# E-GOVERNMENT FOR DEVELOPMENT:
## A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF ZIMBABWE'S INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY POLICY DOCUMENTS

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**ABSTRACT:** Traditionally, governments have been viewed as complex, large bureaucratic establishments with a set of information silos that erect barriers to the access of information and make the provision of services cumbersome and frustrating. However with the emergence of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), there is evidence of improvement in efficiency and effectiveness of internal administration within governments and the relocation of government services from government offices to locations closer to the citizens. This paper is motivated by the need to investigate an e-government phenomenon in a developing country context which is characterised by complex dynamics rooted in politics, economy and social setting. The paper has been scoped to explore the evolution of e-government in Zimbabwe as articulated in ICT policy documents. The policy documents are analysed through the lens of thematic analysis which leads to critical narrative analysis. The use of thematic analysis as a theoretical foundation and a methodological approach for analysing text contributes to a better understanding of government publications. This study has identified that all documents are silent on the political and economic reality in Zimbabwe which directly influences the implementation of capital projects. The policy documents also make no reference to other considerations as funding models and execution plans under a complex political, social and economic environment. As a result, government policy documents remained only as blueprints without any impact towards the implementation of e-government in Zimbabwe.

## 1.     INTRODUCTION
Governments throughout the world have initiated modernization programmes to achieve effective social outcomes towards improving service delivery to their constituencies. Traditionally, governments have been viewed as complex, large bureaucratic establishments with a set of information silos that erect barriers to the access of information and make the provision of services cumbersome and frustrating (Kumar et al., 2007). However with the emergence of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), it is possible to improve efficiency and effectiveness of internal administration within governments and to relocate government services from government offices to locations closer to the citizens (Gichoya, 2005). Through the deployment of ICTs, governments have managed to make the interaction between government and citizens (G2C), government and business enterprises (G2B) and government-to-government relationships (G2G) more friendly, convenient, transparent, and inexpensive. This paper recognises the diverse meanings of e-government by researchers and practitioners. The definitional variances exist in literature, but in this paper, e-government is defined as follows:

> "*E-government is the use of any information and communications technology (ICT) based initiative to connect government to citizens and business nationally and internationally; provide information to government employees; and to connect*

*government agencies together, in order to achieve higher levels of service delivery, internal processes and sharing of government information".*

E-government discourses have gained recognition across technology and public administration disciplines. The main domains under which e-government falls are computer science, information systems, public administration and political science (Heeks & Bailur, 2007). The two main domains which have received much attention from academic research are information systems and public administration (ibid). E-government in this research is studied within the information systems domain owing to the nature of the policy documents most of which exhibit emphasis on deploying technology to solving social issues. There is still however no overarching theory which can explicitly underpin the development and deployment of e-government. This explains that e-government, as a discipline of research is still in its infancy.

The benefit realisation from e-government has triggered a rush by governments around the world to transform government business through technology. While this paper acknowledges findings by several scholars that e-government implementations in developing countries is problematic (Chigona et al., 2010; Ndou, 2004; Heeks, 2003; Dada, 2006), it argues that significant strides made by Africa towards e-government development are worth documenting and as such should attract scholarly consideration. Burke (2012) contends that despite many challenges rooted in colonial history, fragmentation of their polity and economy as well as social diversity, African countries are at varying stages of e-government development. This study argues therefore that the deliberate efforts made by many national administrations in Africa to implement e-government as evidenced by e-government policies and e-readiness programmes, call for scholarly attention.

Many developing countries, especially those in southern Africa, have similar characteristics. However, Zimbabwe has been selected for this study because of two factors. Firstly, the political and economic challenges faced by Zimbabwe since year 2000 were unique. This period was characterised by severe hard-currency shortage that led to hyperinflation and chronic shortages in imported fuel and consumer goods. Referring to the year 2008 which marked the climax of the challenges, Mlambo and Raftopoulos (2010) summed the situation with the following:

*"The Zimbabwean economy had undergone a veritable meltdown, with all indicators signifying a country in severe distress. For instance, inflation rates were estimated in percentages of hundreds of millions, while the country's currency, now denominated in quintillions, becoming virtually worthless".*

The uniqueness of the challenges faced by Zimbabwe also lies in the loss in human capital. Professional Zimbabweans who migrated into South Africa, Botswana, the UK, US, Australia, New Zealand, etc are estimated to be over 3 million.

