



# *Lagos Education Review*

## A Journal of Studies in Education

Volume 16, NO. 2, December, 2016  
&  
Volume 17, NO. 1, January, 2017

ISSN: 0331-9237

**Published by:**

*The Faculty of Education,  
University of Lagos,  
Akoka-Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria*



## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY (ICT): A TOOL FOR ADVANCING UNITY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA

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### **Abstract**

*Efforts made to foster unity and good governance have continued to elude the country despite the number of state policies and programmes such as the establishment of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), Unity Schools, Federal Character principle, States creation and many others put together by successive governments since attaining independence in 1960. This paper examined how Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can be used as a tool for advancing unity and good governance in Nigeria. It also demonstrated how access to expanded use of ICT by the citizenry can become a strong tool for advancing unity and good governance, to build "bridges" between different ethnic groups, widen democratic space, increase productivity and allow better interaction between government, institutions and the people. Counselling implications were provided. Some recommendations were made which included the introduction of more compulsory ICT courses for students in tertiary institutions to prepare them for future leadership roles. The Federal government and the various state governments should also create awareness about the importance and the expanded use of ICT, to allow participation in government decision making process by the citizenry.*

**Key words:** Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), Unity, Good Governance, Participation, Responsiveness, and Accountability.

### **Introduction**

It is believed that lack of participation in government's decision making process by the citizenry is one of the major factors that hinder unity and good governance. Good governance according to Batista (2003), "is an interaction process between government and society". Good

governance is safeguarded as long as governmental processes are transparent. While individuals may organise themselves, express their priorities and make demands to government establishments, one can only be partially optimistic that good governance will



improve with the full application of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) systems. It is believed that the presence of ICT is likely to invigorate political relations by allowing direct citizen participation in government, and by so doing, optimise the representative process and expand participatory democracy (Batista, 2003).

Information and Communications Technology (ICT) has indeed become a major tool for humans and without it people will not be able to participate meaningfully towards the growth of their country and fulfil their potentials (Awe, 2010). The link of ICT to good governance according to Batista (2003), can best be illustrated by the expansion of educational services, distance learning programmes, cultural activities, increasing job incentives, expansion of judicial services and the control of justice, increasing citizenship, public safety, human rights and more interaction with governing authorities, engagement of social groups, monitoring of public interest projects; access to consumer protection and adequate rendering of services to the handicapped. A consistent element in the social-moral montage of the United States schooling is the attempt to cultivate "good" student-citizens (Sink, 2001). Furthermore, Sink (2001), argued that notable 18<sup>th</sup>-century pundits such as John Adams, Benjamin Rush, and Noah Webster strongly promoted this goal (Fraser, 2001). Even though the external impetus of citizenship education appeared to wane during the turbulent 1960s and 70s, contemporary authors and policy makers on all sides of the political spectrum remain convinced that school curriculum and pedagogy should, in part, aid students to engage in and contribute to society's democratic processes. Similarly, in a recent article on the future direction of the school of counselling profession, Sink (2002) recommended that

counsellors should be more closely involved in this agenda.

The window of opportunities for participation created by ICT in many jurisdictions have strengthened the civic engagement of youths who are already active in its usage and it is believed that it has also served to mobilise young people not previously interested in any form of political or social engagement because many youths who do not read newspapers or follow the news on television have been attracted by the opportunity to participate in societal debate through the internet (World Youth Report, 2003).

The study aims to examine the level of ICT accessibility in the various states of Nigeria and if its expanded use can advance unity and good governance at the federal, state and the local government levels. The research was also to ascertain the readiness/preparedness of individuals, students and counsellors, federal, state and local government officials to provide the platform for the citizenry to interact and participate in governance so as to enable them contribute to decisions that will affect their wellbeing.

