

Chapter 47

The Nigerian National Information Technology (IT) Policy

Tega Rexwhite Enakrire
Delta State University, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

This chapter reviews the Nigerian Information Technology Policy which was approved in 2001. It x-rays the objectives of the policy, the sectoral applications, and the implementation strategies of the policy. A performance review of the policy was also done. The chapter concludes by requesting the government to ensure strict implementation of its national ICT policy in order to achieve the set objectives.

INTRODUCTION

For the past two decades, there has been tremendous increase in the use of information technologies (IT). The world continues to face changes that are brought about by use of information and communication technologies (ICTs). Developing countries, and especially those in Africa (like Nigeria), which are often referred to as latecomers in the world of ICTs have been affected by technological changes. These multidimensional changes (technical, financial and economic, cultural, social and geo-political) have impacted upon almost all aspects of life: economic, education,

communications, leisure and travels (Thioune, 2003; cited by Toale, 2003)

It should however be noted that after sinking massive resources into ICT, many countries are still not benefiting. To many ICT is a “paper tiger” – it is not having the desired effect on poverty reduction and wealth creation. Globally, the contradictions are even deeper. The great paradox is that with the amazing growth in computing and telecommunications – wireless technologies, mobile telephony, web services – the digital divide is still widening between the digital “haves” and the digital “have-nots”. While the digital are getting more digital, the analogue are getting more analogue. There is so much evidence of poverty globally in the midst

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of such technology development and innovation. Poverty, lack of leadership and commitment and the weird global structure result in unevenness in the exploitation and deployment of technologies (Awe, n.d.).

Closing these gaps – locally, nationally and globally – requires creative pro-people policies that focus on national priorities – on areas which will have the greatest positive impact on development. Therefore most countries (like Nigeria) have developed national ICT policies in recognition of the enormous potential of ICT. To avoid being left behind, several nations develop such ICT policies addressing several core issues for keying into the benefits of an ICT-driven world. The aim is to be a creator, a producer and not a consumer or mere passenger. It is usually a proactive indication of the seriousness government attaches to the role of ICT in society. A national ICT policy can therefore be seen as an attempt to develop a pro-people ICT road map of the country. Lack of a coherent and comprehensive policy often leads to redundancy, waste of resources, ineffective ICT diffusion and development and an inability to tap into global opportunities (Awe, n.d.)

This chapter describes the Nigerian IT Policy by highlighting the objectives the policy, sectoral applications, implementation strategies, performance review of the policy, policy review as well as its future trends.

BACKGROUND

Information technology (IT) is a term which encompasses all forms of technology used to create, store, exchange, and use information in its various forms (business data, voice conversations, still images, motion pictures, multimedia presentations, and other forms, including those not yet conceived). It is a convenient term for including both telephony and computer technology in the same word. It is the technology which is driving what has often been called “the information

revolution” (Data Center, 2005). Information technology (IT) is a force that has changed many aspects of our lives. the impact of ICT across the past two or three decades has been enormous in fields like medicine, tourism, travel, business, law, banking, engineering and architecture,. The way these fields operate today is vastly different from the ways they operated in the past decades (Soloway & Pior, 1996; Collis, 2002).

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) refers to a broad spectrum of technologies that allows users to get, produce, ad share ideas and resources. It is any technology, which enables communication and the electronic capture, processing and transmission of information (Parliament Office of Science and Technology, 2006) ICTs have become very important to contemporary societies. Whether one is talking on the phone, sending an e-mail, going to the bank, using a library, listening to sports coverage on the radio, watching the news on television, working in an office or in the field, etc, one is using ICTs. (Adomi & Igun, 2008) In this chapter, IT and ICTs are used interchangeably.

A policy is a set of principles and strategies which guide a course of action for the achievement of a given goal. Policies may be developed at the organizational or institutional level or at the regional, national or international level and are embodied in a variety of policy instruments (legal, professional and cultural) (Anderson, 1979). To this end, Montviloff, (1990) Organizations have mission statements from which strategic plans are developed. Policy concretizes, gives guidance and assures consistency with the achievement of strategic plans. Policy is the foundation upon which operations are built. Policies are intended to regulate the conduct of people in systems, but policies themselves are often conditioned by the socio-cultural dynamics of the usually put in place by various governments. However, different stakeholders and in particular, the private sector make inputs into the policy process and affect its outcomes (APC, n.d.).

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