

## ICT INTEGRATION FOR YOUTH EMPOWERMENT IN NIGERIA

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**Abstract:** *ICT has engaged most of the Nigerian youth in Performing educational, social, economic, political, health, and religious activities in different dimensions at present. Similarly, ICT has a potential to bring development for Nigerian youth. It can reduce trade distortions, eliminate poverty, empower youth who form more than 45% of Nigerian population based on the 2006 census figures. This paper therefore explores the usefulness of ICT on Youth empowerment in Nigeria. It further highlights vocational opportunities in ICT for the benefit of the youth which include: Networking, programming, repairs and maintenance, computer sales, phone sales, parts and accessory sales and phone calls among others. From the literature review some of the challenges of ICT were identified and recommendations were proffered that Nigerian government as a matter of priority should provide the necessary ICT infrastructure, trained manpower, make adequate budgetary allocation and uninterrupted power supply to enhance skill development for youth empowerment.*

**Keywords:** *ICT Integration, Youth Empowerment, Youth.*

**Reference** to this paper should be made as follows: Bello Yerima, et al (2017), Ict Integration for Youth Empowerment in Nigeria. *J. of Social Sciences and Public Policy*, Vol. 9, Number 4, Pp. 111-121

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### INTRODUCTION

Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) include technologies in which the computer plays a central role, such as Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), the Internet, and a variety of generic computer applications. Youth empowerment is partly determined by the ability to establish a synergistic interaction between technological innovation and values. Nwagwu (2006) supported this when he asserted that the rapid rate at which ICTs have evolved since the mid-20th century as well as the

convergence and pervasiveness of ICTs, give them a strong role in youth empowerment and globalization. Similarly, Brakel and Chisenga (2003) maintained that ICTs have a significant impact on all areas of activity, particularly the technological development of any country. In addition, ICT comprise a complex and heterogeneous set of goods, applications and services used to produce, distribute process and transform information. Traditional technologies continue to be important for large number of youth around the world, particularly in Nigeria. However, new technologies have a vast potential for youth empowerment which needs to be fully exploited. Over the past decade, there has been a growing understanding that these technologies can be powerful instruments for advancing economic and social development through the creation of new types of economic activities employment opportunities and other services and the enhancement of networking participation and advocacy within society.

### **Concept of Youth Empowerment**

Youth simply refers to a young person between childhood and adult age. It is a transition period between adolescent and adulthood. However, it must be emphasized that there is no consensus regarding the age bracket of a youth. Ejiogu (2001) maintained that person who is aged between 17 and 20 years is a youth. FGN (2001) and Oluwadare (2004) considered persons within age bracket 10 to 24 years as youths. The United Nations defines youth as person between ages of 15 and 24 (UN and world Bank) and 15 to 29. (The Commonwealth). Nevertheless most of the definitions of youth point to a stage of between adolescent and adulthood. In Africa, like most developed countries, a person is defined as a youth when the individual reaches the age which is generally referred to as the age of majority. This age is often 18 in most countries and therefore that particular individual becomes an adult member of society. Youths have both positive and negative attributes which are predominant and distinguish them from the adults. They are energetic and full of life; they are fearless (sometimes to a fault); they are generally militant, rebellious and have disregard for social norms and ethics. They usually lead campaigns against what they perceive as injustice inequality, discrimination and violation of fundamental human rights. Youth is the age of discontent and rebellion zz(Ejiogu 2001) They remain the bedrock on which every nation's development thrives. They are the most exuberant, the sharpest in memory, the most talented, the most innovative and the

healthiest in most societies. These qualities have made them the most potent resource without which society is lifeless. Despite these positive attributes, they are arguably the most vulnerable, most deprived, most discriminated against, the most marginalized, mostly exploited particularly by politicians, the most counterproductive, and the most endangered species in society especially in Africa (Del-Tumi 2011).