Secondly, there is evidence that the Government of Zimbabwe is fully aware of the critical role that science and technology play in socio-economic development. It is one of the few countries with a stand-alone government ministry of ICT. Since 1999, the government has been conducting research on the possibilities of harnessing ICTs for development. This is clearly demonstrated by the e-government policy documents which were created over the years. It however remains unclear if the ICT and e-government policies address the peculiarities of social and economic needs of Zimbabweans in the context of political and economic challenges obtaining in the country since the turn of the century. Under this background, the critical question addressed in this paper is:

> *What do government policy documents seek to achieve towards Zimbabwe's intentions to implement e-government?*

The paper is organised as follows: the next section presents the methodology adopted, followed by a section on the description of the documents under study. Thematic analysis of the ICT policy documents is presented in the next section leading to a critical narrative analysis of the same in the following section before the paper ends with a summary and conclusion.

## 2.    METHODOLOGY

This paper adopts qualitative document study and analysis. According to Henning et al. (2002), through qualitative enquiry, a researcher wants to understand and to explain in argument, by using data from the evidence and literature, what the phenomenon is about. A document study approach is an analysis of any written material which contains information of the phenomenon being studied. Documents are classified under personal and official documents. Personal documents include diaries, autobiographies, personal letters, verbal communications, photographs, video recordings etc. Official documents are more formal and structured and are maintained by large organisations such as governmental institutions.

The documents which were studied in this enquiry are government policy documents that are made available in the public domain. The approach of studying government policy documents has been selected because the documents provide a rich picture about government's intentions concerning e-government deployment. This study considers only those policy documents which were compiled to address the Zimbabwe government's modernisation agenda through the use and deployment of ICTs. Some of the documents that provided primary data in this paper were available at the former ministry of Science and Technology Development offices in Zimbabwe while others were obtained from the Ministry of ICT.

### 2.1    Data Analysis

Textual data presented in policy documents were analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Braun and Clarke (2006:82), 'A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set.' In analysing these documents, this study interrogates the data with the aim of answering the question which was raised in Section 1.

Thematic analysis can be an essentialist or realist method on one hand, reporting experiences, meanings and the reality of participants, or it can be a constructionist method on another, examining the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences, etc have on a range of discourses operating within society (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It can also be a 'contextualist' method, with a free-play between essentialism and constructionism, and characterised by theories such as critical realism (Willig, 1999). According to Ryan and Bernard (2003), themes come both from the data (an inductive approach) and from the investigator's prior theoretical understanding of the phenomenon under study (a priori approach). In a priori approach, themes come from the characteristics of the phenomenon being studied as understood by the researcher. A researcher's values, theoretical orientations, and personal experiences can be sources of themes in a priori approach (Bulmer 1979; Strauss 1987; Maxwell 1996). In this study, a priori approach was used based on dominant narratives found in information systems literature. In information systems, a system is

designed for specific purpose(s) and it is from this background that themes were discovered from textual data contained in government policy documents.

## 3.    DESCRIPTION OF POLICY DOCUMENTS
This section describes the dominant ICT policy documents which are the objects of the study. These are the Strategic Plan (2010), the National ICT Policy Framework (2006), National e-Readiness Survey Report (2005) and a cluster of other policies as explained in sub-section 3.4.

