DIGITAL INCLUSION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the paper was to explore the impact of Digital inclusion on sustainable development in Nigeria.

Design/Methodology/Approach: Exploratory design was adopted for the study in which qualitative data was obtained through in-depth review of relevant literature and the researcher's personal observation of the scenario.

Findings: Findings revealed that the poor state of Nigeria's economy is a factor that is responsible for digital exclusion and digital illiteracy in Nigeria; digital inclusion is impacting on sustainable development in Nigeria to a low extent; the state of infrastructures such as ICTs and digital literacy skills is a serious impediment to digital inclusion in Nigeria; inadequate funding of libraries in Nigeria is affecting provision of ICTs and encouraging digital illiteracy, library services are very significant in digital inclusion and sustainable development in Nigeria.

Practical Implication: Inadequate access to computer and internet connectivity could undermine digital inclusion and sustainable development in Nigeria.

Originality/Value: The paper recommended that: Federal and State Governments in Nigeria should show seriousness in addressing the infrastructural problems impeding digital inclusion and sustainable development in Nigeria by repositioning the institutional and legal frameworks that would ensure effective and efficient digital inclusion and sustainable development in Nigeria; Federal and State Governments in Nigeria should partner with the private sector in ensuring that the necessary infrastructures that will facilitate digital inclusion and sustainable development are provided; the private sector should assist public libraries with ICT facilities that will enable them acquire ICT literacy skills and enhance digital inclusion and sustainable development in Nigeria.

Key Words: Digital Inclusion; Sustainable Development; Nigeria; Issues; challenges.

Introduction

The United Nations (UN) member states and the UN General Assembly formally agreed in September 2015 on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and conceived a global agenda for development that is based on "economic prosperity, social inclusion and environmental sustainability" which is known as the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development (UN, Department. of Economic and Social Affairs, 2018; IFLA, 2019). In response to this development, the UN's Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development, which was established by International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in 2010 broached the idea of promoting development and empowerment of each and every individual and society through the benefit of broadband (UN Dept. of Econ. Affairs, 2018).

Since the creation of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, the Commission has been concerned with identifying the ways in which ICT can be applied in the execution of the 17 sustainable Development Goals and 167 indicators to measure their progress (IFLA, 2019). The underlying rational for such ICT and development initiatives, according to UN Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development is "the expanding body of literature on the correlation between ICT and economic growth and its potentials in poverty alleviation that has emerged since the World Summit on the Information Society a decade ago with the rise of the information society and knowledge economy in the G8 Agenda (UN

Department of Economic Affairs, 2018). International Federation of Library Association (IFLA) (2017) have also keyed into this laudable programme by displaying its relevance in the UN 2030 Agenda. In solidarity with the UN, it stated that "The UN 2030 Agenda is a political commitment, which means that everyone, including libraries and civil society, will have a vital role to play in making sure governments are accountable for implementing the SDGs". This statement implies that libraries in Nigeria have a role in ensuring the success of the implementation of the SDGs.

Sustainable Development is a concept that projects the image of a nation among the comity of nations in the world. It determines the extent to which a country is concerned with solving survival needs of its citizens such as food, healthcare, poverty alleviation, education and a host of others. In this regard, nations must not only endeavour to satisfy the needs of the present generation but must plan to also solve those of future generations. To achieve this noble objective requires access to information by all citizens of a nation. It is for this reason that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is considered relevant due to its propensity to disseminate information extensively and rapidly. This also explains why they are being applied in virtually every facet of human endeavour in a bid to fast-tract sustainable development in the society. Thus, Digital Inclusion (a concept that has emerged from ICT utilisation) has become a measuring device in determining the level of sustainable development of nations.

