The Role of ICTs in Governance, Statebuilding, and Peacebuilding in Africa: The Case of Ethiopia

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The Role of ICTs in Governance, Statebuilding, and Peacebuilding in Africa: The Case of Ethiopia

Abstract
While the codification of a national ICT policy is an important indicator of a nation's commitment to the development of ICTs, it is possible that states are “coerced” into implementing ICT reforms, particularly e-Government reforms, through pressure from donors (Brussels, 2011) and other significant and powerful constituent groups. Even when policies are developed by a state's own volition, what matters is not the policy per se, but how and to what end the policy is used. Located in one of the most economically marginalized and unstable regions of the world, Ethiopia's prioritization of economic development, stability, and national security might be legitimate. However, such concerns could also have a chilling effect on ICT development in the country. In light of this, this study seeks to examine how Ethiopia's ICT policy is deployed and the extent to which the policy creates an enabling environment for the free flow of ideas, promotion of good governance, and socio-economic development.

Disciplines
Communication Technology and New Media | Critical and Cultural Studies | International and Intercultural Communication

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The Role of ICTs in Governance, Statebuilding, and Peacebuilding in Africa: The Case of Ethiopia

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The ICTs, Statebuilding, and Peacebuilding in Eastern Africa Project:

This occasional paper series is part of a larger project run by the Center for Global Communication Studies (CGCS) at the University of Pennsylvania, conducted in partnership with the Programme in Comparative Media Law and Policy (PCMLP) at University of Oxford, and funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York (CCNY). This project seeks to bring greater clarity about the expectations and the realities of the use of communication technologies in developing contexts. In media and development theory, policy, and practice, strong normative statements about the transformative power of ICTs have often clouded the understanding of how people and communities actually make sense of, and engage with, the old and new communication technologies that surround them. Under this framework, this two-year project explores the use of ICTs in Eastern Africa.

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Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have become an indispensable part of modern life. For developing nations in particular, they are seen as critical to economic, social and political development. For example, the growth in mobile communication has enabled greater access to market information for farmers and fishermen, particularly in rural areas, increasing their profits (World Bank, 2009). Countries with efficient ICT programs are also able to curb the level of corruption and promote good governance (Brussel, 2011), promote gender equality and witness changes in educational provision (Unwin, 2004), and reduce some aspects of social exclusion—for example, by encouraging minority ethnic group learners to speak more within the host community (Webb, 2006).1

Given the benefits of ICT, it is troubling that ICT adoption and use have lagged in many developing countries. There is significant regional disparity in ICT use (West, 2007; Zafar and Aftab, 2012; Daniel and Hastings, 2006). According to West (2007), while 34% of countries in Western Europe offered executable services online in 2007, only 9% did in Africa. In its 2008 e-Government survey, the United Nations (2008, p. xiii) found that “There were large differences between the five regions [of the world] in terms of e-government readiness, with Europe having a clear advantage over the other regions, followed by the Americas, Asia, Oceania, and Africa. Asia and Oceania were slightly below the world average, while Africa lagged far behind.” The disparity in internet development for Africa generally, and for Ethiopia in particular, is even more dramatic. Although Ethiopia accounts for more than 8% of Africa’s total population, only 0.6% of the continent’s internet users are in Ethiopia, and Ethiopia’s internet penetration rate of 1.1% is well under Africa’s average of 15.6% (Internet World Stats, 2012). With respect to the availability of e-government services, in 2012 the United Nations’ world e-government development database ranked Ethiopia 172 out of 193 countries (United Nations, 2012).

With a view to reversing this scenario, in 2009 the Ethiopian government approved a national ICT policy and affirmed the government’s commitment for its implementation. The ICT policy document describes Ethiopia’s “national vision” regarding ICTs as follows: “transform Ethiopia from a country associated with poverty to a middle-income economy and society with deep-rooted participatory democracy and good governance based on the mutual aspirations of its peoples” (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2009, p. 3). The document states that the government envisions ICTs as not only improving economic growth but also supporting “Ethiopia’s on-going process of democratization and good governance” (p. 1) because ICTs enable “all citizens to participate in the political process as well as have access to global knowledge and information” (p. 2).

The ICT policy document also outlines various factors that contribute to the country’s low level of ICT development, most notably:

- The absence of appropriate legal and regulatory frameworks;
- Limitations in telecommunications infrastructure and low level of internet services penetration;
- Lack of organized data and information resources, and poor accessibility to those that exist;
- Lack of skilled human resources coupled with low ICT literacy; and

Ethiopia’s articulation of its ICT policy is closely tied to the government’s distinctive idea of development, specifically the idea of a developmental state in which the government heavily intervenes in economic and social life in order to promote systemic economic growth.2 Consistent with its declared developmental state model, state intervention in critical sectors, including the communication sector, is seen by the government as crucial for achieving accelerated and ‘equitable’ development of the nation as a whole. As a result, one of the most significant factors influencing Ethiopia’s ICT use is the monopoly of the internet and telephone markets by the government-owned Ethio Telecom.3 In fact,

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1 More examples of the ICTs in development contexts are given in Bott & Young, 2012; World Bank, 2009, and Msimang, 2011.
2 It has been argued that such a model has worked in some countries, such as Singapore (e.g. Huff, 1995).
3 Ethio Telecom was previously known as the Ethiopian Telecommunications Corporation (ETC). The name was changed to
Ethiopia is often cited as one of a few countries in the world that exercise complete control over the communication sector (Adam, 2010). While there are various explanations as to why the Ethiopian government believes it is important to have a monopoly over the communication sector, Ethiopia's developmental state model—which prioritizes economic growth and national security—is central. The government considers the communication sector, and the telecommunication industry in particular, as a cash cow that generates significant revenue (twenty billion birr in fiscal year 2013, which is slightly more than one billion USD) (Muluken, 2013), which the government could put to use as deemed necessary. The government also sees control of the sector as an important way to keep in check security threats the sector could pose to the regime if left to the whims of the market. The concerns over the destabilizing potential of ICT have been exacerbated by the unrest generated by the Arab Spring and the role that technologies are said to have played in bringing down long-surviving authoritarian regimes in the Middle East.

