

The Nigerian e-Government Strategies (NeGST): A Strategic Approach to Poverty Eradication in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria has made frantic efforts towards achieving the millennium development goals (MDGs) as spelt out in the United Nations' Agenda for the world. A critical assessment of the e-Government strategies in Nigeria is important being responsible for 20% of the population of the entire African continent. This paper presents a review of the e-Government strategies in Nigeria; the human capital development initiatives; the information and communications technology (ICT) diffusion and e-Inclusion. The global and continental ranking of the country is presented as well as recommendations to accelerate developments towards achieving the MDGs. Findings revealed that there are ongoing efforts in Nigeria to address the issue of poverty. The various initiatives of government include: the National/State Economic Empowerment Strategies (NEEDS/SEEDS), the Vision 2020, the National e-Government Strategy (NeGST) and a well-formulated National IT policy to mention a few. The little hindrance encountered in the research is that the available data was only up to the year 2005 and 2006 in some cases. However, based on the human capital development indices such as: economic empowerment and poverty reduction, education, health, employment generation, etc, it was observed that the adult literacy level of 64.2% is satisfactory and better results are expected before 2015. The life expectancy level is constant (54 years) from 2002 to 2007, which is the one of the lowest in Africa. On school enrolment, the major problem is access and poverty. It was observed that only 25% of primary school leavers made it to the secondary school level, while about 14% of the students at this level made it to the tertiary level. Similarly, the average percentage of female enrolment in schools is 45%. The health facilities are under-funded and are grossly inadequate both in quality and quantity. There is an average of 1,700 persons per hospital bed and the ratio of physicians to the populace is about 1:6000. This calls for a state of emergency in this sector. One major sector of the economy that is experiencing a boost is the ICT and Telecoms. The sector had brought about a teledensity growth of 0.73 to 37.05 from 2001 to 2007. Consequently, Nigeria has been named the fastest growing Telecoms nation in Africa and the third in the world, with a number of direct and indirect jobs created. Similarly, the rate of Internet diffusion is encouraging bearing in mind that the level was almost non-existent in 1999. It is obvious that Nigeria would be able to bridge the divide by 2015. Generally, there are some meaningful developments in the country arising from the various poverty eradication schemes but the resultant effect has not imparted positively on unemployment. This is the opinion of the populace and hence the need for government to re-strategize, otherwise, fulfilling MDGs by 2015 may not be realistic.

Keywords: e-Government, e-Democracy, National IT Policy, NeGST, NEEDS, and Vision 2020, MDGs, and Poverty Alleviation

INTRODUCTION

The world representatives assembled in Geneva from 10 – 12 of December 2003, for a maiden summit tagged: “*Building the information society: a global challenge in the millennium*”. The summit declared a common desire and commitment to build a people-oriented and development-poised information society that is aimed at enabling everyone to create, access, utilize, share information and knowledge (WSIS, 2003). The initiative was to enable individuals, communities and peoples achieve their full potentials by promoting sustainable development and improving quality of life premised on the principles of the United Nations. Arising from the summit is the recognition of ICT as a panacea for sustainable development, hence the evolvement of the concept of e-Government, e-Democracy, e-Policing, e-Health, e-Learning, etc. as contained in the eight (8) developmental goals called the millennium development goals (MDGs), with the overall objective of reducing poverty by 50% by the year 2015 (UNDP, 2000).

Information Technology for Development (IT4D) is defined as the implementation, use and management of IT infrastructures to stimulate social and economic development (Qureshi, 2007). IT offers access to information and expertise; it enhances competitiveness and access to markets; it enhances administrative efficiency; it enhances labour productivity and learning; and it is a veritable tool for poverty eradication.

E-government refers to the use of information and communications technology in public administration combined with organizational change and new skills to improve public services and democratic processes and to strengthen support for public policies (Vassilios, 2004). ICT has been adopted in Europe, particularly at all levels of administration as a veritable tool for modernising public services, re-engineering administrative processes and empowering the citizens.

Agunloye (2004) presented e-Government as an interaction between citizens, businesses and organizations, government ministries and all the tiers of government. Thus, as against traditional governance in the developing world, that is characterized by hunger, war, poverty, sickness, ethnicity and oppression as well as unemployment, using ICT powered government would lead to transparency, accountability and efficiency in governance in order to deliver better services and wealth for the general well-being of the citizens. E-government is seen as a route to better governance as it is open and transparent, and an enabler for participatory democracy; it is service-oriented, and it provides personalised and inclusive services to every citizen; and it is a panacea for enhanced productivity and better utilization of the taxpayers’ money.