### **Meaning of Information and Communications Technologies (ICT)?**

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is the way in which technology produces an open door to knowledge or information through telecommunications. ICT is related to Information Technology (IT), but differs slightly because it centres on communication technologies which include; the web, mobile phones, wireless networks and so on. In recent years, knowledge through telecommunications changed the way in which the world communicates, for example, people today connect with friends and family via video calls such as; skype, on the spot messaging like;



yahoo messenger, google chat and social networking websites. These help people in society connect and stay in touch on a daily basis. As a result of this, the world is now referred to as a “global village”, where people in different parts of the world communicate as though they are living close to each other. This explains why ICT is often examined in the event of how “today's” communication technology affects the world as a whole (Tech Terms, 2010). Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in its annual socio-economic report in 2011 described ICT as any communication device or application which includes radio, cellular phones, television, computer and network hardware and software, satellite systems. It also include various services and applications associated with them such as videoconferencing and distance learning (NBS, 2011). ICT is used to handle and process information such as texts, images, graphs, instruction for use by means of electronic and communication devices such as computers, cameras and telephone. ICT also refers to electronic or computerised devices, assisted by human and interactive materials that can be used for a wide range of teaching and learning as well as for personal use. It includes the rapidly improving communications technologies, such as radio, television and mobile telephony, as well as networking and electronic data processing capacities, and the software for applications of these new technology and capabilities. The defining characteristic of ICT is its capacity to harness, access and apply information and diffuse knowledge at electronic speed to all types of human activity, thereby giving rise to contemporary knowledge-based economies and societies. (Ajayi and Ekundayo, 2009; Nwagwu, Obi and Ogwu, 2014; Hamidu, Musa and Adamu, 2014). Given these characteristics of ICT as a tool for processing

and sharing of information using all kinds of electronic devices and technologies for the manipulation and communication of information, there is no doubt that ICTs can be used to foster unity and good governance in Nigeria.

### **Fostering Unity and Good Governance in Nigeria**

It is only in a free society with opportunity of free participation and respect for citizens' rights can unity and good governance be achieved. True democracy places emphasis on freedom, and opens competition, popular and meaningful participation, responsiveness, transparency and accountability (Arowolo and Aluko, 2012). Since attaining independence in 1960, unity and good governance have been the top priority of the government of Nigeria. The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme, the Unity Schools, the Federal Character Principle, and the State Creation are examples of state policies intended to achieve this goal (Hamidu-Musa and Adamu, 2014). However, efforts at achieving this objective have been difficult by successive governments in office principally because of the complex interplay of ethnic-nationalism by various regional leaders of the country. Other militating factors are social, political, cultural and the different ideologies of the various ethnic groups to name a few. For example, the various nationalities and ethnic groups in Nigeria are yet to fully accept the unitary system of government that is still being practiced after its promulgation in 1966 by the then ruling military administration under the Unification Decree 34 of May 29, 1966. Large majority of the regions in the south of Nigeria prefer full federalism instead of the unitary system of government that has been in place since 1966 (Siollun, 2009). The country's past and current population census which has the



North outnumbering the South and which is the basis for sharing the national cake is still a touchy issue that has not yet been resolved and neither is the issue of inequality in admission in schools and the quota system in filling up vacancies in Federal Government's establishments. Nigeria is also a country where a section seeks the supremacy of Sharia over the constitution (Obasanjo, 1989).

Aside these, is the problem of corruption. Corruption is evidently a major issue and it has negatively impacted on good governance in Nigeria. Akinde (2011) argued that the nature of governance since independence in Nigeria has raised a lot of questions regarding the essence of the state because governance has consistently failed to meet the yearnings of the citizenry. He went on to state that the concept of governance has received several treatments by scholars to the extent that some do not differentiate between governance and government. While governance may be referred to as the exercise of executive and administrative functions of the state for the sole purpose of fulfilling "terms of social contract or contractual obligation to the citizenry", government, on the other hand refers to the office or position of authority to administer the affairs of the state. In administering the affairs of state, many leaders have used state power to serve personal interests and ensured denial of interest of the generality of the governed, rocked several development policies which have resulted in the failure of development plans, ill-implemented projects that have led to mass poverty and legitimacy crisis (Akinde, 2011). It is obvious from all these that the integration policies and programmes of the Nigerian government have fallen far below expectations, as primordial ethnic loyalties and corruption are still deep rooted in the country (Hamidu-Musa and Adamu, 2014).