While the codification of a national ICT policy is an important indicator of a nation's commitment to the development of ICTs, it is possible that states are “coerced” into implementing ICT reforms, particularly e-Government reforms, through pressure from donors (Brussels, 2011) and other significant and powerful constituent groups. Even when policies are developed by a state's own volition, what matters is not the policy per se, but how and to what end the policy is used. Located in one of the most economically marginalized and unstable regions of the world, Ethiopia's prioritization of economic development, stability, and national security might be legitimate. However, such concerns could also have a chilling effect on ICT development in the country. In light of this, this study seeks to examine how Ethiopia's ICT policy is deployed and the extent to which the policy creates an enabling environment for the free flow of ideas, promotion of good governance, and socio-economic development.

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Ethio Telecom in December 2010, when management of the company was outsourced to France Telecom (ownership remains in the hands of the Ethiopian government).
The goal of this study is to critically examine Ethiopia's ICT policy and to compare the government's rhetoric with actual practice regarding ICTs. The aim is to shed light on how the Ethiopian government is approaching the ICT space, what this suggests for the future of ICTs in Ethiopia, and what it may tell us about the potential or actual role of ICTs in improving statebuilding, governance, and citizen voice in Ethiopia. This project was conducted as part of a larger grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York examining the role of ICTs, statebuilding, and peacebuilding in Eastern Africa. There are two strands to the research. First, a rhetorical analysis of the 2009 policy document seeks to understand how the Ethiopian government views and articulates the role of ICTs in the country's development. This analysis is supplemented by interviews with various stakeholders, both within and outside the government, to understand how the policy statements are being translated into the real world. The following questions are addressed:

- Who are the players that influence ICT policy and the ICT policy debate, according to the document?
- How is the government approaching ICTs and ICT policy?
- How is the policy being implemented, according to interviewees and a review of existing evidence?

While Ethiopia's ICT policy document provides insight into the government's approach towards ICT development and implementation, it is not merely a guide to ICT policy in Ethiopia. In many ways, it is a public relations document: it seeks to show the Ethiopian public, and the world, how Ethiopia envisions itself as a country and how it envisions itself in the world of technical innovation. It is often argued, for example, that "documents can owe more to the interpretations of those who produce them than to an objective picture of reality" (Denscombe, 2003, p. 228). By closely examining the text we can gain insight into how the Ethiopian government is approaching the ICT space. Rhetorical analysis is defined as "a process of illumination and evaluation" that can "lead us to a fuller and richer understanding of a particular work" (Andrews, 1983, p. 3). Analysis of persuasive texts, in particular, provides insight into "what the speaker was trying to do, what the speaker said, and what the speaker meant" (p. 4). In the case of Ethiopia's ICT policy document, understanding how a policy issue is framed for public consumption at a particular historical moment, and comparing that rhetoric to action, illuminates how the government is positioning itself in the future ICT landscape of the country, and what impact its policies and actions might have on the public. Such an examination is particularly important in Ethiopia given the potential conflict between the access to information implied by an improved ICT infrastructure and the Ethiopian government's reputation for restricting the country's information space.

The interviews, which present a more nuanced picture of how a policy is actually applied, sought to supplement the rhetorical analysis and provide further understanding of the intent of the policy as well as how it is being put into practice. To better understand the intersection between policy and practice, two of the country’s key ICT initiatives—TeleCourt and the Telecom Fraud Offense Law—were used as examples in interviews.4

In order to identify the most appropriate individuals for in-depth interviews, the research team conducted preliminary interviews with policymakers and other stakeholders referenced in the policy document, including the Parliament, the judiciary, the private sector, educational and research institutions, civil society organizations, the mass media, and the international community. Approximately 30 individuals were approached, and 15 interviews were ultimately conducted between mid-February and mid-July 2013. The policymakers interviewed included representatives from the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the stakeholders interviewed included representatives from NGOs, the African Union (AU), the House of Peoples’

4 A 2011 study aimed at explaining cross-national variation in government adoption of new technologies reports that we know very little about the specific ways in which these technologies are being used across diverse contexts, and the manner in which patterns of use reflect overall patterns of diffusion. See Bussell (2011).
Representatives, the private press, the state-owned media, the Ethiopian Press Council, civil society groups, and opposition parties. All of the interviews (except one) were conducted in Amharic and translated into English.

The research team encountered a number of challenges during the interview process, in part due to the sensitive nature of the research. Some potential subjects refused to be interviewed; others indicated that there was no one in their organization who was able to talk to us for various reasons; others who had confirmed did not keep their appointment on the scheduled date; and, finally, others made themselves available but would only speak off the record. For example, representatives from the World Bank—which was, according to the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, a key actor behind the ICT policy initiatives—indicated that the project phased out in 2010 and they did not know much about it. One interviewee, from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was willing to answer our questions, but only off the record. What is interesting about this particular interviewee was that his responses were consistent with official government policy, and he has been supportive of what the government does with regard to ICT, including the government's monopoly over the telecommunication sector, but did not wish to express such a conviction on record. After initially declining our interview request, a representative from the EU agreed to forward the questions to Brussels to obtain permission to speak with us, but he never got back in touch with us. Finally, representatives from a few organizations, such as the Ethiopian Commodity Exchange (ECX), promised to avail themselves for an interview, but never responded to further enquiries from the research team.

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5 Interviewees were conducted with the following organizations/institutions: Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (3), Federal High Court, House of Representatives, The Reporter, Capital Newspaper, Ethiopian Consumers’ Association (2), Ethiopian Lawyers Association, African Union, Ethiopia Radio and Television, Ethiopian Broadcasting Authority, Unity for Democracy and Justice Party, Consortium of Christian Relief and Development Association (CCRDA). Due to the sensitive nature of the subject material, only the names of organizations are listed.

6 For more on the project, see World Bank (2010a) and World Bank (2010b).
Background: Ethiopia as a Developmental State

Ethiopia’s ICT policy is, in large part, informed by the country’s developmentalist orientation. Among political economists, Ethiopia is recognized as what is known as a “developmental state,” where the state is the main actor in the country’s politico-economic spheres. Developmental states are generally conceptualized as those states whose governments have concentrated sufficient power, autonomy, and capacity at the center to shape, pursue and encourage the achievement of explicit developmental objectives, either by establishing and promoting the conditions and direction of economic growth, by organizing it directly, or a varying combination of both (Johnson, 1982; Leftwich, 1995; Chang, 1999; Beeson, 1999). In other words, a developmental state is one in which the state plays a strategic role in economic development, with a bureaucracy that is given sufficient scope to take initiative and operate effectively. Economic development is prioritized over other spheres of public policy, and the national economy as a whole is prioritized over individual industries (Johnson, 1999; Kwon, 2005). In developmental states, governmental control of key institutions ensures equal access of all citizens to services. Empirical evidence from East Asian countries suggests that the economic successes these countries have achieved after the Second World War are attributable to strong state intervention (Johnson, 1982; Deyo, 1987; Haggard, 1990; Wade, 1990).

