

E-GOVERNMENT IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

Chete, Fidelis O. and Imouokhome, Francis A. U.

Abstract

Government activities in Nigeria are yet to move from the old brick and mortar style in spite of the computer technology available to us in the present world. Hence, transactions at all the tiers and levels of government in the country are characterized by high process inefficiency, low service quality, wastage and redundancies. The backroom engine, which will run good governance through due diligence, due process and transparency actually needs to be formally strengthened and institutionalized for widespread effectiveness through computer-assisted modern processes now commonly known as e-government. This paper identifies the possible challenges the Nigerian government will face in implementing e-Government and outlines some strategies for its success. It discusses the status of the e-government programme in Nigeria and gives reasons why the country should move forward with the e-government project. The paper concludes that e-Government, when successfully implemented, will enhance economic growth and development.

Introduction

There has been much discussion on how technology can be used to contribute to good governance. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) will not only make government more efficient, but it should make them more democratic, accessible and responsive (Wong, 2000). In addition, inadequate tax collection system, non-consumer centered services, a high level of fragmentation and duplication, incomplete execution of planned improvements and low accessibility to government information by the public, have tended to also become a culture of Nigeria's public service (SunNews online, 2004).

Nigeria's current public sector reforms place emphasis on privatization, deregulation, monetization of benefits and the anti-corruption act. All these, and many more are initiatives aimed at improving due process and transparency in governance. Public analysts say, however, that little may be achieved if government business continues to be conducted the old way. Thus "for government to enhance its image, provide an environment where it is easier to comply with rules and regulations, and decentralized power and decision making and utilize resources in value-added activities, analysts say government at all levels must embark on electronic-government or e-Government" (SunNews online, 2004). "Electronic-Government (e-G) is the introduction of electronic methods of improving the way government performs its business. It is the government's equivalent of e-commerce. Its potential is huge as it can enable a 7-day, 24 hour service" (Ibrahim, Onuolapo, Alade & Ayobami. 2003).

This paper discusses the meaning and scope of e-government, and shows Nigeria standing in e-government. It also highlights the gains, challenges and strategies of implementing e-government in Nigeria.

Meaning of E-Government

Obasanjo (2004) defines e-government as the use of information and communication technologies to improve efficiency, effectiveness, transparency and accountability of governance through implementing data ware housing and integrated decision support system to manage modern economy for the benefit of the governed. Uyoe (as cited in SAP Nigeria, 2003) defines e-government as the movement of citizen services to the web inclusive of re-engineering, procurement, digital information access and electronic commerce with Internet technologies. The real focus of e-Government is to increase the convenience and simplicity of citizen interaction with government (Atease as cited in SunNews online, 2004). According to him, e-government makes it easier for citizens to conduct their affairs with government. The application of e-government imperatives requires changing how government works, how it deals with information, how officials view their jobs and interacts with the public. Achieving success in e-G also requires active partnerships between

government, citizens and the private sector. Thus, the fact that e-G has to do with government does not mean that only the government is involved. The shift must be from government of the people for the people and by the people to government of the people by the people and with the people (Ekuwem as cited in SAP Nigeria, 2003). The Nigerian government is determined not just to be a user but a driver and developer of e-government and will invest time, resources and funds in the development of information and information technologies; building of a national information infrastructure and their application for all facets of government activities and commerce, in order to promote e-learning, e-business, and ensure e-democracy (Obasanjo,2004). Four perspectives of e-governance may be identified. These include:

- (i) Government to Citizen (G2C), with the sole aim of providing citizens with one-stop access to relevant information and services on-line;
- (ii) Government to Government (G2G) which aims to share integrated Federal, State and Local data within key lines of business;
- (iii) Government to business (G2B) which aims to reduce burden on business by adopting processes to streamline data collection and eliminate redundancies, and
- (iv) Internal efficiency and efficiency which aims to apply industry best practices to government transactions. This includes best practices in e-training, one-stop recruitment, enterprise human resources, budget and performance integration, e-payroll, e-travel and integrated acquisition and e-records.

