



IWNest PUBLISHER

International Journal of Administration and Governance

(ISSN 2077-4486)

Journal home page: <http://www.iwnest.com/AACE/>



The Practice and Challenges of e-Government in Nigeria in the 21st century

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 23 Feb 2015

Accepted 6 March 2015

Available online 28 March 2015

Keywords:

Globalization, e-government,
information technology, teledensity,
Nigeria

ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the state of the present condition of e-government commitment in Nigeria. It also, examines the difficulties encountered in the implementation process. Layne and Lee (2001) "Stages of growth theory" was adopted to explain the position of Nigeria in the implementation and the challenges it faced on e-government. To do this, this paper used secondary data as a source to collect different articles and report. This paper finds that while e-government is present in Nigeria, it is still in its initial stage. Not only have that, the environment lacked many prerequisites for the survival and continued maintenance of e-governance due to many factors such as inadequate electricity, technical expertise etcetera. It is therefore suggested that both the government and the stakeholders should take it up as a challenge to find quick and lasting solutions to them. There must also be political will and government should have its administrative staff retrained in IT to properly manage the facilities and infrastructure necessary for e-government.

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To Cite This Article: Yusuf Musa Yahaya and Hassan Abubakar Idris., The Practice and Challenges of e-Government in Nigeria in the 21st century. *Int. J. Adm. Gov.*, 1(4), 82-86, 2015

INTRODUCTION

Governments around the world are increasingly becoming distinguished and more concerned with the benefits of information technology in the delivery of public services [4]. This innovation has been driven by the rapid pace of globalization and the revolution in information technology [16]. In the late 21st century globally, e-Government is associated with providing opportunities to increase the connection, availability and modes of interactivity between government at multiple levels and the citizen. It is also associated with transforming current governmental services in ways to increase efficiencies, improve processes and automate tasks previously undertaken by governmental employees manually. Electronic infrastructure and network functionality are being adopted by government around the world [15]. Growing demands at national government level and amongst citizens the world lead to a greater focus on the provision of e-Government services. Governments which want to remain relevant to their citizens must take an active role in the implementation of e-Government. Citizens have witnessed the massive transformation of service in the private sectors with greater accessibility and greater use of technology that has created an expansion of innovative ICT solutions and they are now demanding that their governments should do the same. This creates an environment where government is pressured to the provision of e-Government services which must be approached with seriousness [10].

Many reasons are advanced for this. The economic rationale behind this is that, it yields lower costs and speedier dissemination of information while the administrative argument for it is that, it leads to more cooperation and better coordination among government parastatals and agencies. Also, the government may decide to create public images using the e-government because public sector organizations need to have their excellence reflected in their websites, so they cannot afford to present itself by an outdated and uninteresting online presence [8]. Politically speaking, it is more important than ever, that government delivers goods, services, demonstrate its values and allow light to shine on its decision-making process. Technologically, organizations can achieve much more online nowadays than just the basics. New tools are being adopted at all levels of government that provides quick response, support direct service and engage the community [15].

Since the inception of democracy in Nigeria, in 1999, the government is committed to making service delivery effective for the citizens. This paper attempt to investigate the state of the present condition of e-

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government commitment in Nigeria and outline the difficulties encountered in the implementation process. This is because, there is concern about e-Government and whether it matches citizen expectations and requirements. The success of e-Government initiatives depends on bringing the citizens, businesses and all stakeholders on board from the outset. Then developing e-Government initiatives and frameworks from these requirements is because E-government is not simply a public goods that provides another channel of communication between governments and their constituents. It is an opportunity to employ new technologies in order to enable the transformation of government into a model more appropriate for the 21st century that meet the growing needs of their citizens [7].

Objectives of the Study:

- i. To examine whether the e - government practice exist in Nigeria and at what level.
- ii. Also, to assess the challenges facing the implementation of e-government.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Layne and Lee's "stages of growth" model [9] has been used in explaining the position of Nigeria in the current trend in the use of e-government or government use of technology to enhance the access to and delivery of government information and services to citizens, business partners and employees in Nigeria. The theory is mechanical or process based one stressing the stages government pass through or developmental process to achieve excellence in effective service delivery. They offer a four stage model starting with cataloguing, going on a transaction stage, followed by vertical integration and eventually horizontal integration. This model is used in analyzing the current stage of e-Government in Nigeria. Data were collected through secondary sources and analyzed via content analysis.

