Managing government rural information and communication technology (ICT) for success and sustainability

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Abstract

Technological innovation indicates that achieving digital access and jump starting development in rural Nigeria may not be as difficult as many think. There is emerging new technology models that aim to narrow the digital divide between the urban and rural areas. Result from developed countries show that rural information and communication technology could be the most potent means of driving change in rural areas if well managed. Thus ensuring equal access to less privileged groups and create new kinds of job and financial transactions while improving quality, speed and sensitivity of state apparatus to the needs of local citizens. This paper examines how government rural ICT could be successfully managed and sustained. The paper advocates that illiteracy; erratic power supply; band-width connectivity problems; corruption and inadequate funding amongst others are the factors hindering the development of rural ICT in Nigeria. It recommends improvement in education of the rural people, power supply and massive infrastructural development of the rural communities while urging the government to take the issue of corruption in governance very seriously.

Key words: Managing, Rural development, Information and Communication Technology and Sustainability

Introduction

The global buzz word these days is represented by the letters ICT. ICT stands for Information and

Communication Technology. The concepts, methods and applications involved in ICT are constantly evolving, touching every facet of our daily lives.

Rural development in Nigeria is one of the most important factors for the growth of the economy. The present strategy of rural development mainly focuses on poverty alleviation, better livelihood, provision of basic amenities and infrastructural facilities which is only in theory. Many years after independence, Nigeria has not been able to move to the stage where the urban centres can categorically be acclaimed as developed not to think of the rural areas. Nigeria, after over fifty two years of independence, is still grappling with the appendage: a developing nation'. Public administration, governed by bureaucratic structures built on rationale principles, that dominated the twentieth century, has failed to respond to the changing requirements of the present times, though this failure cannot entirely be attributed to non-workability of bureaucratic structures. Application of ICT is a paradigm shift from the traditional approaches government has been using for the past decades. With the use of government renders services and information to the public using electronic means. With the awareness amongst the citizens and their better experiences with the private sector- the demand for better services on the part of government departments has become more pronounced. infusion of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is playing prominent role strengthening such demand. Combining **ICT** with Rural Development will not only speed up the development process but it can also fill

the gaps between the educationally and technologically backward sections of the society (Rama Rao, Venkata Rao, Bhatnagar and Satyanarayana, 2004).

Bhatnagar (2004) observes that several e-governance projects have attempted to improve the reach, enhance the base, minimize the processing costs, increase transparency and reduce the cycle times for rural programmes in the current dispensation rural transformation. Mukherjee (2011)sighted the introduction of Simputers and e-chaupal as some of the initiatives by the government of India that have been able to bring the rural population into contact with the information technology up to some extent. Opportunities for ICT application in rural development are immense but will also pose some challenges government.

Rama Rao (2004) remarks that Information and Communication Technology can increasingly be used by government to deliver services locations convenient to the citizens. The rural ICT applications attempt to offer the services of central agencies (like local or district administration, cooperative union, and state and central government departments) to the citizens at their village door steps. These applications utilize the ICT in offering improved and affordable connectivity and processing solutions.

A large number of rural egovernment applications, developed as pilot projects, were aimed at offering easy access to citizen services and improved processing of government-tocitizen transactions. Some of these have drawn international attention and have won prestigious awards for their innovative approaches. They have demonstrated the power of ICT in rural context and are seen as reference models for future e-government project implementations.

Conceptual Framework

Across all development systems in transitional economies of the world, of which Nigeria is one, the term rural has technically been taken to be any area of underdevelopment, poverty and thin population (Alinno, 2004: 1). The main features of the rural areas of Nigeria are: depression, degradation, poverty and deprivation. In most rural areas in Nigeria, like in other rural settings in the developing nations, basic infrastructure, where they exist at all, are very inadequate to make any meaningful contribution to development.

Though rural development in Nigeria lacks a uniform definition because different scholars view it from different perspectives for the purpose of this paper, rural development is used to denote the actions and initiatives taken to improve the standard of living in non-Urban neighbourhoods, countryside communities and remote villages.

