**TESTIMONY OF KENYA’S GRADUAL ENTRY INTO THE INFORMATION SOCIETY OVER THE LAST TWO DECADES**

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to show how Kenya has gradually entered into the Information Society over the last two centuries. Evidence of this is given through the Kenyan society which has made quite a step forward in incorporating various information technologies in both the economy, government and even in the policy and institutional environment.

Introduction

Modern Information Technology is a relatively young discipline in the world. The explosion of computing technology happened as recently as 1950s under the roofs of American defense departments in the form of ENIAC machines. Kenya and Africa in general have not been at the fore front of the great Information revolutions as has been the case with other continents. Most of the Technology that the continent consumes has been imported. However, there has been a marked change of game play in Africa and especially in Kenya over the last twenty years. Kenyans have been able to assimilate various technologies which are pertinent to their society, modify them and even invent new information systems which are being used as a yard stick in various parts of the continent.

The Kenyan government has embarked on heavy technology adoption and digitizing of its services Muchira(2015). It formed ICT Authority - a state corporation tasked with rationalizing and streamlining the management of all its functions (ICT Authority, 2014). The body enforces ICT standards in government and enhances the supervision of its electronic communication. Digital initiatives started by the government include issuance of new generation digital identity. The identity cards put into single document personal information from the tax office, registrar of motor vehicles and the registrar of persons (Mutegi, 2014). The cards provide the country with a national identity platform that will be the cornerstone of the security strategy by improving the identification process and adopting an accurate national database. The Kenyan government also launched biometric registration for civil servants with the goal of rooting out ghost workers earning double salaries from different ministries and others who draw civil-service salaries but are no longer working (Obwocha, 2014). This move is expected to save the county, as well as the national government, millions of shillings as well as reduce the huge wage bill.

The Kenya Revenue Authority launched *iTax* which is a fully integrated automated solution for the administration of domestic taxes. The web supported platform provides internet based taxpayer registration, filing and status enquiries with real-time monitoring of accounts (Kuria, 2015). The Kenyan government also launched an e-procurement system which is expected to strengthen relationships with suppliers by providing easy access to documentation and simplifying of the bidding process while providing clear audit trails and identification of the originator of all transactions (PSCU, 2014).The government’s Huduma centers provide services and information from one stop shops through integrated technology platforms. The public is able to get birth certificates, national identity cards, passports, registration of business names, and applications for marriage certificates, drivers’ licences, police abstracts, EACC clearance certificate, NHIF registration, NSSF member statements, registration of welfare groups, status of pension claims, student loan application and other services (MyGov, 2015).

Under the ministry of education, the government has rolled out various initiatives to enhance service delivery in the provision of quality education. Key among them is the laptop project which seeks to introduce laptops as a teaching and learning tool in the public primary school system. The project involves issuance of laptops to all class one children, digitizing the school curricula and training teachers on the new curricula. Through the project, the government seeks to incorporate ICT to support and enhance the attainment of curriculum objectives, enhance the appropriate competencies including skills, knowledge, attitudes and values, and manage education effectively and efficiently at all levels. The goal is to come up with an educational system that is strongly oriented towards producing citizens who are comfortable and productive in a hi-tech world (Denvir, 2014). In the health sector, the government has partnered with various institutions to roll out initiatives which improve access to healthcare

However Kenya has not performed as well as other countries with which it was at par with in the 60s such as South Korea. One can argue that the difference is as a result of The US’ vested interests in these countries, or just an African curse that Kenya is lagging behind.Nonetheless, it is evident enough that Kenya has indeed taken big steps in entering into the information age over the last two decades.

The economic sector has not been left behind either. Some of the major economic sectors in Kenyan society include but not limited to: Agriculture, Forestry and Farming, Energy, Tourism and Financial services. The Konza technology park is an example of an initiative that shows that the government is keen on technology adoption. The technology city will be on a 5000 acre site and it will host a business process outsourcing park, Science Park, convention center, mega malls, hotels, international schools, world class hospitals, Championships Golf Course, Financial District, High Speed Mass Transportation and Integrated Infrastructure. The park’s main objective is to promote the acquisition and usage of ICT and promote good ICT governance (Anthopoulos, 2015).

In addition, all major government ministries which form the backbone of the Kenyan economy have adopted the use of e-government. The internet has opened a new medium of communication for individuals and businesses and provided opportunities to communicate and get information in an entirely different way (Kumar *et al*., 2007). The number of cellular telephones in a country informs the level of usage of government websites (Mavetera, 2006). As of 2017, there are approximately 23 million mobile phone users out of a population of 49 million people in Kenya. This means a vast population of the Kenyan market actually has the potential of accessing government services online. In tourism, the government is now able to promote and advertise Kenya abroad via its tourism website. These has made it possible for more tourists to “discover Kenya”. There have been technologically innovative companies such as M-shamba(m-shamba,2015) which have developed mobile based solutions for persons in the Agricultural sector to share information hence making this sector of the economy a success. Shamba shape up is a media based platform whereby Agricultural experts give advice to farmers throughout the country through television and media(shambashapeup,2015). The power of the mass media in disseminating Aquaculture information to the farmers is essential (Ndati et al, 2014).However, it is not yet established howthe Department of Fisheries in Kenya utilizes the mass media sources,especially the Internet, to disseminate the valuable information on agriculture to the farmers and their officers. It appears that the full potential of the aquaculture sector to contribute to human development and social empowerment is yet to be realized, and the sector may require new approaches to realize its goals. Although Kenya has much to do in reintegrating its economy and the information society, what has been done so far is satisfactory.

Kenya has a diversified set of institutions. They range from schools, corperative societies, financial institutions, parastatals, various foundations and NGOs among others. Adoption and use of internet has been very common in these institution environments. There has been need for various institutions to link up and exchange information. For example, the University of Nairobi which is an educational institution has partnered with Barclays Bank of Kenya in which case funds paid to the school via the bank is automatically reflected in the school’s computer systems. In addition, Banks and other lending institutions can share information about customer credit score hence are able to make much better informed decisions about the credit worthiness of various individuals before giving them loans. There exists a centralized and digitized data store for registered NGOs which are operating within the country. This kind of coordination has ensured that rogue NGOs which could potentially be used to fund criminal organizations are no longer operational within the country. Twenty years ago, anybody could start an NGO, get funding from some militia abroad and create plans of toppling a government. Thanks to the integration of Information society in Kenya, such a scenario is near to impossible from happening. Based on these facts, it’s evident that Kenya’s institutional environment is very up to date with the modern Information society; and has made quite an improvement over the last twenty years.

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