Seminar on Sharing Success Stories and Challenges in E-Governance/E-Administration

(Notes for Ministry of Communication Technology – Nigeria)

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DEFINITION OF E-GOVERNANCE

The “e” in e-Governance stands for “electronic” and implies ‘technology’ i.e. Information Communication Technology. Hence, e-Governance can be loosely defined as “technology driven” governance.

E-Government is the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to improve the activities of public sector organizations – viz Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs).

Wikipedia defines E-Governance as the application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for delivering government services, exchange of information communication transactions, integration of various stand-alone systems and services between Government-to-Citizens (G2C); Government-to-Business (G2B); Government-to-Government (G2G) as well as back office processes and interactions within the entire government frame work.

E-Government in NIGERIA

The adoption of e-Governance is expected to lead to government services becoming more available to citizens in a convenient, efficient and transparent manner. The three main target groups that can be distinguished in governance concepts are Government (Public/Civil servants), citizens and businesses/interest groups.

The impact of ICT in the world today cannot be over-emphasized because it enhances productivity, growth and business performance and it is clear that no country today can hope to be globally competitive without leveraging the power of ICT.

The realization of the transformative power of ICT has led Nigeria to adopt e-Governance as a part of government policy. This is gradually resulting in government delivering better services to its publics in a more efficient, cost-effective and transparent manner.
GOVERNMENT ICT INFRASTRUCTURE

The Federal Government currently spends close to $1bn on ICT infrastructure and services per annum. However, this spend is in functional or Ministerial silos and largely skewed towards hardware purchases and ICT infrastructure. The realization that savings could be made if such infrastructure is shared by various MDAs led to the creation of Galaxy Backbone Ltd. A government company set up for the sole purpose of providing ICT infrastructure and services to all Federal Government MDAs.

The introduction of the “1-Gov.net” project by Galaxy Backbone (GBB) is to ensure that infrastructure and transversal applications are shared across MDAs, resulting in huge savings. This approach to providing shared infrastructure received validation from the highest level in 2013, with GBB winning the United Nation’s Public Service award for “the promotion of whole-of-government approaches in the Information Age”.

ICT POLICY

Our ICT policy describes government’s strategic intent and identifies seven key result areas that we are prioritizing between now and 2015:

1. Cost reduction and transparency in governance.
2. Ubiquitous and cost effective national ICT infrastructure.
3. Multi-faceted strategy that enables equitable access to the infrastructure.
4. Citizen engagement and convenient delivery of government information and services.
5. Strong support for the development of education, health, agriculture and financial services on the ICT infrastructure.
6. Skills development to sustain the industry.
7. ICT entrepreneurship and innovation and the development of a strong and vibrant ICT industry.

E-GOVERNMENT PROJECTS

The Federal Government’s prioritization of ICT in our national vision is further evidenced by the fact that the government is implementing major changes in its Finance and HR systems.

IPPIS: Integrated Personnel & Payroll Information System

GIFMIS: Government Integrated Financial Management Information System

The huge investments in these projects have delivered significant results in the reduction of payroll cost (IPPIS) and increasing transparency and efficiency of the finance and budgeting process (GIFMIS) – Billions of Naira has been saved since the introduction of these applications.

MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY PROJECTS

In fulfilling its mandate and also implementing the ICT Policy, the Ministry of Communication Technology (MCT) is also leading the implementation of a number of e-Government projects:
SINGLE WINDOW PORTAL

This Government Service Portal (GSP) brings convenience to citizens who want to access government services. It provides more structured information about government activities and services, allowing for 2-way communication on various social media platforms; it also allows for end-to-end transactions as well as payment processing where applicable. It is already implemented and more applications and services spanning across MDAs are to be added.

GOVERNMENT CONTACT CENTERS (GCC)

We are also already in final implementation stage of Citizen Information Centres which is basically outsourced Government Call Centers (GCC) that will provide access to selected government services via special short code number that will be publicized and citizens can call ‘toll free’ to have access to specifically trained agents that can handle their requests and/or answer their questions.

PUBLIC ACCESS VENUES

These are places where Federal Government through its relevant agencies has provided networked computers with access to the Internet in a conducive atmosphere for citizen’s usage. Over the years, literally hundreds of Public Access Venues (PAVs) have been donated to rural communities and educational institutions all across the country by government agencies. PAVs serve to provide PCs and Internet access to citizens who otherwise may not be able to afford it.

