



Position Paper

TEAM UP TO REAP THE LATEST OPPORTUNITIES ARISING FROM THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION: FOCUS ON E-GOVERNMENT

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As the understanding of the opportunities and benefits, for both public sector and citizens, arising from the digitization of public services (efficiency, cost reduction, transparency and social inclusion) grows, an increasing number of Public Administrations and Governments globally are adopting e-Government solutions.

In this context, South Africa is among the African Countries with the highest degree of e-Government development (ranking 3rd in SSA), but it still lags behind the top performers (76th at global level), with a gap in fixed broadband penetration (3.2 subscriptions per 100 people) and an average Internet connection speed of 3.7 Mbps. Thanks to Government commitment at national and local level, important opportunities can arise for companies in key fields such as ICT infrastructures, integrated cloud-based and Open Data platforms, e-payment solutions and cybersecurity.

To get the most out of the digital revolution, however, a holistic and integrated strategy should be implemented. Both South Africa and Italy have already implemented - or are currently developing - e-Government initiatives to drive the digital transformation of their Public Administration. Sharing mutual experience and know-how in policy and governance, as well as in specific sectors, can enhance the collaboration between the two Countries.

The challenges of e-Government in South Africa

1. The adoption of e-Government is spreading globally, as Governments and Public Administrations at every level of governance (local, regional, and national) become increasingly aware of the opportunities offered by digitalization and its application to public services.

2. Digital solutions in the public sector span from the possibility to provide citizens with more effective, integrated and efficient services – by making their interaction with public authorities faster, more convenient and less costly – to higher levels of transparency and accountability. Moreover, e-Government enables reduced administrative costs of information management and communication and can drive up demand for access to the Internet.

3. Technological developments can also enhance social inclusion and the democratic participation of individuals in public decisions, and improve the evaluation process of policies and services, thus boosting overall development and economic growth.

4. According to the United Nations' EGD¹, in 2016, 94 Countries recorded high-to-medium level of e-Government adoption (33 more than in 2010), while those with low or

very low levels decreased by 14% between 2010 and 2016 (reaching an all-time low total of 99 Countries). In this context, **South Africa stands among the top-3 African countries for the adoption of e-Government**² and has been improving its positioning since 2010.

5. However, South Africa lags behind top performers, ranking 76th globally.³ The Country presents high levels of citizens' participation in e-Government and adequate availability of digital services, while major opportunities for further improvements arise in telecommunication sector and infrastructure development.

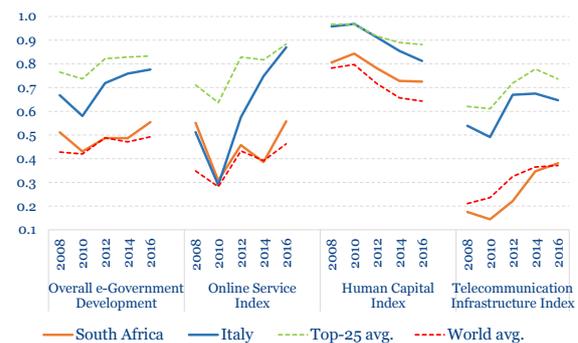


Figure 1. Level of e-Government development (relative score) in selected countries and areas, 2008-2016. (Source: TEH-A elaboration on U.N. data, 2016)

¹ e-Government Development Index. Source: United Nations, "e-Government Survey 2016".

² After Mauritius (58th) and Tunisia (72th).

³ Italy ranks 22nd globally.

6. Considering ICT development, ⁴ South Africa ranks 88th globally. While the number of mobile phone subscriptions and Internet users has been growing at a fast pace (from 7.5% to 51.9% Internet users between 2005 and 2015), a noticeable gap in fixed broadband penetration (3.2 subscriptions per 100 people) and average internet connection speed (3.7 Mbps) emerges.



Figure 2. ICT Development Index in selected Countries (relative score), 2010 and 2016 (Source: TEH-A elaboration on ITU data, 2016)

7. The South African Government is committed to filling this gap: in 2013 the “South Africa Connect” policy framework set a target of delivering Internet speeds of 5Mbps to 90% of the population by 2020. The target is higher for schools, health and government facilities: 10Mbps speed and 100% coverage.

