



THE CONCEPT OF E-DEMOCRACY AS A TOOL FOR TRANSPARENT GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES (CASE STUDY: MADINA URBAN COUNCIL)

Mr. Victor Dagadu, Ghana Christian University College, Ghana

Rev. George Kwasi Agbenyegah, Ghana Christian University College, Ghana

Lillian Aku Holali Seddoh, Graduate Student, Ghana Christian University College

Abstract

E-Democracy becomes the new tool for measuring government activities by the use of information technology to make elected officials more transparent, accountable and acceptable to the public. Much recent publications such as Conventional Governance to E Democracy by Bidu et al (2019), E - Democracy : The fruit of E-Government, Emad Abu-Shanab (2015) and E- Democracy Back In : Why it Matters for Future Research on E-Governance Andrew Chadwick (2020) agreed with the researchers assertion of the subject except they linked e-democracy to E-Governance that integrates ICT in Public Administration. This study was done for for Madina Urban Council and it mainly revealed that Madina Urban Council performed numerous functions of E-Democracy but most of the citizens do not have much information about the council and their roles and responsibilities in the concept .The study recommended that the council should be provided with computers and internet networking facilities so that any information about the council and its E-Democracy activities would be accessecible to the citizens. The also study made recommendation that the council should have website with two way communication medium.

Keywords : E-Democracy, E-Government, ICT in Public Administration and Madina Urban Council

1.0 Introduction

Democracy is defined by Abraham Lincoln as the government of the people, for the people and by the people. This is the direct type of democracy where people sit under trees and take decisions which bind all of them. The modern world and its population increase has call for the representative type of democracy where the majority is represented by few people in the parliament and they take decision or make laws which bind every citizen. (Budge lan, 1996)

The representative democracy ensures that leaders are elected through the democratic processes by conducting free and fair election. This means that the electorate must seek the mandate from the citizens before they can come to power and be accountable to the people.

In the process of electing the leaders some problems arise which normally affects election results. The introduction of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has brought about a new concept of e-democracy where politics can be carried out through the use of ICs. With the spread of the Internet in the early 1990s, there was much discussion about the democratizing impact of the new information technologies. In democratic polities, where participation in the formal democratic process has been on the decline, due to the problems encountered, the growth of the Internet has being a vehicle for a new kind of democracy. Globally the Internet has become a mobilizing tool providing political information to the citizens. (Burton, Paul F and Petrie, J. Howard. 1991)

The Internet has also become an important tool of domestic political mobilisation and participation. Many individuals routinely use the Internet to contact public officials, search government sites, register to vote, raise campaign funds, and coordinate grassroots activities. (Best and Krueger 2005).

Information and communication technologies have the capacity to reorganize the society (that is globalization) so that governmental information will no longer be far off from the society.

In international scenes, computer networks are use to access government information and the citizen are also allowed to contribute meaningfully in the formulation of government policies. This is the role of e- governance. (Ronaghan, 2002)

E-government has been defined as the transformation of public sectors internal and external relationships through Internet-enabled operations thereby strategically deploying ICT to optimize government service delivery and governance”.

The term e-governance is related to all activities based on the modern information and communication technologies that the state carries out in order to increase public management

efficiency, to improve the citizen-oriented public services and to provide a more transparent performance framework. Therefore, electronic government has to do with the use of new information and communication technologies both in political and administrative processes (Hernandez, M. G. 2006).

The introduction of e-government has fueled the demand for information, thereby further expanding governmental collection, storing and processing of personal data about its citizens. In today's interactive society, extensive information can be gathered about a citizen's personal life from computer networks everywhere in the world. The combined Technological Innovations of the personal computer and the internet have led to the practical ability to create, manipulate, store, transmit and link digital information. This ability is one of the most significant single influential innovations of the twentieth century. More than ever before, it is possible to create an electronic collage that covers most of a person's life- a life captured in records (Reyes Zatarain del Valle 2003)

In Anglophone West African Societies, e-government represents an emerging digital layer on top of traditional government practices. It is a layer that is developing due to incremental public sector reforms over the years and the call to create a knowledge-based society. Such reforms in public administration have provided the initial framework for the emergence of e-government initiatives (Castells, M. 1998)

2.0 Objective of the Study

These e-government initiatives are expected to bring many benefits including efficiency, accountability and transparency, improved decision-making as well as greater satisfaction. The innovative use of the computer and the medium of the internet also improved the quality of collection, processing and dissemination of government information allows productive use of databases, and creates efficient network communications that are characteristics of a knowledge-based society.

Public officials would agree that e-government can have major impacts for improving the efficiency of public services. Al-tamil and Sait (2001), have expanded this view by stating that "e-government is the transformation of public sectors internal and external relationships through Internet-enabled operations thereby strategically deploying ICT to optimize government service delivery and governance"

E-democracy means that information and communication technology is used in political processes to enhance transparency and participation.