E-Government in Nigeria:

Countries in sub-Saharan Africa has not adequately restructured their public bureaucracies in response to the demands of the information society and many of the governments are still hierarchical and lack accountability and transparency at a time when in many developed countries, e-government is replacing the traditional bureaucracies [11]. Asogwa pointed out that in order not to be left behind, in 2003 the Federal Government of Nigeria launched the National Information and Communication Technology Policy to help diversify the country's economy, promote public sector reform, and improve opportunities in education, health, and agricultural modernization among other things [4]. In the words of former president of Nigeria chief Olusegun Obasanjo in 2003, argued that the government has adopted a national policy for information and communication technologies with emphasis on public-private-partnership to ensure that Nigeria as a country is part of the evolving information society [12]. This declaration was followed by setting up a body tasked with the responsibility of implementing National e-Government Strategies (NeGSts). This is an eye opener or a starting point to Nigerians at a time when many countries have not only advanced but excel in this area.

While e-government still includes electronic interactions of three types -i.e. Government-to-Government (G2G); Government-to-Business (G2B); and Government-to-Consumer (G2C)—a more holistic and multi-stakeholder approach is taking shape. It also stimulate economic growth and promote social inclusion, particularly of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. ICT has also proven to be effective platforms to facilitate knowledge sharing, skills development, transfer of innovative e-government solutions and capacity-building for sustainable development among countries. E-government can generate important benefits in the form of new employment, better health and education [17].

Successive governments in Nigeria have tried to improve since the conception of revolution in government in the information age. The government of Nigeria have introduced various policies that have achieved tremendous success and in some areas failure. According to the United Nations Report, Nigeria is ranked 141 in the e-government index. For instance, the first communication revolution in the form Global System for Mobile communications (GSM) was introduced in Nigeria in the year 2001 with only 400,000 lines, and a dismal 0.4 teledensity. But today the active lines after 14 years are over 90 million with a teledensity of 64.16. Nigeria is ranked as one of the largest and fastest growing telecommunication market in Africa and among the ten in the world [16]. The Nigerian market has attracted foreign investment of over \$18 billion in private sector investments including FDI, contributing over 300 billion to the federal government. GSM has helped ease people communication with a long distance without a barrier. Meanwhile, more data applications are now regularly being used in the country to conduct business like m-commerce, engage in retail or commercial banking activities such as m-banking and to find work m-labour. Now, government uses telecommunication networks as a plat form to pass vital information on health, security [14].

Another area is e-payment. After the introduction of e-government, the manual mode of salary payment has stopped. This has helped the government to check for errors in payment and detect ghost works in the services of government. An ideal E-payment means that the Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDA) issuing

payment instruction(s) follow an electronic process within establishment. The payment moves electronically from desk to desk for approval before it gets to the bank and approval(s) also must be given electronically. Instructions are then sent to banks electronically who in turn effect to all the banks of which the accounts of their beneficiaries are domiciled from the comfort of their office. Thereafter, associated schedules are immediately made available to third parties receiving the payment. Thus, they are able to view all account balances across banks on one screen, monitor the status of all instructions and are able to see why any instruction has not been effectively carried out [13]. Other payments such as taxes are made through e-payment.

This has help the government to reduce risk of manual payments administratively.

In a major push to encourage e-payments and other alternatives to cash, the CBN commenced a “cashless” policy with first experiment in Lagos State of Nigeria, as part of a wider shared services programme that seeks to achieve a 30% reduction in cost of banking services. Other objectives include increasing access, convenience and service levels across the industry; and integrating financial services into the economy. The CBN estimated the direct cost of cash to the financial system as N114bn (\$718.75million) as at 2009 and projected the figure to rise to N192bn (\$1.2bn) in 2012. Cash-in-transit, cash processing and vault management costs make up 24%, 67% and 9% respectively of the total direct cost of cash. CBN data also indicates that pre-cashless Lagos, cash constituted 85% of commercial payments in Nigeria. Apart from the direct cost, other costs include robberies and cash-related crimes; corruption and money laundering, non-financial sector costs of cash processing by all entities across the value chain; government revenue leakages; and inefficient treasury management. The CBN has recently extended the cashless policy to other parts of the country in July 2013 which is a clear indication of the policy success of e-government in Nigeria. Now, empirical evidences have shown how people prefer to transact cash less than the manual banking system. Customers now can also use their mobile to transact and make payment using Point of Sale (PoS) terminal [1,3]. Another success recorded is the use of e-system to process e-passport for international travelers. E-passport is one of the fastest e-services government provide online which reduces traffic and corruption tendencies of the immigration officers.

