Electronic Governance: Myth or Opportunity for Nigerian Public Administration?

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Abstract

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have changed the process of governance in the world. To manage government affairs for the benefits of citizens, governments have adopted e-governance technologies in service delivery. The objectives of this study are to provide a comprehensive review of e-governance in order to give it a sound framework, assess the levels of e-governance implementation, and evaluate critical success factors of e-governance implementation. The analysis of the impact of e-governance in service provision Nigeria is also provided. It notes that Nigeria is facing a number of challenges in the introduction of e-Governance. Given the importance of the successful implementation of electronic governance services and from a practical perspective, the paper suggests that government should take a positive position towards the factors which will bring about effective and efficient e-governance in Nigeria. Government should declare access to ICT services as fundamental human right of every Nigerian and to establish a timetable and guarantee enabling environment for attracting the right level of investments. The paper concludes that there is a lot of hope on the potential of e-governance to transform the internal efficiency of government and the relationship of government with citizens.

Introduction

E-governance, the adoption of web-based technologies to deliver and conduct government services, has become a global trend in public administration (Gasco, 2003). E-governance often comes with a promise to improve public administration in terms of efficiency, one of the primary values in public administration (Lee and Perry, 2002). However, e-governance has the potential to alter the traditional relationship between government and citizens by creating a new virtual government-and-citizen interface. The potential for electronic government to transform public administration has been heralded at various points throughout the past half-century. Even by the 1960s and the 1970s, as computers started to appear in government organisations, some public officials and commentators predicted that information technology would bring a revolution to public administration. As increasingly sophisticated information and communication technologies (ICTs) spread across all organisations during the 1980s and 1990s, politicians jostled to claim credit for “information age movement”. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, as use of internet became increasingly widespread, claims for the transformative power of ICTs became correspondingly enthusiastic (Margetts, 2005).
E-governance initially began as a process where government entities developed websites and began populating these sites with information. After mastering this information dissemination aspect, government units moved toward processing online transactions. Subsequent to mastering transaction processing, governments moved across a continuum and engaged citizens online in a participatory framework; that is, offering Internet applications that connect citizens with public administrators, decision-makers, and perhaps elected officials (Schwester, 2009).

Assessment made by World Bank (2001) indicates that e-governance is in the nascent stage of implementation in both developed and developing countries. Government departments in many developing countries publish information on websites as a first step towards e-government. Many of these sites are poorly designed and the department does not update or monitor the quality of information. Initially, the publishing of information online was targeted at attracting foreign investments, but as Internet penetration grew in urban areas, many sites began to focus on delivering information and services to citizens and businesses. A large number of developing countries from Asia and Latin America have implemented transaction-oriented e-governance applications on a pilot basis. However, only a few of these pilots have been replicated on a wider scale. With the popularity of e-governance and the increasing interaction between government and citizens through the Internet in many countries of the world, a major question comes: To what extent does e-governance promote public accountability and service delivery in Nigeria?

E-governance has already arrived in Africa, though it is essentially an imported concept based on imported designs. There are growing numbers of e-governance projects, some of which are contributing to public sector reform and delivering gains of efficiency and/or effectiveness across a broad agenda. However, this positive picture must be set alongside significant challenges (Heeks, 2002).

What this paper attempts to do is to carefully examine the myth and opportunity of e-governance in Nigeria. The paper therefore provides a comprehensive review of e-governance in order to give it a sound framework. It assesses the implementation of e-governance in Nigeria, the benefits and challenges of e-governance. The concluding part provides remedial actions for successful implementation of e-governance in Nigeria.

**E-Governance: Meaning And Scope**

The term governance needs to be understood before we move on to e-governance. The concept of "governance" is as old as human civilization. In essence, the term "governance" refers to the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented). The word "governance" can be used in several contexts such as corporate governance, international governance, national governance and local governance. Governance is not the exclusive preserve of the government. It extends to civil society and the private sector. It covers every institution and organization from family to the state. It involves exercise of political, economic and administrative authority to manage the affairs in and the
manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources for development. It can be better understood as the complex mechanisms, processes, relationships and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their rights and obligations and mediate their differences.

