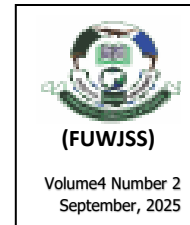# INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) APPLICATION IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICES IN POST-FUEL SUBSIDY NIGERIA

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Abstract

The removal of fuel subsidy in Nigeria has significantly impacted the socio-economic landscape, exacerbating poverty and unemployment and placing increased pressure on the nation's social welfare system. In response, this study explores the evolving role of social workers in addressing these challenges, with a particular focus on the integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into their practice. The paper highlights how ICT tools such as: data management systems; virtual counselling platforms; and social media, are enhancing the effectiveness of service delivery of social workers, especially in underserved and rural communities. The study's findings underscore how ICT supports advocacy, education, financial inclusion, and capacity building. Challenges and barriers such as limited infrastructure, digital skills gaps, cultural resistance, and ethical concerns were identified. The study concludes that ICT offers social workers powerful tools for engaging communities, promoting inclusion, and delivering timely interventions. Thus, the study recommends strategic investments in digital infrastructure, skills training, and policy development to support ICT integration. Collaboration between government, NGOs, and technology firms is also emphasised as vital for scaling impact. Ultimately, ICT has the potential to reposition social work as a catalyst for inclusive socio-economic development in Nigeria's post-subsidy era, enabling social workers to better support vulnerable populations and drive systemic change.

Keywords: Fuel Subsidy, social welfare, ICT, social development, vulnerable populations

Introduction

Nigeria's decision to remove fuel subsidies has brought about a significant change in the country's socio-economic environment. The aim behind this policy shift is to reallocate the funds previously used for subsidies into crucial sectors such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure, thereby driving long-term growth (Aniemeke, 2024). In the short term, this change has led to higher fuel prices and inflation, which have

hit the most vulnerable populations hardest, particularly with 133 million Nigerians living in poverty (Aniemeke, 2024).

The field of social work in Nigeria has evolved from traditional, community-rooted methods to more formal, structured practices over time. This shift has been influenced by the country's colonial past and various socio-political changes, with increasing emphasis on professionalising the field (Aniemeke, 2024). The use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in social work is now seen as a means of enhancing services, allowing social workers to access up-to-date information and manage resources and communication more effectively (Awagu, 2020).

In the aftermath of the subsidy removal, ICT's role in social work has become even more critical, assisting professionals in addressing the challenges posed by economic shifts. The government's "Nigeria Vision 20:2020" underscores ICT's importance in advancing national development (Awagu, 2020). Through the use of ICT, social workers are in a stronger position to assist those affected by the subsidy cut, supporting poverty reduction efforts and improving socio-economic conditions (Aniemeke, 2024).

Nigeria's removal of fuel subsidies has brought about major socio-economic shifts, altering the country's economic structure and intensifying the hardships faced by its impoverished citizens, with about 133 million Nigerians currently living in poverty (Aniemeke, 2024). Before this change in policy, social work within the country primarily relied on traditional, community-rooted practices and showed minimal involvement with Information and Communication Technology (ICT), as the profession gradually evolved from informal communal structures into a more organised system (Aniemeke, 2024). Because ICT was scarcely used, social workers often operated without timely data, lacked efficient tools for resource management, and had limited access to real-time communication platforms (Awagu, 2020).

The sudden economic shock caused by subsidy removal sharply raised fuel prices, spurred inflation, and heightened the urgency for coordinated social action, thereby pressuring social workers to embrace ICT tools to cope with the rising demand for their services (Aniemeke, 2024; Awagu, 2020). Viewed from this perspective, the subsidy removal acts as a catalyst that has hastened ICT adoption in Nigerian social work, marking a notable transition from low digital involvement to technology-based strategies aimed at reducing poverty and boosting socio-economic stability.

This study examines how Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can be integrated into social work practice in Nigeria to address socio-economic challenges arising from the removal of fuel subsidies. It explores the role of social workers in responding to the adverse impacts of this policy

change, assesses how ICT tools can enhance service delivery and promote digital inclusion, and identifies key challenges such as limited training, inadequate policy support, and poor infrastructure, while proposing strategies to improve ICT integration in social work practice.

