

**Transformative Potentials of E-governance: The intrinsic role of Information  
and Communication Technology in Reinvigorating Public Service Delivery in  
Nigeria**

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**Abstract**

*Proffering solutions to developmental issues such as poverty, unemployment, high costs of governance and poor service delivery among others require changes to government processes through the use of information and communication technologies (ICT). This paper examines the transformative potentials of e-governance vis-à-vis the intrinsic role of information and communication technology (ICT) in reinvigorating public service delivery in Nigeria. To accomplish the objective of this paper, systematic review of literature on these issues was presented and discussed. The paper deliberated that e-governance is more than just the visibility of government website on the internet. In other words, e-governance relates to restructuring the state's administrative procedure and in ensuring that the government is more transparent, and service-oriented. Remarkably, public service delivery in Nigeria has been adjudged to be poor, and fall short of expectations of citizen. As a result it has become a theme of mockery because of its rigidity and after many years of effort in implementing reforms in public service, it costs too much to delivers very little, and the level of achievement is not sufficiently responsive and accountable. The paper concludes that public services reinforce the social contract*



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Rahim et al.

*between states and citizens and, as such, serve as indicator of wellbeing of the society. Therefore, for Nigeria to make progress; there is need to strengthening public service delivery via ICT. The paper recommends that effort should be intensified to ensure that e-governance bridge the digital divide through training and by adapting technologies that is accessible to all user groups.*

**Keywords: E-governance, information technology, public service delivery, e-readiness, digital divide.**

## INTRODUCTION

The desire to reposition the public service for effective and efficient service delivery has been the preoccupation of many countries in both developed and developing nations. As a result, governments across the globe have initiated a number of policy frameworks to reform the public sector by reorganizing the structures, systems and processes that will enhance the delivery of services to their citizens (Adeyeye & Aladesanmi, 2010). Literarily, the public service of any country is an establishment of governance and administration created basically to provide public good (water, electricity, health care, qualitative education and transportation systems among others) to the citizen in the most efficient and effective method. The Nigeria public service is a product of colonialism, initially created as a mechanism to conveniently implement the administrative structure and activities of the British colonialist for exploitation and actualization of colonial rule. However, the public service in Nigeria has transformed after independence in 1960 to a complex structure for harnessing the country's resources and to expedite economic development in a way and manner that will transform natural resources into goods and services that would meet the increasing expectations of the citizens (Inyang, 2008).

To effectively accomplish the aforementioned objective, the day-to-day activities of government can no longer rely on the conventional approaches. Hence, there is need to leverage on information and communication technology (ICT) to plan and execute government policies. Tella, Amaghionyeodiwe, and Adesoye (2007) maintain that information communications technology (ICT) contributes significantly to economic growth by helping to support the economy and playing vital roles in specific practices that lead to economic growth. Therefore, advances in information and communication technology have steered an era of innovative thinking and increasing integration in service delivery founded on commonality of infrastructures, data and improved business processes (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development-OECD, 2005).

Rahim *et al.*

Various metaphors have been used to represent the adoption of information and communication technologies in public sector, most prominent are: e-governance, digital government, and electronic governance (e-governance). In general, e-governance refers to the use of internet technology (IT) as a mechanism for exchanging information, offering and transacting services with citizens, businesses, and other arms of government (Rao, 2003). According to Okot-Uma (2004), e-governance encompasses the adoption of information technology to ensure unrestricted movement of information, to eliminate the physical boundaries of traditional paper and physical based systems in service delivery. Deloitte (2003) viewed e-governance as the application of technology to improve service delivery in the most economical way to the betterment of citizens, business entity and employees.

Despite the importance of public services to individuals and countries, the World Bank's World Development Report released in 2004 discovered large disparities in the quality and quantity of public goods and services across developing countries and within countries (World Bank, 2004). In most African countries, including Nigeria, providing public services constitute a huge challenge, which is conventionally perceived as exclusively government responsibility to offer the needed services. In reality, the challenges and difficulties of service delivery are widening given scarce resources and management challenges; thus, government alone often cannot offer these services at levels that match speedy population growth, and urbanization in Nigeria. In Nigeria, citizen's perception of the government is that the institutionalized systems of service delivery of public services is poor, hence, its lacks required structures, and capability to deliver services that meets and exceed citizens expectations. In particular, running of governments in Nigeria costs too much to delivers what is far below citizens' expectation and increasingly perceived as unresponsive or accountable. More worrisome is the fact that many public bureaucracies were seen as bloated, incompetent and self-centered, motivated essentially by underlying rent seeking tendency which is promoted by traditional administration bureaucracy (Olivier, 2015).

