Strengthening Citizen Participation through E-Governance: Taking Stock and Looking Forward to Uganda's Local Governments

Abstract

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Index terms—

1 INTRODUCTION

With the emerging knowledge and information society, Electronic Government (e-government) and Electronic Governance (e-governance) have become viable options for countries in search of London Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Sciences efficiency, effective and accountable service delivery systems. Its nolonger in dispute that the quality and effectiveness of any governance policy largely depends on the involvement of all its stakeholders in decision-making (Kiwanuka, 2022;Mansoor, 2021; **??**reelakshmi, 2020 and increase accountability at local levels **??**MoLG, 2021). The model is premised on a government conviction that common citizens as the end user of social services are better placed to identify and respond to their own needs, priorities, and direct use of resources. Accordingly, the e-governance conviction is based on two theoretical perceptions.

Firstly that the quality and effectiveness of any governance policy largely depends on the involvement of all its stakeholders in decision-making (Garg, 2008; **??**alam, 2018).

Secondly that e-governance is a great platform that provides a single point of access and interaction for both the governors and governed. Yet local government managers, employees and professionals find investments in such technology-intensive systems inherently expensive and risky. Expensive in terms of the infrastructural set up and maintenance and risky considering the less certainty that it will automatically serve the intended purposes (Ayaz & Yanartas, 2020).

Uganda, like the rest of Africa, is embroiled in an explosive digital connectivity and significant improvements in communication and information technology (ICT). The ICT momentum is building at a time when the country's Local Governments still grapple with appropriate mechanisms to strengthen the participation of citizens towards a tangible influence in decisions, policies and procedures that affect them (ISER, 2018; Kiwanuka, 2022). Citizen participation as enshrined in Article 176 (2) (b) of Uganda's Constitution **??**1995) and Local Government Act (1997) is intended to promote and guarantee accountability, transparency and responsiveness in the service delivery systems at local government levels. However, meaningful citizen participation in the country's Local Governments continues generating more questions than answers. As would be expected, a citizenry that does not readily accesses information, not knowledgeable enough, and with limited channels for engagement and feedback can hardly hold any government accountable (Eckardt, 2008;Mansoor, 2021; **??**reelakshmi, 2020). For citizen participation to be meaningful a well-defined e-governance system that defines the channels and platforms of engagement and communication as well as access of government information is paramount.

Methodologically, the paper was a desk research based on a critical interpretive review and theoretical synthesis of literature to explore the inherent opportunities and implications for strengthening citizen participation in the context of Uganda's Local Governments. Moving forward, the paper conceptualizes and theorizes e-governance and citizen participation, provides a context of citizen participation in Uganda's Local Government system, reflects on the evolution and reality of e-governance in Uganda. The paper then analyses the opportunities and implications of e-governance for strengthening citizen participation in Local Governments of Uganda from a theoretical perspective before providing a conclusion. participation are arrangements in which citizens, as

1

individuals or groups, are given a platform to input and influence decisions that affect them. In this respect therefore, citizen participation is implied to be both direct and indirect interventions with determined social interests in public activities. Whereas direct participation happens when citizens as individuals or groups influence financial, political and administrative decisions, indirect participation is where citizens are involved in decision making through their elected representatives. Whether direct or indirect, citizen participation is significant for improving decisions concerning the utilization of public resources towards public value and thereby makes public servants and political leaders accountable to the people. By implication, therefore, strengthening citizen participation denotes a deliberate and conscious process of putting citizens back to the center of their political discourse and empowering them to appreciate their stakes and leverage so that they use them to influence their community needs and aspirations.

As a concept e-governance can be conceptualized from the perspectives of governance and digital revolution. Although sometimes governance and government are used interchangeably, the two are different. Whereas government describes the institutional apparatus to perform mandated responsibility, governance refers to the manner or processes taken to guide a society best achieve those mandates and responsibilities ??Muinul & Momtaz, 2007). To that far, therefore, government is only one of the significant players in governance that aims to enhance access to and delivery of government services to benefit citizens. By extension, the common theme around definitions of e-government relate to the automation of traditional paper-based government procedures towards new styles of leadership, legislating and strategic choices as well as new ways of doing business, organizing and delivering information ??Basu, 2004). Whereas e-government describes initiatives of government organizations to institutionalize ICT applications (Wide Area Networks, Internet and Mobile Computing) that can transform relations with citizens, businesses and other arms of government, e-governance is more than a government website on the Internet ??Muinul & Momtaz, 2007; ??alencia, 2007). Various definitions of e-government relate with e-governance focus on its processes, expectations and outcomes to the wider society.