For any government to truly say it has gone 'e' the following values must have been provided: reduced operational costs; driving operational efficiencies; enhanced economic development; improved services to citizens and business; and redefined community and governance (Uyoe as cited in SAP Nigeria, 2003).

Moseki (as cited in SAP Nigeria, 2003) added that all these values are, however, dependent on the following success factors: a clear vision, shared and communicated; achievable targets; investment and political support; enabling infrastructure to bridge the digital line; access availability and affordability; availability of funding; and skilled resources to maintain gateway.

Governments around the world are, however, embracing e-government. A recent study of global e-government undertaken by researchers at Brown University shows that 21 per cent of government agencies around the world are offering on-line services, up from 16 percent in 2003, 12 percent in 2002 and 8 percent in 2001 (Providence, 2004). The "Fourth Annual Global e-Government Study" conducted by West (2004) measured the on-line presence of governments in 198 countries. The research evaluated government websites on two dozen criteria, including the availability of publications, databases, disability access, privacy, security and the number of online services. The study reviewed 1,935 government websites during June, July and August 2004. The researchers found that 89 percent of websites have online publications and 62 percent have links to databases (Providence, 2004). In addition, the researchers also rated the countries for overall e-government performance. Using an assessment based on the number of services plus access to information, privacy, security and foreign language transaction, they rated each country on a 100 point scale. The most ranked country is Taiwan, followed by Singapore, the United States, Canada, Monaco, China, and Australia. Nigeria is ranked 109 (see Appendix for excerpts from the survey report). The table shows the ranking of government's web efforts in 64 of the 196 countries studied. The ranks are for those from 1-14, 18-20,25-35, 101-109, and 124 to 129.

The study showed that Nigeria was ranked 103 in the previous year (2003) and 109 in the last survey conducted in 2004. This shows a decline in progress made by Nigeria, compared with Togo, now rated 8th in the world from 44th position it occupied in the year 2003, The issue now is: what are the challenges facing the Nigerian government in successfully implementing e-Government and what are the prospects of being an effective player in the e-Government utilization?

E - Government in Nigeria: Government Efforts

The Sokoto State Government, while enumerating the projects executed in the first four years of the present administration, gave six prospects and compelling reasons why Nigeria should move forward with e-Government.

(a) Better Service

There is the public and business expectation for quality, simple, accessible and responsible government programs and services. The digital age has brought with it not only a public expectation of good services, but an expectation of quality services when people want it, where they want it, and how they want it.

(b) Stronger Accountability

E-Government provides new information tools for measuring results and holding government accountable, thereby increasing public confidence in the institution of government and democratic process.

Under e-government, managers and staff will have easier access to information to help them measure and evaluate results and make some decisions. E-government will also make the governing process more transparent. Citizens' access to information will improve, enabling the public to directly assess how government is performing.

(c) Increased Efficiency and Effectiveness

E-government will give taxpayers the best value for money from the public service, lending further impetus to the evolution of e-government.

With better feedback on results, e-government will be better equipped to adjust its plans and policies to improve outcomes.

(d) Transformed Public-Sector Systems

Prosperity and quality of life in any given society depends heavily on public-sector system that reaches beyond the provincial government's provision of such services as health, justice, education, social services, transportation and resource management. To produce the best outcomes for the public, public-sector systems must apply information and information technology to enhance system management. The availability of high quality information across a whole sector is a powerful driving force for working together new ways to improve service to the public.

(e) More Relevance

In shifting to e-government, Nigeria will be committed to achieving high satisfaction levels, high participation levels and frequent repeat business from users of services. E-government has the potential to close service gaps by overcoming distance barriers in rural and remote areas. Government should be determined to lead the competition and to be the bride of other organizations in the public and private sectors. As a result, citizens and businesses will look to the government to meet current and future needs.

