



# Electronic governance and hybrid libraries in Namibia

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## Abstract

A nation that is information empowered is capable of contributing to the democratic process. Governments are realizing more the importance of information and communication technologies (ICTs) as governing tools. Libraries have always been valued institutions within societies as trusted sources of information; and are becoming e-government access points relied on by both the patrons and government agencies (Jaeger and Fleischmann, 2007). They assist in finding information and some provide computer access and free Internet access. It is not surprising that with electronic governance (e-governance), libraries; in particular public libraries are expected to provide citizens with access and guidance in using e-government websites, forms and services. The paper is based on a study commissioned by International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) and carried out by the Department of Information and Communication Studies in 2009 on electronic governance and hybrid libraries in Africa. One of the study objectives was to investigate the existence and the role of hybrid libraries in e-governance in Africa. The study, which included a survey of several southern African countries and a case study of Namibia, employed the use of questionnaires for data collection. The paper focuses on the Namibian case study. The authors conclude that there is great potential for libraries to provide and promote e-governance but this is faced with many challenges, which include technological and human and financial resources.

## Keywords

electronic governance, e-governance, libraries, hybrid libraries, information society, Namibia

## Introduction

Electronic governance and information society are interrelated. The common element between the two is the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and the advantages associated with it (Ngulube, 2007). The use of ICTs can contribute to the improvement of government operations and service delivery. E-governance brings information closer to the people and information required can be obtained almost immediately and this increases the willingness of customers to proactively involve in government matters, beyond just being recipients of services. The increase of the use of the Internet by citizens and its application towards political and community purposes is an indication of the growth of the potential benefits of ICTs in participatory democracy around the world (Clift, 2004).

Democratic governance requires the participation of the people, yet the voices of the poor, women

and minorities too often go unheard. It requires 'inclusive participation' in which all people take part in the government of their country. To be effective, they will need access to information, and modern technology can play an important role (United Nations Development Programme, 2010). In a global information society, there is need to democratize access to information using ICTs, provide adequate and relevant local content to users and equip them with requisite information literacy skills to efficiently find their way in a maze of information networks (Mutula, 2004a). The African Information

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Society Initiative (AIS) launched in 1996 proposed that "Africa should build, by the year 2010, an information society in which every man, woman, child, village, public and private sector office has secure access to information and knowledge through the use of computers and the communication media" (Economic Commission for Africa, 2008). E-government is a phenomenon that is linked to the information society and the advantages associated with it (Ngulube, 2007). Information plays a pivotal role in e-government. This is why governments are looking at ways of distributing information to their customers, i.e. citizens and businesses.

Access to information is vital for transparency, accountability, participation and rule of law – all hallmarks of democratic governance. It empowers people to take an active part in political decision-making, including the free and open debate essential to sustain pluralistic regimes. E-governance involves public investment in information and communication technologies (ICTs) to strengthen governance processes. Access to and use of ICTs can provide new and innovative communication channels that empower people and give voice to those who previously had none, while allowing them to interact via networks and networking (United Nations Development Programme, 2010). Library staff can be "intermediaries, facilitators and enablers of e-government content" (Dublin City Council, 2008). Libraries have always shared information resources through a variety of means but the Internet has provided opportunities to enhance this sharing of resources. A number of digital library developments have been witnessed which include resources freely accessible on the Internet as well as electronic resources which libraries have subscribed to on behalf of their users (Pearce, Cathro and Boston, 2000).

A study on e-governance in Burkina Faso in 2005 showed that ICTs can make it possible to carry out participatory consultation processes with citizens and businesses regarding administrative and political decisions (Sore, 2005). Hesselmark and Miller (2002) carried out a survey on ICT in Namibia and concluded that "there has been a shift towards a more developed information society" (p. 35).

This paper presents and discusses the findings of a study carried out by the Department of Information and Communication Studies, University of Namibia on e-government and hybrid libraries. It highlights e-government in Namibia's context, focussing on the existence of hybrid libraries and their role towards meeting AISI's vision as well as promoting e-governance.

## Literature review

### *E-government and e-governance in Namibia*

The terms 'e-government' and 'e-governance' are sometimes used interchangeably. E-government refers to any government functions or processes that are carried out in digital form over the Internet. E-governance is the public sector's use of information and communication technologies with the aim of improving service delivery, encouraging citizens in the decision making process and making government accountable, transparent and effective (UNESCO, 2010).

