

## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT): A PANACEA FOR UNEMPLOYMENT REDUCTION IN ZAMFARA STATE

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### **Abstract**

*The neglect of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has contributed to the high level of Unemployment and rising Poverty in Nigeria. This is because, people lack the basic and needed modern technological innovations therefore, struggling with the challenge of meeting up with the present global technological realities. ICT has continued to thrive in many countries, it is unfortunately an area that is neglected in Nigeria. No wonder why things are not working as they should in Nigeria! The neglect of ICT is rubbing the Nation of the contribution their citizens would have made in the economy. The objective of this research is to find out how ICT can reduce unemployment in Zamfara State. Data was obtained through qualitative method with intense individual interview as tools. Participants were randomly selected from a group of Students, Traders and Farmers in Zamfara State, Nigeria. The research finds out that ICT is a weapon to Zamfara State's unemployment provided it will be given the necessary attention it deserves. The researcher concluded that; adequate utilization, financial support and proper orientation in ICT can drastically reduce unemployment in Zamfara State. While among the recommendations is that Zamfara state Government should put more emphasis to ICT adaption, Education and Training being it a remedy to the States's Unemployment.*

**Keywords:** ICT, Panacea, Unemployment Reduction, Zamfara State.

### **1.0 Background to the Study**

The alarming rate of Unemployment in Zamfara State is constantly increasing. The fact that Zamfara State is blessed with abundance human and natural resources is a reality, but the effective utilization of these resources always keeps the state at a lost. The rapid speed of crime in the state can never be exonerated from the level of its unemployment. Unemployed persons desperate to make a living may end up into stealing, kidnapping for ransom and arm robbery, many people are engaged into drugs abuse due to the prostration of redundancy.

The general realization that Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) is an indispensable medium of bringing about economic development and job creation is no longer a doubt. The wealth, strength, social and economic wellbeing of any society is measured in terms of its technological advancement. For a nation such as ours to be free from unemployment and become competitive in the global market environment, education programmes must be meaningful links to the social and economic needs of its people (Aina, 2002).

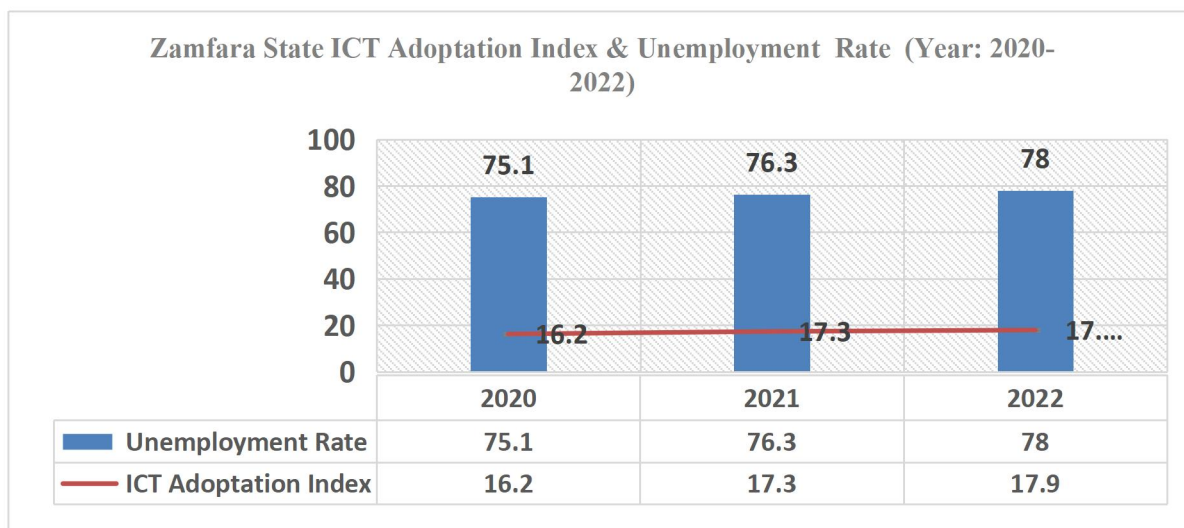
Government worldwide is doubling effort in promoting ICT with a firm and strong belief that skills and Technological formation wipes unemployment, enhance productivity and sustains competitiveness in the global economy. ICT has been identified as discipline that cut across almost all fields and promote their operations. ICT being a practical profession has proven itself as a discipline that can proffer lasting solution to the problem of Joblessness for any aspiring society.

