

Problems and Prospects of E-Governance in an Emerging State: The Nigerian Example

ABAH, E. O., PhD¹ & NWOKWU, PAUL MONDAY¹

¹*Department of Public Administration, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki*
Corresponding Author: NWOKWU, P. M.

Abstract: The study was undertaken to examine the problems and prospects of adopting e-governance in an emerging state with Nigeria as a point of reference. To achieve the objective of the study, the researcher adopted content analytical technique as there was heavy reliance on secondary data obtained from articles published in reputable journals, official publications, relevant books, etc. After critical analysis of the available literature on the subject matter, the study revealed among others – that poor knowledge of ICT, Inadequate Legal framework, inadequate infrastructure, etc are among the factors that impede effective implementation of e-governance in Nigeria. On the other hand, the study discovered that e-governance holds a lot of prospects for the country such as providing information on job vacancies, e-police system, medium for information dissemination, economic development among others. On the strength of the foregoing, the following recommendations were adduced – that government should provide ICT infrastructure, there should be enactment of ICT laws in the country, government should show commitment to make e-governance achieve successes in the country, etc. The study concludes that e-governance is central to actualization of simple, moral, accountable, responsive and transparent government in the country.

Keywords: E-governance, Emerging States, Challenges, Prospects, Transparency.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Governments all over the world exist to minister to the needs, yearnings and aspirations of the people. In the course of administration, bureaucratic institutions are employed as veritable tools to initiate and implement public policies and programmes aimed at meeting the needs of the populace. Initially, traditional administrative method such as the use of papers to process government works was widely adopted to perform public functions. This method was adjudged to be slow and non-responsive, etc to the dynamic needs of the citizens. Thus, public administration at that period was perceived to be inefficient and ineffective as it took a long period of time for government to respond to the needs and aspirations of the people. Moreover, people were hardly involved in the management of their own affairs as opportunities for direct participation of people were not created in such system of governance. The result of the foregoing was near mass loss of confidence and trust in the government of the day as it was perceived to be self-serving.

It is important to note that government exists in an environment and changes in the environment definitely exert influence on its methods, procedures and processes. Thus, with breakthrough achieved in the Information and Communication Technology, there were significant changes in the way and manner people and institutions (public and private) perform their day-to-day responsibilities. People now use their mobile phones to make calls; e-mails are currently used to send and receive messages, mobile communication is growing in an astronomical manner just as we navigate the World Wide Web. According to Onuigbo and Eme (2015), individuals use the internet to shop online, transact banking business, book for flight tickets and make online payments, check the weather, carryout researches and interconnect with other people who reside outside the shores of their countries. Government on its part is not left out. It has been influenced by the technological environment so that it now determines the method and procedures that it employs to perform its functions. The use of ICT in the performance of government functions is technically referred to as e-governance.

Advanced economies/countries have long embraced ICT in public administration. This is basically because they possess the infrastructure, capacities, competencies and skills necessary to drive e-governance and that the system enables governments to attain utmost efficiency, effectiveness, accountability and transparency in their interactions with the citizens or other clients (Nchuchuwa and Ojo, 2016). Consequently, the application of information and communication technology in the process of public service delivery by the western

countries' governments has endeared them to the people/citizens who perceive the governments as being responsive and responsible to their changing needs as well as alive to their assigned mandates.

However, the emerging nations could not afford to be left behind in upgrading their modes of carrying out their public functions as they have adopted ICT. It is believed that the use of e-governance will assist their governments to make public service delivery efficient, flexible, profitable and competitive. In addition, it possesses the magic wand to blur the line of differences between the public and private sectors, hence making public service delivery appear more citizens' focused and business-like.

Despite the gains envisaged in the adoption of e-governance by governments of developing countries particularly Nigeria, a lot of challenges still rear their ugly head thereby undermining effective operation of the system (e-governance). This study is therefore undertaken to critically examine the challenges and prospects of e-governance in Nigeria.

II. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

E-Governance

There is no doubt that e-governance has been variously defined by several scholars reflecting their worldviews and personal idiosyncrasies as well as their individual social milieus. At this juncture of our discourse, we are going to examine most of the conceptualizations as advanced by renowned scholars. To Ojo (2014), e-governance is a political strategy through which the activities of government are made known through the use of modern communication technology. In the words of Estevez and Janowski (2013), e-governance is the application of technology by government to transform itself and its interactions with customers in order to create an enduring impact on the society. UNESCO in Hassan and Siyanbola (2010), views e-governance as the public sector's use of information and communication technologies with the intent of enhancing/improving information and service delivery, encouraging citizen participation in the decision-making process and making government more accountable, transparent and effective. Ayo (2014), avers that e-governance is the administration of the state or country using ICT. This implies that e-governance is the adoption of ICT in executing government operations. To Backus (2003), e-governance is the application of electronic means in the interaction between government and citizens, government and businesses as well as internal government operations to simplify and improve democratic government and business aspects of governance. In his own submission, Oyawoye (2006), sees e-governance as the use of ICTs to enhance the government/citizen interactions and the delivery of public services to the people. He added that it includes the legislature – citizenry interface as well as the executive-citizenry interface. It shows expression in the evolution of the government internets into extranets. E-governance involves new styles of leadership, new ways of debating and deciding policy and investment, new ways of organizing and delivering information and services. It is seen as a wider concept than e-government, as it can bring about new concepts of citizenship both in terms of citizen and needs and responsibilities. Coleman (2005), argues that e-governance entails the digitized coding, processing, storage and distribution of data relating to three key aspects of governing societies: the representation and regulation of social actors; the delivery of public services; and the generation and circulation of official information. From the foregoing avalanche of definitions, one is not left in doubt that e-governance remains a paradigm shift from the traditional model of discharge of government activities which is always hierarchical, linear, and one-way to the use of information and communication technology which has prospects of improving public service delivery and encourages citizens' involvement in the governance process even in the comfort of their homes. E-governance encourages interface between government and citizens, government and business, government and government as well as interactions among government, citizens, business, employees and non-governmental organizations. In this kind administrative model, government leverages on the ICT to carry out all its fundamental and constitutional functions. The beauty of this system of governance is that it gives citizens opportunity to be involved in the process of decision-making as they can in the comfort of their various homes advance their views on any issues that are at the policy agenda of government. In addition, it encourages interactions or interface between government and all other critical stakeholders which are important for success of government in the day-to-day performance of their responsibilities. This interface creates the sense of belonging to all these stakeholders who then strive to ensure the success of any approved policies and programmes by the government.

Emerging State

In the context of this study, an emerging state means a country that belongs to the third world country. Such countries are characterized by weak institutions, corruption, poverty, poor human development index, etc. They suffer from a variety of developmental challenges and their institutions are oftentimes opposed to innovations and new inventions. In an emerging state for instance, the operatives of various institutions of government tend to be averse to information and communication technology and they tend to do everything possible to frustrate any genuine attempt to introduce the ICT model (e-governance) in public service delivery. The bureaucrats are perceived to be comfortable with the bureaucratic principles which they subject to all

manner of abuse, hence the poor state of development in such country. Countries in Africa such as Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon, Latin American countries etc. are part of this group.

However, we adopted Nigeria as an emerging country in this study so that knowledge obtained from the study will thereafter be extended to other developing countries.

Evolution of E-Governance in Nigeria

Available literature reveals that ICT initiative in Nigeria could be traced to 1950s with initial focus on print and electronic media. Much result was not attained due mainly to the fact that there was strict government control over the outfits. This however, limited awareness about the importance of ICT among the citizens. It could be safely argued that the private sector was the only area where some ICT initiatives were experimented with, hence leaving a large and growing opportunity gap around the main public sector which is responsible for over 80% of all data (Maduabum, 2008).

It must be noted that e-governance initiative began in Nigeria with the establishment of the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) and the Nigeria Communications Commission (NCC) in 1992. NBC was able to record some successes as it licensed few private operators which provided wireless telephone services particularly in Lagos and subsequently commenced operations in 1997 (Madubum, 2008).