Achieving the MDGs is a herculean task for most nations, particularly, the developing ones. For some years now, Africa has remained at the bottom of the table of the annual UN global e-Government readiness report (UN, 2005). Governance in Nigeria and Africa in general is characterized by corruption, debt overhanging, unemployment, low productivity, unfocussed policies, insensitivity and bad leadership (Gowon, 2006 and Nwabueze, 2003). All these have grave consequences on developmental issues like education, health, employment, electricity generation, transportation and other major sectors of the economy (Ezigbo, 2006).

Cookey (2005) identified corruption as a *sine qua non* for making progress on growth and human capital development in Nigeria. The high level of corruption has been identified to be responsible for the high degree of misrule, insecurity, hunger, poverty and politically motivated massacre in Africa (Iyayi, 2004).

Nigeria is the most populous black nation in the world and is responsible for 20% of the African population. It is the 6th largest oil producing country in the world but the accrued revenues have not translated to the well-being of the populace on account of corruption by government

officials. Consequently, the country has not been able to provide the basic necessities of life for her citizenry; and meeting the MDGs may be an upheaval task. This practice is prominent among many African nations (Tell, 2006).

OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

The primary objectives of this paper include:

- i. to review the e-Government assessment in Nigeria;
- ii. to review the MDGs initiatives in Nigeria;
- iii. to review the human capital development and poverty level in Nigeria;
- iv. to review the level of ICT diffusion in Nigeria;
- v. to assess the e-Readiness status of Nigeria.

NIGERIAN e-GOVERNMENT ASSESSMENT

The Global e-Government Report

Africa was the lowest in 2005 ranking among the other continents of the world. However, within Africa, the “Giant of Africa”, Nigeria, was ranked 22 among the 45 nations in Africa (UN, 2005). Mauritius ranked first with an index of 0.5317 and world ranking of 52, followed by South Africa with an index of 0.5075 and world ranking of 58, while Nigeria occupies the 22nd position in Africa, having an index of 0.2758 and world ranking of 139. The country trails behind Namibia, Lesotho, Cape Verde, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Uganda and Congo among others. This report on Nigeria is disheartening being the 6th largest oil producing nation in the world. The world best ten countries according to that report: the US (.9062) came first, followed by Denmark (.9058), Sweden (.8983), UK(.8777), Republic of Korea (.8727), Australia (.8679), Singapore (.8503), Canada (.8425), Finland (.8231) and Norway (.8228). Within the next ten countries are: Germany, Japan, Netherlands, Austria, Belgium, Ireland, etc. However, in the 2008 global ranking, Sweden came first (0.9157) followed by Denmark (0.9134) and US came forth (0.8644). This is an indication of improved services and concerted commitment by these countries to infrastructural provisions (UN, 2008). The story is slightly different in Africa. With the exception of some few countries that improved on the 2005 ranking a number of others performed worse. Nigeria moved from 139 to 136, Egypt moved from 99 to 79 and a few others but countries like Ghana, Togo, Cote D’Ivoire, Morocco, Tunisia etc slid backward.

The DFID report of 2006 presented Nigeria with a population of 130 million, where about 75 million people lived with abject poverty; about 2 million AIDS orphans; about 12 million children were out of school; one in every 5 children died before age 5; and a per capital income of \$0.30 per person per day (DFID Nigeria, 2006).

Nigerian government is constantly making efforts at achieving the millennium development goals but lack of probity, accountability and transparency as well as lack of the basic infrastructure is a major hindrance. Thus, the global and continental ranking of Nigeria is abysmally low that smaller countries are high up on the ladder. It is thus obvious that the size of the country and her wealth had not translated to the well-being of the citizenry. However, the current efforts of government as contained in vision 2020 is a clear indication of her further commitment not only to eradicate poverty by 2020 but to have the nation listed among the top 20 economies of the world.

