

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as a Tool for Micro Entrepreneurship Development in the Villages of the Rural Areas of Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

There are many opportunities found in the rural areas especially in the developing countries of Africa. Many skilful young men and women in the rural areas are being wasted due to lack of exposure and medium of harnessing these potentials in them. Many of these skilful young men do not know that such skills can be made useful for them and the society and also generate income for them and their families. This article attempted to address the position of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as a tool for entrepreneurship growth and job creation in the rural areas of Africa. The paper pointed out some major challenges such as lack of training, inadequate power supply and provision of ICT resources and other uncertainties such as government policies. The paper also suggests the establishment of Rural Village ICT Centres as ways government can come in to help reduce the cost of ICT infrastructures and resources to encourage the rural entrepreneurs bring out the skills domicile in them and also learn ways to stay in the business.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, ICT, Training, Business, Entrepreneurial Skill

INTRODUCTION

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has played a vital role in the enhancing skill and talents in the world today. Many countries including developing countries like Nigeria has embraced ICT as a major factor in teaching and learning in our schools. ICT can be said to include a range of services and tools which are used to disseminate, interact, documents and manage information. It is expected that ICT will be in the centre of development in African countries especially in terms of entrepreneurship education. The stages of human development has been characterised by curiosity, inquisitiveness and thinking based on a better way of doing things in order to solve the problem of man. Down the lane may not be limited to farming and food production to settlement within the villages and communities. As the ages past this curiosity to inquire, combat challenges and finding new approaches in creating solutions to the existing problems has made man transform his environment technologically and in various forms which are essential components of entrepreneurial skills in man. ICT-driven entrepreneurship is the ability to use innovations in manufacturing and distribution of

products and services in order to accelerate strategies in managing and marketing of one's products.

There is the view that entrepreneurship is desired on the bases that it helps to open up opportunities for the majority of the nation's population and also improves social welfare. Entrepreneurship can be a positive factor in making economies more productive and sensitive to the societal needs as most micro enterprises form majority of the country's economy. ICT is mainly the use computers and other communication equipments to collect, store, process, retrieve and transfer data and information. It also explains a better way to provide users with modern transaction record keeping in business. ICT provides entrepreneurs global access to information, learning and support the need around them. All these are laudable opportunity leveraged by ICT in the global world today. The question now is how this can be applicable in the remote villages of African vis-a-vis Nigeria. The developing counties remote village entrepreneurs are the worst hit by the technological advancement in ICT. Most of them have never seen or torch computer before. It therefore, becomes difficult for them to understand the uses and how it can help to enhance their creativity in life. You see how difficult it could be for somebody who has not seen computer to use the modern technology of computer software to enhance his business.

LITRETURE REVIEW

Entrepreneurship has been as old as man, in finding new and better ways to improve its environment and overcoming militating challenges. The concept was first established in the 1700s (Suleiman et. al 2020) and means starting one own business.

An entrepreneur is viewed as someone who has the ability to establish, run and become successful in a start-up business venture with the risk entitled to it as to make profits. Entrepreneurs are often known as source of new ideas; he brings new ideas to the market. The position of an entrepreneur whether profit-seeking, creative and controlling, would be essential to the usage of knowledge. He has the technical knowhow in finding potential business opportunities, he organises effective distribution of resources and monitors the utilization of new ideas for effective production. Most economics believe that entrepreneurship is a factor that stimulates economic growth and alleviate the problem of unemployment in our society. However, small businesses and micro enterprises form the pivot of job creation and poverty eradication in all the developing countries of the world especially in Africa. It is clear that in most remote villages in Nigeria entrepreneurs don't have access to huge capital to start their business ventures, they rather begin with small capital which takes time to develop into a profit making venture; this means there is competitions of extinction. In the villages of the rural areas you observe that there are many gifted hands (skilled entrepreneurs) in many fields of human endeavour such as Music, arts and Designs. How do these group of people showcase these talents?. There is no platform for an artist, sculpture makers to showcase their product. How do people even patronize them by way of demand and supply as the case may be?

It is obvious that these groups of entrepreneurs do not have the capacity to use of ICT; some have not even hard about it.

