

## **OPEN GOVERNMENT POLICY THROUGH INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY: PATHWAY TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Citizens' right to access the documents and proceeding of the government for public consumption via information communication technology will have a long way in ensuring sustainable development in Nigeria. More so, open government is viewed in term of service delivery and public accountability, which could be facilitated by technology especially information technology that is capable of improving the transparent budgetary system, civic engagement, integrity, the fight against corruption and government's accountability. This paper explores literature on open government, information communication technology, sustainable development and enhancement of open government through information and communication technology. The use of internet, journal, thesis, archival material and the vast expanse of the literature assisted in the source of information. Therefore, this paper revealed how sustainable development can be enhanced in Nigeria through application of information and communication technology in open government policies. The study concluded that open government will be enhanced with the application of information and communication technology which is necessary for sustainable development in Nigeria.*

**Keyword:** Open Government, Policy, ICT, Accountability, Budget, Transparency

### **INTRODUCTION**

Over the past decades, the most prominent areas that have emerged and changed many aspects of life is the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) development, which have become increasingly important in education, health, agriculture, human resource, social services as well as governance activities around the globe. Open government policy is a global trend for governments to become more open, responsive, inclusive, transparent, accountable and efficient in service delivery to the citizen. The developments of technology have made it practically impossible to achieve the idea of open government policy without recourse to the global trend on the use and application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

The concept of Open Government Policy is a cultural change towards the relationship between governments and citizens. This will ensure all-round improvement in the life of the citizen, enhance citizens' participation in governance and engender sustainable development. Sousa (2018) asserts that erosion of confidence in the major institutions of society has been explained as a result of both contextual government effectiveness and poor macroeconomic outcomes and, as a consequence of deteriorating in the quality of government performance. The solution to every challenge will be provided by human being, in which problems facing governments on economy and other areas can be solved through citizens' participation in governance, especially in the area policy formulation and implementation.

Moreover, the challenges facing government such as corruption, poor performance and lack of accountability are products of secrecy in the activities of the government.

The above has put the government under increasing pressure to improve quality of governance, by allowing decision-making to be a subject of public scrutiny, allow citizen's participation in governance and ensure government activities are verifiable by the citizen. Indeed, the challenge to achieve these is less about finding new solutions to the transmission of government services, and empowering citizens to become agents, as opposed to subjects, of governance with the application of Information and Communication Technology. This will enhance policy formulation, implementation as well as improve the provision of social service across Nigeria. Despite this, Nigeria has not really experienced ideal open government if at all, with improvement in the Information and Communication technology that is being experienced yearly. The resultant effect of this is difficult in the achievement of sustainable development goals as a result of lack of citizens' participation, ineffective government services and lack of accountability by government officials. Against this background, this study intends to examine the enhancement of open government through information and communication technology which will enhance the achievement of sustainable development goals in Nigeria. The study aimed to assess the effect of information and communication technology in ensuring open government and analyze challenges that open government may pose to the achievement of sustainable development in Nigeria.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The concept of open government has been in use for some time now. Scholars in the field of Computer Science see open government as a new paradigm among various research interests and areas which overlaps and few times change the meaning of concepts like e-government, open data, and e-participation. Open government as a concept involves citizen's participatory areas of government such as crowdsourcing. Crowdsourcing involves the means by which the government get informed and also a way of making it more effective when the data production and management are distributed to a diversity of actors of both the private and public sector. The concept of government can be defined as a means of focusing not totally on technology but on the interoperability, participatory dimension, and openness that the use of technology might enhance the activity of government including a fundamental change in the way government operate (Hansson, Belracem&Ekenberg, 2004). Open government means a kind of new strategy or mechanism that enhances government interactions with the citizens through the adoption of ICT networks in an innovative way and approach (Noveck, 2009). Among these mechanism/ strategies is the ability of government to seek for assistance from the citizens, consult and take support from them. Generally, these strategies/mechanisms are created to enhance, stronger and effective institutions (UN Guidelines, 2013). Used data in the open government are accessed publicly and freely by all citizens.

In a situation whereby government-related issues are publicly accessible, in line with open data principle/guidelines. It is called open government data. Open government as a concept has become an increasingly global phenomenon for transforming the public sector. This concept is seen as a new method of achieving more effective and efficient government, making best decisions and being proactive in solving problems. The concept of open government has no uniform definition (Yu & Robinson, 2012), but is important to note that

the concept is not new because it has lately actualized itself under the waves of current technology. Open government to some means a proposed new model of state reform and modernization of public administration to improve the value to the public of the delivery of public services in an equal and reciprocal manner.

### **CONCEPT OF INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

ICT is an umbrella term that comprises any communication applications or devices, encompassing: television, mobile and fixed phones, radio, computer and network hardware and software, satellite systems and so on, (as well as the various services and applications connected with them, such as videoconferencing, distance learning, etc) essential for the delivery of information in the form of audio, data, video, image, etc from one place to another. ICT comprises all technical systems used to handle information and help communication. Various reports underscore just how important and exceptional ICT productivity gains are not only for individuals and businesses but for a nation (Microsoft, 1999; Oghogho & Ekekwe, 2011).

