

RESEARCH BRIEFING
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MAKING ALL
VOICES COUNT

WHEN DOES THE STATE LISTEN?

A GRAND CHALLENGE
FOR DEVELOPMENT



Has Kenya's ICT revolution triggered more citizen participation?

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Further reading

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Cassim, A. (2016) *What happens to policy when policy champions move on? The case of welfare in South Africa*, Brighton: IDS

Darko, T. (2016) *How does government responsiveness come about? The politics of accountability in Ghana's National Health Insurance Scheme*, Brighton: IDS

Katera, L. (2016) *Why is it so hard for non-state actors to be heard? Inside Tanzania's education policies*, Brighton: IDS

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When does the state listen?

Communication between the state and citizens is an essential element for an equal and just society. Growing social inequalities, lack of proper public services, and denial of basic human rights all act to widen existing communication gaps. Key to bridging these gaps is ensuring not only that citizen voices are heard, but also that states have the capacity and incentive to listen and respond. As much of the literature on accountability focuses on citizen voices, a group of researchers from Ghana, Kenya, South Africa and Tanzania – in collaboration with the Institute of Development Studies – decided to look at state responsiveness. Trying to find instances of accountable governance, when the state is responsive to citizen voice, this team of researchers interviewed key actors

across the state–citizen spectrum who had been involved in landmark social justice policy processes during major junctures of democratisation in these four countries. Calling their research project *When Does the State Listen?* (Loureiro et al. 2016), they examined when and how the state listened, and to which actors; and why, at times, it chose not to listen.

The researchers identified three types of juncture when the state listened: (1) 'hearing' moments, when the state engaged with citizen voices but did not change the way it acted; (2) 'consultation' moments, when it engaged with citizen voices through two-way dialogue, resulting in one-sided action; and (3) 'concertation' moments, when coalitions between reform-minded officials and politicians and organised citizen



Protesters sit down in the street during an anti-corruption demonstration in Nairobi in December 2015.

BEN CURTIS/ASSOCIATED PRESS

voices engaged in two-way dialogue and action for accountable governance. They witnessed concertation moments when state and non-state actors shared a sense of urgency and a common goal, despite different understandings of accountable governance. But they also found that states often reverted to consulting or hearing, as concertation moments are arduous and temporary, and part of larger, ever-changing policy processes.

In this brief, Nyambura Salome surveys the extent to which Kenya's information and communications technology (ICT) revolution transforms *e-government* – implementing decisions with the help of ICTs – into *e-governance* – using ICTs to help make decisions (Marche and McNiven 2003). Her study of Nairobi, the country's main technology hub, concludes that ICTs do not necessarily trigger better governance. State actors mistake e-government for e-governance and are often indifferent to citizens' aspirations for more public participation. On the other side of the state–citizen interface, and despite an explosion of e-government tools, only a small minority of Nairobi citizens use ICTs to engage with the state. At the end of the day, it seems that much of Kenya's ICT governance revolution is still yet to mature, lacking a concerted effort from state actors to engage with non-state actors.

ICTs and development in Kenya

Kenya's ICT development journey began in 1998 with the introduction of a new Communication Act; in 2002, President Mwai Kibaki's government established an

E-government Secretariat to oversee the computerisation of government services. Since then, the country has been on course for an ICT revolution, and has recently been feted as a leading regional tech hub. US President Barack Obama's decision to host the 2015 Global Entrepreneurship Summit in Kenya – a first in Sub-Saharan Africa – was evidence of this reputation, as is the government's marketing of *Africa's Silicon Savannah*, a business-outsourcing project on the outskirts of Nairobi.

Most of the government's ICT policy initiatives have been pegged on its Vision 2030, a national planning blueprint that spells out the long-term vision for the country to achieve middle-income status by 2030. Vision 2030 rests on three pillars: social, economic and political (Government of the Republic of Kenya 2007). The social pillar aims at investing in people in order to improve their quality of life, while the economic pillar seeks to improve the prosperity of all regions of the country, and all Kenyans, by achieving a 10% growth in gross domestic product (GDP) by 2017. The political pillar envisages moving the Kenyan people to the future as one nation, envisioning a democratic system that is issue based, people centred and results oriented, and is accountable to the public.

