

	<p style="text-align: right;">Date : 18/05/2007</p> <p>Impact of e-Government on Management and use of Government Information in Kenya</p> <p>Nerisa Kamar Research Librarian, Egerton University J.D. Rockefeller Research Library Njoro- Kenya. Email: koriesn@yahoo.com</p> <p>Co-author: Millicent Ongo'ndo Assistant Head Cataloguer, Egerton University Main library Njoro- Kenya Email: millex2002@yahoo.co.uk</p>
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ABSTRACT

Electronic Government (e-government) is the use of ICT to provide information and improve the delivery of government services to the citizens using electronic means.

In Kenya, e-government is available at <http://www.e-government.go.ke/> This shows all government publications contributed, compiled and published by the current 23 ministries.

Government information is used for decision-making, budgetary, government policies, poverty eradication and scientific research among others purposes. These multiple purposes have enhanced the need for accurate timely information achievable through e-government.

However, the problems of e-government in Kenya include lack of government ICT policy, poor information infrastructure, entrenched graft, digital divide, 'confidential' labeled documents and inadequate human skills.

This paper has the objective of looking at e-government as implemented in Kenya and at its efficiency and effectiveness in allowing effective use of government information. It further attempts to draw a comparison between Kenya and other countries that have embraced e-government in the region.

It concludes that information infrastructure is the gateway to global access and use of government information by citizens & governments.

Key words /descriptors: information, e-government, Kenya

<http://www.information.go.ke/egovernment.htm>

1.0 Introduction

Every government generates an enormous amount of information in its day-to-day activities. The socio-cultural, political, economical and historical status of any government is largely affected by the knowledge it has and how this knowledge is utilized. The most effective way of utilizing the knowledge by the government is to bring the government close to the citizens through Electronic Government (e-Government).

E-government is the application of information technology in the provision of government information and services with an aim of minimizing the burden of public administration and the business activities to its citizens. It plays a big role in bridging the gap between the urban and rural population in any country. With e-government, information about the services offered by the government through the different ministries can be disseminated fast up to the grass root levels. This is intended to avail and improve the delivery of government services to the citizens to all citizens wherever and whenever needed.

This paper is based on literature review and analysis of existing documents. It attempts to highlight the various ways in which e-government has been applied in Kenya and how it affects the quality and accessibility of government services to the citizens. Discussed in the paper are the benefits of e-government, the challenges and suggested recommendations.

According to Wikipedia, e-government refers to "government's use of information and communication (ICT) to exchange information and services with citizens (Government-to-Citizen, or G2C), businesses (Government to Business, or G2B), and other arms of government (Government-to-Government, or G2G)."

E-government is not merely computerization of government services and the use of Internet, it includes different non-internet based information technologies like telephone, mobile telephones and related features such as short text messages, fax, T.V and radio-based delivery of government services, as well as closed circuit television. Information Technology (IT) is used to promote the generation, processing, storage, dissemination, communication and the application of information in different government sectors.

The components that need to be put in place in order for e-government to be effective include websites for accessing information, improved service delivery, affordable and reliable telecommunication and electricity connectivity, information technology literate citizens, well developed infrastructures such as computer hardware and software, adequate funding, availability of adequate skilled human resources to collect and organize information, and well developed government policies (Silock, 2001).

1.1 Implementation of e-government

It is the duty of the government to put in place the required infrastructure and a competitive environment to allow the interchanging of information between the government, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), the citizens and other stakeholders like development partners. The different stages of e-Government implementation can be summarized as follows:

Website creation: This is the first stage that involves setting up of websites to provide information about structure, functions and services of the government agencies. At this stage there might be links to related websites.

Initial two-way interaction: This is the second stage at which the websites also include downloadable forms that can be submitted offline and there can be a two-way interaction between government officials and users via e-mail.

Online transactions: At the third stage the websites support some formal online transactions like payments or creating and submitting information such as tax returns.

Comprehensive government portals: The final stage exhibits availability of comprehensive government portals that can provide a wide range of information to users and support one-stop transactions without the need for dealing directly with different agencies.

2.0 E-government and its impact in Kenya

Kenya has three arms of government, namely the Executive (The president), the legislature (Cabinet) and the judiciary. There are over 175 Local and Regional Authorities established under the Local Government Act Chapter 265, managed by a bureaucracy composed of civil servants. The local government is made up of Provincial, District, Location and Sub-Location. Civil societies and Non-governmental Organizations also back up the government system.

