# Health
# COMMUNICATION,
# Gender Violence
# and ICTs in Nigeria

Edited by

Eserinune McCarty MOJAYE
Olusola Oyeyinka OYEWO
Ritchard M'BAYO
Idowu Akanbi SOBOWALE

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# The Nigerian Press, and ICTs and the MDG Initiative in Nigeria's Development | 28

*Joseph Obe, Charles K. Ayo and*
*Segun Odukomaiya*

## Introduction

The argument as to whether Nigeria can actually utilize ICTs for her development in the face of the prevailing circumstances is gaining robust dimension. In the UNESCO-sponsored pilot study on adoption of ICTs in Africa and Asia-Pacific, Obijiofor *et al.* (1999) submitted:

> In Africa, ignorance is far more major obstacles and those aware, mostly the educated and literate people in the private sector, say as much as they appreciate the need and importance of ICTs, the economic situation in their countries and general poverty make it difficult for people who need these ICTs to acquire them. In Ghana, for example, the per capital income is US$400 and the average cost of a computer (plus modem and telephone line etc) is US$1500. Also in Nigeria, to acquire a computer/modem, ISP subscription and telephone line would require the total annual income of a graduate.

In a bid to scale up efforts to ensure that Nigeria does not miss the 2015 target as well as utilize its mandate to execute the media component of the MDGs campaign, the UNDP together with the UN Country Team in Nigeria (in 2005) acknowledged the Nigerian media as a development partner. Media professionals have a critical role to play in providing information and setting agenda for the larger society. Hence, the UNDP decided to launch a comprehensive advocacy campaign on the Millennium Development Goals in Nigeria, using the media as the vehicle. The campaign was designed to forge stronger partnerships that will lead to increased awareness about, and ultimately the achievement of the MDGs in Nigeria.

Besides, the engagement of the media was intended to serve the dual purpose of creating/increasing awareness among Nigerians about the Millennium Development Goals and enhancing Journalists' capacity for reporting and writing on the MDGs in particular and development issues in general. For the media to use ICTs tools to write and produce effective stories that will increase awareness about the MDGs and stimulate necessary actions for the achievement of the MDGs, journalists themselves must have unfettered access to those tools. They must know how to use search engines, do database search to source and present MDG-related stories and must have an appreciable level of adoption of ICTs tools.

A longitudinal study by Okoye (2004) aimed at tracking the adoption of computer-based information sources by Nigerian newspapers, notes that "there is a zero or near-zero use of most of the components of computer-assisted reporting (CAR). For example, no Nigerian newspaper is currently using electronic morgue and electronic public records. There is also very little use of CD-ROMs and commercial online databases".

## Brief Review of Relevant Literature

Compelling arguments from researchers hold that the new communication technologies have the key to socio–economic development of many societies. Advocates of ICTS specifically use the Western world experience as an example of the positive impact of ICTS in human society. To them, the impact of industrial techno-logies turned around their socio-economic development. Conversely, those who belong to the anti-ICTs school of thought are of the view that the notion that ICT can lead to development is nothing but a ruse designed to trick the underdeveloped world into a new form of colonialization and bondage. These two positions shall be briefly examined here.

Tehranian (1990) believes that communication technologies play a dual role in society. The first role is the opening up of opportunities for centralization of authority, control and communication typical of the modern Industrial State, and on the other hand, they supply alternative channels of cultural resistance and ideological mobilization for opposition forces. The "Big Media" (such as national press, broadcasting and mainframe computers) are identified with the centralizing forces while the "small media" (such as the alternative press, small scale audio visual production and transmission facilities and personal computer networking) provide the avenues for community resistance and mobilization. On this basis, one can argue that the new communication technologies serve the interests of both

the privileged and the underprivileged classes in society (Obijiofor et al. 1999).

Stevenson, Burkett and Myint (1993) argue that the new communication and information technologies can strengthen the centralized and industrial economies or decentralize empowerment and find creative solutions to local and global problems through new social technologies. Increasing globalization facilitated by the new technologies has brought about changes which flow through to local communities. Paradoxically, however, these local communities are forced to make international connections in order to solve local problems.

As it is in the introduction of new concepts and ideas, adoption and diffusion of the New Communication Technologies (NCTs) met sharp criticisms by those who see nothing good in what they refer to as "Northern domination of the South". The truth is that the New Communication Technologies are purely western products driven by the globalization agenda of the imperial powers.

