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ICT AND THE PROSPECT OF GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC

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Abstract

The assumption in any democratic order is that governance is hinged on a reciprocal relationship between the leaders and the led. That is, the leadership responsiveness and accountability to the people on one hand, and the increasing participation in forms of demand and support from the people in government business on the other hand. This symbiotic relationship provides the platform that drives democracy which presupposes development. In Nigeria, following the return to civil rule in 1999, the country has witnessed continual citizen participation in governance which has gone a long way in enhancing leadership quality and development. This article argues that one way in which this has been done is the ever-rising use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) tools in the democratic space. Its deployment in different areas of governance has contributed to opening the democratic space, thus creating greater freedom and access to governmental machinery by the citizens and enhances the socio-political mobilization and participation necessary for functional operation of the government. Attempt is made to examine the use of various products of ICT, especially, social media and blogosphere in making demands of accountability and openness on the government by the citizenry. It maps out the existential obstacles to the use of ICT and its misuse in governance in Nigeria.

Keywords: Information; Governance; ICT; Democratic; Accountability

INTRODUCTION

Freedom access to information is one of the components of fundamental human rights. This right is sometimes documented orally, in prints or in writing which are displayed via internet and other forms of information and

communications technology (ICT) in this modern time. Currently, nations are witnessing a tremendous increase in ICT in the area of importance or usefulness, acceptability, among others, and to use same to collect and transfer information in a reciprocal relationship between the leaders and the led. Despite the prevailing relevance of ICT, banished approach by governmental actors is on-going through stringent rules and regulations, in which right to access and freedom of expression through information has been reduced (Apeloko, 2021). On that premise, principles of democratic governance and its operations requires to be considered.

The interaction between government and the citizens has a huge advantage in the area of governance in which ICT products is often subjected the opinion of major actors. The choice is sometimes general and often situational especially in the delay of adjusting to the dynamics of technological development. In promoting governance via ICT products, the users, that is, blogosphere have employed Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Whatsapp to express opinions and views on governance. These views are often conflictual on ICT involvement. It is deliberate in the sense that, the phases of interaction have found it difficult to manipulate the public in disseminating vital information through its' products. However, stringent rules on several occasions have marred its usage as state authority attempt to suppress the citizens quest for information. In other words, ICT products enhances checks and balances between government to citizens and citizens to government. The interaction between the ICT and its users has called for both academic and practice debate within the context of governance. The impact of this has increased popular participation in politics in developed and developing states. It has also spread across the economic section in every political environment. However, the application and users (citizens) of ICT tools have not only undermined the fundamental purpose otherwise, also covers the wrong usage (government) into activity of governance. To achieve the basics objectives of ICT in governance, a fundamental human rights must be guaranteed. This involves the right to own property, religion, association and gathering, freedom of expression, among others. In this regard, the significance of freedom of expression cannot be overemphasized in governance in which demand and support from citizen to government on public issues.

Several methods of interacting with the government are in tandem with the feedback approach. This approach often guides governmental plans and to criticize their actions in which nations can embrace policy and administration. This role further connotes the oversight function embarked upon by the legislature and the judiciary over the executive arm of government in the state. However, the function of other arms of government has been over time politicized by the polity. Furthermore, the heavy politicization in governance has crippled and negates the principles of separation of power and rule of law promulgated by both Baron De Montesquieu and A. V. Dicey. Albeit, doctrines in Montesquieu and Dicey incorporates and protects governance stakeholders that are devoid of favoritism and nepotism which may arise from political actors or the governed. To this end, the legislature and the judiciary have not been able to rise to the occasion of reshaping the directions of the arm of government responsible for good governance vis-à-vis the executive arm. Thus, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) also dominates the parlance of enhancing good governance in the state.