The Economic Indices of some Selected African Countries

The Financial Standard Newspaper presents a daily/weekly report of the performance of the economies of some selected countries in Africa. The various criteria used include: inflation rate, interest rate, life expectancy, Internet penetration among others. The excerpts from the papers for over two years are presented as follow:

Table1: Economic indices for some African Countries

	Nigeria	Morocco	Niger	Eritrea	Benin	Uganda	Cameroon	South Africa	Ghana	Egypt
GDP Growth	5.5	1.8	0.2	2	3.5	4	4.1	4.9	5.4	NA
Inflation Rate	11.6	2.1	8.1	15	3.5	8.1	4.2	0.2	14.8	NA
Interest Rate	30.5	13.4	NA	16.8	NA	NA	10.8	12	15.5	NA
Life Exp (Male)	46.5	68.5	51.63	57.4	51.9	51.63	63.5	43.8	55	68.77
Life Exp (Female)	47.7	73.4	53.69	60.7	54.22	53.69	47.7	43.7	57	73.93
Internet Users(m)	5	0.5	NA	NA	0.425	0.5	NA	5.1	NA	5
Population (m)	133.58	31.15	13.957	4.401	8.439	29.7	16.322	47.432	22.75	74.033

[Source: Excerpts from Financial Standard Newspaper; and Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_population_in_2005]

1. Life expectance ratio

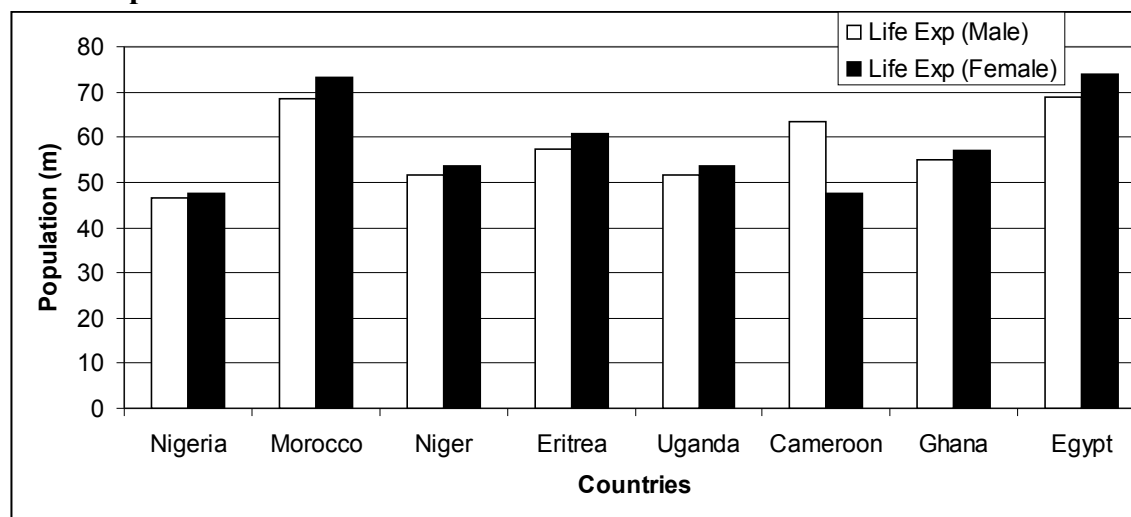


Figure 1: Life Expectancy ratios of some selected African countries

From table 1, the life expectancy ratios of some selected African countries are presented in figure 1. Life expectancy is higher in some African countries like Morocco, Egypt, and Eritrea and fair in some East, South and West African countries. If the dividend of democracy is to improve the well-being of the citizenry, then Nigeria has not fared well, considering its life expectancy rate that is about the lowest in Africa. It is the lowest among the selected countries. The situation in Nigeria can be improved upon through an improved healthcare system, job creation, provision of water and education, and improved economic situation. DFID (2007) reports described the health system in Nigeria as off track because government spending on health is below 5% of the total budget. The same is true of education, which is between 5% and 9%, far below the 26% recommended by UNESCO.

