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Degree in Global Communications

Final dissertation

Participatory Communication Development:

E-participation in Sub-Saharan Africa

Media as a driver for change

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Acronyms

AU (African Union)

ICT (information and communication technology)

SDG (Sustainable Development Goals)

UN (United Nations)

UNDP (United Nations Development Programme)

UNDESA (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs)

UNECA (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa)

GPSDD (Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data)

1. Introduction

Modern communications indisputably involve the use of internet. In a globalized world in which information flows are multiple, constant, cheap, and diverse the benefits of international communications are evident. Media is a tool that can be used in many ways, from connecting family members to facilitating information for project management. In this study, we will take a look at one specific application of global communication that focuses on nations' progress and maturity: development communication.

Development communication is a discipline that aims to facilitate social and economic evolution through knowledge sharing. Through the lens of the two-way communication model, we will examine the benefits and challenges of e-participation in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Being part of e-government, e-participation is a digital tool that fosters engagement through feedback and citizens' contribution in the online government agencies and departments.

In this African region, a total of 206 million people have access to the internet, and even though it is the least connected continent, the numbers have been constantly growing the past years and, as trends show, will continue to increase.

Taking into account a powerful tool like media and considering the current internet rate trends in Africa, a two-way model of communication could improve the current status of development projects in the continent through increased interaction between the development workers and the local communities and shareholders. This supports the argument raised in this dissertation that media, in the form of e-participation through the internet, can be seen as a driver change.

2. Motivations and reasons for research

The African continent faces many challenges. The region, as to today, integrates 32 of the 46 states on the United Nations List of Least Developed Countries (UNCDP, 2021). The path towards development is holistic, and development communication is key for these countries to further evolve.

As telecommunication technologies advance in the African continent, the rise of communication platforms offers an opportunity for development communication strategies to take place – specifically participatory communication models. These participatory models enhance the importance of feedback and information-gathering to further adapt and improve the message aimed to a specific target.

The author started realizing about the importance of communications when she started using social media at a young age. The fast, interactive, and superficial simplicity of modern communications amazed her. Years later, she got interested in the functioning of communications to the point that she wanted to study it as a degree. And today, she is aware of the impact that it can create, from individuals to nations.

She currently studies a double degree in International Relations with Global Communication in the Pontifical University Comillas. In order to complete her studies, it is a requirement to carry out a research paper on each and both of her degrees.

The reason underlying this research paper is the desire to study how could media positively impact the development of the African continent, aiming to be part of the effort to empower African nations to connect.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. Development Communication

Development Communication represents the social process in which knowledge is shared to achieve progress and evolution. Media plays a central role as a tool to carry out this process, as it connects the development project workers with the local communities and stakeholders. It originates as the need to accurately design strategies to approach targeted audiences for an effective outcome (Servaes, 2002).

The term is relatively new, emerging after the Second World War, when countries like the US began to promote development and started to shape their foreign policy towards ideals such as democracy, political stability, or economic development.

This process comes forth as a key strategic aspect of development theories, aligning the theoretical concepts to the communication strategy. This means, the development communication has a changing nature depending on the prevailing development theory of the moment. There are multiple development theories that have tried to grasp the different explanations and interpretations since the 1960s to the current day: the dominant theory, the modernization theory, dependency theory, basic needs theory or the neoclassical theory.

The dominant theory was the predominant approach in the beginnings of development communication, with thinkers such as Wilbur Schramm, Daniel Lerner, and Everett Rogers. Wilbur Schramm is of special interest, as he was a development communication pioneer that researched about mass media in Africa. In 1964, he wrote a book called "*Mass Media and National Development: The Role of Information in the Developing Countries*". There, Schramm expressed how in developing countries, the role of mass media included investigative "watchdog" journalism, policy maker, and "teacher for change and modernization" (Schramm, 1964).

Since the 1970s, academics like Paulo Freire, Juan Diaz Bordenave, Luis Ramiro Beltran Alfonso, Gumacio Dagon and Cardoso have pointed out Western domination of the discussions and actions towards development (Imoh, 2013). Their claims insist that the dependency status of developing countries was reiterated and impeded the advancement and evolution of the Third World countries. It criticized the “guide” or “provider” authority role taken by the economically powerful nations, and urged for a participatory approach. This criticism towards domination started to grow in the 1990s and reached platforms such as the United Nations or advocacy networks (WB, 2009).

The different ways to interpret development and its respective adaptations to communication guide us through the different branches of knowledge: According to the World Bank, in the development communication discipline, there are three main communication models: the diffusion model, the life skills model, and the participatory model. This last one will be looked at through the analysis of this study.

Development Communication	The Diffusion Model (one-way/monologic communication)	The Life Skills Model	The Participatory Model (two-way/dialogic communication)
Definition of the problem	Lack of information	Lack of information and skills	Lack of stakeholders' engagement
Notion of culture	Culture as obstacle	Culture as ally	Culture as “way of life”
Notion of catalyst	External change agent	External catalyst in partnership with the community	Joint partnership (external and internal)
Notion of education	Banking pedagogy	Life skills, didactics	Liberating pedagogy
Notion of groups of references	Passive: targets audiences	Active: targets trainee groups	Active: targets citizen/stakeholders
How you are communicating	Messages to persuade	Messages and experiences	Social issues engaged, problem-posing, dialogue
Main notion of change	Individual behavior	Individual behavior, social norms, experiential learning	Individual and social behavior, social norms, power relations
Expected outcome	Change of individual behavior, numerical results	Change of individual behavior, increased skills	Articulation of political and social processes, sustainable change, collective action
Duration of activity	Short- and mid-term	Short- and mid-term	Mid- and long-term

Figure 1: Conceptual Approaches to Development Communication (WB, 2009)

3.2. Two-way communication: The participatory communication model

In this study, we will base the theoretical foundations on the two-way/dialogical communication model. This model of development communication refers to the active involvement of stakeholders in decision-making processes for projects or programs that directly affect them (Slocum, Wichhart, & Thomas-Slayter, 1995). It is not merely the exchange of information, but the analysis and discussion of aspects to be improved and developed. A constant and fluent interaction is needed for it to succeed.

The main feature of this horizontal and dialogic communication model is the active involvement of stakeholders on the decision-making process. It gives practitioners the opportunity to take feedback from communities and key stakeholders in order to solve current development problems. Through free and open dialogue, participatory communication can properly navigate through different conceptions and meanings, avoiding (or reducing) confusion and misunderstandings.

The benefits of the participatory model are many: First of all, it adds credibility and reassurance to the project or program taking place. Getting first-hand information about a certain issue undoubtedly increases the possibilities of the project to be accurate and, thus, more successful. Secondly, it empowers communities and participants. It is a social practice in which the people are directly involved in projects that will affect them, therefore expanding their scope of influence and control over significant outcomes (WB, 2009). All of this enhances the community-ownership feeling that most-likely traduces to a large-term sustainability of the project.

Still, it is not a supplementary value. Nowadays, participatory communication is key for development projects.

Participatory communication can take place in each stage of the development project. Depending on the approach and the necessary means, it can be more useful in the research, design, implementation, or evaluation stage. It helps build an accurate definition, ensure the most-effective and reliable partnerships in the region; foster relevance, commitment and sustainability; and to point out favorable or missing efforts in the outcome.

According to the World Bank, there are four types of perceptions in terms of participation: passive participation, participation by consultation, participation by collaboration and empowering participation. Starting from the first method, the least engaging one, passive participation consists of providing information to the stakeholders, getting minimal or null comments back. Its aim is to inform the community about the strategy, objectives and actions. The second type of perception, the participation by consultation process, consists in an increasing interest on the “extractive process”, in which stakeholders are asked to answer about certain topics posed by the managers of the project. Although this process can provide researchers and professionals very interesting information, it is important to bear in mind that there is not a requirement for the experts to introduce all responses/opinions/comments given. Participation by collaboration focuses on the cooperative aspect, where stakeholders are asked to give advice regarding the means and capacity building. Lastly, empowering participation is the most engaging process, in which stakeholders do not only provide information and advice on some issues that managers rise, but are also involved in the analysis, negotiation and joint decision-making process. (WB, 2009).

It can also be divided in local, national and international levels of participatory communication in decision-making processes.

Adopting participatory communication is enormously beneficial for development projects to be successful: “To reinforce the benefits of adopting participatory communication, it is important to understand that participation and participatory communication are main answers to why so many development initiatives in the 1970s and 1980s did not achieve their objectives to produce significant improvements for the many poor of the planet. The causes of many such failures were ascribed to the limited understanding of local context and the insufficient involvement of local stakeholders. In addition, misunderstandings and differences in perceptions about key problems often led to limited political buy-in and faulty project design.” (WB, 2009). We can see how participatory communication is seen as an essential tool to prevent past errors. Furthermore, there is a false assumption that this

model focuses only on local projects, as it can also be seen in community, district or national level. (WB, 2009).