### 3.1    Strategic Plan (2010)
Termed the 'visionary Strategic Plan of the Ministry of ICT', was crafted to provide a roadmap of e-government implantation. The action plans contained in the document were geared toward operations, procedures, and processes. Using the ABCDE model (Figure 1), the strategic plan attempted to answer critical questions: where are we? Where do we want to be? How will we do it? How are we doing? A baseline was created from the ICT Ministry's organizational profile and inputs solicited through workshops from various key stakeholders from the ICT sector in Zimbabwe. However, these are generic questions which do not address the specifics of a politically polarised context as Zimbabwe. The success of the plans therefore hangs in the balance as the gap between paper-based plans and their practical implementations remains wide.
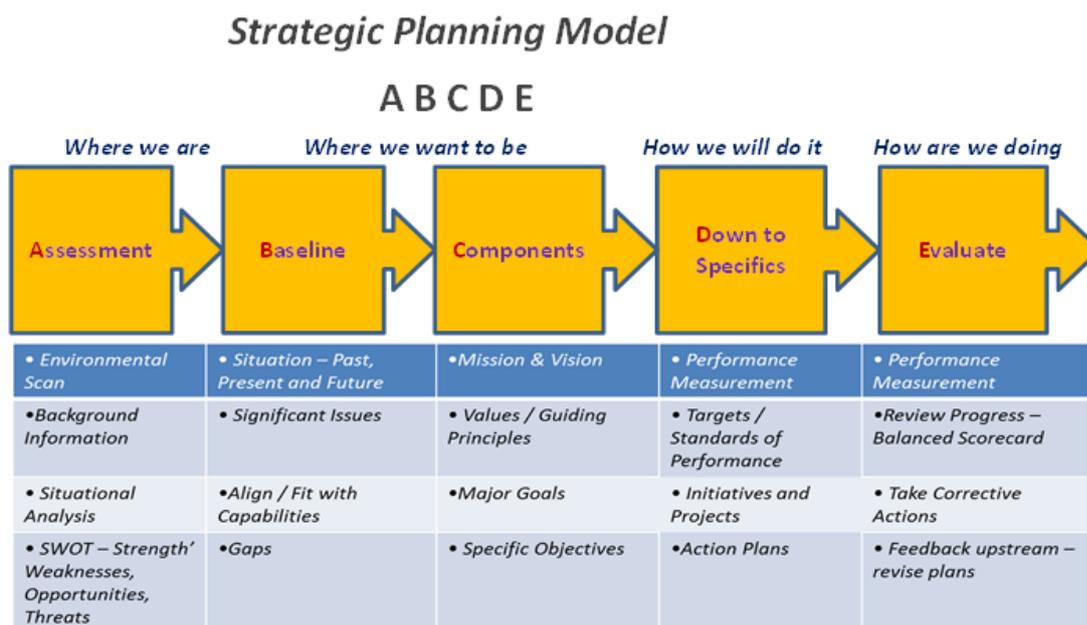


**Figure 1: The ABCDE Strategic Planning Model (Source: MICT, 2011)**

### 3.2    National ICT Policy Framework (2006)
A National ICT Policy Framework was developed in Zimbabwe in 2006 whose purpose was the requisite guidance and direction to the formulation and implementation of ICT strategies and programmes in and across all sectors of the economy. It was crafted under the following vision: *"to transform Zimbabwe into a knowledge-based society by the year 2020",* and the mission statement: *"to accelerate the development and application of ICTs in support of sustainable socio-economic growth and development in Zimbabwe".* The objectives of the National ICTs Policy Framework were:
   (i)        To ensure provision and maintenance of infrastructural facilities necessary for ICTs development,

(ii)      To promote systematic, relevant and sustainable development of ICTs,
(iii)     To embark on extensive educational and training programmes to provide adequate supply of qualified ICTs personnel and knowledge workers in all sectors,
(iv)     To establish institutional mechanisms and procedures for determining sectoral application priorities and
(v)      To encourage the development and use of, and ensure equitable access to benefits offered by ICTs across gender, youths, the disabled and the elderly (National ICT Policy Framework, 2006).

It is the research's observation that this well-documented ICT Policy Framework could be a significant starting point towards coordinated efforts at adopting e-government. The framework, together with the e-readiness survey, informed the construction of the strategic plan.

