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Digital Governance, Public Service and Envirtizenship: Prospecting E-Society for Sustainability (E-S4S)

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Abstract:

The globe is undergoing unprecedented transformation. Describing the emergent society simply as a global village is speedily becoming anachronistic as there exists a conceptual shift to the concept e-society. Digitalization engenders a plethora of e- (or electronic-) phenomena: e-commerce, e-service and e-governance, among others. Just as there is the fast emergence of the global e-society on the one hand, there is also the global environmental challenge of the anthropocene: environmental imbalance and widening gap between environmentally safe and unsafe communities. The emergent e-society throws up issues of eco-friendly public service delivery mechanisms in developing nations: communities in developing countries are fast becoming referents for environmental abuses. The paper analyzes the plausibility of leapfrogging digital governance for birthing a global public service delivery framework for sustainable governance in developing countries. The paper critically examines the interplay between the phenomena digital governance, public service delivery and sustainable governance. The analysis birthed the epistemological construct envirtizens – by which we conceptualize environmentalists of the emergent e-society: digital and networked citizen-environmentalists. The paper recommends, among others, formation of a global framework – E-Society for Sustainable Development (E-S4S) – as a desideratum for engendering clean public service delivery architecture in developing countries.

Keywords: e-society, digital governance, sustainability, public service, envirtizenship

1. Introduction: Governance Technologies for Sustainable Development

Good governance is incontrovertibly and inexorably pivotal to development. The ability to institute and maintain governance processes describable as good governance is key to that phenomenon technically referred to as sustainable development. Birthing sustainable development requires, among others, environmentally responsible and responsive leadership; which is the crux of sustainable governance. As noted by Guney (2017) for example, governance has an important and positive effect on sustainable development.

Additionally, the applications of data sciences are penetrating the governance spaces of nation-states and creating an international society best conceptualized as *global e-society*. The emergent e-society throws up issues and challenges of environmental sustainability in developing nations: communities in most developing countries are fast becoming easy labels and referents for environmental abuses and injustices. Against the background of the *facticity* of the transformation of governance spaces by technology, it is imperative to explore the possibility of harnessing the instrumentality of governance technologies to engender a public service delivery framework for sustainable development in communities across developing nations. To this end the paper consists of five interrelated parts. Following the present introductory part, we shall in the second part analytically conceptualize digital governance and global e-society. The third part explores the interplay between digital governance, public service delivery and sustainable governance; an interplay which births for us the epistemological construct *envirtizenship*. In the fourth part we prospectively analyze the plausibility of leapfrogging digital governance for birthing a global public service delivery framework for sustainable governance in developing countries. The fifth and concluding part critically recommends, among others the formation of a global framework – *E-Society for Sustainable Development (E-S4S)* – as a desideratum for engendering *clean* public service delivery architecture in developing countries.

2. Digital Governance and E-Society: Conceptual Analysis

A broad concept that means different things to different people (GDRC, 2019), governance for our purposes refers essentially to that function of a largely elected body of the state referred to as government. Governance is in general understood as the art of administration. With particular reference to the state, governance refers to the processes, manners and machineries for the administration of the state. As noted by UNESCAP for example, governance means the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented). Implied in the concept *governance* is the institutional frameworks deployed by the state for enabling peace and security, facilitating socio-economic growth and preserving the natural habitat, among others.

Thus, it is the responsibility of the government of any given state to deploy appropriate governance architecture for enabling peace, and engendering a safe and clean environment, among others. Early forms of governance had been analog. By analog governance we refer to that kind of state administration characterized by paper-based processes and face-to-face meetings, among other spacio-temporal bureaucratic processes and procedures. Paradigmatic of our conception of analog governance is the early Greek form of state administration which laid the foundation for representative or indirect democracy. Digitalization, as Durkiewicz and Janowski (2018) notes, however, has the propensity to enhance governance space than the traditional or non-digital form of governance.

