

E-GOVERNMENT FOR QUALITY GOVERNANCE: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN WEST AFRICA.

By

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Abstract

Government activities in Nigeria need more reinforcement 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 pivot which will run quality governance through due diligence, due process and transparency actually needs to be formally strengthened and institutionalized for widespread effectiveness through computer-assisted modern process now commonly known as e-government. This paper discusses the status of e-government programme in Nigeria and little effort they have made. It also identifies the possible challenges the Nigerian government will face in implementing e-government and outlines some strategies for its success. Recommendations were made and concluded that e-government, when successfully implemented, will enhance quality governance for economic growth and sustainable development.

Introduction

There has been an enormous discussion on how technology can be used to improve quality governance in Nigeria. E-government which emanates from Information and Communication Technology (ICT) will not only make government more efficient but should also more democratic, accessible and responsive for sustainable national development (Wong, 2000). According to Sunnews online (2004), inadequate tax collection system, non-consumer centered, services, a high level of fragmentation and duplication, incomplete execution of planned improvements and low accessibility of government information by the public, have tended to become a culture of Nigeria's public service.

Nigeria's current public sector reforms place emphasis on privatization, deregulation, monetization of benefits, anticorruption and security and etc are good initiatives aimed at improving due process and transparency for quality governance. The feasibility may not be assured if the government business continues in their conventional method. Thus, for government to enhance its image, provide an environment where it is easy to comply with rules and regulations, and decentralized power and decision making and utilize resources in value added activities must embark on electronic-government (Sunnews online, 2004). E-government is the introduction of electronic methods of improving the way government performs its business. Its potentials are tremendous as it enables 24 hours service a day (Ibrahim, Ayobani & Onuolapo, 2003).

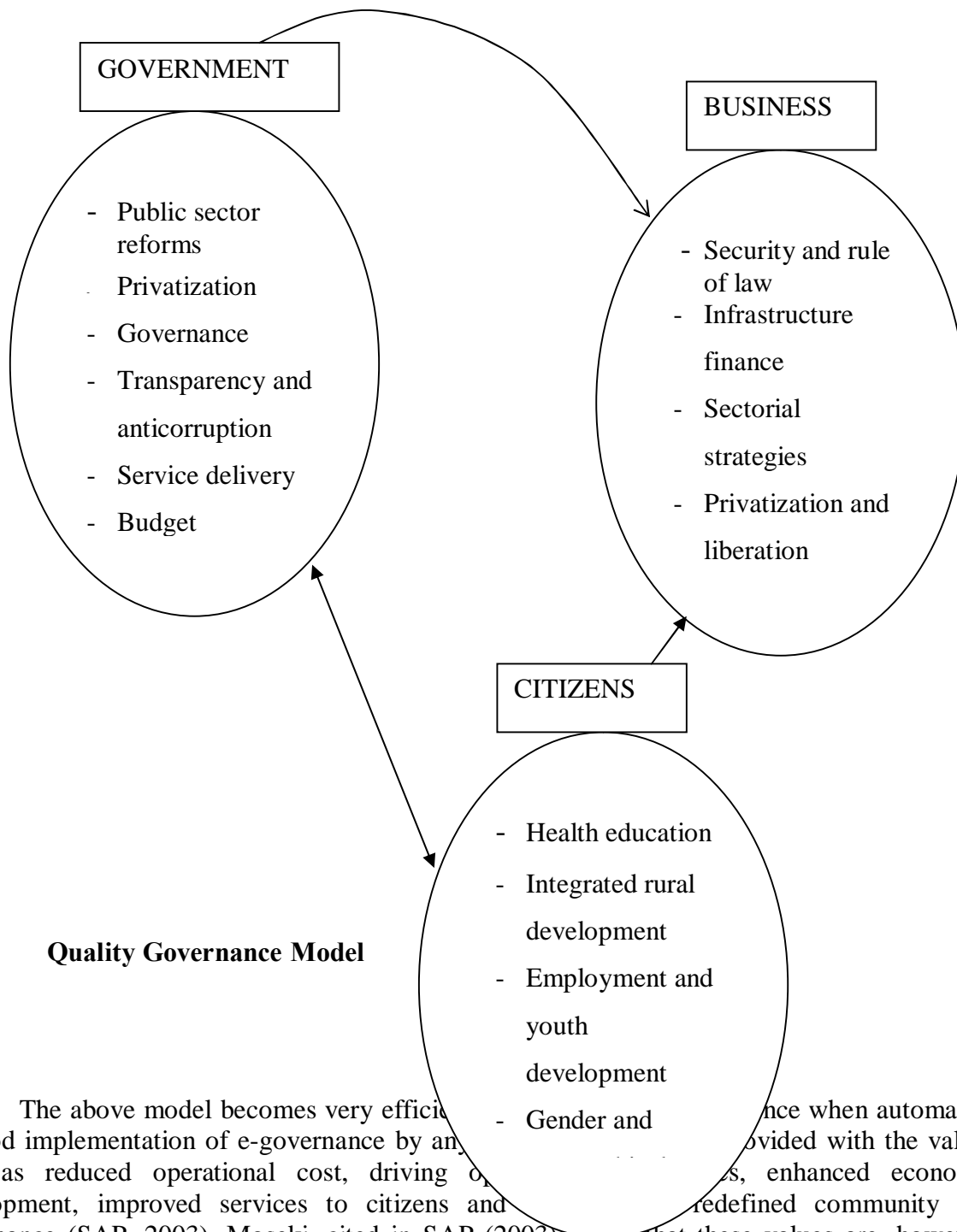
This paper discusses the concept of e-governance, shows Nigeria's status in e-governance and efforts made. It also highlights the challenges and prospects for e-governance in Nigeria.