(e) Increased Economic Growth

By sustaining a high quality of life through the application of digital technology to public services, e-Government will produce a more powerful magnet for investors. The result is a stronger economy that will attract and keep high value-added jobs for the people.

In addition, Obasanjo (2004) in concluding his address to the e-government stakeholders conference, said:

Revenue is generated because of the increase in efficiency, blocking of waste pipes and generally more transparent nature which reduces corrupt practices ... tax collection would be improved by 300% nationwide when e- taxation modules are deployed at Federal, State, and Local government levels...Another form of revenue comes from service charges, when for instance a citizen pays a token fee for renewal of license online, checking of examination results, establishment posting or for buying of application forms from e-kiosks or e-buka at local or remote areas without traveling to urban centers.

The federal Government of Nigeria is determined to compete, survive and succeed as a nation in the 21st century. In addition, the government believes overwhelmingly that this country's future will depend on not only its capacity to invent, create and master new and

emerging technologies but in ensuring that these ideas move to the global market. By so doing, it is believed that these will spur economic growth, create new jobs for our people, strengthen our industrial performance and create abundant wealth for the nation. In line with the above belief, the democratic government is seriously desirous and committed to using e-government to enthrone transparency and fight corruption in all its ramifications (Tailed, 2000).

Determined to cut the bureaucracy that attend governed business in the country, the Federal Government recently launched an e-government initiative which will take government transactions online. The project, which is a private public partnership of a tripartite joint venture registered as National e-Government Strategies Limited (NeGSt) comprises of government (5 percent), a consortium of banks, (15 percent) and strategic partners (80 percent) (Sun News online. 2004).

The fear in some circles, however, is how the public service can adopt to the change that would be necessitated by e-government. How can employees in the public sector imbibe the culture of the computer age after many years of moving files from one place to the other?

The present administration has laid the foundation for e-Government in Nigeria by carefully thought-out programmes, some of which include:

- Adoption of a national policy on ICT and plans to integrate its applications to agriculture, health, education, military and other sectors;
- enactment of national Telecommunications Act and appointment of an independent regulatory body;
- The launching of a data and research satellite in 2003 and plans to launch a communications satellite in 2006;
- Setting up of the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) as a clearing house for ICT- related applications and mandating it to implement related national policies as well as making it the custodian of the nation's top level Domain (.ng);
- Active promotion of cyber specific laws to ensure security in the use of e-mail and other operations originating from electronic or internet-related facilities, cyber cafes, Internet Service Providers(ISPs) or personal mobile or fixed telephones.

The Nigerian government, having seen how imperative e-government is to offering improved life to its citizenry, has decided to adopt a model for governance (Ajayi, as cited in SAP Nigeria, 2003). *

- e - Administration (citizen centered administration and planning).
- e-Accounting (Budgetary and management).
- e - Taxation and revenue management (on-line taxation).
- e - Judiciary (court proceedings data bank).
- e - Education (electronic - learning.)
- e - Legislation (National Agency online).
- e - Statistics (strengthening of the FOS and NPC).
- e-military.

Amongst the deliverables of government are: e - tax, e-learning, e-traffic, e - procurements, e - pricing, e-mail, e - tourism, e - payment, e - revenue, e-legislature, e - policing, e-judiciary, e- health, e - agriculture, e - services, e - kiosks, e-buka. (Isoun as cited in Vanguard online. 2004). Despite these efforts at creating an enabling environment for e-government in Nigeria, the sector is faced with a number of challenges..

Challenges and Prospects of E-Government in Nigeria

A lot of resources are required to access (ICT) dependent information. These resources/infrastructure: include telecommunications infrastructure to provide network access, electricity infrastructure to power and make ICTs work, skills infrastructure to keep all the technology working, money to buy or access ICTs, usage skills to use the ICTs and literacy skills to read and understand the end results (Einadoye, 2002). According to Sunnews online (2004):

The single most important requirement for successful e - Government implementation in any country is Internet connectivity. The provision of independent, reliable and secured low cost, high data rate Internet connectivity is very essential for the implementation of e -

Government strategies in the country... a latest survey revealed that 0.4 percent of Nigerians use Internet and the majority of this percentage are corporate users (p.4).