ICT is nowadays posing considerable pressure on the orthodox structures of governance and livelihood. Governments all over the world are advocating for a review of approaches to facilitate infusion of ICT at each level of governance. Practical, Pragmatic and innovative systems must continuously be developed and reviewed to address societal needs of today and that of the future in line with technological advancements. Relevant ICT contents must be developed for international, national, and regional consumptions (Kundishora, 2020).

Premium Times (20th June, 2024) Published that, “as part of Zamfara State job creation efforts, the state government said it employed over 6,000 civil servants between 2019 and 2022, including 556 teachers and other health workers”. That has not changed the status of the state in the unemployment index due to the state’s inability to carry along the modern approaches in governance.

According to the National Multidimensional Poverty Index Report as stated by National Bureau of Statistics (2018), Zamfara State has an estimated population of **3,278,873 People**. From which are **1,641,623 Male** and **1,637,250 Female** (2011 Estimate) National Population Commission. The Citizens unemployment rate stands at **78%** ( $3,278,873/100 \times 78 = 2,557,521$  unemployed Citizens) of the total population.

Camble (1994) stated that, there is no doubt that information is power, therefore the content and context through which information passes must be simple, timely, accurate and easily accessible for the citizens to achieve desired objectives. Therefore, Zamfara State must start making direct contributions to the pool of ICT resources so as to alleviate the high level of unemployment in the State.



**Figure 1: ICT & Unemployment Index Chart**

**Source:** Premium Times (2024)& ZITDA (2024)

The above chart illustrates that, the unemployment rate in the year 2020 is 75.1% while the ICT Adaptation rate is 16.2%, in the year 2021 the unemployment rate raised to 76.3% while the ICT adaptation rate shift 17.3%, in the year 2022 the Unemployment rate raised to 78% while the ICT adaptation rate slightly raised 17.9%.

This implies that, the level of unemployment in Zamfara State is at an alarming rate with a continues increase. While, the ICT adaptation in the state is very low and increasing at its slowest rate.

## 2.0 Literature Review

### 2.1 Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Nigeria

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is perceived differently by different scholars. Hence, there are many definitions and views of ICT. Some scholars perceived it as a term that

encompasses a lot of activities involving the acquisition, storage, processing and dissemination of information by the use of appropriate software and hardware designed for Specific purpose. Damachi (2001) asserted that, Information and Communication Technology refers to technologies that provide access to information through telecommunications which includes the Internet, wireless networks, cell phones, and other communication medium. He stressed that, ICT is an umbrella term that covers communication devices and applications such as; television, radio, cell phones, computers, mobile phones, satellite etc.

ICT has become the key enabler and driver of globalization. It is a fact that, ICT occupied a central position in all spheres of human endeavors. Its roles in societal development have been considered pervasive (Hayat; Jianqiu; Farkhunda; & Ye, 2014). This shows that, ICT now serves as bedrock for societal development in all ramifications and it is nowadays used in almost all aspects of human endeavors. The 20th century marked the beginning of ICT in the Nigeria, the role of information increased immeasurably as a result of social progress and the vigorous development in technology. Before, ICT focused on areas of broadcasting as compared to what we have now. The spread of ICT in Nigeria has been fair, but with the misconception of meaningful utilization (Yanty & Sihombing, 2019) .

According to Kehinde & Agwu (2015) Nigeria emerged as the largest mobile telecom market in Africa with more than 61 million mobile subscribers. The telecommunications sector continues to perform impressively and has remained one of the major drivers of growth in the Nigerian economy. The sector recorded a real GDP growth of 34.69 percent in the third quarter of 2009. Till date, the business of ICT is seen in Nigeria as it has been noted that this sector has created job opportunities for many unemployed citizens in Nigeria.

## 2.2 Concept of Unemployment

There is no universal accepted definition for the concept of unemployment since it is multifaceted phenomenon. Therefore, different nations choose definitions that align with their national priorities. Unemployment is a general concept that refers to a state of being jobless or unemployed. In other words, anyone who is capable of working but doesn't find employable work throughout the relevant period may be deemed to be unemployed (Abdullahi & Saka, 2023).

According to Akeke (2011)Unemployment refers to a situation where people who are willing and capable of working are unable to find suitable paid employment. It's a serious economic problem which every responsible government is expected to monitor and regulate. The higher the unemployment rate in an economy, the higher the poverty and other associated welfare challenges.

The International Labor Organization (2001) defines unemployed persons "as those persons who are currently not working but are willing and able to work for pay, currently available to work and have actively searched for work". It also includes people who have lost their jobs and those ones who have voluntarily left their work (World Bank, 2010) cited by (Osemeng, 2013). Unemployment causes poverty, crime, political thuggery, kidnapping, low standard of living and all sorts social vices in the society.