The significance of ICT does not lie in the technologies themselves, but more in their power to create greater access to information and communication in underserved populations (TechTarget, 2003). Many countries around the world have established organizations for the advancement of ICT with a focus on closing up the existing economic gap between technological and less technological areas. Globally, the United Nations earnestly promotes ICT for Development (ICT4D) as a means of linking the digital gap.

Despite its potentials, ICT can present new ways for fraudulent practices and corruption to take place. When wrongly used, ICT can prevent national development and economic success, expand existing disparity between developed and developing nations, between the high, medium and low class of the population and misdirect scarce resources. It is therefore essential and crucial to promote an enabling, trustworthy, transparent and non-discriminatory environment that fosters the responsible and effective use of ICT for development for the benefit of all (Braund *et al.*, 2006).

### **CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

Development is a specified state of growth or advancement, a new and advanced product or idea, events constituting a new stage in changing situations (Oxford Dictionaries.com). The term development is the act or process of developing, growth or process. Sustainable development is the organizing standard for meeting human development goals while at the same time sustaining the capability of natural systems to provide the natural resources and ecosystem services upon which the economy and society rely on. The desired result is a state of society where living conditions and resources use continue to meet human needs without undermining the integrity and stability of the natural system. Sustainable development can be classified as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations.

While the modern concept of sustainable development is derived mostly from the 1987 Brundtland report, it is also rooted in earlier ideas about sustainable forest management and twentieth-century environmental concerns. As a concept developed, as shifted to focus more on economic development, social development and environmental protection for future

generations. It has been suggested that “the term ‘sustainability’ should be viewed as humanity’s target goal of human-ecosystem equilibrium (homeostasis), while ‘sustainable development’ refers to the holistic approach and temporal processes that lead us to the endpoint of sustainability” (Shaker, 2015). The term sustainable development appeared in the late 1970s and was definitely consolidated in 1987 by the aforementioned Brundtland Commission. This commission prepared the most broadly accepted definition of sustainable development:

Sustainable development is a transformation process in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, orientation of technological development and institutional change are reconciled and reinforces present and future potential, in order to attend to needs and future aspirations. It is that which attends to present needs without compromising the possibility of future generations attending their own needs (Becker, 1993).

Although a broad acceptance of the term ‘sustainable’ had existed in the international community, it is also true that there is no consensus on a clear and unique definition for the concept. From an environmental perspective, the notion of sustainability “originates from theorizations and ecological practices that try to analyze the temporal evolution of natural resources, taking its persistence, maintenance or capacity of returning to a presumed state of balance after some type of disturbance as a basis” (Raynaut, Lana & Zanoni, 2000). Sustainable development like any other conventional economic imperative presupposes joining the maximization of economic production with social (minimizing current and future human suffering) and ecological (protecting the ecosphere) imperatives (Wackernagel & Rees, 1996).

## **THE RELEVANCE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

The United Nations sustainable development goals (SDG) hope to address the dysfunctional trend in human development within a relatively short period. Although achieving the SDG deadline might be optimistic, its eight objectives are essential to good governance for sustainable development. These goals are (1) eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, (2) achieving universal primary education, (3) promoting gender equality and empowering women, (4) reducing child mortality, (5) improving maternal health, (6) combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, (7) ensuring environmental sustainability, and (8) generating a global partnership for development.

Although number seven is listed separately, the prevailing contemporary environment dictates that all eight shares a phenomenological umbilical relationship and ICT is fundamental to realizing such noble endeavors. More countries and enterprises are recognizing the importance of ICT to poverty alleviation. A poor woman farmer in a rural community can use a telephone to enquire about her vegetable prices without the overhead of bus fare or the physical endurance such journey require. One will agree, however; that such possibilities arise out of the willingness to invest financial resources, ICT infrastructure, and capacity building.

Charles (2012) opined that ICT provides new opportunities for those who are literate, have a good education and adequate resources. Disadvantaged and marginalized groups have little chance to benefit from tools such as the Internet automatically. This further increase

social divides, widens the gap between rich and poor countries, regions, individuals and even between men and women.

Gilhooly (2005) argued that if countries want to tackle the MDG now SDG seriously, they must appropriately deploy, integrate, and prioritize ICT. The author noted that ICT is essential both to eradicating poverty and in creating sustainable human development. He conceded, however, that the paradox of “persistent scarcity in a digital era of superabundant capacity – is perhaps the greatest single challenge to the networked economy and society”. Gilhooly further opined that because of the complex prevailing realities, grasping fulsome clarity is difficult to achieve. Nevertheless, Gilhooly proffered that if ICT is situated appropriately, it can significantly aid the process of the SDG in relatively short periods thereby substantially reducing the gap between the advanced nations and emerging economies.

