

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as Occupational Empowerment Needs of Artisan for Community Development in Imo State

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ABSTRACT

Information and communication technology (ICT) has become a potential tool for empowering individuals for social, economic and political transformation globally. Artisans need to be advanced in ICT especially in developing nations like Nigeria where artisan are dramatically underrepresented in the ICT field. This paper examines the profound influence of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) on artisanal communities in Imo State. It specifically focuses on how ICT serves as a catalyst for both occupational empowerment and community development. The study delves into the distinctive requirements of artisans, exploring how interventions in ICT can effectively address these needs. This includes enhancing skill sets, providing access to markets, and ensuring financial sustainability. Through a comprehensive analysis of the current situation in Imo State, the paper proposes strategic initiatives. These initiatives are designed to harness the full potential of ICT, creating a positive impact on artisans and, consequently, contributing to overall community development. The amalgamation of perspectives presented in this paper aims to offer valuable insights for policymakers, community leaders, and stakeholders. The goal is to assist them in developing targeted strategies that optimize ICT for the holistic empowerment of artisans, fostering sustainable socio-economic growth in the region. Artisans are bedrock of manpower at rural economy, paying this role effectively for rural community development in this 21st century needed adequate empowerment in which ICTs is prerequisite. ICT gives artisans a lot of chances by fostering an environment that supports their professional empowerment and sense of self-actualization.

Keywords: ICT, occupation, empowerment, occupational empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

In this modern age, communities must contend with the challenges of preserving their identity, fostering communal growth, and improving population conditions as globalisation expands beyond national borders. Rural communities are faced with a multitude of functions, duties, and responsibilities as a result of the need to decentralise and delocalize as part of the globalisation movement. The only way these communities can communicate with the outside world, gather news from the outside world, and inform the world about their communities and their residents is through the power of ICTS. Technology has altered how people interact, learn, live, and work. Millions of people have gained access to knowledge and its applications thanks to the unrestricted flow of ideas and information, opening up new options and prospects in some of the most

important areas of human endeavour. However, the vast majority of people on the planet are still unaware of this revolution. This is the situation in Imo State, where the bulk of the artisans lacks access to ICT devices and some are ignorant of ICT usage for their development. Governments of Imo State also neglect of the craftsmen in their ICTs empowerment scheme. Thus, empowering artisans who are in majority at the community level is prerequisite for community development.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

The use of information and communication technology (ICT) has become essential to modern living. Anywhere in the world can be evaluated with a few mouse clicks or finger swipes on the computer, and the sorted results are instantly available. According to Fossac (2012), ICT is a crucial instrument that enables and facilitates the general public to access relevant, efficient, and flexible modes of learning. Megha (2013) asserted that information and communication technologies (ICTs) encompass all currently available digital tools that facilitate the use of information by individuals, businesses, and organisations. He goes on to say that information and communication technology (ICT) includes any devices that can store, retrieve, alter, send, or receive digital information electronically. However, according to London, Trower & London, as referenced in Mandah (2016), information technology is made up of all the instruments that people have historically used to manage information, conduct business, and interact with others, in addition to other techniques and methods. According to Sallai (2011), the word ICT, IT and other related phrases or acronyms refer to a group that was established to support the process of digital convergence, which aided in the development of massively advanced digital technology. He went on to say that the realisation of knowledge, skill acquisition, information, and the networked society depends heavily on the role of the convergence sector.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) represents the convergence of computer and communication technologies, encompassing devices and applications used for communication, information creation, management, and distribution. This includes computers, the internet, telephones, television, radio, and audiovisual equipment. However, the contemporary definition extends to any device and application employed to access, manage, integrate, evaluate, create, and communicate information and knowledge (Agim, Iroze, Osuji, & Obasi-Haco, 2018). Devices associated with ICT include but are not limited to radio, television, cellular phones, computer hardware and software, network hardware and software, satellite systems, peripherals, and services.