Governance is conventionally conceptualized, as the process by which a political system achieves such values as accountability, participation, openness (or transparency) and respect for the rule of law and due bureaucratic process. It also includes, according to Boeninger (1992), the capacities of a system to exercise authority, win legitimacy, adjudicate conflicts as well as carry out programme implementation. In other words, the bottom line of governance is its ability to respond to the needs, aspirations and yearnings of majority of the citizenry. And once a political system is able to achieve these, it is referred to as responsive, accountable and effective governance.

E-governance concept originated at the beginning of 21st century, mostly as a copy of e-commerce into public sector. All intentions were directed towards the presence of the public services on the Internet. In the early years of its development, e-governance follows the evolutionary e-business evolving model, which in particular means that in the early days of e-governance evolution, primary focus of the e-services was simple appearance of graphic user interfaces with no interactions. Early enthusiasm during the mean time weakened but such experiences brought crucial acknowledgments (United Nations, 2008). Today, because of those acknowledgments, the focus is on coordination and effective assessment of the needs, efficiency and public benefits for such services. The development of electronic public services enters in the new phase, which is mostly determined by reengineering of existing processes of public government. Public sector by its nature (based on information and communications) is ideal for international increase of efficiency and quality (Mario, et al 2009).

The term e-governance is of recent origin and there is no commonly accepted definition. The term was perhaps coined about a decade ago after the success of electronic commerce to represent a public sector equivalent of e-commerce. Definitions of e-governance abound. The definition of the concept of e-governance and its evolution in time has been the focus of a large body of research (Fang, 2002; Hu et al., 2009). More or less restrictive definitions of e-governance have been given, but there is still no unique definition of the term (Yildiz, 2004). Nevertheless, it has been generally recognized that e-governance offers a huge potential to increase the impact of government activities for citizens (Fang, 2002). This shows that the interpretation of e-governance is quite broad and divergent.

The term is used in a loose manner to describe the legacy of any kind of use of information and communication technology within the public sector. For those who see it as some form of extension of e-commerce to the domain of the government, it represents the use of Internet to deliver information and services by the government (Bhatnagar, 2007). The Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations defines e-governance as utilizing the internet and the world-wide-web for delivering government information and services to citizens (United Nations, 2008). General definition describes e-governance as the use of information and
communication technologies (ICT) to transform government by making it more accessible, effective and accountable.

E-governance refers to the use of information technologies (such as the Internet, the World Wide Web, and mobile computing) by government agencies that can transform their relationship with citizens, businesses, different areas of government, and other governments. These technologies help deliver government services to citizens, improve interactions with businesses and industries, and provide access to information (Moon, 2002). E-governance can be defined as the use of emerging information and communication technologies to facilitate the processes of government and public administration (Drucker, 2001). This definition focuses on the use of ICT to assist in the administration or management of government.

Basu (2004) states that “e-governance refers to the use by government agencies of information technologies that have the ability to transform relations with citizens, businesses and other arms of government”. In terms of actually using these technologies following are some ends, better delivery of government services to citizens, improved interactions with businesses and industries, citizen empowerment through access to information, or more efficient government management. Benefits resulting from these activities could be less corruption, increased transparency, greater convenience, revenue growth and cost reductions. According to Chatfield (2009), e-governance refers to the use of information and communication technologies, particularly the internet, to deliver government information and services. E-governance is understood as the use of ICT to promote more efficient and cost effective government, facilitate more convenient government services, allow greater government access to information, and make government more accountable to the citizens (World Bank, 1992). For the purpose of this paper, the definition of e-governance provided in the European Commission (2003) will be adopted:

[e-governance is] the use of information and communication technologies in public administrations combined with organizational change and new skills in order to improve public services and democratic processes and strengthen support to public policies.

This definition is quite wide and includes aspects that are fundamental for successful use of ICT, such as organizational change and user skills. It does not assign a value to ICT or e-governance per se, but relates them to a wider effort to support public policies.

The aim of e-governance is to allow the public to initiate a request for a particular government service without going to a government office or having direct contact with a government employee. The service is delivered through government web sites (Brannen, 2001). E-governance comprises of an alignment of ICT infrastructures, institutional reform, business processes and service content towards provision of high-quality and value added services to the citizens and businesses. Wimmer and Traunmuller (2001) contend that the main objectives of e-governance should include the following: (1) restructuring administrative functions and
processes; (2) reducing and overcoming barriers to coordination and cooperation within the
erial administration; and (3) the monitoring of government performance.