Nigeria is one of the developing nations of the world that has keyed into the SDGs Agenda in its bid to ensure the wellbeing of its citizens and the socio-economic growth of the country. However, the question that comes to mind is, to what extent has Nigeria embraced digital inclusion in sustaining its developmental efforts? Is digital inclusion making any impact on the country's sustainable development? what is the role of libraries in digital inclusion and sustainable development in Nigeria? This paper is an attempt to provide answers to these questions and a few others.

Aim

The aim of this paper is to explore the impact of Digital Inclusion on sustainable development in Nigeria.

Objectives

The objectives of the paper are as follows:

i.   To examine the nature of Digital Inclusion and Sustainable Development in Nigeria.

ii. To assess the impact of Digital Inclusion on Sustainable Development in Nigeria.

iii. To identify the issues and challenges of Digital Inclusion and Sustainable Development in Nigeria.

iv. To determine the role of Libraries in Digital Inclusion and Sustainable Development in Nigeria.

v.   To proffer strategies that would enhance Digital Inclusion and Sustainable Development in Nigeria.

Methodology

The paper adopted the exploratory research design in which qualitative data was obtained through in-depth review of relevant literature and the researcher's personal observation of the scenario.

Conceptual Clarification

Digital Inclusion

There are numerous descriptions of Digital Inclusion. Some scholars posit that to understand Digital Inclusion, one has to first know what digital divide is. This is due to the fact that ICT has affected all facets of human endeavour. According to Ifijeh, Iwu-James and Adebayo (2017) the ability to possess and apply ICT in our daily activities is critical and this is used to determine the level of a country's sustainable development and its status among all other nations. They further stated that it is this disparity that has resulted in the term "digital divide". Digital Inclusion therefore is the ability of individuals and groups to access information and communication technologies. Digital Inclusion does not only involve access to internet but also availability of hardware and

software, relevant content and services; and training for digital literacy skills required for effective use of information and communication technologies (Reder, 2015 cited in Iji and Abah, 2019). Generally, definitions of digital inclusion usually entail areas of access to computers and the Internet.

Sustainable Development

Sustainable Development has been described in many forms. Udoudoh et al (2019) opined that sustainable development is "ability to make development sustainable, that is to ensure that it meet the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". Adejumo and Adejumo (2014, cited in Udoudoh et al, 2019) captured sustainable development as being all about resource exploitation at a rate that would not be detrimental to future generations. A concise and lucid version of sustainable development is that further given by Udoudoh et al (2019),that is "not using up resources faster than the planet can replenish or restock – maintaining better quality of life now and for incoming generations to come".

Discussions

Nature of Digital Inclusion and Sustainable Development in Nigeria

The Predecessor of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) being Millennium Development goals (MDGs) was introduced in year 2000 by the United nations (UN) to address the issue of sustainability in development globally. Consequently, eight goals were outlined with the intention of achieving them by 2015. The goals addressed issues to do with poverty and hunger eradication, achievement of universal primary education, promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women, reduction of child mortality, improvement of maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases, ensuring environmental sustainability and develop a global partnership for development (Ifijeh, Iwu-James and Adebayo, 2016; Gillword, 2017; Odoudoh, Omame and Adamu, 2019).

However, the UN did notice by 2015 that many developing countries (Nigeria inclusive) were far from realising the MDGs. It was this scenario that led the UN to summon another meeting of the 189 member countries in 2015 and adopted the 2030 Agenda of a set of 17 sustainable goals that is meant to end poverty, fight inequality and injustice and tackle poverty (Ifijeh, Iwu-James and Adebayo, 2017; Odoudoh, Omame and Adamu, 2019).

A prerequisite for achieving sustainable development was prescribed by the UN in which member countries were implored to ensure full participation of their citizens in development programmes and strengthen the capacity of citizens to access and utilise timely information. This in turn informed the application of ICTs in information generation, processing and dissemination in the 21st Century, meant to facilitate the achievement of the SDGs (Ifijeh, Iwu-James and Adebayo, 2016).