The characteristics of good governance

according to Oviasuyi et al, (2010) is (1) Participation by both men and women in governance either direct or through legitimate intermediate institutions or presentations, (2) Transparency, where there is good governance (3) Responsiveness, which means that public policy decisions and implementations represent adequate responses to popular needs and expectations (4) Rule of Law, which implies the existence of fair frameworks that are enforced impartially (5) Effectiveness and Efficiency (6) Accountability which means that people will be able to hold government authorities responsible for public issues as it affects them (7) Government Appointments, meaning that those appointed into government adopt fair and ethical practises based on considerations and merit.

### **Utilization of ICT to advance Unity and Good Governance**

Today, the importance of ICT in all spheres of life such as governance, social, education, commercial through the aid of technology is beyond mentioning. Without information, decision making would be subjective and ICT has become central to all forms of social and economic growth (Awe, 2010). The infusion of ICT into public administration enhances efficiency in the delivery of services to the people. ICT helps in taking high quality decisions and at the same time saves time. It is in recognition of these laudable roles that the federal Government of Nigeria laid foundation for e-government in Nigeria in order to ensure full exploitation of the potentials of ICTs in sustainable democracy and advised the need for a well-equipped ICT centres in all educational institutions to enable them live up to their social and political responsibilities (Nwabueze and Ozioko, 2011).



Countries which have adopted and applied expanded use of ICT to their operations have witnessed dramatic improvement in their development efforts. Several countries (Chile, Colombia, Mexico and more recently Austria) and a number of major principalities (Seoul, Republic of Korea) have placed their entire procurement information system on the web and accorded free access to the documentation. The Seoul city system, the On-Line Procedures Enhancement for Civil Applications (OPENS) 83 was developed to achieve transparency in the city's administration by preventing delays or abuses of civil affairs by its public servants. The web-based system allows citizens to monitor applications for permits or approvals, where corruption is most likely to occur, and to raise questions in the event of any irregularities detected. The site receives over 2,000 visitors daily (United Nations, 2007; Nwabueze and Ozioko, 2011). Local illiteracy could be tackled with ICT use. Sanitation and hygiene issues, and local health concerns and problems could be improved with ICT use. Racism and absence of "bridges" between different ethnic groups could be addressed via internet, distance education, and community radios. ICT has also been recognised as a strong tool for sustainable development and improving governance by widening democratic space, increasing productivity, administrative effectiveness framework. ICT allows better interaction between government, institutions and people (Batista, 2003; Garuba, 2014).

### **Factors Impeding Expansive Use of ICT in Nigeria**

ICTs have helped in connecting many countries of the world to drive home the forces of globalization. People across the world are able to connect in a matter of seconds or minutes. The impact of ICT is felt in all fields such as education, business and development

of infrastructure. Government, organizations and decision makers are using ICTs for new developments. However, there is a danger that the following factors might prevent the expansive use of ICTs in Nigeria.

#### **1. Poor infrastructure**

The inescapable fact is that many of the various states in Nigeria do not have an active website and even when they do, the authorities hardly respond to issues raised by the general public. According to the General Report by Tardif (1999), ICTs are now an integral part of the socialisation process even though glaring disparities between different countries and different regions within these countries are deplorable. For example, in spite of the fact that the Federal Government of Nigeria fully appreciates the role of ICT in national development, it has not done enough to put the necessary ICT infrastructure in place to promote interaction between providers and users of information through the application of information processing system in the country beyond what the banks and other private organisations are doing presently (Awe, 2003).

