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Availability and Accessibility of ICTs in the Rural Communities of Delta State, Nigeria

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Introduction

Modern Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are a source for the development of wealth and power when they are directed for the well being of humanity (Ahsanullah, 2002). Nigeria has a population of about 120 million people living in 774 local government areas in the 36 states and the federal capital territory. The country is embracing the new technology with an explosion in the use of mobile phones providing communication previously undreamt of. About a million people have mobile phones, but Internet use is lagging behind with only an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 Nigerians connected to the Internet (Olukoya, 2002). One reason for this is that about 80 million Nigerians are rural dwellers who are excluded from participating in the emerging information economy.

To make Nigeria a key player in the information society through the use of ICTs as the engine for sustainable development and global competitiveness, the Nigerian government has the following goals for the use of ICTs:

- Education
- Creation of wealth
- Poverty eradication
- Job creation
- Global competitiveness (Ajayi, et al., 1998)

The Internet and other ICTs are affecting all human activities that depend on information, including rural development and food security. O'Farrell, et al. (1999) state that a better understanding of existing information practices and socio-technical processes is necessary in rural areas if ICT-based projects are to be more effective.

Accascina (2000) identifies how ICTs directly and indirectly affect poverty alleviation, notably in relation to rural development and food security. Examples include the delivery of market or employment information, or the creation of well-paid jobs that eventually "trickle down" to poor communities.

Adimorah (1990) stresses that, “our information services are still elitist, serving only 20% of the educated elite group while the 80% illiterate rural dwellers wallow in information deprivation.” The present administration in Nigeria does not want to be left out of this global system. According to Okeh (2002), the literature has stressed that the quality of life of rural dwellers can be highly improved by effective provision of relevant information to rural communities.

Methodology

This study uses a survey. The instrument for collecting data is a questionnaire that has two parts. The first part collected data on personal characteristics of respondents, while the collected data on ICTs in the rural communities of Delta state. The data were analysed using frequency counts and simple percentages.

The sample for this study consisted of 132 rural dwellers of whom 125 completed the questionnaire. The respondents were drawn from eleven communities in the Ethiope East local government area of Delta state. The communities are Abraka, Igun, Okpara Waterside, Okpara Inland, Okurekpo, Salubi, Ovu/Ovoire, Kokori, Eku, Oroakpo, and Isiokolo.

Findings and Discussion

Section A: Bio-Data

Table I: Distribution of respondents by age.

Age	Frequency	%
18-28	78	63.2%
29-39	41	35.8%
40-50	5	4%
Total	125	100%

A majority of the respondents are between the ages of 18-28 and 29-39. A majority of the work presented in this study is being carried out by people who are relatively young and alert enough to be able to make use of ICTs.

Table II: Distribution of respondents by gender.

Gender	Frequency	%
Male	101	80.8%
Female	24	19.2%
Total	125	100%

The study respondents were primarily male.

Table III: Distribution of respondents by educational status.

Educational status	Frequency	%
Primary School Certificate	28	22.4%
WAEC/TCII	41	32.8%
NCE/Diploma	12	9.6%
B.sc and above	21	16.8%
None	23	18.4%
Total	125	100%

About one-third of the respondents are WAEC/TCII holders while more than one-fifth are primary school certificate holders.

Table IV: Distribution of respondents by occupation.

Occupation	Frequency	%
Unemployed	28	22.4%
Farmer	15	12%
Petty trader	26	20.8%
Civil servant	12	9.6%
Student	20	16%
Full time house wife	24	19.2%
Total	125	100%

A little more than one-fifth of the rural dwellers are unemployed, while another fifth are petty traders, and one-fifth are housewives.

Section B: Availability and accessibility of ICTs

Table V: Availability of information sources

Sources of Information	Frequency	%
Internet	0	0%
Telephone (GSM)	25	20%
Fax machine	0	0%
CD-ROM	0	0%
Television	17	13.6%
Radio	31	24.8%
Computer system	42	33.6%
Scanners	10	8%
Total	125	100%

One-third of respondents indicated the availability of computers in their communities. A quarter have radio and one-fifth have telephone (GSM). Internet and email services, fax machines, and CD-ROMs are completely absent.

Table VI: Accessibility of information sources

Sources of Information	Frequency	%
Internet	0	0%
Telephone (GSM)	18	14.4%
Fax machine	0	0%
CD-ROM	0	0%
Television	18	14.4%
Radio	31	24.8%
Computer system	39	31.2%
Scanners	19	15.2%
Total	125	100%

Nearly a third of respondents have access to a computer, while about one fourth have access to radio. About 15% have access to scanners, telephone (GSM), and television.

Table VII: Reasons for the use of ICT

Reasons	Frequency	%
Personal decision	125	100%
Communication	110	88%
Education	11	8.8%
Reduction of conflict	7	5.6%
Enhance development	114	91.2%
Political awareness	114	91.2%
Religion	2	1.6%
Occupation	91	72.8%
Fight ignorance	82	65.6%
Competition	125	100%

All responses are well above 50%, with the exception of education, reduction of conflict, and religion with 8.8%, 5.6%, and 1.6% respectively.

Table VIII: Constraints on the use of ICTs

Constraints	Frequency	%
High cost of facilities	121	96.8%
Unavailability of infrastructure	125	100%
Limited access	112	89.6%
Lack of skills	119	95.2%
Lack of information policy	66	52.8%
Lack of implementation of ICT policy	118	94.4%
Lack of relevant infrastructure	110	88%
Lack of awareness	110	88%

Language barriers	117	93.6%
Little or no government support	125	100%
War, instability, and conflict	65	52%

Table VIII shows total neglect by government in the provision of ICTs in rural areas. Respondents ticked all the constraints listed above as factors militating against the effective use of ICTs in the rural communities.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The study reveals that a majority of the respondents are unemployed, petty traders, farmers, or housewives. A large portion are illiterate and this affects the accessibility and use of modern ICTs

To ensure that ICTs are available and accessible, and to guarantee that rural dwellers benefit maximally and contribute meaningfully to the challenges of the information age, the following are recommended.

- Efforts should be made to educate the rural population, teaching them about government policies and facilities as well as skills in the use of ICTs.
- In order to enhance access to information by rural dwellers, the government should provide and maintain communication support infrastructures.
- Computer education has not been introduced in schools in the rural areas. Computer exposure should start from primary schools in the rural areas where pupils learn to use them as an intelligent toy.
- The use of local languages in the radio and television programmes should be encouraged. This will go a long way in conveying the intended/desired messages to rural dwellers and help them perceive radio and television as sources of information.
- Computers and other ICTs should be used in adult education programmes.

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