Succinctly, pessimists about the future of NCTs have advanced dangers inherent in the adoption of the new technologies, to include:

- The marketing of pornographic products on the Internet;
- The damage to children in terms of creating a virtual world divorced from nature;
- The perpetration of organized crimes;
- The likelihood that they may widen the existing gap between the *information rich* and the *information poor and;*
- Further cultural impoverishment by continuing the one-way communication between North and South. More centrally is that NCTs create an information based economy and not a communicative society (Inayatullah 1999:12).

Lerner and Schramm (1976) threw more light thus:

> Throughout the less developed regions, people have been led to want more than they can get. This can be attributed in part to the spread of the mass media, which inevitably show and tell people about the good things of life that are available elsewhere...As people in the poor countries were being shown and told about 'goodies' available in developed countries, they were also being taught about their own inferiority...at least in terms of wealth and well-being. Recognition of the disparities between the rich and poor countries produced among some a sense of aggressiveness. Both apathy and aggression usually are

counter-productive to genuine development efforts (p. 341-342).

Another argument against the new communication technologies is the attempted erosion of the conventional media through 'illegal dissemination of 'unedited' media products. This is because most or all of the online media sites publish what they see. The cyber journalists do not bother about the ethical quality of what they are disseminating because there are no gatekeepers. Joseph Dominick (2005) identifies three damaging implications of this 'no gate keeping' disaster. One, the risk of overloading the system with unwanted, trivial, worthless; or inconsequential messages is increasing. Two, the information obtained on the net are not evaluated by professionals (editors), thereby losing in authenticity and objectivity. Three, since online journalism has no gatekeepers, their information does not pass through censorship.

## Theoretical Framework

To best understand the thematic preoccupation of this study, the concept of *critical mass theory* as it applies to the adoption of new communication technologies is desirable and would be used. The term comes from physics, where *critical mass* refers to the minimum amount of material needed to trigger and sustain a radioactive chain reaction. The term has been loosely applied to communication and refers to the minimum number of people needed as adopters before a new communication technology can have a permanent place in the society (Kaye and Medoff 2001).

Williams, Strover and Grant (1994) corroborated thus:

> An interesting aspect of the critical mass perspective is that widespread use appears to have a snowball effect. Once a perceived critical mass is using the technology, those without it are strongly motivated to adopt it. The reasoning here is that despite the drawbacks, such as cost or difficulty in using the technology, people (and institutions) are pressured to adopt the technology because failure to do so may exclude them from existing communication networks.

Before any medium can be considered a mass medium, a critical mass of adopters must be reached. Generally, critical mass is achieved when about 16 percent of the entire population has adopted an innovation, although in the case of mass media, fifty million users

seem to be the milestone (Markus 1990; Neufeld 1997 cited in Kaye and Medoff 2001).

Researches have shown that the rate of radio adoption crawled along for thirty-eight years before hitting the magic fifty million users; television took thirteen years, while cable took ten years to hit this mass medium status. In less than six years of its existence as a consumer medium, the Internet has reached the fifty million users mark (Kaye and Medoff 2001). Between 1995 and 1997, the estimated number of US online users ranged from 51 million to about 58 million. ("About One in Four Adults" 1996; American Internet User Survey 1997; CommerceNet and Nielsen Research 1995; "GVU's seventh www user survey 1997; Hoffman, Kalsbeek, and Novak 1996a; McGarvey 1996; MIDS 1995; O'Reiley Survey Sets" 1995; Taylor,1997).

In 1998 and 1999, between 57 million and 64 million people in the United States used the Internet (Decotis 1999; "Relevant Knowledge Rank the Sites" 1998 cited in Kaye and Medoff 2001). In 1999, Jupiter Communications claimed that in the United States alone, there were as many as 90 million Internet users (Guglielmo 1999 cited in Kaye and Medoff 2001). The Computer Industry Almanac claims that the use has topped 100 million people—40 percent of the population (*"US tops" 1999* cited in Kaye and Medoff 2001). More alarming is the Data monitor's claim that by the year 2003 about 545 million Internet users will be around the world ("Data monitor: 545 users," 1999 cited in Kaye and Medoff 2001).

This study was aimed to determine the current state of adoption and use of ICTs by media professionals in sensitizing the entire citizens of Nigeria on achieving the MDGs, as well as the challenges surrounding such adoption and use.

