

**MESSAGE BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE SOUTH
AFRICAN DEPARTMENT OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, DR
ROB ADAM, TO THE e-GOVERNMENT STAKEHOLDERS FP7
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Thank you very much for the opportunity to address this important workshop. In the preparation of the information society research agenda for the Seventh Framework Programme, it is indeed appropriate that attention is paid to the critical domain of e-Government. The challenges faced in this area are truly global. The European Commission's efforts to involve its international partners in this consultation are therefore greatly appreciated.

In my short message, I will be sharing with you an African perspective on research and innovation responses required to enhance e-Government as part of the development of an inclusive and sustainable global information society. From an African perspective there are two chief objectives, firstly the improvement of current service delivery, and secondly the anticipation and preparation of future services.

With regard to the first objective of enhancing service delivery, the focus should be on gaining in efficiency, effectiveness and achieving the broadest reach possible, by introducing innovative new business models. The world of e-commerce provides excellent examples, where through the introduction of such innovative processes, small enterprises originally operating in small domestic markets are now successfully engaged with global retailing. The goal is for e-Government to move from merely information provision to fully integrated service provision, in order to enhance the quality of life of citizens.

Ensuring fully inclusive access to e-Government services, irrespective of factors such as location, ability or disability, socio-economic conditions or culture will remain a priority in the developing world. In this context, whilst it is essential to deal with an increasingly globally integrated society, the recognition of local values and cultures is important. Technology solutions such as intelligent systems, significant advances in human language technology and the rapid development of mobile platforms for service delivery will play a vital role in addressing any tensions between the global and local perspectives.

With regard to the second objective, and anticipating future services, an important focus should be on developments, which could have the same "leapfrogging" impact for e-Government in

terms of usability, as those which had transformed the Internet into the World Wide Web. Another example from e-Commerce is perhaps useful. Internet search engines have been existence for some time, but Google's introduction of innovative technology and business models radically altered the landscape. We should in sense therefore be looking to determine the phenomena, which could be the "Google of e-Government."

Within this context, multi-disciplinary research in the e-Democracy domain, focused on future government and citizen interactions, will be essential. Achieving efficiency and effectiveness in e-Participation and e-Democracy will be fundamental building blocks for developing optimal governance models in the global knowledge society. It is therefore important for social scientists to join forces with information and communication technology professionals in the FP7 research teams. Within the African context, they should also address issues such as infrastructure backlogs and social systems, in order to ensure e-Government benefits are leveraged optimally.

In conclusion I would like to emphasise that, based on our knowledge of current and future trends, a unique opportunity exists for accelerating and leapfrogging technology developments to enhance e-Government. The partnership modalities of the FP7 if optimally deployed can play an important role in achieving this objective.

In South Africa our national ICT research strategy currently being developed, identifies e-Government as an important research theme, as does the Consolidated Action Plan for Science and Technology in Africa, recently adopted by the African Ministerial Conference on Science and Technology. The African research community will therefore be well prepared to engage with the partnership opportunities presented by the FP7.

There are undoubtedly many different paths to achieve enhanced e-Government. In some areas, where little or no services currently exist, quick wins could be registered. In other more comprehensive interventions will be required. There is not set formula – innovation will be critical, but the building of platforms which is future proof and also enable better and different futures, will be essential contributions in addressing global societal and technology challenges, and in eliminating the inequities, which continue to scar our world.