#### **2. Cost factor**

Telecommunications contribute to development by facilitating social change and economic activity, improving quality of life, bringing cost benefits in rural social service delivery and promoting good governance and transparency (Panos Institute Report, 2004). The report cautioned that the cost to users could be an obstacle while Kituyi-Kwake and Adigun, (2008) also raised the issue of affordability. The issue of affordability is indeed an obstacle but what are the other militating factors?



There are a myriad of problems that are being over-looked. Having access to the internet could be difficult for the average Nigerian and even those who have the means to meet the cost of service charge due to inadequate infrastructure in the country. For instance, provision of electricity is epileptic and it is often not available for users to power their computers. From the economic perspective, many citizens find it difficult to pay subscription charges to service providers. Patronising cyber café although cheaper, has its own cost implications apart from paying for internet use by the hour, there are added costs of transportation to the various places they are located and other inconveniences associated with cyber café.

### **3. ICT/Internet Illiteracy and Availability**

There is also the problem of computer/internet illiteracy in the country regardless of the high enrolment of pupils in schools and the high academic qualifications of the country's large population. Many prospective users within this educated group are not knowledgeable enough to operate and manipulate a computer even though they may own one in their offices or even carry a laptop/tablet about. To some of them, laptops/tablets are mere status symbols. Anyamene, Nwokolo and Anyachebulu, (2012) investigated the extent of availability and use of Information and Communication Technology resources for counselling university students in South East universities in Nigeria. The study revealed that ICT facilities for counselling are limited in the universities in South Eastern states of Nigeria. It was also discovered that the level of use of ICT in the universities is very low. Apart from the

recommendation that ICT be integrated into career counselling by career counsellors through positive use of chat rooms, e-mails and social networking (Obi, Mohd and Bernice, 2012), Tardif (1999) contended that efforts should be made to eliminate these obstacles because they block citizens' access to knowledge, information and media which could help them participate even more actively and meaningfully in the life of their local, regional and national communities and contribute to harmonious interaction at the local, state and international level.

### **Level of ICT accessibility in the various states of the Federation**

It is the researcher's assumption that the introduction of expanded use of ICT increases interaction among citizens and the various arms of government. On the basis of this assumption, it is anticipated that the Federal government, state governments, state legislature and the local governments would each have a website that will be accessible to members of the public to enable them interact and engage in participatory governance. Having taken this position, the researcher also decided to ascertain the level of ICT's accessibility in Nigeria on state by state basis relying strongly on the data provided by the National Board of Statistics. Beyond that, the researcher checked the websites of the Federal Government, the 36 States and the FCT and the respective local governments to confirm whether the institutions maintain an active website base and whether they are accessible for interaction with the citizenry and other organs of government for the purpose of obtaining information on government policies, legislative work and to obtain relevant information on its operation.

Literature review showed that unity and good



governance have eluded the country despite the number of programmes put together by successive governments in the country. However, the researcher was mindful of the fact that given the differences in political party structure in Nigeria and the level of awareness and education of the governed, the information requested might not be found in some websites but in others, more information are likely to be provided. The researcher was able to find individual state government's web sites and examined 16 of the states' website along with those of the FCT and the Federal government.

Following a survey carried out by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in 2011, it was discovered that 82.9 per cent of the total population of the country had access to radio, and 63.9 per cent had access to mobile phones, less than half of population, 44.7 percent had access to television while internet penetration is still very low at 3.1 per cent giving an indication that more than 95 per cent of the country's population does not have access to either the personal computers (P.Cs) or the internet (NBS, 2011). See Table 1 below;