Analog governance is not in tandem with 21st century statecraft (CAP, 2009). Governance in the 21st century is characterized by a clear departure from the traditional analog form of administration. The governance space in the 21st century is continually being shaped and reshaped by the exponential developments in information and communication technology (ICT). Data Sciences - a multi-disciplinary concern with the use of information (or data) in solving problems - has in particular birthed various applications or technologies for governance. Backbone to the emergent governance technologies is the Internet (or Internet of Things (IoT)) which implies a worldwide exchange of data through wireless network of electronic (or information) devices such as smart-phones, computers and super computers.

Thus, ICT in the 21st century is engendering a form of governance infrastructure that may aptly be referred to as digital (or e-) governance. With particular reference to governance of nation-states, and a clear departure from the traditional analog governance of Ancient Greece, for example, digital governance implies the deployment of ICT infrastructure by government to ease processes or procedures of administering the delivery of public services. Digital governance thus implies electronicization or digitalization of government processes and activities. Aside its potential to ease the process of governance, proponents of e-governance often argue that the deployment of ICT in governance have the potential of creating a culture of transparency (Bertot et. al., 2010).

Given the penetration of smart technologies, governments the world over are re-engineering the way government (or public) services are delivered. Smart or information and communication technologies are birthing societies of a different kind, *e-societies*. The concept e-society is a construct deployed to refer to that society where as a result of deep penetration of ICT, human interactions and communications are founded on digital or electronic platforms. In the electronic or e-society, for example, citizens engage in e-phenomenon or e-based activities such as e-commerce, e-business, e-entertainment, e-voting and e-learning, among others. As noted by Schmid (2001), among others, there is an emergent society in which virtually every facet of existence is shaped by the e- or electronic phenomenon.

The e-phenomenon creates e-based societies which transcends geographical boundaries or nationalities. E-societies are inhabited by *smart* or e-citizens (also known as *netizens*) who are availed big data (or big picture) about local, national and international affairs. As noted by Lee (2014) governments find it imperative to embrace the emergent smart life as it becomes necessary to run smart city services that meet up with the lifestyle of smart citizens. Thus, there is an emergent transformation of the world into a global e-society in which only the digitally literate survives.

3. Digital Governance, Public Service Delivery and Sustainable Governance: Road-mapping Envirtizenship

The above interplay between digital governance and e-society has implications for public service delivery and sustainable governance. It is the primary responsibility of government to facilitate the provision or delivery of basic public services or amenities: security of lives and properties, supply of water and electricity and, protection of the environment for healthy habitation. The duo of the growing emergence of e-societies and the phenomenal penetration of digital governance has far-reaching implications for public service delivery the world over. Paradigmatic of the public service delivery mechanism of any government is that organ of the state referred to as the Public or Civil Service. The delivery of public services is the core of *public services* institutions like the water, sanitation and environmental protection agencies. Digital governance implies digital public service delivery. Digitalizing public service delivery frameworks thus becomes a desideratum and an almost absolute imperative for governments in the emergent global e-society of the 21st century. It is against the realization of the inevitability of an emergent e-society that the UK Office of the E-envoy came up, for instance, with a Strategic Framework for Public Services in the Information Age in year 2000.

Against the background of the fact that the e-society is an open society, the deployment of digital infrastructure to drive delivery of public services ensures openness and transparency in governance. Accordingly digital governance is promissory of birthing and institutionalizing the inexorably intertwined normative hallmarks of democracy; accountability and transparency, among others. Public service delivery mechanisms in developing countries are characterized by analog governance infrastructure. Common denominators of analog governance infrastructure include prebendalism, corruption, waste, and institutionalization of bureaucratic bottlenecks. The myriad ills of the perennially present problem of mis-governance in developing countries have the possibility of being critically redressed with the adoption of appropriate governance technologies and e-practices such as e-tax, e-procurement, e-recruitment, and most importantly e-biodiversity, among others.

Now we analytically explore the interplay between the trio digital governance, public service delivery and sustainable governance. Haven conceptualized digital governance and public service delivery in previous sections it becomes instructive at this juncture, first, to conceptualize sustainable governance. Though there is the problem of multiplicity of interpretations with respect to conceptualizing sustainable governance, the variously available scholarly connotations and denotations of sustainable governance infer and refer, among others, to sustainability, sustainable development and environmental governance.

