

## **Measuring the evolving ICT sector and its impact on business community in Cameroon**

### **Background Information:**

Hydra Project International since 1999 has been strengthening private initiatives in order to fight against poverty. With the coming of the information technology age, Hydra has in the recent years indulged in the collection of data on the new software and the use of ICT by business enterprises. The purpose for collecting this data is to compare progress made every year in order to help the government and business enterprises evaluate ICT policies and set realistic targets.

### **Evolving ICT in Cameroon:**

The ICT sector in Cameroon has rapidly evolved over the years though it still leaves much to be desired. Before 1990, the only means of communication was the fix phone and the national postal service; there was only one national radio station and one national television station. All these were owned by the state. There were no computers (PCs) let alone the internet.

With the coming of the internet to Cameroon in 1998, there was some improvement in communication though this was still expensive and there were very few cyber cafés. North West Region for example with a population of about 1,600,000 inhabitants had just one cyber café (with about 10 PCs). Presently there are over 100 cyber cafés in the North West region alone and all the major businesses now have internet connection in their offices and there are a few home connections. This has greatly facilitated business transactions and lowered the cost of communication. About 40% of Cameroonians now have access to the internet.

The mobile telephone was introduced in Cameroon in the year 2000. Before this, we had just the fix phone, which was mainly at the urban centers and completely absent at the rural areas. This greatly hindered communication between the urban and the rural areas.

Most recently, fiber optics technology is creeping into Cameroon. This will surely go a long way to address some of the setbacks.

### **Impact of ICT on enterprises in Cameroon:**

Businesses, especially banks, now have modern software to facilitate and safeguard information and transactions. Our banking sector was predominantly manual with the use of a few typewriters. All documentation was being kept in office files. Presently, it is unheard of to find a bank without computers, internet connection and even a website. Modern software like FLEXTRA, SAP, QUICK BOOK, etc. are being used by banks to facilitate transactions. Some banks have even gone as far as creating online accounts within their websites. It has also led to some business enterprises and manufacturing

companies being able to advertise their businesses online since most of them now own website.

The greatest boom in business communication came in the year 2000 with the onset of the mobile phone. This has facilitated communication even to the most remote parts of the country. There are three mobile phone service providers in Cameroon; Mobile Telephone Network (MTN), ORANGE and CAMTEL. There are more than 5 million Cameroonians subscribed to mobile phones. Even at these figures statistics still show that there are close to 200 new subscribers per day.

Despite all, there are still a lot of setbacks. The internet connections are terribly slow and unstable coupled with the regular power cuts. The internet facilities are almost completely absent in the remote regions of Cameroon. Mobile phone calls are still expensive and there are fluctuations in network.

### **ICT survey:**

We however conduct regular surveys on ICT use in some selected enterprises in order to compare the progress of ICT use in our various business enterprises. In the recent surveys we could see the situation in the use of ICT by enterprises for the past three years. Here are some figures of some selected enterprises that use ICT as an integral part of their businesses.

#### **January 2010**

<b>Enterprise</b>	<b>Number of institutions contacted:</b>	<b>No. using of internet</b>	<b>No. using mobile phones</b>	<b>No. Using computers</b>	<b>No. Using modern software</b>	<b>No. Using fiber optics</b>	<b>No. owning webs ites</b>
Banks	12	12	12	12	12	0	12
Microfinance	93	41	93	93	82	0	31
Schools	7675	83	3454	4137	0	0	34
Retail	41243	874	30222	23414	18435	0	835
Insurance	60	15	60	60	18	0	9
Manufacturing	546	423	345	122	0	0	323
Cyber Cafés	1298	1298	560	1298	1298	23	12
Hospitals	78	21	57	43	0	0	12
Newspapers	68	40	68	68	0	0	7
Radio Houses	103	86	103	103	0	0	9
Television Houses	66	52	66	66	0	0	11
Transport Agencies	65	14	65	21	0	0	7
Cable television	21	15	21	21	0	2	6
<b>Total</b>	51328	2974	35126	29458	19845	25	1308

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Banks	11	11	11	11	11	0	11
Microfinance	84	26	76	79	32	0	23
Schools	6897	52	2923	3220	0	0	21
Retail	39121	631	25345	20231	15643	0	561
Insurance	60	12	60	60	12	0	6
Manufacturing	531	48	323	112	0	0	119
Cyber Cafés	1112	1112	497	1112	1112	2	11
Hospitals	74	17	51	31	0	0	6
Newspapers	65	33	64	65	0	0	3
Radio Houses	97	62	97	97	0	0	5
Television Houses	64	41	64	64	0	0	7
Transport Agencies	65	10	65	12	0	0	5
Cable television	18	10	18	18	0	0	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>48199</b>	<b>2065</b>	<b>29594</b>	<b>25112</b>	<b>16810</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>782</b>

**January 2008**

<b>Enterprise</b>	<b>Number of institutions contacted:</b>	<b>No. using of internet</b>	<b>No. using mobile phones</b>	<b>No. Using computers</b>	<b>No. Using modern software</b>	<b>No. Using fiber optics</b>	<b>No. owning websites</b>
Banks	10	10	10	10	10	0	8
Microfinance	79	19	71	79	51	0	15
Schools	6352	34	2453	2345	0	0	6
Retail	39111	445	19987	10594	8756	0	322
Insurance	58	9	58	58	9	0	5
Manufacturing	517	29	317	105	0	0	103
Cyber Cafés	1096	1096	383	1096	1096	0	7
Hospitals	73	21	43	26	0	0	3
Newspapers	65	23	60	65	0	0	3
Radio Houses	91	45	91	91	0	0	3
Television Houses	59	32	59	59	0	0	5
Transport Agencies	53	3	53	8	0	0	2
Cable television	14	6	14	14	0	0	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>47578</b>	<b>1772</b>	<b>23599</b>	<b>14550</b>	<b>9922</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>484</b>

For the past three years, we have witnessed a great improvement in the use of ICT in enterprises in Cameroon especially in the use of computers. The use of mobile phones has greatly solved communication problem between the urban and the rural areas, though there are some remote areas in Cameroon that still not have access to any of mobile telephone networks and internet facilities. It should also be noted that ICT measurement in Cameroon is still at an infant stage.

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