Olayiwola (2018) Identifies the following types of unemployment:

- ✓ **Structural Unemployment:** This unemployment happens when there is a change in the structure of an industry or the economic activities of a Nation.
- ✓ **Seasonal Unemployment:** This unemployment is due to the seasonal variation in the activities of particular industries. This might be caused by climatic changes, changes in fashions or by inherent nature of such industries.

- ✓ **Residual Unemployment:** This unemployment is caused by personal factors such as old age, physical and mental disabilities, poor work attitudes and inadequate training.
- ✓ **Frictional Unemployment:** This is caused by industrial friction where jobs may exist, yet the workers may be unable to fill them just because they are unaware of those jobs.
- ✓ **Technological Unemployment:** Technological changes are taking place constantly, leading to the increased mechanization and digitalization of the production process. This naturally results in the displacement of labour and finally causing unemployment.

### 2.3 Causes of Unemployment

Some of the causes of unemployment in Nigeria as stated by Aina (2002) are:

- ✓ **Poor Educational Planning:** it is a widely held view that the high rate of unemployment among our graduates is traceable to our educational system. The architects of this assertion believed that, our educational system does not equip graduates with adequate skills necessary for them to meet societal needs. Consequently, the rate of graduates turns out to rise faster than the expansion of job opportunities.
- ✓ **Adoption of Untimely Economic Policy Measures:** This is a factor that has elicited unemployment problem. For example; following the introduction of Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) in September 1986 that ushered in liberalization, deregulation and the devaluation program of domestic currency, many of the teething domestic firms collapsed. This in return resulted in the loss of many jobs and thereby rendering many people unemployed. Although, these policies were designed to jump-start the growth of economy, but given the structure of the Nigerian economy, some of the policy packages became inimical to the system due to their untimeliness.
- ✓ **Unstable Political Environment:** A stable political environment usually enhances economic stability. Today, most developing countries are characterized by inter-tribal warfare, border disputes and complete breakdown of law and order. As a result, many countries fear coming to Nigeria to do business. Therefore, all the benefits associated with foreign investment will be immensely reduced especially that of creating new employment opportunities.
- ✓ **Wrong Impression about Technical and Vocational Studies:** There is the enduring societal biased attitude against Technical and Vocational Education. A large number of job seekers lack practical skills that could enhance self-reliance.
- ✓ **The Neglect of ICT:** ICT emerged as the leading provider of employment globally especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century as it directly affects governance and economy development. Even with the expansion of the industrialization, the neglect of ICT by governments has direct bearing on unemployment.

Based on the preceding explanations, it can be understood that Nigeria's unemployment problem is caused by a combination of Social, Economic and Political factors.

### 2.4 ICT as a Panacea for Unemployment Reduction in Zamfara State.

According to Kundishora (2020) "ICT has brought a lot of benefits to our daily lives as it eases interaction among humans and also to assist with daily tasks. So, it has created various opportunities for job seekers in the area of web design, business centre, graphic design, data programming, repairs and the like. More so, ICT is an entrepreneurship education that can create jobs and it is effective in the reduction of unemployment in our communities". There are different ways by which ICT can reduce unemployment in Zamfara State, some of which are discussed below:

- i. **ICT Education:** The ICT education equipped its beneficiary with a sound knowledge of being a global player to participate actively nationally and internationally in the areas of market survey and supply. ICT can be used to search for where the goods are needed across the globe, the

goods can be sent for sales where they are needed so as to retain the employment of the employee and shun cyclical unemployment. Nigeria is having different geographical zones with their peculiar season of the year. Instead of an employee being idle for the seasonal nature of his job, ICT may help to identify another geographical zone where such jobs are being undertaken and his services will be needed.