These three pillars – symbolised by the three traditional African cooking stones – are seen to be interconnected and have a symbiotic relationship. None can stand alone, and none can thrive without the others. Our observations indicate that the ICT revolution is contributing to attaining the goals of the economic and social pillars. There has been tremendous growth in the ICT sector,

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particularly in mobile phone technologies. In September 2013, there were 31.3 million mobile phone subscribers, 25.1 million mobile money subscribers, and an estimated 19.1 million internet users (Communications Commission of Kenya 2013). ICTs now contribute KES280 billion to the economy, and the 2014 National ICT Masterplan projected that the sector has the potential to generate 180,000 jobs and contribute at least 8% of GDP by 2017 (Ministry of Information, Communication and Technology 2014). However, our focus is on whether there has been parallel progress in the political pillar.

The current government won the election in 2013 after a campaign based on the promise of delivering a new digital, tech-savvy government, which it contrasted with the opposition's 'analogue' mode of politics. Their manifesto was popular with young people because of its promise to deliver 1 million jobs, and to provide laptops to schoolchildren. Since being elected, the government's push for e-governance and innovations in the ICT sector leading to jobs for young people has been evident. At the time of this research, there were 41 public services that could be accessed online, and 12 Huduma centres, one-stop shops for people to access basic services such as identification (ID) cards and driving licenses. All 18 government ministries have uploaded general information online, and

recently the President gave a directive that all procurement processes should be carried out online. Other initiatives include the creation of an e-citizen platform, where citizens can access some basic services instead of visiting the Huduma centres. The government has also created a one-stop website (www.mygov.ke) as a single platform for all government information, including the government diary, information from all 47 counties, and activities in each ministry. Other initiatives include the Kenya Open Data Portal, where the government uploads reports and data collected in various projects.

Some private sector actors support these government initiatives. Four of the main players in the telecoms industry contribute 0.5% of their gross annual revenue to the Universal Service Fund (USF), the objective of which is to promote broadband expansion in regions which would be difficult for private providers to reach. Other players include the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the World Bank, which have provided both technical and financial support in promoting the ICT sector.

Article 196 of Kenya's 2010 constitution views ICT as one of the most effective methods for promoting principles of good governance by ensuring that citizens actively participate in decisions that

shape their lives. The extent to which the government is promoting use of ICTs in governance is undoubtedly visible through the Huduma centres and the other initiatives discussed above. However, whether citizens are using these e-platforms to voice their own issues, or whether the government is enabling participation by its citizenry in determining its course, were issues of concern for this study.

The puzzle: access, engagement and state responsiveness

As discussed, there is a thrust towards achieving the targets of the social and economic pillars through the ICT sector; however, whether there is a parallel thrust towards the targets of the political pillar is in question. Government commitment to ensure and enhance access to public services is commendable, but is the citizenry aware of its e-government initiatives? To what extent do citizens engage with the state or their political leaders, beyond accessing basic services? And do the leaders – politicians or bureaucrats – listen to the citizens?

In order to respond to these questions, we carried out case study research in Nairobi county, which is not only the seat of the national government, but also the hub for most of the country's ICT initiatives. Furthermore, due to the concentration of many mid-level colleges and universities, it has a relatively large population of young people who have some basic information technology (IT) skills.

We took a purposive sample of 120 young people who were university students, young professionals or entrepreneurs; five

bureaucrats from the ICT Authority and the Communications Authority of Kenya; and two elected politicians. Questionnaires were administered to the young people, and we interviewed the bureaucrats and politicians. Personal experience, secondary data and observations were also used for this study.

Public services through e-platforms: awareness and accessibility

One of the most curious findings is that not many of the young people we talked to were aware of the government's ICT 'revolution', and two thirds of the questionnaire respondents had not accessed any of the online services provided by government. The following reasons were given: lack of awareness of the existence of the e-platforms; lack of personal computers; lack of ICT knowledge; and fear of victimisation or condemnation. Fear of victimisation was discussed in reference to being condemned for raising any controversial or sensitive political innuendo. One third of the sample had used the e-platforms or visited the Huduma centres for services such as applying for a national ID card, a driving licence, or a Kenya Revenue Authority personal identification number (PIN), or for filling in their income tax return.

