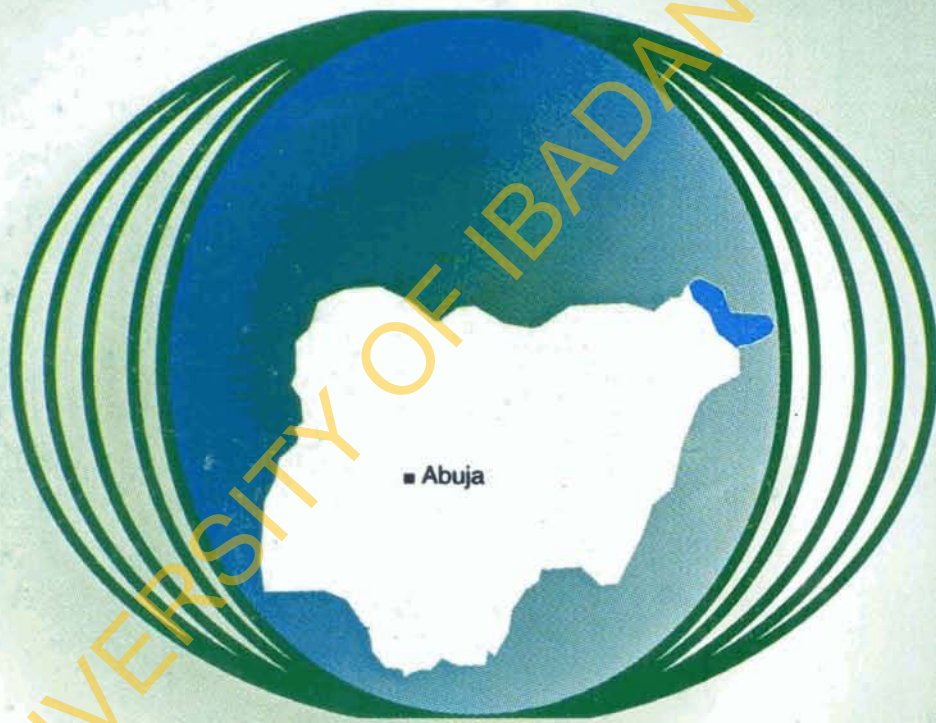
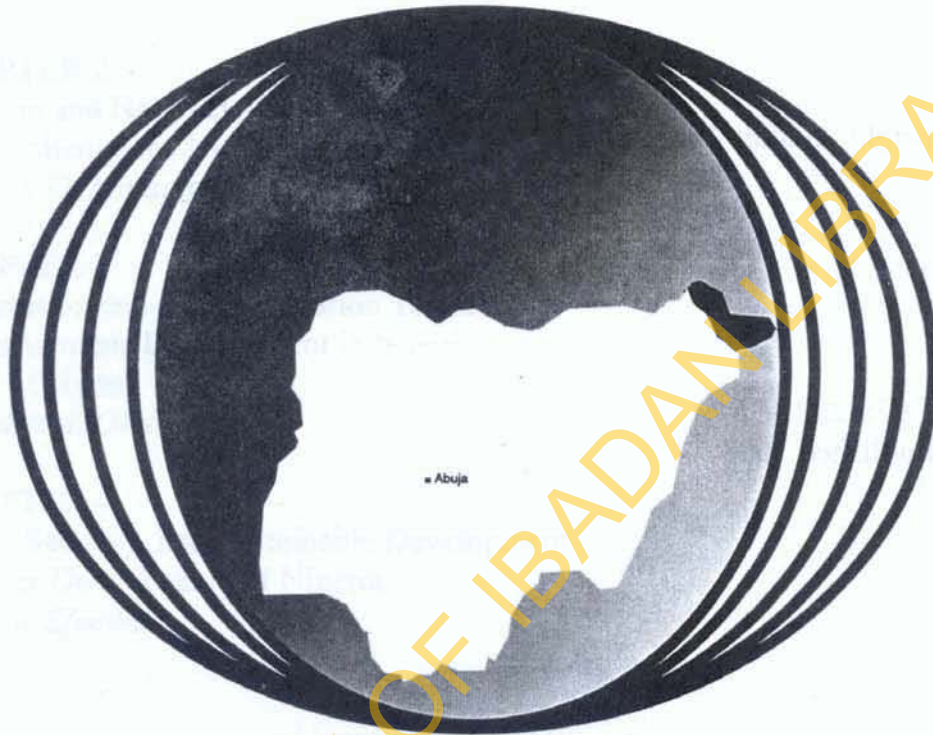


