

NEW INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO: STRATEGIES AND MEASURES

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ABSTRACT

This article will primarily allow a definition of the strategic development of ICT in the Democratic Republic of Congo, to be put forward. For the most part it involves the precision of many types of measures and strategies (such as institutional, regulatory, infrastructural measures), human resources, the development of content and partnerships, all of which do not yet exist in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

While encouraging an active and sincere partnership between public and private sectors, with all the difficulties this implies, this article will also allow for the recognition of the role that ICT can play in the development of Democratic Republic of Congo, if correctly integrated and adequately used, as well as conform to the Democratic Republic Congo's norms and realities.

Taking into account the near absence of laws and regulations about the use of ICT in the Democratic Republic of Congo, we have put forward several pertinent strategies and measures and have suggested appropriate ways of executing them.

Key words: ICT, strategies and measures, ICT development

INTRODUCTION

Since 1998, many countries have been celebrating the advent of the internet. The Democratic Republic of Congo, however has as of yet, remained in the population promotional phase, the politicisation of issues concerning the insertion of new technologies into society, the conscious-raising level of critical and pertinent uses of the internet, and consideration for the often forgotten, such as the rural communities.

Despite the obvious efforts in the past several years to democratize society, as well as efforts to reconstruct and modernise the economy as approved by the Democratic Republic of Congo, there are still particularly low indicators of human development. The serious problems of poverty are continuously exacerbated, and these undermine the Democratic Republic of Congo. The average lifespan, universal access to education and an acceptable standard of living are all below international norms. Along with the aforementioned problems, the inefficiency of institutions, the low quality of governance and political instability constitute the major difficulties that interfere with the actual development of new technologies.

At the same time, the development of new technologies that support this movement is a phenomenon that is irreversible. The consequence is that, the Democratic Republic of Congo must play a major but non-exclusive role in the sector of new technologies. In addition, new horizons must be opened, notably the partnership with the private sector in which strong leadership must be developed. Finally, we must adapt the use of ICT to the actual needs of the Congolese community in order to hope for visible and rapid results. The necessity for a stable, predictable and transparent regulatory environment in the Democratic Republic of Congo would favour a stronger foundation for the commencement of this public/private partnership.

Taking into account the near absence of laws and regulations concerning ICT in the Democratic Republic of Congo, we have put forward several pertinent strategies and measures and have suggested appropriate ways of executing them.

In terms of institutional measures, it is vital to have a clear vision. This must allow for the promotion of an institutional environment favourable to the reinforcement of human capabilities and general support for this sector's activities.

With regard to regulatory measures, a legal and representative framework favouring the definition and management of norms in this sector must be created. With regard to the measures of infrastructure, basic

telecommunication infrastructures must be promoted and reinforced. Measures of investment promoting a suitable environment for investment and competition in the ICT sector must lead the way for developing content and partnership.

CURRENT SITUATION OF STRATEGIES AND MEASURES OF ICT IN CONGO

Due to wars and political conflicts, the Democratic Republic of Congo is classified among the poorest countries in the world and certain indicators consider it, among the poorest of the African continent south of the Sahara, with nearly 80% of its population surviving on the limit of human dignity, with under US\$ 0.20 per person, per day (Democratic Republic of Congo, 2005).

The Democratic Republic of Congo does not actually possess in its official documents clearly defined national strategies about the use of new technologies. What we can access, however, is the two-fold issue of the Democratic Republic of Congo's situation. This can be defined in terms of constraints and opportunities. On the one hand, the infrastructure concerning ICT throughout the country varies from almost in existence, in progress or completely obsolete and therefore nonexistent. On the other hand, the situation of the private sector in the Democratic Republic of Congo is more or less encouraging ICT and therefore should be further encouraged.

This general situation, in which we can observe a quasi-total absence of judicial coverage, demands the necessity of a clear definition of the roles of the different partners.

If the Democratic Republic of Congo wishes to use ICT to commence the process of development, the fundamental issue at hand is how to find the best partnership between the public and private sectors.

This partnership in the Democratic Republic of Congo also faces certain constraints in the public and private sector. The Congolese public sector is characterised by low wages, pressing demands in multiple domains for the reduction of poverty, a great need in ICT coverage, and short term interest. The private sector is characterised by limited investment opportunities, difficulties in the maintenance and development of ICT activities, and difficulties in paying taxes.

Additionally, the reinforcement of the capacity of human resources in the ICT sector poses a crucial problem to financing training abroad; finances that the Congolese partners in this field do not have at present. The demand for personnel knowledgeable in technological domains increases daily.

This situation does not attract potential investors. Consequently, the government must affirm its willingness to render the country more attractive to investors by improving productivity in all sectors and reducing transaction costs.

The present situation in the domain of infrastructures and connection of ICT in the Democratic Republic of Congo is much worse than originally believed. Infrastructures are obsolete or nonexistent, with a low rate of connection. In general, aside from coverage and infrastructures at the level of high media that necessitate reinforcement, the majority of telecommunication infrastructures is held and managed by public enterprises in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

CHALLENGES TO OVERCOME

There is lack of favourable conditions for the development of ICT in order to encourage the commitment of the private sector. There is lack of strategies for the use of ICT and lack of training program of a new labour force. There is also ignorance that the ICT domain is also a creator of new jobs and new professions.

Expanding the measures and strategies of development in an efficient partnership with the private sector and civil society; and reinforcing the quality of the legal and regulatory environment in order to turn it into an advantage rather than a constraint.

