CHARACTERISING E-PARTICIPATION LEVELS IN E-GOVERNANCE

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Abstract:

E-governance may be understood as a pattern of shifting from traditional the performance of this governance via the electronic medium in order to facilitate an efficient, speedy and transparent process of disseminating information to the public, and other agencies, and for performing government administration activities. An E-government can transform citizen service, provide access to information to empower citizens, enable their participation in government and enhance citizen economic and social opportunities, so that they can better lives for themselves and for the next generation. The implementation of e-governance is to enhance good governance generally characterized by participation, transparency and accountability. This paper will discuss the horizons of e-governance in the transfer of service delivery, e-governance and ICT, levels of e-participation in e-governance, citizen’s perception and main issues of e-governance.

Keywords: e-governance; e-participation; ICT; Citizen’s perception.

Introduction:

E-governance as a pattern of shifting from the traditional to use of modern information and communication technologies by the Government to support public services, government administration, democratic processes, and relationships amongst the citizens, civil society, the private sector, and the state. An E-government can transform citizen service, provide access to information to empower citizens, enable their participation in government and enhance citizen economic and social opportunities, so that they can better lives for themselves and for the next generation.

On the other hand Governance refers to the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority in the management of a country’s affairs, including citizens’ articulation of their interests and exercise of their legal rights and obligations. Every government when they come to power they talk of implementation of e-governance to enhance good governance generally characterized by participation, transparency and accountability. Most governments have not been able to achieve any of the three aspects.

The emergence of the new information and communication technologies (ICTs) has all the attributes of imparting added value to the processes that characterize good governance. Thus ‘e-governance’ is the public sector’s use of the most innovative information and communication technologies, like the Internet, Local Area Networks, Mobile Phones, to deliver to its citizenry improved services, reliable information and greater knowledge in order to facilitate access to the governing process and encourage deeper citizen participation. It is an unequivocal commitment by decision-makers to strengthening the partnership between the private citizen and the public sector. E-governance should be seen to encompass
all ICTs, but the key innovation is computer networks – from intranets to the Internet – creating a wide range of new digital connections:

- Connections within government – permitting 'joined-up thinking'.
- Connections between government and NGOs/citizens – strengthening accountability.

**Connections between government and business/citizens – transforming service delivery.**

- Connections within and between NGOs – supporting learning and concerted action.
- Connections within and between communities – building social and economic development.

The novelty of using new technologies in governance is that it expands beyond internal government operations to include electronic service delivery to the public and the subsequent interaction between the citizen and the government. This potential for interactivity can be identified as one of the most important elements in the way e-governance will change the nature of government. Heeks, (1999)

The main aim for e-governance includes:

1. To enhance government and public institution efficiency, transparency and accountability by providing better public service and information delivery to citizens and others;
2. To foster greater interaction between government institutions and the people, thus giving greater voice to citizens in governance processes. Core components of e-governance include "e-participation," "e-administration" and "e-service delivery."

According to Evangelidis et al (2002) e-government is not entirely a technology phenomenon but rather it is about re-inventing and re-organizing the way service providers (public/private) and citizens (or users) interact in society.

At a less philosophical level the Electronic Service Delivery toolkit (www.esdtoolkit.org) identifies the following ten transactions within e-government:

- Providing information
- Applications for service
- Booking venues, resources and courses
- Collecting revenue
- Consultation
- Paying for goods and services
- Procurement
- Providing access to community, professionals or business networks
- Providing benefits or grants
- Regulation (such as issuing licenses) (Inman, 2003)

Wimmer, (2002), Jacumeit, (2002) points out that e-government makes considerable play of the concept of the ‘one stop shop’. They argue that the one stop shop or portal is attractive to citizens, because this portal can act as a familiar point of interaction with government in offering:

- Online information
- Communication (through e-mail)
- Online services, such as registration, vehicle registration, passport request, and tax form completion
- Access to online publication,
- Online payment systems,
- E-voting
- E-democracy and participation
- People networking

The horizons of e-governance

When one refers to the use and impact of ICTs on the public sector, a wide variety of terms come up – most notably the use of e-government, government online, digital government, e-governance, and e-democracy. These are sometimes used interchangeably. But, more importantly, they are rarely used consistently. These terms are still so new that they haven’t yet found their way into dictionaries, so it is not surprising that they often mean different things to different people. In this paper we will refer to e-governance as a concept covering the following fields of application:

- **e-administration**: improving the internal workings of the public sector with new ICT-executed information processes. Some examples are: integrated human resources and payroll systems, integrated financial management systems, web-based data resources to improve decision-making, intranet system to improve information flows within governmental instances. Some authors refer to this dimension as *back-office capability* and it is generally recognized as a precondition for developing e-services and e-democracy.

