Chapter XV

ICTs as Tools for Poverty Reduction: The Tanzanian Experience

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Abstract

This chapter attempts to enhance the understanding and knowledge of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in relation to the Tanzania National ICT Policy as a case study. The authors extensively explore these pervading technologies as they impact on the education, commerce, social, cultural, and economic life of the poor Tanzanian people. The chapter looks at how Tanzania is coping with the issue of poverty eradication as one of the eight UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It addresses the issue of digital divide and the role that ICTs can play in poverty reduction. Tanzania’s efforts in embracing ICTs and the challenges facing the country in its efforts are also addressed. Overall, the chapter demonstrates that ICTs are a set of tools for knowledge sharing, which is a powerful means for poverty reduction. Furthermore, it is advisable to focus on information literacy rather than just focusing on computer literacy.
Introduction

In this chapter, an attempt has been made to enhance the understanding and knowledge of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in relation to the Tanzania National ICT Policy as a case study. The authors extensively explore the evolving frontiers of these pervading technologies as they impact on education, commerce, social, cultural and economic life of the poor Tanzanian people. The chapter also attempts to show case examples of ICT national projects in Tanzania to demonstrate how the government of Tanzania, entrepreneurs, and some of the rural communities are appropriating ICTs to fit into their needs. The chapter reflects on perspectives, trends, and potential of using ICTs to develop innovative approaches and methods for poverty reduction in Tanzania.

The chapter is organized into six sections. The Background section looks at the general issues, putting Tanzania into perspective and how it is coping with the issue of poverty eradication as one of the eight U.N. Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Targets for achieving poverty eradication are articulated in the National Poverty Eradication Strategy. The Development Vision 2025 aims at guiding Tanzania to achieve five goals by year 2025, namely, (1) high quality livelihood, (2) peace, stability, and unity, (3) good governance, (4) a well educated and learning society, and (5) a strong and competitive economy. This section further puts into perspective Tanzania’s position on the role of ICTs in meeting the goals of the Vision 2025 as well as the MDGs. The framework for appropriating these ICTs for national development and poverty reduction is articulated in the National ICT Policy.

The second section attempts to answer the question: what is poverty and what causes it? It is noted that ICTs are now acknowledged to be a set of powerful tools for building the capacity for knowledge management and hence for building the capacity for poverty reduction. It also addresses the issue of digital divide. The third section addresses the role that ICTs can play in poverty reduction. It outlines the desirable characteristics and attributes of the modern ICTs useful for poverty reduction. This section further addresses issues of connectivity, affordability, and capability. The fourth section details efforts that Tanzania has made in embracing ICTs. It narrates on various projects being undertaken in Tanzania such as projects on increasing capacities and opportunities; projects on reducing vulnerabilities; projects on enhancing government capacity, efficiency, and accountability; and projects on participation, empowerment, and the strengthening of civil society.

The fifth section looks at the challenges facing the country in its efforts to embrace ICTs. It also looks at the prospects and try to project the trend of adoption of ICTs in the country in the next five or so years. In the last section of the chapter, some recommendations are drawn on “an entry point” into dissemination of ICTs to the rural areas of Tanzania. In this section, the authors try to lay out priority areas in harnessing the power of ICTs in bringing about development to the rural people of Tanzania.

Background

Tanzania is one of the 191 United Nations member states that have pledged to meet the eight UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by year 2015 (URT, n.d.). These goals
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