The main characteristics of Kenya are summarized in the following table.

Table 1: Basic characteristics of Kenya

Kenya		
Size (sq. km[miles])		582,646 [224,961]
Population		31,138,735 (02 est.)
Independence year		1963
Languages	National Official	Swahili English
% GDP contrib. by sector (2002)	Agric	24
Industry		13
Service		63
GDP growth rate (2004)		4.3%
GDP per capita (US\$)		1,000
Literacy rate (2001 est.)		83.3%
Life expec. at birth yrs)		45.22
Human dev. Index		0.489
E-govt Index		0.90
Internet users		500,000
Teledensity	Fixed lines Mobile	0.90% 12.42%

Adopted from: *CIA World Yearbook (2002), UN (2002), UNDP (2001, 2003), UNECA , CAFRAD(2005).*

Being a developing country, Kenya is going through the process of globalization and liberalization of its market and services. This has given rise to new business processes, different information flows, changed policies, new kinds of records, advanced security measures, and new data management methods. Kenya launched the e-government strategy in March 2004, at a proposed estimated cost of US\$25,500,000 over the period 2005-2010. The objectives and expected impact of this strategy are to:

- Increase efficiency and effectiveness, and to enhance transparency and accountability in the delivery of government services through the use of information technologies.
- Improve the internal workings of government to be externally oriented and more customer-focused.
- Facilitate collaboration and the sharing of information within and between government agencies.
- Reduce significantly transaction costs leading to savings.

- Encourage participation and empowerment of citizens including the disadvantaged groups and, communities in the rural and remote areas (grass-root level) through closer interaction with the government.
- Attract foreign investments by providing faster access to information.

Kenya has an official national website, <http://www.e-government.go.ke/>, that provides comprehensive government information to a wide audience. Nineteen Kenyan ministries have websites, as compared to four government websites in 2001.

The education sector is one of the largest in the country, with both public and private stakeholders. There is e-learning initiative at the public universities like Kenyatta University and Egerton University through the African Virtual University (AVU). These programmes according to Kenneth (2006) connect to over 2000 institutions and have about 20 million subscribers world wide, to train students in computer literacy, Internet connectivity and improving infrastructure. This is an excellent opportunity for skills and knowledge acquisition for the 21st Century. The ministry of education has also created a website where results and selection to primary and secondary schools can be accessed through the internet or mobile phones through the cheaper short text message (SMS).

The Planning Ministry and the UNDP under the umbrella of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (ADAF) introduced the use of the VSAT technology in a pilot programme to allow communities in eight districts to get access to government information and other strategic resources. They have also been empowered through the Internet to collect information and forward it to the ministry. Through this empowerment, access information on the government system through KenInfo in some eight (8) districts at grass root level. This is geared towards monitoring the Millennium Development Goals (MGDs) and other development indicators.

E-health facilitates access to health information and service delivery towards improved and quality services to Kenyans wherever they are. In Kenya, e-health has been a joined venture between the ministry of health and a Non Governmental Organization – AfriAfya with a mandate of providing health services and information to all Kenyans so as to improve health information flow and service profession to the grass root. According to Mbangi (2006), the project tries to harness the potential of modern ICT for health.

The Kenya Revenue Authority and the Kenya Ports Authority have embraced ICT in service delivery towards and transparency. Use of computers and related technologies have helped speed up service delivery in these areas though it met with resistance initial.

E-governance has been embraced for democracy. According to Silock (2001), one of the major potential areas of e-Government services is that it can facilitate democratic activities ('e-democracy') such as online voting, campaigning and fund raising, voter registration, opinion polling, representative-voter communication and public

feedback. In Kenya, telephones (more so the cheaper SMS facility), and Internet facilities have been used to disseminate electoral results to a wider population.