Agriculture is the main stay of rural economic activities which relate to the primary sector, production of food stuffs and raw materials (United States Department of Agriculture and Rural development USDARD, 2007). Moseley (2003) defines rural development as the process of improving the quality of life and economic well being of people living in relatively isolated and sparsely

populated areas. It aims at finding ways to improve the rural lives participation of the people so as to meet their required needs. Sahanabpsaha (2013) remarks that as a concept, rural development connotes overall development of rural areas with a view to improving the quality of life of rural people. It is an integrated process, which includes social, economical, political and spiritual development of the poorer sections of the society. Continuing, Moseley (2003) concludes that rural development is helping rural people set the priorities in their own communities through an effective and democratic process by providing the local capacity; investment in basic infrastructure and social justice, equity and security, dealing with the injustices of the past and ensuring safety and security of the rural population, especially women. These definitions are in consonance with Chambers (1983) who defines rural development as a strategy to enable a specific group of people, poor rural men and women to gain for themselves and their children what they need.

Sustainability refers to the long term continuation of a development programme outcome following withdrawal of external support. National Health System (NHS) Modernization Agency (2002) defines sustainability as when new ways of working and improved outcome become the norm. In effect, it has become an integrated or mainstream way of working rather than something "added on". As a result, when you look at the process or outcome one year from now or longer

you can see that at a minimum, it has not reverted to the old way or old level of performance. It should be noted that the concept of sustainability may acquire different meanings in different contexts and at different times (Ewurum, Eboh and Igwe, 2009).

Past Government Efforts at Rural Development and Enhancement Programmes

Rural Development is concerned with economic growth and social justice, improvement in the living standard of the rural people. This involves provision of adequate and quality social services and minimum basic needs which are essential to uplifting their living standard. The present strategy of rural development mainly focuses on poverty alleviation, better livelihood opportunities, provision of basic amenities and infrastructure facilities through innovative programmes of wage and self-employment. Mukherjee (2011) asserts that ICT is the new tool for rural development. Information and Communication Technology, if used properly can be of great advantage for the development at grassroot levels. At the same time, the challenge remains with the present administration federal government of Nigeria capture the minds of the rural masses, mostly illiterates, to make them adapt the new technology which is completely alien to them. There are various rural development schemes run by Federal government of Nigeria through various agencies whose main responsibility is to look after implementations of these programmes.

For instance the following are rural schemes in Nigeria as outlined by Offorah (1998); Afolabi (1999:127); Azikiwe (1992:1) and Okeke (1999:37) are shown:

- National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP) launched by the federal government in conjunction with state governments in 1972. The main objective of this programme was to indirectly improve the lots of the rural farmers through the promotion of agricultural development.
- Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) was introduced in 1976 by the military government of late General Muritala Mohammed and was vigorously pursued by General Olusegun Obasanjo after the tragic death of General Mohammed. The programme was aimed at boosting food production and improving the living standard of the masses especially the rural farmers.
- 1980 under the civilian government of Alhaji Shehu Shagari, a programme called the Green Revolution was introduced. The programme was designed to improve the lots of rural farmers and ensure increase in production of cereals, cassava, rubber, palm oil, cocoa livestocks and more especially, increase fish production in the country.
- Agricultural Development Project (ADP) was an integrated Agricultural/Rural Development Programme launched in 1975 to

- give new and energetic life to agriculture.
- National Directorate of Employment (NDE) was the first government programme designed to tackle the problems of poverty and mass unemployment among school leavers graduates in Nigeria and was inaugurated in November 1986. This was designed as total package with all the characteristics of self employment through proper training, development of infrastructure. planning of activities, financial aid, small credit banks, organizing self help groups and subsidies.
- Better Life Programme for Rural Women (BLPRW) was inaugurated by Mrs. Maryan Babangida in September, 1987. The major objectives of this programme were to stimulate and motivate rural women towards achieving better living standards, educate rural women on simple hygiene, family planning, the importance of child care, and increased literacy, mobilize women collectively in order to improve their general well being and for them to seek and achieve leadership roles in all spheres of society, raise their consciousness about their rights, the availability of opportunities and facilities, social, political and economic responsibilities, encourage recreation, enrich family life and inculcate the spirit of development, particularly in the