### 3.3      National e-Readiness Survey Report (2005)

The Government of Zimbabwe in conjunction with the National Economic Consultative Forum (NECF) and with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) commissioned an e-Readiness Survey whose purpose was to assess the country's readiness to become a knowledge society. The National e-Readiness Survey indicated that there was a lot of work to be done in terms of preparing Zimbabwe for e-business, for out of a score of 4, the country scored only 1.4 (National e-Readiness Survey, 2005). With respect to e-Government, the following were the findings of the e-Readiness Survey:

(i)      Government possesses an immense potential for e-Government through its wide area network and application systems such as SAP software, civil service payroll, national registration system and pensions processing;
(ii)     most of the online communication is G2B and G2C, but there is no citizen-to-government (C2G) online communication;
(iii)    The institutional mechanisms for ICT were not well-defined and coordinated and
(iv)    there was no integrated government policy framework for the development of e-Government.

The findings indicate some progress on ICT-based efforts by the government but in an uncoordinated manner due to the absence of an all-embracing ICT strategy.

### 3.4      Other Policies and Programmes

The Zimbabwe Government has established various policies and programmes over the years, suggesting that there is willingness by the government to adopt ICTs as drivers of the knowledge economy. As early as 1999, the Nziramasanga Education Commission Report recommended the introduction and mainstreaming of computer-based teaching and learning in the pedagogy of the Zimbabwe's education system - schools, colleges, universities and other institutions of higher learning (National ICT PolicyFramework, 2006). Three years later, the Science and Technology Policy (2002) was launched. It recognised the ICT sector as a key enabler of national development and accordingly directed that Zimbabwe develop a framework to guide its development and use (National ICT Policy Framework, 2006). Following the Science and Technology Policy was the National Economic Recovery Programme (NERP) (2004 – 2006) in 2003 which was launched by the President of Zimbabwe, R G Mugabe. NERP's thrust was the potential of science and technology in general and ICTs in particular to foster national economic competitiveness and in the process increase export market penetrability. The Industrialisation Policy of 2004 recognised and

advocated for the development and use of ICTs in the manufacturing sector in general and to undergird the national export strategy in particular. ICTs are identified as indispensable in effectively marketing industrial products both on the domestic and export markets (National ICT Policy Framework, 2006). Of importance is to underscore that Zimbabwe is a signatory to the WSIS Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action (2003) which strongly recommended the adoption and utilisation of ICTs to meet the agreed developmental goals. The WSIS in Tunis (2005) made particular reference to speed development of ICTs in order for Africa to participate fully in global markets. Economic development and growth being the locus of these policies and programmes, the Zimbabwe Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of 2005 recognised the role of ICTs as tools that add value and contribute significantly to the achievement of the MDGs by 2015 (National ICT Policy Framework, 2006). After the formation of the inclusive government (GNU), a socio-economic blueprint named Short Term Emergency Recovery Plan (STERP), was produced to ensure political stability and good governance, social protection and the promotion of macro-economic stabilisation. Among other reforms, STERP mentions a new ICT Bill to reform the telecommunication sector along the lines of the SADC model. Table 1 indicates the summary of the policy documents.

## Table 1: Policy Documents Summary.

| Policy | Brief Description | Year Implemented |
|---|---|---|
| Strategic Plan | To provide a roadmap leading to transforming Zimbabwe into an ICT hub with a vibrant sustained economic structure. | 2010 |
| Short Term Emergency Recovery Plan (STERP) | A socio-economic blue-print which recommends the introduction of a bill to reform the telecommunication sector along the lines of the SADC model | 2009 |
| National ICT Policy Framework | To provide guidelines for national ICT implementations | 2006 |
| National e-Readiness Survey | To assess the degree of the country's e-Readiness towards becoming an information society | 2005 |
| Zimbabwe Millennium Developed Goals (MDGs) | A report recognising ICT as a player in meeting UN's MDGs | 2005 |
| National Economic Recovery Programme (NERP) | Economic Turnaround Strategy using Science and Technology | 2004-2006 |
| Industrialisation Policy | To embrace ICTs in the manufacturing sector to boost export | 2004 |
| WSIS Declaration and Plan of Action | Recommends that governments create policy environments that facilitate the development and utilisation of ICTs | 2003 |
| Science and Technology Policy | To promote and harness Science and Technology for national development | 2002 |
| Nziramasanga Education Commission Report | Recommended the introduction of ICT teaching and learning in schools | 1999 |

Thematic analysis and narrative critical analysis of the above documents is discussed in the next section.