**SECURITY,
SOCIAL SERVICES
AND SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**



FAAN

**SECURITY, SOCIAL SERVICES, AND SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**



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Preface

This third volume of the publication of the Fulbright Alumni Association of Nigeria (FAAN). The first two volumes bore the title "Book of Readings" and were to all intents and purposes a record of the proceedings of the conferences that witnessed the presentation of the papers they contain. The present volume, *Security, Social Services, and Sustainable Development in Nigeria*, also contains papers duly presented at one of the conferences of FAAN. However, unlike the first two volumes, this is not a record of proceedings of the fifth Annual Conference in Calabar that witnessed the presentation of the papers it contains.

The fact of the matter is that, as was the case in the previous conferences, the quality of the papers presented at the Calabar Conference was very high. Equally high was the standard of evaluation to which the papers were subjected before selection for publication. It was, therefore, in fairness to the papers and their authors, decided to spare them the conventional albeit erroneous judgement that, papers that appear in conference proceedings do so not because they are of high quality but only because they managed to find their way into the meeting. The papers selected from the Calabar conference and published in this volume merit the space given to them, thanks to their perceived contribution to knowledge and scholarship in their various areas of research.

This is not to say that all the papers are of the same standard. Some are better than others in terms of research they had entailed, and articulation of the ideas they embody. Yet all of them, along with the ones that could not be published in this volume, were rigorously reviewed by experts in their respective fields of research—scholars who, in most cases, are not members of FAAN. Again, along with the ones that could not be published in this volume, many of the selected papers were reviewed by two independent specialists. The high quality of the selected papers herein published, is, therefore, guaranteed.

With regard to the papers that have not been selected, it must be pointed that they have not been published in some cases, not because they were adjudged irredeemably bad. Rather some of them could not appear in this volume because of technical reasons including the failure of their contributors to adhere to review guidelines and submission deadline. The decision to exclude such papers, therefore, has been as agonizing as it was purely professional. All these, however, is not to suggest that this volume is by any judgement perfect. It is not. But how we wish it were, given the support and encouragement that underpin its publication.

The Public Affairs Department of the Embassy of the United States of America, as usual, has been exceedingly gracious and generous in terms of moral and financial support. One, indeed, wonders what would have been the fate of the papers in this volume, without the sponsorship of the U. S. Embassy—the main source from which the volume has derived its being. The

President of the Association, Mallam Abubakar Sokoto Mohammed, was always ready to listen to the needs of the Editorial Board. Dr. Michael O. Maduagwu, one of the editors of the previous volumes, was always available with useful suggestions. All these and the reviewers have done their best to make the publication perfect. But alas, the volume, as already indicated, is by no means perfect. All lapses in editorial matters are completely attributable to the editors. Our sponsors, colleagues and reviewers have done their best and not in any way responsible for any technical or editorial imperfections. And this can also be said about the ideas and opinions expressed in the papers in this volume. They belong entirely to their contributors and do not necessarily reflect the ideas and opinions of the Fulbright Alumni Association of Nigeria (FAAN) as an association, or the editors of this volume as agents of the Association.

