

Entrenching Democracy and Good Governance: The Role of ICT

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Abstract

With the rapid spread of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), new opportunities have been opened for a revival of public discourse and improved governance efficiency. ICTs offer concrete opportunities for local and national governments to improve their performance in terms of transparency, participation and decentralization. The mainstreaming of ICTs within planning and design of development strategies helps to strengthen the establishment of efficient, effective and transparent governance systems. This paper takes a critical look at Democracy and Governance. What constitute Good Governance was also itemized. The role of ICT in entrenching Democracy and Good Governance was also discussed. Finally, conclusion was drawn and recommendations for way forward were given.

Keyword: Good Governance, Democracy, e-Democracy, e-Governance, and ICT.

Introduction

With the rapid spread of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), new opportunities have been opened for a revival of public discourse and improved governance efficiency. ICTs offer concrete opportunities for local and national governments to improve their performance in terms of transparency, participation and decentralization.

The mainstreaming of ICTs within planning and design of development strategies helps to strengthen the establishment of efficient, effective and transparent governance systems. On-line tools can significantly improve the rendering of services and information flows from administrations to their constituencies; communication among administrations and citizens can be enhanced and, lastly, ICTs offer unique opportunities for broadened citizen involvement and participation in the decision-making process.

This is particularly relevant in the developing countries context, where many countries have only recently undergone the transformation to democratic regimes, and where despite the efforts to introduce democratic governance, problems such as corruption of public administration and lack of transparency are still present.

Issues in Governance and Good Governance

Fundamentally therefore, to describe governance as a good one and to determine whether it is a bad one requires the understanding of the essence of the state which are not only embedded in the

constitution but also a function of the religious ideals and the nature of current problems confronting the state.

Governance can be defined as the process that is employed to achieve the noble end of the state. Thus, governance simply implies the art of governing a people within a given territory or a state. It consists of two essential elements of the state, namely the structure of the state and the procedures of the legislative, judicial and those of the executive and administrative bodies at all the tiers of government. In one word, governance remains a state in action. Governance as is the control of an activity by some means such that a range of desired outcomes is attained. Thus, governance in a political sense is a more complex activity. Secondly, political governance is service oriented. Governance is better conceived from Lasswell traditional definition of politics as who gets what, when and how and perhaps how much. Thus, governance has a lot to do with the allocation of values in the society, which to a large extent is political in nature.

In this regard the World Bank view governance as, "the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development (Odunuga, 2003). The Bank further identified the following three key aspects of governance: the form of a political regime; the process by which authority is exercised in the management of a country's social and economic resources and the capacity of governance to design, formulate and implement policies and discharge functions.

The United Nations Development Programme (Odunuga, 2003). sees government and governance as being synonymous. Accordingly, it defined governance as a complex mechanisms, process, relationships and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences. Government, as an art of governance, enjoys four important attributes which include sovereignty, power, authority and legitimacy (Ekei, 2003). All these elements or attributes are the instruments of effective governance in the sense that they provide the necessary anchor and legal/moral justifications to the government. Thus, governance includes institutional and structural arrangements, decision making processes, policy formulation and implementation capacity, development of personnel, information flows and the nature and style of leadership within a political system.

By governance therefore, we mean the manner in which power is exercised by governments in the management and distribution of a country's social and economic resources. The nature and manner of this distribution makes governance a bad or a good one. Thus, when resources are distributed to promote inequality or to achieve personal or group ambitions, the essence of governance which coincides with the essence of politics and essence of the state is defeated.

Good governance, as a concept, is applicable to all sections of society such as the government, legislature, judiciary, media, private sector, corporate sector, trade unions and lastly non-government organisations (NGOs).

According to Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), good governance has eight major characteristics (UNESCO, 2005). 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 (OECD, 2001).

Failure of governance implies that those in political control have not properly managed the economy and other social institutions. According to the World Bank (1992) bad governance has many features, among which are: failure to make a clear separation between what is public and what is private, hence a tendency to divert public resources for private gain; failure to establish a predictable framework for law and government behaviour in a manner that is conducive to

development, or arbitrariness in the application of rules and laws; excessive rules, regulations, licensing requirements, etc, which impede the functioning of markets and encourage rent-seeking; priorities that are inconsistent with development, thus, resulting in a misallocation of resources and excessively narrow base for, or non-transparencies, decision-making.

According to Obadan (1998), when these features occur together they create an environment that is hostile to development. In such circumstances, he further argued that the authority of governments over their peoples tends to be progressively eroded. This reduces compliance with decisions and regulations. Government then tends to respond through populist measures or, as in some authoritarian regimes, resort to coercion. Either way, the economic cost tends to be high, including a diversion of resources to internal security and escalating corruption. Also bad governance by entailing corruption, and lack of accountability and transparency, provides opportunities for the well connected elites and interest groups in the society to corner for themselves a sizeable proportion of the society's resources at the expense of the masses (Obadan, 1998). Thus, bad governance is contrapuntal to a nation's socio-economic and political development.