Studies have showed the impact and influence of CSOs and the media on governance in Nigeria. Since the return to civil rule in 1999, the Nigerian government has often been involved in the act of good governance in criticism by Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP) which was established in 2004. Be that as it may, the modus of Operandi of SERAP is predicated on social protections for the citizens, economic rights for the people as well as accountability and transparency in governance. Hence, the activities of SERAP are limited in influencing the government intentions and outputs. In that circumstance, the actions of SERAP have always been transmitted through mass media assistance (Apeloko & Celestine, 2019). After 16 years of the military regime in

the country (Bitrus, 2007; Iwu, 2009; Akingbulu & Busiek, 2010) and the inception of the fourth republic in 1999, the civilian democratic system in one way or the other has influenced remarkable and noticeable participation of citizens in the democratic procedures in Nigeria (Ozoh, 2009). The success no doubt is associated with democratic institutions and mass media which engage in deployment and political education through political socialization (Fog, 2004). Media, all-inclusive generate strong and vibrant democratic processes all over the world in which the dissemination of authentic endless information represents a support to the system. Information transmitted by media strengthens government and improve citizens to be involved actively to lobby in governance actions and influences its decisions.

Media has also aided in identifying immoderations of the elected representatives and other public office holders which in turn sustain their oaths of office and act created on the demands of the governed (CDGG, 2005). Media scholars have noted the inveterate weakness of its conventional media has sullied Nigerian political democracy as a form of government capable of paving the road to the Promised Land (Streets, 2001; Machesney, 1999). Consequently, the increased ubiquity and autonomy of new digital media has infused contemporary debates about shaping Africa's democracy and good governance with renewed optimism and it is suggested that the context of ICT use, is capable of becoming a powerful influence in the realm of social development and good governance across the continent. Western commentators have represented new ICT or digital media as tools capable of shaping myriad forms of political power, freedom development, and social change in both developed and developing societies (Shirky, 2011; Benkler, 2006; Kahn & Kellner, 2005; Mudhai, 2013; Rheingold, 1993). Without a doubt, the relationship existing between media and governance which allows popular participation of all stakeholders in democratic governance otherwise known as E-governance in any geographical terrain is not devoid of the integration of Information Communication and Technology (ICT) and Governance.

ICT: Conceptual Discourse and Literature Review

One of the most significant outcomes of IT-enabled in public administration is e-governance. This has become an acceptable form in contemporary governance, not only because it is cost-efficient, also it is transparent and timesaving in terms of service delivery and inclusion of citizens in the governance. Although ICT is still regarded as "good development" or as popular participation against elite rule. The positive impact on governance according to Teryima (2015) is that it has developed a new phase of governance phenomenon. In that circumstance, ICT globally has been conceived as the smooth rider toward the betterment of a territory, beyond this description, attainment of successes has been recorded both in developed and developing countries. The modern conceptualization of ICT in governance is unlike the traditional means of interaction between the government and the governed. ICT is therefore described as the progressive development of governance strategies both for the haves and the haves not (Odorige, 2016).

Also, in the several study analyses priority is on ICT and its significance in governance. In the light of this development, various endeavours have reflected ICT definitions in governance. For example, Moon and Bretschneider, 2002; Foutain, 2001; Anderson, 1999; Brown, 1999 & Nye, 1999 define ICT in governance as:

> *As a revolutionized arrangement of processes, structures, and operations of administration as being experienced in the realm of current dispensation of the political system, enhanced performance management, nature of government institutions, drastic reduction of red-tape and, overhauling of public sector institutions for effective and efficient service delivery (cited in Onu & Amobi, 2012).*

In addition to the foregoing, rapid growth in technology which has over the past decades ushered in revolution against previous link existing between information and communication technologies. Consequently, ICT has not left the domain of governance and politics untouched. It has gradually saturated both constituted authority as well as the government structures in extending the arm of governance to the citizens (Onu & Amobi, 2012).

Tomorrow et al. (2012) argued that developments in information and communications technologies (ICTs) have greatly changed the pattern of both private and public conduct and businesses across the world with an expected method of changing information from analog to digital forms. This has fostered convenience and allowed government organizations to effectively store, analyze and retrieve information which is the center of administration. The revolution totally became dominant with changes in telecommunications technology and the merging of computers that resulted in the advent of the internet or World Wide Web (Bretschneider, 2003). The introduction of the internet and web presence in the 1990s has obviously ushered in a new dimension into the discipline of social and management sciences getting studied as E-governance. Thus, creating another emerging pattern that is gradually defining current pattern of governance and administration.