For the purposes of our work we conceptualize sustainable governance as that type of administration of the state that hallmarks protection of the biodiversity as critical to development. Thus, sustainable governance implies the

deployment of the administrative processes and procedures of the state in such a manner that engenders conservation and preservation of the biodiversity for the benefit of both present and future inhabitants.

Our conceptualization of sustainable governance has implications for public service delivery. A *sustainable governance* public service delivery mechanism will consciously formulate and implement biodiversity policies; that is, policies geared towards ensuring that the present consumption of environmental resources does not constitute threat to present and future consumers. Thus, a sustainable governance oriented public service will avoid formulating and implementing policies capable of depleting environmental resources. Public service delivery within the framework of sustainable governance is directed towards protecting the biodiversity or natural environment. As noted by Schlosberg and Craven (2019) for example 'humanity today faces a broad range of ills, from ecological devastation to racist authoritarian nationalism...we live in a world of constant manipulation, greed and damage'. Schlosberg and Craven accordingly developed the thesis of sustainable materialism which shares intellectual affinity with what we describe as sustainable governance. According to the principles of sustainable materialism, as outlined by Schlosberg and Craven, there is the need for governments, among other social institutions, to focus on 'the stuff of everyday life, on the basic material needs of our lives, and on the development of alternative systems and counter flows of power and goods through the lives of individuals, communities, and environments'. Thus, we assert that sustainable governance finds intellectual corollary in sustainable materialism. Sustainable governance implies formulating and pursuing policy frameworks that supports the aspirations of sustainable materialism.

Furthermore, when considered against the background of the fast-paced e-society of the 21st century, it becomes imperative for governments to drive sustainable governance. Sustainable governance in the e-driven 21st century implies institutionalizing biodiversity-centered and e-governed public service delivery mechanism. Implementing the environmentalist philosophies of sustainable governance in the 21st century thus requires that governments see digital governance as a 21st century corollary to sustainable governance.

The interplay of sustainable governance and digital governance is capable of birthing the emergence of a reformative and global environmentalist consciousness. We use the epistemological construct *envirtizenship* to refer to that emergent global environmental consciousness. By *envirtizenship* we refer to an e-driven environmentalist consciousness founded on citizen's respect for the protection of the natural environment. A form of global citizenship founded on the recognition of the environmental rights of human and non-human species, the epistemological construct *envirtizenship* has moral dimensions; *envirtiquettes*. By *envirtiquettes* we shall imply environmental etiquettes: a set of codes or norms that prescribes and regulates human behaviors in relation to the environment.

Within the conceptual framework of *envirtizenship*, we then identify *envirtizens*: a generation of digital, borderless and environment-conscious individuals who, through access to biodiversity informatics, appreciate the need to embrace and deepen a bio-diversified globe: a globe where environment-centered philosophy becomes a norm; a globe where public service delivery is shaped by the principles of environmental justice and global ecological balance; a world where governments and citizens in both developed and under-developed hemispheres see the conservatory philosophies of biodiversity as critical for the continued survival of the universe and its diverse *bios* (or life-forms). Thus, *envirtizens* are the environmentalists of the emergent e-society: digital, borderless and networked *citizen-environmentalists*

4. Global E-Society: Implications for Public Service Delivery and Sustainable Governance in Developing Countries

Implied from the foregoing analytic concerns is the fact that effective and efficient public service delivery in the 21st century rest on two planks: first, electronic or digital governance (which promotes e-administration) and second, sustainable governance (which promotes formulation and implementation of environment-friendly public service policies). Now, with particular reference to developing and under-developed countries, the interplay of the environmentalist phenomenon *sustainable governance* and the e-society phenomenon *digital governance* has transformative potency to reposition public service delivery for efficient and effective allocation of resources.

Public service delivery models in developing countries are more often than not characterized by sharp and negative practices which undermine sustainable development as conceptualized. As Olaopa (2019) notes of the civil service in Nigeria for example, it is difficult for the civil service in Nigeria to deliver any tangible development. Global corruption index ranks most developing and under-developed counties as most corrupt countries (TI Report, 2018). Similarly, global environmental index ranks the developing and underdeveloped countries of the world as most environmentally disastrous (Environmental Performance Index, 2018). The prevalence of the combination of financial corruption and environmental degradation in developing and underdeveloped economies around the globe accounts for the untold poverty that exists in most parts of developing and underdeveloped economies. Developing economies around the globe have become perennial referents for abject poverty, avoidable diseases and environmental degradation in the growing literature on Development Economics (Agbaje, 2017).

