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# Inclusive Innovation In Governance: Critical Reflections From Botswana

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# Inclusive Innovation in Governance: Critical reflections from Botswana

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**Abstract**

*In this paper we examine the promise and potential of inclusive innovation via the lens of the Botswana Speaks Parliamentary Initiative. More specifically we look at the future of eGovernance in light of new technological inroads made by mobile broadband connectivity and ICT infrastructure in Sub-Saharan Africa. The authors of this paper were both designers (in the sense that they co-created the platform with the policy makers and citizens in Botswana), as well as observers (in the sense that they researched and analysed the findings iteratively throughout the project evolution).*
*The first section of the paper is dedicated to providing a contextual background for readers on the unique case of Botswana, discussing the relevance and capabilities of the platform, while situating the project within the broader partner-driven cooperation model of development. The next section of the paper outlines the methodology used internally within the project, as well as the tools employed for data collection and analysis. Finally the paper provides a critical discussion on the relevance, confidence, interoperability and innovation provided by interventions such as Botswana Speaks. From the lack of basic facilities such as clean drinking water, to concerns surrounding unemployment and land reform, we showcase via our data, how technologies are being innovatively appropriated to address core development issues. Do the policy makers respond more transparently and effectively with the aid of such tools? Are the voices being aired and expectations being raised with no real meaningful change to follow? In this paper we start a much needed discussion on the above questions and end with key lessons learnt and future directions for our research.*

**Keywords**: eGovernance, Inclusion, Innovation, Citizen-engagement, ICT4D

## 1.0    Introduction

In essence inclusive innovation takes a different view of development from conventional views of innovation [1]: The latter almost always implicitly understands development as generalised economic growth. "By contrast, inclusive innovation explicitly conceives development in terms of active inclusion of those who are excluded from the mainstream of development. Differing in its foundational view of development, inclusive innovation therefore refers to the inclusion within some aspect of innovation, of groups who are currently marginalised" [2].

Within the remit of this paper we examine our stakeholder group, which is characterized by several different marginalised communities (e.g. youth, rural, low income) that intersect within the context of the Botswana Speaks parliamentary initiative. In terms of which "aspect" of innovation the excluded group is to be invited in – we look at governance processes. Furthermore we adopt a broader perspective on inclusion (beyond income inequality) and instead focus on inclusion that is about giving rights, voice, capabilities and incentives for the excluded to become active participants in processes of development and innovation [3].

This paper presents a project that was launched in September 2012 in partnership with the Parliament of Botswana, eGovlab and Government to You. The two supporting pillars of this initiative concern on the one hand, the design and deployment of a Parliamentary Communication System (the Botswana Speaks platform) that aims to enhance transparency and foster communication between Members of the Parliament and citizens during the legislative process in Botswana. On the other hand it is primarily an initiative that is concerned with building capacity via the training of stakeholders and active engagement of the partners in *governance* processes. The conceptual framework of the Botswana Speaks Parliamentary Initiative adopts a socio-political approach. This project emphasises the role of offline as well as online participation by adapting to the socio-political traditions of the country as well as adapting to the IT infrastructures of the country. Moreover, this project emphasises the importance of capacity building through the implementation of eDemocracy initiatives in developing countries by first, rejecting the donor-recipient relation, thus by encouraging partnership and second, by putting a strong emphasis on training users and participants throughout the project period.

The authors of this paper were both designers (co-creating the platform with the end users – the citizens and parliamentarians of Botswana), as well as observers (researching the engagement and providing analysis and evaluation where needed). By being involved in the development of the Botswana Speaks platform, the authors reflexively acknowledged their motivations & subjective understanding of the tool. Hence right from the start, an independent evaluation team was set up, to provide valuable criticism and insights into the outcomes of the initiative. As the independent evaluation took place at the end of the project (after this paper was written), the

results of that report will be drawn on in our future work. We start this paper with a brief discussion on the contextual background within which this initiative is situated. This involves first - examining the context of Botswana; second - the context of ICT for Development (ICT4D) interventions and third - the context of SIDA[1]'s partnership driven cooperation model (PDC), that all in their way shape the landscape and outcomes of our case. We ask what is unique about this set of variables, as well as how they combine and coalesce to provide us with an understanding that can then be applied to other similar contexts?

## 1.1    Contextual background

### a.  Why Botswana?

Botswana has a long-standing tradition of democratic consultation at the local level, a consultation dynamic that is well perceived and worth looking into when considering the implementation of an eDemocracy initiative in the country. This coupled with the current policies on new ICTs and public services, as well as the IT infrastructure of the country, make Botswana an interesting candidate for analysing the impact of ICT innovations within the broader context of Sub Saharan Africa. Indeed, the Botswana Speaks Parliamentary Initiative falls within the National e-Government Strategy 2011- 2016. With the aim to improve public services in Botswana, the National e-Government Strategy "outlines five major programmes and approximately twenty five interrelated projects that will, collectively, move all appropriate government services online, significantly improve public sector services delivery, and accelerate the uptake and usage of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) across all segments of society" [4]. Besides, the Botswana Speaks Parliamentary Initiative falls within the broader Government's Vision 2016 [5] Declaration that envisages "all citizens of Botswana fully embracing and actively managing the process of change. This cannot be change for its own sake, but rather a fundamental transformation across the broad spectrum of the social, economic, entrepreneurial, political, spiritual and cultural lives of Batswana" [6]. It is within this policy framework that the Botswana Speaks Parliamentary Initiative has been conceptualised.

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[1] Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (http://www.sida.se/english/)

The second dimension that has influenced the conceptualisation of the initiative is the IT infrastructure of the country and its e-readiness. Botswana ranks second for e-government development in Southern Africa just after South Africa (0.3637 e-Gov Development Index in 2010 to 0.4186 in 2012 with a sub-regional average of 0.3934) [7]. That said the ICT infrastructure in Botswana is still rather poor outside of the larger cities. Access to Internet is normally limited to a few constituency offices and community Telecentres in the rural areas. According to ITU[2], fixed broadband subscriptions in 2012 was only 0.75 per 100 inhabitants and those are mainly in the big cities. Mobile phone coverage is relatively good in populated areas but generally still based on 3G technologies which makes Internet access very slow. The limited penetration of the Internet in the country is a reality that needs great consideration when conceptualising an eDemocracy initiative in Botswana. Besides, the significant use of mobile phones and the growing use of mobile broadband call for adaptation in terms of ICT tool development. These considerations went a long way in shaping how the Botswana Speaks platform and initiative were designed (with the mobile interface as well as low bandwidth accessibility). We will discuss more on this in the next section.