ICT has provided relevant entrepreneurial development in developed Countries of world and it is believed that its introduction in the rural areas of developing Counties will facilitate the growth of entrepreneurship in the rural villages. Anoemuah (2019) observed that ICT investment in the rural areas is on the high side interns of cost thereby falling under the least prioritized government projects and as such creates low ICT awareness, no internet connectivity and a long period of time for its benefit to come out. ICT and its resources do not only involve the transfer of information but includes the knowledge of

the use of computers, Networks and internet to disseminate information. Suwarn Kumar Singh (2018) stated that the world is fast advancing in information technology resulting in changing the way business and people communicate, transact and behave. He opines that the cores of entrepreneurship are innovativeness in converting ideas to reality, risk taking and learning from failures and successes. Adenle et al (2019) assert that ICT enhances the competencies of building technology education entrepreneurs and their business managerial practices as veritable tool to nation sustainable development. He argues that the utilization of ICT improves business skills and leads to greater efficiency creating knowledge for business management of the building technology education entrepreneur. Nyika, Geraldine Taponswa (2020) observed that lack of use of ICT in education in the rural villages of Africa especially in the kindergarten, primary or even most secondary schools is a major obstacle facing schools in the remote rural areas. She argues that such development contribute to the low pass rate of schools in rural villages of Africa compared to their urban counterpart. This equally affects entrepreneurial skill development in the rural villages particularly in Nigeria because there are no tools to burst their skills and passion of students in such schools.

The question now is how does somebody in the village get to know how to use a computer? The rural villages have the opportunity to meet up with entrepreneurial development goals such as Poverty alleviation, education etc through ICT (Anoemual 2019). However, in the rural villages ICT has been misunderstood, many believe that it is used for academic and social purposes than using it for entrepreneurship and career purposes possibly because academic careers seem to be more pronounced, and have elevated dignity than entrepreneurial skills. Chime et al (2017) observed that ICT is imperative in rural development especially in such areas as health, agriculture and education with great improvement in content and access to information.

Anoemual (2019) equally observed that one of the major challenges to growth of information and communication Technology in the rural areas is lack of literacy. She stated that most Nigerians in the rural areas are illiterates and do not have enough training to understand the use of ICT and its gadgets for accessing information that will enable them improve their lives. Moreover most of this people are poor and cannot afford the huge cost of ICT resources.

Ankur et al, 2012 (as quoted by Anoemua, 2019) presented in their paper that lack of comprehension in use of ICT in the rural areas development has been at a very low rate. Then government on their own side provides improvement in technologies in urban areas but there is no significant improvement ICT-wise in the rural areas. They observed also that one of the draw backs in improving ICT in the rural areas is lack of electricity which militates against communication. It concluded by inviting government and individual to help develop the rural villages by providing power for effective communication. Electric power is one of the fundamentals in the deployment and use of information and communication technology resources, hence its need for rural development.

Jayita et al (2017) described how the use ICT has help in socioeconomic development of rural villages by contributing towards improving quality of life and economic growth.

ICT RESOURCES AND RURAL VILLAGE ICT CENTRE (RVICTC) ENTREPRENEURSHIP OPPORTUNITIES.

In the rural villages many skilled young people are challenged by means of developing their talents, several factors are responsible for this. One of such factors may be finance but the major one is ICT and its resources. ICT resources include digital devices such as computer system, Projector, Digital Cameras, Mobile Phone, electronics, Radio set, Television, GPS, Automated teller Machine, etc. The use of this technology forms the base of communication and many entrepreneurs in the rural villages fall short of this. For instance entrepreneurs in the rural villages of the developing countries especially in

Nigeria cannot burst to effectively use computer to do work. Having a personal computer significantly helps entrepreneur to do some offline designs, create complimentary cards for contact awareness, prepared his schedules and contact list and manage his time well. Moreover, computer system can be used offline with especial software that can enable a micro entrepreneur regulate his business. For instance a micro entrepreneur can use computer software to know the status of his business by calculate his breakeven point.

A good knowledge on the use of Mobile phones also boosts the capacity and capability of a rural village entrepreneur and spurs him for more exploits. However, micro entrepreneurs in the rural villages are denied these incentives due to lack of ICT Infrastructures within their vicinity in these developing counties of Africa.