As explained earlier, there was a Western dominant development theory that, to an extent, was reformed by the participation method. Empowering and giving a more flexible and humane treat to the development projects made dominant paradigms to be harder to enact.

To an extent, the concept of participation served to reform the dominant paradigm, making it—in the words of its proponents—more expansive, flexible, and humane (Rogers, 1993).

Participatory communication helps the community to take more responsibility and action towards the specific project. It focuses on people, their liberation and self-reliance.

Still, it is also important to look at the disadvantages the model proposes: Although the theoretical scheme can seem reasonable and efficient, in practice it results a complex task. As it must be tailored to specific situations depending on the socio-cultural and economic conditions, the applications will differ and the efforts to adapt each project are much higher than in other communication methods. In other words, it involves individual-oriented studies. In contrast with other continents, the African one lacks accessible information needed for the development project to take place. Thus, for the participatory model, it is necessary to conduct focus group discussions, behavioral proceedings, personal interviews and ethnographic studies.

3.3. E-government and e-participation

E-government, also known as electronic government, digital governance, or internet governance, relates to the use of technological communication tools to offer online services. It involves the transformation government-citizen communications through media and facilitates the access to different government divisions. Connecting the government to the users creates digital interactions that encourage the citizens to get involved in local, national and/or international governance. It is widely used to improve the efficiency and adequacy of the public sector (Hai, 2007). According to the United Nations, e-government

is “a powerful tool for human development and essential to the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals including the Millennium Development Goals” (UN, 2010). But apart from the positive human development factors, it can also decrease government spending. Oasis, an organization that promotes open standards for e-government and citizen-centric government, published a report in which it stated the main guidelines that governments should follow to avoid pitfalls. The main areas observed are single cross-government vision, governance, change factors, legal powers and barriers, funding, procurement, prioritization, user take-up, interoperability achievements and skills (Oasis, 2010).

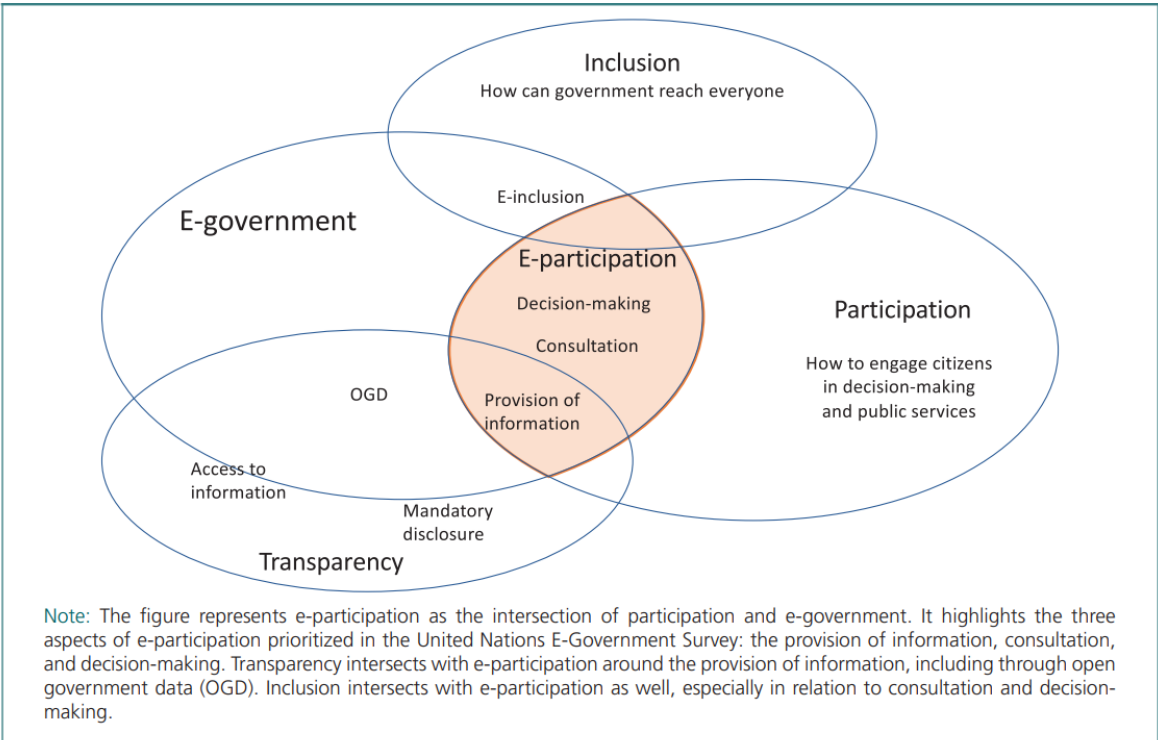


Figure 2: The relationship between e-participation and other dimensions of governance

Being part of e-government, e-participation is the area that opens up the possibility for feedback and citizen’s contribution in the online government agencies and departments. The main difference between e-government and e-participation is that in e-government, is that the first includes any government service that is available digitally, which does not

necessarily have to consist of citizen involvement, like for example downloading a public document. When there is a possibility to interact within the given service, this interaction is referred to as e-participation.

E-participation is a digital tool that fosters civic engagement. Its main goal is for citizens to form part of the decision-making process, democratizing the system, contributing to a more sustainable and inclusive governance, and improving the relations between governments and citizens (UN, 2021).

This participative electronic tool can be used through governmental websites, blogs, networking services or social media. These platforms offer a channel of interaction that can be used as an instrument for the stakeholders. In one side, it allows governments to be aware of the issues that preoccupy the citizenship, political trends, and general opinions, between others. This improves government's awareness on the current national perceptions, and it can encourage or reinforce policy making. In the other side, citizens are given the chance to comment their views on certain topics, make petitions, complain, or even advice, which empowers them (Naranjo-Zolotov, Oliveira, & Casteleyn, 2019) (Aichholzer & Rose, 2020).

There is an index calculated by the United Nations that measures the effectiveness and the level of engagement regarding e-participation around the world. This index makes visible the current challenges, such as the digital divide or the lack of engagement (UN, E-Government Knowledgebase, 2021).

4. State of play

4.1. Development communication in Africa

The history and debates on development communication in Africa are closely linked to the broader global experiences in the field of development communication studies. In this sense, it is important to reflect that connection so as not to pose Africa as an exception. However, it is totally pertinent to ask about the specific casuistry of the continent, and within this of each region, country, or locality.

The introduction of development communication in Africa began in the 1950s and 1960s and had a clear “diffusion model”, with a one-way flow approach. The projects conducted in this region mainly derived from the dominant theory that was the prevalent during these decades and focused essentially on mass media information and persuasion for urban-centered, extensive economic growth, high level of capital investment and technologic innovation (Imoh, 2013).

The radio maintained a strong presence in research and practice and was especially important in rural areas. Anglophone Africa employed radio and theatre for community education, adult literacy, health and agricultural education (Manyozo, Manifesto for Development Communication: Nora Quebral and the Los Baños School of Development Communication, 2006). An example of it can be the non-governmental organization Farm Radio International, that has worked and still acts across sub-Saharan Africa. It focuses on the knowledge exchange from development partners such as agricultural scientists to farmers through rural radio (International, 2021).

Still, there are many factors that have impeded the development communication task in Africa:

First of all, the lack of adequate media channels. Even though access to these channels is increasing, there is still a large percentage of the African population that does not have the means or cannot afford connection to the necessary means for communication. Secondly,

the way in which reception takes place. Exposure to media does not necessarily mean comprehension and integration of the information received. Lack of education or even language barriers impede the message to transcend to the individual that receives it and fails in its objective. Thirdly, it is important to consider that even if there is an adequate channel and a satisfactory understanding, it would be wrong to assume that messages are accepted. The prevalence of dysfunctional communication technology such as television undermines the credibility of the messages, as it is mainly seen for popular entertainment and can take attention away from more serious informational messages.

Post-colonial and communist movements in the late 1960s and early 1970s derived to the African school of development communication, that primarily fostered a people-centered approach (Manyozo, *Communication for Social Change Consortium: Honouring Nora Quebral*, 2005). And during those times, a countering discourse to the dominant paradigm exposed the need to engage with communities in development processes. To avoid passiveness and thus, lack of effectiveness of development projects, this proposed new paradigm aimed to promote a decentralized approach with the inclusion of the stakeholders in the decision-making process.

