

# **THE MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP (Eastern and Southern Africa)**

## **AFRICA LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACTION FORUM (ALGAF) 2007 PHASE VII**

***Theme: THE ROLE OF INFORMATION AND  
COMMUNICATION  
TECHNOLOGY IN  
DECENTRALIZED GOVERNANCE***

### **TOPIC**

***The Role of Information and Communication Technology  
in Enhancing Participatory Governance: The Case of  
Ethiopia***

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**August 3, 2007**

**The role of Information and Communication Technology  
in enhancing participatory governance**

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## **Abstract**

The role of Information and Communication Technologies for development is tremendous. ICTs offer developing countries formidable and cost-effective tools for accelerated development. This paper assesses the role that ICTs can play in development with special emphasis on participatory governance and reviews cases in Ethiopia. Adopting ICTs for enhanced governance in four areas, reducing poverty, providing basic human needs, improving public administration, and enhancing democratization will be discussed in this paper. The paper also summarizes the possible challenges to use ICT in Ethiopia for governance in general.

## **1. Introduction**

Participatory governance is described as a regulatory framework in which the task of running public affairs is not solely entrusted to government and the public administration, but involves co-operation between state institutions and civil society groups [1]. Participatory governance focuses on bottom-up participation with involvement of several stake holders. The ultimate goal is obviously to bring societal change to the community who are the beneficiaries at the end of the day. The initiation and encouragement to community participation in the socio-economic and political affairs of a country particularly in developing countries usually comes from the government. Here one can question why governments promote citizens to participate.

According to Friedman [1] there are two reasons why governments allow citizen groups to become partners in governing. These are:

- First, governments may recognize that their goals cannot be achieved without organized private constituencies whose acquiescence to or active support for government objectives is

essential. In an attempt to secure the required co-operation, they invite the representatives of these constituencies to join in making policy and overseeing its implementation. The implicit or explicit expectation is that the organizations invited to participate will support decisions to which they are party – and will be able to bind their constituents to agreements.

- The second rationale for participatory governance is that it broadens and deepens democracy by expanding the range of citizens engaged in making or influencing government decisions. A stated or an implied rationale is that democracy is, in essence, an expression of popular sovereignty in which all members of the political community are entitled to an equal say in public affairs.

Generally participatory governance's rationale is either to bind organized constituencies to agreed policy outcomes or to offer voice to the voiceless. The objective of this paper of course is not discussing about the philosophy of participatory governance. The objective is highlighting the role of ICT for governance in general and participatory governance particularly.

The role of information and communication technology for governance should be seen from the view point of improving service delivery and enhancing the skill of the stakeholders and ultimately changes the lives of the community.

## **1.1 The Role of ICT for Improved Governance**

ICTs can be defined as a diverse set of technological tools and resources used to communicate, and to create, disseminate, store and manage information. ICTs are not single technologies but combinations of hardware, software, media and delivery systems. They encompass a great range of rapidly evolving technologies

such as: television and radio, phone lines with operators, phone lines with automated touch-tone answering systems, personal computers (PCs), networked PCs, and PCs with CD-ROMs and DVDs, fax machines, electronic benefits transfer, smart cards, credit cards, Internet (e-mail, world wide web), kiosks, computer-mediated conferencing and videoconferencing, commercial applications (such as word processors, spreadsheets, simulations) and proprietary applications (such as decision support models and management information systems) [2]. From the definition and facets of ICT described, we can understand that governance can be improved with several technological options that ICT can offer.

Properly used ICTs can reduce poverty; empower people; build capacities, skills and networks; inspire new governance mechanisms and reinforce popular participation at all levels. The range of applications are limitless, from electronic commerce, to the empowerment of communities, women and youth; from the promotion of good governance and decentralization, to advocacy programs, including the observance of human rights; from long-distance education to telehealth and environmental monitoring. Thus, the benefits, services and processes that ICT provides can be summarized in three ways [2]:

1. They can support tasks that involve complex decision making, communication and decision implementation,
2. They can automate tedious tasks done by humans, and;
3. They can support new tasks and processes that did not exist before.

When ICTs are properly aligned with governance goals, they can help to create gains in both efficiency and effectiveness in the following manner:

<b>ICT in enhancing Efficiency</b>	<b>ICT in enhancing Effectiveness</b>
Create the same outcomes at a lower cost	Create the same outcomes at the same cost in the same time but to a higher quality standard

Create more outcomes at the same cost	Produce entirely new outcomes that did not exist before
Create the same outcomes at the same cost in less time	

However, we have to realize that ICTs on their own do not create transformation but they are best seen as facilitators of change, innovation and creativity. ICTs unleash the creative potential embodied in people. As noted by Robin Mansell, ICTs offer the potential for revolutionary changes in national and regional innovation systems. They have the potential to strengthen economic growth and are being used to create new markets, new technological applications for collaboration, and new methods and tools for scientific and technological research.

