EMPLOYMENT GENERATION THROUGH ICT: A CASE STUDY OF DELTA STATE OF NIGERIA ICT PARKS PROJECT

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Abstract

Statistically, Nigeria has a youth population of about 67 million, aged between 15 and 35 years. 42.2% of these young people are not gainfully employed while only 20% have more than the secondary school certificate. In order to bridge this gap, the Delta State Government developed the Delta ICT parks, a growing 21st century business, service and technology facility equipped to train, educate and encourage an entrepreneurial culture with sound human resource, that would drive development of an ICT knowledge based economy. This initiative, borne out of the Delta beyond oil is already in steady progress, enjoying the partnership of System Application Product (SAP) under the platform of Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA) that portends a global IT based future. The objective of this paper is to access the level of implementation and publicity, skill acquisition and degree of the impact of the initiative on employment generation in Delta State. The study, which adopted a survey design, applied three research questions and used oral interview and a Millennium Park Entrepreneurial Assessment Questionnaire (MPEAQ). The content validity was validated by experts from Entrepreneurial Skills Development and Human Resources Management of Delta State Polytechnic Ogwashi-Uku (DESPOG) with a test, re-test reliability coefficient of 0.82. A Sample of 350 was drawn using stratified random sampling technique from an undeterminable growing population comprising of secondary, tertiary education students, trainees and graduates of the programme. The simple percentage was used for data analysis. The findings revealed the need for the establishment of ICT parks with adequate awareness campaign. Also, that ICT skill acquisition is a panacea for employment generation in most societies. Recommendations were made based on findings on this model of employment generation through ICT in Delta State of Nigeria.****

Keywords: ICTs, Employment Generation, Millennium Park

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1 Introduction & Background

Any nation that is knowledgeable and skilled enough to influence positively the technological, industrial, educational, agricultural and other important sectors of the economy is classified as a developed Nation (UNDP, 2001). To achieve these feats, the youths of such nation must be given right type of education through training which will enable them to be self-employed or employers of labour after their graduation.

Nigeria, despite the enormous wealth and the recent rebasing of her economy as the largest in Africa ahead of South Africa, is still poor with limited overall development. World Bank (2007) as cited by Olaniyi (2009) indicates that two-thirds of the Nigerian population is poor. Poverty rate as a result of unemployment rose from 27% - 70% between 1980 and 1990. In Nigeria, unemployment is a major problem of the country essentially because of over dependency on oil, Government jobs, insecurity, high inflation rate and corruption, insurgency, among others. The Federal Government realized that without tackling this problem, realizing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will become a mirage. Similarly, with the global trend in Information, Communication Technology, platforms where set with such programme as Youth Economic Advancement Programme (YEAP), National Economic Empowerment Development Strategies (NEEDS), State Economic Empowerment & Development Strategies (SEEDS), YOU-WIN and other ICT initiatives were set up to leverage and fill the gaps created by the unemployment situation. This allows Governments at various levels to key in and develop a workforce driven by ICT for employment generation in a 21st century world. Delta State, rich in oil mineral deposits, situated in Nigeria's south- south

geographical region, with multiple ethnic groups came up with the ICT park project to meet this critical need through its Youths Empowerment Initiative Programme. The initiative was carried out with a mission to harness the production potential of youths in Delta State, in order create an era of rapid, sustainable, social and economic development that will transform the state into the most peaceful, ICT and industrialized state in Nigeria (Ofuani,2013). The objective of this initiative of the Delta State Government includes: Developing a platform that will re-orient youths across the state on opportunities to be employed or an employer through education, training and development in ICT; Creating an environment for training on skill acquisition opportunities through ICT in small scale entrepreneurship; and Promote private sector participation for societal development (Chambers, 2002).

The proponents believe that this platform would help to curb youth unrest, and bolster economic empowerment and development. This was indeed the rationale behind the establishment of the Millennium Park in the Central and Northern Senatorial districts of Warri and Asaba, respectively in Delta State. The establishment of these Millennium Parks has positive effect on the youth empowerment and economic development of the state.

The youths are vibrant, energetic, creative and have the potential to play significant roles in economic development, and, the development of ICT is important in stimulating youths in SME's to complete favourably and effectively as a way of fighting poverty through job and wealth creation (Adebola, 2013).