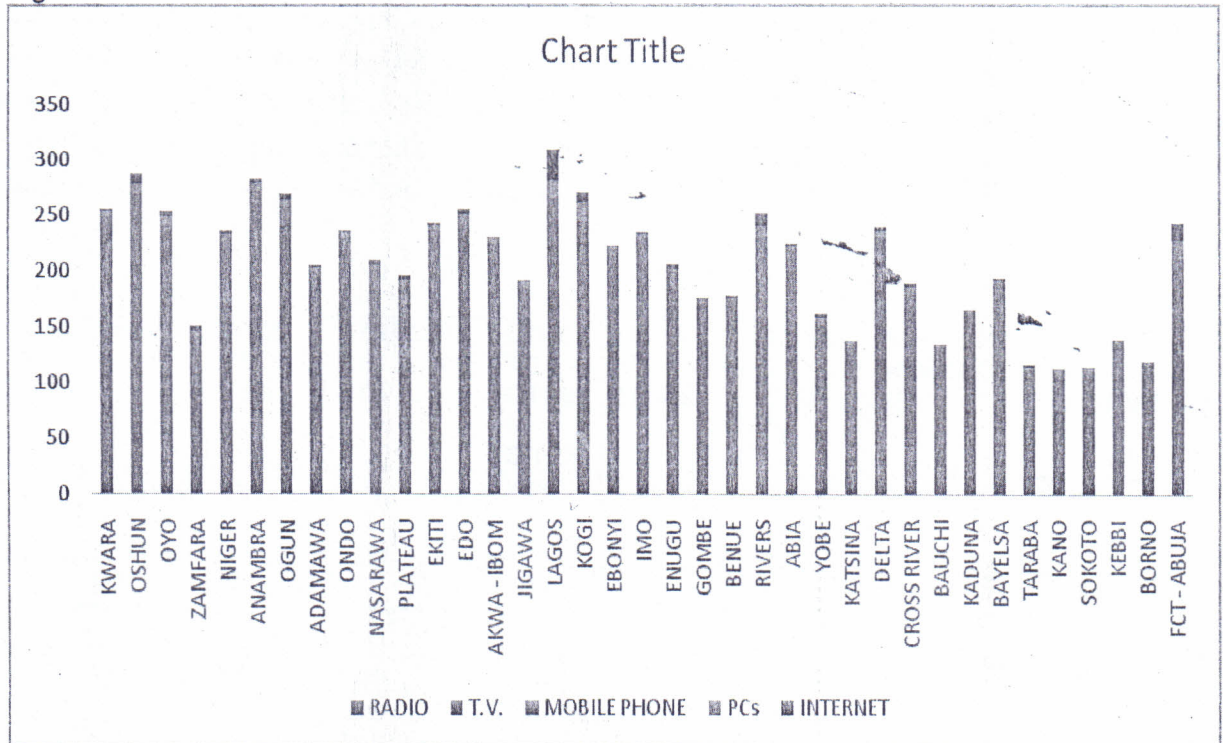
Percentage Distribution and Access to ICTs by Users in the 36 States of Nigeria and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja  
Table 1

S/N	STATE	RADIO	T.V.	MOBILE PHONE	PCs	INTERNET
1.	KWARA	97.7	72.4	78.0	4.6	2.7
2.	OSHUN	97.7	78.3	91.9	10.0	8.5
3.	OYO	94.7	65.6	81.5	6.0	4.3
4.	ZAMFARA	94.6	14.5	36.1	0.6	4.3
5.	NIGER	94.1	46.7	86.2	4.7	4.4
6.	ANAMBRA	92.2	83.0	95.1	8.6	3.4
7.	OGUN	92.2	77.6	87.1	6.4	4.7
8.	ADAMAWA	92.0	32.8	74.8	3.7	1.8
9.	ONDO	91.8	64.2	75.0	3.0	2.1
10.	NASARAWA	90.3	35.8	74.8	4.1	4.2
11.	PLATEAU	90.1	30.0	67.2	4.5	3.6
12.	EKITI	89.4	69.4	77.9	3.6	2.2
13.	EDO	88.9	75.5	78.5	6.9	5.0
14.	AKWA - IBOM	86.7	69.4	68.1	4.7	1.5
15.	JIGAWA	86.4	23.4	75.4	4.6	2.0
16.	LAGOS	86.2	93.0	85.6	15.8	27.0
17.	KOGI	86.1	69.5	87.6	17.4	8.7
18.	EBONYI	85.6	51.7	82.0	1.5	0.8
19.	IMO	84.5	63.8	81.9	2.5	2.3
20.	ENUGU	84.4	43.4	71.2	3.1	4.0
21.	GOMBE	84.4	24.2	62.3	3.7	1.1
22.	BENUE	83.4	35.1	55.0	2.6	1.7
23.	RIVERS	82.8	72.7	75.8	9.0	10.8
24.	ABIA	82.2	66.5	70.6	2.9	2.6
25.	YOBE	81.6	22.3	51.8	3.3	3.0
26.	KATSINA	78.4	18.0	39.7	1.3	1.3
27.	DELTA	78.0	76.0	76.8	5.2	3.4
28.	CROSS RIVER	76.4	48.6	54.3	6.3	3.3
29.	BAUCHI	76.1	13.9	42.8	1.1	0.5
30.	KADUNA	75.1	33.2	54.8	1.9	0.5
31.	BAYELSA	68.5	56.9	64.0	2.0	2.0
32.	TARABA	68.4	10.9	33.1	2.1	1.7
33.	KANO	66.7	9.5	36.2	0.4	0.5
34.	SOKOTO	64.3	15.5	33.1	0.8	0.3
35.	KEBBI	61.3	12.7	65.0	0.5	0.3
36.	BORNO	56.3	9.0	54.1	0.7	-0-
37.	FCT - ABUJA	84.3	56.1	71.8	15.9	14.1