- fields of education, business the arts, crafts and agriculture.
- The Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) was established by Mrs. Maryam Abacha in 1997 as a poverty alleviation programme. The specific objectives of the programme were to utilize all available local resources for the benefit of **Nigerians** through improved production, storage. preservation, recycling, packaging and marketing, improve the living standard of the people, promote production and development consciousness, create employment opportunities at ward levels. encourage the design and manufacturing of appropriate plants, machinery and equipment, encourage producers at ward level form cooperative societies. provide opportunities for training of the ward based business operations. involve organised private sector participation and provide loans directly to people at ward level with the capital needed to set up and run cottage enterprises.
- Programme (PAP) launched by President Olusegun Obasanjo in January 2000. This was a stop-gap designed to tackle the problem of unemployment especially among youths in Nigeria. The specific objective of the programme was to set in motion effective economic empowerment of the people in

- urban, sub-urban and rural communities.
- The National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) launched President again by Olusegun Obasanjo in January 2001 was another of such programme. This one has the objective of helping the teaming population of unemployed youths in Nigeria acquire some useful skills, which could help them become self-reliant. This the administration intended to achieve through Youth Employment Scheme (YES), Capacity Acquisition Programme (CAP) and Mandatory Attachment the Programme (MAP)
- There was the former Peoples Bank, now Cooperative and Rural Development BANK whose main objective was to give financial assistance to artisans and farmers in the rural areas, agrarian unskilled labour, small and big rural entrepreneurs.
- National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development: The main purpose of the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development is to provide credit for the development of handicrafts, agriculture, small scale industries, village industries, rural crafts, cottage industries, and other related economic operations in the rural sector. Others include:
 - Agricultural Development Programme (ADP)
 - Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme (ACGS)

- Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFFRI)
- National Agricultural Insurance (NAIC)
- National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA)
- National Rural Roads Development Fund (NRRDF)
- Rural Banking Scheme (RBS)
- Family Support Programme (FSP)
- Universal Basic Education (UBE)
- Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme (RIDS)

Apart from the specific objectives, the general objectives of majority of the above programmes are mainly targeted at rural development in an attempt to improve the lives of rural dwellers, stimulate and enhance economic growth, as well as get the rural sector to contribute meaningfully to national social development. economic and These programmes have direct or indirect impact on rural development and can broadly be grouped into specific and multi-specific programmes. The specific programmes are those directed mainly at agriculture, health, education, housing, transport, infrastructure. finance manufacturing. and programmes were initiated in the early 1970s and 1980s. On the other hand, most of the multi-specific programmes were put in place in the early 1990s and thereafter to handle general projects,

such as NDE, DFRRI, Better Life, Family Support etc.

Many of these programmes had positive effects some on development although Obadan (2002) says some of them were not explicitly targeted at poor people (rural dwellers). Examples are the River Basin Development Authorities (RBDAs). Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme (ACGS) and Rural Banking Scheme (RBS), which were designed to take care of such objectives as employment generation, enhancing of agricultural output and income, and stemming down rural-urban migration, which no doubt rural development. affect Other development programmes such Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Green Revolution, Free and compulsory primary education and low cost housing schemes impacted positively on the rural dwellers but could not be sustained due to lack of political will and commitment, policy instability insufficient involvement of the intended beneficiaries of the programmes, hence according to Chiliokwu (2006) most of programmes died with these the government that initiated Evidence from e-government projects in developing countries around the world suggests that most of these projects either fail completely or succeed only partially in meeting their objectives. How can these projects be made more successful and sustainable over relatively longer periods of time?