The scope of e-governance services extend from posting generally requested information on a
website to providing and processing online requests such as electronic payment of taxes or
other fees. The main rationale of e-governance initiatives is to put together services focused on
citizens needs (Moon, 2002). E-governance involves novel forms of delivering and tailoring
information and services, connecting communities and businesses locally and globally and
reforming us towards digital democracy. E-governance offers flexible and convenient access to
public information and services with the view of providing citizens an improved service (Moon,
2002).

A major goal of e-governance projects in developed economies is to enhance productivity of
both public and private sectors through the leveraging of ICT. E-governance has captured the
interest of developing countries. There has been a considerable demonstration effect of the
constructive difference that e-governance has made in advanced economies in the delivery of
services, provision of information and internal administration of the public sector. A country’s
ICT infrastructure and its openness to public sector reform play an important role in
determining the types of applications and kind of goals for which e-governance is implemented
(Bhatnagar, 2007). A country’s willingness to adopt basic public sector reform must determine
the breadth and scope of e-governance applications. Many times e-governance applications are
used as a catalyst and enabler to further reform. E-governance projects are funded with the
expectation that these applications will increase efficiency, and bring about more transparency
and accountability to citizens.

The Benefits And Challenges Of E-Governance

Many developing countries are now realizing the need for e-governance in order to provide
customer-focused, cost effective, and easy to use services for citizens and businesses and to
improve the internal workings of government (Pathak, et al, 2008). E-governance applications
have emerged rapidly in the developing world. Many countries use e-governance as an enabling
tool to increase efficiency, enhance transparency, collect more revenue and facilitate public
sector reform. While e-governance is not a panacea that can improve the performance of the
public sector, it is a powerful enabling tool that has aided governments achieves some of their
development and administrative reform goals. Although e-governance can be a catalyst for
change, it is not a complete solution and it must be part of a broader commitment to reform
the public sector (Bhatnagar, 2007). Three factors are critical for the successful implementation
of e-government. These include willingness to reform, availability of information
communications technology (ICT) infrastructure, and the institutional capacity to absorb and
manage change.

The benefits of e-governance come in different forms. Some relate to the provision of fast,
inexpensive services to the population (Heeks, 2001) and for socioeconomic development and
political reformations for developing countries (Ifinedo, 2004; Ifinedo & Uwadia, 2005). E-
governance enables the citizenry to participate in the governance of their country (Moon, 2002). Nowhere is this benefit more relevant than in the developing countries, where governance excludes a majority of their populations by either commission or omission. Similarly, corrupt practices that are rampant in many developing countries, including SSA, could benefit from a purposeful e-governance initiative (Ifinedo & Uwadia, 2005).

The fourth African Development Forum (held in Addis in October 2004) produced a Consensus Statement declaring that E-governance is an important innovation for enhancing good governance and strengthening the democratic process. It further acknowledged that E-governance can facilitate access to information, freedom of expression, greater equity, efficiency, productivity growth and social inclusion (Kitaw, 2006). According to him, successful E-governance initiatives offer tangible opportunities which include: transformation of cumbersome public administration and service delivery processes thereby increase efficiency of governments, empowerment and participation of citizens, thereby contribute to strengthening democratic processes, greater transparency and accountability, thereby lead to better governance and reduce opportunities for corruption, and Stimulation of the usage of ICT applications in other development sectors (E-Health, E-Education), thereby opens opportunities to transform agriculture based economies.

Electronic government is a phenomenon that is linked to the information society and the advantages associated with it. E-governance allows government departments to network and integrate their services using information and communication technologies (ICTs) in order to improve service delivery and enhance the relationship between the government and the public. The major ingredients of e-governance are infrastructure, human resources and information.

