

IT in the public sector

Governments around the world are under enormous pressure to deliver more services with fewer resources. The current European economic climate in countries such as Greece, Spain and others have forced governments to cut their budgets by as much as 50% in some cases - a very serious case of "do more with less".

 By [President Ntuli](#) 23 Jul 2013

Other countries, such as those in the Middle East, have experienced different types of challenges, with various countries putting their own economies at halt with protests that went on for as long as six months.

Service delivery protests

South Africa, like the other countries, is not exempt from citizens' protests. We have seen many service delivery protests across the country in the past two years with citizens complaining about the poor quality of service or lack of service delivery.

The most pertinent questions are:

- What role can technology play to help government improve service delivery?
- What technology opportunities are available that government can exploit to its advantage?
- Does the government have the capacity to deliver on those technologies?
- What is the role of the ICT sector in helping deliver services?

The biggest IT challenge facing the South African government is that its IT still operates in silos. Each department has its own ICT unit that procures IT hardware, software and services to cater for its own immediate requirements without much future planning. With consolidation and standardisation, the government can vastly reduce the costs associated with running IT operations, thereby re-channelling the resources and available savings to innovative ideas that helps them do more with less.

Another major challenge facing the government is big data - the amount of data growth in the world has moved to Exabytes of data. Above that, the adoption of smart phones in Africa is the fastest in the world. Citizens are demanding more convenient ways to access government services. Just like the banks are making banking available on people's palms, citizens will start demanding to renew their car licences from their phones.

Not as gloomy as it looks

So what exactly is the situation in South Africa? I'm pleased to say it is not as gloomy as it looks. We have SARS bringing innovative ways of filing tax returns with more and more citizens embracing this technology. The banks rely on Home Affairs to verify customers' identities and the government continues to pay more than 300,000 public servants every month using technology. Sita hosts the National Matric exams question papers and results, with only minor glitches to date, which is quite commendable.

However, the biggest challenge and opportunity that the government should embrace is the use of cloud computing technologies in various forms to help them:

- Deliver services at acceptable speeds;
- Take advantage of the existing infrastructure to reduce costs - pay-as-you-use will be the acceptable model going forward; and
- Align government political and delivery mandates using technology.

Security is a big concern for the government in deploying cloud. Therefore, cloud service providers have been working hard to address security and compliance concerns together with governments. HP has recently been awarded a private cloud deployment deal by one of the US defence organisations, proving a point that security issues can easily be alleviated should it be planned properly. Cloud is by no doubt a significant shift in the business and economic model for provisioning and consuming IT, leading to significant cost savings.

Government processes and procurement inefficiencies remain a hindrance for the delivery of services. The government needs to review its procurement processes in line with service delivery and applicable PPPF, and other regulations. Using a pay-as-you-go framework, it will become easier to procure IT resources and significantly reduce delivery times as resources will be readily available. For example, instead of taking a minimum of 14 days for RFQ and up to three months for evaluation and order processing to procure a server, you could deploy one within 24 hours.

The government recently published some crucial tenders that will cover document management and cloud. These are definitely some great strides forward in embracing new technology in delivering government services.

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