THE PARADOX OF E-GOVERNANCE! ARE LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN SADC REGION READY? FUMBLING AT A CROSSROADS IN SEARCH OF NEW REALITIES.

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ABSTRACT
The rise of digital platforms cannot be overstated in terms of how it improves the role and functions of local governments in terms of law and order, taxation, legislation, regulation, education, health care, and social development. One of the principal objectives of embracing e-governance is to provide citizens with basic services, enhancing efficiency, transparency, and accountability of local and national governments as well as any other government department or institution. The million-dollar question would be, is Africa ready? Are local authorities ready? If not, what would be the precluding factors in adopting e-governance? This paper seeks to interrogate e-governance practices in the SADC region, exposing how the process has been so dire due to fumbling in the region's local government institutions. This helps the government to align services with the changing needs of both citizens and other stakeholders as it deliberates the challenges that render the fumbling of local authorities at crossroads. The existing paradox presents a challenge as to the preparedness of local authorities to embrace holistically the dictates of e-governance in a globalised society. An empirical study was conducted to provide primary evidence on e-governance systems in local authorities. The researchers in this paper adopt an in-depth review of the existing body of literature premised on the functions of local authorities in Africa and the SADC region. The findings and recommendations derived from this paper will aid in developing an e-governance model in the SADC region which will feed into ICT policy frameworks. Future research on e-governance across the African continent needs to be commissioned to have a full understanding of e-governance in developing economies.
Key words: E-governance, Local authorities, SADC Region

INTRODUCTION

Most SADC countries have welcomed e-governance systems with both hands in their quest to improve service delivery to the satisfaction of the general public. It is beyond any reasonable doubt that e-platforms have been accepted around the globe and have tremendously improved service delivery both in private and public institutions. The e-governance paradox in local authorities is rendered when the new realities meet the traditional practices of governance in Africa. The One step back, one step forward habit owes to the numerous inhibiting factors confronting the African societies. The general idea is to unpack what the SADC local governance sector is doing and also how are they doing it. This research seeks to establish the degree of readiness in selected local authorities in the SADC region in adopting e-governance systems. It will also expose various impeding factors being experienced by the embattled continent. Last but not least, the paper will recommend the strategies that can be employed to improve e-governance systems in SADC Region.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

E-Governance can be an effective and efficient tool for contemporary governance only if process reforms and a holistic approach are adopted. E-governance may be a trajectory toward providing a disjointed but widespread set of policy guidelines with some evidence of convergence. It advances and builds a more collaborative and inclusive form of governance that puts in place improved accountability mechanisms. E-governance is fundamental as it dictates the design and shape of e-tools for improving local governance outcomes and processes. All institutions of government are now expected to take new roles in harnessing the power of information technology, as it is the core instrument of contemporary governance. It is instrumental in changing the way in which the local government operates through horizontal and vertical interactions and information flows, which basically ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of policy making processes.

E-governance initiatives have been perceived as the major vehicle within the local government domain, particularly in improving internal workings. Heeks (2002) reiterated that, among other things, e-governance has cut the process cost, improved the input-output ratio, improved the process performance, made strategic connections in government and created empowerment. Alsheshri and Drew (2010) stated that e-government has become a popular focus of government efforts in many countries around the world. They further went on to mention that more and more governments around the world have implemented and introduced e-government systems as a means of reducing costs, improving services, saving time, and increasing effectiveness and efficiency in the public sector. E-government and the Internet have made an essential change in the whole society's structure, values, culture, and ways of conducting business by utilizing the potential of ICT as a tool in their daily work. The idea behind e-government is to convert traditional information into an electronic format, making it reachable via the internet, giving government officials computers or automating old practices on an electronic platform. It also calls for rethinking the ways government functions are carried out today in order to improve processes and integration. Governments have different strategies to build e-government. Some have created comprehensive long-term plans. Others have opted to identify just a few key areas as the focus of early projects. In all

cases, however, the countries identified as most successful have begun with smaller projects in phases on which to build a structure. E-government researchers divide the process of e-government implementation into phases or stages.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

