

ICT Strategies for Consolidating Good Governance in Nigeria

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Abstract: Information and Communications Technology (ICT) has been regarded as the source for the social and economic empowerment of any country especially a developing country like Nigeria and has remained the catalyst of growth for developed countries. Virtually all government services could be initiated and delivered through ICT and since these ICT tools are efficient and reliable, they are today functioning as promoters of good governance in most countries. To realize her vision of becoming one of the top 20 global economies in the year 2020, good governance through ICT holds the ace for Nigeria's Vision 2020 program. This study looks at some ICT strategies that could help the country consolidate on good governance.

Key words: Good governance, strategies, consolidation, efficient, reliable, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The term governance is wider than government and refers to the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented) UNESCAP (2009). It is also the use of institutions, structures of authority and even collaboration to allocate resources and coordinate or control activity in society or the economy (Bell, 2002).

The concept of good governance is not readily defined but could refer to a government that is functional with stable institutions. UNDP in a comprehensive policy document from 1997 states that good governance is characterized by participation, the rule of law, effectiveness and efficiency, transparency (built on the free flow of information), responsiveness, consensus orientation, equity, accountability and strategic vision. Good governance is very important because simply put, poor governance will never lead to a country's development. Inefficient use of state resources, corruption and unstable systems will never lead to a reduction in poverty. Poor governance threatens not only the countries sociopolitical sustainability but also the environmental and economic sustainability. However, good governance is not the sole determinant of sustainable development but it sure makes a difference. Easterly (2006) states that badly governed countries are poor countries and that good governance tend to come together in packages so it is hard to tell which one is causing economic development.

It has been proved that access to information and communication in its own right plays an important role in promoting good governance (Coffey Int. Development, 2007). Further, information delivery to public is a key task

of government and it is their responsibility to keep citizens informed of what is happening around them. This study examines some ICT strategies that could help in the consolidation of good governance in Nigeria.

GOOD GOVERNANCE AND ITS CHARACTERISTICS

The concept of good governance often emerges as a model to compare ineffective economies or political bodies with viable economies and political bodies. Because the most successful governments in the contemporary world are liberal democratic states concentrated in Europe and the Americas, those countries institutions often set the standards by which to compare other states institutions (Khan, 2004).

Because the term good governance can be focused on any one form of governance, aid organizations and the authorities of developed countries often will focus the meaning of good governance to a set of requirement that conform to the organizations agenda making good governance imply many different things in many different contexts (Agere, 2000).

The Vision of the Nigerian government envisages that by the year 2020, Nigeria will be one of the 20 largest economies in the world able to consolidate its leadership role in Africa and establish itself as a significant player in the global economic and political arena. To achieve this goal, the Vision 2020 statement lists good governance and ICT as part of its thematic areas and with stage 1 of the Vision 2020 timeline due to lapse in 2010, there is a need to consolidate on good governance through ICT which would definitely ensure a solid foundation for the realizations of stages 2 and 3 of the Vision 2020 timelines NV2020 (2010).



Fig. 1: Characteristics of good governance

Good governance has 8 major characteristics. It is participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law. It assures that corruption is minimized, the views of minorities are taken into account and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making. It is also responsive to the present and future needs of society. The following diagram illustrates some of the characteristics of good governance (Fig. 1).

Participation: Participation by both men and women is a key cornerstone of good governance. Participation could be either direct or through legitimate intermediate institutions or representatives. It is important to point out that representative democracy does not necessarily mean that the concerns of the most vulnerable in society would be taken into consideration in decision making. Participation needs to be informed and organized. This means freedom of association and expression on the one hand and an organized civil society on the other hand. The best way for citizens to effectively participate in governance is through ICT tools like the Internet, mobile phones and news media (Hellstrom, 2009).

Rule of law: Good governance requires fair legal frameworks that are enforced impartially. It also requires full protection of human rights particularly those of minorities. Impartial enforcement of laws requires an independent judiciary and an impartial and incorruptible police force and all these could easily be realized through ICT tools since they could be used to inform the citizens about laws and law enforcements in the country.

Transparency: Transparency means that decisions taken and their enforcement are done in a manner that follows rules and regulations. It also means that information is freely available and directly accessible to those who will be affected by such decisions and their enforcement. It also means that enough information is provided and that it is provided in easily understandable forms and media and the best forum for making information freely and cheaply available is through ICT.

Responsiveness: Good governance requires that institutions and processes try to serve all stakeholders within a reasonable timeframe. In a manually-driven economy this requirement is difficult to realize due to bureaucratic bottlenecks but in a technologically-driven economy, ICT tools ensures timeliness and fairness to all stakeholders.

Consensus oriented: There are several actors and as many view points in a given society. Good governance requires mediation of the different interests in society to reach a broad consensus in society on what is in the best interest of the whole community and how this can be achieved. It also requires a broad and long-term perspective on what is needed for sustainable human development and how to achieve the goals of such development. This can only result from an understanding of the historical, cultural and social contexts of a given society or community.

Equity and inclusiveness: A society's well being depends on ensuring that all its members feel that they have a stake in it and do not feel excluded from the main stream of society. This requires all groups but particularly the most vulnerable have opportunities to improve or maintain their well being.

Effectiveness and efficiency: Good governance means that processes and institutions produce results that meet the needs of society while making the best use of resources at their disposal. The concept of efficiency in the context of good governance also covers the sustainable use of natural resources and the protection of the environment.

