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INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) AND POVERTY IN RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

It has been estimated that 850 million adult illiterates are in the developing countries, and over 200 million functional illiterates in the industrial world. The illiterates are still in larger numbers even after 550 years after Gothenburg invented the art of printing. Information and communication technology in the past decade has advanced tremendously in pushing the world to a global village. The effect of ICT in relation to poverty reduction in Nigeria and Rivers state in particular has been silent, as far as this study is concerned. If knowledge acquired from the use of ICT equipment cannot be translated to better and improve lives, then it is not worth it. From 1980 till 1999, the level of poverty has not been stable, but seems to be almost the same rate with that of 1999 to 2015. The present paper takes a pragmatic review of how the growth of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) leads to poverty reduction in Rivers State.

Introduction

Information and communication technology in the past decade has advanced tremendously in pushing the world to a global village. Particularly the technological aspect of it has changed the world economic activities which stand to benefit the developed nations. Also, the information gap between the industrialized countries of the world has been a major issue. As imperialists, it is quite difficult to let their technology out, which is the major factor they have as an edge over the material producing countries, and to dominate the market which is a strong element of power. This is also applicable in most countries, particularly the third world, where the urban sector is richer and developed than the rural areas. For a country to be developed, both areas must not be neglected in the developmental efforts. According to Sharma (2000), it is estimated that 850 million adult illiterates are in the developing countries, and well over 200 million functional illiterates in the industrial world. He further added that, the illiterates are still in large numbers even after 550 years after Gothenburg invented the art of printing. If the current trend continues illiteracy will remain a major development well into the 21st century.

With this in mind, the dream of a harmonized world with equal opportunities for all seems much ever further than before. And the communications revolution repeatedly transformed many countries into knowledge-based societies; the developing countries will be left out of the world. In all, he added by saying that, the prospects for human development which is basic to poverty reduction is not very encouraging in countries suffering from illiteracy and lack of access to information and resources. From the above explanation, the question that comes to mind of the researcher is that, with the rate of illiteracy in the developing world and lack of access to information and resources foster the benefits of ICT in relation to poverty reduction? Most rural areas, if not all, lack all the necessary requirements of life ranging from education, good water, good network of roads, electricity, hospital etc. These are likely to hinder global interaction between them (rural areas) and the rest of the world. The present paper is on information and communication technology (ICT) and poverty in Rivers State.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Poverty Reduction

The relationship between ICT and poverty reduction has also been found impossible in developing countries particularly in Africa. It was also noted by Obasaki (2003) that the rapid advance in technology and telecommunication has reduced the cost associated with foreign portfolio and direct investment. Without moving from one location to another, a foreign investor could deploy funds across the globe with the aid of telecommunication facilities. The ease with which capital can be re-deployed to take advantage of better returns has often proved advanced for the economies experiencing the out flow. To this effect, technological advances take advantage of the other and make huge profits in relation to the other. To appraise the impact of ICT on poverty, the study examined the level of poverty in Nigeria to ascertain whether ICT has negatively or positively affected poverty. For clarity, the works of scholars in this field of study from 1980, to the present 2015 were analysed. To see the trends at which ICT has reduced or increased poverty, bearing in mind that, ICT was fully embraced in Nigeria during the democratic rule, particularly in president Obasanjo's regime.

Poverty Incidence by States from 1980-1996

Table1: Poverty Incidence by States, including FCT 1980-1996

STATES	1980	1985	1992	1996
Abia	14.4	33.1	49.9	56.2
Adamawa	33.4	47.2	44.1	65.5
Akwa Ibom	10.2	41.9	45.5	66.9
Anambra	12.8	37.7	32.3	51.0
Bauchi	46.0	68.9	68.8	83.5
Bayelsa	7.2	44.4	43.4	44.3
Benue	23.6	42.9	40.8	64.2
Borno	26.4	50.1	49.7	66.9
Cross River	10.2	41.9	45.5	66.9
Delta	19.8	52.4	33.9	56.1
Ebonyi	12.8	37.7	32.3	51.0