2. Internet Penetration

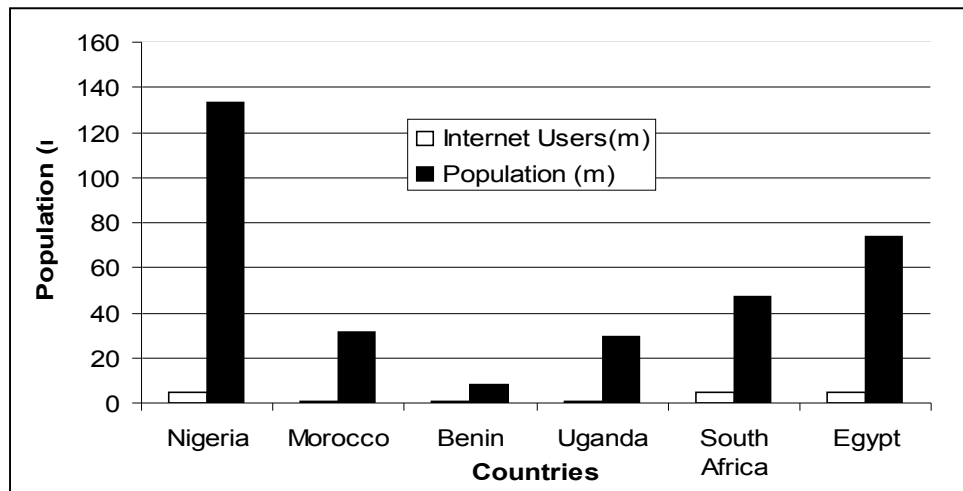


Figure 2: Internet penetration rates of some selected African countries

Figure 2 is constructed based on table 1. The Internet has become a major platform for business transaction all over the world. Therefore, access to this medium is very crucial to meeting the MDGs, particularly poverty eradication through the introduction of e-Commerce, e-Learning and e-Health to mention a few. South Africa has the highest figure (5.1 million). In Nigeria it is 5 million and when compared to the population, it becomes insignificant. Therefore, Nigerian through its recently formulated ICT policy and rural telephony strategy would be able to deploy such services to the rural areas. Although cost and poverty level are a major concern.

THE MDGs INITIATIVES IN NIGERIA

The National Economic and Empowerment Strategies (NEEDS)

After the several years of misrule by the military, the civilian government of Nigeria instituted a dynamic reform team to launch its poverty eradication strategies. NEEDS was a medium-term plan from 2004 – 2007 by the Nigerian government for economic recovery, growth and development (IMF Report, 2007). According to (Olubamise et al, 2007), the strategies include:

- i. Reforming government institutions
 - Restructuring and strengthening government institutions

- ii. Growing the private sector
 - Reducing government influence in the economy
 - Accelerating privatization
 - Deregulating and liberalizing the economy
- iii. Implementing a social charter
 - Improve peoples access to health, education, welfare, employment, security and participation
- iv. Adding value-orientation
 - Anti-corruption campaign
 - Freedom of information
 - Enhancing the role of the civil society

For effective results from the reform, the State Economic and Empowerment Strategies (SEEDS) was formed. SEEDS is a local equivalent of NEEDS instituted to drive government reforms to the grass root. It is to make government accountable at all levels and to institute people-oriented policies that would stem down the tide of poverty in the country. At the end of the year 2007, NEEDS-2 was inaugurated to advance the goals of NEEDS from 2008 to 2011. Simultaneously, Vision 2020 was instituted and was aimed at eradicating poverty and transforming the economy of Nigeria in general.

The overall performance of NEEDS is remarkable. The process is still on course; it surpasses the expected targets in many respects, particularly on privatization and liberalization; banking consolidation and civil service reforms; but it is weak in some areas; and still below expectation in the areas of poverty reduction, employment generation and power supply (NEEDS, 2004). The social charter under NEEDS include: economic empowerment and poverty reduction, education, health, employment generation, gender equality and water sanitation. The projected target for 2007 was to create 7 million jobs, increase immunization to 60%; increase access to safe drinking water by 70%; increase school enrollment rates for girls and increase adult literacy rate to at least 65%. The actual performance revealed that 7 million jobs were not created; unemployment rate declined from 17% in 2004 to 10% in 2006; growth in the education sector is making slow but steady progress; immunization coverage increased from 38% in 2005 to 77% in 2006 (IMF Report, 2007).

The Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) Initiatives

SMEs are defined as businesses with less than ₦100 million (about \$1 million) turnover and/or less than 300 employees (Oyelaran, 2007). Similarly, in the International Finance Committee Report 2007, 96% of Nigerian businesses are classified as SMEs as against 53% and 65% in the US and Europe respectively.

