

Linking Trade, Development and Poverty Reduction.

The Institute of Economic Affairs' Report on Effects of Liberalising the Telecommunications Sub-sector on Poverty in Kenya: A Scoping Study"

Introduction

This is the report of Institute of Economic Affairs' round table meeting on Linking Trade Development and Poverty Reduction held on the 28th of July at the Norfolk Hotel. The meeting brought together the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Information and Communication, policy analysts, researchers and other stakeholders in the telecommunication sector. The meeting examined the paper "*Effects of Liberalising the Telecommunications Sub- Sector on Poverty in Kenya: A Scoping Study*" written by Ms. Gloria Otieno and Mr. Eric M. Aligula, and presented by Ms Gloria Otieno.

The Trade Development and Poverty programme is a 4 year project that is being undertaken in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, South Africa and Zambia and is being sponsored by Consumer Unit Trust Society (CUTS). In Kenya, the Research component of the programmes is undertaken by Kenya Institute of Public Policy Research Analysis (KIPPRA) while the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA-Kenya) undertakes the advocacy component.

The following is an overview of what trade liberalisation is, the link between trade liberalisation, development and poverty reduction, a summary of the main findings of the paper, the discussants responses and lastly the general comments on the paper.

Trade Liberalisation, Development and Poverty Reduction- A Background.

Miriam Omolo of the Institute of Economic Affairs noted that in discussing trade, there are a number of concepts on trade that one needs to understand. These concepts are: trade liberalisation; trade reforms; the link between trade liberalisation and development, on one hand, and the link between trade liberalisation and poverty reduction on the other.

Trade liberalisation can be defined as any act that would make a trade regime more neutral and nearer to a trade system free of government. Trade liberalisation measures have a number of common features, and involve the following: neutralising incentives for exports and imports at low tariff levels through the removal or reduction of import quotas and other quantitative restrictions or their conversion to tariff rates; and the compensatory devaluation of the local currency.

Trade reforms are measures taken to achieve trade liberalisation. It involves changing policies on taxation, tariffs, and customs duty on goods or intermediate products. There are different types of trade liberalisation regimes: preferential trade agreements, most favoured nations, and autonomous liberalisation.

The preferential trade regime is the trade regime that covers trade between states, either through a regional agreement or bilateral agreement such as COMESA, EAC, and ACP-EU agreements. Under this agreement, only members of the regime may have the reciprocal quota free access to the markets of its members and the benefits of a liberalised trade regime.

Under the Most Favoured Nation principle, the Uruguay and Doha rounds, are multi-lateral and non-discriminatory since all states that are signatory to these agreements are treated uniformly or the same in terms of tariffs, so negotiated. Lastly, under autonomous liberalisation, a state undertakes to reform its trade policies on its own. Under the Structural Adjustment Process, Kenya undertook such autonomous reforms. In 1980-84 the first adjustment took place, and in 1985-90 a sectoral approach to reforms was adopted.

On the contrary, in the immediate post independence period, Kenya pursued an inward-looking trade regime that was characterised by controls and protective measures for a number of sectors. However, the oil crisis of the 1970s, and the collapse of the East African Community amongst other factors, necessitated a fundamental adjustment to the economy.

Linking Trade Liberalisation, Development and Poverty Reduction.

Miriam Omolo noted that there is a strong correlation between economic growth and open trade regimes. Trade liberalisation fosters competition, which in turn leads to reduction of prices. In such a regime, the efficient producers like China are price-setters, while the inefficient producers like Kenya are price-takers. On the whole, open trade regimes expose sectors to competition and price volatility, which may be a disincentive to investment. Moreover, technological innovations constantly shift the competitiveness of production from one producer to the other. Trade liberalisation may have adverse effects on some of the poor people. However, generally, trade liberalisation aids growth, which in turn, aids poverty alleviation.

There are two approaches to trade liberalisation: on one hand, the victims or the would be beneficiaries of trade reforms can lobby for such reforms- the demand side players, on the other, governments-bureaucrats politicians can initiative such reforms- the supply side stimuli.

Poverty in Kenya

Miriam Omolo noted that poverty is multi-faceted and is manifested in various ways. Generally to be poor is to lack basic necessities and access to assets or ownership of assets. In spatial terms, Kenya's

poverty in the rural areas is estimated to stand at 52 per cent and the urban at 49 per cent. It is also estimated that the poor spend at least 70 per cent of their income on food.

Linking Trade Liberalisation and Poverty

In examining the impact of trade liberalisation on poverty reduction, the approach one takes matter. Whereas the economist take the macro-picture and long run as their guide in examining the impact of trade liberalisation on poverty, some non- governmental organisation take the opposite-micro and short term view of the impact of trade liberalisation policies on poverty.