Edo	19.8	52.4	33.9	56.1
Ekiti	24.9	47.3	46.6	71.6
Enugu	12.8	37.7	32.3	51.0
FCT(Abuja)	-	-	27.6	53.0
Gombe	46.0	68.9	68.8	83.5
Imo	14.4	33.1	49.9	56.2
Jigawa	37.5	54.0	38.7	71.0
Kaduna	44.7	58.5	32.0	67.7
Kano	37.5	55.0	38.7	71.0
Kastina	44.7	58.7	32.0	67.7
Kebbi	25.4	45.8	37.9	83.6
Kogi	33.3	39.3	60.8	75.5
Kwara	33.3	39.3	60.8	75.5
Lagos	26.4	42.6	48.1	83.0
Nassarawa	49.5	49.5	50.2	62.7
Niger	34.0	61.4	29.9	52.9
Ogun	20.0	56.0	36.3	69.9
Ondo	24.9	47.3	40.6	71.6

Osun	7.8	28.3	40.7	58.7
Oyo	7.8	28.3	40.7	58.7
Plateau	49.5	64.2	50.2	62.7
Rivers	7.2	44.4	43.4	77.3
Sokoto	25.4	45.8	37.9	83.6
Taraba	33.4	47.2	44.1	65.5
Yobe	26.4	50.1	49.7	66.9
Zamfara	25.4	45.8	37.9	83.6

Source: Federal Office of Statistics (FOS) 1999 Publication (in Gbarabe, 2006).

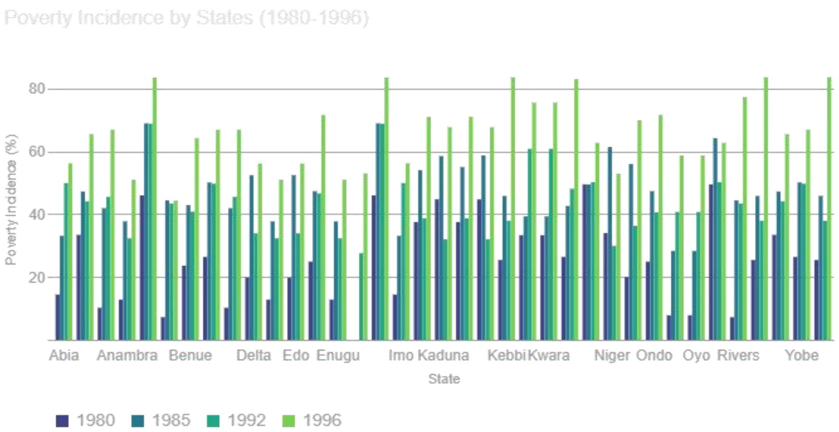

Figure 1: Poverty Incidence by States (1980-1996) Source: Table 1

From the above data, poverty was at an increase between 1980 and 1985; and between 1992 and 1996, while between 1985 and 1992, there was a rapid decrease in poverty level. According to Fos data (1999), 28.1%, 46.3%, 42.7%, and 65.6% for 1980, 1985, 1992 and 1996 respectively. The 28.1% translated into 17.7 million persons in poverty 1980, whereas there were 34.7 million poor people in 1985. The report above also shows that in 1996 the population in poverty was at the increase, which was 67.1 million.

Rivers State Case

In Rivers state, the data shows that there is a sharp increase from 1980 to 1985. From the data, in 1980 the poverty level was 7.2%. In 1985 we had 44.4%; in between the period, we had a difference of 37.2% (increase). From 1995 to 1992, there was a short fall, in other words, a decrease of poverty, which was 44.4% in 1985 and 43.4% in 1992, showing a slide drop of 1.0%. Furthermore, from the data, between 1992 to 1996, there was a high increase of poverty level in Rivers state. In 1992 we had 43.4%, while in 1996, it rose to 77.3%

showing a sharp increase of 33.0%. However, it was during this period that the Nigerian government under president Ibrahim Babangida was instigated by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), which are instruments of globalization, to reduce the Naira by 60% lower than the US$ (dollar). The implication of this act, of course, is shown from the FOS data 1999 in Gbarabe (2006).

