Digital divides or dividends?
Digitalisation of basic services in Ghana: state of policies in action and lessons for progress

INCLUDE
KNOWLEDGE PLATFORM ON INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT POLICIES
Visit the research programme webpage

This document is part of a larger research project into the digitalisation of basic services in Africa. It concerns one of five case studies that assess, on a country-level, what interventions exist, which of these are inclusive of poor and vulnerable groups, and to what extent governments are facilitating the enabling conditions for digital transformation.

Context
In Ghana, initial efforts to digitalise began in the early 2000s and there continues to be wide consensus on the importance of digitalisation for service provision by all major stakeholders. However, only two regions host 73% of ICT establishments in the country, and just 35% of Ghanaians are internet users. Disparities in access, usage and participation exist across gender, age, education level and rural-urban divides.

Key findings
What is Ghana's digitisation experience? What is the extent to which digitisation is leveraged to provide basic services to the population and to reduce inequalities in access?

The cost of devices and data are among the major reasons why some citizens are unable to access and use digitalised basic services in Ghana, in addition to the unreliability of internet connections and a lack of digital aptitude.

The telecommunication sector of Ghana is driven largely by the private sector, with the government providing regulatory functions. Increased competition and regulation within the private sector would provide opportunities to reduce the cost of data and allow for more inclusive access to digital basic services.

The different processes of digitalising basic services in Ghana have not been integrated or synchronized. There are opportunities to increase efficiency and ease of use by linking existing services.

Income, rural-urban dynamics, and educational backgrounds are strongly associated with access and usage of digitalised basic services and thus shaped the inherent and existing inequalities.

Progress notwithstanding, various hurdles stand in the way of effective digitalisation. But if genuine effort is made to use digitalisation as a tool for the inclusive provision of basic services, rather than a goal on its own, such hurdles can be overcome.
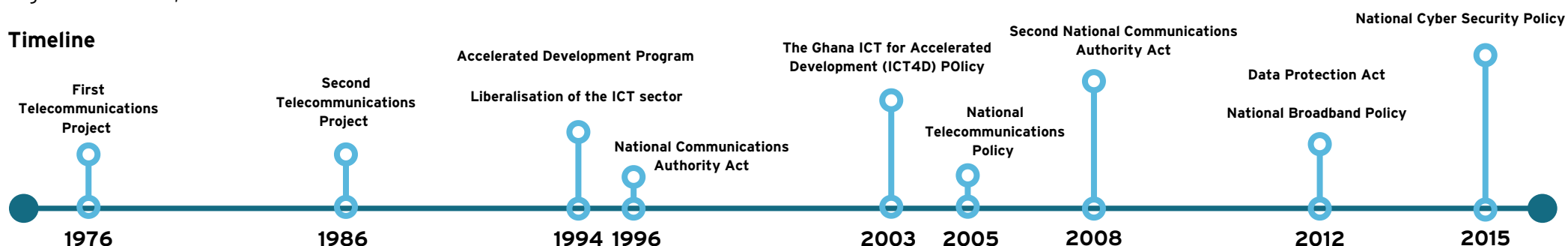
Dr. Michael Kpessa-Whyte and Dr. James Dzisah

Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon

Digital services in Ghana include services for: Passports; Ghana card (ID); Social security; Drivers licence and vehicle registration; E-health; E-education; Payment of public sector salaries; E-justice; m-Birth registration; E-records; E-immigration; E-procurement; Digital property and E-land registration; Paperless port operations; E-taxes; Motor insurance; E-agriculture.

Timeline

Year	Event
1976	First Telecommunications Project
1986	Second Telecommunications Project
1994	Accelerated Development Program; Liberalisation of the ICT sector
1996	National Communications Authority Act
2003	The Ghana ICT for Accelerated Development (ICT4D) POlicy
2005	National Telecommunications Policy
2008	Second National Communications Authority Act
2012	Data Protection Act; National Broadband Policy
2015	National Cyber Security Policy