Presently, the situation remains disgraceful and it is the leaders of Democratic Republic of Congo and people's duty to adopt all necessary measures in order to overcome these challenges. This can be accomplished by defining strategies to mobilise partnerships and resources to support the national measures in ICT, putting into place an institutional framework that will favour ICT development.

Overcoming such challenges must in practice also allow for the following goals to be reached: the international Web with several international transit centres; reinforce the connection in the Democratic Republic of Congo to the internet, which would allow the various partners to have instant access to large global Webs; and find a way of decreasing the cost of connection and access to the internet. This will in turn create a favourable environment

for the development of ICT through the reduction of this sector's fiscal pressure on the Democratic Republic of Congo.

STRATEGIES

In the case of the Democratic Republic of Congo, we do believe that we must facilitate partnerships and reinforce capacities in order to elaborate and provide successful ICT measures and strategies in a suitable environment, create high-level dialogue about the contribution of ICT in the long-term that would involve partnership between the public and private sectors, and develop ICT services supporting private investment. All of this is only possible with the reinforced cooperation between the Democratic Republic of Congo and other nations.

Continuing along the line of developing infrastructures to improve connection, we shall define the following perspectives: campaign on ICT, introduction of ICT in the educational sector; promotion and reinforcement of the use of ICT for better productivity in administration; consider the improvement of connection in the Democratic Republic of Congo by the launch of satellite; and favour the entrepreneurial spirit in the ICT domain due to the elaboration of laws managing new services.

To encourage and promote the public-private partnership, principles based on the orientation of the private sector's resources towards public interest must be applied.

Given the constraints attached to the public sector-private sector partnership in the domain of ICT, we propose that there be: the necessity of promoting a regulatory, stable, predictable, transparent and suitable environment; the development of supporting funds for ICT development; and the development of specific concepts concerning the partners in the national political framework of economic development. At this stage, the idea of liberalisation of national enterprises is indispensable.

- Liberalisation

Liberalisation, which has as a principle the opening of the market place, offers many opportunities to this sector. It notably refers to the following: offering more opportunities to the growth of the private sector; accelerating economic growth; encouraging new investments; improving competition and efficiency; and of increasing productivity.

Meanwhile, initiatives such as the liberalisation of the local market place and the opening of the market to foreign players are to be encouraged through the creation of a regulatory framework for the market based on transparency, flexibility, general comprehensive statement and the law of the industry, as well as new market structures and a new regime of authorisation.

- National Enterprise

This concept developed and used by Malaysia for the promotion of its economic development has the following principles: the public and private sectors become partners and key players by working in the midst of the same enterprise that is the nation. There are therefore two complementary entities: one is in charge of the commercial and economic activities (the private sector) and the other is in charge of services (public sector).

The prosperity of the nation is only possible if the commercial and economic sectors attempt to promote production, marketing and sales, all the while optimising the profitability of investments, and if the services section of the cooperation, supplies in its own right, all the necessary support.

The partners for the development of ICT are multiple in the Democratic Republic of Congo, but we shall only focus on some of them. The partners we shall include are the government, the private sector, NGOs and the Church, etc.

The government of the Democratic Republic of Congo has the duty to guarantee social cohesion, to define strategies and policies in cooperation with the players from the private sector, to serve as the originator and facilitator of initiatives and to become the regulator rather than simply the controller.

The private sector also has its own obligations, such as responsibility, entrepreneurial spirit, innovation, competition, fair-play and participation in development projects.

In this movement to develop ICT, NGOs and Church have the task of promoting the above ideas to the population: being present in the field, educating local communities, constituting a lobby of playing an interfacing role by holding responsible dialogues with the key players.

In their capacity they also have a role to play in this move to develop ICT. They must work towards having a multiplying effect, serve as catalysts, facilitate regional and international integration, and possess and provide funds.

CONCLUSION

We suggest that for better results in the development of ICT, the Democratic Republic of Congo has to: Share resources and experiences with other countries in matters concerning ICT by developing education and human resources; associate the private sector to the matter of ICT measures and strategies; improve the connection on a sub-regional, national and international level by giving the necessary motivation for investment and innovation; and take advantage of experience of other countries. This does not mean that it needs to copy other experiences, but rather be inspired to define its own policies; by capitalising on the experiences of Congolese entrepreneurs evolving in the international ICT sector; by understanding other nations' experiences in order to sustain the Democratic Republic of Congo's initiatives, favour the transfer of technology and expertise.

Taking into account the near absence of laws and regulations concerning ICT in the Democratic Republic of Congo, we have put forward several pertinent strategies and measures and have suggested appropriate ways of executing them.

In terms of institutional measures, it is vital to have a clear vision. This must allow for the promotion of an institutional environment favourable to the reinforcement of human capabilities and general support for this sector's activities.

With regard to regulatory measures, a legal and representative framework favouring the definition and management of norms in this sector must be created. With regard to the measures of infrastructure, basic telecommunication infrastructures must be promoted and reinforced. Measures of investment promoting a suitable environment for investment and competition in the ICT sector must lead the way for developing content and partnership.

ICT therefore constitutes an accelerator to social and economic development if it is correctly integrated and used in an adequate manner, conforming to the specific norms of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

This being said, we hope that clear strategies and measures will first be defined by the Democratic Republic of Congo in order to facilitate a sincere partnership between all of the nation's forces.

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