximise gains from the scarce resources. It is argued that establishing and understanding of the status quo of e-government may help those involved in implementation of e-government to create effective plans and actions (Parajuri, 2007).

Studies for e-government have concentrated in the context of developed countries resulting in paucity of studies for context of developing countries (Heeks, 2003; Kaaya, 2004; Schuppan, 2009). Insights from developing countries context may help to understand how to deal with challenges based on local situations (Thompson & Walsham, 2010). We support the notion that e-government is still a new phenomenon in context of developing countries which has been problematic (Dada, 2006; Heeks, 2003; Ngulube, 2007). International development agents compile indicators to establish the level of e-government. For instance, United Nations E-Government Development database provide statistical data on infrastructure development, human capital, online services and level of participation (United Nation E-Government Statistics, 2011). Indicators on e-government development alone may not reflect the realities of e-government development and understanding of the local context (Sharma, 2004; Thompson & Walsham, 2010). Consequently, this chapter aims to address the paucity of studies on e-government in context of a developing country.

The study analysed the case of Malawi which has made some substantial progress in ICT diffusion and embraced the concept of e-government in its national ICT development agenda (Bichler,

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