THE INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) REVOLUTION AND GLOBALISATION

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INTRODUCTION

Globalisation is a historical process since the end of the Second World War, the world has been moving from individual nations to wider groups. This is evidenced in the formation of continental and wider groups such as the Commonwealth of Nations; United Nations; Organisation of American States; African Union; European Union; and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

Globalisation is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. Unfortunately, it is often understood better in the economic dimension. What is often forgotten is the effects of other dimensions such as information and communication technology on globalisation.

THE INFORMATION SUPERHIGHWAY

The Internet has variously been described as the core of the information superhighway. With the mass introduction of computers worldwide, the availability of information technology has brought the world closer together. This has enhanced the process of globalisation.

The impact of information technology on globalisation cannot be over- emphasised. The global society can now communicate within short response times. This has had effects on the organisation and control of various systems in individual countries. The new information technologies have facilitated the physical movement of work from areas with high cost labour to areas where labour pools are both high quality and low cost.

In the field of education, information technology is viewed as a means of complementing traditional educational techniques. Various computer-assisted means of education such as distance education, the virtual library, and the invisible college network have gone a long way to improve educational methodologies as well as improving access to academic information worldwide.

The Information and Communication Technology revolution has also brought about the increase in access to scientific information and the sharing of research facilities. This is particularly beneficial to scientists in developing countries who would otherwise not have easy access to laboratories and databases. This helps to mitigate, if not solve, the problem of South-to-North brain drain.

The area of medicine cannot also be left out. Information and Communication Technology has led to the use of Telemedicine in solving medical problems across the globe. These range from medical consultations on the Internet through to surgery on television and drugs prescription among countries around the world.

In the field of the environment, information technology has helped to expand humanity's capacities to understand and manage physical and ecological processes. These include cross-border weather forecasts, disaster, warning systems and the establishment of joint projects to combat national hazards like desertification.

In the area of culture, information technology offers tremendous possibilities for the promotion and sharing of physical and non-physical cultural heritage. Computerized programmes and musical productions have opened up avenues, not only for entertainment, but also for cultural programmes.

The introduction of e-commerce through the application of information technology, has enhanced international trade among countries. Although a number of challenges have arisen in this area, what is often forgotten is that the advantages of e-commerce are more than the often trumpeted disadvantages.

On a wider scale, the major effect of Information and Communication Technology on globalisation is in the area of telecommunication. New forms of communication -ranging from mobile phones to teleconferencing have enabled people from different parts of the globe to communicate easily without consideration to time-lapse, weather conditions or distance on the globe.

IMPLICATIONS FOR AFRICA

From the foregoing, it goes without saying, therefore, that the information superhighway has a lot of benefits for African countries. Unfortunately, most African countries are not reaping these benefits due to the following reasons, among others:

1. Poor telecommunication infrastructure, leading to very low teledensity. 2. Low investment in ICT equipment.

3. Linguistic barriers within and among countries in Africa. 4. Lack of relevant ICT skills.

5. Inadequate standardisation of ICT equipment. 6. Ethical and Legal issues such as Copyright.

CONCLUSION

African countries must intensify their efforts in the acquisition and use of ICT if they are not to be left behind in the global village. The impact of ICT has been so great in recent times that it is even affecting global governance. All the arms of government -Executives, Legislature and the Judiciary have all now been affected by the ICT revolution in an attempt to enhance the general development of the society.