Research has also shown that involvement of social groups, age groups, clubs, churches, mosques, women groups, professional groups, NGOs and community-based organizations has brought greater participation in the innovations to be adopted (Ascroft, 1981).

Through time, development communication projects in Africa have evolved and aimed to adapt to the current situations. Still, there are many governmental and private actors that leave these factors out of consideration (Imoh, 2013). And although the communication process is democratized, it is obvious that in most development projects indigenous knowledge is rarely consulted.

4.2. Media and its use in Africa

Interaction in communication platforms is of key importance. In terms of global trends, every single entity that works with people can benefit from a steady and pragmatic communication flow. Many of them already know these advantages and put it into practice: Companies request clients to rate their services, universities ask students to rank their experience, governments invite citizens to participate on the political processes, NGOs question their personnel to examine the degree of success and satisfaction...

Following this tendency, development projects are also in the position to benefit from this communication process. In models such as the diffusion /one-way communication, interactive media is not as crucial, as they have a clear focus on mass media. But the more participatory the strategies are, the more interaction and dialogue is needed. Thus, access to media platforms is essential in order to participatory communications to take place, and this indisputably relates to media and its access.

In Africa, we can see the use of communication for development projects though traditional media. Some print, radio and TV examples include the FEMA, SiMchezo, Pilika Pilika or the ChezaSalama (WB, 2009).

Moreover, for the purpose of this study, we will mainly focus on online platforms accessed through the internet. This platform offers the possibility to interact with the media, creating a participatory environment where internet access unequivocally involves development. According to the United Nations, in the Human Rights Council Res38/7 on “The promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet”, it is stated that the UN:

“2. Recognizes the global and open nature of the Internet as a driving force in accelerating progress towards development in its various forms, including in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals;

3. Calls upon all States to promote and facilitate international cooperation aimed at the development of media and information and communication facilities and technology in all countries;

(...) 18. Calls upon all States to consider formulating, through transparent and inclusive processes with all stakeholders, and adopting national Internet-related public policies that have at their core the objective of universal access, and the enjoyment of human rights;”

The Resolutions by the OHCHR (OHCHR, 2018), therefore, do not only recognize the nature of internet as a catalyzer for development, but further encourage and require states to work on broadening internet access for all spheres of society.

A key element of internet access in development communication is visibility. Giving the voice and the opportunity to communicate while strengthening the community media can create valuable interaction. This can give the poorest and most marginalized people in the world the platform to express their issues, concerns and ideas. Moreover, it can even engage them in a fruitful debate.

Today, the Africa stands as the least-connected continent. As we can see in the graph below, the share of the population using the internet is incredibly low compared to other parts of the world.

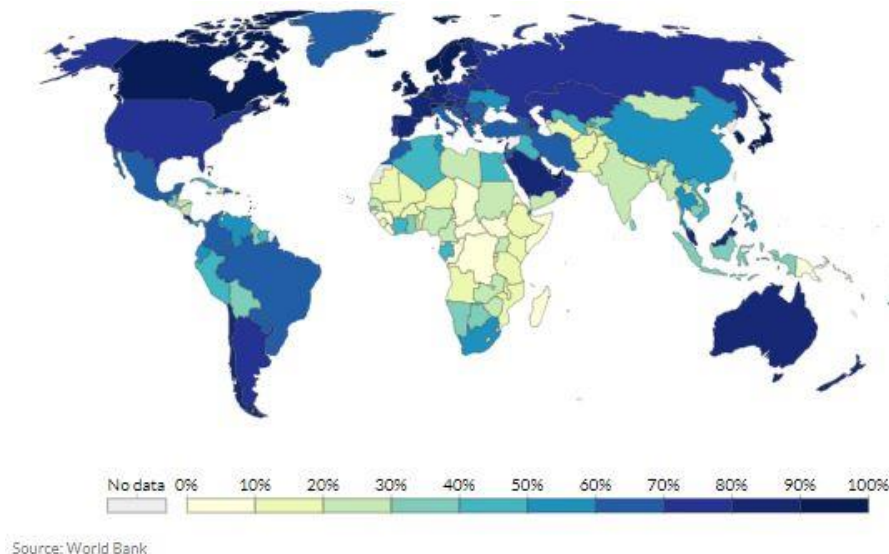


Figure 3: Share of the population using the Internet, 2017.

Even though the low results in Sub-Saharan Africa regarding the percentage of the population using the internet, it must be mentioned that this number has considerably improved in the last years. As we can see in the following graph, the late start of the African region can explain why the internet access is not as widespread as other parts of the world.

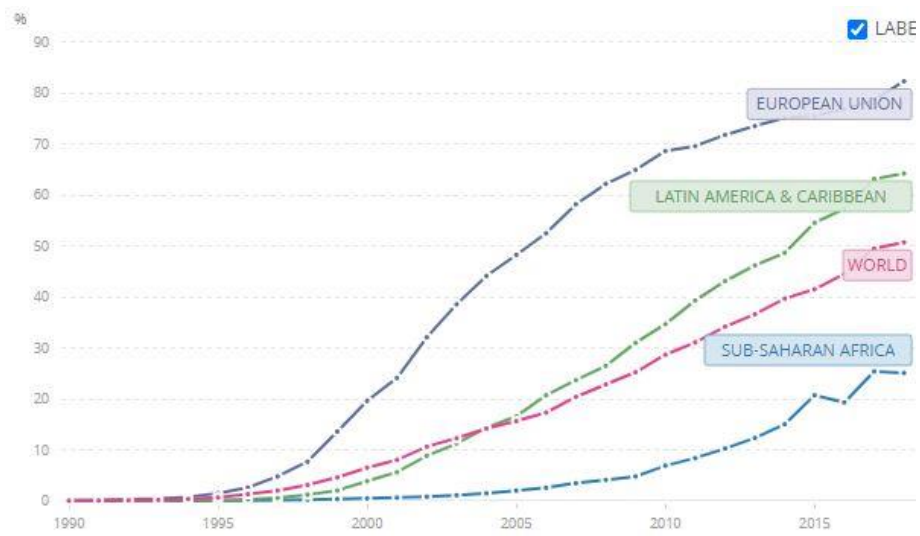


Figure 4: Individuals using the Internet (% of population) - Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America & Caribbean, European Union, World Bank 2019.

In terms of ICT infrastructure, the region is still behind the global standards, having barely a 36% internet penetration (UN, E-Government Survey 2020: Digital Governance in the Decade of Action for Sustainable Development, 2020). This reality has impeded the further development of digital innovation and transformation, which is accelerating at the moment but is not yet up to its potential.

The fact that African countries lack an extended internet access and, therefore, a digital platform for a fluid communication, can dissuade the idea of implementing participatory communication models in the continent. Yet, the complex reality has been changing over the last years and is currently transforming due to rapid growing telecommunication infrastructures and services. The World Bank referred to this phenomenon as the “African digital renaissance” (Bank, 2014), having Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa and Ghana as the leading countries.

There are numerous projects working on improving telecommunication services in Africa, from private entities to NGOs and governments globally. Some examples are the World Bank Innovation and Entrepreneurship Unit's work in the improvement of digital entrepreneurship like digital acceleration programs to support local empowerment through electronic technology in Africa (World Bank, 2016); the ADEN project, conducted by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs aims to improve the access to the internet in those African countries where their relationship is stronger. It aims to equip these nations with enough infrastructure for internet connection, to train professionals for the sustainability of the project, and to support local production of media content and IT platforms (ADEN, 2021); the "Free Wi-Fi for Tertiary Institutions Project", a Ghanaian government's initiative to provide free Wi-Fi to educational centers through kilometers of fibre optic (Presidency G. , 2020); Facebook's "2Africa" project, in which one of the largest submarine cables to provide internet in Africa is being built, aiming to administer three times the total network capacity of existent subsea cable (Facebook, 2020); or the Amos 17 Satellite project, a satellite designed by Spacecom specifically for African's particular and growing communications demand that aims to improve communication services.

4.3. E-government and e-participation in Sub-Saharan Africa

Every two years, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs issues an e-Government Survey. In these surveys we can find how the lack of ICT infrastructure and universal access to the internet has hampered the efforts to develop e-government and e-participation processes (UN, E-Government Survey 2020: Digital Governance in the Decade of Action for Sustainable Development, 2020).

These are some of the reasons why Africa, in terms of e-government, remains the least developed region.

In spite of that, it has significantly improved in the last four years, decreasing the number of low e-gov development index countries and increasing the middle and high states, as we can see in the graph below. In that sense, it is the region with the highest proportion of states that have changed into a higher category.