Extent of ICT in Rural Development

Recent developments in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) have introduced a plethora of opportunities for development in every conceivable area of human endeavour. ICT as an enabler has broken all bounds of cost, distance and time. The fusion of computing and communications. especially through the internet has reduced the world indeed into global creating new actors, environments and providing horizons for the visioned and dynamic members of the society (Pade-Khene, Mallinson and Sewry, 2011). One of the major components and current driving force rural development transformation is communication. Conventionally, communication electronic includes media. communication and now information technology A11 forms (IT). communications have dominated development scene in which persuasive role has been most dominant within the democratic political frame of the country. Persuasive communication for rural development has been given highest priority for bringing about desirable social and behavioural change among the most vulnerable rural poor and women. Initially, the approach lacked gender sensitivity and empathy of communicators and development agents who came from urban elite homes. Added to these constraints is political will that still influences the pace and progress of rural development. Technological changes further compounded the direction of rural development information as communication technology (ICT) has been thought by communication and

development experts as a panacea for other ills that obstruct the development process. It has led to indiscriminate applications and use of ICT in every aspect of information dissemination, management and governance of development. While there are few shining examples of achievements of ICT in development, there are a large number of failures and unauthenticated claims.

closing decade of the The twentieth century was the opening of historic information and communication interventions for technology development. This period has witnessed enormous and unprecedented changes in communications aspect of infrastructure technologies' policies, development and services. The ICT explosion has already started changing the lives of Nigerian rural masses. For instance almost every rural farmer you come across today is with a cell phone. The role of ICT in Rural Transformation must be viewed from this changing scenario.

The Role of ICT in Rural Transformation

Nigeria's the dawn of Since independence, arduous efforts have been made to ameliorate the living standard of rural masses. So, rural development as an integrated concept of growth and poverty elimination has been of concern all the paramount to administrations that have ruled the country. Rural Development (RD) programmes comprise of provision of basic infrastructure facilities in the rural areas e.g. schools, health facilities,

roads, drinking water, electrification etc, improving agricultural productivity in the rural areas, provision of social services like health and education for development. socio-economic the for implementing schemes and industry promotion of rural agriculture productivity, increasing employment providing rural assistance to individual families and groups living below poverty line by providing productive resources through credit facilities and subsidy.

Communication has been seen by a large number of development planners as a panacea for solving major social problems. Apart from evils and introduction the development, communication the educational in process for open and distance learning is seen as a step towards improving the quality of education and bridging the social and educational gap. ICT can be used towards improvement of education, agriculture, social awareness and health However, experience hygiene. indicates that the rich who could afford to have access to private resources have advantage. whether hogged the development or education. In this respect it seems that communication technology has, in no way helped the poor for improving their socio-economic condition. Primarily the responsibility of rural development remained with the pre-economic government. In the liberalization period, i.e. before 1992 broadcast media were used to reach the large rural population or target groups for the rural development projects. In the post economic liberalization period, rural development projects added information and communication technology (ICT) to provide individual need based information in broad development areas through Internet.

After independence, the government took upon itself the major responsibility of development. Hence, the federal, state and local governments carried out development projects aimed at achieving developmental objectives. Few of such projects are briefly described.

a. The Smallholder Farmers Rural Radio

The station reaches rural poor farmer listeners living in remote communities of Imo State, Nigeria with appropriate sustainable agricultural development information in Igbo Language. This radio designs presents broadcast programmes which enables farmers acquire agricultural and environmental management techniques, receive prompt daily market information and advertise their farm products. The educational radio programmes activities include:

- Establishment of state-wide rural radio stations
- Organization of small farmers into radio listener clubs,
- Translating into local languages valuable reading materials,
- Extension services for field demonstrations.

Despite the prospect of this programme to the development of agriculture in the areas of techniques for crop production, livestock rearing, sustainable environmental management, local and international markets opportunities, exportation process, business skills and access to question and answer services, it is quite unfortunate that the programme could not be sustained by subsequent administration in the state due to inadequate funding and ineffective monitoring of field officers.

b. National Rural Telephony Project (NRTP)

N59 Billion National Rural Telephony Project (NRTP), which began in 2001, but was stopped because of poor execution. The first phase of the project was to cover 218 local government areas and provide over 636,256 Code Division Multiple Access (CDMA) lines in all the council (http://www.nigeriamobilesworld.com). The project could not see beyond the tenure of the administration initiated it as a result of poor funding, coordination and management. However, there are several weak links in other areas that make the realization of the project difficult. First of all, the existing voice based telecom infrastructure is too inadequate to be used for data communication applications in rural areas. Similarly, the power supply required to run the kiosks in the rural areas is unstable and often interrupted by load-shedding.