Botswana has a relatively high GDP as well as a tradition of strong institutions and has experienced government officers. The small population, 2 million, makes communication and cross-fertilisation between different areas easier. As can be seen in the figure below, Botswana has higher than average scores on all poverty oriented variables.
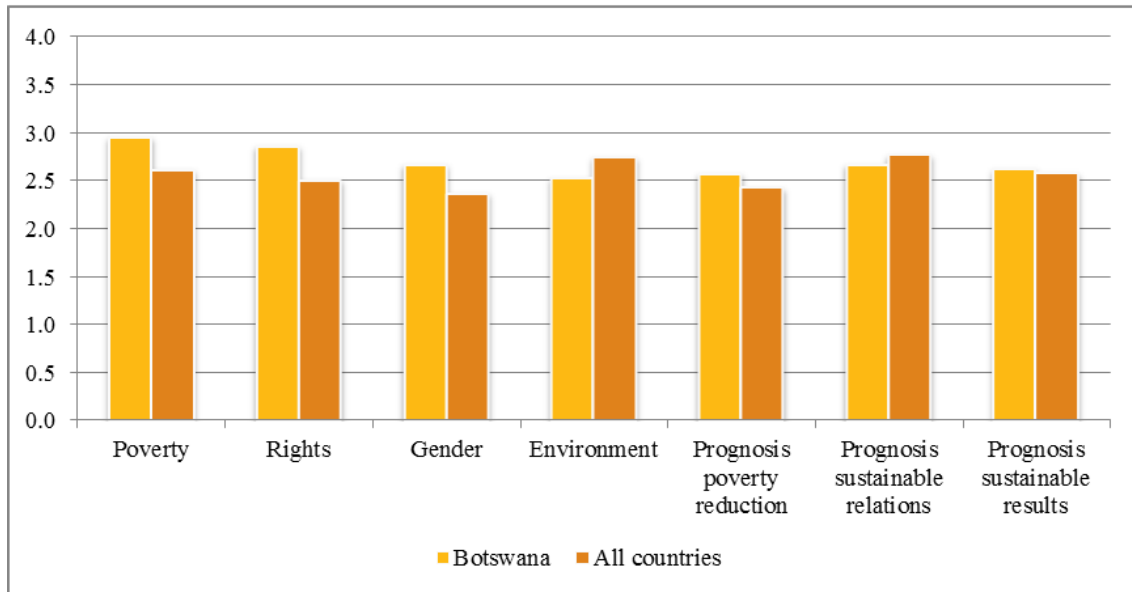
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[2] http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx

*Figure 1: Botswana compared to the average for 7 countries[3] with selective cooperation (SIDA)[8]*

The above factors (high GDP, tradition of political engagement, and sufficiently robust IT infrastructure) make Botswana a strong environment within which to incubate new technological innovations as well as practices surrounding good governance. As a pilot project what Botswana Speaks held as a primary objective was to foster engagement between citizens and policy makers, and through that engagement learn some valuable lessons on inclusion & the future of eGovernance within a development context.

### b.  Not another ICT4D project!

 The Botswana Speaks Parliamentary Initiative has been designed as an 18-month project with three phases. The first phase (6 months) focused on the platform development and training for MPs, staff members involved in the project and constituency officers. Training, feedback and evaluation of the online platform constitute the main aspects of the first phase of the project. During the same phase, collaboration with partners in the Parliament of Botswana enabled the design of the pilot phase (second phase) with the essential definition of constituency meetings (design and purposes) and planning of those same constituency meetings in a timeline of 10 months in relation with parliamentary business in the Parliament. Thus, the

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3
The seven countries being: Namibia, Botswana, South Africa, India, Vietnam, Indonesia and China. As can be seen, Botswana has higher than average scores on all poverty oriented variables, reflecting the priority on poverty in the PDC strategy.

second phase ran for 10 months and maintained training throughout the phase, including training for citizens in the four constituencies involved in the project. The online platform was then made available and used for both deliberation and enhanced constituency services (Speak4Yourself and Uspeak applications designed to better suit mobile access [9]). The third phase, which ran for 3 months at the end of the pilot phase, is dedicated to feedback, evaluation and exploitation of the initiative as a whole. The project targeted four constituencies of Botswana (Nata/Gweta, Boteti North, South East South and Maun West). The development of an online platform through which citizens and MPs could share opinions and concerns, formed one leg of the initiative. The other leg concerned capacity development which came in the form of consistent training and end user engagement.

This was then an ICT4D project that was designed with a significant role being allocated to complementary offline consultations (in addition to those via the platform). The Kgotla [10] as a traditional system was and still is an institution serving as a forum for policy formulations, decision making, including political and economic developmental activities and judiciary on litigations. In Botswana, through this consultation mechanism there is a long standing tradition of political participation at the local level. Putting aside such components of the political and cultural life of the country would be a risk to ensuring the success of any initiative given the influence of traditions and culture in constituencies. Second, an evaluation of the needs from both Members of Parliament and citizens (need for public consultation among the constituencies for parliamentary purposes, need for effective access to information and need for citizens' involvement in decision-making and interaction with their elected representatives) has helped conceptualise the proceedings of the initiative and set up the core elements (offline and online) of the Parliamentary Communication System. A baseline survey was conducted at the start of the pilot and towards its completion to ensure that the initiative evolved in line with local contextual needs.

Built upon the tradition of face to face consultations via the Kgotla and other parliamentary outreach activities, the Botswana Speaks Initiative has been launched in partnership with the Parliament in order to evaluate and standardise an innovative online platform that supports MPs and citizens at the local level in their effort to

execute their social contract and increase policy responsiveness. The initiative includes two online components for consultation which are in use: a case tracking system that favours constituency services in the four participant constituencies (U-Speak) and an online deliberation system open to all citizens in the country (Speak4Yourself).