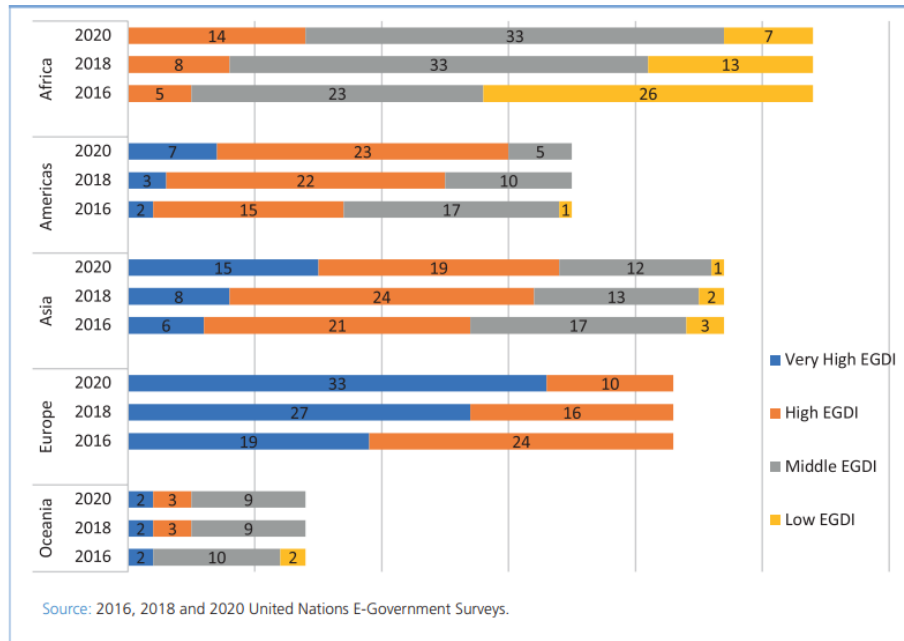


Figure 5: Regional distribution of countries by E-Government Development Index in 2016, 2018 and 2020

Many African countries have already integrated e-government tools, and some of them offer the possibility to interact and participate as to improve transparency, effectiveness and restore trust in the government. There are 17 countries offering on-line instruments for consultation, and only 9 that promote e-participation (UN, E-Government Survey 2020: Digital Governance in the Decade of Action for Sustainable Development, 2020).

As we have seen before, the acceleration of the digitalization of Africa is visible, and this affects the e-government and e-participation area of action. Since 2018, there has been an increase of the platforms that offer the possibility to participate and to receive suggestions/complaints, which leads us to think positively about the future of these electronic tools in Africa.

This improvement is a reflection of the efforts made by the states and the organizations that are involved in this digital transformation. The African Union has played a major role by enhanced the perception of policies African Union’s Agenda 2063 and with the objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that facilitate the creation or development of e-government and e-participation tools. African Union’s Agenda 2063 the

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has set out strategic objectives that are aligned and that aim to intensify the efforts dedicated to citizen participation through technological devices (AU, 2018). Further than that, the African Union (AU) aims to coordinate the implementation and the actions made by states, promoting cooperation and interoperability.

E-governance both affects and is affected by the Policy and Regulation Initiative for Digital Africa; the African Charter on Values and Principles of Public Service and Administration; the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance; and the African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection. All these frameworks set out the regional framework for the use of ICTs, the values expected in the system and the rights of the people connected to it.

In global terms, the United Nation's Department of Economic and Social Affairs is also supporting the implementation of the SDGs, focusing on the North-South and South-South cooperation for mutual benefits. There is a division dedicated uniquely to e-Government issues, named the United Nation's Department of Economic and Social Affairs Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government, where the objective is to achieve the SDGs through the development of ICT tools (UNDESA, 2021). Intensive training and technical assistance to public administration schools around Africa are two of the methods the institution makes use of to enrich the knowledge and awareness of electronic tools in the government.

However, the efforts made by the United Nations go beyond this. During the Coronavirus crisis, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data (GPSDD) have worked closely in a project related to sustainable development data to consolidate the African digital environment to confront the pandemic (UNECA, 2021).

There has been a high impact of e-government and e-participation tools during the Covid-19. Due to the inability or reduction of face-to-face interactions, these tools have contributed to the global health and safety measures. Not only has it helped to continue

the usual commitments, but also has improved the agility to provide information, recommendations, and resources regarding the pandemic. E-governance has acted as a key communication tool for the citizens around the world. The coronavirus crisis has also impacted these electronic instruments, accelerating digital solutions, as many people and organizations have seen themselves forced to use ICTs (information and communication technology) due to the situation.

5. Goal, research question and hypotheses

Growing media trends are easing the possibility to use the two-way communication model, enabling participatory communication. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to assume that the presence of media directly prompts to successful communication. In fact, some requisites must be accomplished for participatory communication to be effective. This leads to the question:

What are the key factors for success¹ of e-participation projects in Sub-Saharan Africa?

The specific objectives that will be studied include:

- Finding the elements that positively affect the establishment and development of e-participation projects.
- Analyzing these aspects, comparing the different case studies examined and researching academic papers on the topic.
- Evaluating e-participation in Sub-Saharan Africa

¹ Here, success is defined as a situation where all stakeholders are accomplishing their major goals.

6. Methodology

This study will use mixed methods in the analysis. The focus will be on e-participation projects in Sub-Saharan Africa. Furthermore, to allow us understand the African paradigm, comparatives and case studies from South Africa and Ghana will be conducted. Furthermore, other African and non-African countries like Uganda, Germany or Saudi Arabia will also be used in the study.

South Africa and Ghana are two of the countries with the best e-participation index scores according to the UN in Sub-Saharan Africa (UN, 2021). In other words, some of the most advanced Sub-Saharan states in the topic, and thus, the ones with the largest amount of data for analysis.

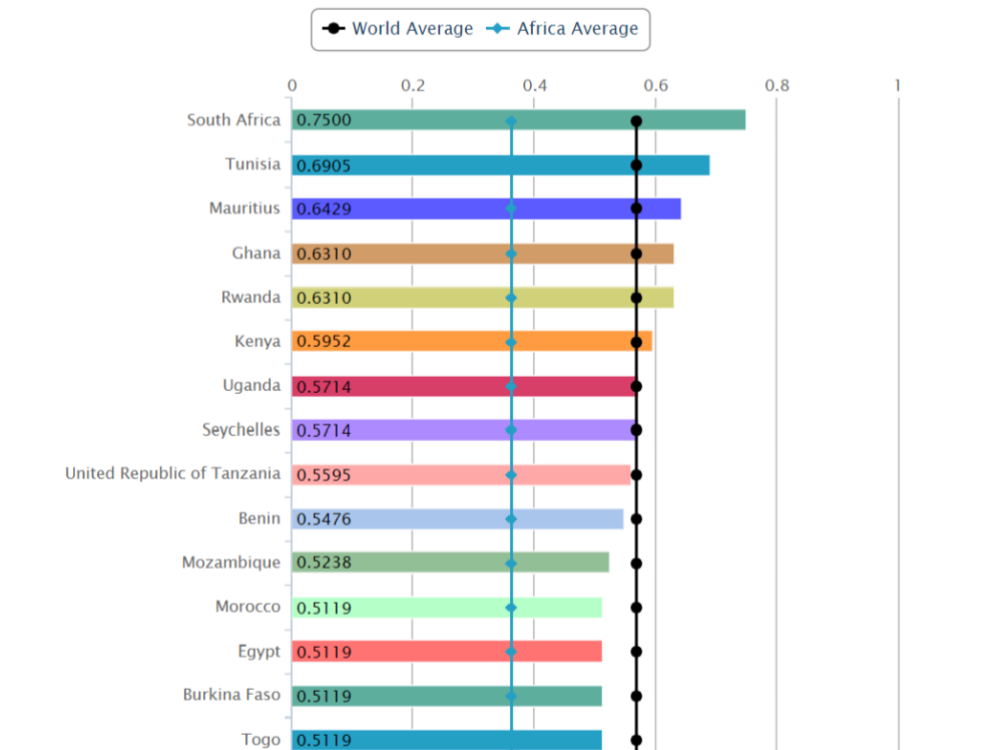


Figure 6: 2020 E-Participation Index

In order to carry out the study, both qualitative and quantitative approaches, together with case study research, will be useful to investigate this topic. The data will mostly be gathered from international organizations informs, academics' research and private entities/NGOs' reports.

The topics dealt with will relate to the channels of interaction, engagement with the citizenship, communication leadership, and degree of trust in the government - between others.

7. Analysis

Participatory communication in Sub-Saharan Africa has significantly improved in the last four years, developing governmental transparency and effectiveness, and even restoring trust in the institutions, as we have seen. Still, this region is the least developed one, urging for an improvement in the Sub-Saharan countries' e-participation activities and tools. This brings the opportunity to analyze the factors that contribute to a successful e-participation project.