According to Deane (2003) e-governance refers to the adoption and use of ICT channels to change the way citizens and business interact with government so as to enable citizens participation in decision making, increased access to information, transparency and strong civil society. The definition above implies improvement of service delivery systems in which information is adequately laid before citizens and other civil actors so as to empower them to input decision making. Relatedly, UNDP (??003) defines e-governance as a process of creating public value, as rooted in people's preferences, with the use of modern ICT. By this definition, UNDP describes e-governance on its ability to satisfy the people's interests and aspirations as an outcome. The multiple definitions notwithstanding, the common position is that e-governance is intended to support and simplify governance by securing the cooperation and consent of the governed. This is achieved through connecting all actors ranging from government, citizens, business and civil society through online services and other electronic means, accessing them fast and adequate information and providing them with unlimited virtual platforms to engage the processes (Backus, 2001).

The common theme from the definitions of e-government and e-governance is that both involve ICT application and automation from the analogue, physical or paper-based procedures in government organizations. The contrast is that on one hand, e-government is a narrower institutional approach which concerns the development of online services to the citizen such as e-tax, e-transportation or e-health. On the other hand, e-governance is a much wider process that defines and assesses the impacts that the applied technologies are having on the practice and administration of governments. It also considers the relationships between government officials and the wider society that has a stake in London Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Sciences the government organizations and institutions.

The next section sheds light on the historical development and reality e-governance in Uganda local governments.

2 III. EVOLUTION AND REALITY OF E-GOVERNANCE IN UGANDA'S LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Whereas e-governance is a fairly new concept with limited empirical literature concerning impact and lessons learnt on service delivery, citizen participation has for long been a component of the democratic governance literature. Over the years across the world, citizens have been granted an opportunity to actively participate in decision making processes on local community development issues, planning and budgeting, social audits as well as electing their leaders at various levels of government ??UNDP, 2003). Citizen participation has its roots in the ancient Greece and Colonial New England in the early 20th century where governmental processes and procedures were designed to facilitate external participation (Cogan & Sharpe, 1986). Although citizen participation was institutionalized in the mid-1960s, various government agencies and officials either excluded or minimized it in the public service planning and delivery processes on grounds that it was expensive, time consuming and neither clear as a concept nor its consequence (Mize, 1972).

The current tide of e-governance has its roots in 20th century 'Reinventing Government' movements widely known as New Public Management (NPM). This movement called for radical changes from the bureaucratic system to a more entrepreneurial government that is enterprising, catalytic, mission and customer driven, as well as results oriented (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992). The reinventing government movement imagined a government

bureaucracy transformed into a community owned with a vital and effective force in society. During that period, scholars especially Osborne and Gaebler looked at a new complex and rapidly emerged economic landscape based on disruptive innovation and discontinuities. This implied that the survival and sustenance of public organizations, like their business counterparts, largely rested on their ability to reinvent themselves through continuous non-linear competitive innovations (Bellamy &Taylor, 1998; Ndou, 2004). The perceived intention was to facilitate operational efficiency, cost reduction, flexibility, dependability and quality.

Adoption of ICT, in this new arrangement, would provide a potential to support the reinventing government movement. Indeed, whereas the industrial revolution centralized state power, the digital revolution is expected to disperse it to citizens, business and other non-state actors who have a stake in governance (Misuraca, 2007). In spite of the ICT excitement and expectations, its adoption to re-invent government organizations in comparison with the business sector lagged behind. It has been only recently that the public sector demonstrated readiness to exploit ICT applications for improving citizen reach, responsiveness and accessibility of services to the citizens as well as transparency delivery systems. The paper adopts Janowski's Digital Government Evolution Model (**??**015 The characteristic themes for each of the stages are presented in table but e-governance is illustrated as the third stage in the evolution.