- **e-services**: providing information and delivering services to citizens. Providing citizens with details of public sector activities mainly relates to certain types of *accountability*: making public servants more accountable for their decisions and actions. It implies as well improving the services delivered to members of the public along dimensions such as quality, convenience and cost. This uses all the potentials of ICTs to deliver the informational components of public services to citizens in digital form. Some examples of information provision are: Calendar of events and entertainment, information on public transport and the environment. Examples of interactive services are: requests for public documents, requests for legal documents and certificates, issuing permits and licenses, online tax payment, payment of online services.

- **e-democracy**: increasing the engagement of citizens in public decisions and actions. The rationale is to make public decisions more responsive to citizens' view or needs by opening information flows from citizens to government. e-Democracy suggests greater and more active citizen participation enabled by the ICTs in today’s representative democracy as well as through more participatory or direct forms of citizen involvement in addressing public challenges. Some examples are: citizen panels, forums and petitions, opinion polls, referendums, online voting. (Finger et al, 2006)

*Finger et al, 2006* observes the following E-governance provides the common framework and direction in the implementation of government policies for the following:

i. Government and Citizen (G2C)
ii. Government Sectors (G2G)
iii. Government and Business (G2B)

The most common group interactions in e-governance are presented schematically in Figure 1 as specified by Michiel B. (2001) research report.
Figure 1: Interactions between main groups of e-governance

**Government to Citizen Services**

G2C services will include providing information and facilitating transitions such as electronically paying bills, making appointments, and renewing licenses. G2C is about giving citizens the convenience of choosing when and where they access public services. It is about changing the way people view the government. And it is about being transparent and efficient rather than bureaucratic.

**Government to Business Services**

G2B services could include providing information, such as industry standards and supplier directories and ratings, and conducting transactions, such as electronic quotations and company registrations. G2B is about making interactions, transactions, and communication faster, clearer, and easier for business.

**Government to Employee services**

G2E services or transactions between employees and their ministry or agency could include information management [intranets], knowledge management [content management systems], and collaborative and communication management [e-mail, messaging systems].

**Government to Government Services**

G2G services or transactions between ministries or agencies could include the provision of central services and information.
E-governance & ICT:

E-governance marks a paradigm shift in governance and offers enabling citizens and governments interact well. ICT comes in as a technological solution for effective and efficient implementations of e-governance. Since e-governance uses information and communication technology, Mansell (2002) says that E-governance is one step towards enabling measures to address the “digital opportunities” and the “digital divide” to set out the issues that should guide such initiatives. An enabling environment and the championing of ICT development and usage are essential to reduce the “digital divide” and to take advantage of ICT opportunities.

According to Slack et al, (2004) e-government can be delivered through the web, mobile phones, and public access kiosks. Citizens will seek opinions in accessing service providers, and will demand the option of consulting information on the move, as well as through fixed machines in their office, home, or even their train seats. Whilst the respective roles of technologies are likely to change over the years, different technologies and combinations of technologies are likely to be useful for different purposes. Morath (2000) suggests that the following factors need to be taken into account in considering the technology preference for specific users and specific tasks:

- **Penetration of technology**, both in general, within specific countries, and within specific segments
- **Bandwidth** and other characteristic of connections
- **Cost** of the equipment and the ongoing cost of the use of connections
- **Reliability**, with problems most likely to be associated with connection
- **Size of display**, which affects the information and interaction options that can be made available at one time
- **Input options**, ranging from touch screen, keypad, to full function keyboard and, ultimately, voice.
- **Integration** with other functions, such as calculations, the creation and storage of local databases and documents
- **Opportunity** to maintain a print record of any transactions or information.

Any new technology can be evaluated in terms of these criteria. Slack et al (2004) explains that linking technologies together in different configurations might also provide solutions that navigate the constraints of one technology, by capitalizing on the strengths of another. For example, linking a Portable PC through a mobile phone gives many of the advantages of a PC, but allows mobile communication. Internet cafes are becoming popular with users who do not otherwise have internet access. Such cafes have all of the functionality of the standard PC linked configuration, but offer access to demographic segments where penetration in terms of PC ownership remains limited. On the basis of the above criteria, the PC linked to a telephone line offers maximum flexibility in terms of the range of information that can be provided, and the ease of interaction. Governments need to establish an Internet presence, but some may also be potential community segments in which the penetration of digital TV is high, or in which the fascination with mobile phones allows to deliver short and sharp marketing messages, brief items of general and product news, and opportunities to effect simple transactions. Ultimately governments need a strategy for multi-channel service delivery and communication that embraces kiosks, telephone, the web, letters and personal contact.

