Chapter 8
Engendering Sustainable Development through the Adoption of Digital Publishing Innovations

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ABSTRACT

Access to information may have contributed to the yawning gap between Nigeria’s wealth in human and material resources and the level of development recorded. Sustainable development can be engendered through the adoption of digital publishing innovations by publishers in the dispensation of their corporate social responsibility often geared towards developing the total person in society. In Nigeria, available gadgets for accessing publications and processing information can be adopted to solve fundamental problems that hitherto plagued production and distribution of information resources. Since ICTs facilitate content development and dissemination, they can be employed for adequate supply of educational books, agric extension information in any language, access to and participation in political dialogues, materials for language learning, etc. Therefore, the publishing industry in Nigeria has at its disposal all that it needs to join the world of e-publishing and e-solutions. The central objective of this chapter, therefore, is to argue that Nigerian publishers are in the position to ensure sustainable development through digital publication and dissemination of information resources, even beyond their present educational books niche, to meet other unmet book and information needs. This is because e-books are easier to market and distribute, and e-payment eliminates transaction bottlenecks. Publishers, however, need the support of government through a viable book policy, stable curriculums, and provision of digital tools to schools; cooperation of and collaboration with the academia (or established material developers); and collaboration with mobile network owners (for effective dissemination).

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INTRODUCTION

Historically, development in diverse areas of human endeavour has been linked to printing and book publishing. Printing guarantees access to information and knowledge, providing individuals the resources for personal and national transformation. Thus, over the years, access to printed materials remained the most significant indicator of the knowledge gap between developed, developing and less developed countries. Similarly, there is an association between nations’ level of development and literacy levels and availability ratio of printed materials. The least developed countries also produce fewer books, are dependent on other countries for scholarship growth, and contribute little to intellectual development – enacting the knowledge gap.

Today, not only does the knowledge gap persist despite the digital bridge, but digital divide also exacerbates this gap. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) increasingly reduce the life span of knowledge, such that many books need to be revised after three years, a process also facilitated by ICTs. Thus, those who cannot consume and contribute to knowledge development at global speed are left behind on the one hand. On the other hand, ICTs are being used to facilitate development since they increase easy access to development information in diverse formats, effectively sideling the print where necessary, but importantly, increasing access through such avenue as print on demand (POD). Development in telephony is ensuring the “death of distance” in the “transport” of information, such that those in remote parts of the world can access information sent from any part of the world (James, 2004) in electronic devices.

“ICTs can be mainstreamed to address broader development challenges.” In making this assertion, Infodev (2009) takes for granted that people understand that ICTs provide access to information for sustainable development. This quality of ICTs commends them for tackling the problems that create 98% of greenhouse gas, even though ICTs contribute the rest 2%. According to a World Bank (and partners) document, among other components, ICTs facilitate knowledge creation and dissemination, by evaluating best practice techniques for climate change adaptation and by disseminating these widely, especially within the donor community and between regions. One aim of the programme will be to establish a knowledge map of digital adaptation strategies for coping with climate change. Dissemination of this knowledge will ensure that the benefits of the programme extend beyond the immediate beneficiaries. (http://www.infodev.org/en/TopicBackground.18.html#3).

The ubiquity of ICTs, notwithstanding, Nigeria is yet to become a major player in digital information creation and consumption, particularly as it relates to development, despite the preponderance of opportunities for access. This paper argues that the infrastructures needed for content development and dissemination by information producers are available and that the tools for consumption are already in use by consumers. Therefore, the book publishing industry, as a major information and knowledge provider, should embrace digital innovations to provide the nation the much needed information and knowledge resources that can ensure sustainable development.

BACKGROUND

Nigeria’s Readiness for Digital Publishing Innovation Adoption: From a broad perspective, the characteristics of information networking that was descriptive of developed countries a decade ago are being observed in Nigeria, to the effect that the number of households and students that have access to the Internet is on the rise, even as computers become more affordable. Moreover, development in mobile telephony and mobile