Government of Uganda is under immense pressure from citizens, civil society and the international development partners to demonstrate commitment to addressing good governance and deepen decentralization through being more involving, accountable and cost efficient in social service delivery **??**Kiwanuka, Kateshumbwa & Andama, 2022;Nabafu & Maiga, 2012). Relatedly, In the wake of rapid development and expansion of ICT characterized by a fast spread of the internet in Uganda, government administrative machinery is also changing from its traditional passive service-led approach to a more citizen-centered and consolidated services. There is a strong government belief that ICT has the potential to revolutionize the way government operates and enhance the relationship between Government and Citizens, Government and Business community and within Government and Government departments **??** It is the belief of the Government of Uganda (GOU) that ICT should be utilized to move into the era of electronic Government (e-Government) aimed at demystifying the role of Government, simplifying procedures, bringing transparency, accountability, and making credible timely information available to all citizens and at the same time providing all services in an efficient and cost-effective manner (2010; p2) Among other purposes, the e-government master plan also: Establishes the vision, strategy and framework; Selects quick win ICT projects and draws a long term roadmap; Defines a governance framework to regulate and control e-Government initiatives; as well as defining the direction for restructuring the legal framework; among others. Some of the institutional-structural initiatives put in place by government in the development of ICT in the country include: the creation of a fully-fledged Ministry of ICT charged with providing strategic and technical leadership, the overall coordination, supervision, support and advocacy on all matters of policy, laws, regulations and strategy; sustainable, effective and efficient development, harnessing and utilization of ICT in all spheres of life to enable the Uganda realize her development goals. Under the general supervision and guidance of Ministry of ICT are a number of agencies including but not limited to: National Information Technology Authority Uganda (NITA-U) created by an Act of Parliament of **??**ganda (2009) However, much as the presence of an effective legal, structural and policy framework that enshrine e-government at all levels of government is a significant building block for citizen participation, positive impacts and outcomes are yet to happen in Uganda's Local Governments. The reality is that the country has experienced more e-government than e-governance. The digital-revolution excitement and momentum has happened more at national than local Government levels. Government Ministries, for example, adopt ICT initiatives based on their respective internal factors and available opportunities for funding on an adhoc basis (Guma, 2013; **??**wangoga & Baryayetunga, 2007). As observed by Rwangoga and Baryayetunga, ICT adoption within Uganda still remains more integrated at national policy-structural and institutional levels but not translated into a harmonized ICT implementation and operational guidelines for Local Government users. Whereas the Ministry of Local Government (MoLG) has instituted several e-government initiatives at its level, the way citizens interact and participate in decision making processes at their local level has not changed much.

The next section contextualizes citizen participation in Uganda's Local Governments.

3 IV. CONTEXT OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN UGANDA'S LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEM

The country's renewed zeal for decentralized governance has mainly been in response to the tumultuous past of civil wars and brutal dictatorships that characterized the first three decades after independence. As **??**evas and Grant (2003, 302) summarized it, "the colonial system London Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Sciences of Local Government largely disintegrated, along with much else? in the 1970s" All the subsequent political-institutional changes did not do enough to bring back the citizens into governance until much later **??**Elliot, 2008; **??**auza, 2007). As a result, governance was characterized by a faulty state-citizen relationship in which the former mattered little in assessing their own needs and participating in local project planning and budget monitoring. By 1986 when the National Resistance Movement (NRM) assumed power, governance was synonymous with an inefficient, decimated and unresponsive service delivery system operating at high costs and overly detached from people's interests and aspirations (Guma, 2013). It is with such background that issues of

citizen participation and e-governance have become central concerns as the country attempts to deepen the good governance principles.