- ii. **E-commerce:** Exchange of goods and services can occur over the Internet. People are running both far and nearby businesses and make dealings online. It is quite easy for businesses to have an office at one point and have staff at another point who attend to customers, thereby creating opportunities.
- iii. **Mass Media Broadcast:** Radio and Television and other social media advertisement networks are enlightening people about job opportunities. For instance, radio can reach every corner of the country and thereby inform and enlighten the populace of any recent development. Also, on television, some programmes are shown to teach entrepreneurial skills like bread making, tie and dye, and so on. Even agricultural practices can be communicated, explained, demonstrated on television which if embraced by the populace will reduce unemployment to the barest minimum in Zamfara State.
- iv. **ICT Repairs:** ICT devices are the order of the day; they are part and parcel of our daily lives. Through ICT vocational training, there are engineers and others that possess technical skills of ICT repairs; mobile phone, computers, photocopiers, printers, etc. All these are relevant skills through which unemployment is reduced in any society.
- v. **ICT Centers/Cyber Cafe:** ICT literates can setup desktop publishing and graphic design centers to produce prints out of various kinds; letterheads, business cards and so on. Cyber Cafe is a place where people receive services such as the use of internet facilities, downloading of materials, uploading of materials, typing and printing of documents, etc.
- vi. **Website Design:** Both governmental and non-governmental organizations, likewise individuals' businesses would want to be on the Internet for the whole world to know them. This can only be achieved when such organizations or individuals are having a website which can only be achieved through the help of those with web design skills. Website design is a very lucrative aspect of ICT which can easily reduce unemployment.
- vii. **Consultancy Services:** Consultation services can be rendered by an ICT expert. For example, not just anybody can go to the market and purchase a computer system for a particular task, it is only an expert who will know the suitable computer or software for a particular purpose. Also, an ICT consultant can help you solve any ICT problem you are having.

### 3.0 Methodology of the Research

This Research work is conducted through primary and secondary methods of data collection. The primary method focuses on a qualitative approach of data collection. Due to dispersed population of the study, an interview means of gathering data was considered more appropriate. An open-ended interview questions were posed. The aim was to gather the relevant information for the attainment of the research objectives. Ndagi (2019) "stressed that, "qualitative research, often described as exploratory research is used in areas where there are few theories or a deficient body of knowledge". The advantage of using interviews was that rapport can be built in depth with each of the respondents. The purpose of the interview was to gain deep insight from the participants on the importance of applying ICT as a panacea to unemployment reduction in Zamfara State. The interview established a very good opportunity for close interaction between the researchers and the participants which made it possible for the researcher to extract the relevant information required.

Nworgu (2012) also asserts that, "qualitative research is an experimental enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the

phenomenon and context are not evident”, just as the case with the application of ICT in reducing unemployment in Zamfara State. The interview questions aim to establish among others:

- i. Determine the extent of ICT adoption and utilization in Zamfara State.
- ii. Knows the level of Zamfara State citizens’ competency in ICT.
- iii. Knows the role ICT Plays or can be able to play in tackling unemployment in Zamfara State.

### **3.1 Estimation of Results**

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is not the sole panacea to unemployment in Zamfara State. Rather, it can be a significant contributor to economic growth; ease and wider the coverage of businesses/e-business, educational enhancement, job creation, etc. Therefore, ICT can be regarded as a driver of economic growth due to its versatility and relativity in almost all fields.

### **3.2 Discussion of Major Findings**

#### ***Extent of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) adaptation and utilization in Zamfara State***

**Respondent 1** pointed out that, ICT has minimum adaptation in Zamfara State which calls for much improvement. He summed up that: “I also think that, the traditional means of running governance and business practices is outdated in this 21<sup>st</sup> Century where the world have become a global Village. Likewise, **Respondent 3** added that, “Zamfara State does not give emphasis to ICT education, going by the fact that most school graduates in the state don’t know how to even boot a computer not to talk of other operations”. **Respondent 5** explained that “The state fully relies on the orthodox method of teaching and learning which leaves their people backward in this digital era. Both the teachers and learners are not ICT oriented...” **Respondent 7** stressed that “Even Electricity in the state is a nightmare not to talk of ICT adaptation which requires adequate power supply for efficient running”. **Respondent 9** added that “...the state lacks good direction in appropriation as most of the State citizens are farmers whereas ICT can be utilized in weather forecast to enable farmers study the weather and know the right time to plant a particular crop”. **Respondent 15** asserted that “...the state could have been wise enough to deploy ICT in the area of insecurity dwindling the state, ICT utilization can drastically reduce the menace of insecurity via GPS tracking of culprits and danger alarm systems”. **Respondent 18** suggested that, “the state does not realize the value ICT can brings to the government and businesses. Proper adoption of ICT in all government sectors and even businesses will increase efficiency and promote service delivery.

#### ***Level of ICT skills and competency of the Zamfara State Citizens***

**Respondent 8** pointed out that, “...I think majority of the people of Zamfara State lacks effective ICT skills and experience. For example, you will see a Trader in a big shop but, do not accept mobile cash transfer and cannot manage to keep a POS machine to advance his business to the next level”. **Respondent 11** added that, “the traditional means of running business by caring cash along is obsolete, most especially with the present insecurity in the Zamfara State. Therefore, ICT awareness by the relevant authorities is necessary because, any robbery attack that leads to loss of business capital will render those people jobless”. **Respondent 13** explained that “there is hardly any small or medium business in Zamfara state where by customers can make enquiry and place orders online. This approach narrows down the citizens and their businesses towards harnessing the ICT dividend of wider business coverage and ease of transacting business”. **Respondent 17** also believed that, “the state is far behind when talking of the citizens ICT skills and competency.” **Respondent 19** also buttress the fact that, “one will find it very difficult to convince majority of the business men in the state that its necessary for them to be ICT literate so as to promote their business”. All they believed is, give me cash and take the goods.”