E-governance in Nigeria language

The major components of ICTs have become important phenomenon in predicting the energy fast tracking the total overhauling in governance. To this effect, it is not only restricted to its significance in the polity, also discourse the challenges in politics and governance. In other word, government and individuals have channeled the ICT disseminators to undermine the rationality of concurrent administration through propaganda vis-à-vis mass media. More so, several stages for the transmission of information through a particular medium is embedded in mass media which often refers to as ICT source. To this end, classification of mass media source comprises of print and electronic media (Shinkafi, 2016).

From the above mentioned, interaction between governmental to citizens and citizens to the government is associated with print and electronic media. For instance, in Nigeria, some of these print media houses have been used for monitoring, while this is thriving, the right of expression through the print media on the other hand had been censored to suiting the power that be, albeit, in a period of time. Over the years, punch, The Nation, The Sun, The Guardian, Dailypost, The Telegram, This Day, Vanguard among others, have consistently transmitted the activities of government as well as its schedules on daily basis. Although it is regarded as one of the components of mass media, yet it is often known as analog method of transmission. This is a result of non-radical nature of it influence on government plans and programmed since the inception of the fourth republic.

While this non-radical model of media functions, the emergence of electronic media products redesigned the phase of governance. Enhanced governance by bringing government nearer to the people through intellectual contribution into politics. From this discourse and through the realm of electronic media growing phase, several platforms for electronic dissemination of information have been developed and incorporated into an arts and acts of governance. In other words, electronic media, as synonymously interchanged with social media, has often been operationalized according to several scholars that the improved in governance is predicated on freedom of Information supported by fundamental human rights locally and globally.

In addition, ICT deployment in several areas of governance locally and international has contributed to opening the democratic space for the citizens. This increases individual's participation and accessibility to the government. Thus, improves the socio-political readiness and strategic involvement in achieving a good functional

governance. Be that as it may, the impact of electronic media cannot to a large extent unnoticed into the following features: i) improved public-centered interest, ii) increased in responsibility and responsiveness of government towards the demands of the people, iii) promote and aggregate various interest in the polity, iv) reduction in the corruptive act, and v) harnessing and promoting local and global governance within the context of sovereignty. In the light of this, attempt is made to examine the various products of ICT, especially, social media and blogosphere in making demands of accountability and openness on the government by the citizenry. It maps out the existential obstacles to the use of ICT and its misuse in governance in Nigeria.

Interactions between citizens and government through ICT

Bretschneider (2003) in his study stated that Information and communication Technologies (ICT) have profound effects for good governance, placing major players, that is, policy makers and implementers under advance observance, leading to improved state conduct and more responsible policies. Lack of access to the information is dangerous to the rules and the rulers. ICT is a major building block for sustainable development and a major driving force for economic prosperity. It allows government and the citizens to participate in governance in a rapidly changing world where democratic ideals are increasing changes by access to varied and developing technologies and ideas (Ertmer, 1999).

Furthermore, the current wave of ICTs development as well as the universal mobile with low-cost of geo three-dimensional tools creates new prospects to basically enhance public services by applying open and integrated methods which includes mass involvement and further transparency in the advancement process. More so, the modern practices of ICTs introduced significant tools to the alter manner in which public services are provided to the people and enhance accountability. The outstanding world outreach of governance through ICT is generally believed to be disseminated through ICTs products. Specifically, these products are although not limited to the following: Facebook, e-mail, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Twitter.

E-Democracy: Citizens to Government (C2G)

Digital democracy is the forthcoming idea of e-government. E-democracy spread across the whole democratic development. The E-democracy ranges from voter registrations, election voting, interaction among elected candidates and their electorates, public opinion polling, total access to technology, supported legislative bodies, and law-making procedures that reassure larger citizen involvement (Tambouris, Gorilas & Boukis, 2001). The link between citizens and government exists under the sphere of democracy. The relationship helps in the integration of ICT and democracy which enhances popular participation of citizens into governance. Consequently, the synergy outcome between citizens, government and democracy is what is known as e-democracy. The means of interaction from citizens to government is enabled with e-democracy. During democratic processes, particularly the electioneering period, citizens communicate with the government in getting information before interacting with government. The period witnesses the choice of candidate among the several contestants. By and large, citizens go to the poll after procedural stages involves in the election. Of course, manifestoes, political debates, campaign tours and familiarization of political candidature with citizens are performed most times with blogosphere platforms.