It has also become more obvious than ever before that the traditional government structures and systems are no longer suitable to meet the demands of growing citizen desires and challenges of complex global economies (Agus, Barker & Kandampully, 2007). While the adoption and benefits of e-governance have been remarkably visible in many developed countries, there is still much skepticism about its applicability in most developing nations Nigeria inclusive. Overall, developing countries have been lagging behind in e-government adoption compared to developed nations (West, 2007). For instance, statistics released by the United Nations E-Governance Survey Report in 2014 ranked Nigeria 162 out of 193 countries in terms of its e-governance status (United Nations E-Governance Survey Report, 2014). The survey also reported that Nigeria had 0.2929 as its e-governance development index figure. Feasibly, governments' establishments in Nigeria are yet to transcend beyond

Rahim *et al.*

the billboard or partial service-delivery to claim e-governance adoption. Furthermore, an unfortunate experience of e-governance initiatives in the Nigerian public sector is that e-governance project were designed to promote the ideals of the government, its service provider, funding groups and donors, and not essentially configured based on the values, needs, and expectations of the citizens served by the government. Against the aforementioned research background, the broad aim of this paper is to examine transformative potentials of e-governance vis-à-vis the intrinsic role of information and communication technology in reinvigorating public service delivery in Nigeria. Specific objectives of the paper are to: (1) evaluate how ICT transform service delivery performance in the Nigerian public sector, (2) determine the degree of adoption of e-governance in the Nigerian public sector, (3) investigate the benefits associated with the adoption of e-governance in the Nigerian public sector, (4) evaluate some of the constraints to the adoption of e-governance in the Nigerian public sector.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **New Public Management (NPM) Theory**

According to Aucoin (1990) and Reichard (1996), NPM originated from public-choice theory and managerialism which offshoots from the criticism leveled against the traditional model of public administration by politicians, public servant, and scholars to seek for what could further improve government effectiveness and efficiency. Against the aforementioned backdrop, the new public management promoted the commercialization as far as it is possible to promote the role of governments in providing services to its citizens, and of the state's relationship with its citizens (Kurt, 2003). NPM offers a fundamental set of philosophies on which so many contemporary e-government initiatives are founded (Chadwick & May, 2003). In the opinion of Samaratunge, Alam and Teicher (2008), NPM is a contemporary management practice with the logic of economics aiming at upholding evolving core public sector values. According to Thompson and Thompson (2001), NPM is a summary description of administrative thinking aiming at reorganizing public sector institutions to align their management, reporting, accounting and control systems closer to business methods with a view of making it results-oriented and productive.

Notwithstanding its usefulness, Aucoin (1990) remarks that NPM-led reforms initiatives were stimulated by a number of partly self-contradictory ideas, reinforced by the private sector market-oriented organizational and operating ideologies. Peters and Pierre (1998) also observe that NPM techniques seem to be found rather broadly, whereas governance is sensitive to political and cultural environment; it is therefore, likely to appear in dissimilar institutional systems in diverse context. Mathiasen (1996) also comments on this theme, and argues that while our inclination may view NPM as simply a laundry collection of tools of best practices, its applicability and effectiveness will vary considerably from one country or

Rahim *et al.*

jurisdiction to another. Essentially, the challenge with NPM is that it did not provide much more than normative reorientation, thus, NPA schemes for managerial and democratic adoption become unrealistic because it fail to fully account for participative and socially equitable public administration (Campbell, 1972).

### **An overview of E-governance**

The global shifts towards improved deployment of information technology (IT) by governments began in the nineties, with the advent of the World Wide Web (WWW). The European Union laid the foundations of what is today known as e-governance in its first action-plan blue print named “Europe 2002, an Information Society for All” at Feira European Council. The European Union views e-governance as a mechanism for connecting civil society and businesses to the government and the modernization of public sector through the use of information and communication technologies. Numerous academics have offered different definitions of e-governance. The word governance comes from an ancient Greek word, “*kebernon*”, which means to steer (Praven & Seema, 2012). The fundamental notion guiding the operationalization of electronic governance (e-government) is the construct “governance”. In general term, e-governance represents fundamental changes in the way government establishments’ work, share information, and offer services to internal and external customers rather than visibility of government website on the internet. Rao (2003) defined electronic governance as the application of information and communication technologies (ICT) to plan, implement, and monitor government activities, and projects.