E-readiness presents a strategic challenge in adopting e-governance systems in SADC local governments. It can be realised that a number of countries have developed sound ICT policy frameworks as a measure to create a conducive environment for e-governance. However, paradoxically, these countries seem not to be ready to adopt the pre-requisite e-governance tools. The availability of these pieces of legislation does not ascertain the readiness for adopting e-governance in local authorities. There are significant factors at work behind the scenes that are impeding the free flow of implementing e-tools in local governments. There is a total failure of most initiatives, which are never implemented or in which a new system is implemented but immediately abandoned, which resembles the fumbling habits of local authorities. Local governments experience data systems infrastructure, legal infrastructure, human infrastructure, technological infrastructure, and institutional infrastructure.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the degree of readiness in local authorities in adopting e-governance?
2. What are the impediments to the adoption of e-governance?
3. What are the strategies that can be put in place to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of e-governance?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To establish the degree of readiness in local authorities adopting e-governance.
2. To expose the factors hindering the adoption of e-governance.
3. To recommend strategies that can be employed as a measure to improve the e-governance systems in local authorities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In June 2004, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) convened in Addis Ababa an "International Workshop on Innovative Applications of ICTs for Local Governance in Africa" in collaboration with the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF). The workshop's primary output, which drew approximately 60 participants from Africa and beyond, was a proposal to establish a regional research network, coordinated by the African Training and Research Centre in the Administration for Development (CAFRAD), to plan and conduct applied research on the impact of e-government and e-governance in Africa (Edith Ofwona Adera and Timothy MwoloWaema, 2011). African countries recognized the need to restructure their institutional frameworks in order to achieve effective public administration.Additionally, they developed an awareness and concern for the larger ties between people and governmental institutions. Adera et al. (2011) suggest that these issues are exacerbated when seen through the lens of ICT infrastructure, where e-government is focused on the delivery of services and transactions carried out by entities in support of a variety of public administration tasks. E-governance is a broader term that refers to the results that may be achieved by the use of ICT to facilitate local public engagement in public sector

management as well as the interactions between all local stakeholders participating in the governance process.

As a notion and in practice, e-governance aims to realize procedures and structures for leveraging the potential of ICTs to engage residents in democratic structures of public sector management, service design, and delivery, as well as to improve governance at the local level. Good governance is a priority for Southern Africa's development strategy since it is seen to be a necessary condition for enhanced socioeconomic performance. Africa has made significant progress toward institutional reforms in public administration and governance systems. According to the United Nations (2008), the ability and flexibility of local authorities are receiving special attention in Africa's governance agenda due to their proximity to rural populations. Additionally, this is where over 80% of the continent's population resides, making it simpler to serve public interests and needs. Increasing reliance on local government has resulted in increased citizen demand for participatory governance institutions that are effective, transparent, and accountable, as well as for efficient service delivery. Local governments in the SADC are responding by striving to revitalize their public administrations through the implementation of e-governance in order to make them more proactive, efficient, and service-oriented.

Local governments are submitting to new realities' demands in order to achieve considerable change, including innovations in their organizational structures, practices, and competencies, as well as in the ways they mobilize, deploy, and utilize human resources. Additionally, they are utilizing their information, technological, and financial capabilities to provide services to residents in the face of impediments (United Nations, 2008). This is due to the growing need for public information, which has ramifications for information and communications technology applications in the digital era. According to the UN e-government report (United Nations, 2008), while the worldwide norm of the global e-government score continues to rise, Africa continues to lag behind. Africa is much behind the global average, whereas Eastern and Southern Africa have made little progress. National e-governance plans and initiatives pay scant attention to local government. One possible explanation for this trend is a dearth of research demonstrating that decentralisation strategies may improve local government.

Decentralization and locally managed administration are widely recognized as essential components of democratic government because they create an atmosphere conducive to bringing judgment calls and service delivery closer to the people, particularly the poor and disenfranchised. Participation of the community in decision-making, planning, execution, and monitoring may result in more efficient, equitable, sustainable, and cost-effective local services (UN DESA, 2003). This may be accomplished through increasing accountability and responsiveness.

Integrating ICTs into these procedures (basically e-governance) has the potential to improve the delivery of governmental services to all residents. It is thus a critical aspect in enhancing the performance of governance systems on a single level. At yet another stage, it can serve as a foundation for strengthening a society's democratic governance system. However, the capacity for e-governance in underdeveloped nations is virtually untapped (Ndou, 2004). This could be due to the difficulty of establishing revised organizational structures and the skills

necessary to manage them; difficulties defining the degree of devolution applicable to judgement calls (Aliyu, 2003); the implications of newly emerging forms of leadership; difficulties associated with the shift toward community collaborations; and the requirement of involving stakeholders.