The potential benefits of e-governance that accrue from the use of IT according to Shatne (2001) and Symonds (2000) include: Reduced government spending and increased interest earning. Costs incurred by a government in providing services can be reduced by the use of the Internet, Reduction in the number of in person government contacts. Governments are under pressure to meet rising expectations for their service. With the use of the Internet more individuals are able to access the government’s services without necessarily going to the government office or contacting by telephone. The use of the Internet will reduce the negative attitude individuals have toward government agencies because not many people enjoy interacting with their government, Delivery of government services from any place to citizens 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Websites serve as convenient and cost effective platforms for centralized service provision. Businesses, residents, visitors, and intergovernmental agencies can easily access public information related to their specific needs by simply checking on different web links. They can also contact government officers directly though email or online request forms. One such development is the use of CRM software, which provides a vehicle through which governments can increase cooperation through integration of back office and front office, and another beneficial outcome of e-governance is the promotion of e-democracy. Some examples of digital democracy include voter registration, public opinion polling, and communication among elected representatives and their constituents.
Nigeria might benefit from e-governance initiatives (in its advanced forms) in many ways. The climate of political instability that has bedeviled the country could be checked through e-governance endeavors. Properly implemented e-governance initiatives could help improve the culture, lack of transparency, and accountability seen in Nigeria. In addition, moving away from a heavily paper based system to an electronic system would reduce the need for manpower. Thus, this would allow the process to be handled by lesser employees and therefore to reduce operations cost. The society is moving toward the mobile connections. The ability of an e-governance service to be accessible to citizens irrespective of location throughout the country brings the next and potentially biggest benefit of an e-governance service (Muhammed, et al 2010).

Nowadays, e-governance has been perceived as a magical wand that would create spontaneous changes in whatever it touched. The first impression was that e-government would change the daily lives of ordinary citizens. However, this positive first impression changed when it was observed that creating a sound system of e-governance would not be as easy as expected. The main disadvantage of an electronic government is to move the government services into an electronic based system. This system loses the person to person interaction which is valued by a lot of people. In addition, the implementation of an e-governance service is that, with many technology based services, it is often easy to make the excuse (e.g. the server has gone down) that problems with the service provided are because of the technology. The implementation of an e-governance does have certain constraints. Literacy of the users and the ability to use the computer, users who do not know how to read and write would need assistance (Muhammed, et al 2010).

Nigeria is facing a number of challenges in the introduction of e-Government. Challenges to Nigeria’s e-governance efforts are well documented. One is the socio-economic inadequacies that exist in countries belonging to the Sub-Sahara region. Other identified challenges include, poor organizational skills, inadequate infrastructural support and poor or limited human capital resources (Ifinedo, 2005). Local e-governance initiatives have also been examined, but from a macro level where identification of policies and initiatives has occurred and the impacts measured using surveys (Ogbomo, 2009).

Some leaders still need to understand the relationship between e-governance and effective governance. Advocacy and awareness building are required in order to evoke changes in political mindset and culture. A major challenge is creating and retaining government capacity to manage the relationship with the private partner in PPP projects as well as to manage the changes associated with the shift from traditional to digital systems. Aside from insufficient skills and resources, problems have occurred with government institutions not showing sufficient respect for e-governance PPP contracts.

Another challenge is to overcome uncoordinated activities within the federal, state and local governments and within agencies of the same ministry or within ministries that have similar functions or responsibilities. Adding to this problem are severe funding and even budgeting defects in respect of e-governance tools and infrastructure within government agencies.
The current Nigerian government has shown commitment towards promoting ICT and e-culture (Ajayi, 2003; Obasanjo, 2004). For example, a conference called e-Nigeria (http://www.enigeria.org) convenes annually to promote e-society awareness in the country. The forum brings together local academics, businesses, software multinationals, and IT professionals and their colleagues from the Diaspora. Policy issues relating to e-governance are now entertained. Further, Nigeria has also sent top government delegations overseas to acquire specific e-governance skills. For example, a fact-finding mission visited India to learn how the e-voting systems work there. The federal government of Nigeria now has a Web portal (http://www.nigeria.gov.ng/). Some state governments (there are 36 states in Nigeria) operate their Web portals as well (Ifinedo, 2004). These Web sites provide the public with government information and have some downloadable forms. Overall, the level of services provided by Nigerian e-governance portals only facilitate “one-way service delivery,” which is the second stage of a four-stage model developed by Layne and Lee (2001).

