

ICT and Social Services Delivery in the Local Government Councils (LGCs) in Enugu State Nigeria

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Abstract: The primary function of every government is to provide the basic services needed by the citizens to improve their standard of living. Local government administration is created to trickle down powers of government, its functions and services which the federal and state government may not readily perform, down to the grassroots. Globalization has created the opportunity to access the avalanche of information, communication and technological services (ICT) to bridge the gap of the challenges of delivery of social services, in all the levels of government. The purpose of this paper is to examine the utilization of information and communication technology (ICT) in the delivery of social services in local government council areas in Enugu state, The work, in its findings, identified the numerous ICT packages that could be used to deliver social services to the grassroots such as e- health services, e-construction services, e-education among others, it also identified barriers that could inhibit the proper utilization of these ICT devices such as personnel problem, inadequate equipment, and lack of finance or capital and recommends support of all the levels of government through increased funding and appropriate legal frameworks to spur the actualization of this ICT revolution. It also suggests putting all the necessary requirements needed for the appropriate utilization of these ICT devices for maximum performance.

Keywords: ICT, Social Services Delivery, Local Government

1. Introduction

Notably, the role of Information and Communication Technology in enhancing public administration cannot be over-emphasized. Since the local government administration's main objective is to efficiently deliver social services to the grassroots, it will not be out of place to seek for avenues to facilitate the achievement of this lofty goals [5]. Supports this view when he asserts that it is the desire of every government of becoming efficient in response to

citizens' demands, that it delivers services more effectively, and in so doing reinforce fundamental democratic values [5]. The functions of the local government councils are recognized in the constitution and this underlines the relevance of local government administration in Nigeria. Local governments have a role to play in the economic and social development of the nation through its structure and administrative processes. The advent of civilian rule after the exit of military rule in 1999 raised high hopes at all levels of the three tiers of Nigerian government, there was an emotional nostalgia for good governance and development,

which is consistent with democratic regimes and this entails better participation, freedom, and accountability. The expectations placed on the local government administration include the actualization of the constitutional functions which include improvement of the standard of living, equal political participation for the people and the effective provision of social services.

Local government administration is created to trickle down powers of government and its functions which the federal and state government may not readily carry-out, down to the grassroots. In 1976 reforms, Obasanjo brought a unified structure and made local government administration, an agency for socio-economic development to the grassroots. The local government was reformed to have elected chairman as head of the executive and councilors acting as the legislature, the major funding becomes a direct disbursement of revenue from the federation account for developmental strides. The main functions of local government include economic planning, collecting taxes, rates, and the provision of social amenities like market, feeder roads, health services, potable water, etc. among others [2].

Accountability and transparency in the Nigerian local government councils, are almost non-existent and the poor performance of the local government administration has left much to be desired. The problems affecting the delivery of social services in Nigeria's local government include incompetent personnel, inadequate funding, corruption and political interference [4]. It is sad that the local government administration rather than be a tool for grassroots development, has become settlement arena for political stakeholders and sycophants. However, while the local government administration is expected to engender development and promote social services delivery, improve governance and political participation, they have become a leech that bites its own apron. The utilization of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the provision of solution to human, social and industrial challenges has resulted to a success story in many fields of human endeavor and climes and local government administration in Nigeria, is not to be an exception. According to [8], ICT consists of the hardware, software, networks, and media for the collection, storage, processing, transmission and presentation of information (voice, data, text, images), as well as related services. Collaborating on the functions of ICT, [3], found that Information Communication Technology (ICT) have played a positive role in areas of computerization of internal accounting, payroll operations, word processing, job costing, scanning, documentation, mapping, decision support, online training/learning, urban planning and budget planning and administration.