Table 2: Trend in Poverty Level (1980-2004)

Year	Level of Poverty Estimate Total (%)	Population (M)	Population in Poverty (in Millions)
1980	28.1	65	17.7
1985	46.3	75	34.7
1992	42.7	91.5	39.2
1996	65.6	102.3	67.1
2000	70	115	64.6
2004	54.4	129	75.5

Sources: FOS, 1999 Report and CBN Annual Report, 2004 (in Gbarabe, 2006)

Figure 2: Trend in Povery Level (1980-2004) Source: Table 2

The table as shown above reflected that in 1980, when the population was 65 million, that 17.7 million out of the above population were in poverty. This number represented 28.1%. In 1985 the Naira was disvalued as directed by the World Bank and IMF, which are instruments of globalization. This manipulation by the developed countries triggered the increase of poverty level. These same folks are also the drivers of the use of ICT as an instrument for development. In 1985, as shown in the table above, out of an estimated population of 75 million, 34.7 million of them were poor. This number represented 46.3%. This sharp increase in poverty level was a direct effect of the devaluation of Naira, and the unsuccessful outcome of the structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP). Poverty continued to increase, as presented in the table. From 1992 to 1996, we saw a tremendous increase in poverty. The estimated population in 1992 was 91.5 million, out of which 39.2 million were in poverty. This represented 42.7 percent. Surprisingly in 1996 when the estimated population was 102.3 million, 67.1 million were poor which represented 65.6% of the total population. This no doubt is alarming, going by the rate of increase in 1980, 1985 and 1992.

The Year 2000 and ICT Development

The year 2000, which is important to this study, marked the era of serious involvement of people in ICT. From 2000 to 2004 as shown in the table, indicates an increase in the number of poor people in Nigeria. These implied that the introduction of information and communication technology (ICT) were negative, as it could not reduce poverty level. In the year 2000, the estimated population was 115.2 million, and the population in poverty as shown was 64.6 million. This represented a 70% poverty rate. Despite the reduction in 2000, there was still an increase in 2004. During that period with an estimated population 129.9 million, using 2.8 per annum growth rate, the population in poverty was 75.5 million which represents 54.4 percent (Fos, 1999 Report and CBN, 2004 in Gbarabe, 2006). These were also reflected in Rivers State during that period as devaluation of Naira in Nigeria at any point determines the level of poverty. However, according to the global multidimensional poverty index by the United Nations, published in June 2015, which was based on data collected between 2004 and 2014. In line with MPI report as at 2010, 46% Nigerians lived below the national poverty line with only 28% in urban areas, and nearly 70% in the rural areas. Though, a similar report by the World Bank, released in 2014 stated that only 33% could be considered to be poor.

Assessment from the Global Multidimensional Poverty Index of the United Nations

Table: 3: State Poverty Rate

States	Poverty Rate
Lagos	8.5%
Osun	10.9%
Anambra	11.2%
Ekiti	12.9%
Edo	19.2%
Imo	19.8%
Abia	21.0%
Rivers	21.1%

FCT (Abuja)	23.5%
Kwara	23.7%
Akwa Ibom	23.8%
Delta	25.1%
Ogun	26.1%
Kogi	26.4%
Ondo	27.9%
Enugu	28.8%
Bayelsa	29.0%
Oyo	29.4%
Cross River	33.1%
Plateau	51.6%
Nassaraw	52.4%
Ebonyi	56.0%
Kaduna	56.5%
Adamawa	59.0%
Benue	59.2%
Niger	61.2%
Borno	70.1%
Kano	76.4%

Gombe	76.9%
Taraba	77.7%
Katsina	82.2%
Sokoto	85.3%
Kebbi	86.0%
Bauchi	86.6%
Jigawa	88.4%
Yobe	90.2%
Zamfara	91.9%

Source: UN; Multidimensional Poverty Index, 2015.