However, NCC received a boost with the coming on board of the Obasanjo's administration in 1999 which properly constituted the commission in April 2000 (Ndukwe, 2004). Furthermore, the Obasanajo's administration equally introduced the National Policy on Information Technology, which was released in March 2001. According to Maduabum (2008), in recognition of the significance of ICT in revolutionizing the economy, the government through the Ministry of Science and Technology also set up the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) to serve as an administrative mechanism with full responsibility to implement the policy. The focus of the policy is the development of local capacity for production of software for both the private and public sectors of the economy. Specifically, it was in 2007 that the National Assembly passed into law the National Information Technology Development Act with an agency established along with the Act to among other things, plan, develop and promote the use of information technology in Nigeria (Olatokun and Adebayo, 2012).

With the Act, government institutions strived to implement or adopt ICTs in their day-to-day operations. As if that was not enough, the Federal Government in 2011 created the Ministry of Communications Technology which was charged with the functions of streamlining ICT development and progress to be in accord with the nation's plan for e-government (Omerie and Omeire, 2014).

In 2012, a National ICT draft policy was presented by the ministerial committee on ICT policy harmonization which contained several policy recommendations and reports. The following are objectives of the National ICT draft policy of 2012 as it relates to e-governance:-

1. To facilitate the implementation of e-government initiatives.
2. To develop frameworks and guidelines including interoperability and e-government framework for enhanced development and use of ICT in the government;
3. To develop and implement ICT training programmes for public sector employees in connection with introduction of e-government and other digital functions within government offices;
4. To co-ordinate the integration of national e-government network infrastructure and services;
5. To promote e-government and other e-services that would foster broadband usages (National ICT Policy, 2012).

The private sector was not left out in the business of implementing ICT in Nigeria. In 2007, the National Information Technology Development Act equally provided for opportunity of public-private partnership in the adoption and management of ICTs in Nigeria by setting up the National e-Government Strategies Limited (NeGST) (Fatile, 2012). The NeGST was a tripartite joint venture or platform involving three parties: government represented by NITDA, private and financial investors and technology partners for which their shareholding in the joint venture is 5%, 15% and 80% respectively (Omeire and Omeire, 2014). The main reason for creating this strategic three-partner alliance known as NeGST was to create a viable unified national framework for the adoption and execution of ICTs in and across government agencies to satisfy their customers' needs.

Reasons for Adopting E-Governance

A lot of reasons motivate governments of several countries to adopt e-governance. However, the main motive for introducing e-governance in government businesses is to ensure efficiency, effectiveness, accountability and transparency in the interactions existing between government and the citizens or its clients. In line with the postulation of Heraclitus that the world is in a constant state of flux, the environment in which government exists changes. Thus, government institutions cannot afford to be left behind by holding on to the

old method of communicating and dispersing their information or serving the public. Therefore, the need to keep abreast with the dynamic environment of communications and information system has moved government agencies across all the levels of government to adopt ICTs in their day-to-day activities (Nchuchuwe and Ojo, 2016). The application of ICT in governance brings about reduction in the cost of providing information and services to the public (Gant, 2008).

Domains of E-Governance

There are three domains of e-governance. They are:

1. E-administration
2. E-services
3. E-society.

A graphic examination of each of them will suffice at this juncture –

1. **E-Administration:** The central position of e-administration is to improve the internal working of the public sector by reducing process costs, managing process performance, creating strategic connections within government bodies and creating empowerment (Onuigbo and Eme, 2015). For instance, reducing the timeframe for license application from two weeks to one day. It could be perceived that it stresses on reduction of timeframe within which government processes are started and concluded. This however saves time for the citizens.

2. **E-Service:** The bottom-line of this domain is to significantly enhance the interactions between the government and its citizens by means of increasing information exchange between them. It is a two-way communication system aimed at improving the service levels of government towards its citizens. Simply put, it is the use of internet, web and mobile technology to improve on the delivery of public goods and services to satisfy citizens' wants.

3. **E-Society:** This is an aspect of e-service domain through which government focuses on institutional stakeholders such as private sector service providers, other public agencies and not-for-profit and community organizations. E-society tends to build long lasting partnerships between government and social/economic communities. A typical example is the creation of a business community portal.

Models of E-Governance

This means the patterns and forms of relationships/interactions which exist in e-governance. It entails some forms of information exchange and dissemination as well as modalities for service provision, connecting communities and businesses locally and globally and the actors involved.