ICT plays a transformative role in the way we live, learn, and work, enhancing the quality of life by improving teaching and learning effectiveness, industry productivity, government functions, and overall national well-being. Its introduction aimed to perform library functions and provide innovative user services. Considering the essence of ICT, Oliver and Tower in Nwankwo, Seimode and Ed's (2020) define ICT literacy as the set of skills and understandings necessary for meaningful ICT use tailored to individual needs. For students, ICT literacy measures their relative capacity to appropriately utilize ICT for educational purposes. Similarly, for librarians, ICT literacy gauges their ability to employ ICT for information acquisition, organization, retrieval, and dissemination in their professional roles. ICT literacy involves skills such as operating personal computer systems independently, using software for preparation and presentation, utilizing the internet and its communication features, and accessing information from the worldwide web (www). It signifies an individual's proficiency with mobile phones, computers, the internet, and other ICTs, demonstrating the ability to use ICT features and applications independently or collaboratively. In essence, ICT literacy encompasses awareness of technologies, application relevance, and the use of technology for information and knowledge, including skills to access, retrieve, store, manage, integrate, evaluate, create, and communicate information and knowledge, with an understanding that ICT impacts personal and social development. ICT industry has improved economies of scale, effectively enhanced the complexity of goods and services, and offered chances for the merging of functions. In this

instance, ICT is more than merely the synthesis of earlier industries; rather, its scope is dynamically expanding to include new products as well as empowering artisans with different opportunities to improve their skills.

Concept of Empowerment

Giving someone the tools to do certain jobs, including technology and agriculture, is the process of empowering them. According to Wikipedia (2014), empowerment is the rise in a person's or a community's economic, political, social, and gender spheres. According to the World Bank Group (2011), empowerment is the process by which people or groups get better at making decisions and turning those decisions into actions that fulfil their desires. Brenyah (2018) provided evidence to support this viewpoint, stating that empowerment is a process by which members of a specific social group are helped to enhance their performance, develop new abilities, and live better lives in order to fulfil their social roles. According to the World Bank (2001), empowerment is the process of giving impoverished people more authority to shape the state institutions that have an impact on their lives by increasing their involvement in local and political decision-making. Giving people the chance to improve their capabilities is the process of empowering them, according to Hammell (2016). It entails granting people the flexibility, chance, and capacity to select what they want to do, be, and do as they choose. Narayan (2002) defined empowerment as the process of increasing the resources and capacities of underprivileged individuals to engage in, bargain with, govern, influence, and hold responsible institutions that have an impact on their lives. Wong in Calves (2009) provided evidence to corroborate this by pointing out that empowerment, together with "opportunity" and "security," appears as the three pillars of the struggle against poverty, and that the two are therefore inextricably linked. As a result, empowering the impoverished is essential to the plan for reducing poverty. Empowerment is the process of strengthening a person's or group's ability to make intentional decisions and to translate those decisions into desired behaviours and results, according to Aslop, Bertelsen, and Holland (2006). According to the definition, empowerment:

1. Is more than just giving poor individuals and groups more assets, capacities, and capabilities;
2. It also involves giving them the ability to make decisions, which has come to be known as the "agency of the poor"; and that
3. Empowerment is contingent upon how social relations, in their broadest meaning (both institutional and otherwise), determine the ability of individuals and groups to put these decisions into action.

THE CONCEPT OF OCCUPATION

Occupation involves engaging in meaningful activities that makes positive and potential impact in one's daily life. Brown and Hollis (2013) opined that occupation as any activity that people engage in day to day to sustain themselves their families and to participate in the society actively. Reberio and Cook as cited in Willard and Spackman (2003), opined that occupation as a process, or as a means, refers to occupation as a method of intervention, as a dynamic aspect of engagement in life and as an unfolding of interaction between a person and the world". Mever as cited in Willard and Spackman's (2003), defined occupation as an essential part of human nature that is manifested by active participation in self-maintenance, work, leisure, and play. Occupation is multifaceted phenomena goes beyond paid work or every day work occupation is very fundamental to human health and well-being, because it provides meaning, identity and structure to peoples lives as well as the society's values and culture.