3.0 Literature Review

3.1 Telecommunication Technology

The microcomputer is considered as the electronic tool which enables a person to type, communicate or even look up for information by the use of the right kind of software. (O' Leary and O' Leary ,1997).

Formal democratic process has been on the decline as the result of the growth of the Internet, being the vehicle for a new kind of political participation. Globally the Internet has become a mobilizing tool providing political information instantly and economically. The Internet becomes an important tool of domestic political mobilisation and participation. Many individuals routinely use the Internet to contact public officials, search government sites, register to vote, raise campaign funds, and coordinate grassroots activities (Best and Krueger 2005).

With the spread of the Internet in the early 1990s, information is now at the doorstep of people. Transformation has taken place in all sphere of life and there was much discussion about the democratizing impact of the new information technologies (Norris and Papacharissi 2002).

3.2 E-democracy

Digital democracy is the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) and computer-mediated communications (CMC) in all kinds of media (such as, the Internet, interactive broadcasting or digital telephony) for purposes of enhancing political democracy or the participation of citizens in democratic communication (Hacker and Van Dijk 2000).

Digital democracy is a collection of attempts to practice democracy without the limits of time, space and other physical conditions, using ICT or CMC instead, as an addition, not a replacement for traditional 'analogue' political practices (Norris 1999). Digital democracy involves the use of Internet and other information communication tools. This is important because there is a wide digital divide among and within countries in terms of Internet access. However, radios and TVs are more available particularly in less developed countries¹.

Digital democracy is complementary to traditional democratic practices where the former do not substitute the latter. Digital democracy enhances traditional democratic practices in

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generally and this goes beyond citizen electronic participation. It includes the adoption of ICTs by political parties or parliaments.

3.3 Impact of E-Democracy

The cyber optimist believes that ICTs have a mobilization effect that increase individual participation. Use of the internet facilitates new forms of civic engagement worldwide and the level playing field for political access. There is a strong relationship between available political information and individual political participation. The use of internet reduces some of the barriers to political participation, levelling some of the financial hurdles, and widening the opportunities for political debate, dissemination of information, and group interaction, and net activism which have the potential to broaden involvement in public life. (Norris 1999) Digital initiatives impact deeply on the improvement of local public management values (that is, transparency, accountability, efficacy and efficiency of decision-making processes, service delivery quality, social inclusion and democracy enlargement) and therefore, on local governability. (Caracas, Venezuela, 2002).

Electronic government initiatives give rise to citizen-oriented public administrations and governments as it shortens the time devoted to solve citizen's demands. Citizens no longer wait a long time standing in line. when a citizen connects to the Internet, she or he is served almost immediately. People no more spend a long time looking for the departments and offices responsible to offer the public services. Contacts with the public administrations decreases. Information and service delivery take place almost at the same time as internet is concerned. (Hacker and Van Dijk (2000)

There is an improved service delivery as a result of longer working hours. Electronic government is alternative for service delivering 24 hours a day 7 days a week. This means the government can meet people's demands through a web page that can be accessed at anytime from anywhere. Therefore there is no excuse to delay obligations (such as tax payments) or to complain for not being able to expound one's needs.

The government is the owner of a lot of information as a result of all the administrative processes. Legal proceedings, staff pay slips, personal data of citizens demanding a service have traditionally been paper-filed. This has prevented the citizen from accessing data flexibly and quickly. Since bureaucracies are built on intermediaries, a lot of time is invested in order to look for the information that is needed or demanded. When information is online, it becomes a tool which the society can use to access information, searches, consultation and

updates can take place in a dynamic and intelligent way (with less errors both for producers and consumers). (Subhash Bhatnagar 2004)

E-government makes procedures and formalities easier since it avoids unnecessary trips. A digital policy reduces trips to governmental offices.

Information and communication technologies help the public sector to adopt this new paradigm, maintaining scale economies while offering personalized services to citizens. The government and the society must interact in multiple ways in order to be effective. Supported Internet services, public kiosks, free phone numbers are some of the tools that public administrators use when solving citizens' demands.

A digital government strategy gives rise to deep transformations and restructurings in the public sector that decrease time and inputs needed to offer a service. Greater productivity reduces public expense and therefore lowered the prices that people pay when demanding a service. (Theresa Pardo 2000)

With the e-government, the administrative capacity increases to meet people's demands. Public goods and services demands are growing spectacularly, both in quantity and quality.

Electronic government brings governments nearer to the citizens because a digital strategy expands and makes more transparent government commitments with the people.

Revenues gradually grow as far as payments management is transparent. Digital tools prevent frauds and set controls and audits for electronic transactions to take place according to the legal rules.

