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Sharing Knowledge Through Networking for the Attainment of Nigeria Vision 20:2020

KEYWORDS: Vision 20: 2020, knowledge – sharing, Service delivery, Special education, Networking, ICT.

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ABSTRACT *Nigeria Vision 20: 2020 is a ten – year economic transformation blueprint for stimulating Nigeria's economic growth, and launching the country onto sustained and rapid economic growth to become one of the top twenty countries by 2020. Knowledge – networking for informed modern development processes offers a means of achieving Vision 20: 2020. Use of the internet in the storage, retrieval and disseminations of information has led to innovative collaboration and far – reaching development processes in developing economies. Yet there is still enormous gap between developed and developing economies which needs to be bridged through networking and information sharing. In Nigeria, information and communication technology (ICT) network is speedily changing the way Nigerians are doing things through informed policy formulation and offering a wider range of opportunity for businesses. The role of the ICT, can play in knowledge – sharing and networking in various development processes and opportunities was discussed. The paper advocated greater provision of internet access and wider service delivery system for more participatory approaches in development processes for both learners with and without disabilities.*

INTRODUCTION

We live in a knowledge-based world primarily shaped by modern science and technology. In the present world economy, knowledge has become a key resource and is very vital for the development and growth of the society. Knowledge-based on information will increasingly serve as the driving force for enhanced productivity, economic growth and performance. Knowledge for development is regarded as integrating into development programs the ability of beneficiaries to access, utilize, and disseminate information and knowledge. Information exchange is therefore an essential component for sustainable development (Norris, 2001).

The current explosion in Internet and other interactive technologies have led to a paradigm shift leading to the new scenario in the storage, retrieval, handling, and dissemination of information even to the remotest part of the world. Blake (1993) observed the growing acceptance of these technologies by wide segments of the society as integral mechanisms through which they communicate, collaborate and conduct their business, paves the way for innovative, challenging and far-reaching development process. The last decade and a half has witnessed a remarkable increase in the use of new information technologies, some of which have made good inroad in the developing economy like Nigeria. However, information gap is still widening. Networking is thought to be a veritable means for stemming the information gap.

All types of relevant knowledge for the corporate survival and success of all organization in Nigeria can be accessed and shared through networking in all the sectors of the economy. There is a need to take advantage of the current advances in ICT which has reduced the entire world into a virtual village. The current paper therefore focuses on sharing knowledge through networking in realizing the Nigeria Vision 20: 2020.

Knowledge-Based Networking

Networking for knowledge rests on a strong belief that individuals with and without disabilities have knowledge and expertise which need to be synergized with the existing information from colleagues, for decision-making and initiating judicious action. Knowledge exchange bridges the gap between communities and amongst development professionals and diverse rural people. Clark (2003) observed that the interactive character of digital networks gives the users of these technologies a place they did not have before. They are no longer passive in the face of information, since they continually sort it. Benefits include more efficient and targeted development intervention, less duplication of activities, low communication costs and wide access to information and human resources.

Networking implies that knowledge is acquired not just by creation but also by transfer and swapping of knowledge existing elsewhere. Networking leads to knowledge sharing of information, building up awareness among the change agents and encourages informed and active community and individual decisions and actions. Woods (1993) posited that knowledge networking holds the prospect for accelerated introduction of state-of-the-art technologies superseding the step-by-step process of transferring know-how and technologies among users and processers of information. It also creates a mechanism which enables articulation and sharing of local knowledge with the potential for further enrichment of this information as it passes through the network users.

Why the Nigeria Vision 20:2020 Policy

Nigeria's Vision 20: 2020 policy is an economic transformation blueprint consisting of a ten year plan for stimulating Nigeria's economic growth and launching the country onto a path of sustained and rapid economic growth to become one of the top twenty economies by 2020. The vision is anchored on the Nigerian Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS II)). It has a social dimension of peaceful, equitable, harmonious and just society; an economic dimension of resilient, diversified and industrialized economy; and institutional dimension of a stable and functional democracy in a market friendly and globally competitive business environment with environmental consciousness and sustainability management goal (Igbuzor & Ake, 2009). Good decision making in Nigeria's policy space will be based on knowledge sharing and synergizing through net-working.