The Namibian government, as with many other governments, is using computer technologies to support business activities. The benefits of conducting business electronically have become clear and the shift towards the electronic delivery of programmes and services has been set. *The E-Governance Policy for the Public Service of Namibia* of 2005 (Office of the Prime Minister, 2005) facilitates the provision of government services via ICTs.

The move to e-governance faces a number of challenges. Technological, financial and political hurdles must still be cleared before the potential of e-governance can fully be realized (Kroukamp, 2005; Ngulube, 2007). Ngulube (2007) notes that the major ingredients of e-government are infrastructure, human resources and information – all of which are insufficient for the majority of people in Sub-Saharan Africa. Nengomasha's study (2009) on e-government in Namibia supports Kroukamp and Ngulube's view points, having established that lack of technological, financial and human resources, legislative infrastructure, leadership and strategic thinking were hindering Namibia's e-government implementation.

The technological infrastructure problems discussed in this paper have significant implications for Namibia achieving AISI objectives and fully becoming an information society.

### *Hybrid libraries*

A hybrid library is a library collection consisting of materials in more than one format, often print, multimedia and electronic resources. It is a continuum between the conventional and the digital library, where electronic and paper-based information are used alongside each other (Rusbridge, 1998). The term 'hybrid library' has also been used to refer to a fusion of traditional library services with those of electronic, digital or virtual libraries (Pearce, Cathro and Boston, 2000). To be effective, hybrid libraries should provide an integrated approach to accessing

electronic and traditional information. Oppenheim and Smithson (2009) view it as a step towards the fully digital library and argue that the development of hybrid libraries depends more on cultural shift than on technological developments.

The management of hybrid libraries faces many challenges. Rusbridge (1998) outlines the challenges associated with the management of hybrid libraries, which are to encourage end-user resource discovery and information use in a variety of formats and from a number of local and remote sources in an integrated way. Carr (2006) argues that hybrid libraries have enabled the rebirth of librarianship as a profession with the emergence of a new cadre of librarians since the 1990s due to the dominance of the Internet. This new generation of librarians is using online tools in staying in touch with "what users want" and has used this as a matter of survival and a question of professional expertise and self-respect.

#### *Potential of hybrid libraries in the transformation to information societies and offering e-governance services in Africa*

The traditional role of libraries as information providers and trainers on how to access information places them in a very significant position in e-governance implementation. Berryman (2004, cited in Dublin City Council, 2008) sees the emergence of e-government as an opportunity for public libraries to move beyond this traditional role of information provision to providing other services. "Libraries can assist by transforming from being lenders of books to enablers of IT skills for the community" (Froud and Mackenzie, 2002 (cited in Dublin City Council, 2000, p. [16]).

The creation of hybrid libraries is an essential part of the information society, a society that is highly dependent on scientific knowledge for decision making. Digital libraries play a very crucial role in any research or higher learning institution (Kaduda et al., 2007). In their study of a medical research institution in rural Kenya, they noted the importance of moving from a paper based library system which is inefficient at its best, to an integrated system incorporating both electronic and traditional paper materials, to enable easier and more comprehensive research.

Libraries in Sub-Saharan Africa, like their counterparts in the rest of the world, are continuing to experience a period of rapid change as they prepare to participate in the global information society (Mutula, 2004b). In this endeavour, libraries face various challenges of economic, technological, content and information literacy nature. Mutula (2004b) confirms the concerns voiced by other authors who see "ICT's

**Table 1.** Library collections.

What does your library consist of? (Multiple responses)	
Printed sources	11
Electronic sources	8
Audio visual sources	9
Other	1

Note: N = 14.

potential to create a new form of disadvantage, the 'digital divide' due to lack of Internet access, skills required to use services and lack of awareness of e-government content" (Dublin City Council, 2000).

#### **Methodology**

The Namibian case study employed qualitative and quantitative research methods, which comprised surveys and interviews. The study population consisted of government ministries, libraries and members of the community in the capital city Windhoek. Sampling was purposive for the libraries, convenience for the Ministries and random for the community members. Fourteen academic, public and special libraries in non-governmental organizations, five ministries and 240 community members took part in the study. Community members included males and females within the age group 15 and above, comprising students, employed, self-employed and the unemployed. These community members were randomly selected from two shopping malls in Windhoek, four bus-stops and the University of Namibia campus. The educational levels of these randomly selected people ranged between primary education, secondary education, tertiary education and no formal education. Questionnaires were administered to the community members and libraries; and the interviews were conducted within the ministries.