The Botswana Speaks platform is built on Joomla!, an open source content management system. From the citizens' perspective, the platform enables users to submit messages on two different platforms. First, Speak4Yourself, an opinion poll application that enables any citizen in the country to enter opinions into on-going polls on specific issues that are of concern to them. Second, the platform includes the Uspeak application, a constituency case tracking system that enables citizens from the four constituencies involved in the initiative to send messages via the online platform or via SMS directly to their MP. From the Members of Parliament's perspective, the platform offers a decision support system and enables users to instantly generate statistics and export tables and graphs in order to analyse and visualise citizens' input and preferences by policy areas and by constituency, over any given period of time.
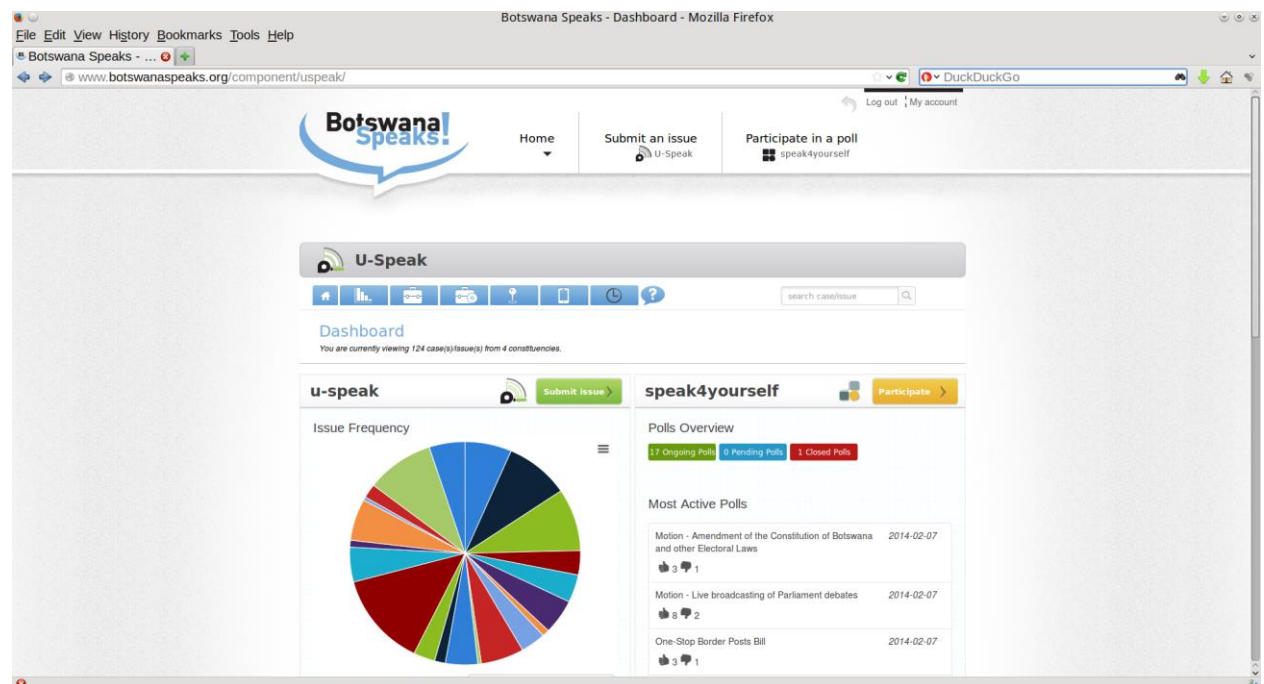


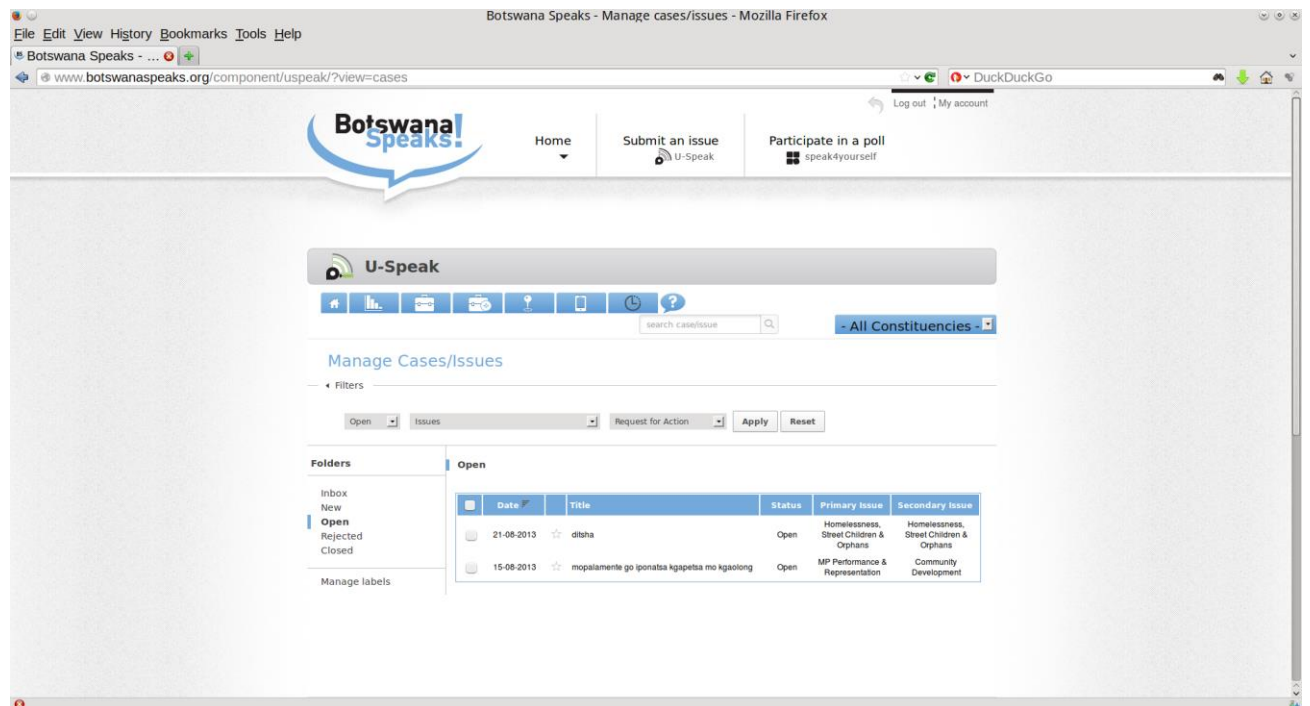*Figure 2: The Botswana Speaks Platform – the dashboard as accessed online (web version)*