Unfortunately, several barriers confront developing countries that result in the slow diffusion of e-governance initiatives. Some of the barriers or problems have their roots in cultural orientations of the region, to include poor infrastructural, organizational, political, economical, and social factors (Ajayi, 2003). By barriers we mean any factor that creates a disincentive for governments to develop new or further develop existing e-governance applications -- i.e., supply side barriers (Enyon and Dutton, 2007). While the subsequent progression and potential benefits of e-governance applications are without limits, there are a number of barriers that impede the implementation of such applications. The weaknesses and challenges that Africa faces in this field are as follows:

There is lack of sound infrastructure for e-government. In the World Economic Forum’s recent study “Global Information Technology Report (2002-2003)”, different countries were ranked according to their readiness to information society. Among 84 countries, Finland, the US, and Singapore takes the top three, and Turkey is ranked as 50th, demonstrating the limited usage and access to internet. In addition, there is lack of well-defined vision and mission statement. Instead of national priorities, the needs and priorities of each organization affected the development of e-governance implementation and this did not result in great success. Therefore, all information society activities need to be coordinated in such a way as to ensure increased economic value added and social welfare, as well as be carried out in a participatory manner.

In addition, lack of cooperation among governmental agencies also constitutes another major challenge to e-government. Although every ministry has its own web page, the linkage between them and a standard system is missing. The system, therefore, is not interactive. In addition, there is lack of information in the Internet environment. Not all the information for which the public access should exist can be found on the web pages of the public administration authorities. On the positive side, all ministries have also an English version of their web pages, but not all the documents are available in English.
There is also lack of cooperation between governmental agencies and private sector agencies. In the private sector, there exists the capacity, technology and qualified personnel regarding IT. However this knowledge has not been used efficiently towards the need of e-governance implementation in public administration. The bureaucracy lacks willingness in the usage of e-governance tools. Bureaucracy in general tends to resist change. Due to the perception that wide usage of the internet would decrease its dominance, the bureaucracy sees e-governance implementation as a threat.

Besides, there is lack of formal education regarding usage of computers and the internet which is common in public sector. School curriculums have not been designed according to the needs of this technology century. Therefore, there is insufficient education in the schools regarding the usage of computer and internet. There is also lack of legal framework in the field of e-governance. The needs which stem from the developments in telecommunication technologies are not fully met by regulations, such as legislation on the preservation of privacy and personal information, provisions regarding information technology crimes in Penal Code, and legislation on intellectual property rights.

E-governance, whether seen as a component of NPM or an extension of NPM – is but the latest example of such transfers: a more appropriate term than "exchanges", which suggests an equality of interaction between industrialized and developing countries that does not exist. The carriers for this transfer of ideas are four main groups. These according to Common (1998), Korac-Kakabadse et al. (2000), and Therkildsen (2000) are; international donor agencies, Consultants, Information technology vendor, and western-trained civil servants.

The International donor agencies have been a main channel for the transfer of new public management through their good governance agendas. These agendas are now incorporating and transferring the e-governance message. The donors, providing a significant proportion of the income for government in many African countries, create powerful leverage for e-government. Consultants work within African governments for many reasons: to compensate for weak or absent skills; to legitimate pre-determined changes; as a required component of donor-funded change. They form an important component that both drives and shapes the reform agenda, including the e-governance agenda within Africa.

Worldwide, there is an inequality of knowledge of Information technology (IT) vendors of skills, of experience between IT vendors and their public sector clients, with the former seen as possessing more of these important resources. Such inequalities are particularly acute in Africa where the often-painted picture of ‘virgins marrying Casanova' fits perfectly the imbalanced interactions that occur between public servants and vendors. As such, the vendors are often in a position to guide – even dictate – the direction and content of e-government.

The main problems facing the emergence of e-governance in Nigeria have their roots in socioeconomic inadequacies that were known to plague several countries in the Sub-Sahara Africa (SSA) region. Some of the problems discussed include poor organizational skills, inadequate infrastructural support, and poor or unavailable human capital resources. Despite
efforts to bring about effective e-government, we indicated that e-governance practices in Nigeria are infantile — government Web services currently provide one-way service delivery. In sum, e-government, like NPM, is an imported concept but one that is now an increasing element of reform programs in Africa.

**An Overview Of E-Governance In Nigeria**

Nigeria has set itself the goal of becoming one of the leading 20 economies by 2020. Increasing national competitiveness to foster economic growth is the primary goal of the national government and seen as the driving force toward the vision. Nigeria believes it is necessary to introduce e-governance in order to make public sector more efficient. The older forms of ICTs - mass media channels involving the use of mediums such as television, radio, or newspapers are still currently prevalent in many developing countries, including Nigeria. These forms of communication are generic and do not consider individual interests or needs. Such channels are more applicable to literate individuals and elite classes of a society (Rogers, 2003).

