

Chapter 18

ICT Policies in Developing Countries: Objectives, Issues and Influencing Factors

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ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on the objectives, issues and influencing factors of national ICT policies in developing countries. It points out how policy has become the driving force for ICT growth; how it can empower a nation and transform its social and economic life thereby improving on the quality of life of its citizens. It further discusses the objectives and issues of ICT policy. It later examines the factors that affect ICT policy. Examples of some developing countries in Africa and Asia with national ICT policies were also given. The chapter concludes that unless a strong national policy institution with dedicated policy decision makers charged with the responsibility of monitoring ICT policy implementation are in place, ICT policies will not be effective in developing countries.

INTRODUCTION

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) potentially offer diverse benefits for developing and least-developed countries in relation to the production and dissemination of, and access to, knowledge and information. A major difficulty in discussing the application of computing technology in developing countries is that such countries as a group are quite heterogeneous. Developing countries differ widely in both the extent to which

they have introduced computer and networking technologies and the extent to which the necessary infrastructure exists for exploiting the technologies (Adeyeye & Iweha 2005).

According to Dzidonu & Siochru (2000), cited by Dzidonu (2002) the emerging information age characterized by ICTs and the extraordinary increase in the spread of knowledge has given rise to an era of knowledge and information. These technologies are offering even less developed countries like those in Africa the opportunity to transform their economies and accelerate their socio-economic development process as part of

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addressing the challenges of globalization and the socio-economic implications of the widening digital divide.

ICT has become a subject of great importance especially in this present day society. Its importance cannot be over emphasized because it has the ability to empower the society. During the last 20 years, ICTs have provided a wealth of new technological opportunities, with the rapid deployment of both the Internet and cellular telephony leading the way. These technologies have invaded every country that is willing to accept them. The most important differentiating factor now is policy. Policy makes the fundamental difference regarding how countries are able to take advantage of the technological opportunities available to them and exploit them for good (Sarkar De, 2005).

ICT policies play vital roles in facilitating ICT developments, promoting investment in the ICT industry that will in turn boost the nation's economy. ICT policies ensure that ICT is affordable and accessible and is also able to address issues on ethical and moral conducts, copyright and cyber crimes. ICT policies offer certain conveniences such as ensuring the development of information infrastructure, information transfer in a nation, proper information planning development, low cost of access, efficiency in the provision of telecommunication network, to mention but a few. ICT policies can contribute to increasing the development rate in developing countries because they serve as development infrastructure facilitators. The rapid growth in the field of ICT and the growth of the information services sector have radically changed the world. These changes have given birth to a new society. According to Dzidonu (2002), if developing countries are to achieve rapid and radical social and economic transformation in the new information age, to be dominated by information and knowledge-based economies, they will need to implement comprehensive ICT-led socio-economic development policies, strategies and plans. It is in the light of this that this chapter discusses objectives of na-

tional ICT policies in developing countries, ICT policy issues, critical success factor and future trends of the national ICT policies

BACKGROUND

The Chambers 21st century dictionary (1996) defined policy as a plan of action, which is usually based on certain principles decided on by a body or individuals. Policies are put in place to achieve a well defined set of goals especially by a nation to meet the needs or improve the life and well being of its citizens. According to Olatokun (2005) cited by Adomi & Igun (2008), such official statements set forth a goal, a vision, a direction, organizational values and norms or other kinds of guiding principle(s) that a group, enterprise or nation intends to follow and adhere to in the pursuit of its everyday endeavours. Policies are formally put in place by governments, different stakeholders and, in particular, the private sector make inputs into the policy process and affects its out-comes (APC, n.d) ICT offers the global society several convenience(s) such as communication measure among countries and for local areas, web systems for business, online trading of securities and distance learning. ICTs create applied technologies in many fields; ICTs could contribute to increasing the growth rate in developing countries because ICT investment includes two aspects – increase in demand and technological change in the supply side – this contribution may not stem solely from innovations by ICT (Tayaka, 2008). ICT policy generally covers three main areas: telecommunications (especially telephone communications), broadcasting (radio and TV) and the Internet. It may be national, regional or international.

According to United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (2007) even when promulgated as distinct policy pronouncement, ICT policies of necessity have to take into account the policy areas, such as education policies, information policies, trade and

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