Therefore, resources of the state must be managed in such a manner as to achieve the desired level of socioeconomic progress for all members of the political community. It is important to note that the resource utilized must also be commensurate with the level of development attained. In short, good governance is about the performance capacity of a government or as it relates to leadership capability. Failure of governance therefore, could expressly mean failure of leadership. Indeed, the best governors are those who met their society in a condition of social and political nadir and are able to save the society or lift it up from doldrums to the position of fame and prosperity.

Governance is good provided it is able to achieve the desired end of the state defined in terms of justice, equity, protection of life and property, enhanced participation, preservation of the rule of law and improved living standard of the populace. Governance is termed bad when it fails to achieve the purpose(s) of the state.

The concept of "governance" is not new. It is as old as human civilization. Simply put "governance" means: the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented). Governance can be used in several contexts such as corporate governance, international governance, national governance and local 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 UNESCAP, 2012. 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.

Characteristics of Good Governance

- 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.

2. **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.
3. **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.
4. **Responsiveness:** Good governance requires that institutions and processes try to serve all stakeholders within a reasonable timeframe.
5. **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.
6. **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 mainstream of society. This requires all groups, but particularly the most vulnerable, have opportunities to improve or maintain their well being.
7. **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.
8. **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.

Governance in Nigeria

In 2000, Nigeria was rated as the most corrupt nation in the world out of a total of 90 countries (Transparency, 2000). While in 2001, Nigeria was rated the second most corrupt nation out of a total of all 91 countries assessed (Transparency, 2001). In 2002, Nigeria retained its number two position as the most corrupt country out of a total of 102 (Transparency, 2002). Though by 2005 Nigeria was ranked number six out of 186 countries (Fordham.edu, 2005). Nigeria was ranked as the most corrupt country out of a total of 133 (Transparency In 2003)

Despite all social and economic policies that have been implemented by successive administrations, Nigeria has remained a laggard in social, economic and political developments. Subsequently, political instability, abject poverty, acute youth unemployment, heightened crime rate, poor health prospects, widespread malnourishment have been the main features of Nigeria's

political economy. One of the major explanations for the failure of all development programmes in Nigeria has been the absence of democracy and the intermittent military intervention in politics. However, with the benefit of hindsight and as demonstrated by the current experience, even the periods of civil rule - 1960-1966, 1979-1983 and 1999 to date failed to produce any positive or better results (Ogundiya, 2010). This assertion is vindicated by the report of a survey conducted by Simbine (2000) in Ogundiya (2010) which showed that, in term of performance, respondents in her study gave higher ranks to three military regimes (General Murtala Muhammed 1975-1976, General Muhammad Buhari 1983-1985 and General Yakubu Gowon, respectively), even though the two civilian administrations of Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, 1960-1966 and Alhaji Shehu Shagari, 1979-1983 were included. This shows that there is no automatic connection between democracy and development. Secondly, though discussable, the result implies, in the context of the Nigerian experience, that the record of the military is a bit better than that of their civilian counterpart. Nevertheless, over generalization may be dangerous in this regard, every indicators pointed to the fact that Nigerians were worse off during Shagari's administrations. Meanwhile, it is not an overstatement to contend that the return of the country to electoral democracy in 1999 has not made significant impact on the economic and social well-being of the people.

Fundamentally, the question of good and bad is ethical/moral. According to Madhav (2007), good governance has much to do with the ethical grounding of governance and must be evaluated with reference to specific norms and objectives as may be laid down. It looks at the functioning of the given segment of the society from the point of view of its acknowledged stakeholders, beneficiaries and customers. It must have firm moorings to certain moral values and principles. The question dealing with governance, though significantly related to democracy, is culture specific and system bound. It depends to a large extent on the historical experiences of a nation, its cultural norms, aspiration of the people and the stated political and economic objectives of the state, including individual and group preferences, current issues, the expectations of the governed, the nature and type of the political system, the ideological and religious predisposition of the state and a host of others. For instance, the fundamental objective principle entrenched in the Nigerian constitution provides the yardstick for measuring good governance. Section 14(1) states that, "the Federal Republic of Nigeria shall be a state based on the principles of democracy and social justice". This is further strengthened in Section 16 (1 and 2) of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution. Section 16 (1) a, b, c and d, says that, "The state shall, within the context of the ideals and objectives for which provisions are made in this constitution - Harness the resources of the nation and promote national prosperity and an efficient, dynamic and self-reliant economy; Control the national economy in such manner as to secure the maximum welfare, freedom and happiness of every citizen on the basis of social justice and equality of status and opportunity; without prejudice to its right to operate or participate in areas of the economy, other than the major sectors of the economy, manage and operate the major sectors of the economy; Without prejudice to the right of any person to participate in areas of the economy within the major sector of the economy, protect the right of every citizen to engage in any economic activities outside the major sectors of the economy. Section 16(2) states that, "the state shall direct its policy towards – The promotion of a planned and balanced economic development; That the material resources of the nation are harnessed and distributed as best as possible to serve the common good; That the economic system is not operated in such a manner as to permit the concentration of wealth or the means of production and exchange in the hands of few individuals or of a group; and that suitable and adequate shelter, suitable and adequate food, reasonable national minimum living wage, old age care and pensions, and unemployment, sick benefits and welfare of the disabled are provided for all citizens.