According to Rogers (2003) the nature of the information exchange relationship in individuals determines the condition under which an individual exchanges or does not exchange information and the impacts of such transfers. Therefore, the nature of exchange of information regarding e-governance products and services in Nigeria will be between individuals knowledgeable or experienced in using e-governance and individuals who have no prior knowledge or experience of e-governance product and services. Nigerian communication channels are generally mass media channels (television, radio, newspapers- UNDPs “old forms of ICTs”), interpersonal channels (social gatherings, one to one informal meetings) and recently, the newer forms of ICTs- interactive communication channels (internet). In Nigeria, e-governance research based more on secondary data has been undertaken to identify the challenges and impediments that e-governance poses for Nigeria (Ifinedo, 2006).

In Nigeria, there are several initiatives geared at accelerating development via the technological platform in the polity. E-Nigeria initiatives geared towards connecting communities, vital agencies, institutions of Government and educational institutions at all levels with ICT are currently being pursued by the government. From the National Rural Telephony projects to other laudable initiatives like the Nigerian telemedicine initiative, Public service network initiative, internet exchange point initiatives, State and local Government ICT facilities loan scheme initiative and wire Nigeria initiative. According to Ekeh (2007), these initiatives are aimed at enabling the rapid development of the Nigerian nation. In addition, and as a matter of necessity, the only skill and tool a nation needs to actualize them (the initiatives) is by making computers affordable and flexible for Nigerians to acquire. Currently, one can access the local/states allocations over the Ministry of Finance website and compare with the estimated values locally (through the in-house package) within the local Government and reasons on how and where the expenditure has gone into can be deduced almost instantaneously (Muhammed, et al 2010).
Most of the understanding of the information age comes from the theory and experiences gained in the developed world. There is little in-depth knowledge of issues that are specifically relevant to the Nigerian context in particular and Africa in general. There are major areas of the economy and society where the impact and potential of ICTs have not been fully harnessed at all in the Nigerian context. Although the implementation of e-Governance has begun in Nigeria, there is little evidence or research to suggest that a clear framework for the adoption of e-Governance is being followed. According to Yusuf (2005), e-governance activity in Nigeria is low. Most government websites are in the publish stage and a few government organisations are at the transact stage. Some organisations have even by-passed the interact stage, thereby giving no opportunity for citizen requests and feedback. Olatokun and Adebayo (2012) observed that findings from a recent study by Mundi and Musa (2010) showed that only 30% of the Nigerian state websites could be described as having reached the second stage of e-government and 70% of them were still very much in the publish stage of e-government. These states were Lagos and Imo and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. They provided services that invite citizens to interact with them such as message boards and chat forums. They also provided facilities for users to give online feedback.

Some other state governments in Nigeria have launched official state websites so as to give all those seeking information on the state access to whatever information they sought and participate in the decision-making process of government. An interesting finding by Awoleye et al. (2008) was that a huge percentage of both government employees and non-government employees were aware of e-Governance in the states, and the governments have achieved this high rate of awareness through the mass media. But in spite of this high level of awareness, only half of the population could be said to be proficient in the use of e-Government. The perception, level of awareness, stage of implementation, as well as the challenges of e-governance in Lagos and Ogun state might differ from that of Ekiti state due to a lot of factors.