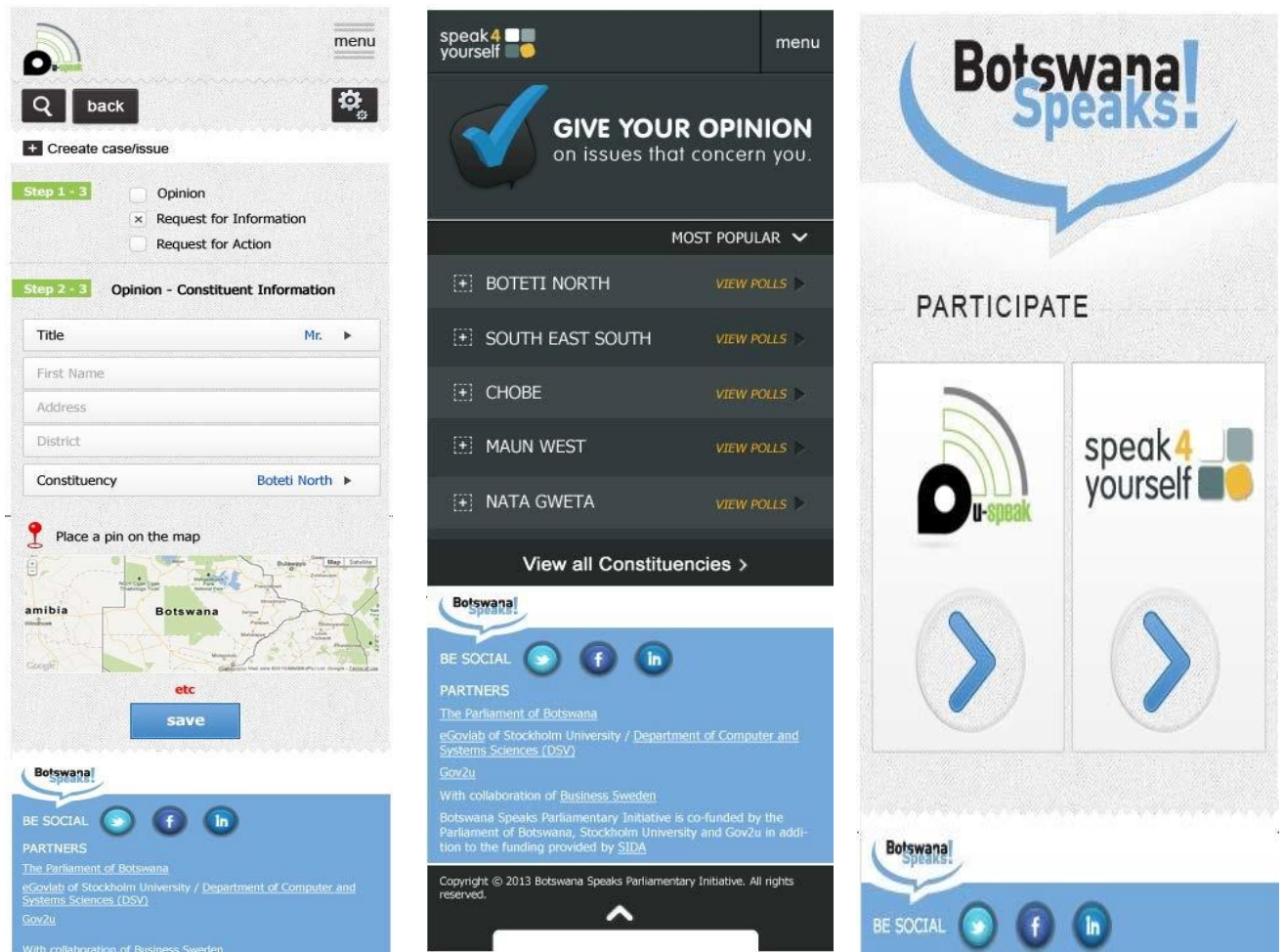*Figure 3: Management of cases – open and closed.*

*Figure 4: Mobile version of Botswana Speaks Platform (from left to right: U-Speak and speak4yourself dashboard, U-Speak issue form, speak4yourself home page)*

In operational terms, Botswana Speaks was aiming to develop and customise the online platform; pilot, evaluate and standardise the application by deploying the two-fold platform in the whole country, establish constituency meetings and implement the platform in four constituencies for improving constituency services; and finally, to promote and replicate the Botswana Speaks platform by analysing the results of the pilot phase and lessons learnt throughout the project in order to expand the online platform to a larger population of users in the country and the Sub-Saharan region, in general.

A two-fold training has been implemented: first, a conceptual training that raises partners' full awareness (MPs, members of staff involved in the project and constituency officers) on the project's implications and expected outcomes in their day-to-day work as elected representatives and civil servants in the National

Assembly. The constituency officers are instructed on how to conduct training sessions as a way to ensure that local actors involved in the initiative are familiar with the online PCS and to train the constituents to improve their IT skills on using the tool, as well. Second, technical training for users and participants throughout the project's period is also provided to ensure the project's sustainability from an ICT perspective. Finally, encouraging the capacity building by training also the citizens in the four constituencies involved in the project is foreseen in order to enhance the potential of participation.

c. **A tale of two partners - SIDA's Partnership Driven Cooperation (PDC) Model:**

As a type of development cooperation, Partner Driven Cooperation is not new. It has appeared in different forms over a long period of time. In December 2007 the Swedish government launched a policy for Partner Driven Cooperation (in the policy called Actor-driven cooperation). The definition of PDC is as follows [8]:

"Actor-driven cooperation refers to measures that stimulate cooperation activities primarily between Swedish actors and actors in low and medium income countries that build on mutual and an explicit division of responsibility between the actors involved and that have the potential to eventually be self-supporting relationships."

In 2009 Botswana was included in the group of seven countries for Swedish selective cooperation, with a strategy for the period 2009-2013. In the strategy it is said that PDC should become the predominant aid modality in 2011. Generally, the PDC projects in Botswana have reached their objectives and the quality of the collaboration has been high. The main problem is that the future of most projects is dependent on future official financing, which is difficult to arrange in Sweden and in some cases also in Botswana.

Within the context of Botswana Speaks, the partnership was considered as an important opportunity to utilise partners' resources [11]; [12], as well as reduce knowledge gaps [13] [14]. The initiative was interested in addressing issues about how to strategically identify and engage stakeholders−in particular the project beneficiary−as partners in the design and implementation of process [15]. This is

reflected quite clearly in the design of the platform itself and the training processes, which shaped the engagement with both members of parliament and citizen groups.

## 2 Methodology

*It is not enough to only "mirror" the world through descriptions and explanations but a pragmatic orientation recognizes intervention and design as a way of knowing and a means for building knowledge about social and institutional phenomena [16].*

Within the Botswana Speaks initiative, our methodology has been one of targeted intervention and design as a way of building knowledge and capacity. Although we have already spoken at length about the project design and methodology, we will discuss here more specifically the tools employed to gather data as well as the analytical framework used to make sense of our findings.

The fieldwork conducted during this project showed a strong interest from local authorities and the youth in the implementation of an eDemocracy initiative in remote areas of the country. Before the launch of the project, base-line- ("pre-project"-) surveys were carried out in February-March 2012; one with 620 ordinary citizens respondents as well as one with 33 MPs. The purpose was to assess their use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and their communication pattern. A "post-project" survey, based on a similar questionnaire, but with additional questions on platform usage, was carried out in October/November 2013 among citizens to assess their use of the platform and gauge the difference in communication patterns with MPs before and after the project. Four hundred and twenty-nine citizens responded to this survey.

The surveys are not based only on random sampling. Efforts were made to reach citizens of all age groups from 18 years and older and from different occupational sectors and different constituencies. In the pre-project survey, the opportunities offered by project orientation meetings were used to approach citizens to explain the purpose of the questionnaires and help people completing them.