c. Rural Information Technology Centres

The federal government through its agency, the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) established Rural Information

Technology Centres in some Local Government Areas of the thirty six state of the country such as:

The ultra ICT centre Union Secondary School Awkunanau, Enugu South LGA, Enugu state, The Model ICT Centre Godfrey Okoye University Ugwuomu, Enugu, ICT And Vocational Training Centre At Ado LGA Secretariat, Ado Ekiti, at Ibedoyin Quarters, Iyin Ekiti,2 Irepodun/Ifelodun LGA, Ijero Ekiti, Aramoko Ekiti, Efon5 Alaaye, Ode-Ekiti Gbonyin LGA, in Emure Ekiti, Emure LGA Ekiti State.

The Rural Information Technology Centres programme nevertheless is in the pilot stage at few locations across the country. The lessons learnt at this stage will be used to design a sustainable framework for deploying fibre on a larger scale to the rural areas of the thirty six states of the federation. Though there are two hundred forty (240) rural information technology centres currently but evaluating the level of success or failure of the programme can only be made in few years time when the programme would have been firmly established.

d. Launching into Orbit of Nigeria's Satellites

With the launching into orbit of Nigeria's satellites, several benefits such as internet access to even the remotest rural villages will be achieved. While government's economic reforms are expected to be enhanced particularly in the areas of e-learning, e-commerce, tele-medicine, tele-education and rural telephony. Based on the experiences and

positive gains from the first satellite launched, series of satellites have been launched and used for nationwide television telecast for education and development. However the sad part is that, in spite of best efforts, satellite television has been used for entertainment more than for rural development.

Towards a Sustainable Management of ICT for Rural Areas in Nigeria

Communication Information and Technology (ICT) alone cannot bring about rural development. Education is one of the basic problems for application of ICT as many of Nigeria's rural population is illiterate. All modern economies have demonstrated in the past that education is the first step to building the right capacity which can emancipate people from ignorance, bridge disparities and alleviate poverty. Therefore introducing ICTs without first meeting the educational need of the rural populace will not help meet the developmental challenge. For ICTs to succeed in rural Nigeria, education for all must be given first priority. It is important to note that the proportion of the economy involved in some or other form of adaptation or usage of ICT is still very small. The proportion of people involved in the ICT Industry, especially in the rural areas is negligible. Thus, another priority action that can help make the benefits of ICT to trickle down as well as contribute to the rural prosperity, would involve setting up several rural and village level micro-enterprises.

The basic challenges that usage of ICT for rural development faces as outlined by Siriginidi Subba (2009) are:

- Illiteracy amongst the vast multitude of the rural people
- Inadequate Power-supply.
- Band-width issues and connectivity problems.
- Financing difficulties encountered by the grass root level institutions as well as by the state governments.
- Acute shortage of project leaders and guides who could ensure implementation of the ICTs at the grass root levels. Unfortunately most professionals want to work in the urban areas where there are ample opportunities available to them for growth as well as prosper. In the absence of these 'technocatalytic' resources; development of ICTs in the rural areas will always be very slow.

Other challenges are:

• Lack of awareness about benefits of ICTs: Despite growing number of people who own a computer and have Internet access, most people in developing countries have little opportunity to connect to the Internet. They are unaware of socio-economic benefits and stimulus to good governance that ICTs can bring. The quasi-absence of demonstration projects in some countries, where very limited information is available to access and advocate the impact of ICTs for development.

- Lack of access facilities: The access facilities mainly comprise computers and connectivity in rural areas. The Internet and computer are expensive to be accessible by ordinary citizens. It is often available only in urban centres, where most Internet Service Providers (ISPs) have their market.
- Language barriers in using the Internet: These would prevent people from familiarizing themselves with benefits Internet based information resources that invariably require ability to understand international languages, especially English. As a result, most people in developing countries cannot read and understand most of the Internet content. Another factor is high illiteracy rate among rural people.
- Lack of local language information products: Lack of suitable information products tailored to the needs assimilation capacities of rural people in developing countries. In to better adjust investment decisions people need updated information on market prices, new agricultural technologies and methods to raise the quality of their products, adapt to changing climatic conditions or demands of agricultural markets.
- Non-availability of government information through online: Most countries do not have pro-poor ICT policies (e-governance and

rural commerce) and plans to reorient relevant government institutions as electronic service providers to boost rural development.