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Knowledge Networking and Nigeria VISION 20:2020

Information is critical to the social and economic activities that comprise the development process. Often pertinent information is available on issues concerning the developmental policies of government but access to such information is limited. This is due to lack of information services which can give appropriate and timely support. Knowledge-networking in such cases will enable millions of people with or without exceptionalities to become better informed about government policy on vision 2020 strategies and decision making processes.

Sharing knowledge by networking creates the challenge to attack vexing problems of poverty, inequality and environmental degradation, with potential to achieve unprecedented gains in economic and human development. Networking gives voice to the people thereby transforming them from mere information recipients to information providers and decision-makers. For instance, the Ministry of National Planning Commissions explained that "The Nigerian vision 2020 economic transformation blueprint was produced through an inclusive process, involving over 5,000 Nigerian," with close attention paid to the issue of leadership and governance challenges. (Usman, 2010). Nigerians, especially those with and without disabilities residing in the rural areas, may not be aware of the development plans of government due to lack of access to information. Networking strengthens the inherent link between information access, democracy, human rights, environmental protection and sustainable development by providing useful information for problem-solving. It enhances community participation and organizations developmental intervention in problem-solving and to improve the relationships between various stakeholders in development (Mohammed, 1999). It also breaks the boundary which confines the availability of information to a few by bringing together governmental and non-governmental organizations, researchers, business and industrial establishments in a network for information exchange.

According to Blake (1993) knowledge-networking needs not be confined within the closed boundaries of information flows but has the potential to evolve as in an alternative institutional model for development promotion. Networking for influencing decision making provides strength to democracy as it enables the policy-making mechanism to continue right down the roots of the nation without being confined by the bureaucratic strait jacket of more formal institutions. Simultaneously, it builds upon institutional memory of past successes and failures to guide towards a more targeted and pragmatic approach to current and emerging challenges concerning Vision 2020 strategy.

Sharing Knowledge by Networking using ICT as a Tool

The emergence and convergence of Information and Communication Technologies are at the center of global social and economic development, and are becoming indispensable to realizing the global information and the global knowledge society (Rogers, 1966). Advances in ICTs applications in digitized network and networking in the 21st century have made information access, retrieval and dissemination much easier and available, irrespective of the location, time, package and user. Access to a range of information and communication technologies provides people with knowledge that empowers them for national development. The term Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) encompasses all converging technologies that carry information, which include traditional telecommunications, informatics, broadcasting (radio and TV), cable television, multimedia Internet, Geographic Information Systems, etc. Information and Communication Technologies offer new ways of providing access to information and knowledge, and thereby create significant opportunities for learning; networking, social organization and participation; and improving transparency and accountability (Canada International Development Agency, 2009). The United Nations Development Programme (1999) on Human Development Reports indicated that, "The past decade has proven the tremendous potential of global communications to provide information, enable empowerment and raise productivity. Thus, information and communication technologies are now a standard operating tool in today's information society, and the information ICTs carry is increasingly becoming an important factor of production.

The new technologies and the free circulation of information and ideas constitute precious instruments for drawing public awareness to the great causes of the twenty-first century. For instance, Tuomi (2004) reported that in January 2005, just after the lethal tsunami that devastated the coasts of South Asia, South-East Asia, the Maldives and East Africa on 26 December 2004, an important part of the funds collected in industrialized countries, in a vast campaign of international solidarity with the devastated regions, arrived electronically, on the internet websites of the main organizations taking part in the campaign (the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Red Cross, Doctors without borders, etc.). The internet also helped some families of children with disabilities seek advocacy information from philanthropic organizations.

The new technologies can also play an important role in the fight against the HIV/AIDS pandemic, not only because they provide for new solutions that facilitate screening and research, but also because they make possible world campaigns meant to sensitize the populations exposed to preventive practices. The Global Initiative on HIV/AIDS Prevention Education launched by UNESCO and the other co-sponsors of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) in March 2004 – and meant to complete the "3 by 5" initiative by UNAIDS and the World Health Organization (WHO) – is based on the constitution of a solidarity network of prevention education that aims at clarifying the link between treatment and prevention. The new technologies thus allow adapting the message and to mobilize at all levels, so as to change behaviours, to support people living with HIV and to limit the impact of the pandemic.