Occupational Empowerment

Occupational empowerment is the process by which people, organizations and communities are trained to gain mastery over their occupation and live using different mechanisms. Hammell (2016) opined that occupational empowerment is the process enhancing people's capabilities and giving them the ability to

developing their skills and profession. Supportive of this view World Bank in Hammell (2016) opined that occupational empowerment is the ability and opportunity given to individuals to improve their capabilities to act on their wish and freedom to make choice. Empowerment is the process of promoting and improving the wealth of knowledge and motivating individual to do their jobs magnificently. It encourages people to gain the skill and knowledge that will allow them to overcome obstacles in life or in their work environment as well as development themselves and their communities.

Artisans

There is need for proper understanding of who the artisans are. Artisans are tradesmen and tradeswomen or crafts men and women who work with the help of equipment, tools or machinery in making things, installing things, repairing things as well as maintaining things using their hands or tools. They are skilled workers, who are involved in skill trade using their hands. Artisans are skilled manual works that specialized in specific crafts, the male artisans are called handicrafts while the female are called handicrafts women because they use hand in making crafts. While some artisans are called technicians due to the technical skills which they acquire. Artisans are divided into two categories. Those that teach or train others are called master while those learning from the master are called apprentice or journey men. Apprenticeship is the period of time apprentice are undergoing training to learn craft or trade from their master under agreed conditions. Artisans undergo apprenticeship or vocational and technical training to acquire skills.

Artisans are people with great talent who have perfected the craft of making beautiful and useful things by hand are called artisans. They have a variety of craft specialties, such as jewellery making, woodwork, welding, painting, sculpture, weaving, and leatherworking. They can be classified into various ways. On this context, however, they can be classified into the nature of their work or based on the materials they use as well as what they work on.

1. Textile workers (textile craft: they are artisans that work with textiles and fabric materials, chemicals amongst others. They are more or less part of the fashion industry. Since tailors or fashion designers that make cloths are textile workers.
2. Wood workers (Wood land Crafts) these group comprises of artisans that work with wooden materials. They use wood to manufacture wooden craft.
3. Building and construction workers (building crafts): These are artisans that use their artisan skills to contribute to building and construction industries. They make use of wooden materials, chemicals, metal materials amongst others.
4. Dress making and tailoring: These are categories of artisan who make dressing with different types of sewing machines.
5. Weavers: Weavers craft gorgeous textiles, apparel, and home décor out of a variety of fibers, including cotton and wool. They employ a range of methods, including knitting and crocheting, to produce exquisite and useful patterns that serve as décor.

Information need of artisans are in the process of finding raw materials for the job, locating government traders, locating market for their products and improving their knowledge and skill. Artisans who are the focus of this study will definitely need information that as to do with their procession Mook and Aina (2004) for instance a hair dresser needs information on the current hair styles, types of hair extensions and hair accessories and different treatment of each kind of hair likewise the tailors too also need information on cloth styles and type of materials that will suite a particular cloth.

ICTs Occupational Needs of Artisans

The foundation of the non-farming rural economy is the artisan sector. Despite the fact that the artisans are

competent and extremely accomplished, they are severely impacted by their lack of access to formal training, marketing, logistics, financial support, and information and technology. ICTs are required to source excellent raw materials, manage the backend logistical, marketing, pricing, and other procedures, and advance and refine artisans' abilities to match the demands of the Western market. Artisans need ICTs to navigate well in present day technological driven society in the following ways:

1. They require training on E-commerce/E-business to enable them exploit opportunities offered by new technologies. It links sellers and buyers directly and close not holding any stock back.
2. ICT based infrastructure such as computer, laptops, soft wares, internet connect, smart phones and other ICT gadget are also part of their needs for effectiveness in their handwork
3. Digital literacy is a major need of artisans that limit their engagement in ICT technologies.
4. Financial capacity is another serious challenge that affects artisans.
5. High level of illiteracy and language barrier because most internet content are in English, there is need to bridge the gap in language barrier.
6. Artisans need proper information on the role of ICT in promoting their skills s well as enhancing it to meet global perspective.
7. They need outstanding internet connectivity and accessibility
8. The need of political will and support in providing adequate ICT infrastructures and motivation
9. Artisans need information on their good, services, occupation and business
10. They also need information on how to access loans from co-operative societies and banks, and as well as information about entertainment, social amenities, and government rules and policies.