Accountability: Accountability is a key requirement of good governance. Not only governmental institutions but also the private sector and civil society organizations must be accountable to the public and to their institutional stakeholders. Who is accountable to whom varies depending on whether decisions or actions taken are internal or external to an organization or institution. In

general an organization or an institution is accountable to those who will be affected by its decisions or actions. Accountability cannot be enforced without transparency and the rule of law.

Challenges of good governance and ICT in Nigeria:

There now seems to be a race to adopt some form of broad-based Information and Communication Technology (ICT) policies for good governance in most African countries including Nigeria. The trouble is many countries are having difficulties implementing them because of they lack the required resources.

A related problem is the unrealistic targets that are usually set by information technology professionals or international institutions, e.g. those related to the United Nations Millennium Development Goals and poverty reduction strategies. It is becoming evident that while states may identify national ICT strategies, the complex nature of the global economy and the ICT sector requires the expertise of civil society and the private sector which are barely involved in the whole process in Nigeria. Another challenge is how the use of ICTs in governance can be beneficial to all the stakeholders taking into consideration all the factors of risk: what is difficult is not introducing technologies but how people can use the technologies at best in order to have a full citizens participation and creating an e-inclusive society.

A third challenge is how to balance control and freedom: networked ICTs may enable a transformation of the economic system faced by the poor but at the same time they may enable ubiquitous control and give or enhance the power of few people. Instead of reinforcing participation and democracy, ICTs could reduce them. Nigeria's Vision 2020 reflects her aspiration to improve the aspect of good governance reduce poverty and hunger, produce good quality products and services and provide good quality education, security and basic health care to the citizens.

But Nigeria's most formidable Achilles Heel venturing into the 2020 economic development and prosperity race are insufficient power and energy supply, poor governance, ineffective institution and dismal social infrastructure, high profile corruption, dwindling educational standards and security, rising inflation, unemployment and poverty. How can Nigeria achieve this lofty objective with all the challenges facing the nation?

There are many forces facing the nation but part of the challenges facing the Nigerian economy is poor governance and rotten institution, social infrastructure and corruption and the resultant weak economy which has prevented the present administration from tackling the deepening social decay and worsening poverty in the society. Is the federal government building the

institutional and infrastructural capacities necessary for meeting the 2020 objectives? The reality is that Vision 2020 will be unachievable without resolving the challenges facing good governance in the country.

Consolidating good governance via ICT in Nigeria: Good governance could be consolidated in Nigeria through a lot of strategies. Examples of well-thought applications around the world show that ICT when applied to governance can help to:

- Reduce poverty by creating a more skilled workforce and increasing the penetration of aid and subsidies to the undeserved
- Provide basic needs by improving the quality of healthcare providing educational opportunities, planning for basic service delivery and helping to improve agricultural productivity and commerce
- Improve public administration by facilitating informed decisions making, managing the burden of foreign debt, revitalizing local economies, improving policing and public safety, improving public administration and efficiency, facilitating regional, national and sub-national coordination and communication, improving the quality of public services and facilitating better post-conflict reconstruction and administration
- Enhance democratization and citizen empowerment by establishing an open online government, enhancing interactions between government and citizens, revitalizing civic institutions and public debate and promoting equity and empowering minorities

ICTs can also be applied to the broad public good particularly by putting information infrastructure to research within local communities to improve delivery of local government services, improve access to information that people need in order to function as informed citizens, broaden citizen participation in governance and stimulate economic and community development.

ICTs can be used by parliaments, governments and public agencies and even individual politicians to provide government documents and other relevant information to citizens and public and private institutions. This information can help to alert and inform about public issues and associated law-making and also facilitate debate (for example, citizens can be in a better position to intervene by approaching their Senator or Representative before a bill comes to the vote).

It can also improve citizens knowledge about candidates for parliaments and other public jobs for example revealing their qualifications for office and political knowledge, their previous performance on election promises, campaign finance which interest group

they support (e.g., business, religion, worthy causes such as natural environment or political party). Through such efforts, a government becomes more accessible and arguably more transparent and accountable to its constituents. Enhanced interaction between government and citizens. ICTs can promote citizen empowerment by enabling citizens to communicate with each other and with the government electronically.

E-mail and other electronic fora can be used to lobby representatives, public officials and commercial enterprises; to publish moral appeals; to protest and to start referenda or citizens law-making. Revitalizing civic institutions and public debate. The capacity for governance might be strengthened using ICT-based networking as the informed (and informational) nature of online conversations allows for the development of an educated and sophisticated citizenry. Of course the ability of a government to empower its citizens depends on its will and vision. Promoting equity and empowering minorities. ICTs could provide a better forum for citizens to voice their concerns against government activities detrimental to their individual and collective interests (UNECA, 1999).

CONCLUSION

In this study, it is examined that the concept of governance and good governance alongside the challenges faced by ICT in the consolidation of good governance in a developing country like Nigeria. It has been proven that ICT plays a major role in the consolidation of good governance and some of the areas where ICT roles are invaluable were the improvement of citizens rights and access to government activities, provision of government services and information about

the activities of government amongst others. It is the view that most of the strategies given in this study could help the government in adopting ICTs for governmental activities thereby making the concept of good governance a reality.

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