For the purpose of this study, e-participation projects will be divided in three different stages in time, in accordance with their levels of maturity and trust: e-enabling, e-engaging and e-empowering. In order to achieve a successful e-participation project, it will be argued how essential it is to perform all three stages, assuring a complete and holistic approach. Through each stage, a set of different components towards the accomplishment of the phases will be exposed, relating them to the actual paradigm in the Sub-Saharan African countries.

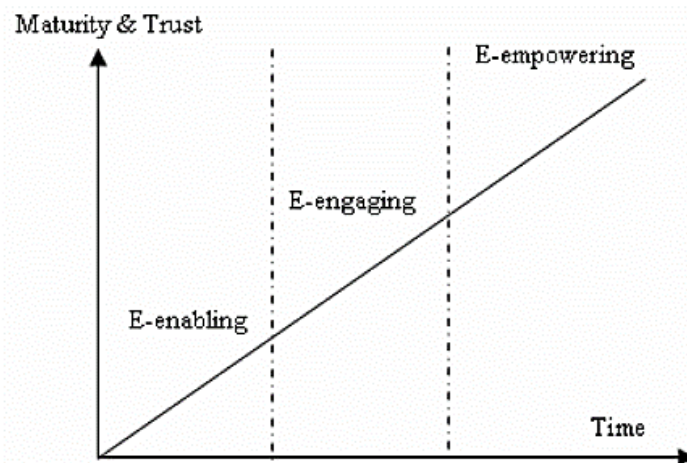
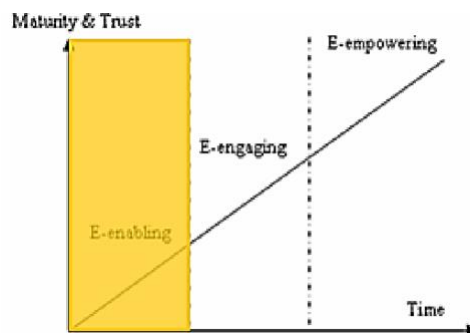


Figure 7: Integrated dimension of e-participation

7.1. E-enabling

E-enabling can be interpreted as the foundational elements that make feasible the communication, supplying the project with the necessary means.

This first step is decisive for the strategy to consolidate and base its structure. Without the e-enabler, neither the e-engaging nor the e-empowering stages would have enough mechanisms to take action, as they are based on this enabling framework. Thus, there are three main factors to take into consideration: ICT infrastructure, use of mobile phones and low literacy in ICT.



7.1.1. ICT Infrastructure

A key element for e-participation tools to work in Sub-Saharan Africa is the ICT infrastructure, as it is the platform in which the service is based on. E-government and therefore e-participation cannot exist without this connection. The ICT infrastructure relates to the computers, mobile phones, internet connection, websites, governmental platforms, etc. The existence of these enabling tools is necessary in order for the citizens to connect with their governments to give feedback and participate in the decision-making process.

The situation in Sub-Saharan Africa regarding this topic presents certain issues, as the lack of infrastructure hampers the evolution of e-participation. Yet, there is a generalized perception that better infrastructures would directly lead to an improvement on the

participation rates. In Ghana, 220 citizens were interviewed and asked about their viewpoint towards the relationship between infrastructure and e-participation in their country. A total of 81.3% of the respondents affirmed that they would “gladly patronize e-participation should there be a better internet infrastructure” (Kodua & Ofosu, 2020). These declarations demonstrate not only the necessity of technological foundations as a bridge towards citizen involvement, but also the willingness of Ghanaians to become part of the communications project.

Moreover, it is not only the existence of this network, but also its quality and accessibility. As much as it is evident that there needs to be an adequate infrastructure, unless it is efficient, it can create annoyance and even frustration, discouraging the user to utilize the digital tool. Focusing on South Africa’s case study, an example of success, the interviewed citizens affirmed that there was not any problem with the network, and that it had never impeded them from accessing the platform. It is easy to imagine that without the necessary ICT infrastructure, the project Lungisa would have not been as successful (Bennett, 2015).

In addition, the devices must be reachable, as in accessibility, to attain as much participation as possible. This aspect univocally relates to the current digital divide. This digital gap could make the most vulnerable population invisible due to their incapacity to engage in the on-line discussion. According to a study on the effects of the digital divide in e-participation development in UN countries, the most preoccupying values can be observed in the rural areas, where access to the internet is limited. Furthermore, the rates in the older population, usually marginalized from the newest technologies, do not seem to show a negative influence on the e-participation indexes. This is reasoned through the argument that countries with older average ages have a higher life expectancy, and thus are also associated with a higher development status (Pérez, Pontones, & Alfaro, 2019). Consequently, it is essential for governments to take into consideration the socio-economic and demographic data in order to conduct pertinent projects and policies to narrow the digital divide and further increase the numbers of on-line citizen participation.

There are several authors such as Shahjahan Bhuiyan, M. Steinbach, J. Sieweke or Stefan Süß that present ICT infrastructure as a necessary prerequisite for e-government and, specifically, e-participation (Bhuiyan, 2011) (Steinbach, Sieweke, & Süß, 2019).

7.1.2. Use of mobile phones

When referring to ICT infrastructures, there is a device that exponentially enhances e-participation: mobile phones, the tool that has revolutionized the accessibility to the internet. Although laptops and computers are also key tools to channel communication, mobile phones and smartphones can highly contribute to the e-participation process.

The fact that these devices are cheap and handy, makes them easier to access the governmental platforms. The communication model has a faster interactivity due to the ease for the receiver to connect. In addition, updates can be done in circumstances in which computers would not be possible, such as in bus rides or waiting rooms.

A study called “The Impact of Smartphones on E-Participation”, made by the University of Münster, highlighted how the usage of smartphones has attained higher participation of the citizens (Stieglitz & Brockmann). As we can see in the graph below, the majority of the surveyed people agree with the fact that smartphones have enhanced discussion and thus, participation.

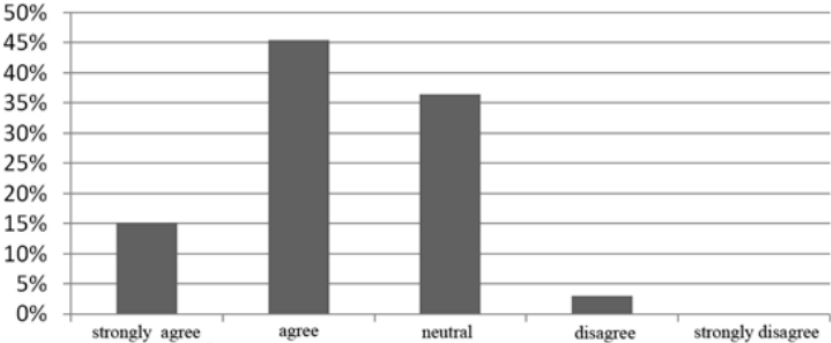


Figure 8: More discussion with citizens due to smartphones

The e-participation project in South Africa also recognizes the use of basic mobile technology as an important aspect for their own success. The study finds that South Africans see mobile phones as a useful tool for government-citizen interaction, because it is seen as more affordable, accessible, and pervasive.

Mobile phones connect people and platforms, and in a region where the use of active mobile phone subscriptions in Africa has expanded from 29% to 37% since 2018 (UN, E-Government Survey 2020: Digital Governance in the Decade of Action for Sustainable Development, 2020), phones are a key factor for further accessibility and greater engagement.

In Ghana, the exponential growth of access to mobile phones enables the country for further implementation of strategies towards e-participation (Kyere & Kumah, 2017). These devices have already been utilized in the past years to interconnect with the government, an example of it is the relatively wide use of this technology during electoral process, where politicians use mobile phones to mobilize their supporters (Kodua & Oforu, 2020), still, there are many factors that hamper the evolution of this participatory tool – as we will analyze in the next chapters.

7.1.3. Literacy in ICT

We cannot assume that access to ICT tools equals e-participation. In fact, low ICT literacy can hinder the process of engagement through the internet, as the lack of knowledge and ability to work with technology does not permit the correct employment of the tools.

The degree to which citizens can take part of the e-participation process is referred to as human capital. Human capital, according to Coff, is “the knowledge, skills, abilities embodied in individuals residing in a country which enable them to participate in governance and its decision-making process” (Coff, 2020). And it is, in fact, an important factor according to the United Nations, that points out three main elements that affect e-participation: information structure, governance and human capital (UN, 2010) In addition,

this idea has been reinforced by scholars from different epochs like Shultz or Goldin, who give great importance to the notion of human capital as a determinant of the participation demands of a country (Shultz, 1961; Goldin, 2014). Therefore, low ICT literacy leads to lack of motivation, meaning that citizens will not engage in the public discussion through media. Thus, evidence points out that literacy is an enabler for e-participation to develop.