Traditionally, “developmental states have been based on various forms of non-democratic political regimes: monarchies in nineteenth-century Europe, capitalist dictatorships in South Korea and Taiwan, and communist authoritarian regimes in contemporary China and Vietnam” (Fritz and Menocal, 2007, p. 536). Ethiopia differs from these classical examples in the fact that the country embraced democracy before subscribing to the notion of building a developmental state. As a result, Ethiopia is not just a developmental state but a democratic developmental state. However, a democratic developmental state is not equal to the sum total of democracy and development; the two approaches have varied historical evolutions and different normative expectations. While it is certainly true that not all developmental states have authoritarian governments, there is “…little doubt that building developmental states in a democratic context does bring with it particular challenges which for the most part Asian and other historic success stories did not face” (Fritz and Menocal, 2007, p. 536). White similarly notes that “…there are certain potential trade-offs and incompatibilities between democracy and development which must be addressed” (2006, p. 63) when thinking about building a democratic developmental state. For example, “democracy has an inherent tendency to disperse power and slow down decision-making processes, and it also makes the state less autonomous and less insulated from societal demands” (Fritz and Menocal, 2007, p. 536).

In the case of Ethiopia, the government has argued that a developmental state approach is justified because of “market failures that would become bottlenecks for development” (EPRDF, 2010, p. 66, translation). While Ethiopia has ratified a number of international documents encouraging privatization and liberalization, the government-owned Ethio Telecom (formerly the Ethiopian Telecommunications Corporation) remains the sole provider of internet and telephone services in the country. The policy document makes no reference to potential liberalization of the sector, and official government discourse indicates that there is no plan for privatization. For its part, the government argues that the privatization and liberalization of key sectors such as telecommunication would put the public at the mercy of corporate owners whose primary motivation is profit maximization rather than universal service; that the investment and subsidies required to achieve universal service can only be achieved by a monopoly provider; and that because telecommunications infrastructure is a public good, the government is best placed to provide it (Adam, 2010).8

7 For example, Part Four of the 2001 African Charter on Broadcasting states that “Telecommunications law and policy should promote the goal of universal service and access, including through access clauses in privatization and liberalization processes, and proactive measures by the State.” A state monopoly over the communication sector also seems to be incompatible with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, of which Ethiopia is a signatory.

8 It has also been argued that the government is disinclined towards privatization because it “has sunk so much borrowed capital into the
Critics argue that the government monopoly deprives the industry of viable competition, which in turn, results in exorbitant service charges, poor service, and lack of innovation, with important implications for the country in terms of exploiting the full potential of ICT for the betterment of society at large. According to a 2010 ResearchICTAfrica report, the “monopoly market structure is one of the major factors in the slow development of [Ethiopia’s] ICT sector” (Adam, 2010, p. 6), undermining not only business competitiveness but also government revenue. Estimates show, for example, that “the ETC loses about 30% of its revenues to bad quality of service on an annual basis” (Adam, 2010, p. 10-11). The lack of investment has also slowed the country’s regional and global integration. For individuals, the monopoly has kept prices artificially high, making computer usage and broadband access beyond the reach of most of the country’s citizens, even with recent reductions in tariffs (Freedom House, 2012).

Despite the articulation of such grand visions for the role of ICTs in improving Ethiopia’s economy and bettering the lives of the country’s citizens, a closer examination of the document indicates considerable uneasiness on the part of the government towards unchecked ICT use, where the desire to take advantage of the potential that ICTs offer is tempered by a desire to proceed cautiously. Acknowledging that “the ICT legal systems framework which has been operational in the country can not cope with the challenges of the fast developing national and global ICT sector” (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2009, p. 8), the policy document states that the government is committed to creating “a conducive legal and regulatory environment” to “facilitate[e] domestic and foreign investment” (p. 10). At the same time, it suggests the need for a strong role of government: that the development of ICTs needs “a safe and secure ICT environment as well as appropriate standards” to prevent damages that might occur (p. 9).

The document includes much discussion of connectivity and interconnectivity (for example, stating that the government should “develop, modernize and expand the country’s communications and telecommunications infrastructure and services” to provide “access to knowledge and information” (p. 6)). Despite this, the emphasis is on connecting government offices and public institutions to each other (through data that “cater[s] to the needs of key sectors of the economy and the delivery of government services” (p. 6)) rather than bringing information and data to the public, fostering connectivity among Ethiopian citizens, or fostering connections between Ethiopian citizens and the outside world. The focus appears to be on using ICTs to create networks among government agencies: for example, though support for “federal, regional and lower level administration intra and inter-agency electronic service delivery and information exchange” (p. 13); the creation of a “digitally networked system of libraries” (p. 15); the linking of “hospitals, health research institutes and health centers with information network at the national and regional levels” (p. 17).

Furthermore, while the policy pays lip service to the importance of the private sector in ICT development and

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9 In addition, the attention to economic development is consistent with the Southern African Development Community’s Declaration on Information and Communication Technology, which aims, among other things, “to promote sustainable economic development, technology network that it is highly risk-averse and therefore likely to maintain the status quo” (Adam, 2010, p. 10). Some argue, however, that the government is in fact taking small steps toward privatization. Baron (2010), for example, contends that the Ethiopian government’s recent contract with France Telecom is a first step toward liberalization of the communication sector.

9 In addition, the attention to economic development is consistent with the Southern Africa Development Community’s Declaration on Information and Communication Technology, which aims, among other things, “to promote sustainable economic development, technology and bridge divide within the Region and the rest of the world” (SADC, 2001, p. 1). Citing international experiences, the SADC document states that “ICT, if harnessed, can contribute significantly to the economic development of countries and facilitate the provision of a better life for citizens” (SADC, 2001, p. 2).
in ICT for economic transformation more generally, the government monopoly on the communication sector makes it difficult for private firms to actually grow and contribute in an effective manner. The policy states, “It is obvious that the development of the economy in general and ICT in particular critically depends on active participation by the private sector…[and] the Government is committed to removing obstacles constraining its development” (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2009, p. 19). Yet despite a desire for increased domestic and foreign direct investment, or for incentives to increase the international competitiveness of private sector firms, the policy makes no reference to liberalizing ICT or allowing the sector to innovate. If the objectives and goals in the ICT policy are to be truly realized, such innovation and development are essential. On a most basic level, Ethiopia needs to have reliable internet service. As it stands now, ICT use in Ethiopia is plagued by poor internet connectivity and frequent call drops, problems that limit one of the goals of the policy itself, i.e., “equitable access to knowledge and information” (p. 2), and the policy includes no discussion of how these issues could be addressed.

