

## **THE RELEVANCE OF INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY IN EMPOWERMENT AND EMPLOYMENT GENERATION FOR YOUTH IN ABIA STATE**

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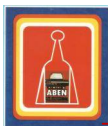
### **Abstract**

*The world is in the center of information communication technology revolution. Information Technology is an apparatus that can assist persons develop their consciousness and capacity for empowering themselves. It offers people a better understanding of the technology and its efficacy in people's daily lives. Its use should increase access to information which leads to possible ways of improving people's wellbeing. This research work is an attempt to see how pastoral and municipal communities in Abia State can be empowered, through information technology (ICT) to reduce their poverty levels. The study is focused on the impact of ICT on income generation, employment and productivity. The research was conducted using structured questionnaire to get the views of the stakeholders. The responses from the questionnaires are analyzed using mean and standard deviation. The findings from the result revealed the following: the underprivileged can be empowered through ICT. Empowering people through ICT will boost their proceeds generation. It is observed that most organizations needed people who are ICT empowered. Information communication technology empowerment is found to enlarge job opportunities for people and also increase production.*

*Keywords- Information Technology, Empowerment, Income generation, Employment,*

### **Introduction**

Information and communication technology (ICT) is fast becoming a popular means of youth empowerment and economic turn around in many countries. Young people looking for meaningful, secure, income-generating work make up a sizable proportion of the population in developing countries. Demographic trends show that youths are growing numerically, making up more than two-thirds of the population of some developing nations. Trends show that about 85% of the world's youth reside in developing countries (Sobeih, 2007). Young people need to be empowered and prepared for the future and ICT can assist in this process. Youth unemployment is becoming an increasingly troublesome issue in many parts of the world. In Nigeria, it has become one



of the most serious socio-economic problems confronting the country. It is one of the greatest and most uncomfortable problems facing the Nigerian economy in recent times. According to (Oyemomi, 2003) unemployment in Nigeria is assuming a crisis-level. Based on the number of graduates and secondary school leavers without jobs, it is evident that unemployment rate is growing at geometric progression (Oyemomi, 2003). This situation is most disturbing, and when one considers the thousands of youths that graduate from tertiary institutions each year, one wonders whether the Federal Government has really appraised itself of the serious problems (such as armed robbery, drug trafficking among others) of youth unemployment in this country. Apart from youths engaging in various vices such as armed robbery, drug trafficking and the like, there is loss of social peace, orderliness, security and other vices associated with poverty. This has challenged the researchers to determine the extent ICT initiatives can contribute to income generation, employment and productivity which will lead to reduction and empowerment of the poor. The impact of ICT initiatives will be determined by its impact on employment and how economic growth as a result of ICT transforms itself into the creation of productive and remunerative employment. Determining the impact of ICT on income generation, employment and productivity have become a crucial task. With the speed of communications and the pace of unemployment constantly on the increase, the government needs to know how technology is affecting the youth. The government needs to know whether ICT systems are helping the youth or hindering them for achieving their goals.

### **Statement of the problem**

Staring at ICT tools, their opportunities and risks, particularly as apparatus for poverty reduction and youths empowerment, it is still an unexpected undertaking in African countries (Abulkhirat, 2006). While the potential of ICT for stimulating economic growth, socio-economic development and effective governance is well recognized, the benefits of ICTs have been unevenly distributed within and between countries. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are eight international development goals that 192 United Nations member states and at least 23 international organizations have agreed to achieve by the year 2015. There is a need to build awareness among decision makers and stakeholders, including regional organizations and the private sector, on the need for investment in ICT capacity building at all levels of formal and non-formal education. This includes training development workers to incorporate ICTs in their activities. Sobeih(2007) stated that emphasis should be placed on training women and youth about using ICTs and ensuring the inclusion of disadvantaged groups. The capacity of young people to exploit the potential of new ICTs as tools for empowerment is inhibited in many ways. For instance, many young people in Nigeria are



yet to understand that outstanding economic growth can be achieved through the use of ICTs. It was observed at many Internet cafes that many students use the internet for their homework while many use it for dubious activities at the cafes. In order for the youths in Nigeria to be info-empowered, there has to be awareness of the use of ICT for empowerment, greater access to ICT tools, and an obstructed free flow of information. There is need to explore how the students are using ICTs.

### **Concept of Youth**

Youth is defined by Webster's New Oxford Dictionary in Adebayo (2002) as the time of life when one is young especially the period between childhood and maturity of the early period of existence, growth or development. The word "youth", "adolescent", "teenager" and "young persons" are often used interchangeably. According to Jega (2012), youth can be defined as a special group of people with strong stamina and passion for realizing certain set goals and objectives. The way in which a nation defines its youth is related to the objective conditions and realities that exist on the ground especially historical and contemporary socio-economic and political issues that need to be addressed. For the purpose of the execution of Nigeria's National Youth Development Policy; the youth comprises all young persons of age 18-35 who are citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. This category represents the most cultured, the most volatile and yet the most vulnerable segment of the population, socio-economically, emotionally and in other respect.