There are two ways of examining the impact of trade liberalisation: the enterprise approach and the government approach. In the enterprise approach one examines the impact of trade liberalisation on the chain of production and distribution on one hand, and the consumption of goods produced at the household levels, on the other. From the government side, one examines the impact of liberalisation on revenue, and how the government spends the new revenue generated as a result of the new economic activities necessitated by policy shifts.

Miriam Omolo pointed out that the research on Trade Development and Poverty has looked at two sub-sectors: Cotton and Textile, and telecommunications. Around table meeting has been held for the former. Thus, this meeting focused on the latter- the Telecommunication sub-sector.

Highlights of the Telecommunication Sub- Sector

The 1997 the Telecommunication Act brought about reforms in the sub-sector. Through this Act the Kenya Post and Telecommunication Corporation of Kenya was split into Telecom Kenya, Postal Corporation of Kenya, and the Communication Council of Kenya, as the regulator of the telecommunication services in Kenya. Moreover, a number of the employees of the corporation were retrenched, and are still set to be retrenched. Hence the question: Is Liberalisation of the Telecommunication Sector improving livelihoods?

The Effects of Liberalisation of the Telecommunication sub-sector in Kenya- A Scoping Study?

Ms. Gloria Otieno, in her presentation, noted that the telecommunication sub-sector is one of the sectors that has been positively impacted on by trade liberalisation. Thus through in-depth review of secondary sources and key interviews, the paper sought to answer the following questions: what has been the impact of trade liberalisation on the workers, consumers? Are they gaining or losing? What

has been the impact of the trade liberalisation reforms on flow of foreign direct investment (FDI) to this sector?

Ms. Gloria Otieno noted that due to resource limitation and lack of access to data on sub-sector were serious constraints on the study. Consequently, there is need for further research on the impact of trade liberalisation on this sub-sector, cost of doing business, and facilitating trade generally within the economy.

Telecommunication Sub-sector

Under the GATS-WTO agreement there are four modes of liberalising the telecommunication sector. Key elements in the liberalisation of the sub-sector for Kenya included: privatisation of state owned enterprises, introduction of competition, and establishment of an effective regulator.

It also includes addressing issues of inter-connection, universal access to telephony and transparent licensing of service providers. Through these measures one improves the telecommunication infrastructure accessibility of the services, and transfer of technology and skill, all of which might impact positively on poverty.

It is estimated that 56 per cent of Kenyan are poor, with the incidence of poverty falling mostly on the unskilled women, and youths. The key challenge in eradicating poverty is how to deal with lack of income; what then, has been the impact of liberalisation on income poverty?

Kenya's Liberalisation of the Telecommunication Sub-sector

In 1998 through an Act of Parliament the Kenya Post and Telecommunication Corporation was split into three: Postal Corporation of Kenya, Telkom and CCK. Though the liberalisation reforms made Kenya commit to the GATS-W.T.O. agreement, there was a provision for limitation on foreign equity. The changes wrought by these changes include: the creation of CCK as an independent regulator of the sector, licensing of two cellular phone operators, improved access to telephony, in-flow of FDI, increase in local investments in the sector, transfer of skills and technology and indirect employment of about 2 million Kenyans. Through the licensing of two cellular phone service providers, 6 million Kenya have access to mobile telephones.

However, despite these changes, Telkom Kenya still enjoys a de facto monopoly on landline telephony, and Kenya is yet to achieve universal access to telecommunication services. Moreover, reforming the sector has also led to restructuring of the labour force, and rural telephony is still low

and service unreliable. Whereas the cost of accessing telecommunication services is reducing, for many Kenyans the services are still out of reach.

The potential of the sector is also hampered by high taxes, poor rural coverage, and prohibitive energy costs. However, the rolling out of the CDMA wireless technology in the sector is expected to lower the cost of telecommunication services.

Perceptions

The respondents noted that accessibility to telecommunication service has improved, even though the rural areas are still lagging behind. Licensing of a third cellular phone provider and landline provider is long overdue. Employment creation in this sector has been positive despite the retrenchment of Telkom workers. The reforms in this sector have spurred investments from the provision of Internet by the cyber cafes to the provision of cellular phone accessories by a number of stores.

In conclusion the presenter noted that a further research is needed in order to establish the impact of telecommunication sector reforms on the cost of doing business, investment, and in spurring trade in other sectors of the economy.

First Respondent: Dr. Bitange Ndemo, Permanent Secretary Ministry of Information and Communication

Dr. Ndemo noted that the presentation was interesting and touched on what is going on in the sector at present. He also noted that the telecommunication sub- sector is dynamic hence the need to focus on policy and engage policy makers, if we desire change in the sub-sector.