Source: NBS



Figure 1



In order to allow uniformity of information sought and to determine the presence or absence of factors that advance unity and good governance in each of the 36 states of the federation and the FCT, the following itemised information became the basis for determining what the research set out to achieve.

- 1) News and events
- 2) Website address
- 3) Structure of government
- 4) Contact email address
- 5) Link to other sites
- 6) Whether online interactive?
- 7) Whether website is active?

Given the difficulties inherent in obtaining the requisite information particularly from the websites of the Federal government, the Presidency, the Speaker of House of Representatives and the Judiciary, the researcher proceeded to other websites that provided access to 36 states' governments' information based on the criteria listed. Table 2 gives a graphic account

of the researcher's findings. Lagos state with 57 local governments provided its citizens the platform to access and log on to the site and have direct interacting dialogue about projects and upcoming events compared to other states in the federation. All manners of information to the general public were available. It provided latest news and events taking place with details of location and when such events would take place. It listed the structure of government including the executive and the judiciary. It had important links to other sites e.g., water corporation, examination fees, levies, Lagos State Land Bureau, Revenue complaints and information units, Internal revenue services and self-assessment tax tools, public procurement agencies and many others (Google website). It is not surprising that Lagos state ranked above all other states in the federation in expanded ICT use and invariably more political responsive to its citizen's demands.

The failure of other states of the federation to



provide the kind of information that Lagos state provided in its website could easily be attributable to high level of disconnect between the government and the governed. The level of disconnect could have been encouraged by a

large majority of citizens' poor level of political awareness and illiteracy. Another reason could be attributable to level of poverty fuelled by the poor state of the economy of other states compared to Lagos.

Source: NBS

Table 2.

S/ N	STATES	WEB ADDR ESS	STRUCTU RE OF GOVT.	LINK TO OTHE R SITES	CONTA CT EMAIL	NEWS & EVEN TS	WHETHER INTERACTI VE	WHETH ER ACTIVE
1.	Fed. Govt.	-o-	Yes	Yes	Yes	-o-	-o-	-o-
2.	Presidenc y	-o-	-o-	-o-	-o-	-o-	-o-	-o-
3.	Speaker, House of Reps.	-o-	-o-	-o-	-o-	-o-	-o-	-o-
4.	Abia State	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	-o-	-o-
5.	Akwa Ibom	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	-o-	-o-
6.	Bauchi	Yes	-o-	Yes	Yes	-o-	-o-	-o-
7.	Delta	-o-	-o-	-o-	-o-	-o-	-o-	-o-
8.	Ebonyi	Yes	-o-	Yes	Yes	Yes	-o-	-o-
9.	Ekiti	Yes	Yes	-o-	Yes	Yes	-o-	-o-
10.	Edo	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	-o-	-o-
11.	Anambra	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	-o-	-o-
12.	Lagos	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
13.	Kaduna	-o-	-o-	-o-	-o-	-o-	-o-	-o-
14.	Bornu	Yes	-o-	-o-	Yes	-o-	-o-	-o-
15.	Yobe	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	-o-	Yes
16.	Sokoto	-o-	-o-	-o-	-o-	-o-	-o-	-o-
17.	Jigawa	Yes	Yes	-o-	Yes	Yes	-o-	-o-
18.	Kwara	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	-o-	Yes
19.	Benue	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	-o-	-o-	Yes
20.	Kano	Yes	Yes	-o-	Yes	-o-	-o-	Yes