ICT brings about social capital enabling people within the same network to have knowledge of others. Hongmei Huo (2013) argued that social capital improves access to information which creates business opportunities and at the same time improves the entrepreneurial opportunity identification process and recognition capabilities, thereby being able to incorporate and evaluate entrepreneurial decision making. Social capital also provides entrepreneurship resources such as financial resource, labour and human capital which is essential for start-up success for sustainable growth in early business. However, entrepreneurs in the rural villages have no easy of social capital because of lack of ICT facilities around them.

For entrepreneurship to thrive well in the rural villages of the developing countries especially Nigeria there is need for Government to establish Rural Village Information and Communication Technology (RVICTC) Centres close to the micro entrepreneurs in the rural villages. Marhaini Mohd Noor et al (2020) observed that rural Internet Centre ICT infrastructures could provide economies of scale to stimulate network building thereby enabling the rural entrepreneurs gain access to information and many ICT benefits. This will provide access to ICT resources which might lead to business opportunities, education, economic growth and other ICT growth that can be beneficial to the poor. It will equally help significantly in building capacity and knowledge base for the rural communities around it. A good communication system combined with IT enables great potential and support to the entrepreneur by providing timely dissemination of technology information needed and accessing world wide information on any desired aspect of entrepreneurial skills. ICT has bridged the gap of communication in terms reach. Computers are now used through internet connectivity to achieve a lot of capabilities. Online chatting, faster mail delivery through e-mail services which has become more convenient than postal communication. The use of multimedia technology has also made interaction with the computer dynamic with video clips, with enabled audio potential, images etc.

However, all these can be made possible through the establishment of rural village information and communication technology centres (RVICTC) within different villages of the rural areas. Introduction of such facilities like RVICTC will enable access to information for the rural inhabitants even in the remotest areas of the communities.

An entrepreneur looks out for change and prospect, responds to it and exploits opportunities. Innovation is a specific tool of an entrepreneur; hence, an effective entrepreneur converts a source into a resource. One way of doing this is to register with the RVICTC as an information centre to build up a resource. Mridulesh Singh et al (2016) x-rayed how Samaikya Agritech P. Ltd in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh operated an Agritech Centres with a support services to farmers who registered with them on commercial basis. The centre technical officers were equipped with computers linked to

their head office in Hyderabad with modem-to-modem telephone connection. A farmer registers by his field and receives support services that are specific to the field. The Farmers detailed information concerning his farming activities were stored in the centre database, this provided the basis for technical supports. Farmers equally received advices through government agricultural services and local institutions. Farming information was up-linked from headquarters to the computers at the centres while farmer special needs were attended by the experts at the headquarters via the technical officer at the centre within 24 hours. Farmer also received inputs such as seeds, pesticide and fertilizers, water and soil analysis, weather monitoring, field visiting by specialists. This according him boosted agripreneurship in the local villages of Hyderabad.

Many young secondary school graduates have wonderful skills and passion that if harnessed can put food on their tables. Some have passion for photography, eatery, local pastry, music, arts, ceramics etc. These talented young people can be engaged through the help of the RVICTC to be trained in various fields and encouraged as young entrepreneur to form micro entrepreneur network which may lead to establishing micro enterprises and cooperative engagement by the entrepreneurs who may develop into bigger entrepreneurs. The centre will also expose the entrepreneurs to such marketing strategies as determining Start-up cost, determining the market mix, SWOT analysis, Knowing ones breakeven point, Inventory and Contact management etc.

Start-up costs include all the expenses on incurs before he actually begins a business operation. Start-up costs vary depending on your business. But whatever your business might be, you should note all the different expenses you have incurred from the moment you started the process through the time your products or services are ready for sale. The RVICTC would help to guide the micro entrepreneurs on such line of thought to place them on sound footing while establishing their own business.

The RVICTC would through an expert in the various fields train the young entrepreneurs on the 4Ps of the market mix. (Product, place, price and promotion). One needs to determine his/her product and place component of the mix, in effect your talent, skill or passion knowing that no one element of the market mix is more important than the other and that all the pieces should fit together to effect a good competition out there. The pricing and promotions would help a micro entrepreneur create overall brand image at a unique point or position to enable him stand out from his competitors. Some of the things the young village entrepreneurs would leverage from the RVICTC in terms of market mix are being exposed to unique designs, signs, use of words, symbols or combination of these employed in creating an image that identifies a product and differentiates it from competitors. Images help to create some level of quality, credibility and satisfaction in customers mind over time. Darma Rika Swaramarinda (2018) stated that ICT brought technology waves into the world, according to him the first is increasing productivity and minimizing cost, the second is increase in effectiveness of the use of computer through the construction of computer networks. The third wave is on generating profits while the fourth and fifth etc; are helping the process of decision-making from qualitative data and reaching customers through the development of Internet network. These are some of the things the rural entrepreneurs benefit from the RVICTC Centre being close to them.

