LEVERAGING INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) FOR POVERTY ALLEVIATION AND ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

[1]Akujor, J. C., [2]Achumba, I. E. and [3]Ogungbenro, O. A.
[1]Department of Financial Management Technology,
[2]Department of Electrical and Electronic Engineering,
[3]Department of Physics
Federal University of Technology, Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria.

Abstract

The target year for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by the United Nations is 2015 with 1990 as baseline -25year span. There were eight MDGs covering such areas as poverty eradication, health improvement, economic empowerment of women, education and sustainability. In response, the Federal Government initiated the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (NEEDS) programme and the State Governments followed suit with State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (SEEDS). The NEEDS and SEEDS programmes were geared towards the achievement of the MDGs in Nigeria. This paper examines the contributions of ICT in the achievement of the MDGs in Nigeria particularly with respect to poverty alleviation and economic empowerment of women.

Keywords: Millennium Development Goals, information and communication technology, poverty alleviation, economic empowerment.

Introduction

Poverty seems to have become a natural phenomena in the under-developed and developing countries. It is a relative term that means different things to different categories of people; to the international community, it simply means living on less than $2 per day; to the average Nigerian, it is the inability to acquire the basic needs of life; to the working class, it is the lack of access to basic government services such as education, food, health care, water, etc. Greenberg (2005) defines poverty as a situation of insufficient material resources, poor access to health care and education, lack of rights, freedom, economic and social empowerment and opportunities.

The average Nigerian is poor, hungry and helpless despite the various economic empowerment programmes of the government. Figure 1 shows the poverty percentage incidence in Nigeria.
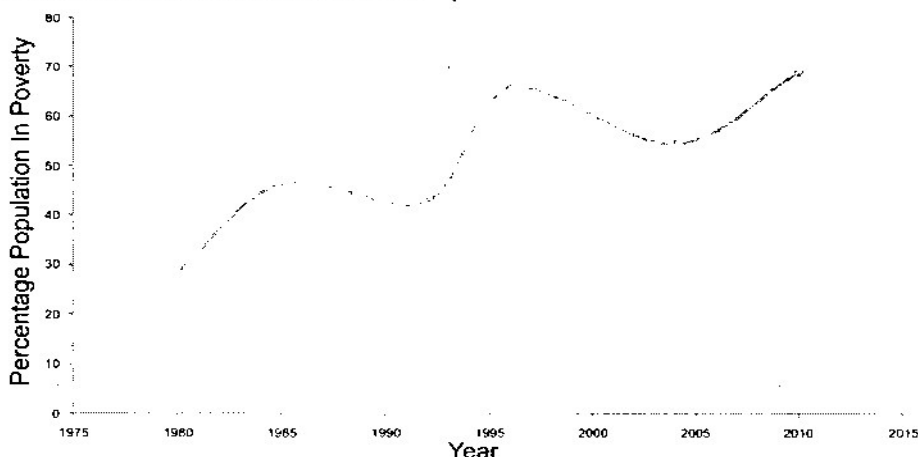

Figure 1: Poverty percentage Incidence in Nigeria (Source: Nigerian Bureau of Statistics, 2012).