The models of e-governance could be classified into four according to Nkwe (2012) viz:

1) **Government to Citizens (G2C):** This type of e-governance is concerned with the creation of links and communication channels between the government and the citizens. G2C is geared towards establishing efficient, free flow of interactions between the government and the citizens which is the underlying reason for the use of ICT in governance.

This model creates a strong connection between government and its citizens through the provision of the following services –

- a. Payment of utility bills
- b. Making online registrations and applications
- c. Filing of complaints via government websites that are created to address grievances and infringements
- d. Sourcing for any government information that educates and enlightens the public (Yadav and Singh, 2012).

This e-governance model is citizen-centric as it focuses on the provision of internet services which address the yearnings and aspirations of the general public. The G2C model is highly supported by such concepts as e-democracy, e-voting, e-transport, e-medicare, and e-citizens which act as outlets for citizens to obtain government services (Samear, 2002).

2) **Government to Government (G2G):** This model provides internet services which enable government at all levels to interrelate. In other words, it encourages intergovernmental relations. This model is believed to be at the centre of e-governance. The reason is not farfetched. The government at all levels, federal, state and local are expected to upgrade and modernize their internal methods of operation, network and progress to higher internet-compliant standard before they can use them to relate or interact with citizens and businesses of the outside world (Nkewe, 2012). It is the goal of this model that governments and public institutions should adopt the latest ICTs in networking and interacting with one another. It is an internal e-governance mechanism that focuses on linking government institutions at all levels for purpose of information sharing.

3) **Government to Employees (G2E):** This model places much premium on the improvement in transparency, efficiency and effectiveness of the interactions between the government and its employees through the use of Information and Communication Technology. It is an internal mechanism to improve communication as well as relationships between the government and its employees. This may be basically to reduce to the barest minimum industrial actions in public institutions. Industrial actions have remained an ill-mind that blows no one

any good. Thus, government through this model ensures the promotion of industrial harmony which creates opportunity for productivity to thrive in the public sector.

4) **Government to Business (G2B):** This model adopts ICT in the procurement and/or delivery of goods and services between the government and the private sector. The G2B model is interested in the interaction between the public and private sectors by means of internet, the web and mobile communications technology. Owing to the large volume of goods and services which are delivered between the government and private sectors, the government puts in place internet based processes of procurement otherwise known as e-procurement (Gant, 2008).

Phases of E-Governance

The phases of e-governance vary from country to country depending on the level of technological developments and ICT functions adopted by the government of the day (Gant, 2008). As it concerns the phases of e-governance, the step-by-step approach towards the adoption of ICT in governance, there has not been a generally acceptable steps. Put differently, the stages or phases of e-governance differ from author to author. However, an attempt has been made to streamline the phases by incorporating several authors' view. We now have mainly four phases of e-governance namely:-

- a. Information phase
- b. Interaction phase
- c. Transaction phase
- d. Transformation phase (Backus, 2001; Savic, 2006).

a) **Phase One- Information:** This is the point at which e-governance begins, which involves the making of government presence to be felt by the public on the World Wide Web, through the creation of websites and populating information on them (Backus, 2001). It has been argued that this stage is very important to the development of e-governance as it exposes the public to the fact that government institutions have gone on-line and that they could be reached through a tap on the key pad. It is expected that government websites should be user-friendly to the general public. According to Mabuabum (2008), the value of this model to the public is that government information is freely accessible, processes are described and the institution becomes more transparent. Ideally, the format of public websites should be similar to that of a brochure or leaflet. Therefore, the essence of this phase is to make government information readily available on the web for use by the public (G2C and G2G).

b) **Phase Two-Interaction:** After the establishment of communication link between the government and the citizenry, the next stage is devoted towards forging a formidable relationship between the two entities through interactions. In the words of Backus (2001), it involves the adoption of various outlets such as e-mail, search engines or filter search options and downloadable resources. A simple intake application can be completed online within 24 hours per day. Ordinarily, these processes could have only been perfected at the counter during working hours. Internally, public agencies use LANS, intranets and e-mail to communicate and exchange information. Interactions equally take place between the government and its employees (G2E).