The policy document briefly references a desire to look to other countries for models—stating that Ethiopia will “adopt regional and international standards and best practices in the development of ICT rules, guidelines and regulations” (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2009, p. 10)—but does not provide much in the way of specifics. The findings from the interviews give a bit more detail. For example, Senait Berihu, the head of ICT at the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology, stated:

…when we first formulated the law, we used overseas laws as a benchmark. Experiences of different countries were taken into consideration; even consultants from countries like Canada, Egypt and South Korea were present to do research on our country’s readiness as well as assist us in carrying out the task. (Personal interview, 15/4/2013)

When asked why the experiences of Egypt and South Korea were deemed more relevant than others, the interviewee noted that these two countries had some similarities with Ethiopia, which made their experiences more applicable than the more sophisticated experiences of the West. It should also be noted that the developmental state model followed by Ethiopia is largely modeled after that of South Korea, so it is hardly surprising that the government has given serious consideration to South Korea’s ICT policy in the formulation of its own policy.

Democracy, Good Governance, and ICTs

The ICT policy document also provides insight into how the Ethiopian government sees the connection between “democracy,” “good governance,” and information flows. Here, the attitude of ambivalence, discussed earlier, conceals a more worrisome contradiction in the document. Even though the document affirms that the government wants to create systems that “ensure that all citizens have equal and equitable access to government services and to knowledge and information” (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2009, p. 1-2), closer examination reveals that it avoids any real exploration of the role of ICTs in fostering free expression, furthering the creation of an informed citizenry, or facilitating participation in the political process. There is little indication that the government sees ordinary citizens as playing a role in enhancing good governance through increased access to information, and little reference to how ICTs could facilitate the media’s role in nurturing and fostering informed citizens, in creating a forum for public debate and deliberation on issues of critical import to citizens, or in getting information about the government to the public.

In Western models of democracy, a key assumption is that a free flow of information is necessary to safeguard democracy, keep leaders accountable, reduce corruption and keep politicians honest, among other things. These outcomes are collectively referred to as “good governance.” The World Bank is perhaps the biggest promoter of the viewpoint that citizens and an open media are critical components of this process, touting its “good governance agenda” and investing in efforts to increase social accountability in order to increase government efficiency, improve service delivery, and reduce corruption.  

Under this definition of good governance, ICTs have been increasingly lauded as an effective and efficient way

10 See, for example, World Bank, 2003; World Bank, 2005; and World Bank, 2012.
to help citizens hold their leaders accountable by getting information to (and from) the public. The possibilities held forth for ICTs have particular potential for Africa, where government accountability is seen as a pressing issue and mobile phone ownership has exploded. One key draw to this type of program is its simplicity. The conception that once information is “out there” it will automatically become utilized by the public to monitor their leaders is embedded in the literature (e.g., Booth, 2012; Bott & Young, 2012; Msimang, 2011).

Other definitions of good governance place a greater emphasis on service delivery, and do not necessarily consider free media and public involvement part of the equation. Udo E. Simonis, for example, acknowledges that there are several different definitions of good governance, but defines good governance as generally encompassing: “possession of all, or some combination, of the following elements: participation, transparency of decision-making, accountability, rule of law and predictability” (2004, p. 4). Simonis presents three well-known models of governance (the UNECA, Asian Development Bank, and African Peer Review Mechanism models), two of which explicitly cite effective service delivery as an important component of good governance.

It is against the backdrop of these definitions that this study analyzes the role of ICT in promoting good governance in Ethiopia. Reading between the lines, one has a sense that democracy and good governance are conflated in the policy document. According to Ethiopia’s version of developmental democracy, “good governance” is defined as providing for its citizens. The document asserts that the government has taken wide-ranging measures to develop ICTs at both the federal and regional levels in a bid to making ICTs accessible to government institutions, thereby improving the delivery of services and information to the wider public and supporting better health, economic prosperity, and increased safety.

The assumption is that if “good governance,” defined as improved service delivery, is achieved, then “democracy” is achieved as well. Read in this light, it is clear that the role of ICTs in facilitating a reciprocal form of communication and empowering citizens to actively engage in democratic dialogue and participation is overlooked in the policy document. There is little indication that the government sees ordinary citizens as playing a role in enhancing good governance through increased access to information. Instead, the public at large is conceived, first and foremost, as a consumer of services and information provided by the government via its various institutional outlets. The interaction between the government and the public is assumed largely as linear and unidirectional—the government as an active agent engaged in service and information delivery facilitated by the use of ICTs, and the public assumed as a passive partner at the receiving end. Social accountability by the public is not necessary because the government is taking on that role itself.

Ultimately, ICTs are treated as way to promote Ethiopia’s developmental state ideology, in which the state takes the lead in pursuing developmental objectives while the private sector and the citizenry are kept at arm’s length. ICTs are not seen as a way to promote “democracy” in a western normative sense but as a vehicle for providing services to its citizens and for accelerating socio-economic transformation in line with the government’s Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program (SDPRP).

Interviews with government institutions corroborate this point of view. Interviewees tend to avoid directly answering how ICT is promoting the process of democratization. They focus on ICT’s role in service delivery, and seem to consider democratization as a byproduct of good governance and efficient service delivery. The government does not view citizens as playing a role in creating and sustaining an efficient, responsible and corruption-free government, but rather sees corruption reduction as primarily the responsibility of government. For example, one interviewee from the government, citing the usefulness of ICTs for reducing corruption, noted that the government was carrying out “anti-corruption trainings” at the woreda level through ICTs. The interviewee further stated that “when they enter [woreda] offices, the telephone presents programmed speeches about corruption for about two to three minutes (Personal interview, 21/03/2013),” describing this as a very effective program. This example may suggest that the government sees corruption control as generally outside the purview of the public.