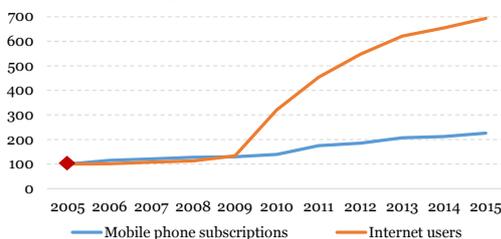


Figure 3. Trend in mobile phone subscriptions and Internet users in South Africa, index number (year 2005=100), 2005-2015 (Source: TEH-A elaboration on World Bank data, 2016)

8. This opens up great opportunities for investments and for international players in Tlc and broadband infrastructures. There is also room for players in the cybersecurity sector and for providers of integrated platforms for public services (e.g. health, education, etc.). Moreover, **a vibrant environment of start-ups and private companies** bringing about innovation and investments is growing in the Country. ⁵

⁴ As measured through the “ICT Development Index” elaborated by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

⁵ The ICT industry’s direct contribution to South Africa’s GDP stood at R94.7 billion (~3%) in 2012, and it is expected to reach R116 billion in 2016.

9. To seize these opportunities, a **holistic and integrated strategy**, should be implemented first, setting up priorities at all levels of Public Administration and assigning clear, shared and assessable responsibilities.

Proposals for a 360° integrated strategy on e-Government deployment

10. Such an integrated strategy should comprise several, intertwined **building blocks**. The following elements are not country-specific and can be seen as invariants for any Government, at central and local level, willing to successfully deploy the digitization of the public service in its Country.



Figure 3. Building blocks for developing an integrated e-Government strategy. (Source: TEH-A elaboration, 2016)

11. The first required action is the definition of **a transparent and effective governance of public services’ digitization**. Optimization of decisional roles and a clear assignment of competences between central and local levels of governance are essential, as well as consistency between political, management and technical roles.

12. This would help avoid replication or contrasts and enhance accountability and the coordination of actions and initiatives at a national level. Simplification and optimization of what already exists (legacy) is also pivotal. To do so, the required agencies and authorities should be set up (e.g. permanent agency in charge of political and strategic guidance, central technical authority, coordination facility between local levels).

13. A second building block refers to **private sector engagement**, especially best performers among: Tlc players, providers of infrastructures and digital platforms, service providers, cybersecurity and data analytics experts. These players should be involved in the deployment of e-Government services through Public-Private Partnership models. Moreover, a clearing house to ensure interoperability with legacy infrastructures, to ease data sharing and monitor results should be established.

14. “**Enabling factors**” should also be fully deployed, acting as invariants for a successful e-Government transition: certified digital identity, electronic payment and invoicing (both to Public Administration and private sector), cloud computing, Open Data, a clearing house to enhance interoperability, and cybersecurity. Moreover, a one-stop solution for citizens and companies, through which accessing to all the provided e-Government services in an integrated and safe way, would represent a “quick win” solution for engaging citizens.

15. Ultimately, **managing the digital transition** is crucial to ensure the full participation of citizens and companies as the final users of e-Government services. In the medium term, the main priority of Governments should be to accustom citizens to interact with Public Administration via digital channels and improve the population’s digital literacy. Particular attention should be paid to the inclusion of those who do not have the means, abilities or skills to manage digital technologies, such as low-income people, the elderly, unbanked citizens and self-employed individuals.⁶

16. To reach this goal, financial and payment service providers play a key role, since bringing digital payments into the public sector can contribute to building a more effective e-Government platform and engaging citizens, helping them get used to digitization and dematerialization and ensuring them of the security of such progress.

Areas of cooperation and mutual learning between South Africa and Italy to transform the public sector

17. Several of the abovementioned building blocks have already been implemented, or at least set up, by both South African and Italian Governments. While the two Countries have different levels of overall e-Government development, they have similar levels of citizens interacting online with Public Administration and using Internet-based solutions. Moreover, they have both developed successful experiences at policy and governance level, together with best practices in selected e-Government services.

⁶ For instance, in 2016 U.N. Women’s South Africa Multi-Country Office and the South African Post Office launched a digital literacy project to provide women entrepreneurs (~10.000) with digital literacy skills in 1,500 Post Office branches across 9 Provinces.

18. For these reasons, Italy and South Africa can share mutual experiences and lessons learned, cooperating both at strategic and operational level in order to accelerate the development and the adoption of e-Government services.

19. Considering policy and governance, in 2012 Italy launched a nation-wide digital strategy – “Italian Digital Agenda” (ADI) – within the framework of the European Digital Agenda and on the basis of an agreement among different Ministries and local authorities. Based on the effective coordination of public intervention both at central and local level, it envisages concrete initiatives and measures to fill Italy’s gap along six strategic axes (infrastructures and security; digital identity; public data and sharing; digital skills; digital administration; smart communities).