For the post-project citizens survey, potential respondents were identified through the Constituency Office, which has records of attendees of past Botswana Speaks

meetings. A sample of those identified by means of these records were contacted and interviewed. Efforts were also made to locate those interviewed in the previous survey. Students in tertiary institutions were also approached and asked to complete the questionnaires after a brief on the Botswana Speaks project.

Citizens from several constituencies (Serowe North, Nata/Gweta, Boteti South, Ngwaketse South, Gaborone Central, Gaborone South, etc.) were interviewed for the purpose of this study and general findings show that there is a strong commitment to and welcoming of an initiative that would gather citizens' opinions offline and online to then be made public or shared privately with elected representatives in the Parliament of Botswana. Those findings should be seen in light of the survey conducted with almost 60% of Members of the Parliament of Botswana (33 MPs) who declared that they would positively welcome input from their constituents in the context of their legislative work. We will discuss more in detail our findings from this survey in the next section, where we compare baseline needs analysis with expectations and outcomes at the end of the project. But before we do that we look more closely at who exactly this user demographic is that we refer to, as it is far from a homogenized group.

## 3 Findings & Analysis

*Getting to know the stakeholders – User Demographics*

As we see in the figures below the user group that we spoke to and who engaged with the Botswana Speaks platform, had the following characteristics:

There was a majority of male respondents that engaged with our platform (66%) over female ones (34%). This is not surprising given the broader gender divide in ICT usage and access. A significant majority of our sample belonged to rural Botswana (81%). This isn't particularly surprising either, as we were targeting rural areas primarily in order to investigate the reach and impact of ICT4D projects and hence our dissemination efforts were focused on rural constituencies.
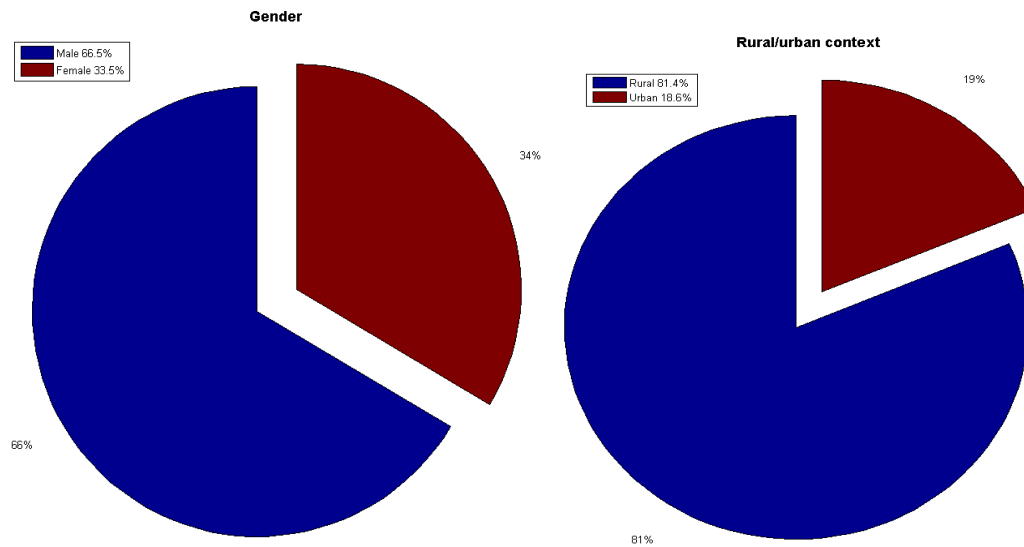
**Gender**

Male 66.5%
Female 33.5%

34%

66%

**Rural/urban context**

Rural 81.4%
Urban 18.6%

19%

81%

*Figure 5: Gender and Rural/ Urban Divide amongst users of the Botswana Speaks Platform*

With regard to language, the majority of those that engaged with our platform (59%) spoke Setswana and the remaining (38%) spoke English. In terms of age distribution, we looked at the users who had actively engaged with our platform, and found a marked slant towards youth. Almost half of our sample (47%) was between the age of 18 and 24. Another 44% fell in the bracket of 25 to 34 years. Which means a staggering 91% of our sample was under 35 years of age. This is interesting because the youth traditionally and in contemporary politics have been a marginalised group, left out of decision making processes and somewhat alienated from participating in governance. Their enthusiasm then to participate in this online and mobile platform, is a promising indication of an innovative way to bring in young people to be a part of democracy in the true sense of the word.
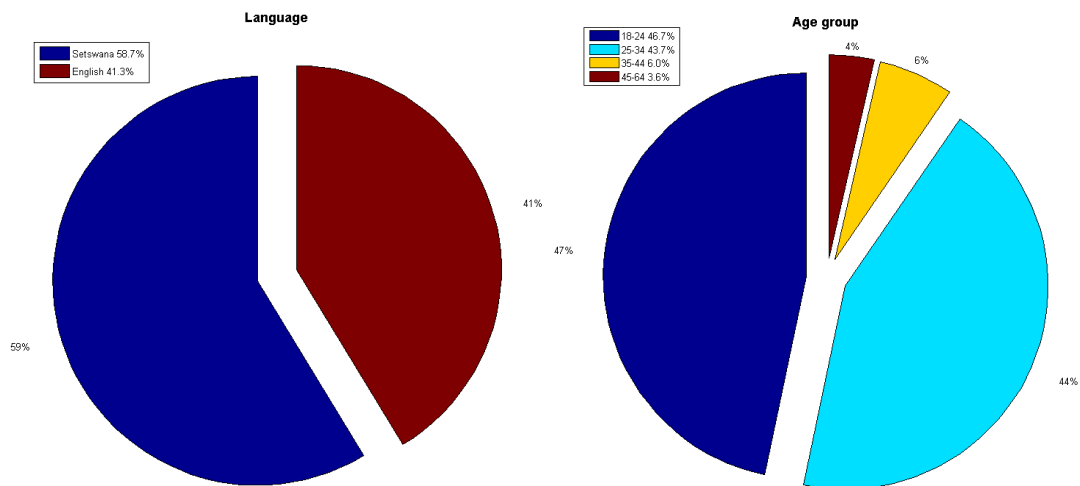
*Figure 6: Language and Age variations amongst users of the Botswana Speaks Platform*