The researchers discovered that the national contexts of all nations were typically favourable to e-local governance. All nations recognized the critical role of local government in national socioeconomic growth and had adopted or were in the process of developing a governance strategy codified in specific laws and regulations, including state constitutions. Policy implementation, on the other hand, was typically slow and insufficient in all countries, with the exception of Kenya, where it had stagnated (Waema and Mitullah, 2008).Nonetheless, the central government retained substantial authority, resources, and duties. Despite this poor execution of governance rules, local governments in many nations were nonetheless able to launch ICT projects, with some having a positive effect on governance. This accomplishment was possible because an enabling environment for e-local governance existed, as demonstrated in the instance of Kenya (Waema and Mitullah, 2008).

Countries with an enabling environment for e-local governance recognized ICT as a crucial or strategic resource for national development and developed a national ICT policy and plan for e-government. This was the case in every country except Ethiopia, where both papers remained unfinished. Additionally, it was obvious that the majority of nations delegated the formulation and/or execution of their e-governance policies and strategies to an agency or unit within the appropriate ministry. The responsible ministry varies per nation. Another factor that facilitated e-local government in the majority of nations was the explicit linkage of national ICT policy with governance. Additionally, there was a strong connection between e-government strategy and governance across the board.

The importance of infrastructure supply as a facilitator of e-local governance is highlighted in this research, particularly in the context of isolated instances of effective e-government implementation. One of the major initiatives in this regard was the development of an ICT backbone infrastructure to connect core government departments, thus creating a government intranet. However, no country has implemented this infrastructure across all ministries or local government levels.

The degree of readiness in local authorities in adopting e-governance

Data systems Infrastructural Readiness: The management systems, data standards, records, and work processes in place are not effective to provide the quantity and quality of data to support the move to e-government. Cain (2001) reiterated that in most African countries, data quality and data security are very poor and there are few mechanisms to address these issues.

Garfinkel (2001) pointed out that the policies and regulations that are required to permit and to support the move to e-government are not in place. It is apparent that Africa is dragging its feet in the process of crafting legal frameworks to support e-government frameworks. It is argued that where policy frameworks have been designed, the implementation process hasn't been effective enough. It is further posited that in most African countries, digital signatures cannot be accepted.

Institutional infrastructure readiness: It is argued that the progress of e-governance depends on the infrastructural capacity of institutions. Institutions in Africa need to invest more in building and creating systems that enable the efficient implementation of egovernance. E-governance can only progress if the institutions exist to act as a focus for awareness and act as a means for facilitation of e-government. Korac-Kakabadse et al. (2000) highlighted that it is of paramount importance that African countries establish institutions that co-ordinate and lead the drive for e-governance.

Human infrastructure preparedness is primarily concerned with the attitudes, knowledge, and skills in place, particularly within the public sector, that are necessary for initiating, implementing, and maintaining eGovernment programs. Numerous African countries face critical skills shortages in fields such as business analysis and systems engineering, as well as project management, contract management, and supplier relationships (Mundy et al., 2001). There are also "mindset" factors to consider. Technological infrastructure readiness While there has been some progress in Southern Africa, the fact remains that the majority of African countries fall far short of the computing and telecommunications infrastructure upon which many Western government initiatives are built (ITU2002).

(PCIP 2002) emphasized the crucial role of an e-champion in ensuring the success of e-government. Visionary leaders put e-government on the table, integrated it into a wider reform agenda, and made it a reality. This is perhaps the most crucial of all the e-readiness challenges (PCIP 2002). As a result, the scarcity of top officials willing or competent to advocate ICT in government in Africa is a significant limitation on the spread of government (Udo and Edoho 2000). For instance, a local authority in Southern Africa implemented a land licensing information system (Anonymous 2000). The system was never implemented, partly because it ran counter to the established interests of strong parties that profited from land licensing. A second possible consequence is a partial failure of an effort in which the main objectives are not met or substantial negative repercussions occur. This includes the "sustainability failure" of a project that initially succeeds but is abandoned after a year or two. For instance, the central government established a network of touch-screen kiosks for isolated rural villages in South Africa's North West Province (Benjamin 2001). Initially, these were favourably accepted by the communities. However, the kiosks' lack of current or local material, as well as their inability to

Adoption of e-governance is hampered by a number of factors.