Be that as it may, the nature of Digital Inclusion and Sustainable Development in Nigeria leaves much to be desired. Albeit there areinstitutional frameworks on ground that are meant to facilitate the attainment of the SDGs, their functionality and efficacy cast doubts on their ability and capacity to help in achieving the SDGs. The Nigeria Communication Commission (NCC), National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA), Federal Ministry of Information and Culture and a host of others are not performing up to expectation. Adejumo and Adejujumo (2014) cited in Udoudoh, Omame and Adamu (2019) observed that, changes in the integrated approach, to social, economic and environmental issues have not really facilitated the development goals in Nigeria. The authors confirmed that problems such as low per capita income, inequitable distribution of homes, low capital formation, inefficiency in the mobilisation of resources, overdependence on a single commodity (oil) as a major source of income, unemployment, inflation, flooding, ethnicity, environmental pollution, corruption and lopsided income distribution have always been on the increase. The most recent, according to the scholars is economic recession in the country, which has worsened and continue to worsen the economic situation of the masses in terms of general increase in prices and quality of goods. This narration appears to be the nature of digital inclusion and sustainable development in

Nigeria presently. It is perhaps for this reason that the Federal Government of Nigeria established the Ministry of Communication and Digital Economy in 2019, which is meant to create the desired digital awarenessand encourage digital literacy among its citizenry. This in turn is likely to foster the development of a digital economy in the country.

Impact of Digital Inclusion on Sustainable Development in Nigeria

Given the poor state of digital inclusiveness in Nigeria, the sustainability of its development becomes questionable. This is due to the apparent inadequacy of essential infrastructure that would drive sustainable development. Critical infrastructure such as ICTs and digital literacy skills are grossly inadequate. Jaryesimi (2006) supports this assertion when he said: "The implementation of SDG goals can be very challenging, especially for countries that are faced with serious infrastructural problems". Lamenting further on this situation, Ifijeh, Uwu-James and Adebayo (2016) stated that "Sustainable development will remain a mirage in any country whose citizens cannot effectively and efficiently deploy the use of ICTs to access and utilise quality information". Apparently, this statement reflects the true scenario in Nigeria. It can therefore be deduced from the foregoing that digital inclusion is impacting on sustainable development in Nigeria to a low extent.

Issues and Challenges of Digital Inclusion and Sustainable Development in   Nigeria

The issues and challenges of Digital Inclusion and sustainable development in Nigeria are many. Some of these include:

Affordability

Ifijeh, Uwu-James and Adebayo (2016) indicated that cost of ICT services is a major barrier to effective use of internet and broadband. They averred that, majority of those who access internets do so through mobile devices such as smart phones and tablets. Citing a survey on availability of internet in Nigeria (2014), Ifijeh, Uwu-James and Adebayo reported that 70% of the respondents who could not access internet services adduced this to the high cost of internet services. According to the report, as cited by Ifijeh, Uwu-James and Adebayo "only

3.4% of households or 747.025% have internet connectivity, while 62% of internet users depended solely on their mobile phones for online access". Similarly, digital inclusion requires that citizens be digitally literate but in Nigeria, statistics show that 95% of Nigerians do not own a personal computer, yet sustainable development, which hinges on digital literacy and access to ICT facilities, is indispensable (Olufuye, 2018).

Literacy and Language Barrier

The literacy rate in Nigeria is 56.9% (Ifijeh, Uwu-James and Adebayo, 2016;Gilwold, 2017). The authors also lamented that one-third of the adult population in Nigeria still lack basic literacy and a considerable number can only speak and write in the local languages other than English; and because most ICT facilities are produced or configured in English, this category of the population is digitally excluded. From this researcher's observation, the emphasis should not be on literacy in general alone, but computer literacy needs to be thought simultaneously with literacy programmes that are conducted all over the country. This would enhance the acquisition of digital literacy.