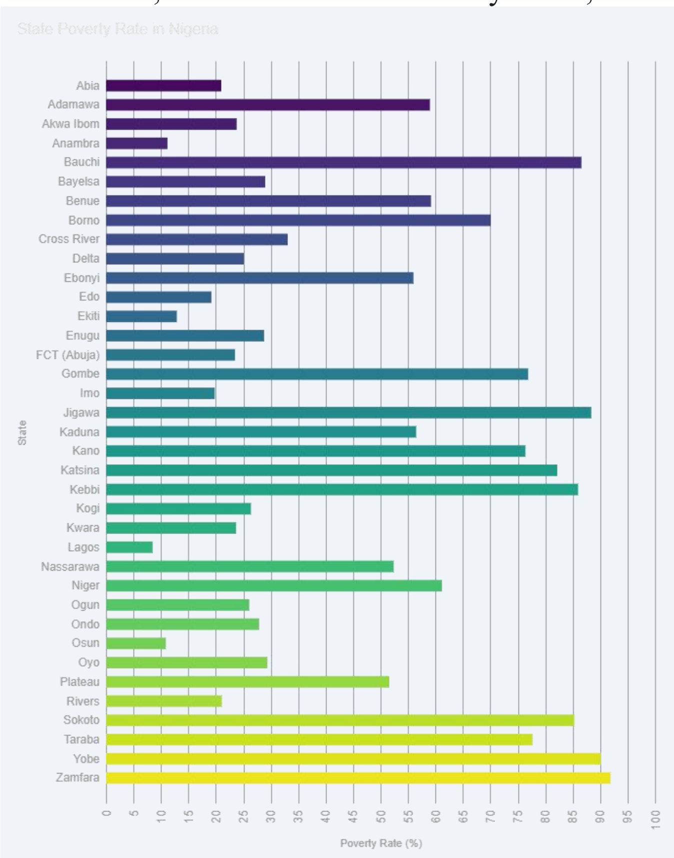

Figure 3: State Poverty Rate in Nigeria. Source: Table 3

From the table, an assessment from the global multidimensional poverty index of the

United Nations has it that, poverty in Nigeria is still below the poverty line and most of which are found in the rural areas. The urban areas are found to be maximally low, in all, it is evidence that the country within this period, which is the era of information and communication technology in Nigeria. Thus, most of the states, from Lagos to Cross Rivers state are mainly oil producing states. During this era, a lot of money was made from crude oil, which led to the building of schools, job opportunities were given to job seekers and enough money for award of contracts. These were also applicable in Rivers State, as one of the beneficiaries of the oil derivation. The data further indicate that states without oil benefits are down the table, like Zamfara, Yobe, Tigawa etc. States like Lagos, Federal Capital Territory (FCT) and Anambra are found low on the ladder, just because of the existing industries and markets, while the FCT was low because it is the capital of Nigeria and the class of people also influences the level of poverty.

Poverty in Rivers and ICT

So, the level of poverty in Rivers State to a considerable height is not influenced by ICT. As shown from the table: 4.2.3, Rivers State poverty level is tagged at 21.0%, which according to the report is below the national poverty line. Between 2008 to 2014, the state government under RT. Honourable Chibuike Ameachi, built and equipped schools with computers in order to enhance the level of information and communication and to enjoy the benefit of globalization. Outside this, the prices of cell phones were also made to be cheaper to enable consumers and Nigeria's populace have access to globalization. Today, there is no Nigeria that could say, he or she has not used a cell phone and other technological equipment, either for communication or in production etc. But the issue is, has this helped to reduce poverty level? Or, what is the relationship between ICT and poverty? From the analysis so far, we do not need to ponder much to understand.