### **Empowerment**

Empowerment means assisting people to overcome obstacles which might prevent them from achieving their potentials. The need to empower arises from the inability of an individual or a group of people to actualize their dreams and reach their greatest potential due to artificial barriers created by individuals and other groups within the same society (Olakulein and Ojo 2006). Youth Empowerment is an attitudinal, structural and cultural process whereby young people gain ability, authority and agency to make decisions and implement change in their own lives and the lives of other people including adults. (Valrus and Fletcher, 2006). Youths are empowered when they acknowledge that they have or can create choices of life, are aware of the implications of these choices, make an informed decision and accept responsibility for the consequences of those actions. According to Fletcher (2005), youth empowerment means creating and supporting the enabling conditions under which young people can act on their own behalf, and on their own terms, rather than at the direction of others. It simply means assisting the youth to overcome the difficulties which might prevent them from achieving their potentials.

### **Impact of ICT**

According to Oladunje and Audu (2014) the issue of ICT is key to inclusive development of youth in the world all over and Nigeria is not an exceptional. ICT offers opportunities for youth empowerment and education, particularly societies where resources are limited. Research has shown that the youths in various locations can use ICT to maintain cultures, gain knowledge, develop skills and generate income. According to the 2015 world youth Report section on youth in civil society ICT is increasingly used to improve access to education and employment opportunities, which support efforts to eradicate poverty.

In ICT, several areas have been identified over the years as a special means of providing services by youths, thereby engaging the youth in self-employment and better their lives. These include:-

- i. Networking
- ii. Programming
- iii. Repairing and maintenance
- iv. Computer sales
- v. Phone sales
- vi. Parts and accessory sales
- vii. Phone calls etc.

In the same vein, access to ICTs can have tremendous effects on youth sense of empowerment and ability to be active participants in their societies at both social, political and economic levels. ICTs enhance the empowerment of youth in the society by increasing their capacity to work as organized networks both within and beyond borders. For instance, the internet can give a rise to political activism through online networks that can complement physical work. Moreover, ICTs are most effective when they are used as means of engagement and enhancement of youth participation in skills work, which are indispensable for human development. ICTs can help improve empowerment and participation in policy debates by creating linkages to government processes to maintain government transparency in turn developing of the citizens and promoting the use of ICT.

Presently, ICTs and their Networks have become the channels of power and financial resources of the world and marginalization from these networks is perhaps the most damaging form of exclusion for any individual or community today connecting youth to these process and opportunities can turn ICTs into powerful enhancers of capabilities for human development.

ICT offer new opportunities for young people to enter the job market. ICT is also a revolutionary force that lowers barriers of entry to job markets and the degree of formality in the employment relationship. It eliminates geographic boundaries, provides flexibility in the value chain, enabling youths to compete for higher-level jobs due to specific skill advantage in technology.

In supporting the impact of ICT on youth empowerment, (Adeoti 2004) asserted that technology has transformed the way younger generation communicate and access information. Two major assumptions underline the role of ICT: the first is that proliferation of these technologies is causing rapid

transformations in all areas of youth's life, the second is that ICT function to unify and standardize culture. It is on the basis of these assumptions that the term information age and globalization evolved.

### **Impediment of Effective utilization of ICT for Youth Empowerment**

There are some factors that are pending the full utilization of ICT in Nigeria, especially in the Nigerian Tertiary Institutions where most of the youths obtained various certificate on ICTs.

Some of these challenges are as follows:

- i. Inadequate Infrastructure,
- ii. Inadequate Skilled Manpower,
- iii. Resistance to Change
- iv. Inadequate Funding.