In the same vein, blogosphere technology makes available and fresh possibilities to permit two-way information flow between the people and the government. Although it is being used to discussed public opinion. The transformation in ICTs and the increase in the spread of knowledge have introduced a new period of information and development of knowledge which is otherwise multidimensional and directly affects economic, political, social, and cultural actions. Globally, the world has acknowledged the importance and significance of

information and communication technologies has played several positive changes in socio-economic and political advancements. The significance roles of ICTs cannot be overemphasized, it is in line with interest of the groups or stakeholders as well as the community's ability to access, yield, apply and adapt to information. ICTs in governance is often regarded as post-industrial gadgets, economic bedrock, and others. For example, a state in Nigeria, Kano, democratic principles, and procedures are impeded, and this hampers citizen's opportunity to participate in, or even endorse any decision-making that would affect their lives. Pessimistically, there are no ICT facilities in all government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) coupled with the epileptic energy supply which making effective and affordable broadband services to browse talk and fax documents all at the same time infeasible. The available communication network is television and the most common is radio considered in the modern world as conservative means and mechanisms for facilitating information flow among the citizens.

The quest for accountability, transparency as well as checks and balances witnessed by Nigerians are not just accidental, but the search for inclusive governance by the citizens via tools of ICT predominantly Facebook, Whatsapp and Twitter. The social media inclusion in governance is solidified by global ways which thrown weight of theories, approaches, and conceptual analysis in literature. Likewise, extant literature has examined tools, especially, blogosphere which has expanded the tentacle of governance beyond the custodians and actors of state governance. In making demands by the citizenry, mutual reinforcement between the government and the ruled, that is ICT governance has challenged the state apparatus through the rules of engagement established on accountability and openness, which in turn dispense good governance to citizens' demand (Apeloko & Amanchukwu, 2014).

In this context, Agarwal & Rastogi (2003) reiterates the quest for access free flow of information in this has likewise increased by social media tools. This and other privileges are arranged in fundamental human rights principles and overtime, the subject matter in product becomes the hallmark of good governance. It subject both actors and fourth arm of government to public trial based on available or perceived information sometimes official rumour. In several instances in Nigeria polity, the current led government was a product of social media roles in governance, not only in playing the opposition role but also made several critique and criticisms through manifestoes and propagandas against the incumbent administration. In other words, social media raise the game of throne between the incumbent and the opposition between 2010-2015. The possibility of administration transition from one administration to another was piloted by information being accessed by the political opponent.

The available data in Nigeria Communication Commission reports (NCC, 2018) affirmed that ICT products users in the first quarter of 2018 has grown from 98.4 million to 100.9 million. While in the same year, it has reached 162 million in the same year at 84%. NCC (2019) reported over 184 million in December 2019. Despite the exponential growth in social media, the existential studies have shown several obstacles that have envelop the potentials of social media in the dispensation of social justice between the government and the governed. From the above reports, detailed in NCC extract, that the pattern of citizens involvement in governance cannot be overemphasized. It is an assertion leverage on accessibility to electronic devices, internet, and communication system. In a recent survey, NITDA (2020) affirms that over fourth million Nigerians are on Twitter, while over hundred million subscribed on Facebook, and notwithstanding, Instagram and WhatsApp pull their strength in registered users.

Hinges on the foregoing, Nigerians accessibility to the information and communication technology, having proven the test of strength in governance through accountability and transparency, it has developed a robust and productive relationship between the government and its citizens, in which importance and significance of ICT

inclusion in governance have redefined the structure, output and interest of the stakeholders. Even though the challenges confronting the essentiality of ICT are often generic, it is most times peculiar on the basis of the operational environment as manipulated by policy actors and enforcement of regulation limiting the soft landing of ICT tools in Nigeria polity. It is against this backdrop, that the militating factors have upturned in one of the effective ways of ICT by combatting corruption through its tools. These tools are peradventure seeming to be in existence before the advent of the mid fourth republic. Without a doubt, enlightenment and education have also increased the scope of good governance.