Accordingly, e-governance progressed on the basis of the revolution in ICT which is founded in digital technologies sources such as; personal computers, and mobile phones among others. The proliferation according to Danfulani (2013) progressively facilitated the easy transfer of information and services between the government and the society.

Saxena (2005).alludes with Rao view and defined e-governance as the processes and structures applicable to the electronic delivery of government services to the public. In a similar perspective, Bannister and Walsh (2002) express that e-governance is a notion that encompasses the utilization of information and communication technology by various government establishments and civil society in stimulating active involvement of citizens in the governing and administrative procedure of political institutions of their country. Backus (2001) defines electronic-governance as the procedure of delivering government services and information to the citizens through medium that functions on electronics principles. Torres, Pina, and Acerete (2005) conceptualize e-governance as the guidelines, procedures and behaviors that influence the way public administration functions, that is, the organization and culture of public administration. In the opinion of Brannen (2001), the major focus of e-governance is to guarantee that the public experience a hitch-free access to government services. Palvia and Sharma (2007) corroborate the above view by affirming

Rahim *et al.*

that the cardinal role of e-governance is the internal deployment of information and internet facilities in the management and control of capital, human, machines, and material resources that are vital to effective government functioning and citizens welfare. Sunday (2014) maintains that e-governance is concerns with the adoption of information and communication technology by the various government establishments to improve accountability, create awareness, and safeguard transparency in the management of government businesses. The shared theme behind all the aforementioned definitions is that e-governance encompasses the computerization of existing paper-based processes in government establishments to innovative approaches that is participatory and more beneficial to the government and society at large (Okot-Uma, 2004).

### **E-governance Perspectives and Adoption Phases**

E-governance can be examined from six perspectives: (1) the public administration perspective; (2) the technology perspective; (3) the transformation perspective; (4) the knowledge management perspective; (5) the sociological perspective; and (6) the legal-political-economic perspective (Pablo & Shan, 2002). Likewise, an examination of e-governance development process reveals that there are five levels of functionality across the various forms of e-governance services. These classifications according to numerous studies and reports categorize e-governance services founded on the level of technological advancement of the website and its functions (Matthias & Gaele, 2003; Kaaya, 2004; Okot-Uma & Rogers, 2004). According to Gartner Group (2000), e-governance will mature according the four-phase of e-governance maturity model. These phases are: Early 90's information-presence; Mid 90's interaction-intake process; Present Transaction-complete transaction; and Future transformation-integration and organizational changes.

According to The United Nations E-government Global Survey (2005), e-governance model consist of five stages of e-governance model. These are: emerging presence, enhanced presence, Interactive presence, transactional presence, and networked (or fully integrated) presence E-governance interactions are also categorized as government-to-citizens or G2C (such as when people file income tax declarations); government-to-business or G2B (i.e. when companies pursue business permits); or government-to-government or G2G (which occurs when diverse divisions or levels of government exchange information); Government to Employees or G2E when government interact with its employees on a regular basis; and Government to Constituents (E-Democracy) which refers to online activities of governments, elected representatives, political parties and citizens democratic processes. Sachdeva (2008) proposed government to NGO (G2N) which is a form of interactive platform through which government interact with non-governmental organizations.

Rahim *et al.*

### **Information Technology and Public Service Delivery in Nigeria**

Efficient flow of information is a necessary pre-condition for effective day-to-day business of government. Therefore, the use of ICT is essential in every aspect of citizens'-government interactions. ICT constitute a major element through which governments govern, manage its resources, offer services, and account for its performance (Heeks, 2002). Therefore, information and communication technology has become the driving force to improve public sector efficiency and effectiveness (Kenneth & Justin, 2004). According to OECD (2003), information technology is a tangible resource in form of equipment or interconnected system of equipment that comprises all methods of technology use to build, store, influence, manage, transmit, interchange, or receive information in its numerous forms. Public service delivery on the other hand, is about providing citizen with services of public interest such as healthcare, qualitative education, energy, transportation, water, and security of life and property. Unlike the demands for services and products from manufacturing firms, the strains on demands on public services are somewhat different and complicated. According to Steenhuisen (2009), the quality of public service delivery is a complicated notion and more importantly public service delivery in some circumstances suffers from cost and efficiency (Gajendra, Xi, & Li, 2014).