Implications for Unity and Good Governance

Countries such as London, New York, Bangladesh, El Salvador, Armenia, Vietnam, Zimbabwe, Ghana and South Africa have recorded positive contributions in ICTs by using it to: create human rights portal to promote human rights reforms; promote democratization efforts; harness email and the internet; promote good ethical governance; increase public participation in governance; create new

opportunities to broaden public awareness about democratic issues and establish new opportunities for interaction. In spite of the benefits, of ICTs in these countries, some countries prefer to build huge national intranet systems to filter addresses and content, regulate, prohibit or ban the use of ICTs to retain control on democracy, governance and rule of law (Selian, 2002). Nigeria aims to use ICT to act as a watchdog of



the Nigerian Legislature and uphold its responsibility and accountability to the people (Digital Governance, 2002). In addition to this, Nigeria can focus on such areas, or borrow a leaf from countries where ICTs have contributed significantly in promoting unity and good governance. Availability and accessibility of ICTs by citizens can bring Nigerians together to contribute meaningfully and to participate fully and actively in upholding the democratic process. This can help in promoting unity and good governance in the country.

### Conclusion

ICT devices have been available in Nigeria for over a decade. ICT plays an important role in promoting unity and good governance, but its crucial role has not been fully understood by the country's political leaders. The various organs of government consisting of the executive, the judiciary and the legislature have failed to establish websites that would present their various programmes so that users of ICT can engage decision makers of these organs of government in dialogue as to the suitability and appropriateness of the decisions they make. Establishing a website enables the citizenry who have access to those platforms or structure to participate in decision making. The challenges are two-fold; the three arms of government and governmental agencies often take into consideration the importance of establishing a website with a view to having the members of the public participate in decision making; on the other hand, a large segment of the public cannot interact with government decision makers because of illiteracy, poverty and lack of skill to handle a computer. Those who have the means, often shy away from the use of ICT because they believe it is a device meant for the youths. Findings by researchers revealed inadequate availability and poor accessibility of ICT

devices by the majority of Nigerians. All ICT devices which include telephones and computers have various functions that must be learnt and mastered by users in order to have optimum use of the device.

### Recommendations

The greatest challenge of the information era is to avoid a gap between those who have and those who do not have access to the goods and skills required in the digital era, efforts should be made by the federal government and the various state governments to create awareness about the importance of ICT and its expanded use so as to allow participation in government decision making process by the citizenry as enunciated in its National Broadband Plan, 2013-2018. This will enable Nigerians use ICTs as is done in other countries of the world to; create human rights portal to promote human rights reforms; promote democratization efforts; harness email and the internet; promote good ethical governance; increase public participation in governance; create new opportunities to broaden public awareness about democratic issues and establish new opportunities for interaction. These are all avenues to foster unity and good governance. Efforts should be made by the various states' governments in Nigeria to create tele-centres in each local government area for those who may not have access to a computer and those that are unable to pay for internet usage to provide them access to information and communication technologies for their personal, educational, social and political use and other commercial and economic purposes. New ICT devices are being developed across the world daily and Nigeria cannot afford to be left behind.



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