Ethiopia strides in e-government: with committed leadership

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The latest E-Government Survey of 2014 that was published a few weeks ago by the United Nations' Department of Economic and Social Affairs commended Ethiopia for the progress made in E-Government Development Index (EGDI). It stated:

"At 72nd place globally, Ethiopia is one of the best performing LDCs in online service delivery, ahead of many wealthier countries, including a number of European nations."

Indeed, the government of Ethiopia hardly needed the neoliberals' lecture on the merits of ICT. The government has long recognized that information and communications technology (ICT) is a key factor for national prosperity is in the current global socio-economic order.

It didn't simply consider ICT as a single, separate sectoral development activity rather a cross-cutting matter impacting a range of socio-economic development objectives and set policy directions to take advantage of these technologies to accelerate the rate of economic growth and alleviate poverty. Indeed, the Government clearly sees ICT as a key factor for achieving progress in economic and social development.

The national ICT policy clearly stated that the government envisions advancing

"the social and economic well-being of the peoples of Ethiopia through the exploitation of the opportunities created by ICT for achieving rapid and sustainable socio-economic development, and for sustaining a robust democratic system and good governance."

The mission statement of the policy elaborates that the direction is developing ‘...Ethiopia into a socially progressive and prosperous nation with a globally competitive, modern, dynamic and robust economy through the development, deployment and exploitation of ICT within the economy and society.’

The policy set four wide-ranging goals - which deal with transforming the nation’s society in to knowledge and information society that supports the nation’s rapid economic development and also helps in enhancing government efficiency and good governance.

In line with that, the government of Ethiopia also articulated an e-Government Strategy with the aim of realizing the need to integrate these initiatives to provide a strategic direction for e-Government implementation in the country.

The e-Government strategy for Ethiopia has been designed, with a focus on facilitating effective delivery of government services to customers (residents, businesses and visitors).
The e-government strategy that was approved in 2011 envisages the implementation of 219 e-services comprising of 79 informational and 140 transactional services over a five-year period. Implementation is proposed through 12 priority projects and service delivery would be through four primary channels—Portals, Call centers, Mobile devices and Common service centers.


In addition—common applications which will horizontally cut across all ministries are proposed, which include initiatives like E-Procurement, Human Resource Management System, E-Office, E-Mail and Financial Management & Information System.

In terms of institutional framework, the coordination and supervision, planning and implementation of Communication and Information Technology development initiatives and ICT policies was elevated to an Agency level with the establishment of Ethiopian ICT Development Agency (EICTDA).

Now, it is further elevated to Cabinet level with the establishment of the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (MCIT).

The success of the strategy was the reason that Ethiopia has become lauded as "one of the best performing LDCs(Least Developed Countries) in online service delivery, ahead of many wealthier countries, including a number of European nations" in the latest report of the United Nations' Department of Economic and Social Affairs

The report, entitled "E-Government Survey of 2014", measures performance in terms of E-Government Development Index (EGDI). The three components of the E-Government Development Index (EGDI) are OSI—Online Service Index, TII—Telecommunication Infrastructure Index, HCI—Human Capital Index

In general, Ethiopia received (between 0.25 and 0.50) which is a middle-level EGDI point. In terms of OSI—Online Service Index, which is one the most important components of the EGDI, Ethiopia received 0.4567 and was ranked 72nd among 183 nations around the world.

The report puts the ranking in context. It shows that Ethiopia is among the best performer among Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs). The report states:

"A landlocked country is one that is entirely enclosed by land, or whose only coastline lies on a closed sea. There are 48 landlocked countries among the United Nations Member States, 31 of which are Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs)

None of the 16 Least Developed Countries among the LLDCs are in the group top ten, with Rwanda ranking 12th in the group and all the others ranking in the bottom 15 of the group.

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The biggest improvers among the LLDCs are Armenia (from 94th to 61st), Azerbaijan (from 96th to 68th), Ethiopia (from 172th to 157th) and Rwanda (from 140th to 125th).

In the context of classification based on income group, the report states that:

"The leading countries in the high-income category were France (ranked 1st globally), Singapore (2nd) and the Republic of Korea (3rd).