Moreover, literacy in ICT is not clear-cut in terms of participating or not participating. It is a tool connected to the level of participation, as there is a relationship between the ability to use, share, and contribute to the online discussion, and the degree of involvement.

In the case of Ghana, 83.6% the interviewed people (54.8% strongly agree and 28.8% agree) subscribe with the fact that “low literacy in technology makes it difficult to participate in online discussions during policy making”. This same study also points out that the majority of the interviewed (39.7% agree and 33,3% strongly agree) admit that “my literacy in technology will influence e-participation” (Kodua & Ofosu, 2020). Going deeper in this issue, there is a desire from the young population of the nation to participate in decisions. The youth explains that “insufficient mechanisms for participation and even so the available traditional mechanisms do not offer them the opportunity to influence governmental policies” (Kyere & Kumah, 2017).

In contrast, South Africa has been involved in programs such as “Creating Opportunity for South Africa’s Youth” (COSY) project in partnership with Digify Africa, which aims to teach digital competences to young South Africans, focusing on the rural areas of the country (IOL, 2020). The efforts made towards closing the digital literacy divide represent a step towards prosperous e-participation projects.

This leads to the next question: are Africans willing to adapt to the digital transformation, and thus, to e-participation tools? The graph below shows the increasing curve of growth in internet usage in Africa, which goes accordingly with digital literacy. The comparison with the rest of the continents clearly portrays the contrasts and advances in each region, positioning Africa in an interesting rank. The impressive growth in the last twenty years

demonstrates the willingness for the digital transformation in Africa. These numbers also visualize the opportunity for new e-projects to take place in the region.

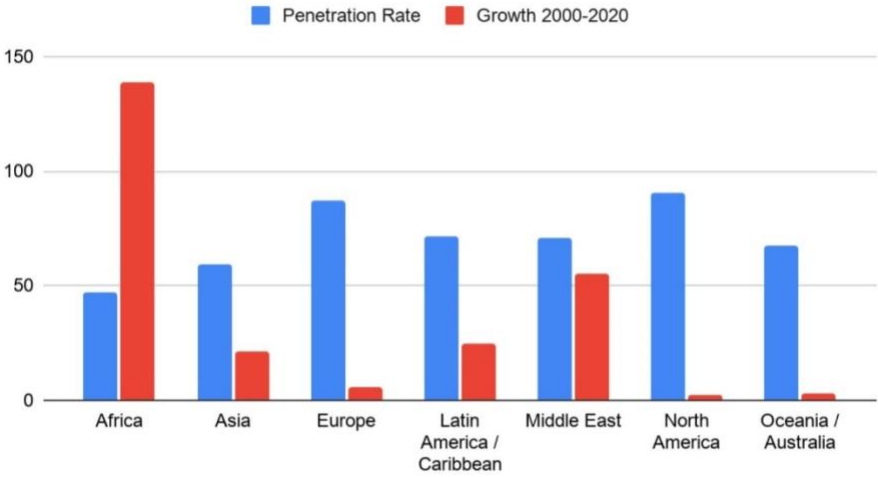
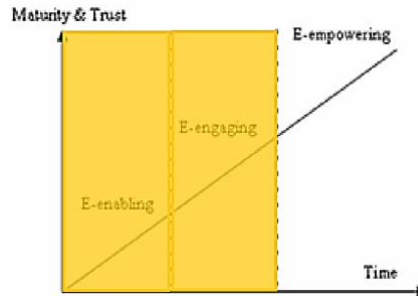


Figure 9: World Internet Usage and Population Statistics, 2020

Therefore, as we have seen in this section, ICT infrastructure, including the use of mobile phones, and literacy are key aspects for the success of e-participation process, and are a current growing trend in the region.

7.2. E-engaging

In order for an e-participation project to be successful, it seems obvious that participation must take place. For this to be accomplished, there are relevant aspects like community integration, intelligible and logical processes, along with marketing and advertising, that can enhance the engagement and, thus, the achievement of this participatory communication strategy.



Once there is an enabling framework, it is important to engage with the public (in this case, the citizens) to aim for the larger scope of awareness. The higher the participation, the higher the determination, and the more diversity of responses. Moreover, at this point, the disparities between the different perceptions from the distinct spheres of a nation’s society will become visible.

7.2.1. Community integration

Despite having the necessary ICT infrastructure and literacy, it is also vital for the program to accomplish generalized understanding and consciousness of the system. According to Aichholzer and Kubicek, getting involved with the general population is an evaluation criterion for prosperous participation projects (Kubicek & Aichholzer, 2016).

There is great significance to the integration of the different communities that conform a country as to extend awareness and receive input from various groups. Community integration means community inclusion in the decision-making process, democratizing the communication model and aiming to reach the totality of the citizenship.

When projects do not include this element in their strategy, it is highly noticeable, and it can either positively or negatively impact the project. In the Project Lungisa in South Africa, a noticeable lack of integration regarding the community of Khayelitsha hampered the efforts for effective communication. The reasons behind this are related to the Organization’s apathy towards the Khayelitsha, as they were not interested in working with them. Consequently, this aspect negatively influenced the work, since collaboration

between the governments and the communities is key to trustful relationships and the development of these kinds of projects (Bennett, 2015). Stakeholders in the project made allusion to the lack of inclusion and extensive use, highlighting the direct connection between the degree of inclusion and the success of an e-participation project.

Nevertheless, regardless of this project in particular, there are academics who argue the communities' capacity of integration. Theorists like Fiol, O'Connor or Anderson (Fiol & O'Connor, 2002; Anderson, 2010) discuss the sense of identity and belonging to a community, highlighting the argument that communities with a stronger feeling of unity are less likely to adopt new adjustments or changes. That is a reason why these communities are also less likely to share personal data, like exposed in the study "Community, Identity, and Agency in the Age of Big Social Data: A Place-based Study on Literacies, Perceptions, and Responses of Digital Engagement" (Hayman, 2020). This shows the need for further efforts if these communities are wanted to be taking part in the project.

Still, it is not always easy to apply more efforts or enlarge the financial resources dedicated to a specific communication project. In fact, a study conducted by the Media Foundation for West Africa about "Barriers to Citizens' Engagement & Participation in Governance in Ghana: The Critical Role of the Media" points out the willingness of the government to advance participatory governance, yet the lack of means and actions taken towards it. Apparently, it "remains on paper" (MFWA, 2019). Therefore, although there is consciousness of the issue, the results turn out to be insufficient due to the absence of actions.

Participatory communication, thus, implies both the senders (non-community members) and the receptors (community members) for "co-evolutionary change". As we will see in the e-empowering section, the presence of community and project leaders will be very relevant for the prosperity of these kinds of projects.

Community integration can be measured through the number of contributions made by the community members. This can be observed through quantifiable methods, counting the inputs. This can be an easy calculation, as electronic systems can make this count

automatically if a specified question regarding the geographical area or community is formulated. However, levels of awareness can be harder to measure due to the lack of information knowledge about the topic.

7.2.2. Intelligible and logical processes

In line with the inclusion, and favoring of the correct understanding of the tool, in order to attract participation and further engagement, it is important for the platforms to be intelligible. There are some main attributes to take into consideration: first of all, to keep the website relatively simple. Any new ICT platform must be clear and intuitive as to facilitate comprehension. As mentioned in the first section of this analysis, inefficient portals can create annoyance and even frustration, discouraging the user to utilize the digital tool. Secondly, it must show relevance. Through the observation of the interaction of the users with the platform, the popular elements can be enhanced, and the less used ones can be adjusted to become more pertinent and suitable. Finally, it is significant to create attractive platforms, as the most appealing the network is, the most engagement it can get (Wattman, Wunker, & Mohanlal, 2015).

In South Africa, the process to engage, for example, in the Coronavirus crisis response is accessible through the governmental website. In the bottom part of the page, the “feedback” button leads to the SA Government Online website feedback (<https://www.gov.za/sa-government-online-website-feedback>). As seen in Figure 8, this platform fulfills the requirements of being simple, relevant and fairly appealing.