Similarly, Ndukwe (2003) submitted that:

While in the USA, the number of Americans with access to computers and Internet is growing at an exponential rate, in Nigeria the story is not entirely cheering. There is a growing split or digital divide which breaks down along national, economic and geographical lines between the information haves and have-nots (p4).

Nigeria must create a national information and communication infrastructure, multi-stakeholder's portals for access to government information. Internet connectivity in Nigeria is not well developed due to non-availability of cable infrastructure in the country, because of the prohibitive price of cable network, coverage of the whole country is only possible with satellite solution (Sweeting, 2004).

A UNDP report (as cited in Emadoye, 2002) regrettably noted the state of poverty in Africa and reported that:

In a world where 80% of the world population have no access to reliable telecommunication and one-third have no access to electricity, it is hardly surprising that the Internet reaches few poor people: there are more account holders in London than in the whole of Africa and many of the latter are affluent, white, urban South Africans. Likewise, more than half of the low-income countries' population is illiterate, with a far greater proportion unable to read English, the language that dominates digitized information.

Poverty is therefore another challenge to e-government implementation in Nigeria. It grossly limits access to Internet in most communities.

Another major infrastructure required is energy. In developed countries, citizens are able to wake up at night, switch on their lights, log onto some server hundreds of kilometers away and do some productive job (Obaro, 2000). Power must be adequate and efficient for e-governance to be successful in Nigeria. There seems, however, to be a remarkable improvement in the telecommunication and energy sectors as submitted by Obasanjo (2004) recently at the e-Government stakeholders' conference.

Another major challenge of e-Government implementation is funding. In Nigeria, the excitement about the e-Government project of the government is that even though the scope is wide, government would spend virtually no money to put it in place. The bill for the project has been picked up by the private sector operators including reputable financial institutions, multinational IT companies and their local counterparts. The financial partners would provide financial expertise and support the entire project life cycle from planning to analyzing, designing, building, testing, deployment management and continuous improvements.

Absence of legislation is yet another challenge to e-government in Nigeria. Udotai (as cited in Sunnewsonline, 2004) listed the following laws as required for the successful implementation of e-government in Nigeria: NITDA Act, Electronic Communications and Authentication, Digital Signature, Computer Privacy, Anti Cyber-Squatting, Computer Evidence, Cyber Crime and Cyber Security, Computer protection and Anti-Spam, Digital Right Management (DRM)-IP Right online.

Recommendations

Implementing e-Government in Nigeria offers an opportunity for improving the way government businesses are carried out, how services are delivered and how avenues are created for citizens to interact with the government. It draws from the openness of the ICT world and impacts on

government activities and operations, breaking barriers of hierarchical traditions, secrecy and bureaucracies that are naturally not compliant with 21st century aspirations and practice. It is an umbrella for institutionalizing due diligence, due process and hence transparency and accountability... (Obasanjo, 2004).

The following strategies are, however, recommended for successful implementation of

e- government in Nigeria:

- i. All tiers of government (Federal, State, and Local) should join in the campaign to electronically network all their ministries and to have a common integrated national network. Government information should be published on-line in a manner such that searches can be easily made.
- ii. The FG should continue to promote private sector investment and participation on ICT, especially since the bill for the e-G projects has been picked up by private sector operators. In fact, government should encourage private sector participation in provision of ICT infrastructure in public places such as our universities, libraries, and post offices.
- iii. The FG should ensure the availability of independent, easily accessible, secured and cheap high data rate Internet connectivity to the citizens.
- iv. Since the e-Government project is part of the FG civil service reforms which are intended to make the Nigerian civil service proactive and respond quickly to the needs of the citizens, the government should implement wide-scale training for civil servants in the use of ICT
- v. The improvements in the telecommunication and energy sectors as submitted by Obasanjo (2004) should be consolidated upon. Government should embrace deregulation of the energy sector (as already done in the telecommunications sector) so as to encourage competition and consequently ensure efficiency.
- vi. Adequate legislation should be made to define the involvement of each level of government in the development and to ensure the security of data being transported through electronic means.