Indeed, 19 of the top 20 countries in online service delivery can be counted among the world’s wealthiest economies. Within the middle-income group, Colombia comes out ahead in online service delivery (17th globally), followed by Kazakhstan (23rd) and Morocco (30th).

Rwanda was found to be the leader in the low-income category in 2014 (ranked 63rd globally), followed by Ethiopia (72nd) and Kenya (79th)."

Nonetheless, while income level is important for a country performance in e-government service, there are other important factors. The report notes underlines that:

"high-level political support, e-government leadership within the national administration, ICT infrastructure and education, as well as institutional capacity for online service development, public accountability and citizen engagement are crucial factors.

"Rwanda, Colombia, Ethiopia, Kazakhstan and Morocco, among others, appear to be performing well.

Initiatives undertaken by these high performers may provide valuable insights for countries at a similar income level."

Indeed, the high-level political support given to e-government is demonstrated by the accomplishments in several ICT infrastructure aspects.
Ethiopia's e-government Strategy has been designed keeping the following guiding principles of e-Government:

- E-Government is focused in creating a SMART (Simple Moral Accountable, Responsive and Transparent) Government;
- E-government promotes causes of e-citizen and e-democracy;
- E-Government is not translating processes, however transforming processes;
- E-Government necessitates capacity building within the Government;
- E-government aims networked and integrated government;
- E-government is citizen-centric;
- E-government provides multi-channel delivery of public services;
- E-Government aims in providing convenient access of information to all, and improving service access & delivery;
- E-Government enables development & participation of all segments of population to reap benefits of IT and also participate in the Governance process and be able to voice their opinions more effectively; and
- E-Government supports in development and inclusion of Private Sector in public service delivery.

Based on the strategy, MCIT has launched more than 28 transactional services extracted from the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), Ministry of Urban Development and Construction (MUDC), Food, Medicine and Health Care Administration and Control Authority (FMHACA), Agency for Government Houses (AGH), and Transport Authority on this portal. More services are to come from various government organizations very soon.

As a result, citizens and businesses are now able to request public services by filling out electronic forms and attaching scanned versions of all necessary supporting documents from anywhere and anytime.

Moreover, they can track the status of their requests using unique service request tracking numbers; arrange appointments with the service providing government organizations when physical presence is required; get periodic notifications through email and SMS; and provide their feedbacks for future improvements.

In this regard, the accomplishments of the SchoolNet and WoredaNet projects are worth mentioning.

The SchoolNet project is one of the largest initiatives of the government that provides educational satellite television broadcasting to 1,710 high schools in Ethiopia via a total of 15,600 Plasma TVs. Some 1482 television programs in 6 subjects (Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics, Civics and Ethical Education, and English) are broadcast to grades 9 to 12 students across the country.

The WoredaNet is another public project that provides a terrestrial and satellite-based network linking 950 districts. It was designed with the primary objective of providing ICT services such as video conferencing, directory services, messaging, Voice over IP, and Internet connectivity to the Federal, Regional, and Woreda level government administrative units across the country.
In fact, the direct link between the committed and visionary leadership provided to the sector and the achievements made had been clearly recognized in the E-Government Survey of 2014 report of the United Nations.

Underlining these accomplishments, the report stated that:

"Ethiopia’s success can be traced in part to high-level recognition of the need to coordinate online services at national level, provide a strategic direction for e-government development in the country and allocate sufficient resources.

The national strategy includes provisions for citizen-centric mechanisms for stakeholder involvement, implementation of 219 online services over a five-year period from 2011–2015, tracking of indicators of achievement and establishment of a national e-government leadership council."

"The strategy is linked to the country’s national development strategy that envisages a transformation from a primarily agricultural to an ICT-based economy.

Despite the country’s status as a low-income, landlocked, conflict-affected country, Ethiopia’s achievements demonstrate that a vibrant online public administration can emerge from a combination of high-level political commitment, engagement of stakeholders and a specific plan of action linking e-government to national sustainable development priorities."