This Centre will equally bring to bear the conditions they should know to help them start-up a business based on their skills or passion. For instance exposing the micro entrepreneurs to SWOT analysis gives opportunity for them to know how to prepare to take off any business.

The SWOT analysis is a marking tool that can help you analyze your market research findings. It enables you to draft your market plan for your business in order to achieve your mission statement. After completing a SWOT analysis you would be able to have a

clearer picture who you are and also what your internal strength and weaknesses are and how you stand in terms of any threats and opportunities to your business coming from outside. Your strengths, the positive internal aspects of the business are all the things that can help you achieve your goals. It is what makes a business unique. Your weaknesses, the negative internal aspects of the business are those things that might slow down, harm or affect the business from the inside.

Your opportunities are the external positive factors that can be conducive to the success of your business. They are those things in the outside world that you can take advantage of in terms of your competitors or emerging market. Your threats are external negative factors that can damage or harm your business. They may be related to things that your may have little or no control over. It may be difficult to avoid threats but it is important to understand what they are and how it might affect your business to enable you make plans to minimize the impact of a potential threats.

Break even analysis can also help micro entrepreneurs in the villages of developing countries Nigeria as an example determine the quantity of his products he needs to sell to cover cost and make profit. Break even analysis is a very important tool when you talk about the financial health of a business.

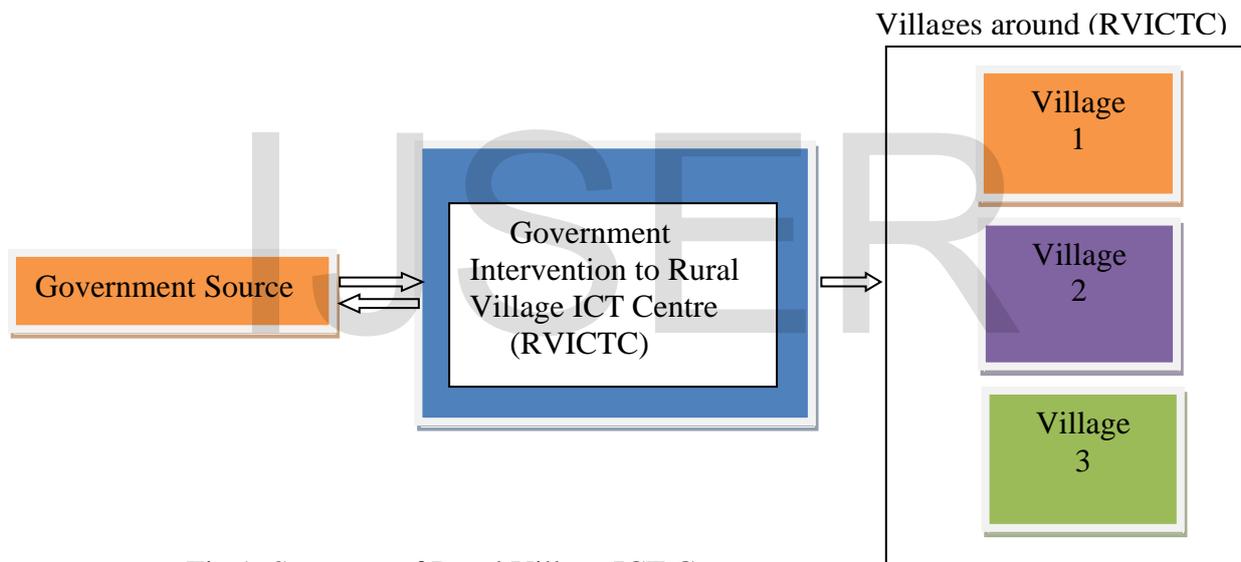
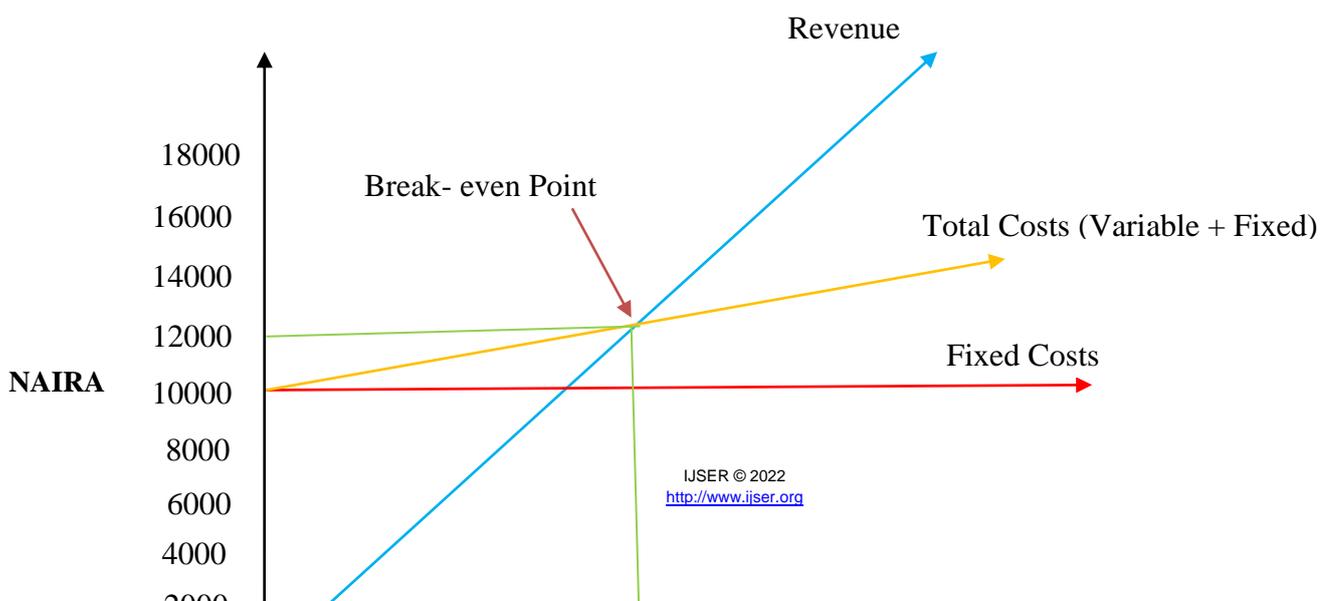


