Toward an informational\(^1\) approach to pre-implementation and post-evaluation of e-participation projects for Africa

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Abstract: In developing countries the majority of e-participation and in general e-governance projects fail. After an introduction to the use of Heeks’s (2003) “archetype of failure”, I will explain the African media landscape. After that I will try to explain how, what I call “an informational approach to pre-implementation and post-evaluation”, can be used to develop new criteria and methods. All this to avoid those failures and provide at the end of the projects ROI (return of investment) data for all the stakeholders and especially for the donors who are investing in e-participation projects in African countries.

Key words: pre-implementation, post evaluation, e-participation, Africa.


According to Heeks (2003) most implementation of e-governance in developing countries fails; 35% of these implementations are considered total failures (not implemented at all or implemented and immediately abandoned), 50% were considered as partial failures (major goals were not attained and/or there were undesirable outcomes). Considering that the total public budget of a country like Kenya is almost the same as the total public budget of one region from south Italy, eliminating those failures has became a main goal. For this reason a new approach to pre-implementation and post-evaluation analysis is a priority for both beneficiaries and donors who are currently investing in those projects.

By examining numerous cases of e-governance failure in developing countries, Heeks (2002; 2003) states that a major reason for these failures is the mismatch between the current reality and the design of the future information system. The risks of failure increase as the gap grows. Heeks (2002; 2003) uses the model (annex 2) to illustrate this situation.

This model has led Heeks (2003) to identify archetypes of situations where design-reality gaps are common. These are summarised below:

- **Hard-Soft Gaps**: the difference between the actual technologies and the reality of the social context in which the system operates;
- **Private-Public gaps**: a system that works in the private sector often does not work in the public sector;
- **Country Context Gaps**: a system designed for a developed country cannot be applied to a developing one;

**Possible scenarios:**

**Sustainability**: these projects often depend upon aid from donors. Once this financing ceases, there is often insufficient funding to continue the project (Swhware and Deane, 2003)

**Size**: impressive projects are often preferred by governments in developing countries, as these projects are seen as evidence of political action. However, the risk of failure is proportional to the size of the project, and large projects often fail (UNDESA, 2003).

**Under estimation of low-tech solutions**: if the aim is to reduce the cost of transfer of information and to reach as many people as possible, then why are low tech solutions not considered? It may be more appropriate to look at low tech solutions that fit with the existing infrastructure (Cecchini and Raina, 2004)

2. **AMDI (African Media Development Initiative) and the “Win to Win e-participation pre-implementation and post-evaluation model”**

AMDI was the most extensive independent survey of the state of the media across 17 sub-Saharan African countries; Angola, Botswana, Cameroon, DRC, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, South Africa, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. In the introduction of the report it is specified that the media environment of Africa benefits from three distinct components (Community media, State-owned media and Private media) and that the need for a holistic approach to strengthening the sector is fundamental.

The conclusion of the survey was that: “In nine of the 17 countries, more than 60% of the population lives in rural areas with restricted access to most forms of media, mainly due to the lack of transport facilities and electricity (eg, in Kenya only 8% of the rural population has electricity). The media in the countries surveyed are serving populations that are growing and are primarily young, rural and non-literate. Radio dominates the mass media spectrum... Television is becoming more widespread although growth over the
past five years is less dramatic than that reported for radio. Newspapers remain concentrated in urban centres with varying growth patterns across the countries. In the new media sector, the adoption of mobile telephony has been the most spectacular, far exceeding the uptake of the Internet...cellular mobile use to more urban areas, the low cost of entry and ability to be “mobile” present media practitioners with a new audience and a possible expansion of the definition of local content production in text messaging and other electronic communications. Furthermore, the presence of new forms of media within these nations presents a new set of opportunities and challenges for the citizens/users, media practitioners, NGOs, journalists and regulators”.

The Win-Win model (annex 1) is what can be a “key challenge for improving evaluation in eParticipation research” in particular in developing countries.

There are three possible pre-implementation and post-evaluation levels;

1) **Overall pre-implementation and post-evaluation of the participatory process in relation to the policy cycle**: political vision, policy information, decision making, implementation (International Association of Public Participation).

2) **Pre-implementation and post-evaluation of an e-participation project impact on the traditional participation project and the related policy cycle**: before and after the introduction of the e-participation platform, CRM about the e-participation implementation

3) **Evaluation of the impact and effectiveness of an e-participation project on the use of low-tech, mobile tech, community media for participation and the related policy cycle**: before and after introducing this model.

The hypothesis model is on the third level because low internet penetration in Africa doesn't allow the use of the same methodology for developed countries. Illustrated below are the two fundamental steps of this model:

a) **Pre-implementation**: exporting of information systems for e-participation from developed countries to developing ones can be risky (these systems impacts are also uncertain in developed countries). For this reason it is better to focus on improving open access and transparency and empowering other media that are accessible to the majority of population. Those media can then distribute content at local levels and send feedback using e-participation platforms as hubs. In this way it is also possible to develop new services for the citizens. For this reason a donor needs to consider open access policy and the design of a

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2 Call for paper from DemoNet “frameworks and methods for evaluating eParticipation”
system that aim to empower accessible media in a specific context, for a specific community as inescapable conditions.

b) Post-evaluation: by using this approach we can concentrate on concrete data e.g.
   - How many radio stations download audio content from the e-participation platform?
   - How many audio feedback the platform received from radios
   - How many SMS information request have been sent by citizens?
   - How many videos have been downloaded and uploaded from community leaders, NGOs and constituency offices?
   - How were communities “A” and “B” impacted by the project?
   - And how all those data influence the achievement of public participation goals: from informing to empowering (see annex 3).

Some best practices are already showing the effectiveness of this model:

   - a bicycle, a smart mobile phone and a network are the core technologies of “Cheng Guan Tong” “City management all in One” in Beijing China;
   - the Village Phone in Philippines, Rwanda, Uganda, Cameroon;
   - a community radio station already working in a slum like Radio Korogocho in Nairobi

The pre-implementation is “informational” because the main objective is not the creation of a new information system but the empowerment of an already existing one. The consequences of this approach are really important for the effectiveness of post-evaluation.

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