

Mobilising Nigeria's tech space for economic growth

The price of crude oil has been crashing after years of successive boom. Nigeria as an oil producing and a dependent nation has immensely benefitted from this oil explosion since its discovery in Oloibiri in 1956. Reports showed that Nigeria earned N77.348 trillion from the oil and gas industry from 1999 to 2016.



For oil, the country abandoned and abdicated agriculture as soon as sweet crude was discovered. Even when agriculture monies were used to build the cocoa house in West, the groundnut pyramids in North and the large expanse of oil palm in the East; every exited the farm for oil fields. As at now, only scraps of the agricultural investments are left.

Fast forward to the present day, oil is no longer the bride that once behold everyone. As expected revenue is thinning. The government has resulted in borrowing to finance its project. Recently, Nigeria got \$328 million loan from China to boost the ICT Sector and it is appealing to the World Bank and International Monetary Fund for assistance.

Moving to a multi-economy

At the same time, the government is looking to diversify the economy in order to move it from a mono-economy reliant on oil to a multi-economy.

One of the sectors it is massively pursuing is technology. The Vice President, Yemi Osinbajo has made it his top agenda to use technology to drive economic growth.

Interestingly, before the government recognised technology as a goldmine, young Nigerians are already pushing the frontiers of technology. These Nigerians are utilising fintech, healthtech, foodtech, propertytech, traveltech, ecommerce and socialtech among others, to tackle social problems and provide much-needed employment.

In this case, Jumia has provided jobs for thousands of Nigerians and at the same time empowered millions more. This is possible because Jumia has over the past six years been able to move from just been a retail store to an ecosystem where you can buy anything and perform any transaction. You can now order food, book hotels and flight, buy groceries as well as make payments. The aim is to keep the customer within the ecosystem and of course, Jumia is clearly achieving this aim.

These creative solutions have attracted million dollar investments from venture capitalists. For example, Fintech startup, Paga, raised \$10m from Global Innovation Partners et al for global expansion.

Also, we have seen the impact of technology in agriculture. Presently, digital farming pioneered by the likes of Farmcrowdy, Thrive Agric and Crop2Cash provide more insights and information to enable farmers to make informed decisions.

The tech space needs to be properly and effectively harnessed so that it can lead economic growth. One of the first things Nigeria must do is to come up with a framework or policy to back up the technology industry. The reason for this is to ensure there is continuity so that the next administration won't sideline the painstaking efforts of the government. This legal policy will help create an enabling environment for the tech space to thrive and survive. It will also bridge the gap between decision-makers and ICT practitioners.

Furthermore, there is the need to promote local and international collaboration among tech startups in the country. This collaboration can be in the form of technical support and data exchange. This will ensure that startups have a longer lifespan and actually help Nigeria.

Importantly, innovation is key to the survival of the tech space. Tech companies have to continually innovate to remain relevant. This can be done through tech and innovation hubs where startups can discuss the latest trends in the tech space.

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