Concept of E–governance

The term "Governance" according to the Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary, as "to legally control a country or its people and be responsible for introducing new laws, organizing public services, etc." It further defines governance as the action of governing a country or controlling a company or an organization; the way in which a country is governed or a company or institution controlled.

E-governance, according to Dora Akunyili (2010) is the use of information and communication technology to enhance access to and delivery of government services for the benefit of all. It also defines as the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to improve efficiency, effectiveness, transparency and accountability of governance through implementing data warehousing and integrated decision support system to manage modern economy for the benefit of the governed (Obasanjo, 2004). SAP, Nigeria (2003) defined e-governance as the movement of citizen services to the web which include re-engineering, procurement, digital information access and electronic commerce with internet technologies.

The application of e-governance requires changing how government works, how it deals with information, certain data and information must be handy in planning, the government needs demographic data and information, sources and volume of internally generated revenue, land allocation criteria, health situation and drug availability, records of government facilities including loans, scholarships, records of insurance and revenue of all licenses, employment information, records of important business and professional transactions, information on current and interactive legislature, judiciary and executives business. E-governance quality governance becomes robust of information flow and maintained between the government-to-business-to-citizens (G-B-C) tracks (Ihekweaba and Ihekweaba, 2008) as show below:



Quality Governance Model

The above model becomes very efficient and effective when automated. A good implementation of e-governance by any country provides the values such as reduced operational cost, driving economic growth, enhanced economic development, improved services to citizens and redefined community and governance (SAP, 2003). Moseki, cited in SAP (2003) added that 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 good progress report in Europe, U.S.A, Australia and Singapore. The success of Liberian election was borne

out of the workshop that developed a critical path model (CPM) for Liberian elections using Microsoft project (Ihekweaba & Ihekweaba, 2008). Again, Sierra Leone's national security strategy was consolidated with an automatic online for civil defense force (CDF). Currently in Ghana, there are a number of institutions and companies developing electronic information systems catering for varied information needs of different categories of users.

E-government in Nigeria and Government Efforts

E-government in Nigeria

Dora Akunyili (2010) on her speech on ICT and e-government in Nigeria at the world congress on information technology (IT) held in Amsterdam posited that proper implementation of e-government of any country must be well integrated in the force tracks of e-government such as government to Business (G2B), Government to Citizens (G2C), Government to Employee (G2E), Government to Government (G2G). But out of these tracks, Nigeria is only practicing two- G2C and G2E system.