Today in Nigeria, despite the adverse consequences of inadequate infrastructure of the general wellbeing of the masses, ICT is speedily changing the way Nigerians are doing things. The commencement of mobile telephony in the country has changed the way things are being done to a large extent. The liberalization of the telecoms landscape actually laid the foundation for the establishment of new media technologies currently being enjoyed by Nigerians. But the fact still remains that majority of the people particularly those with disabilities in the rural dwellings, have no access to ICT facilities due to lack of steady electricity supply in the local communities where majority of the citizens reside and where poverty prevails. Base on this, the president of Information Technology of Nigeria (ITAN), Olufuye (2010) advised the Federal Government to re-engineer Vision 20: 2020 to focus on creating "Digital Nigeria" (DN 2020), which will aid to bridge the digital divide gap and to achieve a digitally competitive Nigeria that would create an enabling environment for the citizenry to succeed and give room for rapid economic growth. He resolved that the purpose of ITAN was to galvanize support for Nigerian government of the vision of growing Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) thereby attaining the status of being one of the 20 largest economies in the world by the year 2020.

For Nigeria to realize a digital regime Nigeria to attain Vision 20: 2020 objectives according to Olufuye, there must be free and fair elections; there must be stable government at the Federal, State and Local government and there must be policy continuum for progressive development processes of the country. He suggested strategies for enhancing digital Nigeria, to include;

- Creating an Information Technology Public-Private Institution (ITPPI) with public and private investment to inde-

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pendently conduct and grow home based research, and propel development through all sectors of the economy;
- Connecting government ICT initiatives with the industry through the above in order to create more jobs and engender accelerated economic development desirous for the attainment of Digital Nigeria 2020 and promote industry cooperation and strengthening ICT industries through the sharing of knowledge, experience and critical information in Nigeria.
- Advocating public policies and legislation that advance the industry's growth and development;
- Facilitating trade and investment in ICT products and services;
- To build skilled digital capacities for Federal, State and local governments; and
- Increasing opportunities for networking and exchange of ideas among states and other stakeholders and publish national ICT research and statistics to track progress and provide veritable data for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).

According to Shirin, (1991) Information and Communication Technology (ICT) allows access to information worldwide, promotes networking that transcends borders, languages and cultures, fosters empowerment of communities and helps spread knowledge about 'best Practices' and experiences. As generic technologies, ICTs permeate and cut across all social institutions, perceptions and thought processes. Further, the new technology greatly facilitates the acquisition and absorption of knowledge, offering developing countries unprecedented opportunities to enhance educational systems, improve policy formation and execution, and widen the range of opportunities for business (World Bank, 1998).

The Role of Knowledge - Networking in the Development Process

Information and knowledge are among the resources acknowledged to be fundamental to the development process. According to Nath (2000) information is critical to the social and economic activities that comprise the development process. Knowledge-networking is required in such cases to enable millions of people to become better informed about decision-making processes in their countries, cities, villages and help local communities to improve their standard of living and the environment around them. Knowledge and information are therefore key factors in economic competitiveness and productivity, as well as in social and political development. This in essence means that information and knowledge empowers people and provides them with the opportunity to make their own informed choices as to what will work best for them. Rogers (1996) observed that developing nations are one of the last frontiers for the spread and application of information technology. Developing countries are still not fully equipped to benefit from information and communication technologies. Developing countries, especially the Least Developing Countries (LDCs) are unable to reap benefits in the information revolution, as they lack:

- Technologies and infrastructure to access information resources.
- Capacity to build, operate, manage and service the technologies involved.
- Trained workforce to develop, maintain and provide the value added products and services.
- Conductive policies that promote equitable public participation in the information society as both producers and consumers of information and knowledge.
- Absence of a replicable precedence of a successful ICT project.

Thus, developing country governments need greater guidance on how to deal with the potentials of information technologies, as infrastructure development and policy modifications are required to harness the fullest potential of information technologies in bringing about a sustained change in improving the quality of life of the people.