Overall, findings from the interviews overwhelmingly support government claims that ICT is promoting good governance, as defined as improved delivery of government services. ICT’s role in service delivery, in fact, is one of the very few points of agreement between government and non-
government stakeholders with regard to the government’s ICT policies. An interviewee (interviewee2) from the Ethiopian Consumers Association, for example, notes that:

As lawyers, we used to carry all relevant documents in bags. You need to refer to just a single article during litigation. But now-a-days you can download the relevant documents in iPod phones. You can have access to any code because they are in your mobile phone.... You do not need to go to a particular place searching for a certain information. All public documents were not easily accessible in the past.... (Personal interview, 3/4/2013)

If we take service delivery as a critical component of good governance, it is evident that ICTs have played an important role in promoting good governance in Ethiopia—most notably, in improving accessibility of education and health services. Ethiopia is one of the very few countries in Africa that are expected to meet the UN’s Millennium Development Goals (MDG) in terms of education and health, a fact which can be at least partially attributed to its ICT-enabled School-Net and Health Extension programs.11 Ethiopia has also made progress in improving the accessibility of the justice system through the implementation of TeleCourt and facilitating the payment of utility bills through three-in-one-billing. These examples of ICT use are examined in turn below.

**Service Delivery and Accessibility of Education**

Despite serious internet connection problems, ICT has played a role in making education accessible to Ethiopians in a number of ways. First, many public and private educational institutions have distance education programs, which are run with the help of ICTs. Next are programs such as School-Net, which provides internet access, televisions and standardized educational content to secondary schools across Ethiopia; these programs have also changed how some subjects have been offered. Currently, more than 550 schools have been the beneficiary of such technology all over the country (Takeuchi, 2008). As part of the program, highly skilled teachers from abroad serve as teachers via the satellite network.

School-Net faces similar challenges as all ICT programs in Ethiopia: a lack of skilled manpower, poor internet connectivity, and unreliable infrastructure. Another impediment to School-Net’s adoption and implementation has been the attitude of teachers towards the new program. At first, many teachers were resistant. They believed that School-Net was introduced not to improve the quality of education or to make education more accessible, but to displace teachers. An interviewee (interviewee1) from the MCIT says the following:

There were so many complaints from the teachers, saying that the project is aimed at reducing the number of teachers; there were also complaints about its content [lacking contextualization] as it is transmitted from South Africa. (Personal interview, 4/15/2013)

Regardless of the initial resistance from teachers, School-Net has contributed to Ethiopia’s progress in achieving the MDGs in universal primary education. In the 2013 MDG progress report, the Anti-Poverty Group ONE indicates that Rwanda, Ethiopia, Malawi, Ghana and Uganda are among sub-Saharan Africa’s top performers in this year’s MDG progress report.12 Beyond and above the positive reports lies a reality. Educated manpower is key to the realization of rapid and sustainable socio-economic development; making quality education accessible to the new generation is a precondition for all around development.

Another area in which ICT has contributed to service delivery in education is in the managing and reporting of students’ matriculation examination results. The national exam is a prerequisite for student admission into institutions of higher learning. The head office that administers the exam and assigns students to various institutions of higher learning is based in Addis Ababa. In the past, officials would notify students of their exam results by sending information to their respective schools, a process that could take weeks. Student placement in schools was also done in the headquarters, with the announcement made via

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newspapers, a process that, again, took weeks if not months. ICT has significantly streamlined this process, allowing students to receive their exam results through a government SMS service once grading is done. An interviewee (interviewee2) from the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology notes:

One of our accomplishments is on students’ matriculation examination results. Students can check their results using new technology (SMS), which makes it much easier than before. The service enables students to check their results and which institutions they have been assigned to and puts their names in the university’s database within a fraction of seconds. Hence, this service eases the previously manual based work. (Personal interview, 15/4/2013)

Service Delivery and Accessibility of the Justice System

Another example of the government’s success in using ICT to improve service delivery is the development of TeleCourt. Since the current government came to power in 1991, Ethiopia has embarked on a comprehensive series of governance and public sector reform programs. These efforts intensified following the 2002 inauguration of the National Capacity Building Program (NCBP), which addressed general issues of capacity, accountability, financial management and transparency as well as sector-specific reforms. Among these programs, the comprehensive justice reform program “was charged with designing a comprehensive reform to overhaul the justice system as well as allow citizens to seek and obtain an affirmation of their rights as embodied in and guaranteed by the new democratic Constitution” (Center for International Legal Cooperation, 2005, p. 13).

One of the problem areas identified by the reform program has been the inaccessibility of the justice system, which, according to the program’s final report, “is neither accessible nor responsive to the needs of the poor” (Center for International Legal Cooperation, 2005, p. 14). To address this issue, the Ethiopian government has introduced what is known in Ethiopia as TeleCourt, a videoconferencing system to facilitate justice proceedings. Similar videoconferencing systems have been used in many other parts of the world, where proponents claim that it saves time and lowers court expenses.\(^{13}\)

The genesis of TeleCourt in Ethiopia can be traced back to its first use in Amhara Regional State, an area whose geographic location, hilly terrain and poor road conditions have made the conventional justice system inaccessible and inefficient, especially during the rainy season (from June to mid September). During this time, courts often found it difficult to handle cases: for example, when judges leave town (which they often do), the court is likely to be without a judge until the rainy season is over. In addition, the terrain and poor roads make travel from other woredas\(^ {14} \) difficult or very costly for individuals whose cases are being heard in court.

The regional state developed TeleCourt in an effort to improve accessibility during different seasons. Under TeleCourt, local woreda offices are equipped with cameras and plasma televisions, and are then connected to zonal- or regional-level courtrooms through a video conferencing system. While there has not yet been a formal assessment of the TeleCourt system,\(^ {15} \) the original system in the Amhara Region was deemed sufficiently successful (817 cases by 2008 (”WoredaNet-Ethiopian, “ n.d.) to warrant scaling up the effort. Today, TeleCourt is used at both the regional and federal government levels. Such an effort seems to be consistent with one of the main principles of a justice system in a democratic society, i.e., “that everyone has access to court when they so desire” (Center for International Legal Cooperation, 2005, p. 58).

One interviewee described the changes TeleCourt has brought in the following words: “I was given justice while I am at my home; eating my household food.” The individual continues, “Whether or not the result of the litigations was enjoyable does not matter. But [the litigants] were happy

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\(^{13}\) See, for instance, the European Union’s discussion of videoconferencing at https://e-justice.europa.eu/content_videoconferencing-69-en.do. Information on videoconferencing equipment in EU member countries is available at https://e-justice.europa.eu/content_information_on_national_facilities-151-en.do. The European Union has found the technology particularly helpful in cross-border cases.