The study determined the current state of the use of ICTs by communication professionals in sensitizing the entire citizens of Nigeria on achieving the MDGs, the challenges surrounding the adoption and use of ICTs by Nigerian media professionals, and assessed how the Nigerian media professionals have been able to use ICTs in setting the agenda for the society as regards MDGs. It also determined the affordability or otherwise of the ICTs tools by media professionals in Nigeria.

The only instrument used for the research was the questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed using both the open-ended and closed–ended approaches and the study population comprised media professionals based in Lagos. The study location was adopted because most media professionals and their organizations are concentrated in Lagos, the nerve centre of the Nigerian Press. Besides, Lagos is today

regarded to have the most developed, vibrant and dynamic media industry in Africa (BBC poll). The media professionals/respondents in each of the media organisations are the reporters at all levels (including freelancers), editors, newscasters, studio engineers and prepress staff. The respondents are limited to these categories because those are the people who use ICTs facilities in the media industry. As for the selected media organizations, the simple random sampling technique was used to select respondents within the media organizations under study.

## Findings

The demographic data of the media professionals are presented in table 1. The data shows that there was a preponderance of male respondents (64.8 %), and that the respondents within the 30-49 years age group constituted the majority. The mean age of the media professionals is 39.5 years and this means that most of the respondents were young professionals who were below the age of 50.

Most of the respondents (55.2%) were married. Only one was separated while just two were widowed. The data showed that a good number of the respondents were single (about 42.9%).

On the highest academic qualification attained by the respondents, more than half of them (67.3%), were in the B.Sc/HND degree category. This means that the bulk of media professionals are B.Sc/HND degree holders. This was followed by the master's degree category (21.2%). Only 1.2% are in the doctoral degree category. 9.7% of the respondents have National Diploma while only 0.6% have Senior School Certificate.

The monthly salaries of most of the media professionals fall in the range of N10,000 and N39,999. In other words, the average monthly salary of about 50% of the respondents was N25,000. Forty-six respondents earned between N40,000 and N69,999, while those who earned between 'N70,000 and N99,999' and 'N100,000 and above' respectively were in the minority (12.2% and 9.5% respectively). In other words, majority of media professionals earn an average monthly salary of N25,000.

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

| Characteristics | Frequency |
|---|---|
| **Gender** | |
| Male | 64.8% |
| Female | 35.2% |
| Total | 100.0% |
| | n=172 |
| **Age** | |
| 20-29 years | 35.8% |
| 30-49 years | 58.8% |
| 50 and above | 5.5% |
| Total | 100.0% |
| | n=172 |
| **Marital status** | |
| Single | 42.9% |
| Married | 55.2% |
| Widowed | 1.2% |
| Separated | 0.6% |
| Total | 100.0% |
| | n=172 |
| **Highest qualification attained** | |
| Doctoral Degree | 1.2% |
| Masters Degree | 21.2% |
| B.Sc/HND | 67.3% |
| ND | 9.7% |
| SSCE | 0.6% |
| Total | 100.0% |
| | n=172 |
| **Monthly income level** | |
| N10,000 – N39,999 | 47.3% |
| N40,000 – N69,999 | 31.1% |
| N70,000 – N99,999 | 12.2% |
| N100,000 and above | 9.5% |
| Total | 100.0% |
| | n=172 |

One major finding of this study is that the greatest challenge militating against the use of ICTs by media professionals in Nigeria is the cost of acquiring the facilities. A minor challenge is lack of basic infrastructure like electricity. Only very few attributed their inability to use ICTs to unfavourable government policies. Another finding is that the cost of acquiring ICTs tools is high (table 2). The income level of the media professionals is also a serious barrier to their acquisition of ICTs. The data had earlier established the fact that media professionals in Nigeria earn an average of N25,000 monthly.

#### Table 2: Challenges against the Use of ICTs

| Challenges | Frequency |
|---|---|
| Cost | 57.3% |
| Lack of basic infrastructure | 34.7% |
| Unfavourable governmental policies | 4.7% |
| Others | 3.3% |
| Total | 100.0% |
|  | n=172 |
| **Cost of acquisition as a barrier to usage** |  |
| Yes |  |
| No | 72.3% |
| No impact | 14.8% |
| Can't say | 1.9% |
| Total | 11.0% |
|  | 100.0% |
|  | n=172˙ |

One important finding that needs to be underscored in this study is that despite the challenges, the adoption and use of ICTs by Nigerian media professionals is not low and it can be said that there is an appreciable level of adoption and use of ICTs by the professionals (table 3).

