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Ette, Mercy

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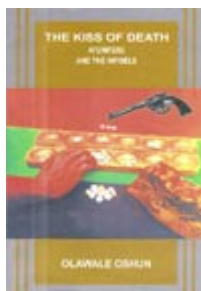
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How Nigeria Can Win The ICT Race in Africa

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Written by Mercy Ette
Sunday, 29 March 2009

A book authored by a Nigerian journalist examines Nigeria's app
development of ICT and concludes that the country is on its way to beco
in Africa

It is not a subject that would readily grab attention of ordinary readers bu
of a journalist-turned-university lecturer, the story of Nigeria's eng
information and communication technologies, ICTs, is a compelling ta
and Communication Technologies in Nigeria: Prospects and c
development is not just an authoritative text on the subject but also
narrative of Nigeria's attempt to harness ICTs for socio-economic develo

Patience Akpan-Obong explores Nigeria's engagement with new te
various levels against the backdrop of theoretical assumptions about th
drive economic development. The result is what the author de
compendium of the development of ICTs in Nigeria both as means to s
development and as ends by themselves.' But this book offers more
also an engaging examination of theories of development, especially th
on communication and information, and how they influence debates on
between socio-economic growth and ICTs.

Akpan-Obong premises her argument on the interconnection of ICT and
but is quick to acknowledge that development must be contextualise
backdrop of a socio-political environment. She provides a brief historical
emergence of development theory before taking on board new perspec
been put forward over the years. These new explanations, she argu
some common understandings of previous decades.

One of the new positions is the 'basic-needs' approach which offers
perspective on how to achieve economic growth through equitable
resources. This approach de-links development from economic growth a
empowering the poor with essential tools for the realisation of their
author argues that Africa had already recognised the advantages of thi
and cites the Lagos Plan of Action, which was drawn up by the defunct C
African Unity, as an attempt to implement 'internally driven strategies fo
and collective self reliance.' This approach, however, was overtaken
adjustment programmes and not given time to yield results.

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

Dan Agbese

Soji Akinrinade

Ray Ekpu

Yakubu
Mohammed

Syndicate

premise that media of mass communication can facilitate modernis
Obong questions arguments that find correlation between low level of
and low level of development and argues that the causality between
technology and economic development cannot be taken as given but m
being subject to other factors in society.

Although there is no standardised and all encompassing theory
development, Akpan-Obong attempts to synthesise dominant viewpoints
authoritative platform for an analysis of development of ICT and their
socio-economic growth and development in Nigeria. She identifies fro
underlying policies and structures in Nigeria's engagement with ICTs fo
and delineates their contributions at different levels.

Information and Communication Technologies in Nigeria is a book for
makers, scholars of development and ICTs and non-specialist readers.
former head of the Political Desk of *The Punch* newspaper and
columnist for the paper, writes fluently and rigorously about a subject
appeals to a certain readership. She puts her journalistic skills to ef
unpacking theoretical explanations that underpin the subject in a detaile
style. Woven into the narrative are interviews and conversations with
the Nigerian ICTs sector. A succinct summary of Nigeria's n
development plans provides a context for an analysis of the country's a
problems of under-development and points out how the state has alw
development process in the country. In fact, it was not until the 1980s t
sector became active in development initiatives. However, in the ICT
private sector has been the driving force in moving Nigeria from telepho
of 0.45 percent in 2001 to 38.09 percent by 2008. This rapid developr
tagged 'a revolution' by many observers.

In a section detailing patterns of ICTs usage, the book examines the d
policies and focuses on usage by four ministries and the Presidency. T
approach enabled the author to examine how policy statements on I
diffusion were translated into practice. In one chapter, the book focuses
usage based on responses to questionnaires administered to 408 N
Service Corps members in Port Harcourt, Lagos and Abuja. Some of th
from the analysis were predictable and Akpan-Obong recognised this.
she acknowledged that her respondents belonged to age groups mo
users of ICTs. Her data also confirmed that while the penetration level
continued to rise, diffusion remained uneven.

Interviews and conversations with many key players in the ICTs s
optimistic picture of Nigeria's prospects for socio-economic developme
Obong argues that potholes and detours on the information supe
hamper growth. Some of these hurdles are the state of the country's infr
public power supply. Consequently, the success of ICTs as tools for ec
is dependent on other factors. This, notwithstanding, the author r
optimism expressed by those she interviewed was well founded becaus
level, it would appear that the appropriate institutional framework has b
through the formulation of policies and establishment of implementing ag
As a late comer to the ICTs arena, Nigeria has recorded significant ac
the utilisation of the technologies and quickly recorded some of the
rates in the penetration and diffusion levels of ICTs. It is on that no
Obong writes that Nigeria is a major actor in the ICT sector in Africa.
view that the African giant could provide continental leadership as
'interesting policy approach to growing its ICTs sector' and the acti
private sectors. Unlike other African countries where the state spearhe
of ICTs, Nigeria's more flexible approach could enhance its chances
front-runner in Africa. Akpan-Obong suggests this could be achieve
development and production of ICT hardware and software for export
Africa. The country could also lead the way by developing local c
internet.

Given these possibilities, it is understandable why Akpan-Obong is
Africa's crippled and sleeping giant could wake up and lead the way
ICTs for socio-economic growth. Her arguments are convincing and are
credible empirical evidence. In essence, Akpan-Obong believes t
prospects for development and economic growth through the applic
despite the poor state of the country's infrastructure. Given the dramatic
ICTs in major cities in Nigeria, her conclusion is not unfounded.

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