Today, Decentralization and Local Governments characterize Uganda's governance system and are enshrined in the country's Constitution (1995). The overriding objective for the country's decentralization policy is to empower citizens, at a local community level, participate in the governance processes intended to improve their livelihoods (Bitarabeho, 2008; Kiwanuka, Pratt & Kamnuanslipa, 2022). The Local Government Act (1997) and subsequent amendments intend to support, streamline and strengthen the said decentralization system (Kavuma etal, 2020; Kiwanuka, 2022). To operationalize the Local Governments, the country adopted a Fiscal Decentralization Strategy (1997) which provides for local revenue, a central governmental transfer system and borrowing as its fiscal instruments. Accordingly, a range of powers, responsibilities and functions have been transferred to local governments in the country. Such powers and responsibility include political-administrative decision-making, mobilizing and allocating resources, determining and providing a range of services in a jurisdiction, planning and budgeting, and making ordinances and bye laws as provided by the local government Act (Uganda, 1997). Uganda's decentralization system is held to be among the most far reaching Local Governance reforms in the developing world only next to South Africa as highly decentralized states (Ndegwa, 2002;Mushemeza, 2019).

Citizen participation in Uganda's decentralization set-up relates with a deliberate process of citizens' involvement in a wide range of administrative policy-making activities as a basis of orienting public initiatives towards society's needs and aspirations (Fox & Meyer, 1995). Indeed, there are institutional provisions for multiple layers of participation for all citizens from the villages to the district levels (Devas, 2005). The institutional framework in the country provides for affirmative action and protects representation for the most vulnerable groups which include the women, youth, and the people living with disabilities at all levels (Uganda, 1995;Uganda, 1997). This is accomplished by reserving electoral seats and quota systems for those groups of people both at subnational and national governments. Generally, citizen participation in Local Governments in the country is manifested in taking part or identifying local needs and connecting them to priorities during planning, budgeting and execution of programs at all levels of local governments. The process involves local budget conferences where citizens interact with local officials to voice their views in the next financial year's development agenda.

Participation also includes electing local leaders as well as citizens offering themselves as candidates in local political positions. As part of accountability, Local Governments are also required by policy to periodically publish and display financial information(s) for the consumption of the citizens (Mushemeza, 2019;Kiwanuka;2022; ??teiner, 2006). Central government also organizes "Barazas", under which citizens on a determined basis face-off with sub-national government officials to get answers, explanations, justifications and agreements concerning performance of development projects in a local jurisdiction. In a nutshell, citizen participation is the governance and public service delivery tool in Uganda's local governments for taking services closer to communities and enabling citizens' participation and democratic control in decision-making.

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Despite the above set up of the country's decentralization, the anticipated citizen participation in Uganda's Local Governments is manifested more in scope, constituencies, numbers, and opportunities but less in terms of scale, content and effectiveness. Meaningful citizen participation in any Local Government can only depend on the availability and ease of accessing information as well as alternative and user-friendly digital channels. Lack of transparency in budgetary procedures and outcomes, for example, may make meaningful participation hard for all local government actors in Uganda. There are a number of channels through which information is passed including: social gatherings, traditional communication modes like local radios, local public microphones, social communication networks, and formal meetings for all key stakeholders organized by either the citizens or public officials. However, the appropriateness, completeness, adequacy and frequencies of such information are still issues in the country's Local Government system where local public officials determine the amount and frequency it's given to citizens. As ??evas and Grant (2000) put it: Accountability requires that both citizens and the central government have accurate and accessible information about local government: about available resources, performance, service levels, budgets, accounts and other financial indicators. .. only when citizens and civil society are armed with such information can there be informed public debate on the allocation of limited resources and public acceptance of tradeoffs (311).

The implication in the statement above is that strengthening citizen participation in a local governance system requires mechanisms that can provide and update information to all stakeholders at a reliable and fast basis. The next section attempts to make sense of the opportunities of enhancing e-governance and its implications to citizen participation in the context of Uganda's Local Governments within the perspective of Venkatesh 's Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (2003).

5 V. OPPORTUNITIES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR UGANDA'S LOCAL GOVERNMENTS FROM A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