Finally with regard to the occupational affiliations of our sample, the largest four groups were from sales and service sectors, governance, education (students) and agriculture. It is interesting to note that if we take away the more obvious candidates in terms of interest and awareness of such ICT4D interventions, (government employees and students) the other stakeholders that chose to engage with the platform came from sections of society that were hitherto excluded from direct participation in governance (e.g. agriculture, construction, mining etc). This is another promising indicator that such a platform could bring in the voice of segments of society, otherwise unheard and under-represented in governance.
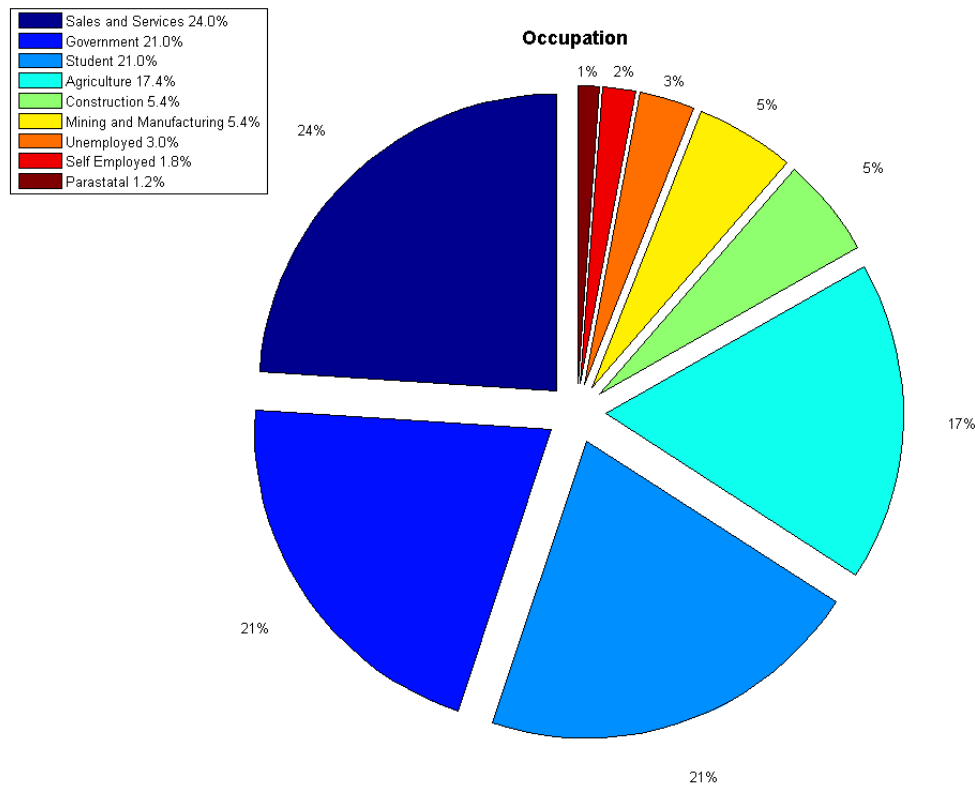
*Figure 7: Occupation variation amongst users of the Botswana Speaks Platform*


*Complexity of future governance – a discussion*


A socio-technical perspective treats technology not as a mere tool or resource but rather as an important factor in relation to society, even an actor alongside humans [17]. Technology is perceived as an active part in transforming society. It is not a neutral tool to be utilised, but is necessary to consider its interplay with other actors in the specific social context [18]; [19]. Technology is thus seen as a central part in the development of the public sector and can act both as an enabler and an obstacle to sustainability.

What we see via the lens of the Botswana Speaks Parliamentary Initiative, is a shift away from the focus on efficiency and effectiveness alone in the public sector to an allegedly more inclusive and innovative 'governance' in the sense of participatory process and dialogue. Dawes [20] discusses the need for a future oriented perspective where eGov is seen as a "dynamic socio-technical system encompassing interactions among societal trends, human elements, changing technology, information management, interaction and complexity, and the purpose and role of

government." We embrace this view of eGovernance in that it is not reductionist in its understanding of complex relationships between social systems and technologies. Neither does it make any assumptions regarding the homogeneity of the stakeholder/ user group. Following from this we draw on Dawes' four analytic lenses with which to examine eGovernance initiatives and research agendas:

*a. Relevance* – The uniqueness of the Botswana Parliamentary Initiative as an ICT4D initiative lies in the way it intertwines the online and offline dimension of the project as briefly discussed earlier. As part of any project in eDemocracy or eParticipation in developing countries, it is essential to favour field promotion by establishing a strong communication strategy to enable the highest number of citizens to get involved. As much as constant promotion in local areas in the country are an essential part of the offline dimension of the project, the novelty with the Botswana Speaks Parliamentary Initiative lies in the socio-political context discussed earlier (importance of local consultations) and its implications in implementing an eDemocracy initiative that would prove successful. Thus, the conceptualisation of *constituency meetings* has been favoured. Constituency meetings draw upon local meetings (kgotlas) and favour consultation on legislative matters. As of today, there is no sufficiently robust mechanism that allows for a wide transparency on parliamentary business in the country and as a result constituency services remain poor. As an answer to these gaps, the Botswana Speaks Parliamentary Initiative offers an offline component that completes the online platform developed for this purpose. Constituency meetings are designed as open discussions (based on the same design as kgotla meetings) on specific issues that are to be discussed in session in the Parliament. Thus, during the pilot phase of the project, a piece of legislation on a specific theme (i.e. Health, Education, Water supplies, etc.) is selected by the Parliamentary Services and will be discussed in several villages in the four constituencies that participate in the initiative. The establishment of such offline meetings requires the creation of a mediator/officer role in the project. Indeed, constituency meetings have been designed on the basis of existing kgotla meetings but involving traditional chiefs in constituency meetings (as mediator and chairs of the meetings) is not possible as they depend on the Ministry of Local Government and not on the Parliament. Therefore, administrators of MPs' local offices will become *constituency officers* for the pilot phase of the initiative. As part of the crucial necessity to foster capacity building throughout the project, training

'constituency officers' who will chair and monitor public discussions on legislation, is an essential part of the project's conceptualisation. During those meetings, local authorities and citizens are invited to discuss a specific topic related to on-going parliamentary business. The constituency officer chairs the meeting and collects citizens' input and requests to make them then available on the Botswana Speaks platform (U-Speak). The use of an offline tool enables constituency officers to gather citizens' input in a similar way than on U-Speak. Once internet connectivity is available more ubiquitously, the constituency officer can sync the offline tool with the platform to gather all data on one single platform.