Furthermore, West (2004) in his research conducted by rating different countries for overall e-government performance (using assessment based on the number of services plus access to information piracy, security and foreign language transaction on a 100 point scale) revealed that Nigeria was ranked 103rd position in the year 2003, and 109 in 2004. This shows a decline in progress made by Nigeria, compared to other countries like Taiwan which ranked most followed by the Singapore, USA, Canada, Manaco, Ghana and Australia. In line with the above research the democratic government is seriously desirous and committed to using e-government to empower economic growth and transparency in all its ramifications for quality governance and sustainable development in Nigeria and the rest of West Africa (Tallen, 2000).

Government Effort

Dora Akunyili (2010) while enumerating government effort in e-government innovation in other to compete, survive and succeed as a nation among the first twenty economies in 20:2020 posited that the use of e-governance in Nigeria, especially its G2C and G2E tracks have used to ensure electronic payment for all public transactions such as salaries of employees, audit government funds, payment for procurements and contracts with great efficient.

The innovation of 'smart phone' which has combined the abilities of the PC's enable the citizens to have access to the internet.

Another recent innovation launched by the federal government on e-government initiatives is the electronic encoding of the particulars of every vehicle and driver, the need to stop the vehicle for manual verification of the status of the license of both human being and the machine has been removed. Any expired license should be dictated immediately the vehicle plate number is feed into the system by a traffic control officer. In effect, this will prevent the traffic control officer to embarrass an innocent driver, whose papers might be up to date.

Despite all these efforts and clear vision by the Nigerian government in e-government implementation. The sector is faced with a lot of challenges.

Challenges and Prospects of E-government in Nigeria

The challenges of e-government in Nigeria are as follows:

According to Sunnewsonline (2004), the most important requirement for successful e-government implementation in any country is internet connectivity. The provision of independent, reliable and secured low cost data rate of internet connectivity is paramount for the implementation of e-government in Nigeria. The latest survey revealed that 0.4% of Nigeria use internet and these people is the corporate user.

Poverty challenges e-government implementation in Nigeria. It grossly limits access to internet in most communities. About 70% of Nigerians are very poor and have no access to reliable telecommunication while one-third have no access to electricity. These make internet impossible to reach poor people in the rural areas.

Nigeria must create national information communication infrastructure, multi-stake holder's portals to access government information. Internet connectivity is not well developed due to unavailability and high cost of cables in the country. As a result, coverage of whole country is only possible with satellite solution (Sweating, 2000).

Another challenge is funding. The government do not have sufficient fund to equip ICT facilities extensively in the urban and rural areas. The excitement about e-government funding is that some of the reputable financial institutions, multinational IT companies and their local counterparts have been taken the bill to support project life cycle.

Another infrastructure required is energy. In developed countries, citizens are able to wake up at night and log onto some server thousands of kilometers away and some productive job (Obaro, 2000). Power must be adequate and efficient for quality e-governance.

Absence of legislation challenges e-government in Nigeria. The following laws are required for successful implementation of e-government in Nigeria. National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA), Act, Electronic Communication and Authentication, Digital Security, Computer Protection and Anti-spam.

Recommendations

E-government implementation in Nigeria offers an opportunity for improving the way government businesses are carried out, how services are delivered and create an avenue for citizens interaction with the government. It is an umbrella for institutionalizing due diligence, due process and hence transparency and accountability for quality governance and sustainable development in Africa (Obasanjo, 2004).

The following strategies are recommended for successful implementation of e-governance in Nigeria and Africa as a whole:

- (i) The FG should continue to promote private sector investment and participation on ICT. And also encourage them in provision of ICT infrastructure in public places such as universities, libraries and post offices
- (ii) The FG should embrace deregulation of the energy sector (as already done in the telecommunication sector) so as to encourage competition and ensure efficiency.
- (iii) All tiers of government (federal, state and local) should join the campaign to electronically network all their ministries and have common integrated national network so that government information should be published online.
- (iv) The federal government should ensure the availability of independent, easily accessible, secured and cheap high data rate internet connectivity to the citizens.
- (v) Adequate legislation should be made to define the involvement of each level of government in the development, to ensure the security of data being transported

Conclusion

All the efforts of the Nigerian government are to provide an e-government that works better and costs less. The mission is to strengthen government's drive towards effective and quality governance and increased transparency for better management of resources for growth and sustainable development in Nigeria and Africa as whole.

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