A book authored by a Nigerian journalist examines Nigeria’s approach to the development of ICT and concludes that the country is on its way to becoming a leader in Africa.

Patience Akpan-Obong explores Nigeria’s engagement with new technologies at various levels against the backdrop of theoretical assumptions about their potential to drive economic development. The result is what the author describes as a compendium of the development of ICTs in Nigeria both as means to socio-economic development and as ends by themselves. But this book offers more than also an engaging examination of theories of development, especially those that focus on communication and information, and how they influence debates on the connection between socio-economic growth and ICTs.

Akpan-Obong premises her argument on the interconnection of ICT and development, but is quick to acknowledge that development must be contextualised against the backdrop of a socio-political environment. She provides a brief historical emergence of development theory before taking on board new perspectives that have been put forward over the years. These new explanations, she argues, contradict some common understandings of previous decades. One of the new positions is the ‘basic-needs’ approach which offers a more useful perspective on how to achieve economic growth through equitable distribution of resources. This approach de-links development from economic growth and focuses on empowering the poor with essential tools for the realisation of their potential. The author argues that Africa had already recognised the advantages of this in the 1980s and cites the Lagos Plan of Action, which was drawn up by the defunct Organisation of African Unity, as an attempt to implement ‘internally driven strategies for development and collective self reliance.’ This approach, however, was overtaken by structural adjustment programmes and not given time to yield results.

Drawing on a broad typology of theories on development, the book is focused on specific issues, for example, communication, by exploring ideas that illustrate a link between communication and development.
Syndicate

premise that media of mass communication can facilitate modernist policies and focuses on usage by four ministries and the Presidency. The approach enabled the author to examine how policy statements on ICT diffusion were translated into practice. In one chapter, the book focuses on patterns of usage based on responses to questionnaires administered to 408 National Service Corps members in Port Harcourt, Lagos and Abuja. Some of the data from the analysis were predictable and Akpan-Obong recognised this. She acknowledged that her respondents belonged to a generation, but the data was still valuable for understanding trends. The book examines the development of ICTs as tools for economic growth and its failure to achieve its potential due to lack of policies and structures in Nigeria. It identifies hurdles such as infrastructural challenges, political instability, and lack of private sector involvement as reasons for the underdevelopment of the ICT sector.

Interviews and conversations with many key players in the ICTs sector reveal an optimistic picture of Nigeria’s prospects for socio-economic development. Obong argues that potholes and detours on the information superhighway are common in Nigeria due to the poor state of the country’s infrastructure. The book highlights the importance of understanding the role of development in Nigeria. It identifies frontline players, such as the Federal Ministry of Communications, the Federal Ministry of Information and Culture, and the Federal Ministry of Science and Technology, who are pivotal in the development of the ICT sector. The author also discusses the role of private sector actors such as the National Bureau of Statistics and the National Information Technology Development Agency.

Given these possibilities, it is understandable why Akpan-Obong is optimistic that Nigeria’s future growth could include ICTs as an important component. The book provides a detailed analysis of how ICTs can contribute to economic development and the country’s socio-economic growth. Her arguments are convincing and are supported by empirical evidence. In essence, Akpan-Obong believes that the prospects for development and economic growth through the application of ICTs in Nigeria are promising despite the poor state of the country’s infrastructure. Given the dramatic growth of ICTs in major cities in Nigeria, her conclusion is not unfounded.