Numerous obstacles and hurdles might stymie the deployment of e-government. Due to the diversity and complexity of e-government efforts, a diverse set of obstacles and hurdles to implementation and administration exist. This section will briefly describe the most significant and prevalent obstacles and barriers, as determined by a literature review. The deployment of e-government has a number of technological challenges, including a lack of shared standards and infrastructure amongst departments and agencies.

Additionally, privacy and security are significant impediments to the introduction of e-government in the public's interest. Government guarantees alone will not be enough unless they are complemented by technology solutions, procedural openness, and potentially independent audits. Another significant impediment to implementing e-government is a lack

of inadequacy of ICT infrastructure. Internetworking is essential to facilitate proper information exchange and to open up new channels for communication and service delivery.

Despite the favourable characteristics of the national enabling environment, the researchers discovered a number of issues at the national level that impeded or may impede the implementation of e-local governance. These are discussed below, along with examples from various research projects: ineffective or uncoordinated adoption of e-government. In South Africa, for example, the researchers noticed a dearth of assistance from organizations established to address and encourage ICT penetration and, by extension, e-government. The Universal Service and Access Agency (USAA) is an example (Abrahams and Newton-Reid, 2008).

Inadequate quality and penetration of ICT infrastructure at the federal, state, and local levels, as well as at the home level. According to the ITU, Mauritius has one of the highest ICT scores in the area (2007). However, by 2006, less than 18% of the population could access the Internet from their homes. Another example is South Africa, another regional ICT powerhouse, where just approximately 4% of households in Gauteng province had a functional Internet connection (Abrahams and Newton-Reid, 2008). The absence of local government as a focal area in the majority of nations' e-government initiatives results in a dearth of e-government policies and strategies at the local government level. For example, in South Africa, neither the national nor provincial governments had an e-government strategy framework (Abrahams and Newton-Reid, 2008).

Most countries vest a significant amount of authority in the central government. While local governments in Egypt, for example, have some administrative power, they are nevertheless financially and politically directed by the national government (Atnafu et al., 2008). On the other hand, financial management in Morocco is extremely centralized (Kettani and Asmae, 2008).

Inadequate fiscal support for local administrations in a number of nations. For instance, the Kenyan government allots only 5% of national income tax to local governments. Additionally, the research found that all nations have a history of allocating insufficient financial resources to ICT. To illustrate, Morocco is classified as a lower middle-income nation by the World Bank; the ICT budget accounts for less than 1% of the entire government operational budget (Kettani and Asmae, 2008). This insufficiency in national financial resource allocation has a detrimental effect on local government budget allocations for ICT.

Methodology

The research paper adopted a qualitative research design, and qualitative research methods and data collection instruments were designed. An empirical study was conducted to provide primary evidence on e-governance systems in local authorities. The researchers in this paper adopt an in-depth review of the existing body of literature premised on the functions of local authorities in Africa and the SADC region. In-depth interviews were conducted with local government administrators so as to understand their opinions, feelings, and suggestions concerning the readiness of local authorities to adopt e-governance. The evidence is based on their practical experience since they are responsible for the day-to-day running of local authorities. Observations were also instituted by the researcher so as to establish the conduct

of work between the clients and workers and the general operations in the use of technology. The sample size is composed of a few countries in Southern Africa, which include Botswana, Zimbabwe, Namibia, and Mauritius.

Findings

The results indicate that local authorities in most of the countries in the SADC region have started rolling out the necessary infrastructure to support e-governance adoption, the paradox being that they are not getting enough support from the central government. Of paramount importance is the fact that most of the countries where ICT infrastructure has been installed, local authorities have initiated internet connectivity, the creation of websites and local area networks. The emphasis on the setting up of the ICT infrastructure has been predominantly on improving the internal administrative processes of local authorities.

Evidence from the research suggests that the implementation of e-governance in countries such as Mozambique and Zimbabwe is being championed by the central government. In that regard, the infrastructure that has been installed by local authorities has tremendously deteriorated due to a lack of constant maintenance. Furthermore, the infrastructure lost relevance because of a lack of expertise that would support the evolution and sustenance of e-governance.