E-Democracy: Government to Citizens (G2C) Perspective

Argument have continued to trail the purpose of FOI via the quest for both sensitive and non-sensitive information from the government. This is evident in Chiluwa (2012); Akinfemisoye (2013) and Kombol (2014) which contributes that the conviction on the direction of FOI is instrumental on the ICT and social media use in Nigeria. In that circumstance, extant literature has shown the use of ICT products in unwarranted pattern which basically hinges on the ownership. More so, politics and pressure has consistently increased challenges confronting the use of social media in Nigeria. Further to this, illegal censorship, and intolerance regulatory rights, not limited to print media, have suffered threat severally, having spread across the sphere of electronic media - blogosphere (Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp). In the current dispensation, electronic gagging, lack of political will, copyright law and liability law, regulation of mass media and others adopted tool by government has continuously limits individual rights and privileges against utilization of social media via blogosphere in many administrations. Consequently, G2C interaction collapse due to inability of the government to fulfil the campaign promises during C2G interaction. However, transparency in governance, efficiency and accountability on released information to the public, provision of qualitative and cost-effective services, responsive administration, creation of single phase of government services, forming a friendly, efficient interface and elimination of the middlemen which supposed to be the features of G2C expectations from government to the citizens have become impediment whenever government perceived low support for the goals of the government including e-government objectives.

In several countries of the world, government communicate with the citizens by releasing severe strain on health system information in Caribbean country. In Africa, Mali especially, engagement of governments with the citizens is facing infrastructural shortcomings. While this is ongoing, Peru communicates with its citizens in supporting local manufacturers through the adoption of ICT in governance. India also allows the citizens to participate in the policy and decision-making. Gabon through the usage of ICT products partners with the citizens by granting access to governmental database especially in agriculture. Likewise in South Africa, G2C is enhanced by interacting with citizens in remote rural areas. This is a deliberate executed strategy by government to connects with citizens. Specifically, opposition prior to 2015 general election employed blogosphere specially to build principles of e-governance through criticisms and propaganda through Twitter and WhatsApp. To this end, e-governance were maximally utilized in changing the course of governance direction strategically. Prior to that election, almost every piece of information was made available for public consumption and in turn, citizens were of the opinion in choosing the next regime between the incumbency and the opposition. Based on the availability of these information, the administration then was commended and criticized. Nevertheless, the administration was ousted out via the effect of social media use through blogosphere. Be that as it may, transparency and accountability was optimally at its peak and this in turn witnessed an upsurge in people's participation in governance. Simply put, blogosphere influence often determines the administrative style in governance. Its contribution however has contributed to existential obstacles on the use of ICT.

Relationship Between ICT and Governance in Nigeria: Obstacles or Blessings?

In mapping the existential obstacles on the use of ICT in Nigeria governance, enlightenment of the citizens has shown in various studies, the responsible factors are not limited to weak institutions, low accountability, poor accountability and transparency system, poor infrastructure, centralization in infrastructural provision, lack of competent personnel, inadequate human resources, higher level of digital divide, poor regulatory control, and low level of awareness and orientation, but also involves, emerging economies, corruption, low standard of living, high cost of data subscription. In the light of the above mentioned, making demands of accountability and openness from the government by the citizenry has been futile owing to those obstacles. However, Freedom of Information Bill (FOI) in this context have not been able to facilitates an attempt to eradicate the obstacles combating accountability and transparency system in the country (Apeloko, 2021).

In the light of the aforementioned, the cause of obstacles to ICT uses in Nigeria governance to a large extent a deliberate action. It is of course, an adopted sphere of secrecy to covering corruption occurrence in Nigeria. On the existing reports from empirical evidence, the concept of institutional adaptability refers to the readiness of state establishment to accelerate ICT frameworks and institute new ideas in line with global regulation pattern of E-governance (United National, 2018) accredited according to Feng (2003) that:

> the implementation of e-government is not a pure technical issue only, but rather an organizational issue. Organizational challenges include Top management support, Resistance to change to electronic ways, Collaboration and Lack of qualified personnel and training. In other words, inability to fulfil campaign promises, intolerance for criticisms, allegiance to the oath of secrecy corruption rush and social barriers.