The adoption of ICT can help the local government to promote transparency and accountability, instill human capital development, and enhance social services delivery. [1], state that local council administrators and stakeholders are therefore concerned on how to utilize new artifacts such as ICT to reposition their administration and services for an effective and efficient service delivery, the plan is to carry

out various reforms in the public sector such as redesigning the methods, structures, systems and processes to the delivering of services to the citizens and counter the persistent problems militating against the actualizing of their functions. The role of ICT is enormous in enhancing capacity building in local council administration, [9] reveals that ICT has major benefits in an organization such as a catalyst for socio-economic development, integration of market, help improve administrative standard, catalyst for innovation through research, boost of business of ICT, council growth through e-government projects and the utilization of digital technologies to ease delivery of social services.

These assertions formally confirm that many authors affirm to the wonders ICT can do in many capacities to improve performance through the knowledge and application of these technologies. To fill the gap on the dearth of literature on the digital innovations and technological advancement through ICT and how to utilize them to improve the delivery of social services in local government councils in Enugu state in particular and Nigeria in general, this study examines how the local government councils can adopt ICT to improve its role in the delivery of social services. Many local government councils in Enugu state fails to access these potentialities to meet up with the expectations in delivery of social services in the state, the researcher seek to bridge the gap by providing answers to the following questions: what areas of ICT are needed to spur up the delivery of social services in Enugu state? What are the barriers hindering the utilization of ICT to enhance social services delivery in the local government councils.? And what are the aspects of support required to make maximum utilization of these ICT gadgets?

2. The Concept of ICT

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) involves the use of electronic device revolving around technology and infrastructure created to store, manipulate, deliver and transmit information. Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) are information handling tools that are used to produce, store and process, distribute and exchange information. These different devices are applied to work together, and combine to form networked world which reaches into every corner of the globe [13]. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) consists of technological apparatus used to communicate, create, organize, disseminate, store, retrieve, and manage information [10]. ICT is a combination of computer and telecommunication applications to solve everyday problems. It is integration of networking applications and systems that allow people and organizations to handle issues and problems in the digital world. ICT is made up of electronic devices in many capacities and packages with workable software that can be applied to multi-dimensional fields of human endeavor, and directed to ease and facilitate the process of doing work.

The process of delivery of social services needs to be

redefined and repackaged to bring succor to the lives of the rural people. A whole lot of accessories and artifacts are needed to assist in the planning and implementation of the programs which a functional local government administration needs to deliver social services to the grassroots. The onus then lies on the councils to utilize the information and communication technologies to facilitate its responsibilities. With ICT, the responsibilities of all that are involved in the process of social services delivery are optimized by using computer applications and digital services in solving specific and general problems and in carrying out duties aimed at implementing and actualizing the council programs, ICT therefore plays a critical role in accelerating work activities, diminishing work load, and introducing a defined line of action or direction. It introduces new ways of doing work, from manual to digital, from paper works to online services, from physical situations to computerized services.

3. Areas of Utilization of ICT for LGCs in the Delivery of Social Services

Globally, governments and organizations are recognizing the need to ensure efficient delivery of social services through the utilization of Information and Communications Technologies (ICT), and also support more effective outcomes in key policy areas such as health, welfare services, security and education. The use of the ICT to deliver value in social services is a major approach in the public service, including the local government administrative councils. Local government council in Enugu state can therefore increase the delivery of social services through the employment of ICT in various dimensions.

a) Human Resource Application:

Information and Communication Technology utilization (ICT) through its capacity building in terms of human resources application and skill development ensures increase in knowledge to effectively carry out all the required functions to actualize a particular service or project [14]. The engagement of staff in ICT trainings enables the staff to achieve higher potential in technology thereby enhancing ICT utilization and quality services needed to implement the social service delivery of the council.

b) Management Information System:

The need to enhance the quality of decisions made by the management becomes imperative since all the expectations of the delivery of democratic dividends hinges on the ability of the local government leadership to pursue objectives and credible services that can truly alleviate the problems of the grassroots and engender a better standard of living for the citizens. Information communication technology is aimed at providing the communication and information services needed to aid managerial functions and connecting them to the modern social service trends needed and how to deliver them [11]. Management information system is critical for decision making and information sharing, and is backed by good technological infrastructures and tools needed for

storing and retrieving data which consequently engenders the organization capacity for taking short- and long-term decisions. Management Information Service (MIS) evolves out of the need for a quick and efficient responsive in the process of decision making, necessitating a digital and scientific module to gather, store and access information promptly. Management information system applied in the local council areas will be used to transform raw data to information and decisions needed to make decisions for all sectors or departments of the council, linked to a particular program or project and aimed at delivering effective and efficient infrastructural service.

c) Management and Accountability System

This is an essential facility which Information and Communication Technology offers the local councils through the monitoring of the work of its department and agencies to make informed and comprehensive decisions on the improvement of the overall quality and cost effectiveness of the local councils in many areas including social service delivery. This requires all the departments connected to the provision of a particular social service to prepare detailed operational and financial reports, presenting them in regular weekly stakeholder's meetings. The local government chairman and the concerned officials are available at each session demonstrating commitment to accountable and transparent management of public resources. The management and accountability system has recorded significant results in improving the efficiency services, significantly increasing citizen satisfaction and saving approximately a credible percentage of the annual budget. The ICT provides a record of the financial expenses of all the social services provided and made accessible to the citizens to monitor the progress of work done.

d) Electronic-Health (E-Health)

E-Health is the utilization of information and communication technologies (ICT) in the provision of health. The Electronic Health activities are packaged to promote and strengthen the use of Information Communication Technology in health development. Electronic Health (E-Health) is the application of ICT for healthcare delivery through the improvement of the efficiency, effectiveness, and quality of clinical services and processes accessed by the healthcare providers, stakeholders, patients, and consumers and aimed at giving medical services to the people. The utilization of E-Health in the local government to contain the rising challenges facing health system in terms of the rising cost, dwindling resources, increasing demands, and workforce shortages. Invariably, e-Health is the application of information, communication, computing, and sensing technologies across the entire range of functions and processes constituting the practice and programs of delivery of health care services [7]. The application of e-Health is enabled through integrated application in the healthcare environment, and include technologies related to computing, communication, sensing and prescription.

e) E-Construction

E-Construction is the assembling of related ICT devices

for effective application in civil engineering and construction services to improve the benefits, opportunities and stoop the challenges in the construction industry. Modern soft and hard wares of ICT are engaged to bring positive changes in construction industries. This promotes the ease of doing work in diverse levels of the local government councils by facilitating integration and collaboration with business partners, suppliers and customers through the enhancement of electronic transactions [12]. The local government councils are therefore called to utilize the e-construction tools to promote the delivery of social services in the council areas. E-Construction engenders digital management of all construction documentation in a safe environment by enabling the distribution to all involved in the project work. E-Construction is a construction administration delivery process that puts away with paper works by promoting electronic submission of all construction documentation and data to all involved, according to [12], E-construction is directed at improving the use of e-Construction in construction of projects, in which all involved transmit information in a common, open information environment and add knowledge about the project, improving communication, belief and collaboration.

Some of the contents of e-construction include, e-procurement, e-tendering, e-collaboration, e-evaluation and e-construction management. E-construction generally involves the virtual or electronic planning room provided for the electronic distribution of plans and specifications. The end point is that it saves time for the stakeholders by creating the opportunity to access all of the information online and enable preparations and actions promptly. Notably, e-construction notably involves the application of tools that support decisions, using devices and software that process, store, analyze, control, transfer and present construction information or data during the entire development stages of a construction project, which are predesign, design, construction, operation and maintenance. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) aims at offering information and analytical tools to construction stakeholders so that they manage to achieve optimal control and delivery of the construction processes. Other fields in which ICT is used in construction industry include designing, accounting, scheduling, record-keeping, Marketing, documenting and knowledge sharing.