Disparities in Urban and Rural Areas

The obvious differences in the availability of infrastructure in urban and rural areas are a hindrance to digital inclusion and sustainable development in Nigeria. Urban areas appear to have better infrastructure than rural areas. This results in the exodus of young people to urban areas in a bid to benefit from better infrastructures and services. A publication on "Trading Economics: Rural Population in Nigeria (2014, cited inIfijeh, Uwu-James and Adebayo, 2016) reported that 84% of urban dwellers have access to mobile phones, while only 58.5% of rural dwellers have access to mobile phones". They further stated that majority of phone owners in rural areas use them for making calls rather than for accessing the internet in searching for important information. This researcher, however observed that, some rural settlers who can afford data use their phones in accessing the internet and do other online transactions such as e – banking, e – commerce and a few others.

Lack of Digital Literacy

Lack of basic digital literacy has been considered to be a major setback to digital inclusion in Nigeria. Digital literacy, according to Ifijeh, Uwu-James and Adebayo (2016) "is the ability to identify, search and utilise required information in multiple formats from a wide range of sources presented through information and communication technologies". Current events show that ICTs are increasingly dominating our activities. Those that do not have access to internet and digitalised services have therefore been excluded from benefitting from the privileges offered by ICT facilities. This researcher also observed that, the wide publicity that is given to digital literacy and ICT over the media presently is gradually improving the situation of digital illiteracy in the country.

Cybercrimes

Cybercrime have become rampant in the cyber space. Hackers are increasingly succeeding in hacking into personal and organisational files. Furthermore, this has resulted in crimes such as identity theft and exposure to hate sites. This development has resulted in reduction in the use of internet and online services by a portion of the population (Olufuye, 2018). This researcher observed that as more people become digitally literate, the rate of cybercrime will likely increase, especially among young people. This is due to the large number of unemployed youths that are turned out in our higher institutions of learning in the country every year, who are mostly digitally or ICT literate.

Libraries, Digital Inclusion and Sustainable Development in Nigeria

Libraries and Librarians/Information Scientists have a crucial role to play in bridging the digital divide and ensuring digital inclusion in the society. This can be achieved through effective dissemination of relevant information that would foster digital literacy. As IFLA (2017) rightly noted, "Libraries support many aspects of the UN 2030 Agenda's vision and the SDGs Libraries are key public institutions that have a vital role to play in development at every level of society" Furthermore, citing a survey on digital inclusion (2014), Ifijeh, Uwu-James and

Adebayo (2016) averred that "Libraries all over the world have renewed determination to support access to digital content, technology and services". In doing this, according to the scholars, digital content libraries must go beyond the level of acquisition to information and digital literacy, dissemination of information resources through various ICT media and training for students, teachers and other users of the library.

Academic Libraries

In ensuring digital inclusion and sustainable development in Nigeria, academic libraries should do the following:

i. Provide lessons in computer skills and technology training. This could be online or within the library.

ii. Enhance efforts of digitisation of library resources.

iii. Ensure the provision of digital content through mobile devices, social media, and virtual research environment.

iv. Support and encourage open publishing platforms, wikis, blogs, social media, citation tools, institutional technologies, data visualisation tools, etc.

v. Teach students and teachers how to navigate library catalogues and databases in order to search and find information.

vi. Teach users how to search and locate required information from internet platforms, such as search engines and data bases. Students need to learn about search engines and Bootees logic; they need to define concepts and key words; library users need to be able to critically evaluate resources relevant to their needs.

vii. Students should be taught how to use social media sites such as twitter, for research and for considering ways in which they can share, network and source for information.

viii. Students should be introduced to different types of digital resources and content.

ix. Students should be taught ways to be up to date with research findings in their

fields by visiting journal table of contents, which alerts one on recent updates on journals of their interest as soon as they are published.

x. Digital inclusion should be encouraged in students by teaching them the art of creating blogs in order to enable them discuss their research findings. This will encourage and build confidence in themselves and enhance their digital competence.

