ICTs and Indigenous Languages as Agents for the Actualization of Millennium Development Goals in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This paper advocates for the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and indigenous languages for the actualization of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Nigeria because both tools are capable of transforming the rural and urban populace. It explores the MDGs so as to unravel the ways ICTs and indigenous languages can facilitate the speedy actualization of MDGs in Nigeria, a country with peculiar cultural heritage and with over 750 indigenous languages. It also analyzes some of the contending constraints confronting Nigeria from actualizing MDGs such as corruption, extreme poverty, lack of attention to indigenous languages, high cost of ICTs which are products of bad leadership. The effective use of Nigeria's different indigenous languages and ICTs, it maintains, remains the most effective way towards educating Nigerians and achieving the MDGs in Nigeria come 2015.

Keywords: Developing Countries, Development, Education, Languages, New Technologies

INTRODUCTION

National development is universally desired. Developed countries desire to get better while developing countries like Nigeria strive to be like the developed countries. The need to bridge this gap prompted United Nations (UN) leaders to sign the Millennium Declaration at the Millennium Summit in 2000, which laid out eight goals called Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to be met by 2015. That Summit was the largest gathering of world leaders ever in history - a total of 192 members of the United Nations (UN) who signed the Millennium Declaration. The aim was to encourage nations to reduce poverty, improve health and promote peace, human rights and human capital development as well as environmental sustainability. The MDGs are global compacts between developing and developed countries. The goals are as follows: eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; universal education; gender equity;
child health; maternal health; combat HIV and AIDS and other diseases; environment sustainability, and global Partnership

This world’s first shared set of integrated goals, have been embraced by most developing countries like Nigeria as they have become signatories to MDGs. Unfortunately, Nigeria is still lagging behind in actualizing these goals. Igbuzor (2007) recalls that Nigeria, which was one of the richest 50 countries in the early 1970s, has retrogressed to become one of the 25 poorest countries at the threshold of the 21st century. It is ironic that Nigeria is the sixth largest exporter of oil and at the same time hosts the third largest number of poor people after China and India. This scenario is quite disheartening. Findings have also shown that 92% of Nigerians live on less than $2 per day and 71% of Nigeria’s population live on less than $1 per day respectively (Igbuzor, 2007).

Furthermore, by 2008, the major source of water for drinking and cooking for 28.4% of Nigerians is a borehole hand pump. Ninety-seven percent of 17–22 year children from poor homes have fewer than 2 years of education. Presently, 26 seats are held by women in the national parliament, while men hold 443 sets. The percentage of women in 2008, between the ages of 15–24 years old, who used condoms at their last high risk sexual encounter was 35.5%. The percentage of children under 5 years of age with fever who are treated with appropriate anti-malarial drugs as of 2008 was 33.2% and as of 2009, 13% of terrestrial and marine areas in Nigeria are protected (Anozie, 2010).

This notwithstanding, the Nigerian government has continued to pledge and demonstrate its commitment to actualizing the MDGs between now and 2015. Hajiya Amina M. Az-zubair, Senior Special Assistant to the President on MDGs, on Monday 27th 2009 gave highlights on what have been achieved so far in the country as regards MDGs. They include the following:

- 62 million doses of vaccine for routine immunization and 67.7 million doses of anti-malaria;
- Rehabilitation of TB and leprosy centres in Orji River, NTBL Zaria and Sokoto;
- 45,000 teachers recruited and deployed through the FTS;
- 157,000 primary school teachers received I O-Service training;
- 12,000 youth leaders trained on patriotism and leadership (Az-Zubair, 2009).

These achievements of Nigerian government on MDGs notwithstanding, a lot still has to be done. For instance, in today’s world, there is no gainsaying the fact that there can be no development without Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). However, to strengthen and intensify efforts to sustainable development in a country like Nigeria with peculiar cultural heritage, indigenous/local languages must be used alongside ICTs to communicate development messages to the people since MDGs can never be achieved without the people no matter the amount of media inputs.

Indigenous languages are local languages of the people, originated in a particular place, and were not brought in by migrants. ICTs on the other hand, are modern technologies such as the internet, mobile phones and computers among others for speedy and effective acquisition processing, storage and dissemination of information. Over 750 indigenous languages and a lingua franca (English Language) are spoken in Nigeria. However, the indigenous language of a particular community would be better utilized alongside any of the following ICTs for the actualization of MDGs in Nigeria:

- **Digital Television:** This is a type of television different from the analogue television, which transmits audio and video digital signals. With digital television, more television stations can be received. Some of these stations can be in indigenous languages with special interactive features that can help the disabled and illiterate rural people. Also, a special Community Viewing Centre
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