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CHAPTER 3

Information and Communication Technology for Sustainable Development in Nigeria: Hope or Hype

By

Benedict A. Oladele

Abstract

The increasing diffusion and adoption of Information and Communication Technologies as tools for development activities is impacting positively on the economies of most nations so much that access to and utilization of the technologies have now become one of the determining factors in the categorization of nations into developed and developing. The disparity in the capacity to access and apply the technologies among nations is referred to as digital divide. Efforts at bridging this divide perhaps explain the worldwide move by nations to put in place policies as mechanisms for developing their capacity, adopting and utilizing the technologies thereby availing themselves of the opportunities presented by the global information superhighway, including membership of the information society. Nigeria accordingly in the year 2001 put in place the National Policy for Information Technology with a mission statement to make the country an active player in the information society, including using the technology as an engine for sustainable development and global competitiveness. The paper thus, takes a critical look at the policy with regard to its suitability or otherwise to attain the set policy objectives of utilizing ICTs for sustainable economic development, delivery of social services across the different sectors of the economy and membership of the global information society. The policy is analyzed in the context of the country's growing development challenges. The paper concludes that the policy though, a reactive one for that matter, is nevertheless capable of making Nigeria an ICT – driven society provided the issues of synergy and resource allocation are addressed at the level of implementation.

Introduction

Contemporary advances in information and communication technology (ICT) have brought about the emergence of products and services for information management (sourcing, processing, transmission and delivery), which, is an intermediate operation to decision-making and

productive activities. The integration and application of these products and services or ICTs (computers, telecommunication, electronics, software) have resulted in a number of possibilities such as distant learning and communication services including the ubiquitous World Wide Web all of which in recent times have affected human activities in a way that has never been known. The impact of these services is of such a magnitude in developed and in some emerging economies that in the words of Oladele (2004) “new habits and culture have emerged in much the same way the old ones have been redefined.” Arising from this development is among other things the concept of global village, which seems to enjoy wide acceptability but diverse meanings among scholars. In the area of ICT studies, the concept enjoys a much clearer explication in the context of literal disappearance of time, distance and spatial barriers with regard to information sourcing and delivery. Thus Oshikoya and Hussain (2004) perceived the global village as that world arena that consists of “networks of individuals, firms and countries that are linked electronically and in inter-dependent relationships.” The individuals, organizations as well as nations therefore are no more than nodes in the global network. In this network therefore, access to and possession of ICTs are critical determinants for relevance and competitiveness.

At the national level, the demands and challenges of ICT-induced competitiveness have prompted countries to put in place policy and strategies for developing their national information infrastructures (NII) and human resources as platforms for ICT utilization and diffusion across all sectors of their economies. In an apparent reaction to this global development, the Nigerian government recently enunciated the National Policy for Information Technology (NPIT) as a mechanism for launching the country into the global information super highways. The policy is also presumably expected to help bridge the digital divide (ICT4D) between the country and the rest of the world, as well as making the country an active player in the ever-changing information arena. These objectives are encapsulated in the mission statements of the policy which envision making “Nigeria an IT capable country in Africa and a key player in the Information Society by the year 2005, using IT as the engine for sustainable development and global competitiveness” (NITDA, 2003:iii). In the light of this vision, the question is whether the policy can lead to the actualization of the set objectives or not and if the objectives are to be attained what are the challenges that must be addressed in the light of the urgent need for the delivery of social services in the country. The intention of this paper therefore is to critically discuss the NPIT in the context of the contemporary development challenges staring the country in the face with regard to social services delivery. The paper is therefore divided into five sections. Following this introductory part is the section on the country’s development challenges and how they can be addressed using ICTs as tools. The third section deals with a review of the implementation strategies of the policy in the light of the existing government set up. Next to this section is an analysis of the role of National Information

Development Agency (NITDA) in the implementation of the policy. This section is followed by a road map agenda arising from the analysis and finally the concluding section.

Challenges of Development

Development is a dynamic process of enhancing human dignity through the provision and access to those elements or social services that can impact positively on the well being of the members of any society. In addition to enhancing the general standard of living of the people, these services also go to enhance their life expectancy. For these services to be effective, they must be on a continuous or sustainable basis of which government has the constitutional responsibility of providing the enabling environment and mechanisms for the attainment of the utopia. But then development as an exercise has its unique challenges depending on existing societal conditions.