ICT and Skill Empowerment of Artisans for Community Development

People who participate in various community activities make up the community. The community is comprised of individuals with varying backgrounds, abilities, and experiences, as determined by the overall population in these areas. Since community development is "for the people and by the people," there is a need for the expansion of these human powers, upon which the development of their community rests. Thus, in order to have a thorough understanding, community development must be defined. Community development is a process of social action in which people of a given community organise themselves for planning actions, define their common and individual needs and solve their problems, execute these plans with maximum reliance upon community resources and supplement these resources with services and materials from government and non-governmental agencies outside the community," according to Anyanwu in Ogbonnaya (2016). This definition places a strong emphasis on the necessity of community members' growth and enhanced quality of life. Given that the community's development must come from its people. Since they cannot contribute what they do not have, it is crucial to empower these community members, the majority of whom are artisans. ICTs' power can be completely utilised and leveraged in this situation to support local development. ICTs serve as a means of communication between many rural areas and the outside world, providing access to news, innovative ideas, and information on local communities and their residents. Gwani (2023) outlined the opportunities available for artisans in ICT to include access to information and knowledge, agricultural transformation, E-commerce and entrepreneurship, access to healthcare services, financial inclusion and skill development and employment opportunities. Gwani (2023) further explained that ICT adoption:

1. Serves as a crucial opportunity to bridge the information gap between rural and urban communities;
2. Is a pivotal sector in rural Nigeria, can undergo significant transformation through ICT adoption. Technologies such as mobile apps, weather forecasting systems, and remote sensing tools provide farmers with real-time information on weather conditions, market prices, and advanced farming techniques;
3. Facilitates the growth of e-commerce and entrepreneurship. Digital platforms and online marketplaces

empower entrepreneurs to showcase and sell their products to a broader customer base, fostering economic empowerment, reducing reliance on traditional agricultural practices, and expanding business reach;

4. Presents an opportunity to overcome healthcare challenges in rural areas. Telemedicine and mobile health applications connect rural communities with healthcare professionals, enabling remote diagnosis, consultation, and treatment;
5. Enables financial inclusion for rural communities through mobile banking, digital payment systems, and microfinance initiatives. This empowers artisans with convenient and secure access to financial services, promoting entrepreneurship, economic growth and poverty reduction.
6. Creates avenues for skill development and employment for artisans, that training programmes on digital literacy and ICT skills equip them for various job opportunities.

A significant part of a community's development is the work of artisans. They alter people's perceptions of vulnerable communities all over the world and provide a platform that, by fostering growth in this industry, aids in the development of means of subsistence for other community members. Encouraging people to work together and develop their skills with people who have different experiences and backgrounds not only addresses social cohesion but also has a significant positive impact on the community as a whole. Maintaining cultural heritage is greatly aided by the work of local artisans. Their creations frequently use age-old methods and patterns that have been handed down through the ages. Artisans contribute to the preservation of cultural legacies by carrying on these customs. Buying goods made by local artists is only one aspect of supporting them; another is making an investment in the health of our communities. Choosing artisanal goods encourages makers to carry on with their craft and showcase their skills to the world. Empowering artisans also has a powerful effect on the individual. It has been demonstrated that employment in the arts and crafts sector, or other craft-based output, provides a lifeline for vulnerable women. In addition to preserving jobs, artisans encourage the use of local raw resources to generate revenue for people. The role of artisans in community development cannot be over emphasized, Individuals and communities are economically empowered through artisanal work. Through selling their goods, artists help local economies grow, provide for their families, and frequently give people a sense of empowerment by giving jobs and sharing their expertise.