In rendering services to the public, ICTs are potentially capable of transforming the way in which most public services are delivered and also the relationship between government and the citizen. Richard Heeks [3] has identified three basic change potentials for ICTs within the context of governance:

- Within the African context governments can deploy ICTs to meet developmental challenges and facilitate good governance.
- ICTs are being seen as offering an efficient way of cutting costs associated with generating and disseminating this information.”
- ICTs can be used to enhance the democratic process, ensure effective participation and bring government closer to the people. In addition to expanding the democratic space, ICTs can be used to address many of the developmental challenges from effective macro-economic and public sector management and promoting human capital development, to reducing poverty.

## **2. ICT Applications in Governance**

ICTs can further governance goals in many ways - ranging from enabling long-distance education, telemedicine, and environmental management, to strengthening of participatory approaches and the creation of new livelihoods. In this Section we describe how ICTs can improve governance in particular and focus on four main areas: poverty alleviation, providing basic services such as healthcare and education; improving public administration and enhancing democratization and citizen participation.

### **2.1 ICT as a Tool for Enhancing Democratization**

ICTs can be applied to the broad public good – particularly by putting information infrastructure to work 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. In this section, we will discuss three categories of enhancing democratization through ICT.

***Establishing an open government:*** 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 facilitating debate (for example, citizens can be in a better position to intervene by approaching their MP 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. Through such efforts, a

government becomes more accessible, and arguably more transparent and accountable, to its constituents [2].

***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.

## **2.2 Poverty Alleviation**

***Creating a more skilled workforce:*** Through distance learning, use of educational software, and IT-related professional training programs, ICTs can help provide access to culturally appropriate educational, and job training, thus producing a higher-skilled workforce.

***Increasing the penetration of aid and subsidies:*** ICTs can help better target aid to the poorest and the most deserving citizens and at the same time make the aid more timely, and cheaper and more user-friendly to administer.

## **2.3 Providing basic Services**

***Improving the quality of healthcare:*** ICTs can improve healthcare workers' access to knowledge bases about health and disease, e.g. the National Institutes of Health Medline system [4]. They can enhance their ability to collaborate with

physicians, epidemiologists, and other specialists regarding immediate health concerns. Automated tools for diagnoses and data storage tools can improve the efficiency and accuracy of care provided.

***Providing educational opportunities:*** Telecommunications networks and specialized educational software can be used to supplement traditional education, especially in remote and rural communities. They can also improve educators' access to colleagues' research in other countries. This helps to enhance their ability to participate on the basis of substance (rather than being distance limited) in joint research work with international colleagues, enable dialogues with teachers in other countries and provide access to collections of teaching materials and other information that can be put to direct use in the classroom [4].

***Planning for basic services delivery:*** Computerized decision support tools can be used to create national and local level plans for basic services such as water, sanitation and electricity. Web databases can improve policymakers' ability to create and report statistics to international organizations in a more timely manner, and to obtain international statistical comparisons in computer form [4].

***Improving agricultural productivity and commerce:*** ICTs can help to collect, store, process and present complicated data – a prerequisite to robust information for decision-making – quickly, accurately, and more efficiently than is possible otherwise. For example, use of the Internet at community telecenters can improve policymakers' and farmers' access to agricultural libraries.

## **2.4 Improving Public Administration**

***Facilitating informed decision-making:*** Through judicious use of commercial or customized software that can help to forecast resources, policymakers can make better decisions.

***Revitalizing local economies:*** Policymakers can enable small enterprises – the engines of job growth – to work together through enterprise networks, to share resources, skills, and services to better compete in the global economy -- and serve their local communities.

***Improving policing and public safety:*** ICTs can be utilized to establish the rule of law with the help of computerized databases, communications networks and channels, and GIS's.

***Improving public administration and efficiency:*** ICTs can contribute to improved productivity and streamlining of internal government administration (procurement, human resources, budgeting, planning, evaluation), by helping to remove paper from the process or by facilitating coordination and consolidation of information. In the process, they can help reduce corruption and increase accountability as well.

***Facilitating regional co-ordination and integration:*** ICTs can be used to create collaborative mechanisms within government departments and promote dialog and bridge differences between opposition and ruling parties.

***Improving public services:*** Public agencies and private (nongovernmental, both nonprofit and commercial) organizations can be woven together to create new civic networking markets for delivering government services using information technologies.