\(^{14}\) Woredas (districts) are the second-lowest administrative division in Ethiopia; they are made up of wards (kebele) and then collected together to form regions and zones.

\(^{15}\) To the authors’ knowledge, no assessment exists. The authors are currently undertaking an in-depth study of the TeleCourt system, to be published in 2014.
because they had access to the justice system.” In addition to addressing the problem of accessibility, TeleCourt aims to address another serious problem in Ethiopia: lack of qualified judges. Like many other sectors, Ethiopia’s justice sector has an acute shortage of skilled manpower. Judges in many courtrooms lack proper qualification or experience, or both; judges in capital cities are usually better qualified and experienced than those in more remote areas. Using TeleCourt, these judges are able to hold hearings of cases in other parts of the country, which would have been impossible otherwise.

ICT has also been used to monitor judge performance and improve accountability. According to one of our interviewees, in the past, courts would receive complaints that judges mistreated the litigants or the public, but these reports were impossible to verify. With the video camera and interconnections provided through TeleCourt, the president of the high court or other high-ranking court administrators or officials can use the system to check whether judges hear cases properly and treat the public and the litigants fairly.

Another benefit of TeleCourt is its ability to reduce or minimize the anxiety that witnesses and defendants feel when appearing in court. One of our interviewees describes it as follows: “Because of their sense of safety and freedom, [witnesses and defendants] elaborate their cases even better than some professional lawyers. This is the good part. We have been talking about this among judges. People raise administrative or other dissatisfactions with the plasma TV very well. So I can say that ICT has made court procedures more friendly.”

While TeleCourt appears to have been successful in increasing the accessibility and accountability of Ethiopia’s justice system, it faces the same challenges encountered by other ICT-driven programs in Ethiopia—most notably, poor internet connectivity, lack of skilled manpower, and shortage of materials.

TeleCourt’s effectiveness and accessibility depends on strong internet connectivity. Given Ethiopia’s undeveloped and often unreliable internet infrastructure, cases are often postponed, resulting in a backlog of cases and an increased caseload for judges. Another related challenge is shortage of materials, as the televisions and other hardware needed to implement the TeleCourt system are expensive. Finally, to operate efficiently, TeleCourt requires skilled manpower, which is not always easy to find. With regard to the gap between the promise and the reality of TeleCourt, an interviewee from the opposition Unity for Democracy and Justice Party (UDJP) noted:

Courts are among the exemplary institutions for the success or failure of good governance... [I]f you wish to attend litigations via telecourt (because there are problems like transportation), [i]t was in relation to this that this technology could have facilitated good governance. But we do not see this. This is a good example that illustrates we are not taking advantage of ICT... The plasma is there but it actually does not function. They tell you about lack of sufficient number of judges. A good case in point is the case of Andualem [opposition leader accused of terrorism and put in prison] and his friends. We went to the court on time to attend. But the suspects did not come from the prison because the judge said that there is no need for them to come. They can confer via video. But later, the judge told us that the plasma does not function and that the prisoners are on the way to the court. You see, we were there on time. But look what this inconvenience is. Lack of skilled manpower makes the technology almost nonexistent. What would a technological artifact do unless it is properly utilized? I have gone to schools and observed similar problems with the school plasma.

(Personal interview, 14/03/2013)

There are shortcomings inherent in the use of a system that allows for remote access to justice. When a case requires cross-examination of witnesses and defendants, for example, helpful non-verbal cues such as expressions may be less obvious to judges and prosecutors (Treadway and Johnson, 2006). So far, however, interviews with relevant authorities and a review of the evidence indicate that TeleCourt has been mainly used for appeals and other court procedures that do not require cross-examination.

In spite of some of the challenges identified above, TeleCourt has helped people to have access to the justice system, which otherwise would have been a long and expensive undertaking. Overall, what began as a problem-driven solution for one regional state has evolved into an innovative approach that has significantly improved accessibility of the justice system nationwide.
Three-in-One Billing Services

A final example of ICT being used to improve government service delivery is the development of what is called “three-in-one billing service.” In the past, customers were required to go to three different places to pay their water, power, and telephone bills. The “three-in-one billing” system combines payment services of the three bills in a single location. Although this project was expensive, the government was able to accomplish it through public-private partnership. Interviewee2 from the MCIT notes:

Since the cost of this project was expensive —around 100 million Birr—we had to find a way to finance the project so we used a mechanism of Public-Private partnership. There are a number of countries like South Africa that have failed with this project, but we were successful. And the reason for our success is our passion for the work, and we brought foreign companies to work in consortium together with the public-private companies. The project was funded by money collected from tax. So whenever government increases its efficiency, the tax paid by people would be used for better capital projects. Currently, we have saved money in millions and have gained advantage from work efficiency. (Personal interview, 15/4/2013)

Maintaining Peace and Security

Despite such positive improvements, Ethiopia’s control of the ICT space has worrisome elements, particularly when it comes to control of the media. The government’s control of the media is rationalized, at least in part, by a stated need to protect national security. Ethiopia’s desire to open up to ICTs and new technologies is coupled with the need “to safeguard national, institutional, and individual security concerns” (ICT Policy, 2009, p. 9). The ICT document cautions that “if proper care and due protection is not given to the application of computers and internet, various damages can transpire” such as the receipt of “false and inaccurate data / information… by individuals, business affairs and public organizations” (2009, p. 9). But the interviewees expressed mixed opinions about whether these security concerns were hampering freedom of speech and access to information and privacy rights, among other areas.

Like in many other places, ICT has also been used to fight crime in Ethiopia. An interviewee from the House of Peoples said the following:

There was a meeting in Addis Ababa. Three people went out of the meeting and went to a nearby supermarket. A foreigner was walking before them and he dropped some money. Two of the people from the meeting picked it up…. They went home but the surveillance camera followed them to their own homes. I was highly amazed. Their every act was recorded and police went to their place and the two were caught red-handed…. This is good in terms of the man who lost his money even though it embarrassed the two individuals. This happened a year ago. This will force everybody to behave properly. (Personal interview, 21/03/2013)

This example demonstrates how ICT can be used to successfully fight crime in Ethiopia. It also suggests the possibility that the use of ICT in this way could serve as a deterrent to crime, or even corruption. The two suspects happened to be public officials who were caught red-handed suspected of stealing. What would happen if they assumed higher public offices? The fact they were caught red-handed would pave the way for the possible dismissal from the office they had held at the time.