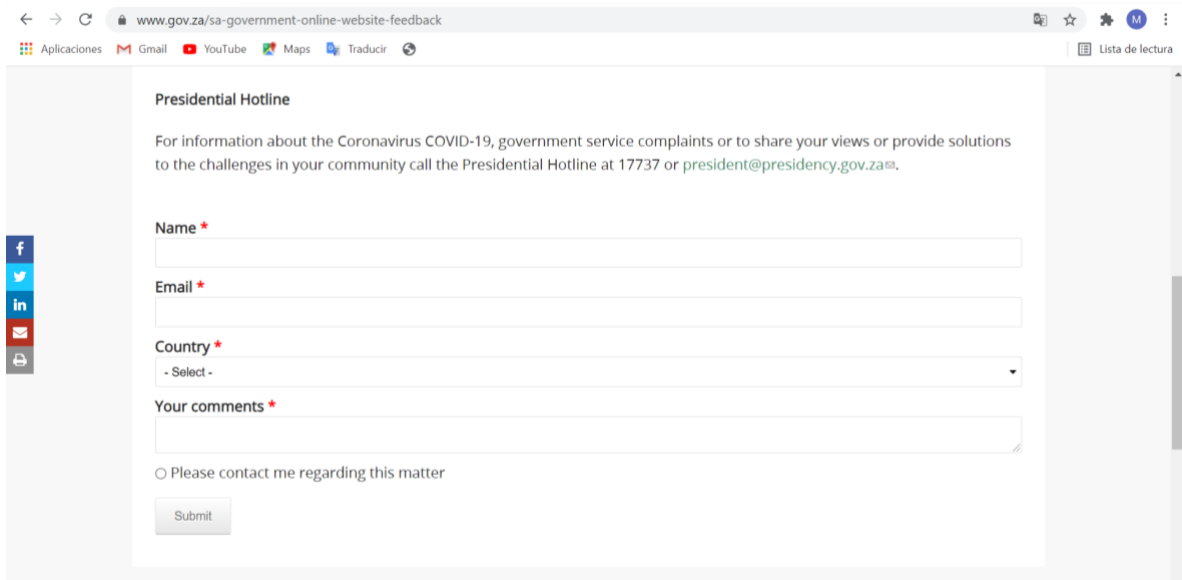


Figure 10: Feedback Website in South Africa

This process in Ghana is not as accessible. The website to provide feedback must be accessed through the Ghana Open Data Initiative (<https://data.gov.gh/feedback>). The portal works in a similar manner than in South Africa, yet there are two steps to add the feedback: first, a page to sort out the agency and the type of feedback, and later another one to provide the feedback through an e-mail user.

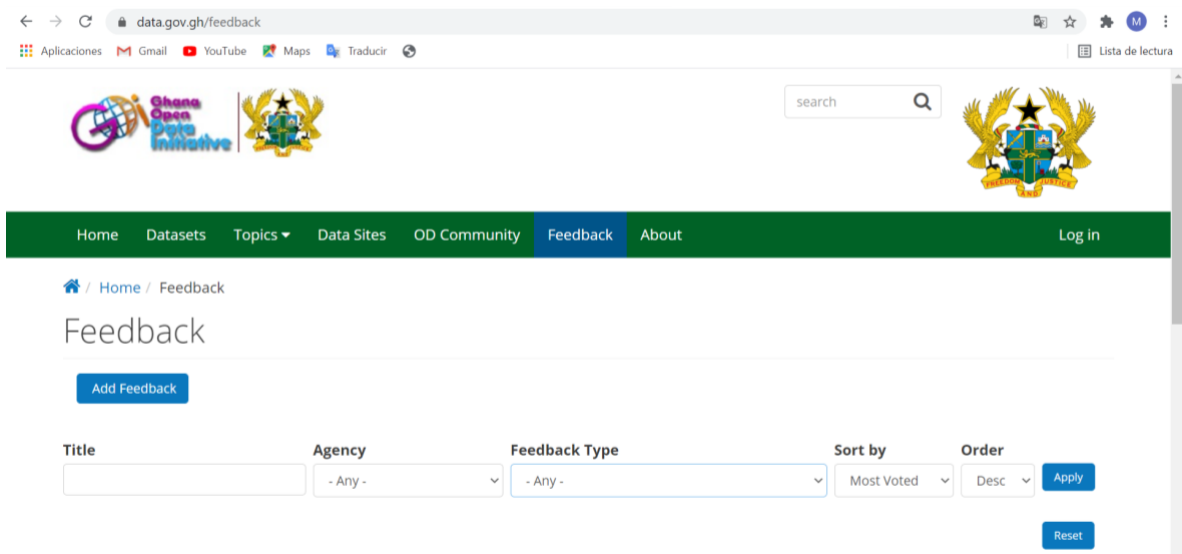


Figure 11: Feedback Website in Ghana

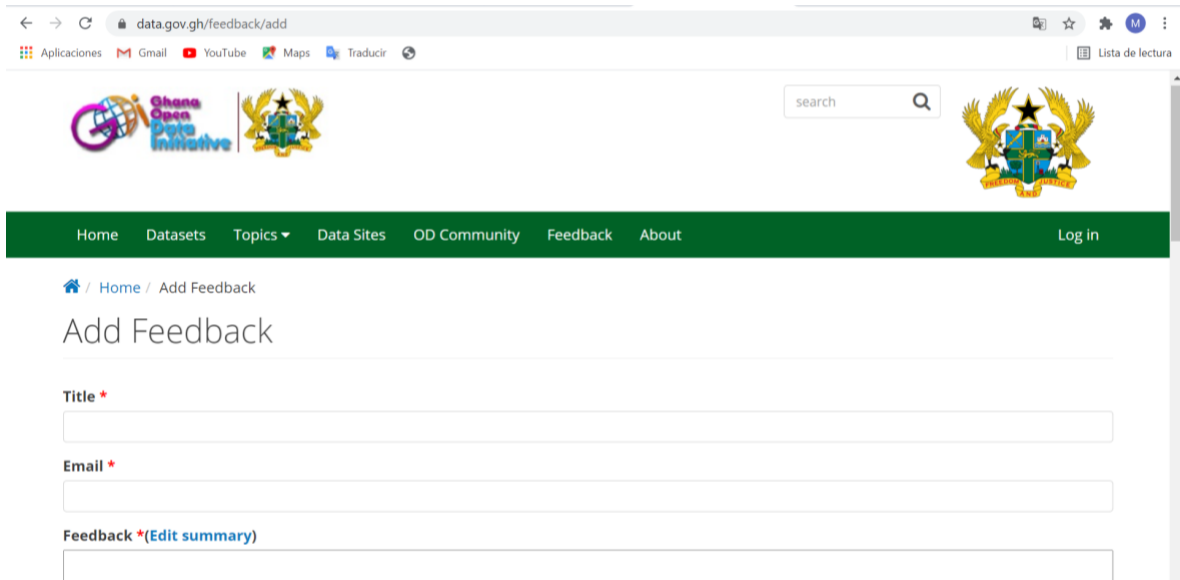


Figure 12: Feedback Website in Ghana

These are just examples coming from some of the most advanced Sub-Saharan states in terms of e-participation. Yet, it is important to take into consideration these portals when assessing the current situation.

7.2.3. Marketing and advertising

Marketing and advertising are two elements that can, together with the mentioned factors, assure a successful e-participation project. A marketing and advertising strategy makes the activity visible and enhances awareness in the digital participatory tool. Through promotion, there is a wider range of individuals that the project can reach.

E-participation services are only useful when the citizenship knows about them (Almarabeh & Abuali, 2010). In order to conduct this strategy, campaigns to promote the tool and to encourage its use are necessary, as much as a research to identify the target audience.

In Ghana, there is poor mass awareness of the e-governance project (Asare-Nuamah & Agyepong, 2016) and the mentioned authors urge that “mass awareness must be generated through promotion and marketing of e-governance initiatives and policies”. Moreover, the lack of involvement, for example, in UgandaWatch (a mobile participation project in

Uganda), directly relates to its poor visibility. The Ugandan citizens were unaware of this tool, thus did not interact with the platform (Hellström & Karefelt, 2012). Moreover, an e-government study conducted in rural India highly recommends campaigns to improve general knowledge about the activities taking place, and to construct an image on the public. This study highlights the fact that these campaigns were “vital for e-government to succeed” (Cecchini, 2004).

There are numerous ways of promoting a certain service, from print campaigns to viral media. In the case of e-participation, the online publicity could be the best answer, as to virtually connect with the public. A target public, overall message, specific objectives, quantifiable actions and evaluation practices should be part of the marketing and advertising section.

Moreover, as the graph below explains, there are different formats for this marketing and advertising feature that keep evolving as society does. Currently, it can be noticed that search advertising, along with video advertising are on the rise. These could be interesting to focus on, as they can be target-driven and very visual. Still, other formats such as social media or banner advertising must be taken into consideration.