United Nations (2017) further affirms that information and communication technologies (ICTs) are crucial in achieving all of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and have a key role to play in eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world. ICTs form the backbone of today's digital economy and have enormous potential to fastforward progress on the SDGs and improve people's lives in fundamental ways. Much work remains to be done in order to harness the opportunities and benefits made possible by digital technologies. Working together and broadening engagement with different stakeholders for a meaningful impact will be crucial.

## **IMPORTANCE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY FOR OPEN GOVERNMENT**

In many countries, citizen participation in decision-making for development processes has been rare and difficult to bring about. World Bank (2017) supported this argument, that governance processes are often taken place within a given set of formal and informal rules that shape and are shaped by political power. The asymmetries of power make it difficult for citizens to hold officials and public service providers to account, which is otherwise known as open government.

Many governments and civil society actors have identified ICT based initiatives as a way to improve governance, transparency and strengthen accountability mechanism, with the potential to support efforts towards sustainable development. Fatimah, Christian, Nurfadilah, Widiandi & Rangkuti (2017) argued that ICTs offer potentially shorter, more direct routes to accountability by connecting citizens to service providers. However, they can also be effective as tools to put greater pressure on politicians and policy-makers, by expressing demands for improved public services and opening up space for citizens to participate in shaping public policy. ICTs can also improve the capacity of government bodies to be transparent and responsive, helping to tackle corruption and improve efficiency.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Actor-Network theory helps us to explore the questions of “why and how we have the technologies that we do”. The theory is a theoretical and methodological approach to social theory where everything in the social and natural worlds exists in constantly shifting networks of relationships. It posits that nothing exists outside those relationships. All the

factors involved in a social situation are on the same level, and thus there are no external social forces beyond what and how the network participants interact at present. Thus, objects, ideas, processes, and any other relevant factors are seen as important in creating social situations as humans. ANT holds that social forces do not exist in themselves, and therefore cannot be used to explain social phenomena. Instead, strictly empirical analysis should be undertaken to "describe" rather than "explain" social activity. Only after this can one introduce the concept of social forces, and only as an abstract theoretical concept, not something which genuinely exists in the world. Although it is best known for its controversial insistence on the capacity of nonhumans to act or participate in systems or networks or both, ANT is also associated with forceful critiques of conventional and critical sociology. Developed by science and technology studies (STS) scholars Michel Callon and Bruno Latour, the sociologist John Law, and others, it can more technically be described as a "material-semiotic" method. This means that it maps relations that are simultaneously material (between things) and semiotic (between concepts). It assumes that many relations are both material and semiotic.

## **DISCUSSION**

Information and Communication Technology has become an independent variable for testing many variables such as openness of government to its citizen, citizens participation in governance, accountability and transparency, economic development, improved social service delivery, among others. Sustainable development, a concept developed to identify area of necessity for improved standard of living of people adopted by the Nations of the world with seven basic cardinal points requires all parties participation, both the government and the governed, which can be enhanced through the use of information and communication technology. The study affirmed that the use of Information and Communication technology will enhance citizen's participation in governance and public policy geared toward the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Eradication of poverty, the achievement of universal primary education, reduction of child mortality, and other key areas of Sustainable Development need improved information and communication technology for the discharge of the services. Policies of government-directed toward those key areas need all actors' participation for formulation, implementation and evaluation to enhance standard of living. Despite the necessity, application of Information and Communication Technology in Nigeria for open government is faced with numerous challenges ranging from unstable power supply, lack of technical know-how, scarcity of spare parts, policy summersault as a result of government attitude, high rate corruption, cultural affinity rather than national patriotism, among others. The effectiveness and efficiency of Information and Communication Technology in policy formulation and implementation, governance activities and provision of social services for Sustainable Development will be enhanced if those identified challenges can be ameliorated in Nigeria.

## **CONCLUSION**

Open Government is a concept that advocates citizens' participation in all government activities, including policy-making and accountability. The idea is to ensure all-round participation in government activities for sustainable development. Participation of citizens

involves suggestion for government activities, inquiry about government activities and verification of activities of government to ensure constitutionality and sanctity in governance in Nigeria. This action can be enhanced through the use of information and communication technology in various ministries, parastatals and agencies of government in Nigeria. The present governance issue cannot be verified without the application of information and communication technology apparatus into the activities of both the government and the governed. However, sustainable development goals will only be achieved when all actors in governance are involved, which will be possible through application of technology.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study recommended the following to enhance the act of open government through information and communication technology for sustainable development in Nigeria;

1. The government should ensure availability of information on the website of Ministries, department, and agencies as a support for open government.
2. Power supply problem, which has been identified as the impediment towards development in Nigeria, should be resolved to enhance the application of information and communication technology in governance.
3. The government should create a portal for citizens' online complained aimed at improving government effort toward service delivery.
4. Institutions for citizens' complaint such as Public Complaint Commission (PCC) should be strengthened to improve government service delivery for sustainable development in Nigeria.
5. Regulatory agencies such as the Nigerian Communication Commission (NCC), should ensure improved service from network providers for uninterrupted internet facilities and affordable cost.

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