In the figure below we observed from our survey data that a large segment of our stakeholder group (the ones that engaged with our platform) communicated with their representatives in the parliament via face to face communication. The Botswana Speaks Parliamentary Initiative thus took existing links between constituency officers, administrators, MPs and their citizens, and coupled that with a web/mobile based platform, where dialogues & conversations could continue. The relevance of such a model lies in the fact that it did not seek to *replace* or *reinvent* traditional & local governance practices, but rather it extended the reach and impact of a relationship by making it more transparent and immediate.
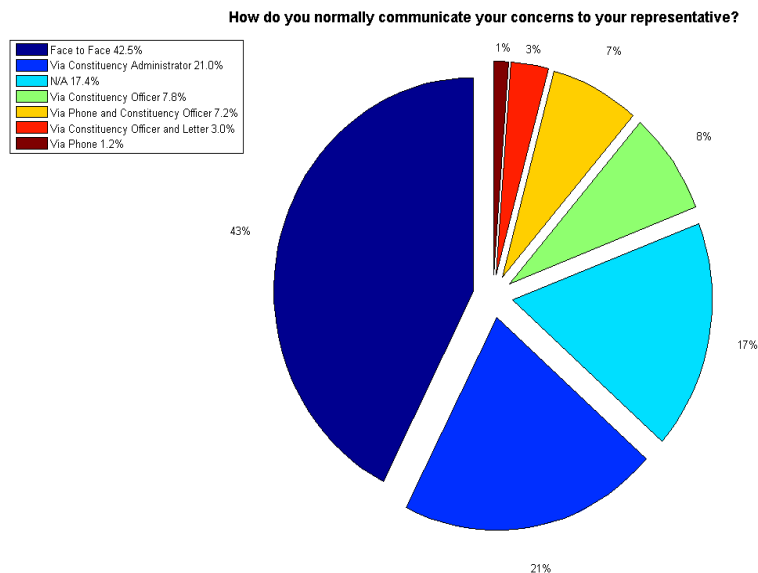


*Figure 9: Offline communication between users of the platform and their representatives*

*b. Interoperability* – As discussed above, with the growing access to connectivity in the form of mobile broadband coupled with a growing demographic of young users who engage via social media, there emerges an interesting trend in future eGovernance. We observed this via the Botswana Speaks Parliamentary Initiative, where citizen and policy makers were engaged in a dialogue that brought together several different traditions of goveranance. So for example in many cases where our citizens logged in questions and comments for their representatives via the platform, they were given responses via a face to face meeting with their MP. The interoperability of offline and online consultation worked very well in the context of Botswana, however this does raise some questions of how it would work in other contexts where democratic and transparent processes were relatively new and hence fraught with some tension. Issues regarding citizen privacy and anonymity in that context then become highly crucial. We will touch upon this in more detail in the next sub-section. Interoperability also concerns technological aspects, such as the ability to access the platform via mobile or web. The interesting and innovative impact of an initiative such as Botswana Speaks, is its ability to transcend barriers that come with geographic remoteness (such as is characterized by rural regions in Africa) or poor infrastructure (lack of PCs, internet connectivity via cables) or language.

*c. Confidence* - One of the reasons why eDemocracy and eParticipation projects in developing countries tend to fail is for their lack of capacity building throughout projects. Several variables lead to failing ICT4D projects (i.e. design, capacity building, etc.) (Heeks, 2010; Dada, 2006). And we would like to focus here on one variable that proves essential in the case of the Botswana Speaks Parliamentary Initiative: capacity building. We have so far shown the different aspects of the initiative: online/offline, online platform/SMS functionalities, fostering deliberation/improving constituency services. In order to ensure the success of each one of these aspects, sustained training of Parliament staff, Members of Parliament and constituency officers is indispensable. Training for citizens in the four constituencies involved in the project was ensured in order to enhance chances of participation and ensure sustained use of the platform.

Training is designed in two-fold: first, a conceptual training that allows participants to be fully aware of the implications of the projects and its expected outcomes. Such

training is less about training participants than making MPs, members of staff involved in the project as well as constituency officers full partners in the project. We believe that by rejecting the donor-recipient dynamic and encouraging partnership, the initiative is more likely to lead to successful results and sustainability in the long run. Second, technical training is also provided to ensure sustainability of the initiative from an ICT perspective. The low penetration of the Internet as well as the considerable low level of IT skills in the country needs to be addressed for the sustainability of the project. Thus, the Parliament of Botswana has put into place an IT training scheme for MPs, members of staff and local administrators in order to sustain IT skills in the long run. At the same time, as mentioned earlier, partners in the projects (Government to You and eGovlab) offer technical support but also training sessions throughout the period of the initiative (orientation seminars, workshops, team meetings, etc.).

Thus, as part of the first phase of the training, MPs and partners in the Parliament have been made full partners in the initiative. By designing together the pilot phase of the project (i.e. discussing jointly implications of constituency services at the local level, limits and expected outcomes of the online platform, design of the online platform, etc.) partners are trained to grasp the outcomes of the initiative and the implications in their day-to-day work as elected representatives and civil servants in the Parliament of Botswana. Second, technical training is provided as an essential element of capacity building. The lack of IT skills is seen as a serious brake to the successful completion of the initiative and therefore technical training is seen here as an integral part of the project, as much as the development of the online platform. Moreover, regular trips to the constituencies taken by the staff of the Parliament involved in the initiative will ensure that citizens in remote areas will also be trained to use the online platform (mainly via the mobile friendly platform).

While the above project design went a long way in winning confidence amongst our user group (see figure 10 below), it is important to stay critical of such interventions and remind ourselves of the inherent concerns.

**How useful do you think the Botswana Speaks platform is for citizens who have concerns to share with their representative?**

Very Useful 73.1%
Useful 21.0%
Neutral 6.0%

6%

21%

73%
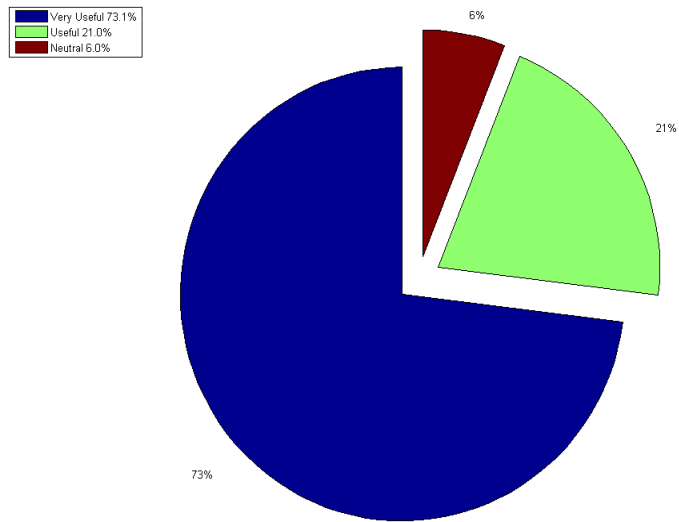
**Do you feel the Botswana Speaks platform makes governance more open and transparent?**