### ***Role ICT can play in reducing unemployment in Zamfara State.***

On the issue of ICT reducing unemployment in Zamfara State, **Respondent 6** believed that, “ICT is a most for any aspiring community or society.” He stressed that for Zamfara State to develop ICT is one major tool that can drive its economy and create countless employment opportunities. take example of agriculture which is the pride of the state, new farming methods can be easily communicated to farmers via their GSM phones. Even farming manuals and demonstrations can be developed and communicated easily through mobile devices which almost every farmer possess nowadays. **Respondent 14** said that, “the issue of insecurity which dispersed most rural dwellers from their homes and farms can be tackled through the adoption and proper utilization of ICT surveillance, tracking and danger alarm devices”. When farmers have peace of mind to freely cultivate, this alone can alleviate poverty and promote employment opportunities in Zamfara state”. **Respondent 5** explained that “The state fully relies on the orthodox method of teaching and learning which leaves their people backward in this digital era. Both the Teachers and Students are not ICT oriented...” **Respondent 7** stressed that “Even Electricity in the state is a nightmare not to talk of ICT adaptation which required adequate power supply for efficient running, therefore adequate power supply alone can reduce unemployment”. **Respondent 18** suggested that, “the adoption of ICT in all government sectors and even businesses will increase efficiency and promote service delivery. Therefore, majority of the **respondents** are of same believe that, Zamfara state is blessed with abundance natural resources but, the lack of modernization of operations and good governance has resulted to many social, economy and educational backwardness.

#### **4.0 Conclusion and Recommendations**

Based on the preceding explanations and findings, the researcher concluded that ICT is a weapon against the issue of unemployment in Zamfara State provided there is adequate adoption, financial support and proper policies implementation and orientation. Also, the social vices like corruption, kidnappings, herdsmen attacks, banditry, armed robbery, drug addiction, and the likes which are caused by the threat of unemployment can be minimize drastically through proper ICT utilization.

Therefore, to reduce the burden of unemployment in Zamfara State, the following recommendations are put forward:

- ✓ Government should put more emphasis in ICT through improve funding in this critical sector and at the same time increase its access to the ever-growing population. This can be achieved through making it easily accessible so that the general public can be able to acquire the necessary ICT skills relevant to their jobs and for self-employment.
- ✓ Zamfara state government should make it a policy that each and every local government area most setup an ICT training centers where the youths could learn some ICT skills; ICT hardware repairs, software development, Web Design, etc. The youth should also be encouraged to participate by attaching some incentives to the respective training programs.
- ✓ Institutions of learning within the state should install ICT skill centers or upgrade where one exists. This can be done through government funding or NGOs Interventions. Thus, will promote proper information communication and technology equipment in our schools to enhance the teaching and learning of ICT in schools.

#### **5.0 Policy Implication: Change of Government’s Mindset**

Governments all over are required to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of internal functions and processes within governmental departments and institutions. While externally, governments are called to be more transparent and give citizens access to government information (Kundishora, 2020).

Zamfara State government is now faced with the challenge of transformation, a paradigm shift that is necessitated by the age of network intelligence. The government must undergo internal and external transformation in order to move swiftly to ICT developments and its dictates. Zamfara State government should appreciate its overall responsibility of creating a conducive environment that allows for the development of ICT for citizens benefits; meeting the needs of citizens and improving the quality of their lives. Ensuring easy access to ICT infrastructure, roads and electricity (including solar and renewable energy) for remote and rural areas should be considered an important part of those strategies. According to International Labor Organization (2001), Governments at each level should understand ICT and their implication to governance and the society at large. The Policy should unequivocally spell out the role of government towards sustainable society.

### 5.1 Identified Gap for Future Study

After a thorough research and findings on the topic “Information and Communication Technology: A Panacea for Unemployment Reduction in Zamfara State”. The research realized that there is need for research on “The possible Deployment of ICT in Tackling the Menace of Insecurity in Zamfara State”. This is because, Zamfara State is well-known as a centre of farming, but the issue of insecurity in the State has resulted to; Rural-Urban Migration, Abandoned Farm Lands, Loss of Jobs, Unstable Economy that create fear in the mind of external investors.

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