However, there is a felt need for the provision of infrastructure for knowledge creation, dissemination and use. This view was corroborated by Stiglitz (2005) in these words, that:

If the developing countries are really to be "in the drivers' seat" they

must have the capacity to analyze the often difficult economic issues

which they face. Local researchers, combining knowledge of local

conditions including knowledge of local political and social structures

with the learning derived from global experiences, are provided with the

best prospects for adapting policies which are both effective and enjoy a

broad-based support. That is why locally based research institutions are very important.

Knowledge for development is an extension of human capital theory that gives greater attention to institutions and infrastructure for knowledge, with communications technology being of central importance (World Bank, 2008).

Access to knowledge is made possible by Knowledge sharing, which is one of the effective means of disseminating information to the different departments of an organization, as well as the different sectors of the economy. Expertise exists in people, and much of this kind of knowledge is tacit rather than explicit. At its most basics, knowledge sharing is simply about transferring the dispersed know-how of organizational members more effectively. Knowledge sharing is based on the experiences gained internally and externally in the organization. Making this know-how available to other organizational members will eliminate or reduce duplication of efforts and form the basis for problem solving and decision-making (Colle, 2005).

The need to ensure and access all types of relevant knowledge for the corporate survival and success of all organization in a country has become more necessary than ever before in the 21st century. This is due to the impact of globalization in all sectors of the economy and more particularly due to continued advances in ICT which has reduced the entire world into a virtual village. Organizations with common interest and purpose need to collaborate cooperate and share the needed knowledge common to them to advance their performance and achieve their short and long term corporate goals and missions. Thus, by the use of Information and Communication Technologies, information and knowledge become effectively and efficiently shared amongst the different sectors of the economy for accelerated growth and development. Webb (1998) rightly noted that, "Although knowledge has always been present in organizations, and to some extent shared, this has been very much on an ad hoc basis. Until recently it was certainly not overtly managed or promoted as the key to organizational success". More emphasis should be placed on formalizing knowledge-sharing so as to build a more efficient knowledge-based economy. It is evident that Information and Communications Technologies are of fundamental importance for the 21st century. For every business striving for success should utilize the most up-to-date solutions; this is true because ICTs have been identified as crucial elements for developing countries, by integrating them into the international economy and therefore making global markets more accessible.

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Strengths of Knowledge Networks

By focusing on the improved use of information within a collaborative approach, people can broaden the scope of their actions and address issues previously beyond their capacity. Preston (1992) explained that knowledge networks based on information and communication technologies can involve more people hitherto unreached or underserviced and accomplish a deeper geographic penetration especially, to rural areas, than is the case with traditional means and modalities. Knowledge networks are instrumental in helping communities break from the narrow national and local outlooks and from the hegemony of governments and the large corporations. This according to Nath (2000) involves:

➢ **Greater Access and Control over Information:** There is no worse form of human rights violation than to be deprived of the ability to think, create and communicate in freedom. In this era of information revolution, people are having relatively easier access to vast store houses of information but it is tragic that the delivery mechanisms for knowledge are today in the hands of fewer and fewer people. People have very little control over what information is being communicated to them. Globalization has perpetuated in the information content being transmitted, often leaving more and more people out of the information loop which forms the roots of their culture and identity. They have lost the knowledge they had, and what has replaced it is not relevant. Ultimately the impact sublimely expands and erodes the traditional knowledge bases and indigenous processes best adapted to deal with local conditions. The end result is nothing short of loss of knowledge diversity.

➢ **Better Governance:** Citizens and consumers of government services now demand that the government be more open in their dealings. On the face of it, the core principles of a democratic set up are violated when people are excluded from the decision-making process and have little control over the process of their own development. People have the power in democracy and in this age where information is power, access to information by the people becomes the root to a thriving democracy. If all the information is stored digitally, it could easily be put into public domain enabling easier access by a cross-section of users. Indeed, a key element to better governance is to "democratize" people's knowledge and understanding of complex social, economic and welfare mechanisms and processes, and to "demystify" the political choices available to their elected representatives.