With regard to the role of ICT in creating an informed citizenry, which is generally seen as an essential component of democratization, an interviewee from the Ethiopian Broadcast Authority (EBA) said, “ICT contribues a lot in terms of creating access. What used to be done manually has become easy now-a-days. Transparency is also assured because of ICT. And ultimately, ICT contributes to peace because informed citizens can contribute to peacebuilding. ICT fosters democracy, peace, development” (Personal interview, 21/06/2013).

Non-government interviewees, in contrast, describe ICT policy as a constraining factor in relation to the free exchange of views among the citizenry, with a detrimental effect on democratization. For example, while interviewees from the Ethiopian Consumers Association acknowledge that ICT could be used to promote dialogue among various sectors of the society and encourage democracy-building, they also highlighted that it can be used to stifle free flows of information.
One ECA interviewee, for example, states:

*If you ask about anything, you will frequently hear that there is some regulation prohibiting the availability of information. If you...ask who the responsible body is to be consulted, you...have the same response that the regulation does not allow to disclose the responsible body. This is a nation of prohibitive regulations. We need to promote openness and transparency. In general, we are lagging behind other countries...* (Personal interview, 03/04/2013)

Others see even more sinister possibilities. For example, a civil society representative described the government’s development of an anti-terrorism law in the early days of ICT adoption in Ethiopia as “terroriz[ing] the people in such a way that people get scared to write simple emails and text messages.” An interviewee from the opposition party believes the government uses ICT to eavesdrop or spy on its own citizens, stating:

*The technology is used to eavesdrop (to monitor our telephones) without our consent. Our email communications are being spied by because of the technological facility. The government uses the technology to harass citizens and deprive them of their rights in the name of security. Undercover video taping, telephone blackmailing and intimidations are some of the things done with technology. ... We do not have access to alternative media, they are blacked or jammed by the government. The rights secured by the constitution like free communication do not practically exist.* (Personal interview, 14/03/2013)

**Telecom Fraud Offense Proclamation**

Ethiopia’s recent effort at telecommunications regulation demonstrates the difficulty of finding a balance between support for free speech and the need to protect national security, particularly in conflict-prone or peacebuilding contexts. It also provides another opportunity to examine the government’s uneasy relationship with ICTs.

In May 2012, the Ethiopian Government produced a draft legislation on telecom fraud offenses. When news of the draft proclamation became public, there was an immediate and vocal response among internet activists, the Ethiopian diaspora, and the Ethiopian citizenry, calling attention to the legislation’s limitations on free speech and the free use of ICTs. Critics slammed the government for, among other things, the criminalization (with up to 15 years jail time) of the use of VoIP services such as Skype. The initial critical reports, including by the BBC, Al Jazeera and Reporters Without Borders, were later found to have some errors, but the uproar prompted the Ethiopian government to come forth and publically counter what it thought was a misrepresentation by the international media, arguing instead that the legislation was necessary to protect Ethiopia’s national security.

After the law was promulgated, some interviewees expressed a belief (off the record) that the law was initiated to address the perceived threat coming from opposition forces in the diaspora who were believed to be using VoIP services to communicate with individuals within Ethiopia, potentially posing a threat to the system. Yet during the debate that ensued over the draft law, the government sought to dispel such concerns, emphasizing instead the importance of the law to protect Ethiopia’s national security. In an interview with Reporters Without Borders, government spokesperson Shimeles Kemal noted that “the compelling reasons behind the promulgation of this law are technological progress and the alarming increase in the incidence of illegal telephone services that bypass the national network, posing loss of revenue and national security risks.” Shimeles said that his government wished to create no new offenses but rather to address telecoms-related fraud that could not have been dealt with under existing laws, adding that it was wrong to assume that this law was intended to regulate media content one way or another. Rather, “It should be viewed as a legal framework that addresses the serious national security issues highlighted by the increasing merger of telecoms services with the internet. Content-related matters are dealt with by our media laws.” He continued: “The law was never meant to criminalize VoIP services such as Skype or others. Neither did it aim to restrict any Internet-based voice service that takes place between PCs, PC to phone and Internet-based phone-to phone services. Had this been the case, the agency could have used existing laws to ban VoIP and charge users in court.”

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16 Al Jazeera and Reporters without Borders both noted, in their initial reports, that the law had been ratified by the Ethiopian parliament in May.

17 Presumably, this includes Telecommunications (Amendment) Proclamation No. 281/2002, which prohibits (in Article 11) the provision or use of voice or fax services over the internet (although no
The most troublesome parts of the proclamation, according to rights groups and activists, were Articles 5, 6 and 10 in Part 2 of the law. Article 5, covering offenses of illegal interception and access, provides for up to 15 years’ imprisonment and a fine for anyone who “without the authorization of the provider or lawful user, or any other competent authority ... illegally obtains access to any telecommunications system.” Article 6 specifies that anyone who uses the telecommunications network or apparatus to disseminate any “terrorizing” or “obscene” message, or uses the infrastructure for “any other illegal purpose,” could be liable for a penalty of up to eight years’ imprisonment. Article 10, sub-article 3 notes that “Whosoever provides telephone call or fax services through the internet commits an offence and shall be punishable with rigorous imprisonment from 3 to 8 years and with fine;” article 10, sub-article 4 states that “Whosoever intentionally or by negligence obtains the service stipulated under sub-article (3) of this Article commits an offence and shall be punishable with imprisonment from 3 months to 2 years.

Prosecutions have been made under this law. See Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2002. In announcing the new law, the government stated that the “new legislation voids the previous prohibition on private use of VOIP services under the 2002 Telecom legislation which included Skype and Google Talk” (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2012), although other analysis (Article 19, 2012) finds that the effect of the law on VoIP services remains ambiguous. and with fine.” It is here that the groups expressed their concern that this provision could be understood to mean the provision and use of VoIP services. The law, known as the Telecom Fraud Offence Proclamation No. 761/2012, was ratified by the Ethiopian parliament in July 2012. Ultimately, banning Skype and other VoIP communication was deemed unworkable—in part because of the possible outcry from various sectors, but also because it turned out that many government officials themselves had been using VoIP for various purposes. Citizens’ experience (including those of the researchers) since the enactment of the law shows that VoIP service for personal use has not been obstructed. Yet a number of the now-enacted bill's key provisions do appear to be overbroad, with potential negative implications (Article 19, 2012). As it stands, however, the bill appears designed primarily to preserve the monopoly of Ethio Telecom in service provision. Prior to the enactment of this law, there is no doubt that internet cafes and VoIP services such as Skype were providing telephone service over the internet at a significant discount to Ethio Telecom. As a result, customers, especially those making international calls, were crowding internet cafes. If left unchecked, the position of Ethio Telecom could seriously be undermined; the authorities would not allow that to happen at the time when the government has officially declared that it is building a developmental state.
The role of ICTs in governance, statebuilding, and peace building in Africa: the case of Ethiopia