In the over all, general success is recorded in Nigeria in the implementation of e-government project. Effort of the country to become a digital economy has started yielding the expected results as the latest United Nations e-government development ranking showed an upward improvement by 21 points. Nigeria rose to 141 out of 193 countries rated in the UN Global e-government Development Index for 2014. Similarly, the country was also ranked 97 in the e-Participation index, an improvement of 22 points up from 75 in 2012. Before now, Nigeria was ranked 162 in 2012. The upward movement of Nigeria in the 2014 ranking is a welcome development, an indication that shows that progress is being made in the efforts of the Nigerian Government through the Ministry of Communication Technology to enable it promote e-governance in Nigeria. The Ministry has embarked on initiatives to deploy ICT to drive transparency and efficiency in governance and public service delivery. To enable internal efficiency in government, the Ministry is promoting ICT in Government by facilitating e-government, which enhances transparency, efficiency, productivity and citizen engagement [2].

The 'Getting Government Online' initiative, the Ministry is facilitating, is geared at ensuring that government deploys technology as a mechanism to transform the way government operates and enhance the effectiveness of government service delivery for the benefit of its citizens. This has led to the implementation of two flagship projects, namely the Government Service Portal (GSP) and Government Contact Centre (GCC). The Government Service Portal (GSP) provides a single window technology access by citizens and other stakeholders to government services being provided by various Ministries Departments and Agencies MDAs. It is multi-featured and includes collaborative channels that deliver core content management capabilities.

The primary objectives of deploying GSP are to create a single point of entry to Federal Government services, enhance accountability and improve the delivery and quality of public services through technology-enabled civic engagement (mobile technology, Facebook, Twitter, Interactive Mapping, Blogs, Wiki etc), transform government processes to increase public administration efficiency, increase end-user productivity by integrating many different services or data access paths of MDAs. The phase one of GSP included the automation of 10 government processes from the Federal Ministry of Education; Federal Ministry of Health; Federal Ministry of Agriculture; Federal Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment and the Federal Ministry of Communication Technology. Some of the processes automated are Drug authentication, Farmer's Registration, Registration and Accreditation of Seed companies, Seed Import and Export Permit, Trademark registration, Patent registration, Acquisition of License for Class type license and Acquisition of individual type license, Spectrum License etc The Ministry is currently automating the pre-incorporation and post-incorporation processes of the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) and online payment on the Government Service Portal. The Ministry is also setting up Government Contact Centers, which will facilitate efficient response to citizen requests through a two-tier response approach. The Contact Centre, which will be located in the six geopolitical zones of the country is planned to house robust databases as well as accommodate 150 operator seats. Before the creation of the Ministry of Communication Technology in 2011, most MDAs did not have domain names. But in line with its mandate to improve the quality of public service delivery, all websites of Ministries across the federation have been migrated to a standard domain name at '.gov.ng'. [2].

Problems facing the Implementation of e-Government in Nigeria:

There are a number of challenges which every government across the globe face at the initial stage of the implementation process of e-Government. Even though, they will vary from country to country there are a few which are common to all with relatively few differences. Nigeria is not in exception to this problem. These include, among other things technical issues. A primary problem in the implementation of e-Government is the lack of basic Information Technology in most parts of the world or rather the disparity of technological quality between developed and developing nations [10]. There also exists a shortage of IT skills and knowledge in the implementation of e-Government. ICT being a new innovation in most of the federal civil service in the country is threatened by lack of skilled personnel to manage the infrastructure. At the same time there exists a lack of standards for IT [6]. The cost of training people to garner up to date skills has also skyrocketed and is unaffordable. Because of this, the government is completely reluctant in introducing e-government. Also, the costs of internet usage still remain too high for a majority of the people and these people regard

Electricity supply is a very big drawback in e-governance in the country. Nigeria at present generates less than 3000MW of electricity for a nation of over 160 million people. This is very low, thereby forcing many households and companies operating in the country to depend on generators for their electricity [5]. The issue of teledensity is another area of concern. According to statistics from the Nigerian Communication Commission (NCC) there are more than 67 million phone users in Nigeria as at April of 2009 and a teledensity of 47.98. Internet diffusion is an area which should be made problem free for e-government success.

Conclusion:

It is obvious that, the problems identified are great threats to the implementation of e- governance in the country. However, the current ranking of the United Nations is a clear indication of political will to accelerate the level of e-government in the country. Based on the above findings, it showed that Nigeria is still at the second stage of Layne and Lee model. Nigeria lacks the sufficient information technology infrastructure to adequately manage the existing ones and push forward to integration level. If given further priority, Nigeria can be at the both vertical and horizontal integration level to catch up with the global level of e-government development. It is suggested that both the government and the stakeholders should have the political will and government should have its administrative staff retrained in IT to properly manage the facilities and infrastructure necessary for e-government. The government of Nigeria must invest heavily in research and development just like other developed countries in order to create an e-society.

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