Nigeria like any other countries is daily confronted with a number of development challenges. Principal among these challenges are the need for a stable polity, the need for a rapid transformation of the monolithic economy to that which ensures development and growth in such a way that there is equitable distribution of social services including poverty alleviation, food security, reduction of unemployment, quick but fair and firm administration of justice. The high prevalence of these challenges and their magnitude suggest the seemingly inability of the political class in conjunction with the bureaucracy to bring the immense resources of the country to bear on its strategic development needs. This inability inevitably explains the lack luster performance of the country's social services institutions as implied in the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) document where it is stated that

Nigeria has the potential to become Africa's largest economy and a major player in the global economy by virtue of its rich human and material resource endowment. But much of its potentials have remained untapped, and if previous trends continue, Nigeria runs the risk of not meeting the internationally agreed Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015 (NEEDS Secretariat, National Planning Commission, 2004).

The consequence of the inability to tap the nation's resources has in effect according to NEEDS Secretariat (2004:19) left the country "with a GDP of about \$45 billion in 2001 and a per capita income of about \$300 --- one of the poorest countries in the world." This state of affair has direct implications on the nation's capacity to provide social services for its populace. After all, it is believed that the economic imbalance among nations is a reflection on nation's capacity to deliver social services to their populace, which, according to UN system in Nigeria (2001:89) constitutes "the core of development". In

effect, while developed countries are characterized by functional social service systems, their developing counterparts including Nigeria are constrained by weak structures which inhibit the delivery of services like education, health care, food and nutrition, shelter as well as gainful employment for all. The importance of these services on a country's human resource development needs little underscoring as the same UN source in Nigeria posited that "by enabling the world's poorest to lead healthier and more productive lives, such services are a key to reducing the worst manifestations of poverty and to breaking its vicious cycle".

The state of social services availability and delivery in Nigeria therefore is such that does not engender any confidence. Education as an instrument of empowerment is only affordable by a negligible proportion of the population with the public school system exhibiting the worst manifestation of neglect and decline. According to Okore (2004:19) "public expenditure on education has been declining over the years. It dropped from 11.12% of the 1999 budget to 1.83% in the 2003 budget". The health care system on the other hand is to say the least poor as availability and accessibility (personnel, facilities and services) are meant for the few affluent. The average life expectancy and infant mortality rate as indices of development are on the lower side when compared with statistics from countries with comparable level of development. According to the World Development Report of the World Bank (2000:243) in 1997 the average life expectancy and infant mortality rates of Nigeria stood at 52 and 55 for men and women respectively compared to South Africa of 62 and 68 for men and women respectively. Furthermore, the same source in 1997 showed that the infant mortality rate of Nigeria was estimated at 77 deaths per 1000 births compared with those of South Africa and Ghana, which, respectively stood at 48 and 66 per 1000 births. In like manner, food availability and provision of safe water show that about 50% Nigerians are underfed compared to 35% in Ghana (World Bank, 2000). A cursory look on the streets of almost all the urban areas in the country shows evidence of malnutrition. The same picture replays itself in the rural areas. It is however important to observe that the inadequacy of food and prevalence of malnutrition among children are not in terms of national food aggregate availability but in terms of household availability and affordability, which the FAO/WHO (1992:v) document defined as the capacity of a household "to secure either from its own production or through purchases, ... (or) adequate food for meeting the dietary needs of its members". Just like food and water, shelter is an inalienable right of every human being. The situation in Nigeria today marks a departure from this ideal as only the affluent can afford decent and functional housing with the traumatized middle class barely surviving. The urban and rural poor who are the most hit are abandoned to their own devices. Government policies on housing are at best exercises in cyclical motion, which is incapable of moving the nation to greater heights. To illustrate this, the National Housing Scheme policy is aimed at assisting public servants to own houses of their choice.

Accordingly, it is statutorily mandatory at the end of every month for 2.5% of workers salaries to be deducted at source and paid into an account managed by the Federal Mortgage Bank. In turn, workers are in principle expected to avail themselves of loan from the bank at a minimal interest rate. The implementation of the scheme is anything but successful as obtaining a loan has become a mirage.