The Use of ICT in Social Work Practices

Following the removal of fuel subsidies in Nigeria, there has been a notable increase in poverty and unemployment, leading to significant changes in the social welfare system. Social workers are now faced with the growing demands of the population, as approximately 63% of Nigerians are experiencing multidimensional poverty, with an additional 7.1 million people possibly joining this group (Aniemeke, 2024). These economic challenges, resulting from the subsidy removal, necessitate a reconsideration of social work approaches to effectively address the population's immediate needs.

The role of social workers has expanded beyond merely handling individual cases, incorporating broader social development efforts aimed at reducing poverty. Adopting social development frameworks in social work, despite potential conflicts (Breda, 2015), is essential for addressing the root causes of poverty. Approaches that emphasise social justice and inclusion are crucial for empowering disadvantaged communities and building resilience, while efforts to reduce stigma can increase public support for social programmes, thereby enhancing their success (Benbow, Gorlick, Forchuk, Ward-Griffin, & Berman, 2016).

Additionally, the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in social work offers new methods of delivering services. ICT tools improve resource accessibility and organisational performance, allowing social workers to reach more people and provide services more efficiently (Adekanmbi & Ukpere, 2022). In this post-subsidy era, the use of technology can greatly enhance outcomes, making it an essential part of modern social work efforts.

The use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in social work practices is becoming increasingly significant in driving socioeconomic progress, particularly in the context of Nigeria, following the removal of fuel subsidies. Tools such as social media platforms, mobile applications, and data management systems are essential for enhancing communication and information exchange between social workers and their clients, especially in areas where resources are limited. These digital technologies address gaps that conventional methods cannot fully resolve, particularly in reaching underserved populations across Nigeria (Okon, 2015).

On a global scale, the trend of using ICT in social work has gained momentum, particularly during the COVID-19 crisis. Mishna et al. demonstrate how social workers adopted tools like Zoom and WhatsApp to stay in contact with clients when physical meetings were no longer feasible (Mishna et al., 2021). This transition underscores the adaptability of social workers and the potential of ICT to enhance the delivery of services. However, privacy concerns and unequal access to technology remain significant challenges that must be addressed for successful ICT adoption (Mishna et al., 2021).

In Nigeria, the pace of ICT integration into social work is slower compared to other parts of the world. Okon (2015) highlights that the effectiveness of ICT efforts in rural areas depends heavily on understanding local cultures and social dynamics, ensuring that ICT initiatives align with the objectives of the community. While there has been some progress in Nigeria in adopting ICT, a noticeable gap remains when compared to more developed countries in terms of its systematic integration into social work practices. ICT also presents opportunities for empowering clients and enhancing service delivery, as evidenced by its success in agricultural support programmes, which could inspire similar strategies in social work (Marwa et al., 2020; Mishna, Fantus & McInroy, 2016).

The integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into social work practices has become increasingly vital in Nigeria, particularly in the post-subsidy era, where socioeconomic challenges demand innovative solutions. This section explores various ICT applications relevant to social work, including data management, virtual counselling, community engagement, and training for social workers.

Data Management and Client Tracking

Integrating digital records and databases into social work practice significantly improves the efficiency of case management and client tracking. Social workers now have the option to use software designed for case management, aiding in the organisation and accessibility of client data. Transitioning to these digital solutions enhances data organisation, a crucial element for effective service provision, particularly in countries like Nigeria, where resources are often limited. Studies show that implementing ICT tools increases the ability of professionals, including social workers, to collect and utilise vital information for policy creation and service delivery (Uneke et al., 2015). Furthermore, the rapid adoption of ICT methods during the COVID-19 crisis has underscored the need for social workers to incorporate technology into their daily practices, addressing issues of client access and service provision (Mishna et al., 2021).