In some cases, local authorities provided services to their clients electronically through websites, but the most confronting situation was that most stakeholders did not have the necessary resources to access the information, which resulted in the failure of smooth implementation of e-governance. The implementation of e-governance is somehow becoming futile, not because of the willingness of the government but the capacities of relevant stakeholders. The incapability of the stakeholders may be a result of linguistic background, ICT literacy level, and knowledge.

The study also found out that in South Africa, in a province where there are four official languages, content was only presented in English, which magnified the problem of the inability to interpret the information by the targeted population. The problem was also echoed by the fact that the content was not up-to-date and poorly written, owing to the fact that the systems were put in place and neglected such that the information had become irrelevant. The research found out that in most of these countries, publishing information on websites and portals frustrated the local community. Because of a lack of appropriate infrastructure and internet connectivity in their homes, they were limited to accessing information on portals, which exacerbated their frustrations.

According to the findings of the study, most local governments face a number of impediments to implementing e-governance, which means that readiness to implement e-governance remains a pipe dream. The observations suggested that there was a lot that needed to be done so as to deal with the factors that were constraining the community. For instance, the national government should incorporate the local government's e-governance strategic plan into the national budget. This enables adequate financing for local authorities, which includes the installation of ICT infrastructure and infrastructure. It was found out that in most countries where local governments spearheaded the process of e-governance

implementation without guidance from the superior authorities, administrators were reluctant to adopt it.

Notably, the majority of countries have also allocated insufficient financial resources to ICTs. Additionally, a lack of technical ICT skills required for e-readiness was identified as a challenge. This explains why the majority of local governments lacked critical in-house management ICT capabilities as well as training programs designed to develop a sustainable pool of workers with basic ICT literacy or technical and managerial skills. The primary outcome of this issue was the increased reliance on external consultants and contractors, which increased the cost of the e-governance rollout.

Furthermore, the researchers discovered that the majority of local governments lacked institutional governance mechanisms. Thus, the state of ICT staffing and governance structures in local governments around the world reflects the embryonic stage of ICT growth at that level of government.

Furthermore, almost all nations had not updated their business processes in preparation for the implementation of e-local governance systems. This is why Egypt, one of Africa's most advanced governments in terms of e-government, selected LOG-IN Africa for a business process mapping project. The purpose of the project was to assist in the development of a methodology and tools for reengineering business processes prior to embarking on ICT implementation in government or discontinuing a business, while the Web site provides information to foreign nationals about moving to, working in, and entering South Africa. Kenya's e-government Web site, for its part, includes the following information: In Kenya, e-citizenship, e-taxes and revenue, e-civil service, e-education, and e-business are all being implemented.

Reluctance to use electronic communication methods-government is a relatively recent concept that refers to the shift away from manual labour to electronic methods of work in the workplace. These changes will result in the creation of a new sophisticated environment that is diametrically opposed to the one that has been employed in government departments for many years (Abma, 2018). Realin (2017) stated that many personnel view the introduction of e-government as a threat to their jobs and authority and are fearful of losing them. To reduce opposition to e-government systems, employees must first comprehend the value and significance of e-government and ensure that they do not jeopardize their employment. Nevertheless, via retraining and skill development, they can be allocated new tasks. Additionally, it is critical that leaders of e-governments identify the causes of opposition and develop a strategy for overcoming them.

Recommendations

Taking into consideration that there are a myriad of circumstances which are causing the fumbling of local authorities in adopting ICT, the paper proposed the following recommendations:

- For a smooth transition to electronic governance, the government should ensure that there is a comprehensive ICT policy guideline in place. The policy framework should set the principles, models, and standards needed for efficient and effective

implementation of e-governance. This scenario will also help in addressing the digital divide that is prevalent in most developing countries.

- Governments in the SADC region should start investing more in ICT projects. National budgets should reflect the need for the government to adopt e-governance. It can be realised that internetworking requires information sharing, which can only be done when a proper ICT infrastructure is installed.

- The government should promote ICT literacy through funding learners and institutions. E-readiness does not only relate to infrastructural readiness but also the use of digital technology and communication tools. There is a need for users to be able to interpret digital languages in order to function properly. This also enables the sustainability of the systems through maintenance of the infrastructure.

- The government may also engage the private sector for efficient implementation of e-governance and installation of the system. The private sector possesses the necessary expertise, which ensures the efficiency and effectiveness of the system. Therefore, governments should work closely with the private sector to establish a modern infrastructure that will provide access opportunities to disconnected groups and individuals.

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