- Lack of motivation to use information over the Internet: In spite of connectivity, people will not use ICTs unless they are motivated to do so. Community ownership of access facilities and availability of facilitator are key factors to induce motivation.
- Incidence of Corruption: Corruption involves dishonestly using one's position or power to advance one's advantage. It is an act propelled and fueled by greed and it is in most cases at the expense of another. In a nut shell, a corrupt practice is said to have taken place when a person in a fiduciary possible acts in a manner prejudicial to the cause of his or employer, benefit consideration from a third party who is ultimately the beneficiary of the action taken (The Guardian, 2005). Corruption gives continuous concern for the socioeconomic and political issues that seems to threaten the sustainability of rural development initiatives and the survival of Nigeria: the most populous black nation on earth as a single indivisible state. Many authorities, researchers and observers have variously considered that bribery corruption are the twin evils that may dismantle and disintegrate the country if care is not taken in the

analysis. Imaga (2003) remarks in one of his eleven bullet points on corrupt practices that excessive accumulation unearned wealth by leaders, only succeeds in stultifying offsprings who end up as total failures. Corruption exacerbates deprivation and accelerates the scourge of unfulfilled rural development initiatives culminating in poverty, diseases, ignorance and illiteracy amongst the citizenry of a country as it enriches only a marginal few. Corruption takes from the poor and gives to the rich. As people get pauperized, their purchasing power declines, aggregate demand also declines with negative impact on investment and development.

Surprisingly, many pundits developments projects and programmes have acknowledged the fact that corruption is the reason why after more than fifty years of political independence and with one of the best concentration of human and materials resources, this nation is amongst the poorest countries in the World (Ribadu, 2006).

Conclusion

Information and Communication Technology has great relevance in today's world. If implemented properly ICT can surely bridge the gap between economically and technologically backward and forward classes. With the level in IT and ICT in Nigeria, technology is easily accessible to the

government machineries in cheaper and convenient manner. Proper training and implementation of ICT programmes in simple way and language which is easily understandable by the rural people can surely bring about success, sustainability and the eventual rural transformation.

Recommendations for Sustainable Management Rural Information and Communication Technology

a. Adequate and Improved Education

Introducing ICTs without adequate and improved education at the rural level will meet the not development challenges. Therefore for ICTs to succeed, education for all must be the first priority. Therefore the current governments' policy on education for all if well articulated and implemented is a move on the right direction. This is the first step to building the enabling capacity.

b. Provide the Enabling Environment/Incentives

For effort at establishing ICTs at the rural level to be beneficial it must trickle down as well as contribute to the rural transformation and this would involve setting up several rural and village level micro-enterprises. It is expected that government should provide the enabling ground for the rural micro-enterprises to develop, grow and bring the ICT benefits closer to the people.

c. Constant Power Supply

Nigeria is facing a serious power outage and break downs. On the average a rural community in Nigeria that has been hooked to national grid can only receive light for a maximum of one hour or thirty minutes per month. This is very inadequate to support development of ICTs. Therefore, for ICT projects to succeed and bring the needed transformation, adequate and constant electricity supply is imperative.

d. Need to Upgrade the Bandwidth Technology

On band-width upgrade and connectivity problems, even though the technology to upgrade the band-width to a higher level is available, government is expected to provide the resources in form of funding to help change the situation. Once the band-with is upgraded there should be a significant improvement in the connectivity.

e. Involvement of Private Sector

It is an understandable fact that government at all levels are facing financing difficulties, drastic steps are needed to inject funds for the development of the ICTs in the rural areas. Therefore the participation of the private sector is increasingly needed.

f. The Need to Encourage Experts to stay in the Rural Areas

On the absence of these 'technocatalytic' resources e.g. project leaders and guides who could drive implementation of the ICTs at the rural levels. Government should provide the veritable environment that creates ample

opportunities available in urban areas in the rural areas. By this the professionals will be encouraged to stay and work in the rural areas.

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