Digital government promotes modernisation of public administrations as the public sector is expected to cut red tape, reduce queues, deliver higher quality and personalised services, open transparent, fight corruption and waste, make better use of taxpayers' money, and involve the stakeholders more in democratic processes.

3.4 Electronic Media

3.4.1 Mobile Phone

Mobile phones have the potential of fostering political mobilisation. Like the Internet, mobile phones facilitate communication and rapid access to information. Mobile phone diffusion has reached a larger proportion of the population in most countries (Fortunati, Leopoldina 2002)

3.4.2 Internet

Internet provides free and accessible information. Access to the Internet facilitates more direct democracy. Internet puts more information in people's homes than ever before, but this is just a continuation of long-term trends that have brought data increasingly within everyone's reach (Graller, Preston 1999).

3.4.3 Electronic Records.

E-records are strategic and operational assets, vital to the operation of the state for e-democratic success. Records need to be protected and used for the benefit of citizens. Like the traditional paper records, e-records support the day-to-day operation of government services and interactions with citizens and private and public sector partners. As government service moves online, e-records will be the basis for confirming pension and other entitlements registering births and deaths, verifying citizenship and certifying voting rights, enabling the collection of taxes and census enumeration, supporting financial management and enabling audits and evaluations, helping resolve land claims, litigation documenting inter-government's agreements enabling economic planning, describing the government's accomplishment and monitoring nation's development as well as e-democratic activities are concerned.

E-records are the recorded information documents or data that provide evidence of policies, transactions and activities carried out in e-government, e-commerce and e-democratic environments (O'Leary, T.J and O'Leary, L.O. 1996)

According to Norris, P. (2005). technology modernize the process of casting a ballot, especially the implementation of remote electronic voting (e-voting), and boost electoral participation. E-voting is thought to be a particularly important reform designed to encourage turnout among younger people.

4.0 Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The survey technique adopted for this study was to include a large number of people in the study. According to Alreck and Settle (1995), a survey method is recommended when information is gathered from a large number of people. The advantage of the survey research is that it has the potential to provide us with a lot of information obtained from quite a large sample of individuals (Fraenkel 2000). Madina Urban Council in Madina-Abokobi District - Accra was chosen because of proximity to the researcher and the previous work experience

gain from the Urban Council as a national service personnel. Moreover the district is also a newly carved one from Ga District

4.2 .1 Population

The population of the study composed all the senior staffs and junior staffs of the Urban Council Information obtained from the notice board of the council showed that the total populations of the staffs are 120, made up of two groups. (Thus 20 and 100 for senior and junior staffs respectively).

4.2. 2 Sampling Design

Purposive sampling, is a non-random sampling method was use in selecting the sample size for the study. 20% of the population was selected. This method was used because the researcher had previous knowledge of the population .The sample size included both the senior staff and junior staff members of the council.

4.2. 3 Instrument for Data Collection

Questionnaire was chosen as the instrument for collecting data because of its attributes; focus, brevity and simplicity (Alreck and Settle,1985)

Data was collected through the use of structured questions involving the use of both opened –ended questions as well as close ended questions

4.2. 4 Problem Encountered and Response Rate

In spite of the investigator's familiarity with Urban council, he encountered problems in the administration of the questionnaire since most of the staffs were busy and not prepared to fill in the questionnaires. One week was used to administer the questionnaire. Despite the problems encountered a good return rate of 20 out of 24 distributed questionnaires was achieved. The remaining 4 were not returned by the respondents.

4.2.4 Analysis of Data

The responses from the administered questionnaire were closely examined and a coding scheme prepared to facilitate analysis of data.

The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was used for the analysis.

Data is presented in simple statistics using tables, to depict raw data, frequencies and percentages.

5.0 Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the data and presents the findings from the questionnaire survey with reference to the set objectives of the study.

5.2 How the public get information on services provided

The investigator requested respondents to indicate how the public get information on the services that they provide. This was to help determine whether the public is aware of the services of the council. The studies showed that the council uses television publicity (95%) than newspaper publicity (5%).

5.3 Services provided to the public

The services provided to the public by the council include registration of both birth and death certificate (30%) and provision of licenses, sanitation and hygiene (70.0%).

5.4 Channels of communication

The studies revealed that oral communication is commonly used. 75% communicate through oral, 5% through written and 20 % uses both the oral and written for communication.

5.5 Procedures use for gathering views from the public

The study showed that, 60% open forum and 40% assembly meetings

5.6 Assessment of opinion from the general public

The study showed that 55% suggestion boxes are used and 45 % filling of forms.

5.7 Formulation of bi-laws

The study showed that the council seeks public opinion when formulating bi-laws.