The use of ICT means in Governance has impact on the following aspects as outlined by Michiel, B. (2001) research report.
24/7 Service Model

Systems and processes have to be adapted to a completely new service model. Intake processes are made self-service and even in the middle of the night a citizen should get an immediate (automated) response about the status of the application. Citizen’s expectations towards government’s response times will change because of the new communication medium. E-mail should be seen a new but serious channel besides the traditional channels such as telephone, physical counter, post and fax.

Need for Content

Websites consist of content (information). Governments will have to collect (buy), produce and update content daily. Content managers in each (large) department are responsible for the information on the website.

Human Resources

Effective use of ICTs in an organization requires training of people. People should feel comfortable with the tools they can use otherwise they will return to their old working patterns and habits. Maintaining technological infrastructure requires IT skilled resources. Governments will have to compete with the private (commercial) sector to recruit the necessary IT skilled people.

Security

Just about any computer system is vulnerable to external attacks. As the government moves its core processes (information, communication and transactions) to the Internet it is becoming far more vulnerable. Internet increases the number of entry points exponentially. Protection is possible with anti-virus software, firewall at gateways, encryption technology, and authentic identification tools.

Privacy

In phases 3 and 4 governments possess detailed information about citizens and businesses, which is often held in multiple offices on many different computer systems (or still in paper files). The integration of data can result in situations where the privacy of individual citizens is in danger. It is the responsibility of the government to restrict the utilization of private information, and secure such information from access by unintended parties. Due to public concern regarding privacy several countries have already passed data protection laws.

Information Technology (IT) Department:

With the implementation of e-governance IT is becoming more and more important in government operations. The needs for a professional IT department will inevitable increase, not only during implementation, but also for maintenance of software, hardware and infrastructure.
Citizen’s perception on e-governance

E-Governance is a form of public administration making “use of information and communication technologies (ICT) to enhance the access and delivery of government services to benefit citizens, employees and management of urban local bodies.” It aims to “help strengthen government’s drive toward effective governance and increase transparency to better manage social and economic resources for development.”

With efficient implementation of e-Governance citizens have developed the following perceptions:
- Provision of single window system for delivery of services and information to citizens.
- Provision of integrated and simplified services to citizens on any time, anywhere basis.
- Decentralization of service delivery and improve accessibility of information to citizens.
- Improved quality local government operations and management information systems to support and stimulate good governance.
- Bring about transparency and accountability in local and central government operations.
- Improve efficiency and effectiveness in interaction between local or county governments and its citizens and other stakeholders.
- Integrate data and services of various departments.
- Enhance efficient inter-departmental coordination.
- Provide timely and reliable management information relating to municipal administration for effective decision-making.

Levels of Participation

Macintosh, A. (2004) suggests the following three levels of participation (Enabling-Engaging-Empowering)

**Level 1: E-enabling** is about supporting those who would not typically access the internet and take advantage of the large amount of information available. The objectives are concerned with how information technology can be used to reach the wider audience by providing a range of technologies to cater for the diverse technical and communicative skills of citizens. The technology also needs to provide relevant information in a format that is both more accessible and more understandable. These are the two aspects addressed by e-enabling.

**Level 2: E-engaging** is the second level in the use of technology with citizens which is concerned with consulting a wider audience to enable deeper contributions and support deliberate debate on policy issues. This term ‘to engage’ in this context refers to the top-down consultation of citizens by government or parliament.
**Level 3: E-empowering** is the third level in the use of technology that is concerned with supporting active participation and facilitating bottom-up ideas to influence the political agenda. The previous top-down perspectives of democracy are characterized in terms of user access to information and reaction to government led initiatives. From the bottom-up perspective citizens are emerging as producers rather than just consumers of policy, Macintosh, A. et al (2002). The elements are useful as they indicate the scale of participation in governance, see fig 2.