The potential opportunities from e-governance are numerous and general to all countries and levels of governments subject to appropriate adoption and use. Such benefits include but not limited to cost reduction and efficiency gains, quality of service delivery, good governance and enhanced relations between government and government and between government and other stakeholders (Ndou, 2004; **??**ECD, 2002). However, in this paper we take a break and analyze opportunities from a theoretical perspective. This is because many scholars tend to examine and describe the e-governance opportunities with limited attention, if any, to factors related to decisions for adoption of innovations, and how the likelihood of adoption of innovations can happen. To hypothesize the main opportunities of e-governance acceptance and adoption in Local Governments, we adopted its determinants from Venkatesh, etal.'s Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT, 2003). Venkatesh etal identified four key factors for adopting and using technology which include performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions. According to the theory, performance expectancy, effort expectancy, and social influence determine individuals and group's intentions to use a technology, while facilitating conditions determine technology use (Sharma & Mishra, 2015; Wang, Townsend etal., 2012). In this hypothetical framework, performance expectancy describes the degree to which an individual (both citizen and official) would believe that using e-governance will help him or her to improve or attain the intended performance or goals. On the other hand, effort expectancy would refer to the degree of ease associated with using e-governance. Then Social influence being the degree to which an individual (public official or stakeholder) perceives that important others believe he or she should use e-governance. Finally, facilitating conditions in this study are used to define the extent to which an individual believes that there is existence of organizational and technical infrastructure to support the use of London Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Sciences e-governance in Local Governments. The presumption is that where individuals are able to access the required resources, gain required knowledge together with the necessary support to use the digital infrastructure, they will be more likely to adopt e-governance.

There is already evidence in literature that by collecting, storing, processing, communicating and networking across the world, ICT applications in governance can transform old challenges and create unprecedented opportunities for citizen participation, transparency and accountability (Ndou, 2004; **??**ECD, 2002). In line with Venkatesh's UTAUT (2003), the performance expectancy and effort expectancy for adopting e-governance are in tandem with the principles and aspirations of Uganda's long and medium-term development framework. The former is to the extent that e-governance and ICT have a more realistic potential of providing key ingredients for an inclusive and sustainable development at the local government level. Since the cardinal goal of Uganda's Local Government is bringing services closer to the people, adoption of e-governance can also serve as a tool of stakeholder empowerment, transparency and accountability which fits the performance expectations postulated by the theory. To that extent, the necessity of transferring Information Technology and Information System applications to Uganda's Local Government institution is to make interaction faster, increase engagement and is in general useful for the subnational government to perform its duties.

At a point when certain actors especially the governed are getting fatigued with participatory processes, the effort expectancy that expresses the degree of convenience regarding the use of the system is expected to bring them back into their governance. The convenience of letting citizens access complete information and engage in decision making from the comfort of their places of work and abort may have a positive effect on their behavioral intentions. Indeed, effort expectancy appropriately suits the circumstances given the recent epidemics like Covid19 and Ebola that have already had a far-reaching impact on Ugandan communities and changed their mindset on physical interactive processes.

In accordance with facilitating conditions as another theoretical determinant of e-governance adoption by Venkatesh et al (2003) **??**ganda, 2009). Although all these initiatives have their inherent resource challenges, they still facilitate and therefore provide an opportunity for innovations and attitude change necessary for e-governance adoption use in the Local Governments.

There is already some political will and positive attitudes for innovativeness in the information communication direction in many Local Governments of Uganda. Public debates are already happening at local community levels either as part of national policy requirement or as initiatives by local actors some of whom move around with microphone engaging people on selected topical issues (Kiwanuka, 2022)

6 E-governance comes with an influx of information and knowledge at a point when the rapidly changing organizational environment requires government organizations including Local

Governments to become learning organizations. The 21st century Local Government must enhance knowledge management and learn more than ever before as citizens become more informed and expectant which threaten to drift citizen trust, increase public cynicism and distrust about sub-national governments. E-governance is therefore well positioned to provide information and knowledge to Local Government to continuously reinvent

283 and transform themselves as they create their future. This should be especially so given that all other actors
284 expand their capacity to influence results they desire, nurture new and expansive patterns of interaction based
285 on free will and mutual aspirations.
286   Lastly but not least, because of proximity and social identities, Local Governments are the only governments
287 that most people know, can actually reach and feel as they are usually intertwined on issues like food security,
288 public health, education and environment concerns, local politics (Misuraca, 2007). It is, therefore, at such local
289 levels that the impact of e-governance on the government-citizen relationships can be more effective as it breaks
290 the conventional office-based interaction. In the circumstances of Uganda's Local Governments where the citizens
291 are already fatigued by the physical presence in local political decision-making processes, e-governance provides
292 the best alternative to keep them involved from wherever they are.

