

SA ready to embrace mobile government services

Mobilising public services in Africa, the white paper compiled by Informa Telecoms & Media and available at the [AfricaCom](#) event taking place from today, Wednesday, 9 November until Thursday 10 November 2011 at the Cape Town International Convention Centre in South Africa, reveals that South Africa is more ready than Kenya and Egypt in terms of embracing mobile government services.

Despite South Africa's appearance at the top of the index, authors Nick Jotischky and Sheridan Nye note that mobile government implementations have been far slower to take off there than in Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda and Tanzania. The East African countries have been quicker to realise the benefits to citizens and small businesses (agricultural advice, payment of utility bills, commodity pricing information) of delivering public services using cellular technologies.

E-government seen as a source

E-government is seen by African governments as a source of economic, social and political development that encourages greater citizen engagement and improves access to services. In a C-level industry survey that Informa recently commissioned, Two-thirds of respondents believe e-government services are still under-developed in Africa.

Jotischky notes, "It is striking when looking at e-government strategies in Africa that there is no clear articulation of the role mobile devices can play in the spread of e-government services. Given the importance of mobile in Africa's economy and culture over the last decade, this appears strange. After all, not only does the continuing growth in wireless access ensure a wide audience reach, but messaging and data usage trends suggest many consumers in Africa are already using mobile for a variety of purposes. Furthermore, the mobile device market continues to mature and smartphone penetration is accelerating."

Opportunity to enable mobile government

Informa forecasts that by 2016 over a third of mobile connections in South Africa will be via smartphones.

The report also notes that many of the mobile government services already implemented are in East and North Africa. Many of these services are directed at citizens and businesses but governments have not used mobile technology as a way of overhauling internal processes and providing more flexibility to their workforces.

Nye suggests, "Technology providers in Africa have an opportunity to enable mobile government by encouraging the migration of public sector services to the cloud. Virtualisation of infrastructure and flexible, usage-based pricing would allow government agencies to pay for what they need and flex costs accordingly to match demand. Mobility services should form an integrated part of the public sector's cloud migration."

Informa's mobile government readiness index is based on the following indicators:

- mobile penetration;
- 3G penetration;
- mobile broadband penetration forecasts;
- proportion of population living in rural areas;
- the size of public sector as a % of GDP;
- UN's e-Government Readiness Index;
- fixed broadband penetration and
- literacy rates.

The index excluded countries with a population less than 5 million.

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