As one of the poorest nations in the world, Ethiopia's efforts to deal with poverty by harnessing the power of ICTs to accelerate socio-economic development are quite understandable. However, efforts to alleviate poverty and accelerate socio-economic transformation through ICT-assisted government service delivery can coexist with those to use ICTs for attaining democratic ideals, such as freedom of expression and human rights. As Amartya Sen has argued, development should be viewed not just through the narrow lens of economic growth, but through a broader lens of "human freedoms," which in turn depend on economic arrangements as well as on social, civil and political rights (1999). In this line of thought, ICTs should be put to use in a way that will bring about development with all its manifestations.

In low-income, developing countries such as Ethiopia, however, where the democratic transition is not yet complete, political leaders confront increasing pressures to deliver while state capacity remains limited and accountability mechanisms weak. According to Fritz and Menocal (2007, p. 537), "This combination can lead to increased citizen disenchantment and the further deinstitutionalization of democratic structures, while development goals remain elusive." In view of such potential risks, political leaders in parts of the developing world appear to have been making a tacit strategic choice to focus on socioeconomic transformation while paying lip service to democratization. The recent Western economic crisis, on the one hand, and the spectacular economic successes of authoritarian states in Asia and beyond, on the other, seems to have further validated long-held misgivings about the viability of free market democracy in poor third world context. The Ethiopian government’s tendency to place a higher premium on socioeconomic development in its ICT policy pronouncements and little or no substantive attention to issues of democracy, free expression, human rights, and related subjects could be understood as a way of resolving the tensions between the imperatives of a developmental state and democracy while claiming to build a democratic developmental state.

The findings from this study indicate the determination and commitment on the part of the Ethiopian government to support the development and coordination of ICT, both as an industry and as an enabler of socio-economic transformation. The major challenge seems to lie in the selective approach the government has employed with regards to ICT; that is, it seems to emphasize some areas in which ICT could be useful while deemphasizing or intentionally overlooking other areas. The main value embedded in the document appears to be the role of ICTs in accelerating economic growth and reducing poverty by improving government capacity to deliver services and information to Ethiopia’s citizens. Data from the interviews and the document analysis indicate that there is much promise, and progress, in Ethiopia’s efforts to facilitate service delivery and improve accessibility of services. One of the notable examples of is the government’s use of ICT in administering the national exam that is required for student admission into institutions of higher learning, issuing results, and announcing school placements.

Less progress is evident in the utilization of ICT to improve democratic ideals. While the introductory section of Ethiopia’s ICT policy document highlights the role of ICT in supporting the country’s on-going process of democratization and sound governance, the document itself pays almost exclusive attention to harnessing the potential of ICT for accelerating socioeconomic transformation in line with the government’s Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program (SDPRP). There is no single paragraph in the later text of the policy document that is devoted to explaining the role of the ICT in the process of democratization, nor any policy provisions with respect to institutionalizing and promoting such a role. Similarly, while the interviews reveal that there is general agreement that ICT has proved useful in addressing good governance, at least in the realm of service delivery, opinions from members of the government and other respondents are more ambivalent with respect to whether ICT has been used to promote free expression, debate and civic engagement. Government interviewees generally believe that ICT use and policy has been supportive of good governance, reduced corruption and supported the democratization process broadly, while others believe that those democratic ideals have taken a backseat, both in the policy and in its implementation. The latter group calls attention to the exclusive focus on ICT’s role in accelerating socioeconomic transformation, and expresses concern that ICT’s role in supporting the
democratization process has been overlooked. Many of the interviewees from institutions other than the government particularly were of the opinion that government should move beyond simply paying lip service towards the pursuit of democratic ideals and should make use of ICT in fostering democratic deliberation.

When it comes to implementation of Ethiopia’s ICT policy, the document analysis and interviews both indicate that poor connectivity, high cost of ICT equipment, and a shortage of skilled manpower present major challenges in the realization of the policy and the full utilization of ICT in Ethiopia. However, there are significant differences in the findings from the policy document analysis and interviews with government representatives, on one hand, and the interviews with non-government representatives and institutions on the other. The former group believes that the monopoly Ethio Telecom should be empowered to address the connectivity problem, while the latter believes that privatization of the sector would increase competition, which would in turn bring down cost and improve quality. The non-government interviewees view the current policy, and the monopoly given to Ethio Telecom, as a serious challenge in terms of enabling ICTs to play a key role in transforming the country into a “knowledge- and information-based society and economy.”

While both government and non-government interviewees agree that the infrastructure is sufficiently in place and the political will exists for ICT to play an important role in improving service delivery, ICT is not always being used to its maximum potential for a number of reasons. First is lack of skill. For example, quite a few organizations create websites without any relevant information, or fail to update their websites. In other cases, even though the infrastructure for new technology is improving and the new technology is more cost-effective, some opt for a more established mode of communication, such as fax instead of email. An interviewee from a government office says the following:

_We are not using ICT properly. For instance, we went to our constituencies last time. We met our people, talked to them and left for the capital. I told them to attach the reports to my email because I returned to my office immediately for another assignment. But they sent the report through fax. They did not know how to use the email even though they work in woreda offices. The infrastructure is ahead of the people. It is better with people in Addis. But the people who work [outside the capital] do not use emails. They prefer to fax letters and other documents. (Personal interview, 21/03/2013)_

The government deems it necessary that everyone be onboard in achieving Ethiopia’s pursuit of economic development. Since democratic deliberation and the creation of national consensuses through dialogue and persuasion is a protracted and time consuming process, it becomes expedient for policymakers to take charge, asking the citizens to give their blessings and legitimize policies after they have been made. Dissenting voices are insufficiently entertained and substantive democratic deliberations over issues of national import are almost non-existent; when they exist, they are often formulaic and geared towards bestowing legitimacy to the directions taken.

From this perspective, one might need to understand that if ICT’s role in fostering democratic deliberation is not yet that much visible in the Ethiopian context, it is perhaps attributable to the still to be resolved incompatibilities between the imperatives of a developmental state and that of democracy.
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