5.8 Believe in democracy

The study showed that all the people believe in democracy. 100% believes in democracy

5.9 Are you a registered voter

The study showed that, 100% of the people are registered voters

5.10 Any Problems encountered at the polling station on the election day

The study showed that 60% encountered problems and 40% do not encountered any problem

5.11 Problems encountered

The study showed that 75% wasted time in the queue. 10% people's names were not in the voters register and 15% encountered both problems, that is, wasted their time in the queue and could not even find their names in the voters register.

5.12 Computer knowledge

The study showed that 55% have computer knowledge and 45% do not have any knowledge on computer.

5.13. Access to telephone facilities

The study revealed that 90% of the people have access to telephone facilities and 10% do not.

5.14 The electronics media commonly used

The study showed that 50% uses mobile phones and 50% for radio.

5.15 Facilities used for communication in the office

The study revealed that 90% uses telephone for communication and 10% uses letter as form of communication.

5.16 Keeping records of information in the office

The study revealed that 100% records are kept in the office.

5.17 System use for recording file

The study showed that 100% hard cover filling method is used in the office.

5.18 The use of computer in the office

The study revealed that 100% do not use computer in the office.

5.19 Enhances of job performance

The study showed that 100% use of computer would enhance job performance.

5.20 Idea about e-government

The study showed that 95% do not have any idea about e-government and 5% have idea about e-government

5.21 A brief comment about the performance of the Urban Council

The study showed that 65% average performance, 20% good performance and 15 % not performing well at all.

6.0 Conclusion

Services provided by the Urban Council to the public

The Madina Urban Council enforces the registration of birth and deaths and issuance of birth and death certificates to cover all new new cases. Any birth and death which has occurred

within the district must therefore reported immediately to the council for update of records and issuance of appropriate certificates.

Taking of this records enables council to know the statistisc of number of people in the district as well as the death cases reported for a particular period of the year. This also enables the council to prepare its budget for the year. The collection of revenue , issuing of store lincenses, and permmit for erection of structures are services that the council provides. Sanitation and good hygiene practics are all the carried out by the council. It is the duties of the council to ensure that the town and its communities are clean and neat to prevent the outbreak of communicable deseases.

The study also revealed that, the council always informed the public about their services through television, radio and news papers. Communication is very important as far as administration is concerned. Both oral and written are the main channel of communication used in the council. Information flow in the council is both vertical and horizontal. The council interact with the public by organizing open forum and assembly meetings,usage of suggestion boxes to know the views and feeling from the people. This is a good democratic practices and it enhances good decision making.

The study also showed that, in formulation of the bi-laws the people views are listened or taken in to consideration .

The council believes in the concept of democratic practices and studies also showed that most of the staffs are registered voters.As stated by (Best and Krueger 2005; Norris 2002) formal democratic process has been on the decline as the result of the growth of the Internet, being the vehicle for a new kind of political participation.With the problems which are associated with the formal democratic process where much time is being wasted in the queues and people names can not be found in the voters register, internet has brought new transformation and become a mobilizing tool providing political information instantly and economically. The Internet has become an important tool of domestic political mobilisation and participation. Many individuals routinely use the Internet to contact public officials, search government sites, register to vote, raise campaign funds, and coordinate grassroots activities

Access to Telephone facilities

The study showed that the council has been provided with telephone facilities and it enhances effective communication among the staffs. ICT innovation makes it posible to reach people very fast. Electronic media such as mobile phone,radio are commonly used by the people.

This really gives support to Fortunati, Leopoldina views who stated that mobile phones have the potential of fostering political mobilisation. Mobile phones facilitate communication and rapid access to information and mobile phone diffusion has reached a larger proportion of the population in most countries,

Record Keeping

The study again showed that, records of information are kept with use of the traditional manual hardcover filing method. There is no electronic media such as computers and printers use in the council for processing information and storage as well, as the result; most works are done in slow process. Though most of the people have knowledge about computer, such facilities are not provided in the office for the use.

Idea about e-government.

The study also revealed that the people do not have any idea on e-government. Since internet have been the store house for most information and there is 24 hours' access to information, there is need to connect every government sectors to the internet so that the citizens can have access to any information of their choice. This would be the step for e-democracy as far as e-government is concerned.

Though the council is not performing badly, still there is a room for improvement to meet increasing demands due to population pressure.

7.0 Recommendation

There is need to set up e- democratic system for the Urban Council to enhance its functions and services to cover majority of people in the district.

1. Government have to set up the electronic systems for the council by providing them with computers and internet facilities. This will increase the performance of the council.
2. The administration or the government is to build capacity by training more staff in electronic system.
3. There should be a website for council where any information about the council should be found
4. There should be participation chances where both top-down channels and bottom-up channels which should aimed at collecting citizen opinions on general and specific topics. These channels should include the following

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