When further questioned about the responsiveness of the application processes they had used, some respondents observed that processes were slow, because most of the time systems were down. On the support received at Huduma centres, they observed that it was good to have individualised support for those who did not have access to computers or connectivity. This information

was corroborated by the bureaucrats at the ICT Authority, who observed that they receive up to 8,000 requests a day for basic services.

On the question of accessibility, we randomly picked five government ministries and sent out five e-mails to the contact addresses they provided. However, these addresses were all inactive and thus did not provide access to the ministries. We also visited the Nairobi Huduma centre, which revealed that the demand for services is much greater than the provision. For instance, for completing income tax return forms, there were 250 citizens and only three desks to provide the service; similarly, at the ID cards platform, there were 400 citizens and only five providers.

Do citizens engage, and does the state listen?

When the citizens were asked about their engagement with their leaders through e-platforms, this was very minimal. Of the 32% of the sample that had used online services, only four respondents had used them to contact the President directly, two to contact the Nairobi Senator directly, and one to contact the Nairobi Governor directly. When further questioned on what their direct engagement had been about, they replied requesting jobs or financial assistance, and commending the leaders on their role. Only half of those who had made direct contact received a response, and those who had felt honoured. This information was corroborated by the responses of the politicians we interviewed. One observed that citizens do not know how to engage with their leaders, but rather use the e-platforms to lament or request

assistance. The other noted that if her constituents would provide constructive information on development, then she would gladly respond.

It emerged from both bureaucrats and politicians that although those interviewed had an ear to the ground, the majority were not much interested in citizens' voices. For the politicians, the first agenda was to regain any lost fortunes used during the campaign season. For the bureaucrats, there was not much interest in what was being voiced by citizens, since the majority were only interested in accessing their basic needs. The bureaucrats seemed more interested in listening to powerful actors like the 'cream' of the telecom industry, and to the associations and unions that represent them, since their partnership is critical to initiatives like the implementation of the USF. They also listened to the donors that support their initiatives, for instance USAID which supported the development of the National Broadband Strategy. When asked about listening to the public, the bureaucrats observed that it is up to the public to develop an interest in using e-platforms, since digitisation will bring a shift towards paperless services. When the concern was raised about the majority of the public not having the capacity or access to use ICTs, the bureaucrats observed that this is why the government was launching Huduma centres in all counties.

On the question of whether bureaucrats and the politicians use e-platforms to listen or engage with citizens, the view from the bureaucrats was that they follow the policies that have been developed, and since the government was keen on digitising their

services, this was their mandate. On listening to the citizenry through these platforms, one officer intimated that besides accessing basic public services, he had not witnessed any serious engagement by citizens through e-platforms, apart from what he saw on social media like Twitter and Facebook, which was not directed to any ministry in particular. The politicians also observed that a majority of their constituents did not have the capacity or access to use ICTs, and thus face-to-face meetings or public *barazas* or forums were preferable spaces to use when they were interested in hearing public voices. One Member of Parliament observed that there were some groups of young people who had created a WhatsApp platform to engage with her, but much of what she read from them was only criticism, which put her off listening to their real concerns.

The public forums preferred by politicians are those called by leaders from various levels to share their views and listen to the public. However, most of the 120 questionnaire respondents observed that the advertisements for such public forums are usually political, since they are either advertised in the papers very close to the date, or on weekdays, when professionals are not able to attend, or the adverts are pinned in county offices, where only a few people are able to see them. The politicians were viewed as listening more when citizens held demonstrations, or when there was public outrage on social media. One example given was the planned trip by the President of Kenya to attend the inauguration of the President of Nigeria. When the budget for this trip was leaked on social media, there was so much outrage that the trip was cancelled.



A picture used by Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta during his election campaign to promote his 'digital team'.

Our observation is that there is a growing number of young Kenyans who are using social media platforms such as Twitter (#KOT, Kenyans on Twitter), Facebook and Instagram to raise critical issues to the government, including the behaviour of national and county leaders. We also observed the emergence of local champions such as the Ushahidi platform, the Institute for Social Accountability initiative, PAWA254 and various bloggers who are seeking to create platforms for citizen participation and engagement.