f) E-Education

The term e-education involves developing and enhancing education to promote better skills and growth, help create time for teachers', contribute to learning and teaching process and increase students' involvement and motivation through the use of information and communication technology [10]. E-education involves the use of information and communication technology in the delivery of educational services, to promote general teaching skills and introducing new skills and strategies, propagating the integration of new ways of learning and use of new digital technologies into the teaching and learning process. [13], posits that the use of e-education offers many potential benefits for education and

professional development in the local government councils. The paper states that the issue of distance, isolation of professionals within their organizations and across localities can be addressed through a range of online learning solutions. eLearning which is an aspect of e-education is also suited to people who are:

- 1) Based in isolated, rural and regional locations.
- 2) Living with physical disabilities.
- 3) Living abroad or interstate.
- 4) Full-time employees.
- 5) Employees that are mobile rather than office-based.

UNDP evaluation office [13], listed the benefits of on-line learning in the local government councils which include;

- 1) a flexibility around the personal and professional commitments.
- 2) advantages of mobile technologies.
- 3) learning at a convenient time and place.
- 4) Accessed across localities, including those in remote areas.

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations Rome [6], defines e-learning as the use of electronic devices and Internet technologies to deliver a variety of solutions to enable learning and improve performance, the local government councils invariably, can use e-education or e-learning to provide educational services to the grassroots. E-Learning content is delivered in different forms and formats, including the internet, intranet/extranet, audio and video recordings, interactive TV, and CD-ROM.

e-Learning is suited to those:

- 1) Based in isolated, rural and regional locations.
- 2) Living with physical disabilities.
- 3) Living abroad or interstate.
- 4) Full-time employees.
- 5) Employees that are mobile rather than office-based.

The grassroots that are interested to access education through e-learning can be assessed online through online teaching and learning, online exams and quizzes, essays, written assignments, collaborative assignment work, portfolios, simulations, portfolios, case studies, online discussions, publication of student work, debates, reviews, journals, reflections and evaluations [6].

4. Barriers on Utilization of ICT to Enhance Social Services Delivery in the LGCs

The need to fill the gap in the delivery of social services has led to the search for available methods of doing things, hence, the step to utilize information and communication technology to create services that will contain the exigencies of protocols involved in the delivery of social services. However, the utilization of ICT also come with many barriers to contend with, and these include;

- a) Appropriate equipment

The use of the ICT comes with many devices and equipment, the different social services also come with

various packages which are needed to plan, process, procure, serve, carry out and maintain. The e- health, e-construction, e-learning/ education, e-government, management information service among others are installed, services and maintained to give optimal services in the performance of its functions and services. The need to get the appropriate equipment becomes imperative to be able to render the required services with optimum performance.

b) Training of Operators.

The manipulations of the ICT devices require special knowledge and practice. The continual training and retraining of the operators are needed to be able to handle those technological devices and equipment, so it is not an all comers game as great effort to put the operators in shape is continual a demand, this has given rise to many of the devices procured not being put in use as there are no qualified personnel to handle or man them. A lot of training is needed as regards the use of the electronic devices, both the users and learners are continually upgraded in terms of capacity and knowledge to the extent that lack of upgrading and training may stall the use of such devices.

c) Technical Expertise

In line with the need to access the information and communication technology appliances or devices is the need for technical knowledge. For most of the management or administrative staff to utilize the hard-wares and soft-wares for easing their work, the need to have technical or professional expertise in using them, in various areas of need, which may be in accounting or management becomes imperative. The lack of such technical or professional skills may constitute a barrier to effective utilization of such devices in effecting the delivery of social services to the grassroots.

d) High cost

All the processes of the utilization of ICT in the provision of social services in local government councils is usually capital intensive. This is as a result of cost of many ICT devices which are usually imported from abroad. ICT, both its software and hardware are constantly upgraded and re-installed for more efficiency and performance, and it also faces many problems of maintenance, replacement and installation, all of which involves cost. With flexible and replaceable software, constant cost of operation becomes an issue.

