Leveraging on ICT Revolution as a vehicle for Youth's empowerment in Nigeria

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Introduction

The information age and its array of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) have led to an inter-connected and independent world with direct impact on youths who constitute a significant bloc of global population. The scenario has influenced the development of libraries without borders, thus enabling globalization of every sphere of life and information services.

This is indeed a golden opportunity particularly for the developing countries to device strategies on how to effectively leverage on the gains of the ICT sector to serve as catalyst for the economic, political and social empowerment of their teaming population.

On the other hand, Empowerment is instrumentally important for achieving sustainable development and well-being of life which lies in the doing and being what one value and have reason to value. According to Tripathy (2012), the history of empowerment dates back to the mid-17th century with the legalistic meaning; 'to invest with authority'. Thereafter, it began to be used in an infinitive more general way to mean "to enable or permit." This idea of empowerment is an offshoot of the discourse on human development and it came into prominence after the 1980s. Its linkage with feminist discourse went a long way in shaping the idea of women's empowerment. Empowerment has been defined in different ways depending on its application; 'to infuse people with power' (Narayana, 2002; World Development Report, 2002; 2000) i.e. access to resources; as expansion in individual's agency (Kishore, 2002); and as power of decision making i.e. autonomy.

Youth Empowerment is viewed broadly as increasing the freedom of young persons' choice and action to shape their own lives (Narayan, 2005). It is the process of enhancing an individual's or group's capacity to make effective choices, that is, to make choices and then to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. In short, empowerment is the process that allows one to gain the knowledge, skill- sets and attitude needed to cope with the changing world and circumstances in which one lives.

To this end, it is obvious that a highly developed ICT is a sine qua non for the attainment of sustainable development of every nation. Therefore, every nation must place premium on ICT

development as a means of achieving global development goals, particularly the first goal of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which focused on the proportion of youths and adults living below the World Bank poverty bench mark

ICT Revolution and the Nigerian Situation

ICT is a prerequisite for developing countries' economic success. Simply put, the ability of developing countries to thrive in global economy depends to a large extent on efforts taken to leverage on opportunities presented through the ICT to create sustainable jobs for her youths. However, previous studies have shown that most of the developing countries especially in Nigeria are yet to embrace fully the application of ICT in socio economic and political life of the people (Bowery, 1995).

Consequently, Nigeria is still trapped among the group of nations categorized as information poor countries. Salawu (2008) identified factors such as low level technology, lack of expertise, under funding and high costs of equipments occasioned by unfavourable exchange rates militating against ICT revolution and youths empowerment in Nigeria.

Although Nigeria is not relenting in her efforts to be part of the global village, a lot needs to be done in order to achieve a breakthrough in ICT. To this end, Ayodele (2001) sheds more light on this thus:

> The developing countries and Nigeria for that matter have been caught on the backwardness called digital divide i.e we have been left behind by some ten years ago in a revolution that is moving at the speed of light to say ten years is a lot. Thank God, we have vibrant knowledge thirsty citizenry whose only handicap is lack of opportunity. Thanks to ICT, the world has been made a global village. Given the right learning environment, the materials to help bridge the digital divide is at our finger tips.

Digital Economy

The term *Digital Economy* was first mentioned in Japan by a Japanese professor and research economist in the midst of Japan's recession of the 1990s. In the West, the term came into use during the early 1990s. For example, many academic papers were published by New York University's Center for Digital Economy Research. The term was more widely popularized by Don Tapscott's 1995 book, *The Digital Economy: Promise and Peril in the Age of*

Networked Intelligence. This book explained how the Internet would change the way the world did business.

According to [Thomas Mesenbourg](#) (2001),[5] three main components of the digital economy concept can be identified:

- E-business infrastructure (hardware, software, telecom, networks, human capital, etc.),
- E-business (how business is conducted, any process that an organization conducts over computer-mediated networks),
- E-commerce (transfer of goods, for example when a book is sold online).

Flowing from the above scholarly postulations, we can deduce that Digital economy is an economy based on digital computing processes, it is also an important aspect of a knowledge-based economy in which ICT is the backbone of the economy. Thus, in Nigeria, recent studies have shown that acceptance of digital is on the increase, but the implementation is below expectation. This sad reality could be attributed to the little or unavailability of the various components of the digital economy in the country. These components includes; E-business infrastructure, E-business, and E-commerce.

Therefore, expanding the intellectual contribution of Mesenbourg, it is clear that E-Business infrastructure which comprises of hardware, software, telecom, networks, human capital are integral aspects of the digital economy in which youth can leverage on the empowerment opportunities present in them. For instance hardware (Computers, phones, POS devices, wifi devices, flash drives etc) are often used in the culture of digital economy. Youths can get skilled in the retail or installation of these devices to be relevant in the economy. The hardware component of the digital economy is very essential and will remain a lucrative venture for the youth to key in particularly in Adamawa state where the potentials for the implementation of digital economy is fair.

Secondly, E-business (how business is conducted, any process that an organization conducts over computer-mediated networks). The E-business is an aspect of the digital economy where our youths can get skilled on how to conduct businesses online or using the computing processes, this aspect will require youths to educate themselves with digital-marketing skills, social media influence and advertisement, website development and programming.

E-commerce as a third component of a digital economy also offers youths a wider opportunity to get involved in the digital economy to make ends meet. This aspect involves every aspect of commerce that must be made digital. The backbone of Purchase and supply chain for a digital economy is the e-commerce, from where an item is being bought to how its being delivered. Youths can position themselves in the helm of this processes to be gainfully employed, for example building payment collection web portals, creating tracking systems for delivering goods. In advanced cases the use of robots and drones are emerging in delivering goods and services. A simple POS business with consistency can generate reasonable amount of money to remove youths from poverty.