The reports cited in Feng (2003) shows the usage of ICT in governance is not totally predicated on technical know-how but an issue of governance in Nigeria. In that manner, the assertion of Feng does not validate the essence of e-governance in Nigeria. In other words, several scholars, Moon (2002); As-Saber (2007) describe E-governance as procedures that guarantee the efficient and effective usage of ICT products in allowing public institutions to realize its goals and objectives; Saxena (2005) in the study confirms that ICT adopted governance facilitates transparency in government transactions; and Ciborra (2009) also contributes that whole essence of ICT governance is to established an incessant agitation free administration and Saxena (2005) posits the importance of ICT in governance is to improve and allows popular participation of people in governance. This is leverage on information spreading from government to the people. However, Coe, Paquet and Roy (2001); Tripathi and Parihar (2011) and Dawes (2008) drawn a conclusion that the major constraint to free flow of information from government to citizens largely depends on government centric rather than citizens centric. To this end, there is minimum integration from G2C vis-à-vis information spreading.

In addition, another setback which has been an often-frequent factor from extant literature is government level of participation and policy enforcement. These two factors have both made or marred the development and usage of ICT in governance in Nigeria. In relation to policy thrust, citizens strongly support and fulfilling its obligations to government that is, C2G. In contrast to the readiness of the citizens to access government through information that is supposedly to be made available, regulatory policy has often mar the government responsive role to the citizens. Evidence have shown recently in Nigeria, the policy thrust applied by government to circumvent the G2C interaction blocking means of associating with people. Thus, the action is not short of oaths of secrecy which aids lack of accountability and absence of transparency in governance.

Yakubu (2018) posited that social obstacles are mainly concerned with the usage by a throng of citizens. This means that the displayed board must be in working order by all classes of individuals within the government. Insofar, social obstacles comprise several factors such as culture, digital divide, income, and education. Limiting to the scope of this study, obstacles regarded as existing realities which affects the chances of actualizing e-governance inclined in Nigeria policy environment. In this regard, government actors are expresses dismay over power flip and influence which ICT wields if it continued to permeate through the administration, especially, civil administration. Due to the inadequate knowledge on the exponential growth of ICT and its tools in Nigeria, public officials to an extent intimidated by it, therefore, uses all state power to block its operation. In relations to digital divide, government recent has created gap between those who have access to the internet and who would not. Thus, defying the principles of accountability and transparency of e-governance.

Shulz and Newig (2015) incidentally posits that study on electronic involvement in governance remains disjointed and to a large extent disconnected from conventional academic literature. The entry of the conversation with the light of the forgoing, without doubt associated with existential obstacles to the use of ICT tools, that is, social media and its misuse in governance in Nigeria. According to Lennan & Ngoma, 2004; Xiaodong et al., 2019 verified the assertion of several obstacles to the use of ICT tools in governance in shielding governance errors, by achieving this, secrecy, repression and suppression of interest, media gagging, constitution of the Federal Republic Nigeria, inability to withstand criticisms, threat to life and existence are categorize as existential impediments to full utilisation of accountability, transparency, checks and balances through the ICT products vis-à-vis social media. To this end, the figures below, social media is a sector with largest users.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, the study has examined the various concepts related to the title on ICT, governance, democracy, and citizens. In this study, e-democracy and e-governance is beyond governmental administration on the internet. It is obvious that the approaches of C2G and G2C enables the engagement and partnering with relevant stakeholders. This study also systematically conceptualizes various level of interactions existing between stakeholders in governance in Nigeria. In this regard, gap exist has been developed in which C2G have always fulfil its parts in the democratic process, there exist a wide merging between G2C. This especially in access to information on governance administration. Furthermore, little attention has been placed on government emotions to tolerates critiques and criticism particularly, zero tolerance for accountability and transparency. Hence, there are yet several lacunas to be analyzed on germane factors which contributes to the inaccessibility of information on health, cost of governance, education, social protection, and financial openness.

The bowel of this endeavor concludes that ICT products such as, blogosphere and social media especially must be in place to guarantee the bridging of gap from G2C. In Nigeria, this is considered as one of the major predominant issues across the federation of Nigeria. It is a phenomenon which has been on transit since Nigeria got independence. In as much as accountability and transparency are essential to the notion of a good governance, open access to information and transparent decision-making processes is important to examine actions and hold responsible political and bureaucratic actors to accountability. Therefore, enhancing transparency with the execution of ICT transparent governance will in turn be a influential instrument for the Nigeria Government to fight corruption in the struggle to achieve a sustainable development in the subsequently.

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