We note that the poor population percentage has always been on the increase since 1980 irrespective of the various economic intervention programmes and policies of the government. This has also translated to a direct increase in the total poor populace (see Figure 2).
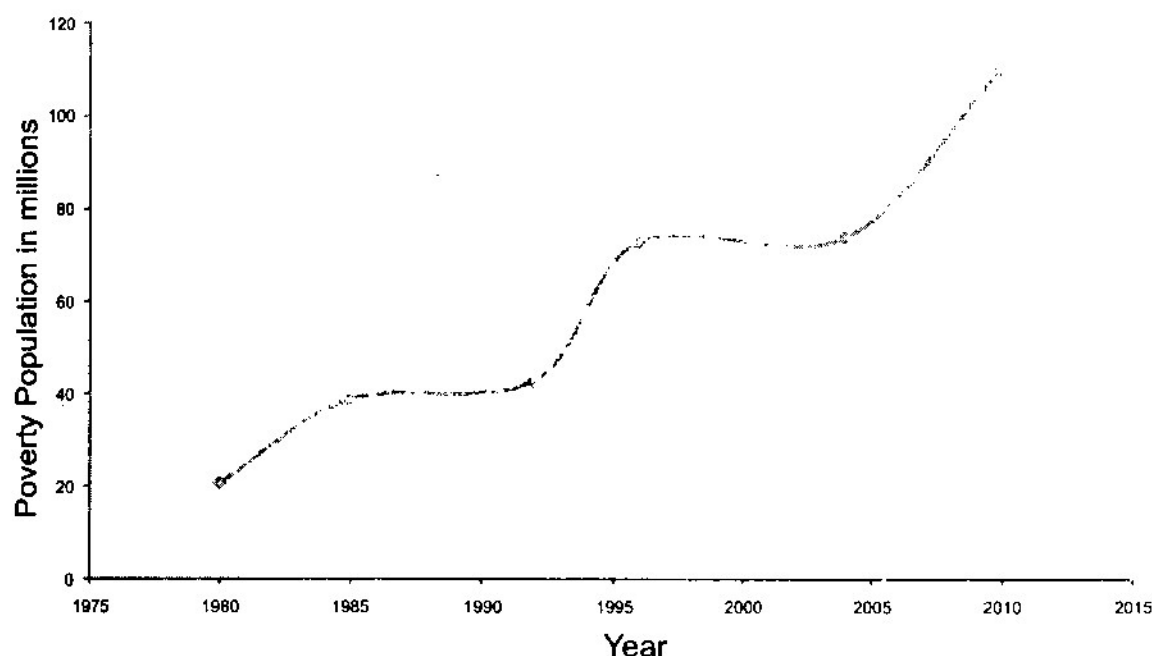

Figure 2: Nigeria's poverty population (Source: Nigerian Bureau of Statistics, 2012).

The Nigerian scenario is one in which the poor get poorer while the rich get richer. The major challenge of the Nigerian government therefore remains the eradication of poverty. The Nigerian poverty case shows that poverty knows no educational boundary since both the non-educated, and all others with various forms of education (formal, technical or vocational) are not spared (see Table 1).

Table 1: Relative poverty incidence by educational level of head of household (%)

Educational level	2009 Relative poverty level
National Poverty Incidence	65
No form of education	75.4
FSLC	62.0
Vocational / Commercial	67.3
JSS	70.3
SSS or O Level	53.6
NCE / OND	47.8
BA or HND	43.5
Technical / Professional	70.1
Masters	18.6
Doctorate	28.3

(Source: Nigerian Bureau of Statistics, 2012)

The Nigerian government has at various times confronted poverty through her several economic empowerment schemes such as: the Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YouWIN); the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS); the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) - a global approach aimed at addressing extreme poverty and hunger - universal primary education, women empowerment and gender equality, high infant (under five years) mortality rate, high maternal mortality rate, the spread of diseases (especially HIV/AIDS and malaria), environmental sustainability and global partnership for development; the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP); the Vision 2010; the Better Life Programme etc. These giant strides notwithstanding, Nigerians still rank among the very poor peoples of the world. Adeyemo (1991), Igbuzor (2006), Odumodu (2008) and many others have attributed this to poor resource utilization and corruption. We appraise the possibility of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in ensuring poverty eradication and economic empowerment for the Nigerian populace and the Nigerian nation. Several authors have x-rayed the potential of ICTs for development and growth (see Wilson and Gapsis, 2014; Santhirasegaram, 2013; Tersoo, 2013; Clarke, Wylied & Zomer, 2013; Owolabi, Oyewole, & Oke, 2013; Akujor et al., 2013; 2009).

The Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Intervention

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is an umbrella term that includes any communication device or application encompassing radio, television, cellular phones, computers and networks, hardwares and softwares, satellite systems, etc. Assar, Amrani and Watson (2009) described ICTs as fundamental infrastructure for economic development and growth. ICTs have the capacity to: catalyze economic, social and human development; create opportunities for new enterprises, connect people and create access to a large volume of data or information.

