Chapter 15
Grey Hair, Grey Matter, and ICT Policy in the Global South: The Ghana Case

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ABSTRACT

By exploring the case of Ghana, this chapter examines the often cited linkages between good governance, ICTs, and development in developing societies. Though some significant ICT-related infrastructural development projects have been undertaken in Africa, the empirics indicate that the region, compared to other regions, such as Asia, has yet to experience the magic expected. Using an e-government project at the presidency in Ghana as a case study, this chapter attempts to understand why the vast potential benefits of ICTs have not been realized in countries like Ghana. The argument put forward by the author is that e-government and by extension ICT policy outcomes in developing polities must be understood as partly a reflection of the world view of policy elites, which is at best generally antagonistic, ambivalent, and even apprehensive of the very notion of a cyber society. The chapter concludes with recommendations relevant to Ghana and other developing polities.

INTRODUCTION

By the last two decades of the twentieth century, the ubiquitous presence and impact of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) on societies across the globe had become a difficult to ignore reality. Inspired in part by the dot com boom, especially in the West and parts of Asia, African policymakers began to appreciate the potentially revolutionary value of ICTs with regard to fast tracking development. Not be left out, Ghana joined the race to leverage ICTs for development in Africa (Anyimadu & Falch, 2003).

By 2003, the ICT4AD (Information and Communication Technology for Accelerated Development) policy document had been drawn up by the Government of Ghana. Preceding this was the rapid emergence of major players in the mobile telephony and software development sectors and increasing Internet awareness, access, and usage (Anyimadu, et al., 2005). In spite of all this, it is difficult to describe Ghana as an economy and

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society strategically exploiting, harnessing, and leveraging the developmental potential of ICTs with significant demonstrable results. In other words, public policy in Ghana has not responded adequately to the emergence of the networked society of Castells (2000).

This chapter will argue that to understand Ghana's predicament it is important to deconstruct the complicated interplay between the generation gaps ("grey hairs" versus "jet black hairs"), mindsets (grey matter) and ICTs policy formation. This vexatious, convoluted, and often ignored intersection will be unpacked using participant observation insights gleaned from working on a major e-government project[1] at the Ghanaian presidency complemented by other primary and secondary data sources. The pivotal role that ICTs can play in fast tracking development in the global South is an argument that has been made ad nauseam. Indeed the World Bank has drawn attention to the linkages between good governance, ICTs and development in developing polities in the last two decades. Some significant ICTs related infrastructural development has been undertaken in Africa in the last decade; Chinese and Indian companies have for example won and executed lucrative contracts in this regard. The empirics however indicate that overall and in comparison with other regions such as Asia, the vaunted development potential of ICTs has yet to be reflected in developing countries like Ghana.

Using Ghana as a case study, the burden of this chapter will be to understand why the vast potential benefits of ICTs have not been unleashed in developing countries. The argument will be canvassed that ICTs policy outcomes in developing polities in the last two decades need to be understood as partly a reflection of the world view of policy elites which is at best generally antagonistic, ambivalent and even apprehensive of the very notion of a cyber society. Recommendations relevant to Ghana and other developing polities will be offered to round off the discourse.

AFRICA, E-GOVERNMENT, AND THE DIGITAL AGE

The 1980s in Africa were generally marked by economic and social malaise in most of the countries on the continent. This generalized state of socio-economic crises in the 1980s in Africa has been attributed in part to the primary commodity and oil price shocks of the 1960s and 1970s respectively and the ensuing debt crises (Aryeetey, 1996; Nafziger, 2006). Africa's policy and political elites seemed to have responded to these crises by turning to the Bretton Woods institutions and signing onto the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) of this International Financial Organization (IFIs). African countries, which adopted the SAPs, had to adhere to strict conditionalities, which were initially economic in nature but later on in the 1990s assumed a political character. Kahler (1992) describes conditionalities as "an exchange of policy changes for external financing" (p. 89). Meeting these conditionalities became a quid pro quo for the loans, grants, and technical assistance that these institutions offered (Amoah, 2005; Killick, 1984; Zormelo, 1996). It must be added that arguably the emergence of conservative governments in Europe and America (Thatcher government in the United Kingdom in 1979 and the Reagan Administration in 1980), the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 provided the geo-political space for the triumphant march of the essentially neo-liberal ideas of government and economic policy formation in developing countries.

The turn to political conditionalities as alluded to above must be seen as a reflection, at least partly, of the growing dissatisfaction of the IFIs with the policy outcomes of economic restructuring efforts in African countries. The emergence of political conditionalities in the 1990s in Africa marked an evolution in IFIs' policy thinking toward the idea that the re-engineering of the institutions, processes and rules of government in Africa is a necessary condition for economic restructuring