The Effect of ICT in Relation to Poverty Reduction in Nigeria and Rivers State

The effect of ICT in relation to poverty reduction in Nigeria and Rivers state, in particular, has been silent, as far as this study is concerned, if knowledge acquired from these facilities or the use of ICT equipment cannot be translated to better and improve lives, then it is not worth it. From 1980 till 1999, the level of poverty has not been stable, but seems to be almost the same rate with that of 1999 to 2015. Which is the era of ICT and the focus period of this study? Poverty is a big problem in Nigeria, and the population that is poor outweighs the number of people that are rich, making it impossible for Nigeria as a country to grow economically, politically and socially. This conditional situation creates other vices in the country. Since a hungry man is the devil's workshop. Its existence (poverty) actually breeds corruption of all kinds, and can spring up. To further illustrate the level of poverty, as a guide to identify the relationship with ICT, Dr. Magnus Kpakol, former senior special Adviser (SSA) to Obasanjo, in a paper titled, NAPEP Programmes as Enabler for Rapid Economic Development in the South-South region; said that 74 million Nigerians in 2008 were poor. In 2007, it was formally 75 million, which by the 2008 figure, had dropped by one million. While in 1999, the population of the nation's poor people was 80 million, when Nigeria returned to democracy. (Mohammed, 2013).

The Daily Trust of January 27, 2011 repeated Nigeria's high poverty level as gathered by governmental and non-governmental organizations in Nigeria. The report stated that over 12 million youths are poor because they have no means of livelihood, which is dangerous to development. (Mohammed, 2013). From the work of Mohammed (2013) it was also stated in the Punch Newspaper of February 14, 2012, that the National Bureau of Statistics said that 112.519 million Nigerians live in relative poverty conditions. To show the inconsistency, in 2004, Nigeria's relative poverty measurement stood at 54.4 percent but increased to 69 percent or 112.518 million Nigerians in 2010. Using the absolute poverty measure, 54.7 percent of Nigerians were living in poverty in 2004 but this increased to 60.9 percent or 99.284 million Nigerians in 2010. Mohammed, further added the voice of the formal Central Bank governor, Sanusi Lamindo Sanusi, when he stated that, 70 percent (105 million out of which were over 12 million unemployed youths, mostly educated and potentially productive) of Nigerians were living below the poverty line, up from 54 percent a year or two ago. Sanusi said such a high incidence of poverty threatened national economic growth and development. Furthermore; Olufemi Ojo, an African international Television Reports, in a programme titled, Policy on Track on Tuesday 29 December 2015, mentioned that, a total number of 6,000 NNPC workers would be retrenched, while 3 million workers in the industrial sectors had lost their jobs. This goes to show that, poverty level in Nigeria, come 2016 will be at the increase.

Summary and Conclusion

In Rivers state to be specific, the labour leader Comrade Onuegbu Chika, in a radio interview (Wazobia FM) on 02-01-2016 added his voice to this sympathetic issue. He said, the devaluation of Naira, has led to massive retrenchment of workers in River state in the oil and gas industry. This to a large extent, will not augur well for this state and Nigeria at large. In all, there is no doubt that ICT does not create job or enhance workers' performance. It may create jobs, enhance people's information and communications skills but the degree of benefits determines how efficient it is to a developing economy like Nigeria. A global world, where social interactions and communications had brought the world to a global village. The market as the case may be is highly regulated to favour the developed nations.

For Third World countries to be manufacturers of their raw materials would have been a stepping stone towards development and self-reliance. These have been bridged, but they kept being material producers. Most of the laptops and machines cannot be repaired; neither do they have knowledge to put them in order, when they get bad. Therefore, they are dominated economically and also politically. This is because, a man who is not self-sufficient in food production, technology etc, is invariably dependent on the other, who as a result controls him at will. So Nigeria and Rivers state as the case may be, are consumers of ICT or globalization facilities which perhaps are a mechanism to hold strong the development of weaker economies. This in all ramification leads to poverty. The trend of poverty level in Nigeria, as earlier assessed, has shown that there is no increase or improvement from 1980 till 2015. The devaluation of Naira and the drop of oil value at the international market are strategies through globalized institutions to stampede development.

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