➢ **Empowered Civil Society:** Civil society has a crucial role to play as they can act as agents for social change by encouraging democracy through greater participation in decision-making processes. They are the force which can make politicians and elected representatives more accountable to the electoral democracy. Powerful Non-Governmental Organizations have forced the government to reverse or to take a second look at a proposed policy that may not impact positively on the citizenry. Strategic information empowers the civil society to influence decision making at the local levels through a variety of initiatives and activities. Today, a prime focus of a growing number of NGOs, civil society campaigners and advocacy coalitions is to address the loss of democratic control over the governments' economic, social and welfare policies. The movement is directed at giving individuals, local communities and regional groupings the chance to advocate policies which protect their welfare interests and promote better governance at all levels. The thrust is on creating spaces for decision-making within the existing governance mechanism that would be democratically informed by welfare and human rights principles, sustainability and social development objectives.

➢ **Effective Environmental Monitoring:** Environmental monitoring is often a data-intensive activity which relies heavily on cross-geographical, baseline and real-time data. Knowledge networking in such cases can provide data from the common pool, thereby reducing the risk of duplication of efforts. Combined with other tools and technology transfer processes, knowledge networking can then be effectively used for regional planning and framing of more effective environmental policies. For example, the forest survey maps produced by Forest Survey of India through remote-sensing proved to be very useful tool for monitoring the impact of current forest policies on forest degradation. Such survey maps are useful information in the public domain and provide common pool material for researchers and academicians to independently monitor the health of the forests.

➢ **Employment Creation:** Knowledge networking has the potential to create enormous job opportunities. Knowledge networking requires skilled and trained knowledge workers-such as web-designers, web-searchers, information scientists and researchers who can perform specific tasks of understanding, compiling, analyzing, providing value-addition and disseminating information. Personnel for low level white collar jobs would be got from places where there are skilled-knowledge workers available at competitive rates. Labor intensive jobs could be performed by knowledge workers from anywhere in the world by making use of information and communication technologies.

➢ **Integration into Mainstream Economy:** Integrating into the mainstream economy calls for producing goods and services to be globally competitive in terms of quality, prices and availability. Knowledge networking provides a platform for producers to assess the market demand for goods, its technical specifications and the prevailing prices in the market. This would enable them to tap export markets, produce competitive goods and carve a niche for themselves in the global markets.

➢ **Knowledge networking as an Industry in Itself:** Markets for information goods and services are young, growing and exceptionally mobile. In this dynamic situation, there are many opportunities and some successful models of creating knowledge based industries in developing countries such as Nigeria. These industries can provide products such as components and equipment, custom software provision or exported services. They can also help improve the information components of traditional products, which constitute fast growing aspects of many industries. For example, the skilled industry in India has been able to take advantage of its low-cost, highly skilled work force and the benefits of international communication links to become a major producer of software.

CONCLUSION

In African countries such as Nigeria where access to simple technologies is greatly skewed in favour of both the disabled and nondisabled, harnessing and spreading the potential of information and communication technologies for knowledge - based networking will continue to be a daunting challenge. Participation of the private sector in the creation, management and dissemination of strategic information and data pertaining to the various dimensions of development is essential. According to Nath (2000) information and communication technologies cannot be the ultimate answer and elixir to problems facing sustainable economic development, but it does bring new information resources but can open new communication channels for the marginalized citizenry. It offers a means for bridging the information gaps through initiating interaction and dialogue, creating new alliances, inter-personal networks, and cross-sectional links between organizations. He further observed that it can create mechanisms that enable the bottom-up articulation and sharing of knowledge. These benefits include increased efficiency in the allocation of resources for development work, obviate duplication of activities, reduce communication costs and enhance global access to information and human resources.

Networking can effectively facilitate sharing of knowledge.

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However, the degree to which people in developing countries such as Nigeria benefits from networking potentials to achieving Nigeria Vision 20: 2020 will depend on how much support the information-poor get to have access to the networking process and the strength of the complimentary human network. In view of this Usman (2010) explained that the new Vision 20: 2020 economic transformation blueprint was produced through an inclusive process, involving over 5, 000 Nigerians. Olufuye (2010) in collaboration posited that while Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) ranked 38 in the world according to 2008 World Bank estimate, should not be the end in itself, but gives opportunity to every citizen and advocate greater provision of internet access and wider service delivery system for more participatory approaches in development processes for both learners with and without disabilities by year 2020.

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