#### **Findings and discussion**

##### *Existence of hybrid libraries*

To identify how many of the libraries were hybrid libraries, an open ended question, "What does your library collection consist of?" was asked. As indicated in Table 1, most of the collections consisted of printed resources (11) followed by audio visual resources, and least were electronic resources. Other resources cited were reprints and newspaper cuttings. Eight (57 percent) of the 14 libraries have electronic resources. The study therefore established that hybrid libraries exist in Namibia. The library collections conform to the definition of a hybrid library (Table 1).

The librarians were asked what type of catalogues they had. Fifty-seven percent said that their libraries had OPAC. Other libraries (36 percent) still use manual card catalogues, while 7 percent did not respond to the question. One respondent said, "manual card catalogue but the community library service is planning to move to the OPAC system once all of our libraries are equipped with computer facilities". The existence of OPAC in 57 percent of the libraries indicates that Namibia's libraries are not just hybrid libraries by virtue of their collections but by the bringing together of technologies creating an environment where "appropriate range of heterogeneous information services are presented to the users in a consistent and integrated way via a single interface" (Pearce, Cathro and Boston, 2000, p.3)

The librarians were also asked an open ended question as to whether their libraries were equipped with computer facilities for users. Where the answers were affirmative, a follow-up question was asked to find out if the computers were connected to the Internet. Most libraries (85 percent) were equipped with computers and Internet connections. One respondent said, "Yes, at present only 11 community libraries out of 60 are equipped with computer facilities and hopefully by 2013 through Education Training and Improvement Sector Program (ETSIP) that is an initiative of Ministry of Education, all the libraries will have computer facilities". Libraries are expected to play a key role in promotion of e-governance through access to Internet provision. As the Dublin City Council (2000) research found, "public library's network enables e-government access through libraries".

#### *The Internet access in libraries*

In response to the question of who uses Internet in the libraries, the librarians' responses as indicated in Table 2 below include: students, community members, the unemployed, academics, government employees, visiting scholars and researchers.

The librarians were asked how reliable Internet access was in the library. Most of the respondents (80 percent) said that access to the Internet through the library computers was reliable, 10 percent saying that access was very reliable and the remaining 10 percent saying that access was not reliable.

When asked what the users use the Internet for, the librarians indicated the following uses as indicated in Table 3 below: research purposes, job seeking, leisure and other uses, which include searching for tertiary institutions, scholarships and assignments.

These user statistics confirm the role of libraries in narrowing the digital divide and transformation of

**Table 2.** Users of the Internet from the librarian's perspective.

Who are the most users of the Internet? (Multiple responses)	
Students	9
Academics	2
Government employees	4
Community members	5
Unemployed	5
Other	0

Note: N = 14.

**Table 3.** Use of the Internet from the librarian's perspective.

What do the users use the Internet for? (Multiple responses)	
Research	11
Seeking for jobs	3
Leisure	4
Other	1

Note: N = 14.

the country into an information society. However the responses also indicate a lack of awareness of the e-government services available. According to the Dublin City Council (2008) "stakeholder interviewees endorsed the value of public libraries in delivering e-government through access and support and by building public awareness of services" (p. [24]).

#### *Library user orientation*

The researchers wanted to find out if the libraries offered user education programmes enabling the users to fully utilize the services provided. Seven libraries said they had an orientation programme, five said they did not and two did not respond.

Those that had an orientation programme were asked a follow-up question on what was included in the programme. All offered computer literacy, lessons in searching online catalogues, electronic resources and Internet search. Other library orientation programs included end note bibliographic training, information literacy skills and general regulations of the library. The majority of libraries have indeed transformed into "enablers of IT skills for the community" (Froud and MacKenzie, 2002, cited in Dublin City Council, 2008).

#### *Hybrid libraries and e-governance*

The importance of promoting libraries as sustainable entities in the delivery of e-government services has been identified by other e-government initiatives

(Stackhouse, cited in Dublin City Council, 2008). Libraries in the Namibian case study responded that they supported e-governance initiatives in one form or other. Libraries supported e-governance initiatives mainly through providing government online documents and enabling library users to download government application forms to apply for government vacancies. Other responses were that people would like community libraries to support all the above-mentioned initiatives once the libraries are computerized and connected to the Internet. Respondents also stated that they would like to have access to ministry websites.