Conclusion

All the efforts of the Federal Government are to provide an e-Government that works better and costs less. The mission is to improve organizational performance, service delivery and the participation of citizens in the day-to-day activities of government. This in turn will generate internal effectiveness and efficiency while remaining transparent and accountable.

E-government, when fully implemented in Nigeria, will enable its citizens to transact more government businesses on the Internet without physical presence and bureaucracy. This in turn will save time and money and also reduce leakages that attend government revenue processes.

References

- Emadoye, J.O. (2002). Information and Communication Technologies Impact on Governance, Social and Economic Development. Paper Presented at the Workshop and Exhibition on Windows of Investment Opportunity in the Petroleum (oil and gas). Power and Telecommunication. Sectors of Delta State on 24th October. 2002. Nelrose Flotel. Asaba: Delta State Retrieved March 2, 2005 from <http://Avvvw.deltastategov.ng/information%20And%20communication%20TECM>.
- Ibrahim, A.; Onuolapo, F.; Alade, T.; Ayobami, I. (2003). Contemporary Issues in I F Applications. E-Government and Electronic Democracy: An Issue in Information Technology Application. *Proceedings of the Nigeria Computer Society* 14(1) 45 - 52.
- Isoun, T. (2004). Government/Private Sector to Deliver E-Government. Retrieved February 28, 2005 from <http://ww.v.vanguardngr.com/articles/2002/features/fe203032004.html>.
- Ndukwe, E.C. (2005). The Challenges of Globalization and the Imperative of Creating Adequate ICT Infrastructure in Nigeria. Paper Presented at the e-Nigeria 2003 international conference on Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Shehu Musa Yar' Adua Centre, Abuja .10 - 12 March, 2003.
- Obaro, J (2000) . IT in Governance. Paper Presented at COAN Conference. May 24-26, 2000.
- Obasanjo, O. (2004). Speech at Stakeholders' Conference on National e-Government Strategies and Implementation for Nigeria. Retrieved February 28, 2005 from <http://www.nigeriafirst.org/objspeeches/2004/stakeholders-conf.html>.
- Providence, R.I. (2004).Fourth Annual E-Government Study. Retrieved February 2.2005 from

http://www.brown.edu/Administration/nevvs_Bureau/2004-05/04-020.html.

Sweeting, M. (2004). Satellite Technology as a Vital Tool for Successful E-Government Solution. Paper Presented at the National E-Government Strategies and Implementation for Nigeria. Abuja: 8th March 2004.

Tallen, P. (2000). Status of Electronic Government in Nigeria. Paper Presented at the E-Government Seminar Held in London, 1st -6th April 2000.

West, D.M. (2004). Global E-Government 2004. Retrieved February 28, 2005 from .
<http://www.insidepolitics.org/egov04int.pdf>.

Wong, S (2000). E-Government as a Means of Fostering Active Partnership. Retrieved 28/2/2005 from <http://www.thinkcentreasia.org/documents/egovernmentactivepartnership.html>.

APC Africa ICT Policy Monitor. Retrieved March 9, 2005 from
<http://rights.apc.org/africa/index.shtml?apc=21865se/> Nigeria to begin e-Gov in 2008.
Retrieved March 9, 2005 from
<http://www.benton.org/publibrary/issuesinfocus/egovtcoverage.html>.

SAP Nigeria /Officetron Company Limited: E-Government Implementation for the Populace Contemporary Issues in I T Applications. Health as a Case Study. *Proceedings of the Nigeria Computer Society*, June 2003, 14(1) 1-10.

Sokoto State Government: Four Years of Positive Development. Retrieved February 28, 2005 from www.sokoto-state.com .

