

Information and Communication Technologies as Drivers of Growth: Experience from Selected Small-Scale Businesses in Rural Southwest Nigeria

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The pervasiveness of information and communication technologies (ICTs) from cell phones to low cost videos, digital cameras, television, internets and laptops to mention just a few has transformed the lives of many especially the rural folks. Recent advances in ICTs have resulted in expanding existing jobs and creating new opportunities some of which were unimaginable only a few decades ago. The result has been significant worldwide and especially in developing countries like Nigeria where over three-quarter of her inhabitants rely on small-scale non-farm businesses and agriculture as means of livelihood. ICTs have therefore become an indispensable tool in fighting poverty and actualizing pro-poor growth.

The result presented here relied on data collected from a random sample of 350 small-scale business owners in Southwest Nigeria. Analysis of respondents' socioeconomic characteristics revealed average to be 44 years. Respondents' distribution by educational status showed that only about one-quarter were educated up to tertiary level with about 43 percent having no formal education. Occupational distribution of respondents showed farming as the highest employer of labour providing livelihood for over 67 percent of those interviewed. Analysis of available ICTs facilities revealed mobile phones, internet, television, video cameras, digital cameras and cam-coders as the most widely used in the study area. Results further indicated cost reduction, ease of marketing and a quantum leap in the incomes of small-scale business owners as outcomes of ICTs penetration in the study area. Ranking of livelihood activities in the study area showed that small-scale businesses like trading, carpentry, brick-laying, barbing/hair-dressing, okada riding, vulcanizing, car-hiring, video clubbing as the most patronized.

It is therefore suggested that effort should be intensified at building capacity of respondents through education. This is because education enhances adoption of new technologies and earning potentials of people. Improvement in the existing state of infrastructures should be made a policy priority to enhance accessibility to and affordability of ICTs.

Key words: Economic growth, ICTs, Rural, Small-scale businesses, Southwest Nigeria