The librarians were given a list of e-governance initiatives and asked to state whether their library supported any of those initiatives. E-governance initiatives supported by libraries were: 15 percent government policies online, 23 percent government projects online, 46 percent access to government publications, 8 percent access to government vacancies online and 8 percent other government information.

When the librarians were asked to give their opinion about how libraries could support e-governance, they responded:

- by working closely with government ministries
- teaching users and promote the use of ICT
- sourcing more ICT resources
- publicize on library websites
- adequate funding by government and major relevant institutions
- intense training by all educational institutions from primary to universities, including library schools, whose products should be ambassadors of e-governance in libraries
- incorporating information technology literacy programs in institutions of higher learning
- by linking up their websites to government websites to enable users to access government websites through the links
- providing speedy access to the internet through the acquisition of more bandwidth
- conducive environment is created for the provision of e-governance information services
- they can contribute by providing free Internet usage to community members.

Critical to enabling what the librarians proposed is trained staff to "support public use of e-government ... quality Internet services ... competitively broadband access in rural areas ..." (Dublin City Council, 2008, [16]). The librarians' responses confirm that Namibia's libraries face some of the challenges hampering e-government implementation highlighted in this paper.

### *E-governance in Namibia*

The respondents were asked to give their opinion on what they thought e-governance was. The question was asked to establish whether government officials and librarians understood the concept of e-governance. Most of the respondents viewed e-governance as access to government information via the Internet, government interaction with citizens online, or access to government websites. Other views were "managing change of government processes" and government attempting to control citizens' access via the Internet.

The follow-up question, "what are the current e-government initiatives available in your country?" was asked. The current government initiatives available were: access to government publications online (e.g. policies); online examination screening for grades 10 and 12; electronic documents; records management system for the public service; and integrated financial management system.

Most government departments were planning to promote the use of ICTs. Other respondents were unaware of pending initiatives. Below is a list of long term initiatives:

- "Currently government is promoting the construction of websites for every government ministry and the provision of relevant content on these websites".
- "Connecting regional offices to MOE-HQ (Ministry of Education Headquarters), providing Internet facilities and connecting schools to Internet, and provide them with PCs and training".
- "On-line applications for passport. For example, if a person resides in a different region from the Khomas region (Windhoek location) and applies for a passport, your information can be accessed in Windhoek".
- "Automating the national population registration online, tax returns, and import export permits".
- "The government is planning to introduce an electronic voting system".

### *Government and the promotion of ICTs*

The government is promoting the use of ICTs in the country by using a combination of the following strategies: distributing computers to schools and libraries; and training government officials and teachers in the use of ICTs.

The Namibian government has an official website which is presented in English but not regularly updated. The information on the website mainly includes government development projects and policy, government development projects only, government policy and

vacancies, government gazettes, ministry-specific information, announcements of seminars, workshops, research, publications, news and statistics.

On the issue of accessibility, the website is accessed often by government employees, students, academics, the unemployed, employed and business people. The government website is accessible from public Internet kiosks, libraries and multi-purpose youth centres.

The setbacks associated with accessing e-government services were cited as:

- inadequate content on the Internet
  - sometimes websites are under construction
  - the content is not regularly updated
- most of the websites are poorly constructed with very few links to other government resources
- poor Internet connection
- language barrier for many citizens – English is a hurdle.

#### Community members

The community members were asked an open ended question on what they thought e-governance was. This question was asked to establish the community's knowledge and understanding of electronic governance. The responses indicated a lack of awareness and understanding by some sectors of the community of what e-governance is. Some of the responses given by community members on e-governance include:

- it is more beneficial for those with access to computer, Internets and other electronic equipment
- it is a good thing because you do not have to queue up for information such as paying bills
- the use of Internet in helping to govern and run the country with interactive participation from the public
- it is the first time to hear of it
- government's efforts to communicate their purpose and ideas through the Internet
- e-governance is electronic resources that libraries offer the users
- also improves government's distribution of its own internal operations to enhance service delivery and democratic participation through the Internet
- government services online
- it is the way people manage affairs of public and private electronically
- emails and government administration done via computers.