On the aggregate, the inadequacy of social services availability and delivery mechanisms in the country are exemplified by the high prevalence of poverty among income earners and in particular among those in the core poverty rung of the ladder. The distinction between poverty related income earnings and core poverty rung is that the former relates to the paucity of minimally acceptable income while the latter has to do with non-availability of resources and opportunities to support human basic needs (UN System in Nigeria, 2004:64). In Nigeria today according to a FOS source quoted in Okore (2004) over 60% of Nigerians belong to the core poverty group. The characteristic features of this group are lack of shelters, inadequate food supply and poor access to clean water, inaccessible functional health and educational services and extreme deprivations. In turn, these features have impacted negatively on the confidence and self-esteem of this poor of the poorest. Inadvertently, the security of this nation is not only unaffected as the people readily become very vulnerable to those who may want to capitalize on their predicaments to use them for anything but noble. In addition, the ability and capacity of the country to take on issues at international fora is inhibited as the nation stands to negotiate from position of weakness rather than from strength. The possibility of exploiting this weakness by enemies of the nation becomes more probable.

The need to turn the nation's economy around therefore is an imperative that must be addressed in a most proactive way. This need is however captured in the document on NEEDS where it is stated that the overall development of the country is one of a wholistic approach in which every sector of the economy is required to evolve its development strategy within a framework of national coordination. Experience has shown that there is always a void between public pontification and bringing resources to bear on such pronouncement but it suffices to say that 'national coordination' of development programmes has always been the bane of the country. In this regard, tools and more importantly ICTs are crucial resources that nations can bring to bear on their development initiatives.

Social Services and Information Technology

The literature on ICT is replete with the wonder stories of the technology on countries' development. While some of these stories are confirmatory in nature as in the case of Singapore and India, others are presented in futuristic terms. Whichever way, the stories point to the fact that the diffusion and widespread utilization of ICTs in some countries is not only the basis of such countries' economic development and growth but also of

their competitiveness in the global market. The stories further show that nations that have failed or yet to embrace the technologies have witnessed stunted economic growth or outright stagnation. In all these stories, one is yet to know the magnitude of the impact of the technologies on development as empirical impact studies are still very scanty (Avgerou, 1998) or in the word of Keniston (2003) stories “built entirely on the empirical vacuum.”

What is however known is that the application of the technologies to productive operations has tremendous implications for productivity at both organizational and national levels. To this extent, it can be said that the widespread disequilibrium in the level of economic development among nations may among other factors be attributable to the disparity in the level of diffusion and application of technologies in the countries. It can further be inferred that the utilization of the technologies by nations is capable of making a difference in their strive to develop. After all Avgerou (1998) posited that ICTs “have enormous potential to increase productivity of almost all economic sectors, to overcome problems of dysfunctional administration and to expand and improve the quality of services” in education, health, agriculture, security, environment and job creation. In this regard, the technologies are no more than tools for the management and distribution of these services. Specifically the technologies as tools can be used for learning and distant education, primary and secondary health care delivery services including telemedicine. The technologies can also be used to manage the agricultural sector in such a way that farmers in the rural areas can link up with their counterparts elsewhere to discuss common interests such as commodity prices, agricultural inputs services, pest control and management and issues that are related to their environment. In this respect, the idea of community information kiosk or park such as obtains in India and other parts of the world is instructive enough. Security or administration of justice as an aspect of social services is one responsibility that is amenable to ICT application and more specifically in the areas of community crime monitoring, prevention and justice administration. It must be said that the management or the delivery of social services in a community or society is a function of management and access to information. This assumes the existence of at least a two-way communication channel between the government and the governed. In this regard, the concept of e-governance becomes very crucial as an avenue for government to make its programmes and services available electronically to the governed. It is therefore posited that the impact of ICTs on economic development is a function of information management within a much wider perspective of development programme and project planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Herein lies the connection between ICTs and social service delivery. It is only when the role of information and knowledge and their interplay in the light of technological diffusion and utilization are appreciated that the trickle down effect of ICTs on development can be felt by the generality of Nigerians. This connection however departs from the a priori notion of some school of thought that the impact of ICT on economic

development is instantaneous. On the contrary, the impact of technology on an economy is tied down to programme planning and implementation.