Sun News Publishing March 29, 2004. Nigeria Sets Agenda for E-Government Implementation. Retrieved March 8, 2005 from
[http://www.simnewsonline.coAvebpages/features/cybersun/2004/mar/29/cybersun-mar-001](http://www.simnewsonline.coAvebpages/features/cybersun/2004/mar/29/cybersun-mar-001.html) -html.

Appendix

Fourth Annual Global E-Government Rankings (Previous Year's Rank and Score in Parenthesis)

Rank	Country	Score	Rank	Country	Score
1 (5)	Taiwan	44.3 (41.3)	33(76)	Kuwait	30.5 (30.0)
2(1) ■	Singapore	43.8 (46.3)	34(95)	Ireland	30.1 (30.7)
3(2)	United States	41.9 (45.3)	35(62)	Sweden	29.9 (29.4)
4(3)	Canada	40.3 (42.4)	101(87)	Botswana	29.8 (31.8)
5(166)	Monaco	39.0 (24.5)	102(26)	Colombia	25.0 (30.0)
6(H)	China	37.3 (35.9)	103(87)	Belarus	24.8 (33.9)
7(4)	Australia	36.7 (41.5)	104(102)	Pakistan	24.7 (30.0)
8 (44)	Togo	36.0 (32.0)	105(106)	Yemen	24.6 (29.1)
9(20)	Germany	35.0 (34.4)	106 (95)	Brazil	24.5 (28.9)
10(185)	Iraq	34.0 (24.0)	107	Barbados	24.4 (29.4)
11 (19)	Hong Kong	33.7 (34.5)	108 (62)	South Africa	24.3 (29.0)
12(13)	New Zealand	33.6 (35.5)	109	Arab Emirates	24.2 (31.8)
13(34)	Italy	33.2 (33.2)	109(177)	Chad	24.0 (27.4)
14.(27)	Bahrain	33.0 (33.8)	109(1)	Comoros	24.0 (24.0)
14 (149)	Dominica	33.0 (26.7)	109(44)	Cote d'Ivoire	24.0 (28.0)
14(7)	Great Britain	33.0(37.7)	109(1	Cyprus	24.0 (32.0)
14(151)	Liechtenstein	33.0(26.5)	19)	(Turkish	
18(27)	Prance	32.8 (33.8)	109(109)	Dominican	24.0 (28.0)
19(32)	Israel	32.3 (33.3)		Republic	
20(1 19)	Bolivia	32.0 (28.0)	109(84)	Ethiopia	24.0 (28.7)
20(184)	Indonesia	32.0 (24.0)	109(1	Kazakhstan	24.0 (30.3)
20(191)	Marshall Islands	3.0(20.0)	109(168)	Libya	24.0 (28.4)
20(1 19)	Moldova	32.0 (28.0)	109(1	Macedonia	24.0(24.0)
20(1 19)	Saint Vincent, Grenadines	32.0 (28.0)	109		24.0(28.0)
25(144)	Malta	31.4(27.6) ■	(103)	Nigeria * Niue	24.0(29.0)
26 (24)	Belgium	31.3 (34.0)	109	Sierra Leone	24.0 (28.0)
27(21)	Netherlands	31.0 (34.3)	109(171)	Sri Lanka	24.0(24.0)
28 (27)	Czech Republic	30.9 (33.8)	109(1	Turkmenistan	24.0(24.0)
29 (23)	Japan	30.8 (34.2)	124	Nicaragua	24.0 (28.0)
30(62)	Saudi-Arabia	30.7(31.8)	125 (94)	Trinidad and Tobago	23.9 (29.2)
31 (13)	Denmark	30.6 (35.5)	126(65)	Djibouti	23.(29.5)
32 (87)	South Korea	30.5 (30.0)	127(95)	Argentina	23.6(31.7) 23.5
			128	Jamaica	(29.4) 23.4(28.9)
			(106)	Russian	
			129 (99)	Federation	