## 4.   THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE ICT POLICY DOCUMENTS

Table 2 shows the identified themes and their description. These themes were identified through a priori approach to theme identification and in Table 3, they were mapped to the underlying objectives of individual policy documents. The themes, technology, environment, organisation and people, are often the focus in information systems and computer science.

**Table 2: Policy Documents' Dominant Themes.**

| Theme | Description | Locus |
|---|---|---|
| Technology | The focus is on IT infrastructure, availability and compatibility | Economic Development |
| Environment | The focus is on national policies, digital divide and locating Zimbabwe within the broader global economy | Economic Development |
| Organisation | The focus of this theme is around organizational processes that should be transformed. | Economic Development |
| People | The focus is around relationships between citizens and government as well as skills transfer and ICT education. | Economic Development |

Table 2 also shows what has been identified in this study as *Locus.* The locus is the basis upon which all themes are clustered. This study identifies one specific locus of all the above themes as the fostering of *economic development* through e-government initiatives in Zimbabwe. In as much as there is evidence from the OECD countries that ICTs facilitate economic growth and development, principally by increasing productivity (OECD, 2005), the same outcome can be achieved in developing countries. All the e-government policies address the economic development locus at both macro and micro levels. According to Ochara (2009), the intent of e-government at the macro perspective is closely linked with larger globalisation concerns of citizen empowerment, gender empowerment, gender equity, achievement of universal access goals and more participatory governance.

**Technology theme:** includes the internal and external technologies that are relevant to the organization (Tornatzky & Fleischer, 1990) be it appropriate to provide services or to manufacture products. As stated by Tan (2010) the technology experience includes hardware and processes, software and hardware connected to the organization.

**Environmental theme:** is the arena in which the organisation conducts and influences its consumers. According to Ebrahim et al. (2004), one of the primary reasons for e-government adoption is that organisations could be driven towards it by the actions of competitors, as well as, establishes a connection with other organisations for better collaboration and the expectations of citizens and business. Recognition is placed on relationships and interactions beyond boundaries, among stakeholders and consumers of government services. Many empirical studies recognized competitive pressure as an adoption driver. Tornartzky and Fleisher (1990), Tan (2010) and Lippert and Govindarajulu (2011) focused on environmental scope and composition of industry, technology support infrastructure, the economy and the regulatory framework as external environmental factors critical to the adoption of innovations in organizations.

**Organisational theme:** comprises the characteristics and resources of the firm, including the area, degree of centralization, degree of formalization, managerial structure, human resources, amount of slack resources and relations in the organization (Tornatzky & Fleischer, 1990; Tan, 2010). To determine the organization's readiness to adapt technological innovations, Tan (2010) further asserted that cost, values and competences contribute to the way innovations are adopted as part of the organization context. Perceived organizational composition can be related to the environmental setting where the organization is operating.

**People theme:** comprises all aspects related to use of technology, education and skills transfer. People are divided into two broad categories: those responsible for designing, developing, building, maintaining and administering e-government applications and those who use the applications. Users are consumers of e-government services and they comprise internal and external users. Internal users are government employees who utilize the e-services to improve internal workings of government. External users are citizens, businesses and stakeholders that include other national administrations, statutory bodies nationally and internationally, etc.

Table 3 shows the mapping of themes according to key text from policy documents. The key text shown in the 'Text Extract' column shows the actual text that underpins the focus of each policy document. In some cases, the text is the aim of the policy document and in others the objectives have been extracted. In all cases therefore, the extracted text is the foundation upon which a specific policy document was developed. The 'Analysis of Text' column indicates how each policy document is related to the locus of economic development. Based on the analysis of text, the 'Theme' column shows the theme to which each document belongs.