ICTs were very strange tools to our system in Nigeria until more recently-around the beginning of the new millennium when its use and acceptability became widespread as if gained more ground by the day. For example, since the inception of the Global System of Mobile Communication, its use has gained more acceptability and usage in the day to day activities of most Nigerians (see Figure 3).
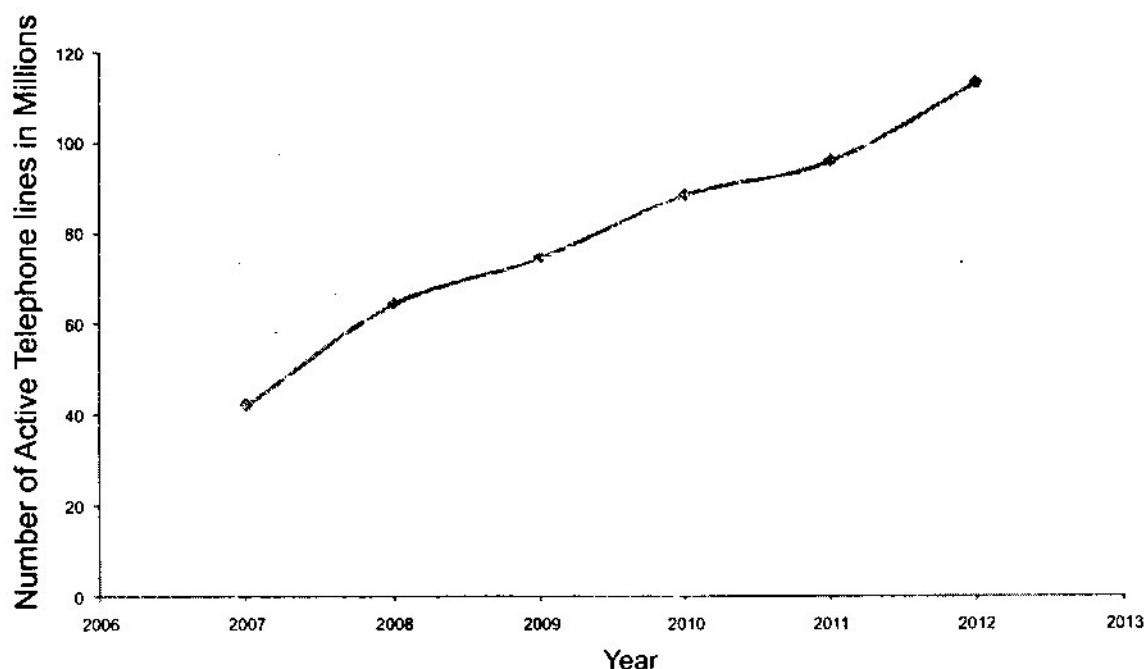

Figure 3: Active telephone lines in Nigeria (Data Source: Nigerian Bureau of Statistics)

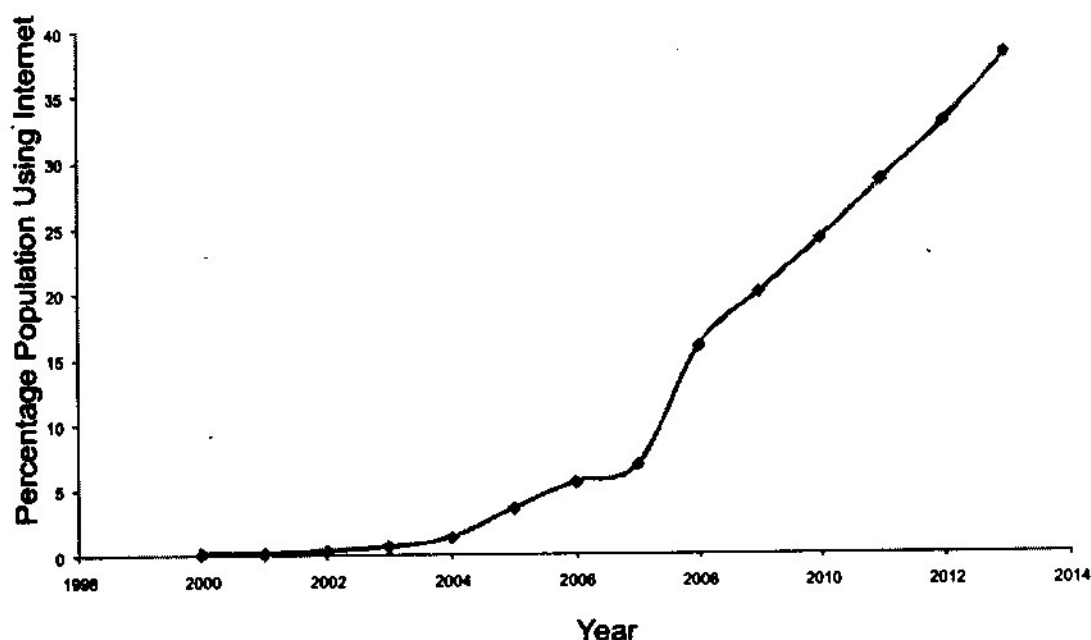The internet use and acceptability is also growing in leaps and bounds by the day as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Internet usage population in Nigeria (Data Source: The World Bank).