Youths and Digital Transformation

Digital transformation (**DX**) is the adoption of digital technology by a company. Common goals for its implementation are to improve efficiency, value or innovation. According to Wikipedia As of 2020, 37% of European companies and 27% of American companies had not embraced digital technology. Over the period of 2017-2020, 70% of European municipalities have increased their spending on digital technologies. In a 2021 survey, 55% of European companies stated the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the demand for digitalization, and 46% of companies reported that they have grown more digital.

It is clear that the world is moving from analogue to digital. Youths are encouraged to embrace digital transformation as a culture as against the current practice of viewing it from the lenses of western imposition. According to the Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa 2020-2030, Digital transformation in Africa is based on foundation pillars (Enabling Environment, Policy and Regulation, Digital Infrastructure, Digital Skills and Human Capacity, Digital Innovation and Entrepreneurship), critical sectors(Digital Industry, Digital Trade and Financial Services, Digital Government, Digital Education, Digital Health, Digital Agriculture) to drive the digital transformation and cross cutting themes (Digital Content & Applications, Digital ID, Emerging Technologies, Cybersecurity, Privacy and Personal Data Protection, Research and Development) to support the digital ecosystem. It will also include policy recommendations and actions under each foundational pillar, critical sector and cross-cutting theme. Some of the proposed recommendations and actions include those highlighted in the AU-EU Digital Economy taskforce report.
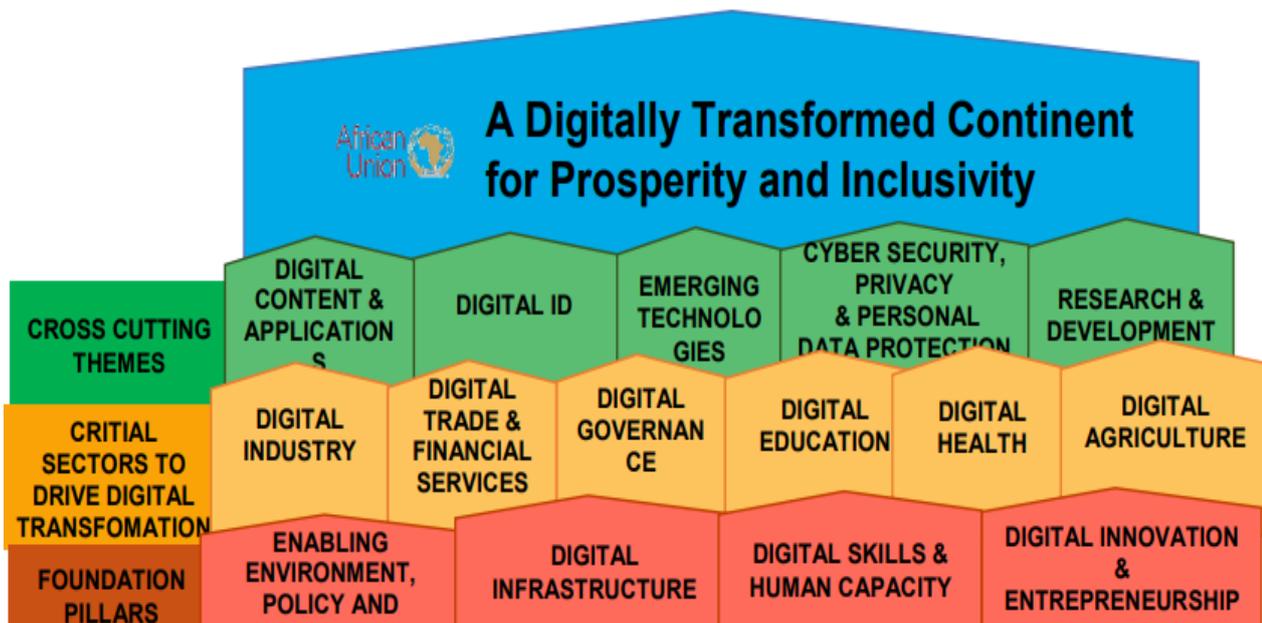
Source: African Union Report, 2021

From the diagram above it can be deduced that Youths have an ocean of opportunities in the digital economy sphere to be relevant.

Item 8 on the National Digital Economy Policy and Strategy (2020-2030), is" Indigenous Content Development & Adoption" it's very clear that ICT is needed in the government and the Nigerian Economy. Therefore, irrespective of one's area of specialization, one can never go wrong with a digital skill.

Recommendations

To improve the implementation of digital economy, this paper recommends the following:

a. Government should create an enabling environment for youths to participate in the ICT revolution by providing proper legislations through the legislative arms to provide legal framework for the ICT Sector in Nigeria.

b. Political parties should make it mandatory for all their aspirants to provide a clear ICT policy in their manifestos to garner support for the support

c. Political Leaders at various levels should include more ICT projects in their agenda to create IT related jobs for youths

d. Policy makers in the educational sector should as a matter of priority re design the national curriculum to make it ICT based. This would help provide a strong foundational base for pupils and students to make them compete in the digital world.

e. Youths should embrace the ICT revolution and spend more time in thinking about innovative ideas around the digital economy

Conclusion

So far, this paper has established the significance of the ICT revolution as a vehicle for youths' empowerment in Nigeria. The paper identified factors such as low-level technology, lack of expertise, under funding and high costs of equipment occasioned by unfavourable exchange rates militating against ICT revolution and youth's empowerment in Nigeria. To this end, the paper recommended a conducive enabling environment to be created by governments at all levels and tiers through enactment of legislations to help the growth of the ICT sector in Nigeria