### **3. The role of ICTs for Participatory Governance in Ethiopia**

Service delivery has always been a core component of any government's obligation to citizens, though the width, breadth and quality of the services to be rendered vary depending on the political, economic and social context of

countries. Facilitating economic and social development profoundly implies implementation of efficient and effective service delivery to the public at large.

In improving the existing service delivery in government sectors, recently various ICT based applications have been materialized in Ethiopia. The ICT applications not only transformed the service delivery, but also increased stakeholders participation. In this section, we will discuss the major initiatives undertaken by the government in promoting ICT based participatory governance in Ethiopia.

### **3.1 Enhanced Public Servants Communication and Participation**

Enhancing public servants skill and keep them informed improves the services rendered by them. In an effort to achieve this, the government has implemented an interactive videoconferencing system called WoredaNet system that connects more than 500 government institutions at federal and regional level all over the country. The 'WoredaNet' initiative aims to make government communications more efficient by connecting all 600 of Ethiopia's local councils (*woredas*) to the 11 regional capitals for the first time. The videoconferencing system enables the public servants as well as decision-makers to interact each other at a distance. Skill improving trainings, meetings, discussions can be conducted with this system. Appropriate stakeholders can participate in a particular issue that requires input from all levels of participants at any institution in the country.

#### **Live Citizens Participation over Radio**

FM Radio based public debate has been aired focusing on different governance issues such as water, electricity, sanitation, health and in general focusing on the socio-economic aspects of the community involving concerned public authorities

and the community (public). During the debate interested individuals can join the session over telephone and can ask questions, comment on the agenda for discussion and even criticize the views reflected during the discussion. Similarly, feedbacks are also provided by the concerned authorities on those questions or comments asked from the participating individuals. So far the Radio transmission program has been operational in areas covering the capital, Addis Ababa and the nearby cities outside the capital.

Such participatory programs have enhanced the efficiency and effectiveness of the public services, promoted accountability and transparency, and assisted in curbing corruption.

### **Revenue Administration**

In improving the tax administration system, computerized tax administration system have been implemented by Federal Inland Revenue Administration (FIRA). The agency introduced specialized tax administration software, SIGTAS (*Standard Intergraded Government Tax Administration System*), that has the capability to calculate tax payers amount based on the payer's tax code. Each tax payer profile such as the total capital of the business owner, the goods hold etc is encoded to the computer. Identification number (code) is assigned to each tax payer. When the issue of calculating the tax comes, the payer has the possibility to participate and see how the amount is calculated. With this system, not only prompt decision is given but also corruption can be controlled through the participatory approach.

### **Web based Judiciary System**

To facilitate the judiciary process in courts, web based system has been introduced by the Federal High Court. The system enables users to access information and follow-up the status of their court case online based on the File

Number (Code). Once the Code is entered by an individual who has court case, the system generates relevant information such as the date the individual has to appear before court, the verdict (decision) passed to a particular case, and others. The system provides appropriate information to those individuals at any time anywhere. For example, an individual's case might be in the court located in Addis Ababa, however, if the individual stay away from the capital, the system enables him/her to access the case filed using the web.

### **Telemedicine**

Telemedicine program aimed at exchanging know-how and creating collaboration in the fight against HIV/AIDS has been operational among medical doctors and ART Clinicians in Ethiopia, John Hopkins University (JHU) and Eastern Carolina University (ECU) using interactive Videoconferencing technology. The objectives of the program are:

- ◆ To review challenging HIV/AIDS cases and discuss best practices in HIV/AIDS management
- ◆ To update Ethiopian ART clinicians on current and new scientific discoveries related to HIV /AIDS
- ◆ To improve clinical management of HIV/AIDS cases in Ethiopian clinics

Pediatric and adult HIV/AIDS cases are presented every two week by Ethiopian doctors and appropriate medical advices, procedures, techniques and new medical discoveries are provided from their counterpart.

According to the survey conducted to assess the outcomes, impact and reaction, more than 30 ART clinicians participate every two weeks, two self assessments indicated that the videoconference sessions were useful, that the clinicians learn, have changed their management of patients, and has lead to improved patient outcomes. Overall, the survey indicated very positive reaction.

## **4. Challenges in ICT Implementation to Enhance Participatory Governance**

The most challenging issues in implementing ICT for participatory governance in the context of Ethiopia can be described in the following sense:

- ◆ Though encouraging efforts are going on in expanding ICT infrastructure in the country, still penetration of internet and web based services are bottlenecks for participatory governance. As a result many people have no access to internet services such as e-mail, www etc.
- ◆ Insufficient ICT skilled human resource in modernizing the public services
- ◆ Financial constraints in government institutions to automate their services.
- ◆ Lack of awareness on the role of ICTs in improving transparency and accountability among the community and the local authority.

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