

**ADF IV ICT FOCUS GROUP**  
**ICTs in Support of e-Government and Public Sector Reforms**  
**ISSUES PAPER**

**Introduction**

The ongoing digital revolution, which began at the eve of last century with the emergence of new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), is making significant impact all over the world. ICTs have dramatically changed the way people live, learn, work and relate. An increasingly number of countries including in Africa are currently harnessing the use of ICTs as a means for improving government services. ICTs have the potentials to transform governments by making them more accessible, effective, transparent and accountable.

E-government can be defined as all the actions carried out by governments for better administration and management using ICTs tools. E-Government uses improved Internet-based technology to make it easy for citizens and businesses to interact with the government. It encompasses three main areas of activities namely: government-to-government (G2G), government-to-business (G2B), and government-to-citizen (G2C). G2G initiatives transform the way in which governmental agencies interact with one another. They allow better coordination of activities, make communication easier and enable more effective sharing of data. G2B projects seek to improve the relations between government and businesses by providing accurate information that can be accessed by all anytime and anywhere. This leads to more transparency and substantial reductions in corruptions. G2C initiatives contribute to deliver services to citizens more promptly and effectively. They also have the potentials to promote civic engagement by involving citizens in the governance process, enabling them to interact with government officials.

**Objective of the Focus Group**

The purpose of the focus group is to examine the state of e-government initiatives (cases and models) in Africa and suggest ways forward. Elements for e-readiness assessment will be overviewed and challenges for e-government in public sector reforms to African countries discussed. Best e-government initiatives will be shared.

**Key Issues**

**1) E-readiness**

E-readiness is defined as the degree to which a country is prepared to participate in the new information society. E-readiness is measured by assessing a country's relative advancement in five key areas namely: network access, network learning, networked society networked economy and network policy. Conducting the assessment provides a country with a readiness profile that consists of its policies, level of technologies integration and regulatory environment.

## Questions

- Are basic information infrastructures easy and affordable to access and use?
- Can the processing and storage of networked information be trusted?
- What is the level of commitment of national governments to improve citizen services?
- Are the right people available to support e-government and build a knowledge-based society?

## **2) Challenges to e-government in Africa**

E-Government is the use of ICTs to provide government services. It is at the heart of the drive to modernise government. Modernising government is about enhancing the quality of services by making them more accessible, more convenient, more responsive and more cost-effective. It is also about making Government administration more open, more accountable, more inclusive and better able to lead their communities. But e-government will not just happen because government has bought some computers and put web sites. They are challenges to overcome.

## Questions

- What are some of the major challenges of e-government to African countries?
- How can these challenges be overcome?
- What are the prerequisites for African countries to embark into e-government?
- How do you see African countries reforming the public sector with e-government
- What needs to be done in the area of ICT policy?
- What kind of better management and funding strategies can help Africa Countries to build sustainable, effective e-government network?.
- Of what help can sub-regional and regional organizations be for national e-government initiatives?
- How can Africa countries make better profit from its partners in e-government projects?
- Given the high cost generally required by e-government and the low level of e-literacy in Africa is it worthy for African countries to launch e-government projects?

Majority of the e-government solutions often involve conversions of paper documents into electronic (digital format e.g. .doc or .pdf) and their storage in information systems.

- How is access to these documents controlled?

- Who is authorized to make editions, modifications or additions to these documents?
- What are the mechanisms to ensure the data integrity of documents during transmission?
- For new documents created in electronic format, what mechanisms must be put in place to ensure their authenticity and proof of origin?
- What are the ways of protecting them against unauthorized editing, changes or deleting?

### **3) Risks involved in e-government initiative in Africa.**

Risk analysis is one of the important tasks to be done before the launching of a project. It gives more visibility during the implementation phase and limits the chances of failure.

#### Questions

- What are the risks for Africans countries to embark into e-government initiatives?
- How to deal with these risks?

### **4) Open source software as alternative**

Software is not generally owned by its users, but is licensed. Open source software is software whose source code is openly published, which is available at no charge, can freely be modified and distributed, and which is most often developed by voluntary effort. Open source provides a way for Africans to help themselves, not to wait for the first world, but to get up and do it themselves. This will help African countries leapfrog into the information age through reduced costs, less dependency on imported technology and its ability to be customised to local languages. Moreover, by giving users access to its inner workings, open source could stimulate the local software industry. The open source philosophy lends itself to making technology available to the masses.

#### Questions

- What do you think about the above regarding OSS ?
- What is the current level of use of Open source software in Africa, especially by government agencies?
- In what main domains is open source currently found in Africa?
- Do African countries possess the skills (programmers) necessary to successfully implement e-government with open source software?
- How do African countries perceive drawbacks of open source such as poor documentation and lack of technical support?
- How Africa Country can promote the use of OSS in public administration by ensuring the availability of OSS expertise?

### **5) Success stories of e-government in Africa**

## Questions

- What are success stories in the implementation and management of e-government system in your Countries:
  - Process wise?
  - Technology wise?
- Are there any failure stories?
- What are the lessons learned in both cases (success / failure)?

## **Conclusion**

These are some of the issues that the Academia and Governance Focus Group will need to consider before the ADF IV in October 2004. The group's agreement on key areas of concern, and consensus on recommended actions, is intended to guide the plenary deliberations, with other stakeholders and selected heads of State, at the Forum itself.