As an activity planning entails goal setting and formulation of strategies for attaining set goals within a framework of resource allocation. As a function, planning thrives on the availability and consumption of current, accurate, relevant and timely (CART) data or information which when internalized becomes knowledge. In the case of social service delivery using ICT, planning cannot exist in a vacuum but on the basis of informed knowledge about the demography of beneficiaries, their characteristics and distribution, existing infrastructure and allocation of resources. The absence of informed knowledge on these parameters and the seemingly refusal by the ruling class to use such knowledge whenever they exist accounts for the elusiveness of development in Nigeria. Most of the country's sources for informed knowledge remain untapped while existing ones are manually driven with their attendant cumbersomeness. The adoption and use of ICTs therefore can accelerate the growth of the economy if not leapfrogging it. This is even more so in the face of the dire need for development programmes and projects linkage in the country. A situation in which government ministries or agencies have unwittingly acquired the image of autonomous archipelagos with little or no contact with one another is dysfunctional to the development and growth of the economy. The diffusion and utilization of ICTs by all government departments in addition to enhancing general economic development and growth, will facilitate pooling and sharing of resources in a network fashion for development programmes and projects implementation for the delivery of social services.

National Policy for Information Technology

The Federal Government of Nigeria in an apparent realization of the centrality of ICT as an engine of growth for sustainable development made public in March 2001 the National Policy for Information Technology. The vision statement of the Policy is to make "Nigeria an IT capable country in Africa and a key player in the information society by the year 2005" (NITDA, 2001: iii). In order to realize this vision, the policy document listed thirty-one generic objectives in addition to sectoral specific (educations, health, agriculture, industry, etc) objectives. The summation of all these objectives is to ensure or encourage widespread adoption, diffusion and utilization of IT across the broad spectrum of the economy including making the country a consumer and producer of ICT of products and services. To attain these policy goals, government listed twenty generic strategies as well as sector based specific ones. The policy charges the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) with the responsibility

To implement the IT Policy, regulate, monitor, evaluate and verify progress on an on-going basis under the supervision and coordination of the Federal Ministry of Science and Technology. (P.vii)

To further demonstrate government commitment to the implementation of the policy, the policy document contains the following resolve

Government recognizes IT as a strategic imperative for national development and taking cognisance of its immense benefits, government has resolved to provide considerable national resources, both financial and otherwise for the realization of the National IT Vision Statement. (P.vii).

This resolve is given effect with a promise in the policy document to kick-start NITDA with the sum of \$10 million take-off grant and the establishment of National Information Technology Development Fund (NITDEF) with an allocation of the sum of \$150 million as seed money in addition to the periodic allocation of 2% of annual Federal Capital budget and 3% tax on all IT items imported into the country. Reading through the document, the Policy can be said to be well couched and well intended but then the potential for its implementation seems to raise more questions than are necessary as a result of a number of incomprehensible policy summersaults.

As contained in the Policy document, NITDA is to mid-wife the Policy into life. The agency came into existence de facto in 2000 but unknown de jure in that its enabling law is yet to come into being. In likewise manner, attempt to give the policy the much-needed legal backing is yet to come into fruition. In the face of these shortcomings, all the agency can do for now in the word of Ajayi (2004) is to provide “enabling environment for the “kick-starting” of IT development in Nigeria” in the form of awareness campaign. The same source further enumerated the agency achievements as to include institutional capacity building such as the setting up of CISCO Network Academy Enterprise Technology Center (NAETC), collaborations with some public and private capacity building institutions in the country as well as assistance to some state governments. These achievements notwithstanding, the lack of an enabling law for the agency including a legal backing for the policy, can only serve to inhibit the agency credibility status with respect to supervisory and contractual relationships with other stakeholders in the IT industry. The tendency therefore is to attribute the afore-mentioned enthusiasms to the general urge of the citizens to embrace IT, and the country’s desire to avail itself of the benefits of the global information highways including joining the exclusive club of information society. Similarly, the non-release of fund for the take-off of NITDEF as stipulated in the policy is traceable to non-passage of the required enabling law. This

typical policy summersault can only serve to deter attainment of policy set goals as much as it underscores the reactive tendency of government in the country to development issues instead of proactive approach.