Yes 89.2%
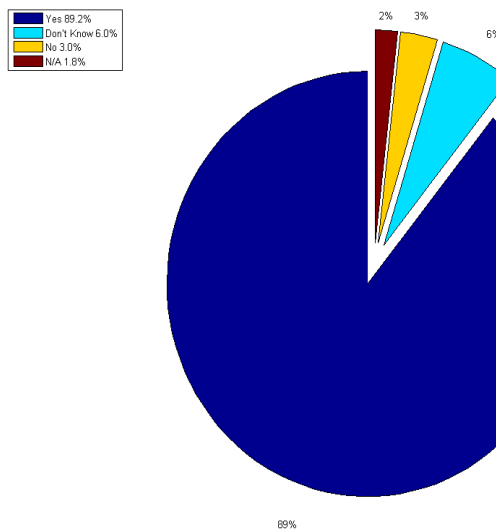Don't Know 6.0%
No 3.0%
N/A 1.8%

2%   3%
6%

89%

*Figure 10: High confidence levels amongst our user group, displaying soaring expectations on the potential of the platform to bring transparency in governance.*

As can be seen in figure 11, a considerable segment of our user group (39%), who engaged with the Botswana Speaks platform, indicated that they had concerns regarding privacy and control of information. This is a key feedback to keep in mind when scaling up and integrating pilots such as Botswana Speaks within a wider context of Sub Saharan Africa. Especially within new democracies and volatile or unstable political contexts, we need to be extra vigilant in what transparency and open governance translates into, in practice. While the ideals are sound and sought after,

their implementation and adaptation to new socio-political contexts is of critical importance if we are to win user confidence and protect citizen identity/ opinions.
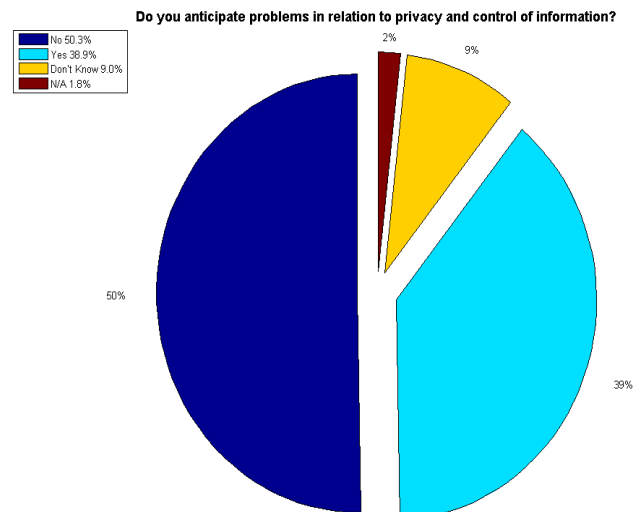


*Figure 11: Anticipation of problems regarding privacy and control of information amongst our user group*

*d. Innovation* – According to our study we found two innovative uses of this platform and technology: the first being the application of new transparent tools (e.g. mobile platforms, sms, web based citizen portals) to bring to light fundamental concerns and needs of citizens living in remote rural areas, hitherto disconnected with their representatives in parliament. The other being the graphical interface (such as the one offered by Botswana Speaks to the members of the parliament) that presents the same issues to policy makers in an intuitive format enabling them to make more informed decisions. To illustrate this point, we look at the lack of water management, which is one of Botswana´s major problems. 1000-year-old groundwater sources are mined, while sumptuous rainfall disappears every year in runoff and evaporation. While this is development concern reported in several documents relating to governance, the immediacy of this was driven home to the parliamentarians when a majority of respondents via the Botswana Speaks platform articulated the need for clean drinking water in their communities. This point was highlighted as the most pressing topic in the discourse between citizens and parliamentarians and then taken up again in the face to face consultations which followed. This demonstrated how innovative new

technologies and their applications can be harnessed to voice fundamental demands. The innovation also lies in the method in which these articulated concerns reach their target, without being drowned in the white noise of bureaucratic process and hierarchies of power in traditional governance structures.

## 4. Conclusion & Next Steps

Multidisciplinary approaches such as the one we have applied within Botswana Speaks are not without challenges. Between the contesting motivations to build and to deliberate, this recent wave of ICTD has not carefully examined the ways marginality is operationalized within the contexts of technology deployments. This in turn has led to a homogenizing of the users of technology and of desirable use, and a flattening of how impacts and 'successes' are measured.

The exceptionally high number of constituency meetings organized to inform citizens about the platform might be regarded as an improvement of constituency service. However, as no budget was allocated for the Parliament team to support these meetings there is no guarantee that this will be maintained beyond the life of the project. With regard to the sustainability of outcomes this is of critical importance. Another factor having a heavy influence on sustainability is the integration of a free SMS service (in liaison with via a local mobile service provider) with the platform. These negotiations are currently under way, and it is hoped that this will be achieved to carry forward the reach and impact of the initiative.

Some key lessons learnt from the comments and proposals made by those interviewed during the final evaluation meeting, are:

- . - Without adequate ICT infrastructure, i.e. widespread possibilities for citizens to access computers or smartphones with Internet connectivity at acceptable speed, attempts to introduce an Internet based platform for communication with citizens is unlikely to have any broad success;
- . - Where the number of Internet connected households is very limited, access to ICT could be provided by means of shared facilities, e.g.

Constituency offices, Telecentres or Internet cafés, but the cost of using such facilities for communication with the Government must be zero or very low (subsidized). Until such infrastructure is available limited success might be obtained by using mobile phone but then free phone numbers for SMS sent to the platform is a must;

. - Presence of IT skills among the users is also a critical success factor (unless one is content with using only mobile phones). Given a low level of such skills (as in the case of Botswana), IT support staff members, who could train and assist citizens to use the platform would need to be provided in shared facilities. In any case a Parliament IT support team has to be set up (and budgeted for) to assist in the introductory phase of the roll-out;

. - The level of response from MPs to cases submitted to them is another success factor. To achieve an acceptable response rate, Members of Parliament must be given adequate training and incentives to use the platform.

In this paper we have presented the case of the Botswana Speaks Parliamentary Initiative. Through a critical lens we have shown how ICT4D initiatives can operate as socio-technical systems that have the potential to transform governance into an inclusive and innovate process. We have discussed in detail the methodology and uniqueness of this approach and have highlighted through our findings how there is a need for improvement in both infrastructure and capacity development in this domain.

In the near future, as the initiative comes to a close, we hope to conduct in-depth impact analysis that qualitatively and critically examines the changes brought about both at the level of members of parliament and citizens, and how such innovations impact the future of eGovernance. As a next step we plan to interview our users and stakeholders who engaged with the platform on questions surrounding sustainability of outcomes. With this we hope to learn more about what meaningful changes and impacts emerge at an institutional level, in governance, from such participatory models that bring together citizens and policy makers in innovative new environments.

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