As observed by Ifinedo (2005) and United Nations (2002), Nigeria has an e-governance development index of 1.02, which is below the UN’s benchmark measure of development at an index of 1.62. The emergence of e-governance in Nigeria can be traced to the advent of democracy in 1999. The first real activity in this regard was the development of government websites. These efforts were uncoordinated and only a few agencies with the resources could establish online presence although the government continues to seek policies and strategies that will accelerate the deployment of the necessary infrastructure. In pursuance of this objective the government has established the National Information Technology Development Agency, (NITDA) under the Ministry of Science and Technology (MoST) to champion development of Information Technology (IT) in Nigeria and midwife implementation of the national IT policy. NITDA is also charged with the responsibility of implementing e-governance initiatives using National e-governance Strategy Limited, (NeGST), a Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) as a special purpose vehicle (NITDA, 2001). NeGST’s mandate is to drive the development of Nigeria’s e-governance initiatives, create a practical strategy and single architecture to guide the evolution of digital government solutions with consistent standards, operating platforms and applications across agencies and government systems.
Some components of e-governance have already commenced in Nigeria e.g. the Nigerian Customs Assycuda Programme, the computerization Resident Permit by the Nigerian Immigration Service, computerization of land and Certificate of Occupancy in the Federal Capital Territory Administration (FCTA). The payroll of some organizations are also being computerized i.e. (ePayment), online checking of West Africa Examination Council (WAEC), National Examination Council (NECO) and Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) result as well as National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) postings are part of real time and cost effective services which are part of e-government. There is therefore the need to consolidate and spread it to other services that have not been incorporated as well as to the rural areas in Nigeria (Muhammed, et al, 2010). NITDA maintained that e-governance reduces waste, saves time and encourages simple, moral, accountable, responsive and transparent conduct in the delivery of government services. It will adequately position Nigeria in the global economy where it now pays a key role. NITDA (2007) cited the specific goals of e-governance as creation of better business environment for local and foreign investors as technology is a catalyst for increasing productivity and economic growth, Quick response and effective delivery of public services to citizens without bottlenecks, Strengthening good governance with broad based public participation, Improved quality of life for the entire citizenry, Improved productivity and efficiency of government agencies, and job and wealth creation as well as poverty eradication.

NITDA (2007) also stated that the deliverables of e-Governance include; Increased transparency on the part of government, Reduce cost of governance, Potentials of project that create values to investors, Bette services that are faster, cheaper and easier for government, business and the entire citizenry, Better productivity by employers, Wealth and job creation for investors; and Better informed citizens

Nigeria seems to be moving in the right direction with the formulation of its new national ICT policy, which appears to promote e-governance initiatives. However, the main problem for the country continues to be the unavailability or poor condition of the enabling infrastructure for e-government, such as telecommunication facilities. Nigeria has unfavourable statistics on its ICT infrastructure (Dutta et al., 2003). For example, basic telecommunication services such as telephone lines, Internet access, and so forth, required for e-governance are inadequate in the SSA region, including Nigeria (Ifinedo, 2005). The teledensity (number of telephones lines per 100 inhabitants) in Nigeria in 1999 was 0.5, but rose to 2.0 in 2002 only after the Nigerian government liberalized the ICT sector (Ajayi, 2003a). Similarly, Nigeria’s Internet usage is poor (ITU, 2005). In 2002, there were 100,000 Internet users in Nigeria (CIA: World Factbook, 2004). However, the current estimate of Internet users in Nigeria is around 3 million people (Ifinedo, 2004). This is at about 1% of the population, which is not encouraging.

In an effort to enhance e-governance in Nigeria, the National e-governance Strategies Ltd (NeGST, http://www.negst.com), has been formed to oversee the national e-governance project. It is a partnership between NITDA and the private sector, whose goal is to implement the backbone of the Nigerian e-governance infrastructure.
Concluding Remarks

E-governance can reduce or overcome barriers of coordination and cooperation within the Nigerian public administration. Centralized databases and standards could become available to several government agencies. Interoperability between government agencies increase and duplication of services may decrease. A poor country like Nigeria could benefit from such cost effectiveness in governance when common standards and timely data resources are shared. The improved services may enhance decision making in governance. The ongoing PSNet project in Nigeria is clearly a step in the right direction.

Government should declare access to ICT Services as fundamental human right of every Nigerian and should establish a timetable and guarantee enabling environment for attracting the right level of investments. Government should review the current educational curricula to include ICT education at all levels. Government should establish a program to enhance local content, in this regard; government is urged to encourage all productive sectors of the economy to develop their websites and Government employees to obtain an e-Mail address. Government should ensure the establishment of ICT departments in all ministries and parastatals at the Federal, State and Local government levels and set aside about 4% of the budget for any Ministry on IT goods and services. An enabling environment should be established by the government for the local manufacture/assembly of computers and accessories (Muhammed, et al, 2010).