The delivery of public services – security, water and clean and safe environment, for example – is a function of governments across the globe. Failure to provide basic public services is indicative of failure of government. The widespread and pervasive poverty that has come to characterize developing countries is largely demonstrative of failed governmental frameworks and institutions for public service delivery. The global phenomena *e-society* and *sustainable governance* however provide intellectual and pragmatic planks for transforming governance in developing countries for effective and efficient public service delivery.

E-society – alongside its intellectual corollary, e-governance – is reshaping global governance frameworks across borders in the 21st century. Just as e-governance makes it possible for citizens and governments to relate across boundaries, it is feasible too for citizens and organizations in any part of the globe to impact public service delivery in

developing countries. For instance, individual and corporate *envirtizens* may influence the development of biodiversity informatics for developing nations. Among others, biodiversity informatics (or e-biodiversity) consists collection, planning, description, discovery, integration, and analysis of data relating to the biodiversity. The availability of processed data about the biodiversity makes it possible for decision-makers to formulate and implement effective decisions about the environment. It is therefore essential to make indicators and knowledge openly available to decision-makers in ways that they can effectively use them (Luiz, Pedro, et. al., 2018). Access to e-biodiversity is therefore key to addressing the phenomenon of leadership deficit in greening public service delivery in developing nations.

5. Conclusion

Thus, there must emerge an e-driven global institution, say the E-Society for Sustainability (E-S4S) – which shall comprise non-governmental organizations, international aid agencies, interest groups and individuals with the common interest of promoting sustainable governance. Bodies such as the envisioned not-for-profit E-S4S shall, among others, seek to formulate and implement initiatives for public service delivery in collaboration with local communities in developing countries. Strategic global e-society collaboration and synergy in the provision of basic and affordable public services in developing countries will positively impact on poverty alleviation and the adoption of appropriate environmental attitudes, beliefs and practices.

Most public service delivery mechanisms in developing countries lack both the competence and capacity to leapfrog 21st century governance technologies for sustainable development. The largely analog public service delivery architectures of developing economies are not supportive of the kind of governance capable of engendering environmentally sustainable culture in the 21st century. Far from the processes and procedures of digital governance, developing countries lack both the requisite environmental intelligence (EI) and e-biodiversity frameworks for effective and efficient delivery of environment-friendly public policies and public services.

The emergent predominantly North global e-society will be saving the earth from further devastation by facilitating e-based networks with local communities in developing countries as a step towards deploying e-biodiversity techniques, among other environmental technologies, to redress the problem of gross environmental degradation in most developing nations. An envisioned E-S4S will aptly fill the gap of addressing the problem of non-green public service delivery architecture in most developing countries of the world where leadership and *clean* public service delivery deficits constitute threats to environmental wellness, peace and harmony.

From our analytico-interdisciplinary study, and with particular reference to engendering sustainable public service delivery frameworks in developing countries, it becomes imperative for the emergent e-society to stimulate and support the deployment and penetration of digital and sustainable governance technologies in developing nations. The emergence of *netizens* (or borderless *citizens* of the net) is reshaping the political space in developing countries, as it is the case with the Arab Spring.

Similarly, the emergence of *envirtizens* (environment conscious citizens) will help deepen environmental governance for sustainability in developing countries. Developed countries are themselves guaranteed safe and green global environments to the extent to which they stimulate and support worldwide adoption of *open* and *clean* processes; a task which an envisioned E-S4S must drive. Bridging the digital governance divide between developing and developed countries is a desideratum for birthing a global and sustainable public service delivery framework for the wellbeing of the totality of humanity. A 21st century global sustainability stitch is capable of saving humanity nine centuries of global environmental stitches. The envisioned *sustainability stitch* remains a desideratum for global wellness.

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