At the level of implementation, the policy document enumerated a number of strategies but fails to state how these strategies are to be accomplished and by who. A typical example is the clause on human resource development where one of the objectives is to develop a pool of IT specialists. The strategy in this regard is to make IT "mandatory at all levels of educational institutions through adequate financial provision for tool and resources." The extent of the relationship between NITDA and educational institutions and their supervisory Ministry of Education is not known with particular emphasis on curriculum design and fund disbursement. In other words, the relationship between the agency and Ministry of Education is not explicitly stated. Ambiguity such as this runs through almost all the sectoral strategies of the policy. Another noticeable trend in the policy implementation strategies is the power confers on NITDA to take on responsibilities that in the technical sense belong to other organs of government. For instance, the policy empowers NITDA to embark on the development of infrastructure such as the expansion of the tele-density of the country. In Chapter 16 of the Policy document captioned **Policy Implementation**, Strategy Number (iii) requires NITDA to increase

The telephone line penetration rate by expanding the existing telecom network and providing new networks by employing modern technologies in order to minimize the cost of expansion.

This responsibility bothers on cross- assignment of functions as there are already on the ground statutory agencies charged with such duties. It is highly probable that such agencies are likely to withhold their cooperation from NITDA and this has the potential to bring about inter agencies mutual distrust and suspicion.

One will want to expect the strategies to include assignation of roles and responsibilities to all relevant stakeholders including government establishments, by defining the level, limits and boundaries of performance of every stakeholder. Instead NITDA seems to be saddled with the responsibility of implementing the policy across the different sectors of the economy. Therefore, one cannot but observe that, the responsibility for the expansion of the country's tele-density lies with the Ministry of Communications and its parastatal.

It seems therefore that NITDA as a parastatal of the Ministry of Science and Technology is saddled with responsibilities beyond its capacity and spheres of influence. As such the agency runs the risk of being overwhelmed by bureaucracy, cold reception and outright rebuff by those Ministries or establishments that may see it as an interloper. This is even more

palpable in the light of the seemingly compartmentalization of government organs with little or no clearly defined mechanisms for policy linkage and synergy. In spite of the enormous responsibilities the policy confers on the agency, NITDA is yet to be known in law as the bill to bring about such recognition is yet to be passed by the legislature four years after the de facto existence of the body. In like manner and as reported by Iboma (2004) the take off grant of N2.5 billion for the agency “has not been actualized since the body was set up in 2001”. This smacks of a wrong approach to ICT development and sustainability in the country. Above all, the policy is a classic evidence of lack of policy, programme and project synergy among government departments and no where is this trend more manifest than in the document on National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) where no mention of information activity for development and IT diffusion and application is mentioned. All these shortcomings have the potential to engender an ICT policy stillborn in the country, as its actualization is most likely to meet with polite rebuff among government organs.

Agenda for Roadmap

In the light of the foregoing, the diffusion and utilization of ICTs for development on a sustainable basis calls for agenda setting within a critical appraisal of some issues contain in the policy document. Some of the issues bother on redefinition of limits and boundaries of cumulative weight of responsibilities confer on NITDA. The responsibilities as they are now are overwhelming burdens with regard to efficiency and effectiveness of performance.

A critical look of Appendix A of the Policy Document shows that NITDA is set out to be an IT Service provider, a consultant to government, chief clearing house and custodian of government electronic based documents as well as regulatory body for ICT industry in the country. These roles are more conflicting than they are complementary. For instance the agency as an adviser to government on all IT related matters is also expected to “cost effectively provide pooled IT resources to government” (xvi) as well acting “as a secure government information clearing house, data repository and central electronic archive facility” (xvii). These functions contradict the role of “licensing and regulatory functions in respect of IT systems and services” (ix) and acting “as repository of IT standards and register, classify and document all locally developed and imported software for the purpose of testing and bench working its claims.” (xvii). Combining the functions of a Service Provider as well as a regulatory agency is dysfunctional as it serves to wade off the private sector from government IT related programmes and projects. This is even more so that in a developing economy such as the Nigerian environment, the private sector needs government patronage as much as the government relies on the private sector in order to keep the economy running. The status of the National Communication Commission (NCC) as a

telecommunication regulatory body is a typical example of the separation of roles between service provision and the regulation of the sector.