In reality, the provision of quality public services reinforces the social contract between government and citizens, which is a key measure of governance and potent indicator of the wellbeing of a society. Generally, providing public services is a top priority in both developed and developing nations and more important in fragile countries if they are to make progress towards the attainment of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Remarkably, citizen's perception of public service delivery in Nigeria is poor and fall short of expectations. Our desk-based literature review and keen observation also revealed number of shared issues as regard poor and detrimental impacts of service delivery outcomes in Nigeria. These consist of cases where government functionaries use services as patronage tools for political associates, remarkable disparities between federal states and local government policies and instances where citizens intentionally opt out of formal service provision mechanism and patronize on unregulated, and informal providers (such as security issues- vigilante and militants).

### **Benefits and Constraints of E-governance adoption in Nigeria**

The significance of e-government is closely connected to good governance and wellbeing of the citizens. In general, e-governance offer tremendous support and simplify government relationship with its key stakeholders (government agencies, citizen and business entity). Bakry (2004) maintains that deploying e-governance results into innovations in the governing and administrative process of a country. According to Fung and Hee (2002), e-governance represents a landmark opportunity to move a nation forward with qualitative,

Rahim *et al.*

cost effective government services and improved relationship between citizens and government. Therefore, the adoption of e-governance initiatives to a large extent empower citizens (Gage, 2002) and help to develop relationships between governments and citizens by crafting innovative platform through which citizens are integrated to overall nation's development agenda (Gasco, 2003). The benefits of e-governance include improved operational efficiency, increased operational effectiveness, innovative processes and systems. Abasilimi and Edet (2015) highlighted the following as the benefits of e-governance: efficient delivery of government services to the public, better interactions with business organizations, and citizen empowerment through access to information and communication technology. In addition, e-governance offers support towards economic growth and poverty reduction, reinforcement of the tenets of good governance – (such as effectiveness, transparency, responsibility, and comprehensiveness) among others.

Notably, the adoption of ICT's to effectively offer public service to citizens is a big challenge in many developing countries, Nigeria inclusive. Remarkably, governments in developing countries are passionate about e-governance initiatives and have developed some level of information technology service, but the reality is that it remains a huge challenge to implement e-governance (West, 2005). The major reason is that e-governance is not easy to undertake. The aforementioned constraints among others deeply shape the disparity of the adoption levels and usage of e-governance initiatives in Nigeria and other developing countries compare to developed economies.

There is also no formal laws regulating e-governance adoption and its implementation in Nigeria is still very low (Yusuf, 2006). In other words, the use of IT regulatory structure in Nigeria has not been properly modernized to fully accommodate e-governance initiatives that are appropriate to Nigeria context (Garfunke, 2001). Similarly, in Nigeria, there is difficulty in meeting the demand for e-governance services, which further weaken the benefits of e-governance; in particular, the cost of internet which is the major platform for e-governance remains relatively high and prohibitive for majority of the citizens (Backus, 2001).

Aside from the fact that Nigeria has only undertaken restricted number of e-governance initiatives; which is akin to poor e-readiness, a large number of these e-governance initiatives have also failed to accomplish its intended goals and in some cases, abandoned prematurely (Ndou, 2004). Correspondingly, Nigeria government face the challenges of insufficient resources and capabilities to promote the technological and managerial knowledge required to successfully deploy e-governance services (Yusuf, 2006). Complicating the matter further is that Nigeria like other developing nations often adopts ICTs that are developed in the Western world and transfer to them which may pose context related challenges (Ndou, 2004). Other challenges to e-governance adoption and



Rahim *et al.*

implementation highlighted in the literature are: infrastructure issue, regulatory law and public policy, digital divide and e-literacy, privacy and security concern, transparency and permanent accessibility, trustworthiness, and socio-cultural factors such as gender, poverty, literacy level, age, and social exclusion among others (Okot-Uma, & Rogers, 2004).

## RESEARCH METHOD

This paper relied on secondary information to describe and provide explanation regarding the interrelationship among the phenomena under investigation. The major benefits of working with secondary information is economy and breadth of data available, which create easier way for providing comparative and contextual information that may result in unforeseen discoveries of subject matter under investigation (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009).

## DISCUSSION

Across the globe, governments are integrating information-based technologies into the domain of public administrative reforms with a view of reinvigorating the delivery of services and the process of governance that is most effective. The growth in the adoption of e-governance is founded on the premise that by establishing solid presence of the government on the internet, public service delivery will experience improved efficiency, effectiveness, and performance. Thus, e-governance initiatives lie at the heart of two fundamental worldwide shifts: the information revolution and the governance revolution and both shifts alter the way society functions and the system of governance. Although the excitement for e-governance came from the desire to achieve better operational efficiency and to respond promptly to citizens' demands for enhanced public services; progressively, e-governance has come to be recognized as a veritable democratic tool in addition to its administrative capability.