The respondents were further asked an open ended question to establish what e-governance services they were aware of. Again the responses demonstrated not

much awareness by some members of the community. Below is a list of responses given:

- don't know
- information on government electronic status
- education such as grade 12 results
- job advertisement and application forms, identity documents, tenders, annual reports
- health care
- services offered by government electronically over the Internet
- maybe voting online
- computer which includes Internet, fax and printer
- website hosting, identification of IT projects, IT projects design, quality control, specialized user training, hardware software specification, programming
- online application of e.g. identity documents and distribution of annual reports
- Ministry of Fisheries regulations and laws on the Internet
- electronic banking
- registration with the Ministry of Home Affairs when applying for national documents
- computer classes.

Nengomasha (2009), in a study on electronic records management in the context of e-government in the Namibian public service, established that Namibia is still at the initial phase of her e-government implementation strategy. This phase is about the government being present on the web, providing the public and businesses with relevant information in order to promote transparency and democracy.

When asked if they knew of the existence of a government website, 66 percent said yes, 34 percent said no. To those that responded yes, a follow-up question was asked to find out if they knew what kind of information was available on the site. The responses show that content was limited to government circulars, laws, policies, constitution, and Ministries' vision and mission statements.

Ngulube (2007) argues that "a fully functional e-government website should have an e-participation framework which provides e-information on policies and programmes, budgets, laws and regulations, e-constitution mechanisms and tools, and e-decision making". The responses therefore seem to suggest that the websites are still far from meeting these requirements.

When asked if they used libraries, 66 percent said yes and 34 percent said no. The question was asked to establish if community members made use of e-government services at libraries. To those that responded yes, a follow-up question was asked to find

out what they used the library for. The responses revealed that libraries were mostly used for research and study purposes, with some using them for leisure. The responses support the survey findings of the United Nations (2008) that e-government can contribute significantly to learners and improve research capabilities as well as the conclusions reached by Kaduda et al. (2007) that digital libraries play a very crucial role in any research or higher learning institution.

The respondents were given a list of libraries and asked if they could access government services from those libraries. Some community members (25 percent) accessed all the types of libraries (academic, public and national), while others accessed only an academic library (25 percent), a public community library (16 percent), the national library (17 percent) and other libraries (18 percent). Other libraries specified were "special library" and "ministerial library".

The responses above confirm the assertion by Berryman (2004; cited in Dublin City Council, 2008) that libraries are significantly positioned in e-governance implementation.

## Recommendations

### *Existence of hybrid libraries*

- A number of information sources are still in print format and this makes them not usable to people who do not visit libraries. Libraries should initiate digitization projects to ensure that information becomes more accessible to a wider audience.
- Eighty-five percent of libraries are equipped with computer facilities and there is a need to expedite the library computerization project through the ETSIP programme so that the majority of library users in Namibia have full access to the Internet.

### *Users of hybrid libraries and library user orientation*

- From the statistics provided, the majority of users use the Internet for research purposes, therefore libraries should start a programme to assist users to search for e-government information which can assist them to participate in democratic processes.
- Libraries need to intensify their orientation programmes by offering computer literacy programmes on how to search online catalogues, electronic resources and Internet search engines.

### *Hybrid libraries and e-governance*

- Libraries need to introduce e-governance services in their respective libraries by ensuring that more government information is available online.
- There is a need to create awareness among library and information personnel as well as members of

the public on the importance and concept of e-government information in Namibia.

- The study established that a large proportion of the Namibian community have no idea of the concept of e-governance and thus are not aware of the electronic services offered by the government, therefore the government needs to market the electronic services that they render to the public.
- Government libraries should be encouraged to establish information portals on their websites for e-government information by working closely with their ministries.
- There is a need for the acquisition of more bandwidth to enable speedy access to the Internet within libraries and other Internet access points.
- There is a need for adequate funding for ICT infrastructure development.

## Conclusion

Hybrid libraries play a crucial role in promoting e-governance as gateways for the dissemination of information. Information should be viewed as an enabler of the existence of e-governance and not as a threat. In a situation where people are not informed and do not have the skills to use ICTs, it would be useless to have electronic governance put in place. Information is the hub that holds the wheel together and libraries are useful sources of information in the advancement of Africa into an information society. Libraries are also important tools to bridge the digital divide between the haves and have-nots. As Namibia strives to move towards an information society, the study has revealed that a number of challenges exist which include issues of bandwidth, infrastructure development, lack of ICT skills, and inadequate funding towards e-governance initiatives. This study has also revealed that a society with access to information is more empowered and can develop into an efficient information society.

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