2 Theoretical Framework

ICT Parks& Employment Generation

For this study, ICT is defined as the integration and utilization of computer technologies for the purpose of disseminating information to a target destination or consumer without the constraint of time and space (Adekomi, 2004). Operationally, ICTs comprise digital devices either in the forms of hard-wares or software for transferring information. The millennium parks intervention of the Delta State Government is to basically provide necessary knowledge and skill acquisition for youths after completion of the training. Trainees would be provided with a support base to fit into the society. The ICT Park, a pet project of Delta state government, was born out of the state's human capital development policy. The park, which is equipped with modern state- of- the art facilities was designed to train young Deltans in acquiring various computer and vocational skills through training that will prepare them for Compu-life and ultimately achieve the desired private sector driven economy of international standards. The overall idea is to harness the positive qualities, talents of young and talented

Deltans with these ingenuities and change them from jobs seekers to employers of labour in the country. For instance, Bill Gates a leading Computer expert in the world today, built an empire in real value terms that has translated into the annual budgets of over sixteen African countries (Ofuani, 2014)

Sesan (2004) stated that in developing countries, there is an astronomic increase on unemployment. He was of the opinion that from 2010 onwards, over 700 million youths will enter the labour market in Nigeria. However, this initiative of the Government of Delta State allows for the training of youths with both secondary and tertiary educational backgrounds to be trained for self-sustenance, economic empowerment and development. The Delta State Government ICT Millennium Parks, which is a 21st Century business, science and technology Park was designed to encourage an entrepreneurial culture and the development of knowledge based industry, as a major ICT hub in the whole of West Africa sub-region. This Park was borne out of "Delta Beyond Oil" initiative with income generation capacity of one billion dollars annually (Ofili, 2012).

Modern Information and Communication Technology in Nigeria

Information and communication Technology (ICT) initiative in Nigeria dates back to when the Nigerian Communications commission (NCC) was established by Decree 75 of 1992. The Commissions main objectives are the following:

- Creating a regulatory environment to facilitate the supply of telecommunication services and facilities;
- Facilitating the entry of private entrepreneurs into the telecommunication market; and
- Promoting fair competition and an efficient market conduct among all players in the industry.

A look at the communication system since 1992 till date reveals a slow development in the communication industry with its enormous potentials. This had lead government into other projects that will make information communication services more accessible efficient and affordable (Arzika, 2000).

Despite the laudable efforts by government, Nigeria lags behind in the race to become a digital society. The 'digital divide' has made it near impossible to empower our youth, women and rural communities. According to the free encyclopedia, Wikipedia (2005), the term 'digital divides' refers to gaps that exist between groups regarding their ability to use ICTS effectively, due to deferring levels of literacy and technical skills, as well as the gap between those that have access to quality, useful digital content and those who have adequate access to information and communication technologies such as computers and the internet and those who have limited or no access need to be bridged so that Nigeria can

harness the potential of these technologies (OECD, 2000).

Currently, ICT is literally putting smiles on faces in most countries. Individuals, organizations, nations, people and groups are applying ICT in processes and in their everyday life. Some economies have improved greatly while others are yet to appreciate the valid potentials of the new phenomenon (Laswell, 1948).

ICT offers a lot of gains to a country's economy and society. Efforts by governments, enterprises, civil society organizations and citizens to capture these benefits can produce significant employment opportunities for young people with requisite ICT skills and competencies (NEPAD, 2002).

Basically, a self-sustaining economic environment would be normally achieved with employment generation through ICT especially in the face of dwindling oil revenue and double digit inflationary rate of our country presently. These benefits can also extend from improvement in the production of goods and services through more efficient processes and higher quality output. More importantly, the potential gain is in the benefits for civil society and poverty reduction. This according to Curtain (2001) can come from the application of ICT to improving the lives of citizen in general and less privileged or poorest in particular. These opportunities apply to not only offering new or improved opportunities to earn income, they also relate to better information about and access to government funded service like the millennium ICT parks. Cecchini (2003) identifies three priority areas in which ICT potential could be harnessed for the reduction of poverty, namely opportunity, empowerment and security. Opportunity makes markets work better for the poor and expands poor people's assets. Empowerment makes government institutions work better for the poor and removes social barriers. Security helps poor people manager risk. ICT infrastructure such as internet, radio, television, enables the relay of education to isolated rural area. Another major benefit accruing from these ICT millennium packs is that it offers talent related job placement in exchange for the over stretched public service employment or other agencies (Bawden, 2001).