### **Causes of Youth Unemployment**

Youth unemployment in Nigeria is a consequence of several factors. One major factor is that of population growth. Nigeria has continued to experience high rate of population growth. This increasing population growth has produced an overwhelming increase in the youth population thereby resulting in an increase in the size of the working age population.

Lack of employable skills due to inappropriate school curricula is another factor contributing to the rising youth unemployment. Analysts have argued that in Nigeria generally, the skills that job seekers possess do not match the needs and demands of employers (Mcgrath, 1999; Kent and Mushi, 1995). According to the scholars, the education system in Nigeria has its liberal bias which indeed over-supplies the labour market with graduates who do not possess the skills required by employers. Many graduates in Nigeria lack entrepreneurial skills to facilitate self-employment (Oladele, Akeke and Oladunjoye, 2011). Another factor is the perception of policy makers and the youth themselves about employment. To the policy makers and the youth, employment



means securing jobs with salary and working for someone else. It is this perception that has continued to influence the institutions in Nigeria that provide skills and training.

Based on this, curricula and training programmes are generally tailored towards preparing young people for formal sector jobs. Since these jobs do not exist, there is often a mismatch between the skills possessed by the job seekers and the available jobs.

Among other factors responsible for youth unemployment are poor governance, ineffective targeting of the poor resulting in resources being thinly spread among competing projects, overlapping of functions, poor coordination and lack of sustainable measures (Musari, 2009).

### **Information Technology:**

Information technology has been shown to promote economic growth. Since the early 1990's, information technologies (ICTs) and the related services are believed to have the potential to promote steady and sustainable growth, to increase competitiveness, to open new job opportunities and to improve the quality of life to all [European Commission, 1993 in Hannes, (2000) . Grameen (2001) discussed how ICT provides unparalleled opportunities to improve the lives of the world's poorest people by creating jobs, improving access to health care, providing education and other services. ICT has helped in connecting community-based artisan producer groups (Cecchini and Shah (2002). It can create jobs, improve access to health care, education and other services (Grameen, 2001). In Ghana, studies revealed that youth participation in education and skills training is inadequate hence the vulnerability in terms of employment. In view of this situation the information and communication technology sector which has the potential to generate job opportunities for the youth needs to be promoted. The regulatory body in the sector has to be strengthened and given the necessary independence to provide an enabling environment for private sector participation for the sector to develop and create the much needed jobs for the youth Grameen (2001).

According to Gerster and Zimmermann (2003). ICT (Information and Communication Technology) refers to any artifact, technique or knowledge used to create, store, manage and disseminate information. This includes radio, television, video cameras and telephones. ICT is defined as the set of activities that facilitate the capturing, storage, processing, transmission and display of information by electronic means (World Bank, 2002). They include telegraph, radio, television, computers, internet services and wireless technologies. Alan (2005), defined ICTs by categorizing them based on how they have been in common use and to some extent the technology used for the transmission and storage of information. Four characteristics can be used to describe the modern ICTs.



- a) Interactivity: they are now effective two-way communication technology. The flow of information can be interactive. It is no longer only received but can be created and offered more easily.
- b) Permanent availability: it is available 24 hours a day
- c) Global reach: geographic distances hardly matter anymore.
- d) Reduced cost: for many people cost of communication has gone down to a fraction of previous values and relatively cheap.

Old ICT include Radio, Television, land line and what may be call ‘really old ICT’ such as newspapers, books and libraries. Today a useful working definition of ICT can be seen as an electronic means of capturing, processing, storing and disseminating information. Kenny (2001) believed that information and knowledge are critical components and information technologies (ICTs) offer the promise of easy access to huge amounts of information useful for the poor.

### **Effects of Unemployment and Poverty**

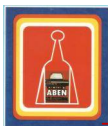
Mass unemployment and the resulting poverty have multi-variance consequences on youth, economic, social, political development of a nation leading to youth restiveness and personal society and national insecurity. As noted by Anho (2012) and Nwaosa, Ojohwoh and Jegbefum (2013), some of the effects includes social unrest; school dropout; destruction and vandalization of private and public properties; creation of fear in citizens; threat to life (individual and national); economic wastage and acute reduction in the nation’s gross domestic products (GDP) and personal/national income; lack of foreign investment in a country or in particular region; committal of other crimes such as; arm robbery; arson; bombing; cultism; youth exuberance; hostage-taking; human and drug trafficking; gangster, kidnapping; thug activities; rape; vandalism of properties; seizure of facilities; occupation of industrial public and personal site; inter and intra community strife; work stoppage; oil bunkering; fake and illegal drug peddling; and outright will from murder.