Dr. Ndemo noted that from looking at the sector from the enterprise approach, it is evident that there are opportunities for poverty reduction. However, these opportunities have not been exploited because of a number of reasons, which includes the nature of Kenyan cultures.

The respondent pointed that the framework for a new telecommunication era is in place, except the ICT Bill. The Ministry is set to lay out the fibre optic cables across the country. This is expected to reduce the cost of telephony and data transfer.

The key objective of the ICT policy is to improve access to telecommunication, through the reduction of the cost of connectivity, soft and hardware necessary for communication. Moreover, the policy

seeks to encourage innovation, entrepreneurship and creation of employment and spur more economic activities.

In this regard, the University of Nairobi and the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology are developing the Madaraka computers, which aim to reducing the cost of hard ware. The government was also negotiated with Microsoft to reduce the cost of windows operating system for schools and government offices. Microsoft too is ready to reinvest some of its profits in Africa and provide Africa with a portal for marketing Africa.

These moves can help Kenya get out of poverty, but only if they take advantage of the opportunities that are there in the sub-sector. We must encourage Kenyans to change, encourage entrepreneurial culture and skills, particularly amongst women and the youth. Indeed, women are prudent entrepreneurs who know how to balance the risks and rewards of investment.

We should also encourage a business environment that favours innovation, enterprise growth and development. We also need to encourage co-operation between actors, macro and micro entrepreneurs, as well as transfer of technology- through venture such as the Madaraka Computers.

On competition in the sub-sector, Dr Ndemo noted that it is technological innovation rather than licensing of a second landline telephone provider per se, which will have real impact on reducing the cost of telecommunication. The competition will be in data transmission. He noted that further investment in GSM technology is unlikely to make the sub-sector more competitive; however, investment on CDMA technology shall make the sector more competitive.

The respondent noted that the government would set up digitised villages to facilitate trade and promote business. The government is also encouraging the provision of Third Generation Networks. Thus the small-scale enterprises should position well and take advantage of these opportunities; therefore there is a need to inform Kenyans of the possible opportunities in this sector.

The respondent noted that through these digitised villages the government would improve access to frequently used documents, and information on government services. And perhaps make the government-citizen relations more interactive.

To stimulate trade, the respondent noted that partnership between the macro-enterprises and micro-enterprises was necessary. It also necessary to encourage the sharing of facilities such as broadcast masts. Moreover with the advent of digitised television, a frequency would carry more channels, and increase the availability of frequencies for investors.

Dr. Ndemo noted that with the provision of the telecommunication infrastructure by and large done, it is the nature of local content in-put that would define competition in this sector. He noted that number portability, and a fair inter-connection tariff to facilitate competition is being considered. The telecommunication sector, the respondent noted is fully liberalised; what is needed is to tell Kenyans of the opportunities in the sector and how they can take advantage of these opportunities.

The Second Respondent: Margaret Chemengich Consultant Kenya Trade Poverty Programme

The respondent noted that the research brings out the best of the impact of liberalisation of the telecommunication sector. It is a success story and in the light of its achievements, perhaps we should have liberalised earlier. It also underscores the fact that the service sector is key to Kenya's economy.

Through liberalisation we now appreciate the benefits of competition, improved accessibility, and investment in the sector. However, we need to link the small-scale entrepreneurs with the giants of the industry.

We need to appreciate that liberalisation with safety nets is beneficial, and that in our trade relations, whether the W.T.O. talks fail, we have no choice but to be inter-linked with the world.

Indeed since we began liberalising, we have had a number of successes such as having KPA systems and processes computerised and speedy delivery of information. What we now need is how to take advantage of the opportunities in this sector for poverty reduction. That is how to use these media for business and personal enhancement.

However, for these changes to be beneficial we need to change how the public sector conducts its communication. The public sector does not recognise e-mail communication, thus despite having the government connected, the speed of communication is still slow. What is needed is a system that does recognise electronic signatures.

Our policies need to encourage trade in outsourcing business. Our professionals should take advantage of these opportunities instead of migrating to the West. However, these opportunities also offer a number of challenges such as how to combat cyber crime; how to tax those who work through these media; and how to collect data on their activities.

This raises institutional issues. This sector needs an enabling legal framework, which shall underpin transactions in this sector. We also need to have a consumer lobby group that will advocate for some of these policy and legal changes necessary to protect our interests.

We further need to adopt these technologies for our educational needs so that we do not peg university admission to the number of beds available in the hostels. We can improve access to education through distance learning. We can also improve access to health care through these technologies. Finally, to encourage investment in this sector, we need to pair the ICT illiterate but rich Kenyans with the ICT literate but capital poor Kenyans.