Proposed Ways ICT Can Help Artisans for Occupational Empowerment for Community Development

ICT has the revolutionary capability to help poor nations skip ahead in the development process by many stages. It can also give people directly the tools they need to take charge of their own lives and escape corrupt, top-heavy bureaucracies. "Efforts must be made to reduce this digital divide for more benefits to occur to most people," according to UNESCO (2013) For the purpose of improving skills in the formal sector, ICT investment ought to come first. ICT is essential for empowering rural communities, according to Education for All (EFA). It is imperative that we support this empowerment action programme in order to advance the work of craftsmen. ICT can improve markets' ability to function in various ways that are crucial to artistsans well-being, including:

1. ICT allows firms and individuals to participate more competitively with ease in the regional, national and global economics as well reducing uncertainty in doing business.
2. ICT provides artisans information regarding prices which enables producers to plan their product mix and input purchases in an efficient way.
3. Access to ICT will enable artisans determines the optimum timing of sale and enable them sell their products to most profitable market.
4. Availability of price information reduces or shrinks the informational asymmetry between the rural artisans and e-middlemen.

5. Access to ICT reduces e-middlemen exploitation of rural artisans.
6. ICT promotes information availability of jobs which could result in better and faster matching between landless laborers and available jobs, ultimately leading to increased productivity.
7. Training in the use and design of computer applications such as e-mail word-processing, design application amongst others will enable artisans to build marketable skills.
8. Marketable skills will enable artisans create alternative possibility of upward mobility.
9. Access to ICT will promote independent income which is the basis for individual autonomy, increase agency and control and, frequently, increased self-esteem and self-confidence.
10. Access to ICT will increase creation of new designs by artisans by increasing their revenue as well as that of their community.
11. ICT makes new designing easier and consumes less time.
12. Access to ICT enables artisans to expertise their innovative sense of design as well as expose them to modern tools.
13. Artisans need to be empowered with internalized skill and experience of ICT to enable them see the need of ICT in every day usage of state of-the art innovations, so that they can use ICT- based tools and techniques to respond to fast changing global needs as well as developing their communities.

CONCLUSION

ICT provide ample opportunities for artisans by creating an enabling environment to support their self-determination and occupational empowerment in the face of high rate of unemployment and the struggling for survival in this technological era. Based on this paper, it was suggested that enabling environment which supports and encourages access to benefit from ICT. There is a need for a motivating and sensitize artisans on the importance of ICT for skill improvement and for promoting self-dependency as well as their community since the development of the community solely depends on its citizens which the artisans are part of, so there is urgent need to empower them, socially, economically and otherwise by the government, telecommunications and well meaning individual. Supporting local craftsmen is an investment in our shared culture, economic prosperity, and overall community development since they are the guardians of our cultural legacy and their labour empowers both individuals and communities.

SUGGESTION

Telecenter establishment is a key strategy for leveraging ICTs to improve the quality of life in rural communities. A telecenter is a kind of information kiosk or multipurpose community public access point. It's a physical location that gives people access to ICTs for personal, social, professional, and educational growth, (Proenza, Bastidas-Buch, and Montero 2001)

1. Government should provide telecenter (information kiosk or multipurpose community public access point), library and information centre for artisans as this will improve the level of information accessibility and usage among the artisans in Imo State. this will give artisans access to ICTs for personal, social, professional, and educational growth
2. Telecommunication companies should come to the aid of artisans in order to improve the erratic interact connectivity and accessibility of ICT.
3. Artisans should be conscientized on the importance of ICT in their profession for socio-economic improvement as well as for improved community Development.
4. IT self teaching and training software should be developed.
5. ICT based resource centres for local empowerment should be established.
6. Master trainer for ICT should be engaged for teaching functional ICT for sustainable employment generation in the respective communities.
7. Promote education and digital literacy among the youth in the artisan communities to ensure that they

can participate in the digital space.

8. Identify member of these groups in the organizations who are likely to be more savvy with computer and internet and train them.
9. Low-cost and users-friendly inventory management software can be explored and promoted among the artisans
10. They should be motivated to explore online market places (buyer-seller platforms) that enable sellers to have WebPages with their product photos, contact information, etc, and link them to potential buyers, both retail and wholesale.

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