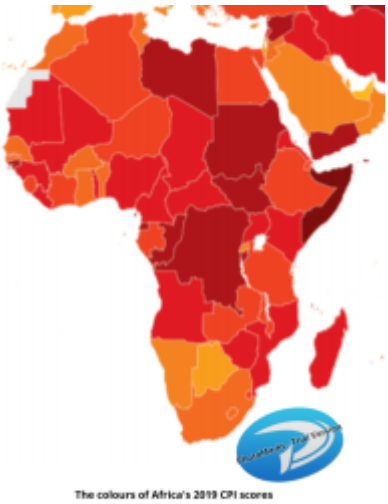
Corruption and social media correlation outcomes in Africa



Does social media usage have any impact on country corruption levels? We have investigated the relationship between corruption and social media usage in Africa at a country level and present our findings below.

Methodology

Transparency International's 2019 CPI scores published in January 2020 are taken to represent the measure of corruption in Africa.

The social media activity at a country level is taken as the subscriber numbers provided for Facebook by Internet World

Stats at www.internetworldstats.com as at 31st December 2019 and for Twitter by We Are Social as quoted in their 'Digital 2020' publication.

The Africa Population numbers are mid-year 2020 estimates taken from the United Nations Population Division published by Internet World Stats at www.internetworldstats.com.

Facebook data was available for 54 African countries in the CPI index but Twitter data was only available for 52 of those countries. These 52 countries were taken as our starting point.

We then removed from the list of 52 countries the 4 countries with distinctly higher corruption levels than the remainder as they did not offer results consistent with the remaining states which we consider to reflect the disruptive effect of very high corruption levels on social and economic behaviour. This leaves a sample of 48 countries.

Statistical robustness

The sample of 48 countries provides a confidence level of 95%. The margin of error is 5%.

Statistical Method	Facebook Results	Twitter Results
Pearson	0.657	0.699
Spearman	0.672	0.625

Conclusion

The above results are relatively robust from a statistical perspective. These demonstrate that, for the data used in our two samples, a strong relationship exists between 2019 CPI scores and per capita penetration levels of country Facebook and Twitter subscribers. This implies that the greater the level of public intercourse via social media the lower the level of corruption in the country concerned.

Note: Improving PFM digital transparency in African finance ministries

by John Leonardo

Introduction

This note provides an introduction to our "Improving PFM digital transparency in African finance ministries" presentation which is also available as a video. Transparency of public finances is a key element of a public financial management (PFM) system enabling public scrutiny of government actions and intentions. Transparency of public finances is achieved by providing information on PFM which is comprehensive, consistent, and accessible to users.

Ministries of Finance (MoFs) play a leading role in promoting transparency of public finances. The World Bank's September 2020 report "Enhancing Government Effectiveness and Transparency – The Fight Against Corruption" has highlighted the importance of ensuring greater transparency in government operations.

Transparency is an important factor in African public financial management (PFM) in view of historically relatively weak PFM in many African countries, including transparency activities, and relatively poor recent progress in curbing corruption.

PFM digital transparency

In a PFM context, digital transparency can be defined as the process of providing PFM related information using digital

platforms such as websites and social media; for example, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. PFM digital transparency should be an important part of African MoFs' digital government strategies.

Currently African MoFs employ PFM digital transparency practices using a range of platforms such as websites and social media (Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, YouTube, LinkedIn). They publish a range of PFM and related material on the latter platforms.

Current PFM digital transparency trends analysis

We have examined MoF website, Facebook and Twitter use to obtain an understanding of Africa MoFs' current use of digital platforms.

The following statistics are presented and reviewed in the presentation:

- Country internet usage
- MoF website visits during May/July 2020 and projected annualised visits for 2020
- Domestic and non-resident visits to MoF websites
- Country Facebook usage

- MoF Facebook page follower numbers

- Country Twitter usage

- MoF Twitter follower numbers

We have also examined penetration levels for MoF website users, Facebook and Twitter followers to demonstrate the level of usage of these digital platforms. In addition, we have identified correlations that may exist between digital platform use and leading economic and governance indicators including those relating to e-government.

Some key findings

Some of our key findings from our analysis are as follows:

- Six of the twenty-five MoFs with Facebook pages had higher Facebook follower numbers than estimated 2020 MoF visits to the respective websites demonstrating the role that MoF Facebook pages can play in boosting PFM transparency

- MoF social media content approaches differ quite markedly with MoFs generally publishing a wider range of material on their Facebook pages compared with the material included in tweets on Twitter.

- African MoF social media activity is helping to raise

awareness about African MoFs' PFM activities. Some African MoFs have generated considerable interest in their activities using social media.