![Levels of participation diagram](image)

**Figure 2: Levels of participation**

**Benefits of e-governance implementation:**

The use of ICT’s in governance can be illustrated through the following examples:

1. **Informing the citizen examples** - making information widely available to citizens with the aim of increased transparency and accountability, providing information about the political process, about services and choices available.

2. **Improved service delivery examples** - by giving the citizens a greater choice, faster delivery and improved efficiency of services.

3. **Increasing citizen participation examples** - improving accessibility of citizens to their elected members, creating a vision for partnership in the decision making process.

4. **Consulting and involving the citizen examples** - stimulating debate, two-way communication and interaction, public information and feedback.

**Main issues on e-governance:**

**Administration**

Providing information via electronic media is the most probable advanced service to date in many countries. However Kenyan government is a bad example in providing digital access to documents or any other information of her institutions. Another issue is to put citizens into a position to fully communicate with public authorities. What seems feasible in the near future is that citizens and enterprises may keep track of their applications digitally due to the recent launch of digital one-stop-shop by His Excellency the president of the republic of Kenya. the rising pressure on a administrative costs both inside and outside the public sector is one of the main drivers and a major obstacle at the same time. On one hand the public requires administration to become more cost efficient, while on the
other hand, the transmission to digitally run processes involves investments that in turn requires additional capital, Klages et al (1998).

**Economy**

Kenya is taking a bearing on the creation of new jobs in the telecommunication sector. However many citizens feel that additional training requirements will have an impact on employment in this sector. The Kenyan government rolled the Digital Village Networks through its umbrella body the Kenya ICT Board to oversee the set up of digital village kiosks, which in return will improve digital communication.

**Education**

Education is one of the area of development for Kenya, and is well spelt out in vision 2030 under the social pillar. In our case this issue involves the training of IT professionals on the one hand as well as computer based education in schools and at universities on the other. Kenyan government has not fully recognized the need for advice and support of its citizens in order to facilitate their contact with new technologies.

**Security**

Security and privacy of information is one of the challenges and ways to increase citizen confidence in the system. There should be proper security tools so that fraud and sabotage of systems can be avoided. The mechanisms and responsibilities to access information should be clearly defined and proper backup of information should be available at any given point of time. It should include information security management, system security, and access control and address issues relating to information systems auditing and security auditing. Data protection, privacy, and security are integral parts of e-Governance in e-enabling delivery of services.

**Infrastructure Scalability**

Infrastructure is another high priority subject. It will mean the improvement of infrastructure; bring electronic communication closer to the citizens, for instance, to provide public connections to electronic services. Tax incentives for the citizens can be intended to spread Internet access over households. Scalability addresses the Technology infrastructure which provides information with respect to applications, databases, infrastructure (IT and physical infrastructure), connectivity, etc. The various components should be chosen carefully based on technical feasibility, economic considerations and criticality of requirements.

The following considerations should be kept in mind while dealing with technology infrastructure or scalability.

- Maintenance and up gradation should be an integral part of the development of scalable e-Governance solutions
- Adaptable and robust application platform to meet the varying requirements.
- Extremely user-friendly interface to reduce the impact of change management
- Installation and implementation procedures shall be simple, to the extent possible
- Scalable IT infrastructure to address future requirements.
- Capable of execution across different platforms
- Secure so as to generate confidence among various stakeholders
- An appropriate disaster recovery in case of disaster

**Corruption**

“Corruption” is defined broadly as “the abuse of public power for private profit in a way that constitutes breach of law and dishonest and illegal behavior in position of authority and power” (Malik and Mina, 2005). Corruption is “like cancer” in the eye, one Dr Huguette Labelle, chairperson Transparency
International (TI) in Bangladesh once said. Corruption has crippled our government operations. With the wake of devolution government in Kenya, the Kenyan president has found it vital to fight corruption first. Resources are not reaching citizens due to this act of greedy.

Conclusion
The e-Government Strategy is designed to achieve pre-determined set of goals and objectives, which are: better and efficient delivery of Government information and services to the citizens, promote productivity among public servants, encourage participation of citizens in Government and empower all Kenyans in line with development priorities outlined in the Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment Creation. All these helps in providing the improvement in overall quality of service to citizen’s thus achieving the characterization of e-governance in terms of increased responsiveness, productivity, accountability, and transparency. In Kenya e-governance remains crippled due to corruption, insecurity, the level of scalability in terms of the technological infrastructure among others. Government employees remain adamant in the implementation of e-governance and as a result there have been problems in embracing the e-governance paradigm shift which remains threatened by “corruption”.

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