Despite growing excitement and benefits of adopting ICT, e-governance initiatives in Nigeria like other developing countries is yet to record significant success, or even affect the systems of governments in developing countries due to wide gap that exists between existing realities and scheme of e-governance initiatives and frameworks (Heeks, 2002; Rabaiah & Vandijck, 2009). No doubt, improving service delivery is not a remote process, it require painstaking effort to integrate and strengthening citizens' participation through ICTs to diffuse e-governance processes on technical, non-technical, and state-specific issues but, it also require a well-functioning public sector that offer quality public services consistent with citizen expectations to foster private market-led growth.

Arising from the above, the challenges of service delivery in Nigeria upset citizens who demand quality services from government. Some of the major challenges to public service

Rahim *et al.*

delivery in Nigeria as earlier noted are absence of coherent e-governance framework and poor capability to deliver service to the citizens effectively and efficiently. In general, public service delivery in Nigeria has been pronounced to be poor, inefficient and ineffective, and fall short of citizens expectations. These shortcomings in service delivery challenges are mostly due to poor accountability, transparency, administrative bottlenecks/high cost of governance, wastage and poor commitment to make things work effectively for the citizenry (Achimuju, 2010; World Bank, 2012). In particular, e-governance position occupies by Nigeria is not impressive considering rather scattered initiatives of many e-governance applications in the public sector. What this imply is that most of these initiatives only exist on the web and are not only incompatible with each other, but lacks complementarities capabilities in building a nation-wide e-governance platform. As a result, government effectiveness in delivering the needed services is ineffective and has always probe the real intention and desire of government for innovative service delivery in Nigeria.

### **CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

This paper examines transformative potentials of e-governance vis-à-vis the intrinsic role of information and communication technology in reinvigorating public service delivery in Nigeria. The enabling role of the information and communication technology (ICT) in the delivery of services to the public sector has gained improved acceptance and recognition. Thus, technology and the systems used in e-governance program offer a roadmap for efficient delivery of services in the public sector. The adoption of e-governance within the public sector in Nigeria has become imperative in enhancing public participation, to observe and assess government projects, safeguarding government accountability and transparency, as well as transmitting information among the citizens', business community, and government.

Therefore, e-governance if implemented correctly can increase current the level of government services, increase accountability, lessens costs of governance, and result in more accurate and well-organized service delivery system in Nigeria. Although it is vital to state that developing countries, Nigeria inclusive are not alone in the travail of high levels of failure with e-governance initiatives. Nonetheless, they do face peculiar constraints that emanate from two obvious challenges: i.e. lack of e-readiness and wide adoption gaps. In conclusion, Nigeria desire to reconstruct the fragile nature of her economy and by extension legitimacy of the government can be strengthen through the adoption and implementation of e-governance initiatives.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In the light of the discussion, conclusion, and implications drawn from this paper; the following recommendations were offered.

Rahim *et al.*

1. There is need for strong political will and commitment toward the adoption and implementation of e-governance in Nigeria to drive the process of public sector reform for accelerated service delivery. Therefore, government should intensify effort towards the development of policy framework that will enhance Nigeria's global information infrastructure at national, state, and local government levels by adopting emerging satellite technologies such as VSAT, fibre optic networks, high speed gateways and broad band/multimedia equipment that is most suitable to our local needs. Other measures that will aid the accomplishment of the aforementioned goal is to restructure the education system at all levels to respond effectively to the challenges and perceived impact of the information age, and allocation of satisfactory budgetary inflow to fund special IT development programme among others.
2. Nigeria government should establish IT Parks in Nigeria to serve as incubating centers for the development of software applications instead of raw importation of information technology from the Western world. This will assist in addressing information technology open standards that will further liberalize and enhance the Nigeria's fiscal measures including incentives to make IT more affordable to the citizenry.
3. The provision of e-governance services should be broadened to encourage multi-channel access to ICTs so as to minimize the digital divide through the adoption of cost-effective technologies that will ensure ease of use, as well as improved quality, convenience and accessibility of information and services of government to all categories of user, regardless of individual, social or cultural factors or geographical location.

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Rahim *et al.*

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Rahim et al.

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Rahim *et al.*

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