c) **Phase Three – Transaction:** It should be recalled that government information is now populated on the web, interactions have occurred between the government and its customers, the next stage in the e-governance process is the performance or execution of government business in the most efficient and effective manner. At this phase, government clientele do not need to be physically present in any government outfits to transact any business with government. In other words, in the comfort of one's house/home, he/she could enter into transaction with government and conclude same with just a click on the mouse button. Savic (2006), maintained that transactions such as "filing income tax, filing property tax, extending or removal of licenses, visas and passport and online voting, etc could be completed online. It is not out of place to argue that the real action of e-governance takes place at this point/phase. That is, government uses ICT in the provision of a wide range of goods and services to her customers. In the internal (G2G) aspect, government has redesigned its processes to provide good quality services geared towards the direction of paperless transactions.

d) **Phase Four- Transformation:** As activities of government are now undertaken through the internet and transactions are perfected, tendencies are that some problems or setbacks could set in. There could be negative feedbacks and complaints from the customers over some issues revolving around payment, services, delivery dates, etc. This stage (transformation phase) makes it possible for these problems to be properly looked into for purpose of resolving them. This phase ensures that all data are integrated into a large database through which the public and other clients can easily gain access through a single portal.

Challenges of E-Governance in Nigeria

A lot of challenges militate against implementation of e-governance in developing countries for which Nigeria is a part. However, Omeire and Omeire (2014), advanced a detailed analysis of the challenges of e-governance enforcement in Nigeria.

- 1) **Poor Knowledge of ICT:** The low penetration of ICTs in Nigeria serves as a challenge to implementation of e-governance in the country. Most Nigerians perceive the use of computers and internet as very complex and strive to avoid them. Among the educated ones the same issue is noticeable. In other words, ICT compliance among them is not high. Majority of Nigerian citizens perceive computers and internets as tools that should be dreaded like a plague.
- 2) **Inadequate Legal Framework:** Despite the existence of various legislations and policies formulated to promote e-governance in the country, their implementation has remained a far cry. The implication of the foregoing is that some of the ICT services from government are not adequately regulated, hence the abuse that characterize the application of ICT in the day-to-day running of affairs in the country be it in the public or private sector.
- 3) **Inadequate Infrastructural Facilities:** ICT cannot work without adequate infrastructure. There should be installation of masks and broadband; electricity supply is essential to energize the ICT facilities for purpose of ensuring wider coverage. Furthermore, internet and telecommunication services are very costly, hence alienating a large segment of the population from participating as well as engaging in e-governance.
- 4) **Corruption:** The operation of e-governance in the country is not shielded from the menace of corruption. Most of e-governance projects and programmes have been stalled in the course of implementation due to pervasive corruption in the public sector. As it has been confirmed or established that e-governance has the magic wand to reduce corruption to the barest minimum, the forces behind the ugly monster within government circles do everything possible to frustrate the process. They certainly want the status quo to remain so as to create room for further milking of the country's resources dry.
- 5) **Lack of Political Will on the part of the Leadership:** It has been argued that since the conception of the idea of e-governance in Nigeria particularly in 2001, both the current and previous governments have not shown strong political will and determination to ensure that government succeeds in her ICT goal. The policy has suffered from negligence on the part of government and the result is manifestly visible – poor development of ICT system in the country.
- 6) **Irregular Power Supply:** The persistent problem of unstable power supply is another challenge that hinders effective performance of e-governance in the country. There is no doubt that stable power supply is very imperative for government to succeed in its drive to ensure adoption of ICTs in its operations. Unfortunately, Nigeria suffers from perennial problem of unstable power supply leading to the government expending huge amount of money to procure power plants to generate energy to power the ICT infrastructure necessary to drive e-governance.

Prospects of E-Governance in Nigeria

The followings are benefits derivable from the application of ICT in governance in Nigeria.

