

Chapter 14

National Information and Communication Technology Policy Process in Developing Countries

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses national information and communication technology policy process in developing countries. It describes the need for information and communication technology policy, ICT policy development process, national ICT policy in developing countries, the role of an ICT policy in the developing country, factors affecting the formulation of national ICT policies and the future of national ICT policy was also discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have critical roles to play in development efforts around the world. There was a time when the benefits of applying ICTs in fighting poverty and promoting economic growth were not widely understood. Many in the development community questioned how high-tech (and often expensive) communication technologies could be used to alleviate such dire challenges as starvation, homelessness, and lack of basic education and health

services. Lately, however, this view has given way to an understanding of ICTs as essential components of broader efforts to harness the free flow of information to increase voice, accountability, and economic development. In recent years, developing countries have started taking concrete actions to incorporate ICT into their national economic policies and development agendas. Many countries are preparing and implementing national ICT policies that emphasize the ubiquity of connectivity as well as new applications in areas such as e-government and e-business (World Bank, 2006). Policy makes a great difference

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regarding how countries are able to take advantage of the technological opportunities available to them and exploit them for good. Countries with progressive policies are seeing these technologies spread quickly. However, countries that are yet to formulate and integrate ICT policy have been plagued by slow growth of technology and the consequent lessening of support for economic and social development (Sarkar De, 2005, cited Adomi & Igun, 2008).

ICTs cannot substitute for a country's own good governance, economic reform or social policies. However, ICTs can be applied to support democratic processes, improve the productivity and competitiveness of all economic sectors, create new sources of wealth, and increase the efficiency of public services, including healthcare, education and disaster assistance. In the era of the global information economy and society, ICTs are an increasingly essential part of development policies and programs. (Implementation team on global Policy participation, 2002). Governments world-wide recognize the crucial role ICTs play in facilitating and accelerating socio-economic development; which has made a number of countries in the developing world are putting in place policies and strategic plans that will enable them to transform their economies into information and knowledge-based economies (Dzidonu, 2002).

Developing countries need to proactively evaluate the impact of ICT on existing sectors, identify the potential for ICT to create new economic and social opportunities, and address development priorities by designing and implementing comprehensive national ICT strategies. By being proactive, countries that have put in place national ICT policies that address all the relevant priority areas (ICT infrastructure and access, human capacity development, the network and regulatory environment, business and entrepreneurship, content and applications) are better able to avail themselves of the opportunities offered by the global economy. They are in a position not only to learn and creatively transform existing ways

of working, communicating and living but also to enhance the productive and human capacities of their people and to assist to reduce existing forms of economic and social inequality and exclusion. On the other hand, those erring on the side of caution risk being excluded from the benefits of the emerging networked economy. Delays in action in becoming integrated can mean a widening of economic and social development gaps, increased marginalization and social exclusion. The social and economic losses that come from not effectively deploying ICT are also likely to increase progressively (UNDP, 2001). This chapter discusses the objectives of national information and communication technology policy in developing countries, ICT policy development process, national ICT policy development initiatives, country case studies, the role of an ICT policy in developing countries, factors affecting the formulation of national ICT policies, feature trends of the topic and conclusion.

BACKGROUND

Information and communication technology is any technology which enables communication and electronic capture, processing and transmission of information. (Parliament Office of Science and Technology, 2006 cited by Adomi, 2008). ICT has a role to play in any country's development (<http://wougnet.Org/ICTpolicy/ug/ugictpolicy.html>). All over the world today, governments are introducing policies aimed at integrating ICT into the national hub and strategies are evolving to enable countries exploit ICT for progress and development. ICT is fast becoming a way of life in Africa and many developing countries.

ICTs can be grouped into three categories (Adomi, 2008):

- Information technology uses computers, which have become indispensable in mod-

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