- The proportion of non-domestic visitors to MoF websites varies considerably demonstrating how digital structures enable reach to the diaspora and other international stakeholders

- Use of digital communication mechanisms to strengthen African MoFs' operational capacity and support PFM reform plans have to date been limited prior to the onset of COVID-19

- African MOFs overall progress to date in the use of digital platforms to promote transparency has been relatively modest

Recommendations

We recommend African MoFs should take advantage of the opportunities provided by digital platforms to improve their PFM digital transparency by:

- Addressing identified PEFA transparency gaps which will result in more PFM material being published

- Establishing Facebook pages if these are not already in place

- Posting a variety of PFM related information on Facebook pages to increase community interaction and promote transparency

- Preparing PFM digital transparency action plans to improve PFM digital transparency performance and support PFM reform activities.

We have also outlined the nature of the tasks that should be included in PFM digital transparency action plans.

Regional analyses of trends in key PFM digital transparency indicators for all 45 African finance ministries are available for:

Central Africa

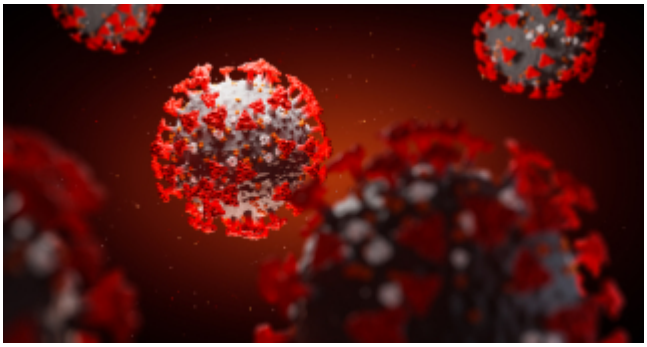
East Africa

North Africa

Southern Africa

West Africa

Small Island Developing States, COVID-19 and Digital Technology



Posted by David Fellows[1] and John Leonardo[2]

The impact of COVID-19

COVID-19 has changed behaviour throughout the world and social distancing has been the key driver. Workers in factories, shops and offices have been protected by creating greater space between workstations, erecting protective screens and using protective clothing. Distancing requirements have been introduced in bars, cafes, restaurants, hotels, markets and shopping centres. All economies have suffered, especially the hospitality industry, air travel and public transport. Unemployment has soared. Schools and higher education colleges have closed. Many countries are turning to the IMF for support.

The internet has proved a beneficial facilitator of economic activity, allowing most administrative work and the ordering of goods and services to be undertaken at home. Video conferencing has facilitated meetings with colleagues, business partners and clients, and helped maintain contact with friends. Online learning has featured in reopening plans for higher education and some schools. In this new world digital technology has achieved an elevated significance beyond its already pervasive presence in the pre-COVID era. In some ways it has already established a new normal.

This brief piece focuses on small island developing states (SIDS) but even here the challenges are not identical. Some countries depend heavily on a now-dormant tourist industry and shoulder severe difficulties. These include poverty, remoteness, disbursed communities and the need to combat the threat of natural disasters. The virus demands a minimisation of personal contact for which the absence of good quality, low cost digital communication leaves many states poorly prepared. The UN E-Government Survey 2020 notes that of the SIDS only Singapore and Bahrain have high overall scores; almost half scored less than 50% of Singapore's score for infrastructure.

Communication infrastructure

Good quality digital communication requires fibre-optic broadband cabling to support business use and homeworking with adequate resilience, even including 4G and Wi-Fi. 5G is costly and has potential shortcomings at present. This option requires specialist advice.

Understanding behaviour is important to government strategy.

Contributing factors include levels of public education, affluence, user tariffs and local cost factors. Lobbying based on knowledge of the operational intentions of the marine cable-laying industry could be important.

Regional collaboration could provide impetus to network improvement strategies, regulatory frameworks and licensing agreements.

Technology applications

The digital service revolution discussed above and already taking place across the world, accelerated by the onset of COVID-19, is inescapably relevant to SIDS. There are many specific business applications of relevance to SIDS, including: health advice (including C-19) and personal consultations; agricultural monitoring and market information on crops and livestock; and weather monitoring for fishing, agriculture and general safety considerations. Additionally, expatriate monetary transfers are being undertaken increasingly using digital systems. The creation of digital services relevant to developing countries gathers pace and must be encouraged.

Video conferencing, email and document handling systems provide an essential communication layer that is particularly useful to achieve social distancing.

Apart from their use of major business applications governments can make use of social media for public messaging, for instance, demonstrating transparency and engaging citizens the struggle against corruption when resources are so scarce.

Technology skills

Digital communication infrastructure must be complemented by a capacity for: upgrading, expansion and rerouting of infrastructure; installing application software; implementing major software packages; and even the development of service applications. This requires learning at various levels gained from school, college, in-service courses and practical experience.

An understanding of the technology is also required to educate potential adopters about the possibilities that digital communication offers them. This includes the general public, small businesses, the public sector and larger private sector organisations.

Digital technology skill development is essential to help SIDS adjust to the current situation.

Towards cost-effective solutions

COVID-19 is forcing change to the way people live throughout the world and economies are in crisis. Digital communication offers the capacity for helping maintain business continuity. Most SIDS would benefit from a higher standard of affordable digital communication supporting improved digital service delivery.