- 1) **E-security System (e-Police):** This could be designed for citizens to give tip-offs to the police as quickly and securely as possible. The e-police system should contain modules for information dissemination and for stolen/wanted cars, wanted suspects/criminals. E-police is currently operational in Dubai, the United Arab emirate (UAE).
- 2) Provision of information to the general public on public and organized private sector employment opportunities. ICT platforms could be helpful in availing prospective employees information on job vacancies in the economy. This system is capable of discouraging the unsolicited applications that are usually sent to various establishments that have no vacancies. The platform could also provide information on examination results, hospitals (e.g. availability of beds and specialist services), airline, railway and road transport schedules; information about charitable trusts, government notifications, government forms and information about government schemes.
- 3) It could be deployed for utility billing and payment system. For instance, it could be used to generate electricity, water and telephone bills as well as serve as platforms for making payment after consumption.
- 4) ICT in governance is beneficial as it serves as a veritable means of quickly deploying information to the public.
- 5) As public information and services are available online 24 hours, the citizens can now perceive their government as one that does not sleep. In other words, e-governance ensures that government continually responds to the needs and aspirations of the people at any point in time.
- 6) It has the prospect of enhancing economic development - local and state governments etc. could be assisted by e-governance to favourably compete to attract local and foreign investment. With the aid of technology, local businesses can eventually compete favourably with their foreign counterparts at the global level.
- 7) E-government helps to evolve communities of citizens and businesses, without the difficulties that result from distance, culture, language, etc.

- 8) Policy formulation is significantly improved because information gathering and analysis are more timely and accurate. In other words, accurate and more reliable data are easily generated from internet facilities which help in formulating public policies and programmes.
- 9) It has the capacity to encourage development of local IT industry that may attract foreign direct investment.

Mabuabum (2008 p. 692), maintains that Nigeria will get maximum benefits from e-governance at the national, state and local government levels as it can –

- 1) Provide citizens access to information and knowledge about the political process, services and choices available;
- 2) Eliminate waste, reduce bureaucracy, reduce cost of service delivery and increased efficiency;
- 3) Fulfill the public needs and expectations satisfactorily by simplifying the interactions with various online services;
- 4) Facilitate a speedy, transparent, accountable, efficient, effective process for performing government administrative activities;
- 5) Provide very significant cost-saving (per transaction) medium in government operations as a result of online business practices;
- 6) Simplify and support governance for all parties (government, citizens and business); and
- 7) Pave the way for a smooth and faster development of a public-private partnership relationship.

III. CONCLUSION

E-governance has come to stay and every government the world over makes strenuous efforts to adopt the system in its public administration. This is so because ICT in governance has the potential to revolutionize the process and method of administration. It ensures efficiency, effectiveness, accountability, transparency, simplicity in the process of governance. Above all, it holds the promise of engendering inclusive government with active participation of the people/citizens in governance. The end result is that it empowers government to be responsive and responsible to the ever changing needs of the people.

Therefore, e-governance holds a lot of prospects for any country that cares to adopt it. Nevertheless, some factors have continued to hamper the application of ICT in governance in Nigeria and that explains why e-governance has not attained the envisaged height in the country.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are advanced if we are to enjoy huge benefits obtainable from e-governance in Nigeria:-

- 1) The institutions of government should demonstrate high level of e-readiness in the performance of their responsibilities. There should be provision of functional computers, employment of highly skilled personnel in ICT as well as provide training opportunities to regularly update workers on modern trends in ICT. It is believed that this measure is central to utilizing e-governance to bring about effective service delivery.
- 2) The government is expected to make available the necessary infrastructure that could help in the successful enforcement of e-governance in the country. Some important infrastructure such as broadband services, internet networks and regular power supply etc. should be provided to drive e-governance in the country.
- 3) There is need for a reliable and strategic framework for e-governance. Government ministries, departments and agencies should establish e-governance implementation committees which will come up with modalities for effective implementation of the project. Also, the performance evaluation units should be established to regularly review the successes and failures in its targets as well as feedback mechanism to report implementation effectiveness.
- 4) Government should enact Information and Communication Technology (ICT) laws that will make computer literacy a compulsory part of the public service at all levels of government. The school curricula should equally be adjusted to accommodate computer and ICT related training programmes in our primary, secondary and tertiary institutions.
- 5) There should be establishment of the Ministry of ICT Affairs to oversee ICT implementation in the country.
- 6) There should be strong political will and commitment for e-governance project to excel in Nigeria.
- 7) Anyone convicted of corrupt acts particularly in the process of ICT procurement and other e-governance contracts should be severely punished to serve as deterrent to others who might wish to take the same step.
- 8) Fund is essential for e-governance to succeed in Nigeria. Therefore, government should make funds readily available to ensure effective enforcement of e-governance in the country.

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