Structural transformation

Africa's recent growth has not been job-rich. More progress can be achieved if concerted efforts are made to add value through ICT aggressive industrialization drive that generates employment opportunities for a large majority of the workforce. A more diversified economic structure will also be critical in strengthening African's resilience to economic, social and human development. These will create opportunities for good and decent jobs and secure livelihoods, reduce poverty and inequality. When people escape from poverty, it is most often by joining the middle class, but to do so, they will need that training and skill through education to be successful in the job market and respond to demands by business for more workers (World Bank , 2007).

3 Problem Statement

The level of unemployment across Delta State and Nigeria was put at over 70%, National Directorate of Employment (NDE, 2009). Olaniyi (2009) expressed the fact that youth unemployment has caused a lot of problems in Nigeria. The Niger-Delta militancy, kidnapping, armed robbery, oil theft, insurgency and internet frauds, which is rampant amongst youths in Nigeria (Nigeria Punch September, 2008). Though various programmes have been put in place by State Governments but little or few results have been achieved.

In order to effectively address this problem, the following research questions are addressed:

What is the current level of ICT Parks awareness amongst youths in Delta State?

What are the levels of implementation of this training on skill acquisition of youths in Delta State?

What is the impact of the ICT Park skill acquisition on societal developments in Delta State?

4 Research Objectives

The objectives of the paper are:

To establish the current level of ICT Parks awareness amongst youths in Delta State.

To investigate the levels of implementation of ICT training on skill acquisition of youths in Delta State.

To establish the impact of the ICT Park skill acquisition on societal developments in Delta State.

5 Methodology

The study employed a survey research approach. The sample for the study consisted of 350 youths drawn from a population of youths who were involved in various levels of secondary and tertiary education, trainees and graduates in Delta State. They were selected through stratified sampling procedures based on location. Questionnaires and oral interview were developed by the researcher to collect information from the participants. The questionnaire was titled Millennium Park Entrepreneurial Assessment Questionnaire (MPEAQ). It solicited demographic information about sex, age, status, educational qualifications and localities.

6 Data Analysis

The data collected was analysed using the simple statistical percentage

Table 1. Demographic distribution of respondents

Sex	Number	Percentage
Male	250	71.4
Female	100	28.6
Total	**350**	**100**

Age	Number	Percentage
18-25	50	14.3
25-30	180	51.4
31-35	120	34.3
Total	**350**	**100**

Status	Number	Percentage
Graduates	160	45.7
Trainees	190	54.3
Total	**350**	**100**

Educational Qualifications	Number	Percentage
WASC/SSCE/NECO/GCE	45	12.86
NCE/OND/	190	54.28
B.Sc and above	115	32.86
Total	**350**	**100**

Location	Number	Percentage
Rural	105	30
Urban	245	70
Total	**350**	**100**

7 Discussion of findings

The respondent distribution sets above, showed the demographic distributions of sex, age, status, educational qualifications and location of the respondents. The sex distribution comprises of male and female with populations of 250 and 35, which represent percentages of 71.4% and 28.6% respectively. The age distribution had clusters of between 18-25, 25-30 and 31-35, with a populations of 50, 180 and 120 respectively (which represent 14.3%, 51.4% and 34.3% respectively).The categories had a population of 160 and 190 for trainees and graduates distributions (with percentages of 45.7% and 54.3% respectively). Educational qualifications also had basic secondary school certificates of 45, NCE/OND of 190, B.Sc and above of 115, which is 12.86%, 54.28% and 32.86% respectively. Finally, the location had 245 and 105 population for urban and rural involvement with 70% and 35% respectively.

Awareness level of ICT in Delta State

A total of 340 respondents with a percentage of 97% identified the fact there are two existing ICT millennium parks in Delta State in two senatorial districts of central and north respectively, located in the cities of Warri and Asaba. Evidently, it goes to show that the level of publicity is high with increased enrolment through internet, school and other sources. This gave room for easy access and large turnout of youths into the programme. More so, the public knowledge was high because the various media, namely social, print and electronic was effectively utilised for publicity across the state. Remarkably, it was noticed in the increase in enrolments between urban and rural youths.

