Building Information Technology (IT) Knowledge Centers as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) for Nigerian Communities' Sustainable Economic Development

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Abstract: This paper calls for corporations to establish Information Technology (IT) Knowledge Centers for communities as corporate social responsibility for sustainable economic development. Several authors call for corporate participation in creating community based IT knowledge centre projects to make knowledge centers as a mechanism for economic sustainable development. The emphasis on corporate and community participation is traced back to stakeholder involvement as a measure for successful project in information systems and international development fields. This paper finds that the concept of participation in IT knowledge centers literature can be useful for communities' economic sustainability and calls for more research.

Key words: Information technology · Knowledge centres · Corporate social responsibility · Sustainable development

INTRODUCTION

According to Schultz, 2011 "the role of business is to achieve the fragile balance between profitability and social conscience". Without the later, the former is unsustainable." IT knowledge centres can provide sustainable information and communication facilities in Nigeria as advocated by Schultz [30]. Knowledge centre will have greater impact if there is participation from the local community in their design, implementation, management and evaluation Caspary and O'Connor, [1] Gómez *et al*. [2] Roman and Colle, [3] Proenza, [4] and Whyte, [5]. However, there is limited research on whether there is any correlation between the two factors, corporations and communities relative to knowledge centre. Thus the question, "are knowledge centres more successful if the community participates", needs to be researched more. Section A of this paper provides review of literature on the impact of IT knowledge centres on communities. Section B discusses analysis. And section C provides conclusion.

The Impacts of IT Knowledge Centres on Communities: IT knowledge centres are defined as "a diverse range of facilities providing education and access to information and communication technologies offering training, internet and community services" [6]. They are "the places that offer educational training and public connectivity with computers and networks" [3]. IT knowledge centres are based on the assumption that technical education and social economics rather than technical connectivity to information will lead to empowerment [3]. Knowledge centres differ from cybercafés in that they have a developmental focus [7]. However, a knowledge centre may include cybercafé. Whyte [8] posits that Knowledge centre projects can be donor-managed and thus fosters communities' economic sustainable development. There are three viewpoints on the impact of IT knowledge centres; namely, impractical, imaginary and intermediary. The impractical perspective reflects the view of development [9] with an emphasis on technology. With this view, IT knowledge centres represent "a new symbol of hope for community development" including the ability to bring "a new economic social order that would be more prosperous" [10]. Hunt posits that "several knowledge centre operators and managers express satisfaction over the potential power of information and communication technology leading to significant positive change in communities. Therefore, knowledge centres represent hope for communities that quest for progressive conditions in their daily lives" [10].

The impractical views of knowledge centres are becoming practical such that and according to [3], "a woman has her cataract removed in India and a farmer in China improved his sales both through information they found online from a knowledge centre." Kanungo [11],

"recounts several cases, for example, 48 women who insured themselves against accidental loss of life or limb and a woman labourer who found a better price for her grain than the price fixed by her land proprietor and farmers in a village who found why their sugarcane farms were affected by disease - all through information they accessed via knowledge centres. The imaginary view point supports the reliance standpoint of development [12, 13] which states that "the notion of connectivity and access leading to "development" is manipulated by corporate giants and development agencies to maintain the dependency of developing countries on the West [14, 15]. This perception can, however, be supported by questions of financial and social knowledge centre sustainability [16, 17, 8]. Financial sustainability occurs when a project "achieves revenue equal to or greater than the expenditure and economic return of a project," [17]. Social sustainability provides positive impact of knowledge centre on the social and economic development of the local community [5, 8, 17]. Nigeria needs IT and social economic knowledge centres for sustainable economic development. Avgerou [18] supports the intermediary view and posits that "access to education and ICT may not frankly guide development, but a necessity for nations, states and community to be part of global economic activity." Knowledge centres can be used "as a tool for strategic national infrastructure," [19]." Ulrich [20] finds that "knowledge centres in rural China fill a fundamental information void and enhance the livelihood of the educated and relatively wealthy." Therefore, knowledge centres might provide benefits to all parts of a community and lead to improved standard of living. The establishment of IT knowledge centres as corporate social responsibility with community participation will lead to sustainable economic development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The World Bank [21] defines participation as "a process in which people, communities and external stakeholders influence decisions that affect them." Thus community participation in knowledge centre projects can be seen as stakeholder's involvement to provide and support their needs. Information systems literatures posit that users' participation often lead to developed system(s) acceptance and utilization because of "psychological buy-in" [22]. In addition, ISO 13407 model, requires that users be regarded as designers [23]. According to [24], users' participation creates better relationships between designers and users. And thereby provides opportunities to integrate users concern and input into the system. This will subsequently reduce systems failure due to top-down approach. There are two theories of community participation; namely, weak and strong participations. Esman and Uphoff [25] believe that the weak approach provides stakeholders a negligible, superficial, ritualistic and barren participation. Brett [26] supports this view and believes that "strong participation could be impractical, costly and politically difficult for development agencies to accomplish." Brett further argues that "strong participation is unattainable in large projects. Contrarily, World Bank [27] study finds that "national, state, or community participation in projects are valuable regardless of the initial high costs, it pays off and brings increased efficiency, sustainability and saves time in subsequent projects". Moreover, Chambers [28] supports strong participation and calls for corporate partnership with communities. Furthermore, Burkie [29] states that "strong participation is an educational and empowering process in which communities and businesses in partnership identify problems and needs, mobilize resources and take the responsibility to plan, organize, implement, control and assess the collective actions that where decided upon." The citizens' level of education in a community can be used as adoptive measure for strong versus weak participation in building IT knowledge centre for a community.

CONCLUSION

This paper aims at contributing to IT knowledge centre literature. The paper calls for major corporations doing business in Nigeria to build IT knowledge centres with community participation. Knowledge centres can provide sustainable education, information and communication facilities in Nigeria and thereby serving as a mechanism for sustainable economic development. Whether the impacts of IT knowledge centers development is based on impractical, imaginary and/or intermediary, it can serve as a bridge for sustainable economic development. Knowledge centers can be used to develop technical and social economic education which will subsequently create public awareness and therefore provide policy, program and project information for Nigerian Government at all levels including businesses. The comparative arguments about weak versus strong stake holders participation are immaterial. We need ICT tools for sustainable economic development of which IT knowledge centers are one of such tools.

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