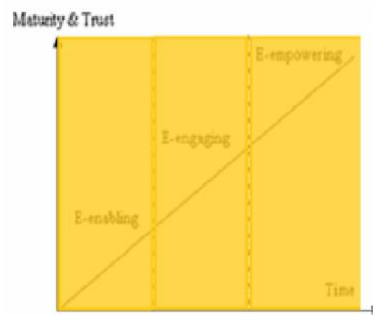


Figure 13: Digital advertising growth by format 2015-2021

7.3. E-empowering

The last stage for a successful e-participation strategy is related to the empowerment. Although e-participation projects are giving power to the citizens themselves through their inclusion in the decision-making process, there are some factors that can further contribute for the empowerment to take place. In fact, they are decisive in order to complete the maturity and trust process.

In this section, project leadership and citizen's trust in the government will be assessed, pointing out the circumstances in each of the two elements, and assessing what factors that can either favor or hamper the efforts towards participatory communication between the two parts. As a result, there will be higher levels of confidence concerning the project, thus, higher chances for it to be prosperous.



7.3.1. Project Leadership

Leadership is a success factor that affects any different fields, including communications. It is a way of directing and exemplifying to maximize efficiency and healthy productiveness. Through directional and inspirational leadership, e-participation projects can achieve its highest capacity.

The concept of leader, related to the human capital, can vary depending on the area of study/action. In the case of communications in developing countries and, more specifically, electronic participation, there is great importance on the links between the different stakeholders. For this reason, it is noticeably better to have two types of leaders involved:

the first type applies to a leader that is close to the local community where the project takes place. This person is respected and followed by the people, but most importantly understands their needs, desires, and ways to interact between each other and external actors. Secondly, a leader who is connected to the government and perfectly knows the project and its strategy of implementation, having a more technical role. The interaction between these leaders is crucial, as there is a convergence of the two “realities” or “worlds”. Again, there must be a differentiation between the presence of such leaders and the actual contact with them, being the second the only effective measure for this topic.

Scholars point out the importance of this factor, arguing that leadership affects e-government and e-participation success in developing countries (Fanie, 2012; Brown & Matavire, 2013).

For example, in the case of South Africa, we can observe the presence and encouragement of local leaders, but insufficient support from the political leaders. “It doesn't matter how good the plans that we come up with here are or how good the intentions at our level are. We will never get it through until the leaders at management and at political level are the ones driving the process” (ICT Manager, Workshop Transcripts) (Mawelal, Ocharall, & Twinomurinzill, 2017). Moreover, the respondents of the study affirmed that at least they had leaders in the municipalities who strengthen and reinforce the use of ICT in governance. Besides, low levels of contact with either the community leader or the governmental leader is an issue in Ghana, where the perception of the citizenship towards the receptivity of these leaders is low (MFWA, 2019).

The leadership in e-participation projects is largely beneficial because it can influence the citizens of the Sub-Saharan countries towards the usage of the instrument, improving the confidence towards it. Leaders give prestige and significance to the tool through exemplification, promoting The focus is mainly on the audience (citizenship) as they are the subjects to this process. Once the enabling factors and the engaging means are achieved, they must endure, hence leadership is of great importance.

7.3.2. Citizen's Trust in the Government

The objective of e-participation projects is to develop democratic principles and improve the functioning of the government through digital tools. However, citizen's views towards the government are another relevant factor. According to a study in "Trust and Risk in E-government Adoption", citizens' trust in the government can be defined as: "Individual perceptions on the integrity and the capability of the government to provide service and is always based on the individual formal experience with the government." (Belanger & Carter, 2008). Thus, the concept implies the expectations provided by the government and whether if they have raised up to the citizen's standards.

Therefore, the degree of confidence in a government greatly influences on the achievement of a prosperous project. When referring to e-participation, it is important to be aware of the motives behind the participation of the citizens in the process. Without a trustful relationship between the citizen and its government, there are high chances that the participation will not be as fruitful.

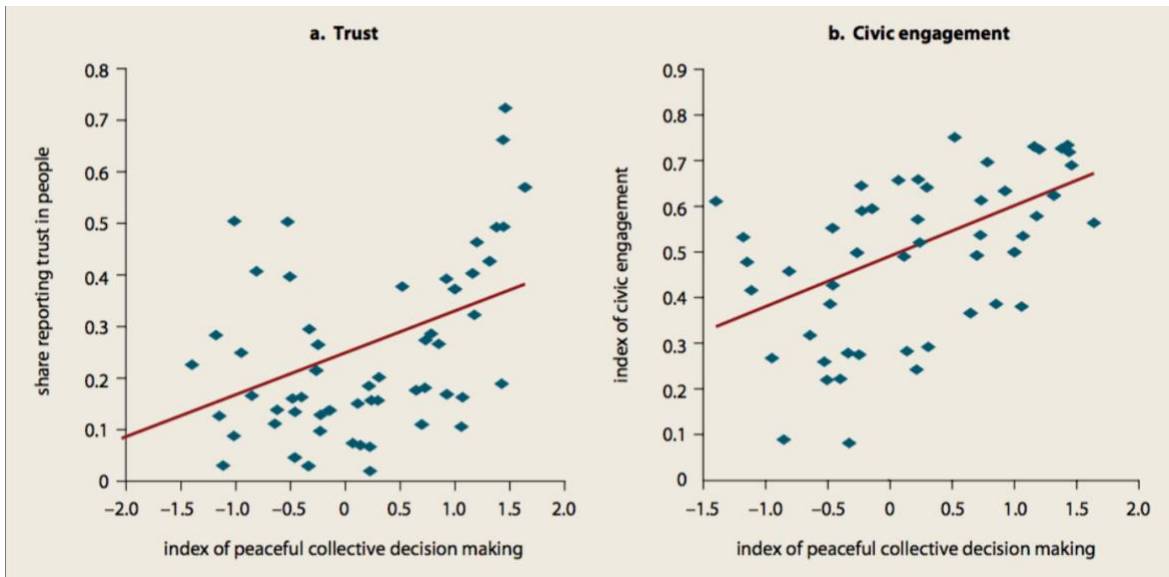


Figure 14: Indexes of trust and civil engagement in peaceful collective decision making

The levels of trust and civic engagement are directly related, as it can be observed in the graphic, meaning that an increased trust in the government's project leads to greater civic engagement, which is key for e-participation projects.

Again, we can observe how this element greatly affects Sub-Saharan nations. Taking South Africa as an example, the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation of the Republic of South Africa emphasizes on the current levels of confidence towards the government, which are stated to be low. The consequence of this is "confrontational climate and lost opportunities to harness the capacity of civil society to partner constructively with government to improve service delivery." (Presidency & DPME, 2013).

Nevertheless, the digital culture is an imperative in this issue. As stated by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in places where the digital culture is not yet developed, there is certain refusal and defiance to e-governance, reasoned through untruthful feelings towards the government institutions, thus lowering the chances of e-participation to happen and succeed (UNDP, 2009).

Still, it is also interesting to point out trust in the government not only as a prerequisite or factor for success, but also as a consequence of the electronic involvement. Building up platforms to interconnect the different actors for a common good can result in a higher feeling of faith, responsibility, and positiveness. This statement is backed up by Tolbert and Mossberger, two academics who observed that governments could improve the levels of confidence in the institutions by getting involved and engaging with the citizens (Tolbert & Mossberger, 2006). In other words, citizen participation in government increases the trust on the institutions through the strengthening of the links and improvement in communication methods.

This leads us to think about the perception of citizens to their governments shapes their intention to participate and engage on the public discussion, and thus, its success (Kodua & Oforu, 2020; Alharbi & Kang; Papadoloulou, Nikoladou, & Martakos, 2010).

8. Conclusion

E-participation in Sub-Saharan Africa is still in its infancy. Even though the situation has significantly evolved in the past years, there are certain factors that must be addressed in order to achieve higher levels of success.

This study has analyzed three consecutive stages towards a prosperous e-participation project: the first stage, e-enabling, creates a supportive framework in which the communication between the government and the citizens can take place. Regarding e-enabling, the aspects investigated involve ICT infrastructure, the use of mobile phones and literacy in ICT. Secondly, e-engaging manages to attract the target audience (citizens) and to promote this service. Here, the relevant components are community integration, intelligible and logical processes, along with marketing and advertising tools. Lastly, e-empowering enhances trust and commitment, making the project sustainable in time and improving the system by adding value to it. In terms of e-empowering, project leadership and citizen's trust in the government are the main features to consider.

This digital tool has been presented as a potential instrument to democratize the communication system through citizen participation. Hence, concluding that the collective management of a country, integrating the different perspectives and realities, results in more accurate and thoughtful decisions.

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