Virtual Counseling and Support Services

The introduction of telehealth and digital counselling platforms has significantly altered the way social workers support their clients. Online counselling tools, such as video calls, have become essential in addressing mental health issues and welfare concerns, particularly during the global health crisis (Supriyanto et al., 2020). Many clients have found these digital methods both reassuring and effective, allowing for consistent care even when in-person meetings were not possible (Supriyanto et al., 2020). The positive outcomes of these services highlight the importance of technology in expanding access to mental health support, especially in areas where traditional counselling options are limited or unavailable (Mishna et al., 2021).

Community Engagement and Advocacy via Social Media

In recent years, platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have evolved into essential resources for connecting with communities and promoting social causes. These tools facilitate the spread of awareness and the gathering of support for significant issues, providing social workers with the opportunity to engage with more people than ever before (Mishna et al., 2021). Utilising these platforms for advocacy strengthens community bonds and fosters a shared sense of purpose among those facing common challenges. In regions like Nigeria, where access to traditional media can be limited, social media serves as a powerful catalyst for driving change and amplifying the voices of marginalised groups (Mishna et al., 2021).

Training and Capacity Building for Social Workers

For social workers, ongoing professional development is crucial to mastering the use of ICT tools in their daily practice. Programmes designed to enhance ICT skills have shown significant benefits, empowering social workers to manage the demands of contemporary social work practices (Huang et al., 2019). Incorporating ICT-focused training into professional development plans is essential to ensure social workers acquire the expertise needed to use technology effectively in their roles (Huang et al., 2019). Moreover, global organisations are increasingly focusing on developing ICT competencies among social workers, enabling them to adapt and deliver services in an ever-evolving digital world (Uneke et al., 2015).

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the Ecological Systems Theory as its guiding framework, which explains how people exist within and are influenced by interconnected layers of systems such as families, communities, institutions, and broader socio-economic settings (Kasteren, Lewis, & Maeder, 2020). In

Nigeria's post-fuel subsidy era, this perspective is significant as subsidy removal has disrupted social and economic structures across various levels (Ayanniyi, 2025). These disruptions affect households at the micro level and institutional functions at the macro level, making it essential for social work responses to address these multi-layered contexts (Oigochie, George, & Joshua, 2025; Olaoye, 2024).

The theory highlights how policies such as subsidy removal can deepen poverty and vulnerability through their ripple effects across systems (Madu, 2025). Incorporating ICT within this ecological lens enables social workers to link individuals to needed support across system layers, encouraging resilience and adaptation. It also promotes the inclusion of marginalised groups by challenging power gaps and supporting participatory engagement within complex networks (Egid et al., 2021; Ranta-Tyrkkö & Närhi, 2021). Grounded in this systems-oriented view, the study examines how fuel subsidy removal reshapes social realities and how ICT can be used to reinforce social work efforts aimed at achieving socio-economic stability in Nigeria (Mercer, 2020; Song & Liu, 2022).

Research Methodology

This study employed a conceptual research design grounded in document and content analysis to explore the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in social work practices within post-fuel subsidy Nigeria. The study relied entirely on secondary sources such as scholarly journals, official government documents, and other credible unpublished materials to form a strong theoretical base. These materials were carefully examined, coded, and grouped into themes that aligned with the study's aims, helping to combine different ideas into clear analytical threads. By doing so, the study sought to critically reflect on existing knowledge, identify gaps in current thinking, review related policies, and suggest practical ways to incorporate ICT into social work practice within Nigeria's shifting socio-economic context.

Socioeconomic Development through ICT-Enhanced Social Work

In Nigeria, the integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into social work, particularly following the removal of the subsidy, paves the way for meaningful socioeconomic growth. This situation underscores the need to explore how ICT can serve as a catalyst for advocating policies, promoting digital participation, expanding opportunities in education and employment, and enhancing broader access to finance.