Digital technology must be designed to the needs and circumstances of individual states. Nevertheless, there could be much to gain from cost-effective collaboration between SIDS

for the purposes of sharing and developing:

(i) an understanding of the economic and social impact of COVID-19 and ways of mitigating these effects through digital communications;

(ii) market-shaping policies and practices for increasing the availability of digital communication at an affordable price;

(iii) strategies and programs to support the provision of expertise in digital technology and its use by business, public services and the general public; and

(iv) knowledge of relevant progress made on these issues throughout the world.

Such an initiative, whether on a global or regional basis, could include SIDS, development agencies, the digital service industry, other private sector partners and potentially the Commonwealth Small States Centre of Excellence. Is this a step too far?

This blog was published by the International Monetary Fund's Public Financial Management Blog on 18 August 2020 at https://blog-pfm.imf.org/pfmblog/2020/08/-small-island-developing-states-covid-19-and-digital-technology-.html.

[1] David Fellows is an accountant who has worked extensively in UK local government, the Cabinet Office as an advisor on local government reform and as an international development PFM advisor. He was a leader in the application of digital communication to UK public sector service delivery. He is a director of PFMConnect, a public financial management consultancy: david.fellows@pfmconnect.com.

[2] John Leonardo is an international development PFM advisor having extensive experience of working with SIDS. He is a director of PFMConnect.

Developing Systems to Combat Corruption

Posted by David Fellows[1]

Introducing the concept of “objective data”

In March 2018, we republished a short note on the use of objective data to combat corruption [2]. The piece highlighted statistical techniques being used in western countries to identify corruption by correlating unorthodox procurement practices with aberrant supplier behaviour established from factually based ‘objective’ administrative data. It was suggested that less complex approaches to the analysis of ‘objective’ data could be used to indicate the need for further forensic examination of officials, suppliers, and politicians. The emphasis was on finding workable approaches for developing countries that were compatible with the available resources.

The term ‘objective’ data refers to factual information derived from official government records. It represents data on transactions, activity schedules, and personal information, recorded through established processes, that give the information credibility. This contrasts with ‘subjective’ data which is often based on opinions or experience that is poorly evidenced and of limited application, as is the case with corruption perception surveys.

Frequent use of objective data

Objective data is checked and compared in dozens of administrative processes which can produce anomalies that may indicate the presence of corruption. For example, invoices are checked against orders and goods received notes or contract certificates, or payroll submissions are checked against timesheets. In addition, national bodies charged with the oversight of public administration – such as supreme audit institutions and public procurement commissions – are

routinely engaged in the examination of objective data which can also lead to the identification of corruption.

Such findings are then included in published reports that may be used to identify process deficiencies or potentially to prosecute cases of fraud and corruption. These oversight functions can be particularly effective when they are invested with independence from government, extensive powers of enquiry, transparency of reporting, and due consideration of findings.

Developing objective administrative data systems

Apart from routine scrutiny provided by administrative processes and oversight arrangements, programs of administrative reform provide excellent opportunities for the development of systems that incorporate the automatic validation and cross-referencing of administrative data to help identify patterns of corrupt activity.

Such arrangements are straightforward, well known, and remarkably simple to put into effect but in practice they are rarely complete or well executed. Too often there is a lack of expectation that good administration will have a beneficial effect. This places a premium on those who hold relevant managerial roles, requiring them to value high standards of administrative practice; exercise oversight responsibilities courageously, insightfully and in partnership with others as necessary; and ensure that reform opportunities are used to best effect. Well prepared and committed management is a prerequisite to any well-intentioned anti-corruption initiative.

Objective administrative data applications

Some examples of objective administrative data and its use to combat corruption are included in an Appendix available here.

The use of objective data could also be developed in other ways. For example:

1. Countries could prepare anti-corruption strategies that include the use and development of objective data and staff training. Such strategies should be accompanied by operational guidance. Anti-corruption strategies and related material are often referred to as being part of the standard anti-corruption armoury but are rarely made available. In practice, however, few of these documents have been produced to a reasonable standard anywhere in the developing world, and perhaps it is time to redress this omission.
2. Additionally, collaboration between states, perhaps on a regional basis, could be helpful in developing techniques for interrogating data, preparing anti-corruption strategies, sharing knowledge of corrupt practices, and building operational cooperation between countries
3. Consideration should also be given by multilateral agencies and regional representative bodies to the development of an international systems assessment schema (akin to PEFA methodology[3]) that would indicate the efficacy and shortcomings of individual administrative systems for the purposes of combatting corruption.

This article is written with government administration in mind, but similar considerations apply to local governments and state-owned enterprises.

[1] Director, PFMConnect. The author thanks John Leonardo for his helpful comments.

[2] This blog was first published at http://blog-pfm.imf.org/pfmblog/2018/03/how-useful-are-perc

eption-indices-of-corruption-to-developing-countries.html

[3] See https://pefa.org/sites/default/files/PEFA%20Framework_English.pdf