The SMEs are managed under the small and medium enterprises development agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN). It was set up in the year 2003, while similar bodies had been in existence for over 50 years in the developed world (Japan since 1941 and USA since 1953), with a lot of results to show. In the 70's and 80's in Britain, between 500 and 900 new firms were created on a weekly basis and about one million self employed people (Abugu, 2007).

The British model was focused on loan guarantee scheme, tax incentives, linkage of SMEs with appropriate technologies and educational institutions and developing venture capital industry.

Nigeria has a lot to learn from this model in order to correct the failed attempts of the past at reducing poverty.

The Vision 2020 Initiative

According to the governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, Charles Soludo (2007), the Vision 2020 otherwise known as the Financial System Strategy (FSS 2020), was predicated on Goldman Sachs' prediction that the economies of Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRIC) would surpass the G6 based on extrapolation growth rate, capital accumulation, exchange rate among others. The organization further predicted the next eleven (N 11) countries that have the potentials to overtake Italy in GDP and Nigeria and Egypt were the only two African countries included. Consequent upon this, the FSS 2020 was formulated to place the Nigerian economy among the 20 largest economies in the world by the year 2020 code named vision 20 20202. Thus, the thrust of FSS 2020 is to:

1. Increase commitment to education.
2. Enforce economic, structural and political reforms.
3. Enhance greater integration into the world trade and finance.
4. Improve power supply, transportation and telecoms infrastructure.
5. Reduce overall dependence on primary commodities and improve industrial economy and business environment.

The Nigerian National IT Policy

The Nigerian National IT policy was formulated in the year 2000. It is responsible for the monumental developments in the ICT sector. The vision is to make Nigeria an IT capable country in Africa and a key player in the information society. Its primary mission is to "Use IT" for: education; creation of wealth; poverty eradication; job creation; governance; health; agriculture; etc. (Ajayi, 2005).

Some On-Going ICT Projects in Nigeria

i. Mobile Internet Units (MIUs)

These are buses equipped with ICT facilities such as PCs, peripheral devices and very small aperture terminals (VSATs) which are used to carry ICT education to rural areas. Currently, there are six MIU buses, but the expectation is to extend the services to all the 774 local government areas of Nigeria (Angaye, 2007).

ii. Wire Nigeria (WiN) Project

This project is tagged "Wire Nigeria". It is intended to provide broadband transmission to all the nooks and crannies of the country. The project is expected to facilitate the interconnection of various equipment, facilities and subsystems in order to provide end-to-end transfer of information (Bello, 2007). The project was divided into 3 phases: phase 1 is to connect all State capitals to the fibre network; phase 2 is to connect all Local Government headquarters; and phase 3 is to provide all Nigerians with fibre Network within a maximum of 50 km from where they live. The project is presently at phase 2. Upon completion, the project is expected to reduce

rural-urban migration; enhance rural urbanization; improve the quality of live of all; improve standard of education; and improve employment generation.

iii. E-Government Project

This is part of the civil service reforms which was designed to make the Nigerian civil service proactive and to respond quickly to the needs of the general populace. The project was a joint initiative between the public and private sector operators under the aegis of National e-Government Strategies (NeGST) and the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA). At the international conference for e-Government organized by the UN in China in 2007, the Nigerian e-Government model was endorsed as a viable option for implementation across the world, particularly, the public private partnership model (Nkanga, 2007).

The project was designed to reduce the bureaucracy that attends to government businesses in the country through the introduction of e-Tax, e-Learning, e-Traffic, e-Procurement, e-Pricing, e-Mail, e-Tourism, e-Payment, e-Revenue, e-Legislation, e-Policing, e-Judiciary, e-Health, e-Agriculture, e-Services, e-Kiosk, e-Buka (e-Cafeteria) etc (Isoun, 2004).

Presently the NeGST has online presence at (<http://www.negst.com>). Similarly, all the Federal ministries are online, and the country has commenced online payment for services in such areas as tax, company registration, online booking, e-Banking etc.

6.0 REVIEW OF THE NIGERIAN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX (HDI)

People are the real wealth of nations. Therefore, every effort that is geared towards poverty reduction must be centered on human development. Thus, in the UN report of 2006, HDI represents a composite measure of three dimensions of human development which include: living a long and healthy life (measured by life expectancy); level of education (measured by adult literacy and level of enrolment at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels); and standard of living measured by purchasing power parity, PPP, income) (UN report, 2006). From the report, Nigeria is ranked among the countries with low human development and has a position of 159 out of the 177 nations considered.