The implementation of e-governance requires strong leadership and vision. It also requires a comprehensive strategy that is not only benchmarked on global best practice but also sensitive to existing political and economic realities. There is the need for continuity of Government plans and actions. For e-governance to become a reality, governments in consultation with stakeholders are advised to develop a National strategic framework, which articulates the government’s vision, targets and milestones, technical approach and standards for e-governance systems (Muhammed, et al, 2010). It is important that Nigeria integrate into the changing world where information and knowledge increasingly become the differentiating criteria (Ifinedo, 2005). Thus, new skills will be learned from the emergence of ICT use in governance that might better prepare the country for the changing world, or help improve Nigeria’s position in the globally networked world, which at the present leaves much to be desired (Ifinedo, 2005). Importantly, the Nigerian economy benefited immensely through the creation of new jobs following the introduction of mobile telephony in the country (Ifinedo, 2004). It is possible that similar benefits could emerge from e-governance initiatives, going by the trend of Cybercafés diffusion in Nigeria (Ajakaye & Kanu, 2004).

Given the importance of the successful implementation of electronic government services and from a practical perspective, the Government and other responsible bodies should take a positive position towards the factors which influence system acceptance (Schepers and Wetzel, 2007). Also, such an understanding requires that the following key factors be examined in the larger context to assess their significance (Jackson et al., 1997).
Planning: The government should undertake strategic planning when developing their websites. The government agencies must critically evaluate their projects before they are undertaken with the main mission of achieving their vision. An important aspect, therefore, is to collect input from the citizens concerning future needs and what they expect.

Provision of user-friendly service: A major consideration during implementation of e-governance application is to create a user interface that is friendly and easy to operate. The degree of sophistication may hamper effective usage of the sites; therefore, website developers must have the user in mind.

Proper training and adequate staffing: The public sector or agencies must hire and ensure proper staffing of their IT departments. In addition, they must implement staff training mechanisms to ensure they keep abreast of the ever-changing technology. Additionally, training leads to job satisfaction, which is an important ingredient in employee retention.

Agency partnership and support from top leadership: Agencies should consider pooling their resources together as a way of reaching their constituents in providing services. IT projects are cumbersome, controversial, and expensive. For this reason, for projects to survive and succeed, there must be political will and leadership support to ensure smooth implementation.

Set up outreach programs to train citizens: Not all citizens may have the expertise to use this technology. It is imperative for the government to ensure public places like libraries, schools, and any other points of computer contact have instruction manuals.

It is evident that e-governance has the possibility of making government processes transparent and accountable. However, Africa has to overcome obstacles such as the lack of infrastructure and infrastructure before it can have fully functional e-governance programs (Sahraoui, 2007). As observed by United Nations (2003), e-governance readiness strategies and programs will be able to be effective only if people at the very minimum, (had) functional literacy and education, which includes knowledge of computer and Internet use; all are connected to a computer; and all have access to the Internet.

There is a lot of hope and hype on the potential of e-governance to transform the internal efficiency of government and the relationship of government with stakeholders. E-governance provides an all encompassing framework comprising e-administration, e-citizens, e-services and e-society. In spite of what people normally perceive the role that the government should play in a society, people tend to accept the benefits and transparency that e-governance efforts can provide. There is nothing inevitable about the interaction of government and technology and the future of web-based government remains open (Maggets, 2005).

E-governance has already arrived in most African countries, and the number of e-governance projects is growing apace, albeit driven significantly by external stakeholders and an external agenda. The cases analyzed in this paper show that e-governance has a key role to play in Africa's current and future development. It can offer critical improvements to the efficiency and
effectiveness of government; and probably offers critical future legitimacy for government. E-government delays in Africa as the West pushes ahead will only reinforce historical patterns of inequality. The issue for African nations, therefore, is not 'if e-government' but 'how e-government' (Heeks, 2002:20). However, the E-government challenge is not a technological one; rather, it is to use technologies to improve the capacities of government institutions while improving the quality of life of citizens by redefining the relationship with them.

E-government, whether seen as a component of New Public Management (NPM) or an extension of NPM, should be seen to encompass all ICTs in all activities of the public sector. The key innovation is computer networks and the three domains are e-Administration, e-Citizens and Services and e-Society (ECA, 2007). There are a growing number of e-governance projects in Africa, some of which are contributing to public sector reform and delivering efficiency in service delivery. E-citizen and services, for example, deals particularly with the relationship between government and citizens; either as voters/stakeholders from whom the African public sector should derive its legitimacy or as customer who consume public services (Heeks, 2002). The correct evaluation of e-government should focus on 4 domains of e-government: e-services, e-management, e-democracy and e-commerce. Unfortunately, many decision-makers and researchers still concentrate one-sidedly on the provision of electronic services and regard participation as an unnecessary complexity cost factor.

References