The Nigerian economy has the capacity for growth with the sustained adoption and continued integration of ICTs in her activities, The emergence of the Global System of Mobile Communication (GSM) in 2001 resulted in faster economic growth across several sectors of the economy. ICTs have brought transparency and as such, economic empowerment to farmers since its introduction in the way and manner fertilizers and farm inputs are distributed in Nigeria. This is evident in the fact that we no longer hear people (farmers) complain about the dissemination of fertilizers again. We can leverage more on this in the agricultural sector in the areas of:

· Dissemination of information about availability of agricultural produce, thereby reducing wastages
· Linking producers of raw materials to end users
· Dissemination of weather and climate information to farmers
· Educating farmers on modern and best agricultural practices.

All these would reduce poverty and economically empower those in this sector.

The introduction of ICTs in this sector has enhanced the dissemination of knowledge. Further enhancement can be brought into the sectors through the sustained use of ICTs in the way and manner the sector is administered

from teaching, to mentoring, to administration and leadership. This would reduce unnecessary wastage of time and resources and enhance educational delivery thereby equipping the citizenry for economic boom. For example, the Federal Government of Nigeria introduced the Integrated Personnel and Payroll System (IPPIS) to ensure transparency and accountability in the public and civil service.

ICTs provide real opportunities for people to access vital information that can lead to wealth and economic empowerment. ICTs also provide real opportunities for curbing corruption and leakages, thereby enhancing savings and security of investment.

Conclusion

The positive trend in the adoption and acceptability of ICTs has made it imperative

to integrate it into our national development strategy. Data and information gathering would become easy and can be used for the purposes of planning, governance, leadership, mentorship and trust building. The number of those reached would grow at the same rate ICTs are generally acceptable. There is the need to sustain the current interest and use of ICTs in our day to day activities and also the need to introduce ICT into the other facets of life and economy in which it (ICT) has not yet been brought to.

References

Adeyemo, O.A. (1991). The Nigerian Planning Experience. England: Oxford: University Press.

Akujor, C.E., Ogungbenro, O.A., Opara, G.C., Osondu, M.C., Akujor, J.C. and Ejiofor, C. (2013). ICT: A strategy for qualitative approach to educational system delivery in Nigeria. *Advances in Science and Technology* 7(2), 129-136.

Akujor, C.E., Dozie, I.N.S., Onwuliri, C.O.E., Ogungbenro, O.A., Ugwoke, R.E. Alozie, G.A. and Mejeha, I.M. (2009), Information and Communication Technology (ICT) As a Tool for the Achievement of Millennium Development Goals in Nigeria *Advances in Science and Technology,* 3(2), 138 145.

Assar, S., Amrani, R. & Watson, R.T. (2009). ICT education in developing economies. *Information Technology for Development (ITD) Journal,* 16 (3), 1-7.

Clarke, S., Wylie, G. & Zomer, H. (2013). ICT 4 the MDGs: A perspective on ICTs' role in addressing urban poverty in the context of MDGs. *Information Technologies and International Development,* 9 (4), 55-70.

Greenberg, A. (2005). ICTs for poverty alleviation: Basic tool and enabling sector, Published by Sida 2005.

Igbuzor, O. (2006). The Millennium Development Goals: Can Nigeria meet the Goals in 2015?". A paper presented at the symposium on MDGs and Nigeria, 27th July 2006.

Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (2012), Annual Abstract of Statistics (2012), Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Odumodu, J. (2008), "Nigeria has no robust health insurance scheme", Nigeria Compass.

Owolabi, T.O., Oyewole, B.K. and Oke, J.O. (2013), "Teacher Education, Information and Communication Technology: Prospects and Challenges of E-Teaching Profession in Nigeria", 1 (2), 87-91.

Santhirasegaram, S. (2013). Capability of Information Access and Poverty Reduction in Sri Lanka: A Cross Sectional Empirical Analysis. *Developing Country Studies,* 3(11), 92-104.

Tersoo, K.S. (2013). An assessment of national poverty eradication programme on wealth creation in Benue State. *European Journal of Business and Management,* 5(19), 28-34.

The World Bank (2015). Internet Users. Retrieved from www.data.worldbank.org

Wilson, J. & Gapsis, N.D. (2014). Achieving the MDGs in Africa: Harnessing E-Learning Potentials. *Developing Country Studies,* 4(5), 28-34.