Therefore, presented in the tables below are the rates of development on some selected macroeconomic and social indicators, enrolment in schools, female enrolment in schools, health development and ICT diffusion.

Some Selected Macroeconomic & Social Indicators

Table 2: Some Selected Macroeconomic & Social Indicators

Variable	Year					
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Inflation Rate (%)	12.2	14	15	11.6	8.5	6.6
Growth in Agriculture Sector (%)	4.22	6.64	6.5	7.06	7.17	7.42
External Reserve (\$ Billions)	7.68	7.46	17.26	28.61	43	51.33
Adult Literacy Rate	57	57	62	62	64.2	64.2
Life Expectancy at Birth (Years)	54	54	54	54	54	54

[Source: CBN Report 2006 & 2007]

Table shows the rate of developments of some selected macroeconomic and social indicators. The inflation rate increased from 12.2% in 2002 to 14% and 15% in 2003 and 2004 respectively, and decreased to 11.6%, 8.5% and 6.6% in 2005, 2006 and 2007 respectively because of the reforms instituted in the banking sector of the economy. The downward trend witnessed from 2005 to 2007 is expected to be sustained.

The life expectancy rate is constant (54 years) from 2002 to 2007. The index is a function of a number of factors such as health, employment, education, water supply etc, on these factors, the country is not doing well presently. The adult literacy rate increased marginally from 57% in 2002 to 64.2% in 2006 and 2007. The rate is above average and better result is expected because of the current reforms in the education sector, particularly the universal basic education (UBE). The agricultural sector has equally witnessed a marginal growth from 4.22% in 2002 to 7.42% in 2007. The country had neglected this sector in the past because of the massive revenue from oil and gas. Presently, the oil and gas is responsible for over 80% of the nation's revenue. One good thing that has happened to the nation is the monumental growth in foreign reserves from the period under consideration, particularly the growth from \$17.26 billion in 2004 to \$51.33 billion in 2007. This development is attributed to the reforms in the banking and the Telecoms sectors, which has not only sanitized the sectors but has made them a global player.

Unemployment Level

Table 3: Unemployment Statistics

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Total Population	129,900,168	134,131,224	138,468,013	140,003,542	144,483,655.34
Total Labour Force	54,929,577	55,538,881	56,170,672	58,933,891	61,249,485
Total Employment	46,800,000	48,124,440	49,486,362	50,886,826	52,326,923
Total Unemployment	8,129,577	7,414,441	6,684,310	8,047,065	8,922,562
Unemployment Rate (%)	14.8	13.4	11.9	13.7	14.6

[Source: CBN Report 2006 & 2007]

Poverty eradication or reduction is largely a function of unemployment both at the formal and the informal sectors. Table 3 only gives the statistics as far as the formal sector is concerned. At the national level the level of unemployment is 70%. However, going by the figures in the table, there were marginal improvements in employment from 2003 to 2005 but the level of unemployment seems to have deteriorated from 2006 to 2007. The worry generally now is that the various programmes of government have not yielded the expected benefits.

School Enrolment

The total school enrolment figures for the country from 2002 to 2005 are presented below:

Table 4: School enrolment

No of Enrolment at School	Year			
	2002	2003	2004	2005
1. Primary	19,353,000	24,768,000	25,464,000	26,160,000
2. Secondary	4,866,000	6,152,000	6,343,000	6,534,000
3. Tertiary	746,000	846,000	888,000	930,000
Total	24,965,000	31,766,000	32,695,000	33,624,000

[Source: CBN Report 2006]

The enrolment in schools is an important factor of human development. However, considering the years under review, 2002 to 2005, the statistics show a marginal improvement across the various tiers of learning. Education at the primary level is the largest because it is largely free and compulsory across the country. From the figures, only about 25% of the primary school leavers proceed to secondary level, while about 14% of secondary school leavers proceed to the tertiary level. The nation has less than 50% of the required infrastructure to meet the yearning needs of the populace, which is due to poor funding of the sector as well as poverty. Most pupils hardly make it to the secondary level before they start to support their parents in one trade or the order. However, arising from the education reform of 2006, particularly the UBE makes education free and compulsory up to the 15th year. Better improvement is expected after some years of implementation.