20. To actively support Public Administration digitization and modernization, the Agency for Digital Italy (AgID) has been instituted with the mandate to promote the success of ADI, particularly in the P.A. according to interoperability, standardization and integration principles. It also coordinates – at state, regional and local level – the policies in the field of innovation and it is in charge of definition of strategy, guidelines, regulations and standards.

21. While Italy has a foregoing experience, dating back to 2000 with the “First Action Plan for e-Government”,⁷ South Africa also offers relevant examples in policymaking and governance. South Africa established the State Information Technology Agency (SITA)⁸ and approved a “National Integrated ICT Policy White Paper” (September 2016).

22. At a local level, a few South African Provinces have developed their own e-Government development strategies such as the “Western Cape e-Government Strategy 2012-2019” and the “Gauteng City Region e-Government Strategy 2015-2020”. In particular, the Gauteng strategy provides a clear vision⁹ based on 5 different pillars:

⁷ Since 2000, Italy has fielded several initiatives for the innovation and digitization of services and made significant investments (in 10 years, ~€50 billion invested by the P.A. in assets and ICT services).

⁸ SITA has the mandate to improve public service delivery to the public through the provision of digital technologies and promote the efficiency of departments and public bodies through the use of IT.

⁹ “Become a connected Government that leverages emerging digital technologies in a collaboration between government, citizens and the private sector that enables effective service delivery and governance”.

building enabling ICT infrastructures; creating common enabling platforms; establishing adequate governance models; promoting usage of e-Government services; and stimulating ICT economy. Each pillar engages several initiatives and periodic assessments are set together with the Department of e-Government.

23. The Gauteng Province has experienced remarkable progress in the rollout of free Wi-Fi, deployment of infrastructures (the 2020 target is to reach a 100% broadband connectivity) and progress in e-Health and e-Education (the target is to build a paperless classroom with the “classroom of the future” initiatives). Cooperation with universities and research centers are also in place and innovation hubs are being implemented in empowerment zones (e.g. Soweto).

24. With regard to e-Government services, on the one hand, Italy has recently developed and launched the Digital Identity Public System (SPID), a system that allows citizens and companies to access online public services through **a single, certified and safe digital identity**. To date, over 3,700 Public Administrations have already implemented this access system offering over 4,000 services, while the Government expect to reach 10 million users by the end of 2017.

25. On the other hand, Italy’s “PagoPA” is a set of rules, standards and tools creating the single node for digital payments towards Public Administration. This system, focused on simplicity and transparency, aims to increase security and reliability for citizens and companies paying to Public Administrations. In addition, public bodies will benefit from automation, standardization and cost reduction. An electronic invoicing system for Public Administration has also been mandatory since 2015 together with related standards and platforms. Italy has also been working on building up, by 2016, a digital registry office at national level, replacing the over 8,000 registry offices at local level actually in place, a key element for the integrated provision of digital services.

Health and Education are two fields that can benefit from improved digitization of services. South Africa intends to develop an integrated e-Health environment through the

strategy, that identifies specific goals, “National e-Health Strategy 2013-2017”. This activities and targets, emphasizes the importance of leveraging e-Health to support a broader transformation of the health sector, also enhancing inter-sectoral collaboration and engagement of private players, universities and research centers.¹⁰

26. E-learning is also regarded as a priority by the South African Government. An example is offered by the “MoMath” (Mobile Mathematics) project, involving – through a multiple-partnership model – the Ministry of Education, local NGOs, mobile operators and textbook publishers. MXit, an online discussion platform, has been adopted to send out mathematics exercises, allowing interaction between pupils, teachers and tutors with the growing adherence of both students and teachers. This kind of initiative is also important for fostering digital literacy and accustoming citizens to the use of digital services.

27. In conclusion, South Africa and Italy, while being placed at different levels of e-Government development, are facing similar challenges related to full deployment of digital public services and have to overcome similar obstacles in order to reap e-Government benefits. Both Countries are committed to building up an integrated strategy and have already gained considerable experience in the setting up and provision of digital services. In this sense, they can share these experiences, the lessons learned and the best practices emerged.

28. Moreover, both Countries can attract and deploy – public and private – investments in those areas where the greatest opportunities will arise in the years to come, among which **high-speed broadband infrastructures, integrated cloud-based and Open Data platforms, cybersecurity and user experience solutions, digital payments and Internet of Things.**

¹⁰ In 2015, the “Mobile-Health Strategy 2015-2019” has been developed to manage information communication, health education and the data management needs of the health system in South Africa.

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