Closing the Digital Divide

Presented by:

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Presentation Outline

1. Exploring the digital divide using Nigeria's case

2. Policy recommendations

Exploring Nigeria's Digital Divide

▪ Rural-urban dichotomy in provision of infrastructure and basic services is entrenched in Nigeria.

▪ Had created inequalities between urban and rural areas in the country.

▪ Poverty rates, unemployment rates, maternal and infant mortality rates, more resource conflicts are all higher in rural areas while literacy rates and life expectancy in the rural areas are lower than in the urban areas in Nigeria.

▪ A recent study by AfriHeritage Institution, a policy think tank based in Enugu, Nigeria shows that most states in Nigeria have less than 10% coverage of 4G internet network with the exception of Abuja, FCT with less than 30% coverage and Lagos state with less than 70% coverage (BECANS, 2020).

Exploring Nigeria's Digital Divide contd.

- With COVID-19 induced 'new normal' there is increased migration of businesses, investment, learning and employment opportunities to the digital space.

- The rural areas must not be left further behind in the emerging new normal where acquisition and use of more digital tools and skills would be required.

- Without urgent efforts at closing the widening digital gaps between the urban and rural areas, existing disparities will worsen and that will delay Nigeria's economic recovery and aggravate the restiveness already taking place in these locations.

Exploring Nigeria's Digital Divide contd.

- Closing the digital divide between cities and the hinterland in Nigeria will be a good strategy to stem rural-urban migration, as many young people in the rural areas can then reasonably acquire digital skills with which to create jobs.

- With digital divide bridged, rural farmers and other residents could easily market their produce and other wares without having to either sell them off at cheap rates during harvest season to middlemen or pay exorbitant transport costs to cities before they can sell their products.

- The power of digital media (particularly social media) has been eloquently demonstrated with the rapid way information and news about COVID-19 was disseminated around the word in the last six months.

- With social media, my community (Okoko Item) was able to network her sons and daughters around the globe to mobilise capacity and funds with which to provide palliatives to the poor and vulnerable among us during the lockdown as well as deliver a World Bank counterpart-funded project in the community.

Policy Recommendations

Bridging the digital divide in Nigeria would require the following:

1. The FGN should tweak their electricity provision strategy. Current focus of investing on power transmission through the national grid and power distribution infrastructure as the only way to give Nigerians access to electricity should be tweaked to incorporate investments in off-grid small cost quick energy solutions, particularly in rural areas, using renewable energy sources.

2. Expansion and upgrade of communication networks beyond the urban areas through effective regulatory partnerships with existing communication firms in the country.

3. Increased internet access to citizens through lowering of data costs in Nigeria. Mobile data prices could be cheaper than they are currently. India, for example is the world's cheapest mobile data rates at an average cost of USD 0.26 per 1GB of mobile data according to Alliance for Affordable Internet. Nigeria, with also large subscriber base (above 170million) pays average of USD 2.76 for IGB of mobile data (Wee Tracker, 2020).

Thank You