**Table 3: Mapping of Themes to Policy Documents**

| Policy Document | Text Extract | Analysis of Text | Theme (s) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Strategic Plan | This visionary Strategic Plan … guides and consolidates the priorities to transform Zimbabwe into a knowledge society, and pulls the entire nation around a single game plan for execution. Through this document the nation of Zimbabwe is able to solve major developmental issues at a macro level, address critical performance issues, communicate the quick wins, short, medium and long term strategies whilst creating the right balance with respect to implementation approaches and options. | Economic development is envisaged through e-government's abilities to foster relationships with stakeholders. | Environment |
| National ICT Policy Framework | To ensure provision and maintenance of infrastructural facilities necessary for ICTs development….promotion of | ICT infrastructures are the bedrock for any e-government | Technology |

| | systematic, relevant and sustainable development of ICTs | implementation. | |
|---|---|---|---|
| National e-Readiness Survey | The absence of a coherent ICT policy invariably inhibits coordination, harmonization, full utilization of the existing infrastructure and its capacity, and initiatives to implement ICTs by various sectors of the economy. | Technological determinism philosophy which relates development to deployment and use of technology. | Technology |
| Science and Technology Policy | Like many developing countries, Zimbabwe needs to fast-track or leapfrog its Science and Technology development in order to enhance its competitiveness in this highly globalized environment. | Science and Technology is perceived as drivers of economic growth and development through competitiveness. | Organisation |
| Nziramasanga Education Commission Report | .. introduction and mainstreaming of computer-based teaching and learning in the pedagogy of schools, colleges and institutions of higher learning | The integration of ICTs in curriculum at all levels of education. | People |

## 5.    CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE POLICY DOCUMENTS

The unique issues of information technology research and development in developing countries have been discussed in several publications (e.g. Surana et al., 1998, Tedre et al., 2011). This study has identified two broad categories which are unique to the context of the research but remain largely unaddressed by the policy documents. The following subsections present a critique of the documents under the two categories, political and economic realism as well as technical issues.

### 5.1    Political and Economic Realism

The first observation this study makes in all documents is that they raise issues which are generic in literature that deals with development and technology in developing countries. While the Strategic Plan is comprehensive in terms of the roadmap, it is not vocal in terms of addressing the uniqueness of Zimbabwe especially on its economic and political dynamism. There are complex institutional issues which have to be overcome before any meaningful ICT project can become sustainable. Common bureaucratic processes in developing countries are exacerbated in Zimbabwe by clear political motivations that obtained for five years under the Government of National Unity (GNU) which was born in 2008. While the strategic plan was created during the period of political instability, it remained silent on how e-government projects could be implemented under such political environment. Evidence of the political competition came to the fore when there was confusion as to under which ministry the mobile operators fell between the ministry of ICT and the ministry of Information. Under the GNU, the two ministries were controlled by opposing political parties which ironically were under one government.

The Strategic Plan and the National ICT Policy Framework were adopted at a time when Zimbabwe had already been locked in political and economic despair, but they or any other ICT policy ignores these complex dynamics. It would have been expected of any policy

debate to address a plan of ICT diffusion under such levels of political and economic instability as well as extreme cycles of poverty and diseases.

　　　A factor that led to failure of the programme was its political agenda (Mhlanga, 2006) in the political chaos that proceeded by the turn of the century. There was political control on the Rural Electrification Programme which however faced a natural death due to shortage of resources. In the absence of electricity, rolling out ICT resources and programmes was out of the question. Therefore, professionals like teachers, farmers and nurses who are deployed to work in remote areas cannot access e-services like the internet or even basic email despite having elementary literacy to use the services.