The Plenary Session

It was pointed out that the telecommunication sector encompasses more than telephony. It also includes voice, electronic data, and it is important to have this broad view of the sub-sector when discussing telecommunication sector.

The participants were informed that Telkom Kenya has launched a video-conferencing facility. Educational institutions can adopt it for teaching because it is an interactive medium that can reduce the cost of delivering extra-mural courses. Moreover, companies can also adopt it, for the same reason. The other technology that can be of beneficial use is e policing in combating crime.

The participants were also informed that fixed line telephony is not viable given the losses associated with copper vandalism, that cost Telkom Kenya about Kshs.500 million annually.

Dr Ndemo noted that we should look at immigration of professionals positively, because such immigration can lead to acquisition and transfers of skills as well as spurring entrepreneurial drive, since has been observed that immigrants tend to do better than their kin and kith back at home.

It was observed that the stakeholders in the telecommunication sector are happy about the proposed ICT policy, especially its provision on licensing, because it aims at making the sector competitive. It was noted that given this kind of policy framework, the Kenya ICT market will have innovative products, and improved access to I.C.T services.

The participants were also asked to think of restructuring as a positive move that can also create a new set of entrepreneurs, and not job loses, as is often thought. The participants were told that the on-going restructuring process at Telkom was going on smoothly, with more than 4000 people having been laid off, and that the sticking point over the G.T.I workers has been resolved.

Hon. Arunga, Member of Parliament for Khwisero Constituency, and a member of the Parliamentary Committee on Energy, Communication and Public Works, noted that the civil societies need to engage parliamentarians with a view to informing the legislative process. He noted that in today's session he

had learnt a lot on ICT. He said that when the Policy and Bill is presented to the Committee, they will invite the civil society and other stakeholders to give their input.

The participants were told that presently the government is laying out fibre optic cables, and terminating them at various major buildings within the city. Moreover, the government is the process of disseminating information on the ICT sector such as the opportunities available for investment and solutions to communication needs. Indeed, there are many options for meeting the communication demands. The challenge of the ICT sector, the P.S. noted, is not technology; but innovative application of these technologies for our use in poverty reduction.

The participants noted that studies of the ICT sector suffers from lack of accessible data. They pointed out that, presently, the data on ICT is subsumed under Transport and Telecommunication, thus making it hard to distinguish what is the significance of ICT. The participants suggested that there is need to dis-aggregate the data on Transport and Communication, in order to facilitate the measurement of the significance of the ICT sector to the economy.

In addition the participants suggested that other stakeholders in the industry should also facilitate the collection of data. The CCK should also release data, the basic data on the sector; presently, the CCK does not, and what it has on its web-site is inadequate for research. The participants underscored the need to divorce ICT from Transport and Communication.

The participants noted that the idea of ICT is not about technology per se, but about its application for economic growth. It was suggested that now that Kenya has a policy in place, what is needed is a plan of action that should spur economic activities through the ICT technology such as the provision of employment through offering call services, IT villages, information flow on commodity market and accounting services.

The participants also noted that there is need to encourage partnerships between the private sector and entrepreneurs through availing funds on competitive basis for innovations. However, the government must take the lead in implementing the ICT policy. It was pointed out that there are conflicts and opportunities in this venture: we must learn how to manage both.

The participants were informed that e-government is going on, however, there is need to start with the provision of basic services, and then attempt to make the citizen-government relation more interactive through ICT: this requires innovation, on how the government service can be provided.

The participants were also told that in order to stem the flow of obsolete computers into the country, the government was encouraging assembly of the Madaraka Computers, which should be more efficient and affordable, so that it the choice for those who would rather ship the old computers. But, until we have the Madaraka computers, there is little one can do about the computer ‘donations.’

The greatest challenge in the ICT sector, it was reiterated, is research and development of relevant technology for our use. Presently, the government has established incubation centres at Jomo Kenyatta University and Nairobi University, while the KCCT will provide quality assurance for the products of these centres. The Starehe Boys Centre and School was pointed out as key player in in-putting the local content for Kenya use, through its project Computer for schools.

The participants noted that in order to boost the economy more needs to done to link the micro-finance to digital villages, the postal services. It was pointed out that there is a positive correlation between the rate of economic growth and info-density or tele-density.

Finally, the participants noted that the Ministry of Education should develop a curriculum for the ICT sector, setting out what minimum qualification should entail. It was also suggested that journalist, especially those writing on business and technology should strive to understand the essence of the two in order to communicate to the development in these fields accurately and adequately.



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