Implications for policy and practice

The findings of this study suggest that the government needs to focus on ensuring parallel progress in the three pillars of Vision 2030. For instance, the open data

While the government is spearheading an ICT 'revolution', the majority of citizens do not have the requisite skills to utilise the public services provided online. Policies that will enable the inclusion of the majority without ICT skills are imperative.

initiative, in which the government is involved in uploading information on tenders and transactions, is an opportunity for citizens to engage not only in business with the government through its many tendering calls, but also to question the data uploaded and raise questions on procuring processes. However, only very few people know about the existence of this website, let alone how to use the data there to interrogate government business.

A second observation is the need to sensitise our bureaucrats and politicians on why the voices of citizens should be critical for them. As was observed, citizen voices are rarely heard – or rather, they are usually only heard during the campaigning season. One respondent pointed out that policy-makers need to have their ears on the ground, and the only way to achieve this is by constantly initiating moments when they will visit and listen to citizens during their daily engagements. The use of mobile connectivity could add value and enrich a politician's leadership, because it is a relatively cheap way to reach out to constituents for their input and vice versa.

In terms of awareness and access to public services, while the government is spearheading an ICT 'revolution',

the majority of citizens do not have the requisite skills to utilise the public services provided online. The launching of the Huduma centres does add value for the population, but our research shows that there are still challenges in terms of the number of stewards managing the desks at the centres and the long queues, and the connectivity, which frequently suffers an overload. Thus, to enable the strengthening of the political pillar, policies that enable the inclusion of the majority without ICT skills are imperative. An increase in the number of stewards managing the Huduma centres would also improve the efficiency of public service delivery.

The thrust towards achieving the targets in the social and economic pillar through ICTs by 2030 is on course; but the parallel thrust in the political pillar is not. Respondents indicated that they have minimal contact with their leaders, which was corroborated by the bureaucrats and the politicians in the study. If the state does not focus on the growth and development of the three pillars in synergy, then it risks political upheaval, because day by day, a growing number of young Kenyans are finding their critical voices on social media. If the government chooses to propel this civic awareness and public participation,

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then it is more likely to be able to steer the voices of the masses towards constructive dialogue. Such an initiative would also ensure that state officers and politicians paid attention to the voice of the people for good governance.

It is critical for the state to revisit the targets to be achieved through the political pillar, and to recognise the added value ICTs can bring. The political goodwill to develop an issue-based, people-centred, result-oriented, accountable and democratic political environment demands that the government should sensitise state officers on their role as leaders in service to the citizenry. Service leadership should also be promoted among politicians, and they should also be taught IT skills so that they can appreciate ICT as a critical vehicle in creating democratic spaces.

There is need for the government and the civil service to address cultural attitudes to ICTs, and citizens' fear of victimisation or condemnation. A need for safe spaces is critical so that citizens do not fear victimisation when raising their concerns on governance issues. The creation of such safe spaces could be vital for good governance, in

that it would result in the revelation of shady under-dealings by corrupt agents.

As highlighted, there are various actors and champions in Kenya who are working on citizen participation and engagement. These actors certainly need to work together, to create a strong civil society force that could have an impact on government and bring about positive changes in governance. They also need to work together on empowering not only citizens, but also state officers to use e-platforms for constructive engagement.

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About Making All Voices Count

Making All Voices Count is a programme working towards a world in which open, effective and participatory governance is the norm and not the exception. This Grand Challenge focuses global attention on creative and cutting-edge solutions to transform the relationship between citizens and their governments. The field of technology for Open Government is relatively young and the consortium partners, Hivos, the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and Ushahidi, are a part of this rapidly developing domain. These institutions have extensive and complementary skills and experience in the field of citizen engagement, government accountability, private sector entrepreneurs, (technical) innovation and research.

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Research, Evidence and Learning component

The programme's research, evidence and learning contributes to improving performance and practice, and builds an evidence base in the field of citizen voice, government responsiveness, transparency and accountability (T&A) and technology for T&A (Tech4T&A). This component is managed by IDS, a leading global organisation for research, teaching and communication with over 30 years' experience of developing knowledge on governance and citizen participation

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