Sustainable ICT Adoption and Integration for Socio-Economic Development

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Chapter 3

Development of an Inclusive Participatory Democracy System

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ABSTRACT

Barriers such as unequal access, lack of digital skill, low income and disability constitute limiting factors for technology-mediated citizens and government interaction in developing countries. It is against this backdrop that this work explores the integration of Voice, Web and SMS technologies, in Nigeria's democratic process. The proposed system takes advantage of the ubiquitous nature of mobile devices to explore the plausibility of increasing the level of citizens' participation in democratic practices, particularly, those in rural areas with no Internet access and the physically challenged electorates. The server module for the e-democracy system was developed in PHP. Ozeki SMS server and Voxeo Voice server were used for SMS transaction code and VoiceXML code respectively. The prototype e-democracy system shows that developing nations can take advantage of their present level of technological development to give voice to the voiceless and improve their democratic system.

INTRODUCTION

The Global public management efforts since the 1980s have been revolutionizing the relationship between citizens and the State. The revolution focuses on governments being more responsive to the populace and requires new strategies to rebuild the relationship between citizens and governments and to promote more citizen participation in public administration (Kettl, 2005; Oni, et al., 2014). The use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in enhancing citizens' political participation has been identified as key to the revolution and a solution to the problems of representative democracy, particularly, the disconnection between representatives and citizens and the decline of political interest amongst the populace (Kang & Dugdale, 2010; Azeta, et al., 2015). E-participation initiatives have served as means for two-way communication between government and citizens. To the government, it serves as information provisioning tools and to the citizens as an avenue to voice their opinions, deliberate on policy issues, and give viable contributions to policy options. ICT has been persuasively argued to play a key developmental role in developing countries (Sahay & Avgerou, 2002; LeBlanc, et al., 2004). Leveraging on the capability of the internet and mobile technology, e-participation has the potential of creating new forms of engagement, deliberation, and collaboration in the political process to make democratic processes more inclusive and transparent (Coleman & Gotze, 2001; OECD, 2003b; Shirazi, et al., 2010). It has the potential to transform uncompetitive industries and dysfunctional public administration and to provide unprecedented opportunities for the information-intensive social services (Sahay & Avgerou, 2008).

Most countries have leveraged on ICT tools to foster new relationships between citizens and the State in order to alleviate the crisis of democratic legitimacy. The use of ICT is therefore, capable of bridging the disconnect between citizens and their representatives. Contrarily however, in developing countries such as Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) countries, e-democracy implementation is still in its introductory stage, though most governments have embarked on e-government implementation strategies. In these countries, e-participation in democracy is mostly centered on private organizations' initiative. Considering the prevailing challenges of poor governance, lack of accountability and transparency, these governments mostly need to join their world counterpart in promoting citizens participation public decision making and explore the capability to put in place adequate infrastructure for e-democracy implementation.

After the start of the democratic era in Nigeria and the election of a democratic government dated as early as the 1990's till now, the elected government formed the National Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), the National e-Government Strategy (NeGST) and the National IT policy. Among others, the

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Electronic Democracy (E-Democracy): Anything that governments do to facilitate greater participation in government and enhance effective governance using digital or electronic means.

Electronic Participation (E-Participation): The use of internet and mobile technologies to enhance democratic governance.

Inclusive Political Participation: Government and citizens political interaction that does not exclude any particular groups of people.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT): Collection of devices, protocols, procedures and networks employed in the information technology fields to foster interaction among different stakeholders.

Participation: Taking part in joint activities for the purpose of reaching a common goal i.e. direct public participation in political activities.