

# FOSTERING NIGERIA'S SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY THROUGH INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

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## **Abstract**

Nigeria is a nation with a lot of socio-economic problems because of her low level of modern technology. However, in this 21st century, a prominent aspect of technology is information Technology and Nigeria is not sound in it. This paper discusses issues that focus on how information Technology can improve the socio-economic status of Nigeria in the 21st century. This is because information technology facilitates communication, improves business activities, minimizes transportation hazards, creates employment opportunities, and facilitates acquisition of education.

## **Introduction**

The 21st century is a period in which we hope and struggle for socio-economic development. A great resource for socio-economic development of a nation is technology. However, a prominent fruit of technology is information technology (IT), Information technology is greatly linked with Internet services.

Nigeria is a nation that has not yet advanced appreciably in technology, which includes information technology. A close look at Nigeria reveals existence of a lot of socio-economic problems as a result of lack of effective focus on technological advancement.

This paper dwells on the issue that proper orientation or involvement in information technology (IT) will promote socio-economic development of Nigeria in this 3rd millennium. The paper deals on the issue by discussing the concept of information technology (IT), the state of socio-economic development and I.T in Nigeria, and utilization of IT for socio-economic development.

## **The Concept of Information Technology (IT)**

Information technology (IT) is a technology that integrates two main technologies: Telecommunication and computer technology. Information technology can be seen as a marriage of or union between information processing and storage (which is the main focus of computer technology) and information generation and distribution (the main focus of telecommunication technology). Falaki (2002) notes that " the technology involved in acquiring, storing, processing and distributing information by electronic means (including radio, television, telephone, computers etc) gave rise to information technology (IT). That is the marriage between computer technology (essentially for information acquisition, storage and processing) and telecommunication Technology which is for information distribution." At the centre of information technology (IT) is the computer for it plays a vital role in information processing, generation, storage and transmission. Generally, IT focuses on information and information is a source of knowledge (knowledge is power). **Ekeræzie** (2003) notes that information technology (Infotech) consists of two parts (computer and communication) for it is a technology that merges computing with telecommunication links carrying data, sound and video. Ekemezie also points out that computers are the centre of information technology and they enable faster operations in information. He notes that information is what computer processes, transmits, and stores and " We use information, for example, to calculate, communicate, and make decision."

Information technology is a system that is dynamic and has great influence in the socio-economic life of man for it is continually evolving, breaking barriers, and defining new horizons. In fact, it has brought changes and challenges in the political, social and economic affairs of nations. Globalization is possible as a result of information technology. Inyiama (2004) has rightly observed that information technology has transformed the human world into " global village" where people can easily communicate with one another in multi-media, electronically, from any point in the globe to another and the technology affects socio-economic activities. Ekemezie (2003) points out that the world has moved from industrial age into information age and there has been advancement in information revolution.

Information technology greatly gears towards Internet services. "The whole world is becoming increasingly addicted to this communication super highway most often referred to as the Internet because of its many advantages"(Inyiama, 2004). According to Ohayagha (2003), Internet is worldwide connection of computer and their networks that enhance the computer user to reach any individual who can access the network through his own computer,

Inyiama (2004) outlines some of the uses of the Internet such as its applications in E-mail, facsimile, electronic bulletin boards (uses of bulletin boards are classified advertisement, Internet forum, specialized support, discussion arena), data bases (uses of data bases are publication functions, structuring of abstracts as data base records, identification and interaction of groups with similar interests, provision of information on radio or TV programmes and also on book titles, CD-titles), file transfer. Internet has proved to be a viable system that deals with high speed of information flow and has led to the existence of electronic commerce, virtual learning, telemedicine, online remote diagnostics, repair of systems, online banking, teleconferencing etc.

### **The State of Socio-Economic Development and Information Technology in Nigeria**

As a developing country, Nigeria is faced with a great burden of socio-economic problems. Different governments in Nigeria have taken steps to address these socio-economic problems without success. Okeke (2003) points out that over the years, the Nigerian government has introduced programmes to improve the well-being of the citizens but they have failed because of inadequate background information on the part of the policy makers, implementation and the supposed programmed beneficiaries. Nigeria is a less developed nation because of low level of technology (Nwosu, 2004). Nigeria has low socio-economic status and the citizens experience poverty (Aghenta, 1988). Umoru (2004) observes that " Nigeria is not at present doing well in its economic, scientific and technology sectors."

