Promoting effective governance using technology

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Outline

1. Problem statement
2. Solution
3. Impact
Can tech promote good governance?

- How can we make collective voices heard?
- Technology can be an important driver for good governance when situated within a framework of citizen-centric participatory approach backed by responsive duty bearers who are able to effectively engage while converting feedback into action.
Tech & Good Governance

• Connecting citizens to duty bearers
• Provision of feedback
• Duty-bearers communicating with citizens
• Amplifying citizens voices
• Fundamental requirement are institutions, policies and process
Problem Statement

Broken Feedback Loop

Parliament  
Citizens
Road Blocks

• Absence of a mechanism for parliament to provide timely and detailed feedback and info to citizens.
• Absence of an effective system for citizens to convey information to Parliament
• Low level of awareness, and means for citizens to understand the work and role of parliament
• Inappropriate and ineffective utilization of emerging digital technologies for communication flows between citizens and parliament
• Increasing cost of utilizing traditional systems and tools such as public media, face to face interaction and periodic publication of gazettes
Our Approach

• Citizen-centric approach to participatory governance

• Better understanding of challenges citizens face in engaging with policy makers

• Leverages the opportunities that emerging internet technologies provide in narrowing the gap between them and closing feedback loop

• All media approach in order to reach more citizens
Why parliament

• Parliament is a critical structure in the success of any democracy

• Enhances participatory democracy and good governance

• Achieving good governance requires the existence of a strong, efficient and effective parliament

• Parliament plays an important role in gauging, collating and presenting the views and needs of the people

• Articulating citizens’ expectations & aspirations as input into national development agenda

• Identifying problems and policy challenges that require attention
Making Parliament Work

• Parliament needs to interact with and engage citizens on an on-going basis

• Key functions: debating the important issues of the day (deliberative), checking and approving government spending (budget/taxes), monitoring and tracking the work of the executive arm (oversight).
Our Solution – Connecting Citizens To Parliament

• Since 2013, Penplusbytes (www.penplusbytes.org) & Parliament of Ghana:

“Connecting Citizens to Parliament” two-way communication system between citizens and Parliament of Ghana via functional, accessible, and user-friendly tools such as an online portal for citizen engagement; social media tools SMS, WhatsApp and mobile apps as well as offline face-to-face engagement and use of community radio.
Minister makes a Promise

CGA analyzes reports and feedback

Codification of Assurance By CGA

Platforms (SMS, Web App, Mobile App)

Field visits to monitor and verify progress

Assurance communicated to the citizens

ICT4D Conference
Citizens can access the web app on their computers and mobile devices with internet access.

Citizens can access the app on their Android smart phones.

Feedback can be sent via SMS with a mobile phone.
Channels

www.assurance.gov.gh
www.facebook.com/govassuresgh
@govassurance
Mobile App: www.assurance.gov.gh/mobile
feedback@assurances.gov.gh
+233 (0)24 199 5737
(9030 to all network)
#ghpromises
MARK THIS DATE-Feb 24/26, 2015 Committee on Government Assurances Public hearing: Questions to Minister of Petroleum on promises made to end the power crises by the 1st QTR 2015

🗣 WhatsApp: 0279848444, 0241995737
💬 Sms Short Code: 9030
📱 Download Android App
Challenges

• Executive arm of government capture of Parliament
• Low number of assurances
• Inadequate institutional capacity of Parliament - mindset, tradition, lack of offices and a full fledge research staff and financial resources
• Feedback processing is seen as extra work and time consuming
• Slow responsiveness
• Inability to handle information overload
Challenges

• Partial automation of feedback processing
• Majority of direct technology users – urban, youth and within middle class bracket
• Apathy on the part of some citizens
• Lack of understanding of the role of parliament by citizens
• Unintended effect: committee members reducing their face-to-face interaction
IMPACT

1,848,000 verified users

3 million plus messages
Impact

- Citizens have a greater voice to contribute to Ghana’s democratic governance process and interact with the Parliament of Ghana.

- Enhanced the oversight work of Parliament in general and particularly the Committee on Government Assurances (CGA) by helping it overcome the challenges affecting its ability to hold elected representatives accountable due to lack of citizens input.
During a Verification Visit- GAS PLANT
IMPACT

• Contributed to Ministers making realistic assurances
• Citizens awareness of government’s promises and assurances have increased as a result of the project
• Increased ability of citizens to engage with Parliament of Ghana using digital tools was a game changer.
CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

• Leadership is very important
• Trust and relationship building is key
• Transparency in terms of what the project can or cannot do is important
• Citizens willingness and ability to invest in engagement process
• Ghana is recording relative growth in the use of digital technologies to promote good governance
You can understand our excitement when we started the "Connecting Citizens to Parliament Project" in partnership with Penplusbytes to implement an innovative mechanism of connecting citizens to Parliament, using new digital technologies including SMS, an online portal, a Mobile App and WhatsApp.

Our work was more efficient as, for the first time ever, we had a dedicated website on which citizens could report on projects within their communities and reach out to us via an integrated media system about other governance issues that they had concerns with. The project also equipped our committee members with technology, information and knowledge management skills.

Hon. Emmanuel Kwasi Bedzrah – NDC Member of Parliament, Ho West Constituency and Chair Committee on Government Assurances
Our future plans

• Scale up this project to the whole of the parliament of Ghana

• Roll out to other parliaments in West Africa
Conclusion

- Evidence shows that technology can promote effective governance using a citizens-centric approach combined with responsive duty bearers.
Thank you

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