### **Purpose of the study**

The general objective of this work is the exploitation of ICT for creating employment, improving income generation of people and improving general productivity in Abia State.

### **Research Questions**

1. Can the use of ICT policy add to revenue generation?



2. Can the use of ICT generate employment opportunities and economic empowerment in Abia State?

The hypotheses for the research are set as follows:

**H0:** ICT empowerment cannot add to revenue generation.

**H0:** ICT empowerment cannot assist in creating opportunities for employment.

**H0:** ICT empowerment cannot assist to improve general productivity.

### **Method**

The study was carried out in Abia State. Youths from rural and urban areas of Abia State, formed the population of the study.

Data was collected using a suitable structured and pre-tested questionnaire. The questionnaire sought answers on varying issues especially strategies in skill acquisition in computer technology, entrepreneurship, accounting, key-boarding, management, communication and creativity. Descriptive statistical tools -mean and standard deviation, were used to analyze the data collected.

### **Results**

**Table 1: Mean responses on the information communication technology policy add to revenue generation**

| S/N | Hypothesis                                                                | N  | X    | $\delta$ | Decision |
|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|------|----------|----------|
| 1   | the use of ICT policy add to revenue generation                           | 27 | 3.37 | 0.29     | Accepted |
| 2   | it achievable to generate employment opportunities by the use of ICT      | 30 | 3.75 | 0.26     | Accepted |
| 3   | The relevance of ICT help in enhancing general productivity in Abia state | 28 | 3.50 | 0.28     | Accepted |
| 4   | ICT will create employment for the Abians                                 | 25 | 3.12 | 0.32     | Accepted |
| 5   | ICT can improve income generation of Abia youth                           | 32 | 4.00 | 0.25     | Accepted |
| 6   | ICT can improveth the general productivity of the Abians                  | 25 | 3.12 | 0.32     | Accepted |

#### **Field work 2016**

3.37, 3.75, 3.50, 3.12, 4.00, and 3.12. All the mean scores were above 2.5 and as such, served as the basis for acceptance that the use of ICT policy can add to revenue generation in Abia State.

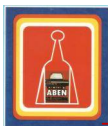


**Table2: Mean responses on information and communication generate employment opportunities and economic empowerment in Abia State.**

| S/N | Hypothesis                                       | N  | X    | $\delta$ | Decision |
|-----|--------------------------------------------------|----|------|----------|----------|
| 7   | ICT adopts type writing skill building strategy  | 27 | 3.37 | 0.29     | Accepted |
| 8   | ICT adopts communication strategy                | 30 | 3.75 | 0.26     | Accepted |
| 9   | ICT adopts case system strategy                  | 28 | 3.50 | 0.28     | Accepted |
| 10  | ICT adopts conceptual development strategy       | 25 | 3.12 | 0.32     | Accepted |
| 11  | ICT adopts data analysis and processing strategy | 32 | 4.00 | 0.25     | Accepted |
| 12  | ICT adopts industrial training (SIWES) strategy  | 25 | 3.12 | 0.32     | Accepted |
| 13  | ICT adopts entrepreneurial strategy              | 26 | 3.14 | 0.31     | Accepted |

#### **Field work 2016**

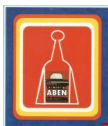
The meanscores for ICT as a means of generating employment opportunities were 3.37, 3.25, 2.87, 3.00, 3.62, 3.50, and 3.50 respectively as shown in table 2. All the means scores were above 2.5; indicating that information communication technology has positive impact on revenue generation and job creation and empowerment for sustainable development.

#### **Discussion**

ICTs can engage and motivate youth to get involved in developing and learning about their communities and thus forge increased commitment and empowerment. For instance, citizen journalism, user-generated content, reporting, and neighborhood videos and music are attractive and constructive ways to get youth engaged in positive local development processes. Young leaders in Abia state have attributed the access to information as an empowering agent allowing youth to "hold their head high and walk into a meeting with government officials. Knowledge is power, power is self-esteem."

The results of this research did show clearly that ICT trains students/youths in the study area in computer skills, key boarding/computerprocessing and analyzing skills, entrepreneurial development, accounting skills, records management, and secretarial skills. It did show also that ICT education adopts the following strategies: Student Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES), type-writing, communication, case system, case analysis, data processing, as well as entrepreneurial strategy.

National development is the capacity of a nation or country to advance communal interests and amenities for her people, like good education, pipe borne water. It also includes the degree to which other development indices have been well applied especially the introduction of information and communication technology (ICT) that has now become the 'life blood' of most businesses. In developed countries, education has indeed improved beyond every reasonable doubt, but can same be said for developing countries? In any case, education has been proven to be a dynamic instrument



of social change and a cornerstone around which the wheel of human development revolves.