Low productivity in utilization of information technology is one of our nation's technological problems. In Nigeria, the use of information technology has assumed increasing significance but the operational effectiveness of the application has been far below expectation, if not disappointing. Emenari (2003) observes that a wide gap exists between the use of Internet in African countries like Nigeria and in the developed world because much of Nigerian population has not experienced the technology. Inyiama (2004) observes that Nigeria "is lagging far behind in the application of I.T. She is therefore, not contributing enough towards the evolution of the appropriate learning process for the future."

The high level of poverty and lack of basic infrastructure in Nigeria has resulted to poor utilization and low appreciation of information technology. According to Ibenta (2003), "the World Bank Annual World Development Report also shows that the gap in technology and living standards between Nigeria and other developing countries is becoming wider and wider, not to talk of highly industrialized nations". The introduction of information technology has not been matched or integrated with other development programmes like development of adequate supporting infrastructure, education and training of users. For instance long distance education, as practiced in Nigeria, lack the technological back up necessary for greater effectiveness (Inyiama, 2004). In fact, if Nigeria wishes to develop in I.T, many other infrastructures are required. Nigeria lacks the manpower (qualified technical personnel) needed for managing and maintaining the information technology equipment. The number of qualified computer personnel specializing in IT produced in our higher institutions is not enough to match the required manpower for management of information technology.

### **Utilization of Information Technology for Socio-Economic Development**

Information technology can serve as a vital technology for nation building and productivity in this 21st century. Discussion on how information technology is vital in socio-economic development pertains to gains or benefits of Internet in the social and economic development of our society.

Information technology facilitates communication. Presently, we can send and receive messages using electronic mail (E-mail). E-mail is an electronic means of sending messages or information to people across the globe. It provides a fast, economic convenient means of sending such messages to the recipients at a very little cost. It is a store-and-forward managed data network, which electronically allocates mailboxes in computer system subscriber terminal (Nwajinka, 2003).

Information technology can improve business in Nigeria through the use of E-commerce. This is a technology that deals with commercial or business transactions on the Internet. The advantage of E-commerce is that it can create global medium that can dismantle distances and boundaries in business transactions. With E-commerce, it is possible to bring together customers, vendors, suppliers and employees on-line.

Information technology has impact on prevention of transportation hazards. I.T can ease transportation problem of Nigeria for it can reduce congestion on the roads. People can sit in the office or home and carry out transactions without transportation.

A vital socio-economic importance of Information Technology in Nigeria is creation of employment opportunities. It is unfortunate that a lot of our youths are unemployed. With the existence of organizations and business centres concerned with information technology, our youths can be employed for socio-economic development. Employment helps to generate income for a happy and healthy living as well as prevention of idleness that is associated with social vices. Unemployment leads to emotional (psychological) disturbances and distress; and social vices inhibit socio-economic development.

A very important resource for human development and hence socio-economic development, is education. Internet, through E-learning, provides an avenue and multi-media for promoting appropriate learning processes in the 21st century. For instance, a computerized library has important advantages over the conventional library for it is easily accessible, richer in content and cheaper. Students can get more serious and enthusiastic in learning using the Internet. Internet provides multimedia that facilitate acquisition of knowledge and skill in a manner that enables learners (students) learn and grasp much more easily, even when the subjects are considered difficult using conventional techniques. The use of Internet can bring decent behaviour in our school system. Learning on the Internet can enable frustrated and disappointed student turn away from campus cultism or joining other bad ones, because of the excitement multi-media learning offers them (Inyiama, 2004). Information technology can also make distance learning possible, thereby enhancing literacy level and human development of the nation.

### **Recommendations**

To ensure that Information Technology plays a great role in fostering socio-economic development in Nigeria, it is recommended that

1. Nigerians should develop strong value system towards technology and its use;
2. there should be adequate manpower development on Information Technology;
3. effective education on Information Technology should be carried out in schools;
4. bad practices that affect development of Information Technology should be avoided.

### **Conclusion**

Lack of good orientation towards technology has greatly resulted in the socio-economic problems being faced in the nation. Focus on Information Technology can be a resource for alleviating the socio-economic problems of Nigeria. In this modern era, Information Technology (I.T) seems to be the greatest agent for civilization in the 21st century for it has great influence in virtually all aspects of human endeavour. Thus, it is an axiom that focus on information technology will greatly improve the socio-economic status of Nigeria in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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