The Concept of Democracy and E-Democracy

Democracy can be defined as,

“government by the people; especially, rule of the majority; a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodically held free elections (Merriam-Webster, 2012)

E-Democracy

E-democracy is a term that elicits a wide range of reactions.

E-Democracy is the use of information and communications technologies and strategies by “democratic sectors” within the political processes of local communities, states/regions, nations and on the global stage.

The “democratic sectors” include the following democratic actors: Governments, Elected officials, Media (and major online Portals), Political parties and interest groups, Civil society organizations, International governmental organizations, Citizens/voters (Steven Clift, 2003)

E-Governance

There are distinct differences in how representative institutions and elected officials use ICTs compared to administrative agencies and departments. The use of ICTs by parliaments, heads of state/government, and local councils (and elected officials in these institutions) lags significantly behind the administrative-based e-government service and portal efforts. This is a services first, democracy later approach. This focus of e-government resources on services does not mean that e-democracy is not gaining increased attention in some governments. In fact, leading e-service governments are now at a point where they are exploring their e-democracy responsibilities more seriously.

Information and Communication Technology for the Enhancement of Democracy

The integration of information and communications technologies (ICTs) in development cooperation, with a view to promoting economic development and broad poverty reduction. ICTs have the potential to contribute to economic development and democratization – including freedom of speech, the free flow of information and the promotion of human rights – and poverty reduction.

Investment in traditional e-government service delivery is justified based on the provision of greater citizen convenience and the often-elusive goal of cost-savings.

Another phenomenon that is becoming more and more relevant today is the use of mobile technology for broadened participation of civil society in decision-making process. Due to their availability, simple use and cost-effectiveness, mobile phones are more and more considered by governments and NGOs as a powerful means to engage citizens in political and social debates. According to the World Information Society Report 2007, jointly published by ITU and UNCTAD in May 2007, the number of mobile cellular subscribers around the world is growing rapidly. Thus, the number of mobile cellular subscribers rose from just 12 million in 1995 to over 1.15 billion in 2005, at the growth rate of 58 per cent per year in the developing economies.

Low income countries are making important gains in mobile telephony with mobile phones outnumbering fixed lines by seven to one in Least Developed Countries (LDCs), and by as much as nine to one in Sub-Saharan Africa. By the end of 2007 it is estimated that about half the world will have a mobile phone connection compared to about 300 million who have computers.

Today e-governance is used:

1. As a tool for bringing openness and effectiveness to local administration. Conducting transactions openly has proved to be very effective at fighting corruption. This is crucial for all those countries especially Nigeria, where levels of corruption are still high. An example of the efficient use of ICTs to fight corruption is the launching of the Electronic Graft Management (EGM) project in Kenya. The EGM project offered a corruption reporting facility in six towns with existing Internet infrastructure. Anonymity of users was ensured and reports were transmitted to EGM centers for analysis and follow-up with relevant authorities.
2. To enhance service delivery by providing the citizens with services that is cheaper, more efficient and faster. Electronic services have the advantage of enabling the citizens to obtain information and to carry out transactions 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and are particularly suitable for simple administrative transactions, such as requests for permits, or submissions of tax files.

Goals for e-government in governance that promote democracy and effective governance include:

1. Improved government decisions
2. Increased citizen trust in government
3. Increased government accountability and transparency
4. Ability to accommodate the public will in the information-age
5. To effectively involve stakeholders, including NGOs, business, and interested citizen in new ways of meeting public challenges.

Challenges Encountered in using ICT for e-Governance

Many e-governance initiatives aiming at enhancing citizen participation and engagement have not fulfilled the potential offered by new technologies, and many of them have manifested a regression towards improved information provision models of e-governance. This is mainly due to the lack of institutional and legal e-readiness, as well as the lack of political will to fully explore the potential offered by ICTs. Another important challenge lies in putting in place necessary infrastructure, creating conditions for capacity building and awareness-raising, and in defining a clear vision and strategic goals of e-governance implementation.

In addition, lack of awareness on behalf of both the local population and policy-makers on the role ICTs play in enhancing good governance and local development is often reported. The basic problem is that people simply do not see – in concrete, practical terms – how ICTs can make a difference to their lives, and how they can contribute to their development as individuals and as citizens of a country.

Recommendations for the way forward

A possible solution to tackle the problems of connectivity and availability of technology could be to promote further implementation of Community Multimedia Centres (CMCs). CMCs offer affordable

or free computer and internet access, training, and possibilities to connect with more remote communities through the use of local radio.

Conclusion

From the above discussion it should be clear that good governance is an ideal which is difficult to achieve in its totality. Very few countries and societies have come close to achieving good governance in its totality. However, to ensure sustainable human development, actions must be taken to work towards this ideal with the aim of making it a reality.

To be involved in defining the future of democracy, governance and public work at the dawn of the information-age is an incredible opportunity and responsibility. With the intelligent and effective application of ICTs, combined with democratic intent, we can make governments more responsive, we can connect citizens to effectively meet public challenges, and ultimately, we can build a more sustainable future for the benefit of the whole of society and world in which we live (Steven Clift, 2003).

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