

ABSTRACT

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ICT POLICY IN RWANDA

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Since the year 2000, over twenty-five African countries have embarked on passing Information and Communication Technology (ICT) policies at the urging of donors, particularly the UN Economic Commission of Africa, the World Bank, and the British DFID. Rwanda is at the forefront of African efforts to implement ICT policy. This study uses extensive qualitative methods, as well as geographic information systems to collect and analyze data. Interviews were conducted with participants in a snowball sample of forty government officials, civil society representatives and private sector representatives, within the context of a larger four-nation study. The focus in this study is not on ICT as an object in and of itself, but as a lens into the operation of the state and the government. In an effort to rebuild the country's shattered infrastructure, the Government of Rwanda has distributed ICTs using multiple social entry points: including post offices, schools, and tele-centers. The physical components of ICT have been distributed widely throughout the country. Rwanda not only leads its neighbors in the region, it outstrips most of them. Nonetheless, the Rwandan ICT policy process has been extremely hierarchical with no significant participation from the grassroots. The implementation of ICT policy in Rwanda reveals the authoritarian, and potentially autocratic nature of the government. Although the Government of Rwanda has distributed huge numbers of standalone computers, they are not integrated into technological systems which could truly benefit citizens. This study argues that these technological "artifacts" likely serves two important political functions: first, they signal compliance with donor demands, and second, they demonstrate the reach and authority of the central government to the population.