　　　While the Strategic Plan, the e-readiness survey (2005) and the National ICT Policy Framework (2006) strongly emphasise the need to close the digital divide, there is no action plan on executing this agenda. According to Mhlanga (2006), lack of action plans exposes the government to the risk of giving their critics an opportunity to regard these policies as political rhetoric since the mechanisms used in the e-readiness survey and subsequent compilation of the policy framework are a preserve of those in power. The rural electrification programme has since been abandoned by the government, making it impossible to ever consider ICT diffusion in non-electrified and marginalized areas. It follows therefore that while the National ICT Policy Framework (2006) includes references to ICTs in education and the Nziramasanga Education Commission Report (1999) strongly recommending ICT-based education, no meaningful ICT education programmes can be implemented without electricity. Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) initiated ICT education programmes were also unsuccessful due to lack of supporting infrastructures and utilities like electricity in remote areas. The Kubatana Trust of Zimbabwe, which includes an NGO network organisation called the NGO Network Alliance Project (NNAP), was established to strengthen the use of e-mail and Internet among Zimbabwean NGOs and civil society organisations and to provide human rights and civic education. Initially Kubatana had a network of 240 NGOs and community service organisations which were involved in its lobbying and advocacy campaigns. Many of these NGOs were de-registered and banned from operating in Zimbabwe as they were accused by the government of interfering in political affairs. The effectiveness and thrust of Kubatana was then terribly dented and this in turn reduced the impact and success originally envisaged. World Links Zimbabwe which is part of the international network of World Links organisations which historically has been a pioneer in the promotion of education through ICTs opened its doors to Zimbabwe in 1999 but has realized very few of its dreams because of the adverse political environment.

## 5.2　　Technological Determinism

Technology has been identified as a dominant theme in Table 3. According to Ndou (2004), the tendency of e-government is to focus on the use of technology towards the improvement of government and the provision of services and information through the government. This approach means that basic human needs and capabilities are rarely ever explicitly addressed (Madon, 2005), and the assumption often made is that people's well-being will be achieved if there is an improvement first in the delivery of government services (Macueve, 2008). Mhlanga (2006) makes an observation that the e-readiness survey promotes technological determinism at the expense of social constructivism. An analysis of other initiatives like the National ICT Policy Framework (2006) and other policies and programmes points to the same misconception of technological determinism. Technological determinism is a technology-led theory of social change whose view is that:

"*Particular technical developments, communications technologies or media, or, most broadly, technology in general are the sole or prime antecedent causes of changes in society,*

*and technology is seen as the fundamental condition underlying the pattern of social organization"* (Chandler, 1995).

From this explanation, we can conclude therefore that the technological deterministic view of ICT diffusion asserts that ICTs are incrementally and fundamentally changing the working, social and personal lives of people. This claim underscores that availing ICTs to a society then becomes a panacea for development. The United Nations World Public Sector (UNWPS) Report (2003), operating on the premise of technological determinism, reports that the potential of e-government as a development tool for all citizens hinges upon three prerequisites which are (i) a minimum threshold level of technological infrastructure (ii) human capital and (iii) e-connectivity. Simply put, e-government readiness strategies and programmes will be able to be effective and include all people only if, at the very minimum, all have functional literacy and education, which includes knowledge of computer and Internet use; all are connected to a computer; and all have access to the Internet (UNWPS, 2003). Yet, to say that society should avail itself of the most modern technologies to solve problems is not a practical reality in Zimbabwe.

On this basis, Mhlanga (2006) emphasises the need to embrace social constructivism rather than technological determinism. Social constructivism is a theory of knowledge that consider how social phenomena develop in particular social contexts. It involves looking at the ways social phenomena are created, institutionalised, and made into tradition by humans (Casey, 2007). In this rergard, Mhlanga (2006) argues that ICTs should be harnessed for structural poverty reduction as well providing social services. The National ICT Policy Framework (2006) was adopted at a time when Zimbabwe had already been locked in political and economic despair, but the framework or any other ICT policy or programme does not address a plan of ICT diffusion under such levels of political and economic instability as well as extreme cycles of poverty and diseases. In such instances, the Kenya case, reported by the OECD (2005), is an example of the social constructivism approach where ICT-assisted development was initiated to address critical issues of education, health, and poverty. The World Food Programme (WFP) developed a handheld device to enable its teams to gather data directly in the field and transmit the data to a central computer using wireless technology. The new system allows faster and more efficient deliveries of relief and food – literally saving lives, and giving new meaning to the term "just in time" delivery. Through such efforts, experience is proving that information technology can play a vital role in understanding development problems and implementing better solutions (OECD, 2005). All the e-government initiatives in Zimbabwe are silent on such potential of ICTs to play a role as a catalyst for rural development.