e) Policy and Issues of Regulations

Operations of ICT are usually regulated in many countries and series of requirements and regulations are put in place to control and monitor the utilization of such services. Sometimes the processes of registration and using such programs or packages may require protocols that may deter or retard the procurement or usage of such devices.

f) Personnel problems

The barrier the issue of personnel problem may cost in the utilization of ICT in the delivery of social services in local council areas may come in different dimensions as it may be the need for qualified staff to handle the ICT machineries, it may be in terms of the personnel to train the available staff or

in terms of getting expatriates in short time to handle whatever maybe required to install, use and maintain such devices.

g) Power and other required facilities

The use of ICT in the delivery of social services hinges on the availability of many factors which constant power supply is one of the important requirements. ICT usually is an electronic device and is run on electricity. Again, information and communication devices are accessed on-line through data usages accessed through Wi-Fi or network providers, especially for services that need internet. For local councils to put maximum use of the ICT services to be used by the local populace these requirements are needed for the program or service may not work.

5. Required Support for Maximum Utilization of ICT in the LGCs

a) Political will

The digital age has the opportunity of introducing modern ways of doing things that results to a great ease of doing business associated with it. This behooves even those not yet catching up with the trend to be swooped by this digital trend. It is therefore necessary for governments, especially in developing nations such as ours, to steer up the necessary courage and will to join the trend and avail the citizens the opportunity to benefit from the efficient social service delivery occasioned by information and communication technology. The numerous services it offers made things easy and affordable even from the most rural part of the state. E-health is accessed through a digital interface where doctors can be reached at any hour of the day, prescriptions are made and local pharmacy appears at the door step to provide the drugs. There is a strong call for the government at the grassroots to develop the political will to posit the local councils to go a long way to deliver social services through ICT.

b) Citizen's Support

There is need to support the new trend of using ICT to provide social services in the grassroots. The citizens must be ready to take care of the facilities cited in their locality and provide the security and other sundry requirements needed to keep the project or programs afloat. The lofty projects must be kept away from miscreants and vandalizes, as it may not be promptly re-installed or maintained if vandalized.

c) Broadband

The time has come where governments establish community broadband to provide data and Wi-Fi services even to the remotest part of the rural areas. The utilization of ICT in the grassroots level needs constant availability Wi-Fi or data services to make it always possible to use the information and communication facilities at every hour.

d) Maintenance Culture

The problem with government facilities is the lack of maintenance culture. There is a strong need to create a maintenance culture to promptly repair devices and

equipment that need repairs. Spare parts are to be in good supply while maintenance department are to be created and equipped to maintain and service the devices as and when needed.

6. Recommendations and Conclusion

Innovations in information and communication technology have brought revolutionary changes in the public service, not only in Nigeria but globally. The digitization of public service via electronic channels is seen as an avenue to improve the functions and services of the government. Consequently, the usage of ICT facilities in the local government council areas is no more to modify the accounting and administrative processes alone but also to perform actual delivery of social services in the core function areas of the councils. The heavy cost involved in building of big structures like hospital are reduced as patients in the local councils can access health services through e-health where the use of computer interface brings the patients and the doctors face to face at any given time, and medical services are accessed immediately. In the area of education, learners in the remotest areas of the local councils can be thought and trained through distant-learning facilities made possible by e-learning.

The trend is enormous and there is need for the councils in Enugu state to key into these digital technologies in carrying out their function in bringing social services to the grassroots. A lot need to be done, by the local government council administrators in terms of creating the enabling environment and providing the enablement in all the areas of need to make these services accessible and therefore bring satisfaction to the people in the grassroots. The state and the federal government are supposed to also support the ICT revolution in facilitating the delivery of social services through instituting a legal framework and financial support to make the ICT assistance to delivery of social service a reality.

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