Female Enrolment

Table 5: Percentage of Female enrolment in Schools

Percentage of Females in Educational Institutions	2002	2003	2004	2005
1. Primary	51	53	53	53
2. Secondary	48	42	43	44
3. Tertiary	45	43	43	43

[Source: CBN Report 2006]

From table 4, about 50% of the female population in Nigeria attended primary school. The number of the females in the secondary school decreased from 48% in 2002 to 42% in 2003 but gained an increment of 1% each in 2004 and 2005. The percentage of female students in tertiary institutions was 45% in 2003 and decreased to 43% in 2003 through 2005.

Health Services

Table 6: Distribution of Some Health Services

Health Services	2002	2003	2004	2005
1. Population in Nigeria (Census 1991)	122,364,720	126,152,844	129,927,425	133,702,006
2. Population per Physician (No)	3,190.30	3,141.30	3,100.00	3,059.00
3. Population per Nursing Staff (No.)	951.80	922.50	818.00	714.00

4. Population per Hospital Bed (No.)	1,685.50	1,722.70	1,764.40	1,806.00
5. Life Expectancy at Birth (Years)	54	54	54	54

[Source: CBN Report 2006]

The level of health facilities is low, thus requiring urgent attention. The number of persons per hospital bed was 1,685.50 in 2002, which has increased marginally to 1,722.70 in 2003 and 1,764.40 and 1,806 in 2004 and 2005 respectively. Similarly, the number of persons per physician was 3,190.30 in 2002, which reduced to 3,141.30 in 2003 and further down to 3,100 and 3,059 in 2004 and 2005 respectively. According to a special report on the health situation in Nigeria, a ratio of 1: over 6,000 was reported (Yusuf, 2008). This abysmal situation arose because only 20,000 out of the 60,000 medical doctors ply their trade locally while the remaining ones are abroad in search of greener pastures. The situations of health problems are multi-dimensional. They range from education, water supply, environment, and poverty to funding among others. It has been observed that developments in these sectors is poor, particularly, the provision of safe water.

Ekiwhire (2008) reported that diarrhea, killed 1.9 million people every year with over 4 billion reported cases in recent years. In Africa, diarrhea is 4 times more common than HIV virus.

MAJOR ICT DEVELOPMENTS IN NIGERIA

Telephone Usage in Nigeria

Table 7: Distribution of Telephone Usage in Nigeria

OPERATOR	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	Oct-07
Mobile (GSM)	266,461	1,569,050	3,149,472	9,174,209	18,587,000	32,322,202	49,057,883
Mobile (CDMA)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	424,579
Fixed Wired/Wireless	600,321	702,000	872,473	1,027,519	1,223,258	1,687,972	2,391,442
Total	866,782	2,271,050	4,021,945	10,201,728	19,810,258	34,010,174	51,873,904
Teledensity	0.73	1.89	3.35	8.50	15.72	24.29	37.05

[Source: <http://www.ncc.gov.ng/subscriberdata.htm>]

The deregulation of the telecoms industry in the year 2001 is responsible for the growth of telephone subscribers. It shows an improvement in teledensity from 0.73 in 2001 to 37.05 by 2007. The GSM is a major contributor to the growth.