CAPACITY BUILDING

Our youthful population (50% of Nigerians are under 30) is becoming more and more IT savvy, which is not surprising as young people, are predominantly early adopters of technology. The youth are also the fastest-rising population group and we intend to turn this into a huge potential by setting up ICT Incubation Centres (in conjunction with local entrepreneurs), to help our smart young people, build businesses out of their knowledge and ICT skills.

These incubation centres (currently in Lagos & Calabar) provide facilities and services to move young entrepreneurs in the ICT sector from ‘ideas’ to ‘business’ in the shortest possible time.

Furthermore, an ‘IT Innovation Fund’ with seed money from government will also be launched to provide the much needed venture capital funding these incubates will require to grow and succeed.

E-Governance

In the area of e-Governance, the MCT is working on several initiatives and projects. The following key areas have been identified to help drive this aspect:
**Connected Government:**

This is an ongoing effort to deploy more comprehensive and integrated use of information and communications technology (ICT) in government to provide better response to citizens’ demands, improve service delivery and make administration more efficient.

Having invested in the 1-Gov.net network established by the Galaxy Backbone to deliver shared and transversal ICT services across all MDAs in a more efficient manner, we are now working to expand the network to include secure connectivity between Security agencies in order to leverage on the capabilities of the individual agencies to strengthen synergies in the database management, information sharing and collaboration.

**Informed Citizenry:**

This includes the use of Web and New Media to improve citizen engagement and drive efficiency in government. Our two (2) flagship projects in this regard – the Government Services Portal & Government Contact Centre – will help ensure the following:

- Improve citizens’ access to information and services
- Increase efficiency in service and information delivery to citizens and other stakeholders
- Create 1,250 jobs through outsourcing
- Stimulate the call centre outsourcing business in the country
- Encourage Online Service Delivery

**Open Government /Open Data Initiative:**

This is to increase non-sensitive government datasets online in accordance with the Freedom of Information (FoI) Act. The Ministry is working with various partners to develop the Open Government Partnership (OGP) Country Plan and Technology Roadmap for OGP. It is believed that by embracing the Open Data in Government, we will deliver benefits such as:

- Create over 10,000 microwork and three times indirect jobs
- Positions Nigeria in the forefront of good governance and dynamic civic engagements
- Create job opportunities for software developers

On their own, none of the foregoing initiatives, which are by no means exhaustive, are particularly unique to Nigeria, but collectively they harness the power of ICT for development and transformation in our country.

The success of these initiatives will mean that regardless of where people live, how much they earn, their level of education etc., they will have access to the same or similar levels of basic government services and standard of living.
CHALLENGES

In the adoption and delivery of e-Governance, there are a number of challenges that are being contended with:

- Inadequacy of funds allocated to projects due to other contending infrastructural and social services.
- Difficulty in streamlining various silos of e-Government projects already existing or being implemented prior to the creation of the Ministry of Communication Technology.
- Lack of equality in public access to the Internet between urban & rural dwellers or those with low literacy levels etc.
- Hyper-surveillance: potential to erode the privacy of the citizenry
- Cost: The perceived lack of value for money when the huge cost of deploying e-Governance projects is compared to the actual value to the people.
- False Sense of Transparency: Critics believe that since the government or its agents are directly responsible for the provision of the information online, then the perceived level of transparency is dubious.

Advantages of e-Governance

- Freedom of Information: Non-sensitive data sets will be routinely made available on government portals/website and can often be accessed by citizens & NGOs.
- Democratization: greater citizen participation in government activities and policy formulations – social media interactions etc.
- Cost Savings: less need for paper forms and need for citizens to physically visit government offices.
- Speed, Efficiency and Convenience: This is in tandem with the previous point.
- Help improve transparency in government activities
- Improve the quality of service delivery
- Reduce cost of government operations in the area of ICT deployment.
- Improve citizen access to, and ease of interaction with, government

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, the importance of ICT and more specifically e-Governance to National Development cannot be over-emphasized. However, the success of any e-Government solution is hugely dependant on the number of people who make use of the platform – either due to accessibility, literacy level etc.