The composition of NITDA Board of Governors is one item on the roadmap agenda that deserves some consideration. It is a truism to say that IT is a pervasive phenomenon that transcends all sectors of an economy. The composition of the Board shows that the Ministries of Science and Technology (NITDA parent Ministry), Communications, Information, Finance and Education are represented on the Board. On the other hand, those of Health, Industry and Justice are not represented. Whereas the health sector as contained in Chapter 5 of the document is expected to play a very prominent role in the adoption and use of the technologies just as objective number (vii) of the policy is aimed at using IT “to improve judicial procedures and enhance the dispensation of justice” including making laws relating to the use of computer or cyber crimes, piracy and ethics. The exclusion of the Industry Ministry from the Board seems to have been compensated for with the slots given to professional bodies like Information Technology Association of Nigeria (ITAN), Computer Association of Nigeria (COAN), and Nigerian International Group (NIG). The slots to one’s thinking seem acceptable at the level of professional practice but they do not represent the Ministry that coordinates all activities of the sector. Issues of policy coordination are bound to occur and this serves to underscore the need to include the ministry on the board.

Conclusion

Information and communication technology is not just an engine of economic development as its adoption and utilization has impacted positively on micro development initiatives like poverty reduction and social services delivery. It is however not yet known the quantum of impact the technology has exerted on these services as most reports still belong to the realm of conjecture as opposed to empirical calculations. The missing gap notwithstanding, there is no disputing the fact that the effectiveness and efficiency of ICT application to productive ventures depends on the availability and functionality of the country’s national information infrastructures (NII).

In Nigeria, the current policy initiative to develop the country’s NII as well as the adoption and use of ICT across the board is no doubt one of the surest way to align the country with the contemporary demands and challenges of the global super information highways. It is however observed that due to the inherent flaws contained in the policy one can not but conclude that the initiative is by nature reactive rather than being a proactive framework for putting the country on the global information superhighways. The reactive nature of the policy may be explained in terms of the level attention that is accorded ICTs as engines of growth by nations. As it is today, and from the perspective of implementation, the policy suffers from both errors of commission and omission. A situation in which mechanisms for policy

implementation are as vague as much as they are bereft of arrangements for coordination can only lead to confusion thereby eroding the basis for future policy performance evaluation. More specifically, the failure of the policy to assign explicit roles to government stakeholders is a major defect as the policy runs the risk of becoming nobody's responsibility. Furthermore, the non-passage of the enabling laws to give legal effect to the policy and non-appropriation of take-off grant for its implementation are all recipes for policy stillborn which has always been the bane of the country's development initiatives.

More importantly, the designation of NITDA as the agency to oversee the implementation of the policy in addition to serving as a service provider and a regulatory body smacks of excessive devolution of power on one agency and this has potential for counter productivity and alienation of other actors in the sector. The assignment of these roles to the agency negates the policy intention to provide a level field play ground for all stakeholders. The premise for this assertion is based on the pervasive nature of ICT as it cuts across all strata of the economy. This characteristic nature demands that the policy should be implemented with the active collaboration and participation of all stakeholders with the agency performing regulatory functions of providing level playing ground for all actors. As it is now, the policy if implemented serves to engender exclusiveness instead of inclusiveness. One cannot therefore but opine that the policy will need to be reviewed with a view to upgrading NITDA to a commission within the presidency including limiting its role to that of a regulatory body similar to that of the Nigerian Communication Commission. It is further concluded that until the identified flaws are corrected the policy may end up rekindling more of hypes than hope for the country's adoption and diffusion of technologies for the delivery of social services to all Nigerians.

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