Public Libraries

Public libraries should do the following in their bid to encourage digital inclusion and sustainable development in Nigeria:

i. Offer free classes on internet use, teach access use skills that would impact the economic, social and cultural heritage of the people.

ii. Encourage basic computer skills in users.

iii. Provide information resources in various formats and guide in the proper use of the information resources.

iv. Provide free internet services and training for users.

v. Be part of any Digital Inclusion Initiatives; participate in programmes aimed at developing people with digital skills, as this would enable them satisfy their information needs and also enhance their capacity to contribute to sustainable development.

vi. Engage in awareness campaigns on the need for people to acquire basic digital literacy skills. This is due to the apparent migration of essential services to online platforms. Some of these essential services include: admission issues, drivers licence requests and renewals, pension's enquiries, etc (Ifijeh, Uwu-James and Adebayo, 2016; Adebayo, Ahmed and Adeniran, 2018).

Special Libraries – These libraries exist within organisations and serve the information needs of staff in the organisations. Special libraries should do the following in their attempts to encourage digital inclusion and sustainable development in Nigeria:

i. Provide information resources in digital format and encourage their use;

ii. Ensure regular provision of internet services;

iii. Organise ICT literacy skills acquisition programmes;

iv. Organise workshops, seminars, symposiums and the like on ICT/digital resources application in libraries;

v. Reward staff that display high competences in digital resources application in job performance.

Summary

The summary of major findings of this paper includes the following:

1. The nature of digital inclusion and sustainable development in Nigeria is not impressive.

2. The poor state of Nigeria's economy is a factor that is responsible for digital exclusion and digital illiteracy.

3. Digital inclusion is impacting on sustainable development in Nigeria to a low extent.

4. The state of infrastructures such as ICTs, and digital literacy skills is a serious impediment to digital inclusion in Nigeria.

5. The numerous challenges such as lack of access to internet, digital illiteracy, disparities in access to infrastructures in urban and rural areas, cybercrimes, etc are great obstacles to digital inclusion and sustainable development in Nigeria.

6. Inadequate funding of libraries in Nigeria is affecting provision of ICTs and fostering digital illiteracy.

7. Library services are very significant in digital inclusion and sustainable development in Nigeria.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to explore the impact of digital Inclusion on sustainable development in Nigeria. It first gave a generic scenario of digital inclusion and sustainable development from the perspectives of the UN and other international organisations. Attempt was then made to discuss the topic based on the

objectives stated in the paper. It highlighted the summary of major findings and concludes that the state of digital inclusion and sustainable development in Nigeria leaves much to be desired, and if Nigeria is to make meaningful headway in this direction, the public and private sectors of the economy must go into partnership in ensuring that all the necessary infrastructures that will facilitate digital inclusion and sustainable development in Nigeria are provided.

Strategies for Digital Inclusion

In view of the findings in this paper, the following strategies are proffered:

i. The Federal and State Governments of Nigeria should show seriousness in addressing the infrastructural problems impeding digital inclusion and sustainable development by repositioning the institutional and legal frameworks that would ensure effective and efficient digital inclusion and sustainable development in Nigeria.

ii. The Federal and State Governments of Nigeria should partner with the private sector in ensuring that the necessary infrastructures that will facilitate digital inclusion and sustainable development are provided.

iii. The Federal and State Governments of Nigeria should establish a Special Fund for Public Libraries in the country to enable them procure the necessary infrastructure that would facilitate digital inclusion and sustainable development in Nigeria.

iv. TETFUND should encourage beneficiary institutions to give more attention to libraries in their domain in order to enable them acquire the necessary facilities that will encourage or enhance digital inclusion and sustainable development in Nigeria.

v. The Private Sector should assist State Governments in the provision of infrastructures that will enhance digital inclusion and sustainable development in Nigeria.

vi. The Private Sector should assist public libraries in acquiring the necessary facilities that will enable them promote digital literacy and sustainable development in Nigeria.

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