Fig 1: Structure of Rural Village ICT Centre



These entrepreneurs may also leverage the opportunities of RVICTC to learn skills such as computer hardware repairs, Database and software designs, networking and some computer software like word processing, excel, inventory and contact management software. How can a micro entrepreneur in the rural villages of the developing countries leverage this opportunity? Chiroma A. A. & Abifarin M. S (2018) assert that there is need for establishment of entrepreneurship education in Nigerian. They stated that if the development of entrepreneurship education is anchored in ICT, it would definitely create jobs and alleviate the problem of unemployment in the present economic situation in Nigeria. RVICTC would go a long way in providing support services both to farmer around and other entrepreneurs within the locality. Government can partner with reputable NGOs and private institutions in providing such facility to the villages. Since the establishment of centres could be capital intensive, government should take such responsibility, make electricity available to the Rural Village ICT Centres and Provide internet facilities.

They should also offer a very low price incentives such as computers/laptops, mobile phones etc to encourage micro entrepreneurs in the villages around the centres.

However, the NGOs and private institutions should have the obligation of providing man power to facilitate training and system maintenance for the sustainability of the centre.

CONCLUSION

Micro enterprises are the hubs of a countries economy, hence engaging the youths through the Rural Village ICT Centre (RVICTC) to develop their skills and potentials is a road map towards any country's development. ICT has actually bridged the gap in terms of reach because with the use of ICT infrastructures and resources distance is no longer a barrier. The establishment of rural village ICT centres would be a good beginning for the activation of entrepreneurial skills in our youths in the remote villages in the rural areas of Nigeria. This would go a long way to expose these entrepreneurs to the wider world and their relevance in the society. The Rural Village ICT Centre (RVICTC) would build confidence in our young people and create job opportunities, economic growth and reduce rural migration to urban cities since their talents, skills and passions can put food on their tables. Such venture would also reduce the present killings and insecurity in Nigeria because the youths would be engaged.

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