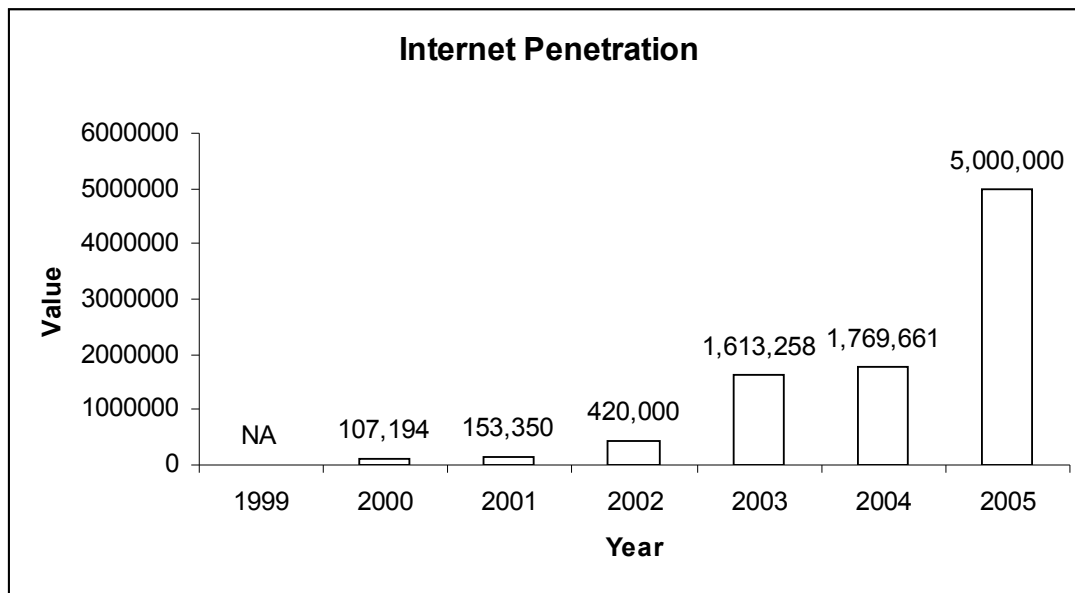
The transformation in this sector of the economy is monumental as the number of GSM subscribers by early 2008 had risen to over 50 million. The sector had created thousands of direct and indirect jobs. If the platform is well harnessed, it could mark the beginning of m-Government, m-Democracy, m-Payment and m-Procurement, that is, the deployment of government, democracy, payment and procurement services on mobile devices respectively, which would improve the e-Inclusion or e-Participation in the polity and the economy.

Internet Usage in Nigeria

Coming from a level that was non-existent in 1999, to a total population of 5 million in 2005 is very commendable. This is the second largest in Africa after South Africa with a value of 5.1

million. However, the value is expected to be higher now and perhaps the highest in Africa because of the commitment of government to the National IT policy, which is expected to extend ICT facilities to the nooks and crannies of the country. Thus, the level of Internet penetration is encouraging as there is phenomenal growth, though, much is still expected from a nation with a population of 140 million.

Figure 3: Distribution of Internet Usage in Nigeria



[Source: <http://www.ncc.gov.ng/subscriberdata.htm>]

CONCLUSION

The Nigerian e-Government strategies are aimed at improving the well-being of the citizenry, particularly meeting the MDGs and they have started yielding dividends but very gradually. The MDGs initiatives of the country have brought about major reforms in the economy through the institutionalization of NEEDS, SEEDS, Vision 2020, NeGST, as well as the provision of improved ICT services such as telecommunications and the Internet.

The ranking of the country on e-Government readiness may not be encouraging, but the level of access to ICT is worthy of praise. The position is low because of the population of the country. Mauritius was ranked first but its population is not up to a local government area out of the existing 774 local government areas in Nigeria. However, the ranking of South Africa, Egypt, Algeria whose population is about one-third or half of the Nigerian population is worthy on note. Therefore, based on the analysis of the social charter that imparts directly on human development and poverty, it was observed that the adult literacy level of 64.2% is satisfactory and better results are expected before 2015. The life expectancy level is constant (54 years) from 2002 to 2007, and is the one of the lowest in Africa. On school enrolment, the major problem is access and poverty. It was observed that only 25% of primary school leavers made it to the secondary school level, while about 14% of the students at this level made it to the tertiary level. This trend is not encouraging if we must eradicate poverty. Similarly, the average percentage of female enrolment in schools is 45%. This is fair as the 50% benchmark by 2015 is realizable. The health facilities are under-funded and are grossly inadequate both in quality and quantity.

There is an average of 1,700 persons per hospital bed and the ratio of physicians to the populace is 1: over 6,000, which is twice the WHO recommendation, a state of emergency should be declared in this sector.

One major sector of the economy that is experiencing a boost is the ICT and Telecoms. The sector had brought about a teledensity growth of 0.73 to 37.05 from 2001 to 2007. Consequently, Nigeria has been named the fastest growing Telecoms nation in Africa and the third in the world, with a number of direct and indirect jobs created. Similarly, the rate of Internet diffusion is encouraging bearing in mind that the level was almost non-existent in 1999. It is obvious that Nigeria would be able to bridge the divide by 2015 with the attendant benefits to other areas such as e-Learning, e-Health, e-Commerce, e-Democracy and e-Government to mention a few. The current NeGST drive of the country is encouraging, particularly the provision of rural telephony would address the issue of access-divide and offer the rural dwellers equal opportunities for economic and social empowerment as well as enhanced participation in the polity (e-Inclusion or e-Participation).

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