

Chapter 9

The Nigerian e–Government Strategies (NeGST): A Strategic Approach to Poverty Eradication in Nigeria

Charles K. Ayo
Covenant University, Nigeria

I.T. Fatudimu
Covenant University, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

Nigeria has made frantic efforts towards achieving the millennium development goals (MDGs) as spelt out in the United Nations' Agenda for the world. A critical assessment of the e-Government strategies in Nigeria is important being responsible for 20% of the population of the entire African continent. This paper presents a review of the e-Government strategies in Nigeria; the human capital development initiatives; the information and communications technology (ICT) diffusion and e-Inclusion. The global and continental ranking of the country is presented as well as recommendations to accelerate developments towards achieving the MDGs. Findings revealed that there are ongoing efforts in Nigeria to address the issue of poverty. The various initiatives of government include: the National/State Economic Empowerment Strategies (NEEDS/SEEDS), the Vision 2020, the National e-Government Strategy (NeGST) and a well-formulated National IT policy to mention a few. The little hindrance encountered in the research is that the available data was only up to the year 2005 and 2006 in some cases. However, based on the human capital development indices such as: economic empowerment and poverty reduction, education, health, employment generation, etc, it was observed that the adult literacy level of 64.2% is satisfactory and better results are expected before 2015. The life expectancy level is constant (54 years) from 2002 to 2007, which is the one of the lowest in Africa. On school enrolment, the major problem is access and poverty. It was observed that only 25% of primary school leavers made it to the secondary school level, while about 14% of the students at this level made it to the tertiary level. Similarly, the average percentage of female enrolment in schools is 45%. The health facilities are under-funded and are grossly inadequate both in quality and quantity. There is an average of 1,700 persons per hospital bed and the ratio of physicians to the populace is about 1:6000. This calls for a state of emergency in this sector.

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One major sector of the economy that is experiencing a boost is the ICT and Telecoms. The sector had brought about a teledensity growth of 0.73 to 37.05 from 2001 to 2007. Consequently, Nigeria has been named the fastest growing Telecoms nation in Africa and the third in the world, with a number of direct and indirect jobs created. Similarly, the rate of Internet diffusion is encouraging bearing in mind that the level was almost nonexistent in 1999. It is obvious that Nigeria would be able to bridge the divide by 2015. Generally, there are some meaningful developments in the country arising from the various poverty eradication schemes but the resultant effect has not imparted positively on unemployment. This is the opinion of the populace and hence the need for government to re-strategize, otherwise, fulfilling MDGs by 2015 may not be realistic.

INTRODUCTION

The world representatives assembled in Geneva from 10 – 12 of December 2003, for a maiden summit tagged: *Building the information society: a global challenge in the millennium*. The summit declared a common desire and commitment to build a people-oriented and development-poised information society that is aimed at enabling everyone to create, access, utilize, share information and knowledge (WSIS, 2003). The initiative was to enable individuals, communities and peoples achieve their full potentials by promoting sustainable development and improving quality of life premised on the principles of the United Nations. Arising from the summit is the recognition of ICT as a panacea for sustainable development, hence the evolvement of the concept of e-Government, e-Democracy, e-Policing, e-Health, e-Learning, etc. as contained in the eight (8) developmental goals called the millennium development goals (MDGs), with the overall objective of reducing poverty by 50% by the year 2015 (UNDP, 2000).

Information Technology for Development (IT4D) is defined as the implementation, use and management of IT infrastructures to stimulate social and economic development (Qureshi, 2007). IT offers access to information and expertise; it enhances competitiveness and access to markets; it enhances administrative efficiency; it enhances labour productivity and learning; and it is a veritable tool for poverty eradication.

e-Government refers to the use of information and communications technology in public administration combined with organizational change and new skills to improve public services and democratic processes and to strengthen support for public policies (Vassilios, 2004). ICT has been adopted in Europe, particularly at all levels of administration as a veritable tool for modernising public services, re-engineering administrative processes and empowering the citizens.

Agunloye (2004) presented e-Government as an interaction between citizens, businesses and organizations, government ministries and all the tiers of government. Thus, as against traditional governance in the developing world, that is characterized by hunger, war, poverty, sickness, ethnicity and oppression as well as unemployment, using ICT powered government would lead to transparency, accountability and efficiency in governance in order to deliver better services and wealth for the general well-being of the citizens. e-Government is seen as a route to better governance as it is open and transparent, and an enabler for participatory democracy; it is service-oriented, and it provides personalised and inclusive services to every citizen; and it is a panacea for enhanced productivity and better utilization of the taxpayers' money.

Achieving the MDGs is a herculean task for most nations, particularly, the developing ones. For some years now, Africa has remained at the bottom of the table of the annual UN global e-Government readiness report (UN, 2005).

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