#### **Inadequate Infrastructure:**

Institutions in Nigeria lack adequate ICT infrastructure to effectively tap into the opportunities offered by the cyberspace. Personal Computers (PCs) are available in most Nigerian tertiary institutions, but they are not readily accessible to students. In most cases, the basic software needed for practical works are not available and where they are available, they are not accessible because of the low ratio. There is also the lack of Computer Aided Interaction and some other specialized software to support some areas of teaching learning and research. Internet connectivity is available in most tertiary institutions in Nigeria, but in most cases the bandwidth subscribed to (which determine speed of access) is too small to support any meaningful academic (Achimuguet al.2010) activity during peak period. Some institutions have subscribed to Virtual Library sites whereby members can access electronic academic materials such as journals. Also some institutions have CD-Rom collections on specialized fields, but the currency of the information on the CDs cannot be guaranteed as no effort is made to update them Whereas ICT infrastructures like multimedia projectors are available in Nigerian tertiary institutions to support teaching, learning and research, other infrastructures like Interactive white Boards and mobile devices are lacking.

### **Inadequate Skilled Manpower**

Inadequate ICT technical personnel is a major problem in Nigerian's tertiary institutions. The reason for this can be ascribed to the lucrative job opportunities available to ICT professionals in other organizations outside the academics. The situation has made institutions rely on commercial private ventures to provide support for the few ICT facilities available. The support offered in most cases is commercial and lack academic content. As a way out of this challenge, some universities like Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife, Lead City University Ibadan, Bowen University Iwo and National Open University of Nigeria are in partnership with private and international organizations for ICT technical manpower development.

### **Resistance to Change:**

There is the concern of faculty members not willing to take the "soft" approach to teaching and learning. Rather, they stick to the traditional hard "approach". Report from OECD (2005) gave reasons while faculties resist e-learning.

### **Inadequate Funding:**

This is the major challenge confronting the acquisition and utilization of ICT in Nigerian tertiary education. Most institutions solely rely on their proprietor for funding and the bulk of such fund goes to servicing the overhead cost. Since no clear sustainable business model has yet emerged for commercial provision of e-learning, and failures have been more numerous than success, (OECD, 2005), institutions are not willing to invest the little fund available to them on e-learning project.

### **The State of ICT in Nigeria and Its Acceptability by Youths**

Ogunsola and Aboyade (2005) observe that Nigeria had a late start in the use of computers, but the growth in their use has been quite remarkable. The computer installations are widely distributed in universities, government departments and agencies, banks, commercial establishments, and industries. The private sector is also not left out in this information technological revolution. Nigerian university campuses too are now full of Information Communication technology facilities enabling lecturers and students to do their researches and other academic works using various IT devices. They also note with happiness that both the Federal Government of Nigeria and other

international funding agencies are interested in the general development of ICT in higher education in Nigeria. The Federal Ministry of Education, for instance, has embarked on the establishment of the National Virtual (Digital) Library Project. Funding agencies like Carnegie Corporation of New York are also interested in the Nigerian ICT developmental programme. Mobile cellular services made their first appearance on the Nigerian market in 1993 with a "national" service operated by NITEL and a smaller Lagos service operated by Mobile Telecommunications Services (MTS). The two firms, with a joint subscriber base of 12 500, provided voice services over an analogue E-TACS network, as well as basic value-added services such as voicemail and paging, from three switches in Lagos, Enugu, and Abuja. However, in 1995, MTS closed its operations due to failure to pay interconnection charges to NITEL. M-Tel subsequently emerged as NITEL's mobile service provider. The GSM licensing process was cancelled early in 2000 and the process of auctioning four mobile cellular licenses was reopened in December of that year, after soliciting credible bidders. The winners who emerged out of this process and settled the agreed license fees included Econet Wireless Nigeria, Mobile Telephone Networks (MTN) and Communications Nigeria. The new GSM licenses were awarded for a period of five years (renewable) and all operators can operate in the 900 MHz and 1800 MHz spectrum bands. Whereas they do provide for a potential upgrading of future networks to GPRS (general packet radio switching), they do not encompass third generation (3G) networks, which will probably be auctioned off sometime in the future. Nigeria's digital mobile network has grown significantly since the three companies, awarded the Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM) license in January 2001, began operating in August 2001.