ICT as a Tool for Policy Advocacy

During the period following the reduction of subsidies, information and communication technology (ICT) has proven to be a powerful tool for advancing policy initiatives and ensuring that governments remain accountable to the public. When ICT is incorporated into social work practices, it enhances the way communities communicate and organise their resources, which is vital for driving forward changes in policies that benefit underserved populations (Awagu, 2020). The "Nigeria Vision 20:2020" strategy highlights how ICT can drive progress on a national scale, proposing that its thoughtful implementation can lead to more open and responsive governance (Awagu, 2020). Furthermore, Joseph observes that the rise of ICT has given diverse groups the ability to engage in online commerce and other digital activities, which can impact how policies are developed and ultimately improve the governance system in Nigeria (Joseph, 2019).

Digital Inclusion and Empowerment

Ensuring digital access is crucial for uplifting disadvantaged groups, including those in rural areas, women, and young people. Through ICT, these communities can now access important social services that were once difficult to obtain. Tools such as mobile devices and online platforms help bridge the gap between service providers and those in need, ensuring essential support is available (Olaoye, 2023). This is especially relevant in places like Nigeria, where unequal access to resources remains a significant challenge. Research by Ogbuabor, Orji, Okoro, and Osondu (2020) also supports the notion that ICT enhances human capital by providing better access to information and services, thereby promoting fairness and opportunity.

Improving Access to Education and Employment

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) plays a vital role in shaping education and skills development initiatives, particularly for underserved communities. Through digital tools, remote learning and vocational training become accessible, helping individuals acquire the competencies required for employment (Joseph, 2019). In Nigeria, where conventional education systems may fall short in addressing the needs of all populations, ICT offers a solution. Social work practices can harness these technologies to create equitable learning opportunities tailored to various needs, ultimately driving socio-economic progress (Obutte, 2017).

Promoting Financial Inclusion

The integration of ICT has significantly enhanced efforts to include more people, particularly those with limited incomes, in the financial system. Digital tools and services have made it easier for individuals to access banking and learn about managing money, which are crucial steps in combating poverty (Olaoye, 2023). As highlighted by Olaoye (2023), when people use ICT to access financial resources, they can manage their money more efficiently, thereby supporting broader economic progress. Mobile-based solutions, in particular, have opened doors for underserved populations, enabling them to participate in economic opportunities and improve their quality of life.

Challenges and Barriers to ICT Application in Social Work
Technological Barriers

Social work practices in Nigeria, particularly after the subsidy era, face significant challenges due to technological limitations. Many areas, especially rural regions, struggle with poor internet connectivity and inadequate infrastructure, making it difficult to access essential digital tools and services (Awagu, 2020). Furthermore, social workers often lack the digital skills needed to navigate modern technologies. Research highlights that limited training opportunities and demanding workloads prevent many professionals from developing these critical competencies (Sambo, Imran, A & Akanbi, 2022). As a result, their ability to effectively use ICT tools and engage with clients in a digital-first environment is severely constrained (Anene, 2024).

Cultural and Institutional Barriers

The integration of ICT into traditional social work practices faces significant resistance due to cultural and institutional barriers. Many professionals are hesitant to embrace new technologies, often preferring to adhere to established methods of delivering services (Leo, 2022). This reluctance is largely driven by ethical concerns, particularly regarding privacy and the need for cultural sensitivity, which are crucial in social work (Kerkhoff & Makubuya, 2021). Consequently, the introduction of ICT requires a thoughtful approach, ensuring that ethical principles are upheld and the cultural backgrounds of the communities served are considered. The key challenge is to reconcile the benefits of technology with the necessity for culturally sensitive practices in social work.

Funding and Resource Allocation

In the current era, following the reduction of subsidies, financial support and resource distribution for ICT projects within the social work field have

become more restricted. These funding challenges hinder the creation and deployment of essential technological systems that could enhance the efficiency of services (Awagu, 2020). Furthermore, when determining where to allocate resources, the benefits of integrating ICT into social work are often overlooked, leading to a delay in the adoption of new methods that could promote economic and social progress (Leo, 2022). As Nigeria strives to upgrade its communication networks and utilise ICT for development, it is crucial to allocate appropriate resources to building digital expertise within the social work sector (Anene, 2024).