Analysis does show that there are incompetent stenographers, typists, clerical officers, account clerks and others alike, in both public and private sectors. Castle in Ndukwe (1996) warned that it is not enough to provide academic secondary education and higher professional education in medicine, agricultural sciences and technology without training middle man-power –the skilled artisans. Nwosu (2002) posited also that business education makes students experience practical skills like entrepreneurship, keyboarding, communication, case analysis and reporting, as well as managerial, technical and operational skills.

From the results of this study, it is obvious that business education teaches students various computer skills – data analysis, data processing, calculations and spreadsheet data processing as stated by Oduma (2004) and Nwafor (2005). In fact, there are assertions that key-boarding remain an innovation in teaching as it enables business education graduates/trainees, secure gainful employment or be self reliant and compete satisfactorily in the chaotic universal society condition of the ‘survival of the fittest’.

Amaewhule in Oduma (2012) noted that the economic development of any nation demands active participation in all economic activities by its people, and this could be achieved through entrepreneurship education. The National Economic Empowerment and Development strategy (NEEDS) is a home medium term development and poverty reduction plans that describes the Nigeria’s’ economic, structural and social policies/programmes for promoting growth and development in all facets of the economy. It specifically emphasized the need for value reorientation, wealth creation, poverty reduction and employment generation. Studies conducted in 2007 by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the Food and Agricultural organization (F.A.O) in the Latin American and Caribbean regions have indicated that rural enterprises can be an important modernizing agent for small scale Agriculture. The governments supported this process by creating incentives for agro-industry to invest in the region. This has not only been in developing countries, but also a clear development policy of the European Union which channels a large part of the total common budget to develop the backward and poor regions in Europe.

At this present stage of our national development when emphasis has shifted to technology, educational policies must be designed and implemented in a manner that emphasizes short and long term societal benefit and how applicable it is to particular social and economic circumstances. It is on this premise that Ndukwe (1996) in his article titled “Nigerian’s false Education System” observed that the nation’s educational practices are based on the myth of how things are done in Britain, United States of



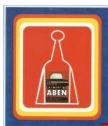
American and Russia. Indeed, the sad circumstance governing the prospects of business education in Nigeria has been that of a very few enlightened populace recognizing the high premium placed on business education and those who hold the pen and earn more than those who wield the hoe and operate different types of machines. The poor public perception towards ICT especially from the rural area and the negative gesture of the government on its enhancement, as well as the gross misconception by rural students contributed to the exodus of ICT education from such areas. Furthermore, with the seeming inadequate fund allocation by the federal government of Nigeria, one would see the contradiction in Nigeria's education philosophy and what is presently the true position of her educational system.

Take for instance, the high import duty on textbooks and other instructional materials and the strong bias for academic and literary subjects which are some of the major defects in the Nigeria educational policy framework. As such, technical education has not been adequately developed and there has been a great dearth of man-power with the technical know-how needed for the effective implementation of the various programmes of economic development. Consequent upon this and as shown by recent developments, comprehensive schools and road side commercial schools are plagued with cheats, misfits and quacks that debase the teaching profession.

The challenge for higher educational institutions therefore, is to create a new generation of teachers that are capable of employing a variety of technological tools into ICT education; be it academic, administrative, research, and extension activities. There is also the need to take more seriously, the quest to industrialize the nation while restructuring the educational system at all levels. Above all, a teacher of ICT education is expected to know how to successfully integrate ICT into the subject area to make learning meaningful. This knowledge development during pre-service training has gained much importance and the exposure to ICT during this time is helpful in increasing teachers' willingness to integrate technology for classroom teaching.

## **Conclusion**

ICT specifically has played a central role in young people's rise to prominence on a global scale. It has helped them mobilize, collaborate and given them a voice where there was none before. It has brought them together in response to social concerns. It has connected them across vast geo-political barriers. Therefore; all ICT programmes should be sustained and rejuvenated since it trains manpower for teaching, banking, commerce, insurance, public relations, marketing, and entrepreneurial operational skills in different areas of endeavors.



### **Recommendations**

1. Funds for the establishment of new ICT schools should be channeled towards equipping and maintaining the established ones.
2. The conditions of service for teachers in general should be improved especially those involved in ICT.
3. The rate of supply of instructional materials required for effective teaching and learning of the subject in question should also be increased, while more time should be allocated to these skilled subjects in school time tables for their mastery.
4. Promoting ICT skills development in extracurricular educational settings shows that one can acquire ICT skills almost anywhere. These are out-of-classroom opportunities which governments need to pay attention to and support if they want to foster an ICT-savvy, innovative labour force.

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