The Geneva Action Plan of WSIS (2003) covers commendable ground to bring both aspects of technological determinism as well as social constructivism. While it was agreed during WSIS (2003) that individual economies would operate within their economic strengths as they attend to these action plans, the Zimbabwe Government did not develop their own action plans to implement the resolutions not until the ICT ministry's Strategic Plan of 2010. What has since been witnessed was the distribution of computers to urban and rural primary and secondary schools by the president without accompanying action plans to operationalise the equipment.

## 5.3     Tensions Arising from the Analysis

Firstly, the disharmony in the inclusive government did not resonate with the intentions the government wanted to achieve through its modernization efforts. Ministries headed by opposing political parties worked to outdo each other for political mileage. Modernisation efforts through ICTs in general and e-government in particular suffer because of political

instability. Secondly, while the Strategic Plan does articulate a detailed roadmap to implementing modernisation efforts, it however needs to be underscored that design (as evident in the policy documents) and reality may be inconsistent (Heeks, 2002). Zimbabwe also faces the same challenges which are common to all communities in developing countries. Some of the challenges are lack of basic facilities such as water, proper roads and reliable electricity supply, lack of technically skilled people, inadequate institutional arrangements, inadequate bandwidth nationally and on the gateway, etc. It is not clear in the Strategic Plan how projects leading to addressing these challenges will be financed. Despite a well formulated Strategic Plan, the following comment is a demonstration that any conclusion based on analysis of policy documents alone is not adequate:

> "*The rural areas where the majority of Zimbabweans live are still largely without substantial infrastructure. Deterioration of infrastructure is open for all to see on the road networks, railway lines and the telephone networks. This is a result of a compound of problems including shortages of foreign currency, high inflation and fuel shortages limiting repair and maintenance work on most infrastructures and stopping any further development. Zimbabwean industries and manufacturing sectors have been starved of electricity and are hence not producing items that would ordinarily be used to service and maintain the infrastructure. The impact of these issues has been a deterioration of the ICT sector …*" (Zungunde, 2009)

## 5.4    Implications for Theory and Practice

The use of thematic analysis as a theoretical foundation and a methodological approach for analysing text contributes to a better understanding of government publications. The main finding reported in this study is that all themes are an embodiment of the locus of economic development. All government plans which are delivered in the form of blueprints carry the locus of economic development. Under the same locus, themes vary depending on the focus. Development is understood as building the capability to remove the major sources of constraints that people suffer from, "unfreedoms" (Sen, 1999), such as famines, under nutrition, limited access to health care, education, and sanitary arrangements (Macueve, 2008). Critics of the capability of e-government initiatives to foster economic development argue that GDPs of developing countries rarely expand individual "freedoms". According to Sen (1999), individual "freedoms," means access of individuals to facilities for education and health care, as well as political rights. E-government efforts can therefore yield limited success as long the citizenry is chasing after these "freedoms".

For the purposes of application, knowledge of the holistic picture of all factors necessary for an information systems project is useful. This study has argued at a theoretical level, but the idea of technological determinism has implications at a practical level where projects fail if they fall short of factoring in social aspects. Absence of other considerations as funding models and execution plans are as important as strategic documents.

## 6.    SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The paper has presented the Government of Zimbabwe's position towards intentions to implement e-government. The several ICT policy documents presented are evidence that the government is fully aware of the need to improve service delivery through ICTs. The study however revealed that all policy documents ignored the political, social and economic setting of Zimbabwe. These factors have a direct influence in the funding of capital projects including e-government.

Through thematic analysis of the policy documents, the study revealed that the technology theme is the most common. The documents therefore bring technological

determinism, a view that privileges technology as the unquestioned agent of systems innovation. However, contemporary research in information systems rejects that technology alone can shape and alter basic things about behaviour and processes. Instead, emphasis is now placed on social constructivism, a perspective which considers technology as merely a tool in the broader social transformation processes

A major limitation of the study is that it was only scoped around ICT policy documents without relating them to progress of actual e-government implementation. Further research which compares policy to practice is recommended to expand the knowledge contributed by this study.

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