Strategies for Effective ICT Integration in Social Work Practice
Building Digital Infrastructure and Capacity
As Nigeria moves beyond the subsidy era, enhancing digital infrastructure has become a key factor in ensuring effective social work practices. The public sector's limited ICT capabilities and inadequate infrastructure have been recognised as major obstacles to boosting productivity and leveraging technology in social work (Leo, 2022). Proposed solutions include expanding internet availability and ensuring access to affordable devices, both of which are essential for social workers to communicate effectively with those they serve. Studies indicate that when ICT is integrated into vocational training programmes using a well-organised curriculum, it can increase engagement and raise the standards of professional development (Lytvyn et al., 2019). Consequently, investing in digital infrastructure is not merely about connectivity; it's also about creating a supportive ecosystem for learning and applying ICT tools in the field of social work.

Policy Framework and Support for ICT in Social Work
The role of government strategies in shaping the use of ICT within social work cannot be overstated. Without a robust framework of policies, there are notable shortcomings in innovation and the application of technology in Nigeria, as highlighted by Leo (2022). It is essential for policymakers to devise comprehensive plans that promote the integration of ICT into social work. This ensures that professionals in the field are provided with the necessary resources and support. Furthermore, addressing disparities in access to technology, which have been exacerbated by the pandemic (Mishna et al., 2021), is vital. A well-defined policy framework can guide the responsible use of ICT, safeguarding the privacy and confidentiality of clients while improving the effectiveness of services delivered.

Training and Skills Development for Social Workers

Programs designed to build ICT skills play a crucial role in assisting social workers to manage the demands of contemporary practice. The sudden shift to online platforms during the pandemic highlighted how essential it is for social workers to master tools such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and WhatsApp (Mishna et al., 2021). By introducing training focused on ICT, social workers can develop the confidence and ability to use these tools effectively, resulting in improved service outcomes and stronger connections with clients. Furthermore, remaining committed to ongoing learning in ICT is vital to keeping pace with technological advancements and overcoming the challenges of digital interaction (Martínez et al., 2022).

Collaboration Between Government, NGOs, and Tech Companies

Collaboration between government bodies, non-profits, and tech firms is key to boosting ICT access and improving the delivery of social welfare services. When these groups join forces, they can share knowledge and resources, generating fresh ideas to tackle the unique challenges faced by social workers in Nigeria. For instance, non-profits can drive ICT projects targeting communities in need, while tech companies provide the tools and systems necessary for seamless communication and efficient service delivery (Orogbemi, Uzor & Oduwale, 2022). These joint efforts can result in a more unified strategy in social work, using technology to expand reach and achieve better outcomes.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in social work during Nigeria's post-subsidy period offers significant potential to address the country's growing socio-economic issues. Tools such as data management systems, online counselling platforms, and social media campaigns have become crucial in enhancing the efficiency and impact of social work interventions. These technologies enable social workers to manage cases more effectively, provide remote support to vulnerable groups, and engage with communities on a broader scale. Given the financial and social challenges of the post-subsidy era, innovative solutions are essential, and ICT offers a key foundation for social workers to combat poverty, promote inclusion, and support socio-economic progress.

However, to fully realise the benefits of ICT in social work, further research and practical improvements are required. Future efforts should focus on developing ICT solutions that can be tailored to Nigeria's specific social and economic conditions, including enhanced digital tools for reaching rural areas, online interventions that respect cultural differences, and strategies to bridge the digital divide. Additionally, studies should

address the ethical and privacy concerns associated with the use of digital tools in social work, as well as the training and resources necessary to equip social workers to use these technologies effectively. These measures are crucial for expanding ICT's role in promoting social justice and economic growth in Nigeria.

Looking ahead, the adoption of ICT has the potential to redefine social work in Nigeria, positioning it as a central driver of socio-economic development in the post-subsidy era. By leveraging ICT to deliver services more efficiently, engage clients more effectively, and advocate more powerfully, social workers can help mitigate the negative impacts of subsidy removal on vulnerable groups. Moreover, with the appropriate policies and investments in digital infrastructure, ICT can empower social workers to create lasting social change, ultimately contributing to the creation of a fairer and more inclusive society in Nigeria.

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