According to the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) the GSM network achieved 350,000 connections within six months of their launch (Telecommunication in Nigeria-Overview <http://www.mbendi.com/indy/cotl/tlcm/af/ng/p0005.htm>) By September 7, 2010, nine years since the introduction of GSM in Nigeria, the country has witnessed an unprecedented massive development of telecom infrastructure across the country by the operators. Indeed, the rate of investment in the telecom sector since 1999 is regarded only second to the oil industry. With over 45 million subscriber bases, Nigeria's telecommunication industry is regarded as the fastest growing in the world.

This has opened up huge business opportunities in the telecom industry. The GSM has also revolutionized our business environment as people can transact their businesses from the comfort of their homes through the use of GSM facilities. At the same time social relationships have been enhanced. GSM has also empowered the people economically through creation of mass employment. Today, so many unemployed people are earning their living by making phone calls, selling recharge cards and GSM accessories. GSM has equally become a major source of revenue for the government. The NCC has continued to introduce necessary measures to enhance the quality of service delivery and steady growth of the industry. The measures include the introduction of unified licensing, which made it possible for fixed wireless operators to offer GSM service. Equally significant is the granting of 3G licenses to some operators. The 3G, as it is popularly called, is the most advanced technology on GSM, which enables the operators to offer both data, voice video conference services (Udutchay, 2008).

Awe (2009) says for Nigeria to truly celebrate the October 2009 independence, ICT must be called to the party as it is an engine for sustainable development in health, education, agriculture, poverty reduction, wealth creation, employment, security, youth empowerment and other key sectors. Awe's assessment of the state of the ICT in the country includes the following, among others:

- a. Telecommunication availability has improved and Nigeria is one of the world's fastest growing mobile markets. But the cold, hard facts are that communications quality is low and ICT penetration is still insufficient considering Nigeria's size and population.
- b. It's important to note that important variations in the nature of access determine telecommunication impact, for instance, broadband density is particularly low as there is a great gulf between broadband and voice telephony penetration. Nigeria must move beyond voice telephony.
- c. Furthermore, cost is a barrier. Lack of awareness and access excludes many from the digital environment. In a country where poverty still walks the streets, ICT remains a stranger. Computing and telecommunication resources are unaffordable to the majority.
- d. Software is at the heart of the global knowledge economy. Any nation that values its sovereignty must take software serious. Software opportunities in Nigeria are not being fully exploited to unleash the



potentials of the Nigerian people and the Nigerian nation. Local developers however face challenges of ignorance and patronage. Existing software promotion policies have not made much impact. Bureaucratic sloganeering will not get us anywhere.

- e. Information security is an area of concern. Cybercrime, hacking, phishing, ATM fraud and general identity theft are on the increase. Security of information assets is critical to building confidence in today's networked world. Having secure information environments helps in attracting more investment in ICT.

## **CONCLUSION**

All over the world, the use of information and communication technology is changing the face of economy, skill acquisition, government etc. information is a key factor to any development process. The internet as an information and communication medium has come to play a major role in the distribution of information. Lack of access to information and communication technologies has remained a major challenge to youth development. The youths are a key players in the information society if they have been well educated, which gives them the informational abilities to survive in a new and globalized economy. Above all, information and communication technology is pivotal to the creation of employment in particular and citizen in general.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

Consequent upon the various literatures review, the following recommendations, which when strictly adhered to would diversify ICT opportunities for youth empowerment and improve the economy of Nigeria.

1. The potential of youth towards development of ICT should be harnessed to improve their horizon and create employment.
2. The nation's infrastructure should be upgraded and the dilapidated ones replaced so as to encourage the use of ICT by youths.
3. The funding of ICT should be encouraged through public private partnership
4. Teaching of ICT should be included in school curriculum of both primary and secondary schools so as to get the youth abreast of ICT application at early stage.
5. Intensive seminars, conferences and workshops should be mounted by relevant bodies to educate and upgrade the technical skills of youth in the area of ICT.

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