#### Table 3: Level of Adoption and Use of ICTs by Media Professionals

| Assessment | Frequency |
|---|---|
| Very High | 24.2 |
| High | 34.6 |
| Moderate | 32.7 |
| Low | 8.5 |
| Total | 100.0 |

The reality however is that most media professionals that are really involved in reporting are reporters/state correspondents who are on the field. These journalists rely on cyber café/business centres to send their reports to Head Office while very few who own the ICTs tools pay through their nose and some got them through loans or hire purchase.

Nigeria, like other developing countries cannot dictate the media in their own terms and as such they cannot regulate the cost of purchase, let alone fixing the price of equipment. The country relies on the price dictated by the western world that manufactured and brought the ICTs tools to us. This cost of acquisition is acknowledged

to be the greatest headache to the media professionals in their quest for using ICTs tools.

It must be stressed that barring the hiccups in the purchase, media professionals still achieve an appreciable level of adoption and use of ICTs tools. The truth is that one does not need to own the tools before using them. Through a cyber café, one can use the tools with as little as thirty naira. However, owing the tools is much better as it allows one unfettered access and usage at any convenient time.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

This study concludes that the use of ICTs by Nigerian media professionals is noticeable but relatively insufficient if Nigeria must realize the MDGs by the year 2015. It is insufficient because there are prevailing circumstances militating against the adoption and use of ICTs by media professionals. The study is the view that the income levels of the media professionals could not match the cost of acquisition of ICTs. This means that what the media professionals earn as income cannot enable them to afford ICTs tools without sweat. In contemporary Nigeria, to buy a digital camera, computer laptop, with modem and payment for Internet subscriptions cost between one hundred and fifty and three hundred thousand naira (N150,000 and N300,000), depending on the sophistication and configuration of the ICTs tools.

With the average monthly income of media professionals put at twenty five thousand naira (N25,000) and three hundred thousand naira (N300,000) annually, one could infer that it takes the total annual income of a media professional to buy a digital camera, computer laptop, with modem and pay for Internet subscriptions. The case among freelance journalists who do not receive specific salaries and live on 'brown envelopes' is even worse as they live on gratification offered by newsmakers. The implication of this is that journalists who should be maximizing the benefits inherent in ICTs do not see computers as useful equipment compared with vehicles or calculators. In other words, these journalists see computers as luxury tools that could only be acquired when one is economically comfortable. To them, it is a question of scale of preference: if you have to feed and if you have to think of having a laptop computer, you will want to feed first, because if you don't feed, you are not likely to survive.

The study recommends an urgent need for the unprecedented media advocacy about MDGs through the writing and production of effective stories for MDG awareness. Besides, the agenda-setting mandate of the press must be invoked such that public attention will

be directed towards the country's realization of the MDGs by the year 2015. By this mandate, the media will be able to encourage the public to think about the MDGs. Nigerian media professionals should take a little time out of concentrating most of their energy on political and sports reporting and hearken to their call of developmental journalism. In other words, the MDGs issues should be given media hype as is the case on news about Adedibu and godfatherism, the scandal among political office holders and EFCC activities. Because of the seemingly technical nature of the concept of the MDGs, journalists should always introduce a human angle/touch to their MDGs stories, so as to make them interesting and entertaining to readers.

Media organizations in Nigeria should seek the assistance of international journalism training organizations like the National Association of Computer-Assisted Reporting based in the United States of America to enhance the capacity of their men in the use of the components of computer-assisted reporting in their business. This would enable Nigerian journalists to be proficient in the use of ICTs to communicate MDGs.

Media organizations in Nigeria should endeavour to provide free Internet-connected laptops for their reporters especially those on the field, with connections through the global systems tele-communications (GSM), such that wherever there is communication network, the journalist can access the net through his/her laptop. It is not enough to computerize and network the newsroom only, the real news come from the field reporters. The current practice of making the reporters purchase laptops, digital cameras and pay subscriptions on their own through loans or otherwise is not healthy and threatens the ethical conduct of the profession, as it makes the journalists susceptible to 'brown envelopes' and other undue gratifications from newsmakers.

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