2.1 Benefits of e-government

The often cited benefits of e-government in a developing country like Kenya include improved efficiency, increase in transparency and accountability of government functions, convenient and faster access to government services, and improved democracy, and lower costs for administrative services (Netchaeva 2002, Silcock 2001). These benefits are realized in the following ways:

- The citizens get connected to the government more easily using electronic means of communication. In turn, efficiency in public service delivery is achieved through faster dissemination government information to a larger audience.
- The cases of corruption are reduced as accountability and transparency is increased. These results from the fact that the physical contacts of the citizens and government service providers are limited, and their activities are easily monitored.
- Equal opportunity to access to information is provided regardless of one's physical location and physical disability. The barrier of distance is overcome with diversified service points.
- The bureaucracy experienced in the government offices is broken because the hindrances caused by those in 'power' are removed and the services are offered regardless of one's background.
- Interdepartmental exchange of information and merges of related services is enhanced between government agencies. This leads to significant reduction of transaction costs, time, space, and manpower.

3.0 Challenges

The main challenge of implementation of e-government in any developing country is whether the intended objective of reaching the citizens is actually achieved. The e-government should reach all the people who need government services regardless of their location, age, status, language, or access to the Internet. In East Africa, for instance, this poses a challenge since out of a total population of about 91 million, only about 1 million people have access to the Internet. Moreover, these services are concentrated in urban areas. The challenges of e-government in Kenya are given below:

1. Kenya government treats a lot of information it generates with a lot of secrecy. According to Kamar (2006), government information is classified as per classification system put in place by the generating ministry/department, but generally classified into:¹ Secret – remain in creating ministry/department. The public does not have Access to them; ² Top secret- their access by the public is dictated by the creating Ministry/department; ³ Confidential and ⁴ Public records. This type of classification has created legalistic obstruction to the flow of information, as a result the citizens cannot get open access to a lot of information that they need.

2. Reluctance to share information. This has resulted in policies that deny access to information and the creation of ‘empty’ government ministries websites with information of little value to the public.
3. The government is faced with management challenges in the implementation of e-government. The uncoordinated e-government activities result from low level of public administration of e-services, as well as low quality and insufficient e-content information from the grassroots levels.
4. Low information technology literacy in the country has slowed down the process of e-government in Kenya. Jaeger and Thompson, 2003 assert that if a government does not play an active role in educating the citizens about the value of e-government, the system would fail. There are inadequate qualified ICT staff and training schemes to serve the country. The existing training opportunities are limited and costly for the ordinary citizen.
5. Kenya has un-even distribution of Internet facilities, high cost of connection and in some cases low penetration of high-speed of connectivity to the Internet. The critical issues with respect to ICT are low fixed network penetration, especially outside Nairobi and non-urban areas; limited capacity of both dedicated and dial up Internet links, poor quality of the local access network, inadequate independence of the communications regulator, lack of ICT standards, inappropriate legislative framework to implement e-governance and lack of ICT policies (CAFRAD, 2005).
6. Digital Divide is experienced between the urban rich and poor, the rural and urban citizens, the IT literate and the IT illiterate. Most of the website content is also English dominated and can only be understood by a minority elite. Kenya has the teledensity of 0.16 in rural areas and four in urban area (Mutula, 2002)
7. Insufficient allocation of financial resources due to financial constraints and mixed government priorities have slowed down the rate at which e-government is introduced in the country
8. One of the biggest impediments to delivery of government services is entrenched graft, which reduces the efficiency of service delivery, slows down the economy and discourages foreign investments.
9. According to Heeks (2003) most e-government implementations in developing countries fail due to a mismatch between the current and the future systems resulting from the large gap between physical, social, cultural, economic and other contexts between the software designers and the place in which the system is being implemented. This can be said to be true of Kenya where appropriate technological issues, hardware and software applications, database development, high capacity network, Local Area Networks (LANs) and Wide Area Networks (WANs) have not been put in place in government offices.

4.0 Way forward/Recommendations

In order for e-government to be effective in Kenya, the government should develop a directory of the government and NGOs websites. In addition, the government’s attitude towards service provision has to change, and there must be a high level of transparency in government operations. The public should be given access to a wider range of

government records. The automation and integration of government records and information infrastructure should be expanded up to the district level.

The government should develop a government portal to increase involvement of citizens in decision-making and public activities. The electronic payments, advertisements of government jobs and dissemination of information on social/health issues and related public events can be channeled through the government portal.

5.0 Conclusion

Government information is not only crucial in the development of any nation but a basic right for each citizen. It is therefore the duty of governments to avail relevant and timely information to its citizens for timely decision making. This is achievable through use of electronic media so as to have a balanced knowledgeable citizenship as well as an efficient and effective system of governance.

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