293 # 7   VI. CONCLUSION

294 The From a practical perspective however, the variety and complexity of e-governance initiatives and apparent
295 adoption delays are evidence of a wide range of challenges and barriers to its effective implementation and
296 management. Despite the general belief that e-governance offers considerable potential for strengthening citizen
297 participation in Local Government of Uganda, it largely remains unexploited. It is sufficient to conclude that
298 the country has experienced more e-government than e-governance. We therefore provide recommendations for
299 effective adoption and application of e-governance in developing countries like Uganda.
300   Uganda's Local Governments will need to adjust a number of areas including communication and information
301 systems, leadership styles, deliberation systems for local issues together with the local decision-making
302 approaches, ways of interacting with citizens and developing appropriate and supportive regulatory frameworks.
303 The Local Governments will also have to develop e-governance systems that are context-specific, with an inherent
304 monitoring and evaluation system to track their impacts on citizen satisfaction with their participation and
305 sustainable local economic development. This implies undertaking evidence based analysis of what constitutes
306 public value and determining how ICT tools can be appropriately used to advance and promote public value. Local
307 Governments will also have to analyze the emerging trends on ICT usage, national policies on ICT applications
308 and other factors that may affect acceptance and use within their respective local contexts. Finally, since local
309 governments are organs of the central government in Uganda, the later has to play a role that facilitates not only
310 adoption but also affordability of ICT and e-governance. The national government should deliberately perpetuate
311 a system that ensures that the security of electronic transactions and communications is assured, protection of
312 privacy, empower citizens to control personal information and commit to universal accessibility and affordability.
313   Without such and more considerations and since e-governance opportunities entail certain unique conditions,
314 needs and obstacles, Local and Central Governments risk missing out on the digital opportunities for often lagging
315 behind in the process of technology adoption and reinvention.
316   The paper was a desk research based on a critical interpretive review and theoretical synthesis of literature.
317 The paper also reflected on the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology Venkatesh et al. (2003)
318 to determine opportunities for adopting e-governance in Uganda's Local Governments. We appreciate that desk
319 research is generally limited to what is available and our conclusions and recommendations may therefore, only
320 provide partial answers, both in terms of precision and timeliness of the information. We're also aware of the
321 potential bias that usually characterizes such public information. We're also aware that the UTAUT postulations
322 may not necessarily fit Uganda's Local Government context and could also have excluded some constructs that
323 may be crucial for explaining the country's context. We recommend that any other researcher(s) on the same
324 should adopt a hybrid approach pairing desk research with some key informant interviews with local government
     experts. [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6]

Figure 1:

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Figure 2: Figure 1 :

better organized under respective District Development Forums or District NGO Forums composed of senior citizens, representatives of political parties, civil society organizations, vulnerable groups and Traditional Churches in a particular District. Although these are still more prevalent at district levels, they provide the social influence hypothesized by Venkatesh et al., (2003) to mobilize and influence the people to appropriately make use of the available social media to engage Local Governments on many citizen priority issues. Unfettered. Relatedly, the unprecedented proliferation of smart mobile devices in recent times, supported by increased telephone network coverage and tele-density, has meant that populations in local communities in Uganda are getting unfettered access to ICT tools and applications. Accordingly, there is a steady and significant increment in the number of internet subscribers in the last 10 years. For example, whereas the proportion of subscribers stood at only 2.5% in 2012, the number rose to 34.4% in 2019 (UCC, 2019; Waisswa & Okello, 2014). To that extent, the mobile phone provides a big opportunity to government officials at all levels to connect, consult and engage with the citizens, business, civil society and other non-state actors within local jurisdictions on matters of local development and social concerns. In order to guide and regulate the usage of mobile phone devices and internet however, the government has put in place a National ICT Policy (Ministry of Information and Communication Technology, 2014), together with a number of regulations and mechanisms including compulsory registration of SIM cards and the Computer Misuse Act (2022), among others.

However, although the internet

connectivity is improving, it generally remains unaffordable to many Ugandans in the local governments. This together with the fact that not many people in the local communities can afford the high bandwidth results into low internet coverage.

Figure 3:

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