Level of implementation of ICT programmes in Delta state

A total of 345 respondents representing 98% addressed the issues raised. This high response rate was attributable to the various types of training programmes available. In the sense that the programmes had full-time, part-time and weekend periods that allowed categories of Delta State indigenes to fit into any training session. Similarly, the involvement of schools, partnering the parks was an added advantage because results showed that schools engaged students in Work Training Schemes, exchange programmes visit and resource programmes

with the park as well as Industrial Training. The schemes gave a broader scope of involvement. Also, as a way of ensuring that appropriate skills are acquired, the duration of the programme was tied to the type of skills to be acquired with a spread from 3 months- 1year. The skills acquired ranged from business, operational, managerial, basic computer application packages, desktop publishing, networking, e-business skills, etc.

Impact of the ICT park skills acquisition on societal development

A total of 335 responses representing 96% responded to the issues raised. They revealed that this computer entrepreneurial training had a major pragmatic value shift in the society. It goes to show that the various government support schemes on graduation through engagements into related ventures and provision of take-off grant/incentives where a major boost. This initiative have succeeded in removing a lot of government job seekers from the streets, improved such services as e-registration, cyber-cafes among others in the society. Moreover, findings revealed that most of the graduates of this programme had an increase sense of belonging in the society, increased number of workers over time. Tertiary education graduates can also undertake their mandatory National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), which is a one year programme on primary assignments. These graduates lived their dreams of gaining employment with a mind-set that the state provides equal opportunities irrespective of place, status, class, creed or religion.

Challenges of ICT in Nigeria

The peculiarity of the country's pace of development has left some major challenges that affect the growth and development of ICT. These challenges as also hinted by the interviewee are summarised below:

Poor electricity supply: Inadequate power supply has been identified as a major challenge militating against the growth and development of information and communication technology in Nigeria. Regrettably the current democratic government has partially privatized the power holding parastatal of Nigeria with various power stations under construction. But the megawatts generated are yet to be felt by the average Nigerian. In most parts of the country, not even a kilowatt gets to households for domestic consumption as electricity penetration was 50.3% in 2012 (e-learning report, 2014).

Poor Global System Mobile (GSM) outreach: Accessibility to GSM is on the increase in Nigeria. As evidenced in the recent rebasing where Nigeria is rated as the largest economy in Africa and limiting broadband growth can negatively affect employment opportunities. However, some of the interviewees noted that the GSM outreach is yet to hit its peak where all nooks and carnies of the country are

connected. It creates a vacuum where access to internet crannies usually affects the smooth flow of information especially were internet users and penetration was 48,366,179 and 32.9% in 2012 (e-learning, report, 2014).

High cost of Internet Connectivity: Most of the interviewees indicated high cost of internet connectivity as a major challenge. Due largely to poor electricity supply, GSM connectivity and policy implementations access to internet in Nigeria is still very high. ICT service exports 4.4% and mobile subscription 68 per 100 in 2012 (e-learning, report, 2014). Most households, individuals, institutions, organization pay so much to be connected in order to be part of the fast growing global village.

Weak government policies and programmes: The federal government of Nigeria today is yet to develop a master plan in her economic roadmap towards globalization that will promote the full integration, of young entrepreneur into the business world. This was also alluded to by the interviewees. Though such programmes like You Win", have been introduced by the previous administration, it is yet to impact on the economic development of Nigeria.

Recommendation

From the above challenges, the following recommendations are proposed:
- Government should create and sustain a policy of full privatization of the power sector to sustain such ICT parks
- The policy of full connectivity should be enforced by the regulatory agency, namely Nigeria communications commission
- Government should put in place policies that would encourage and subsidize internet access cost in the country
- Policies and programs of government should be matched by appropriate constitutional penalties on default.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can said that the Delta ICT millennium Park initiative for employment generation is a laudable model which can be successfully implemented to become a great platform for job creation and the recreation of entrepreneurial spirit and skills, that is necessary for self-sustaining economy.

ICT has become a key factor in economic development in most developing countries. In employment generation, stakeholders should strive towards this youth societal and global empowerment which would reduce poverty and crime rate across the country. Today's youth are well positioned to capitalize on their familiarity with ICT to generate a win – win opportunities along ICT value chain that will also bring about the opportunity for youths to

come up with solutions without relying on government.

Young professionals in ICT should also be encouraged and positioned in a way to build upon previous research, fill critical gaps and respond to real gaps confronting unemployment challenges in the country.

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