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Impact of AGSMEIS-Funded ICT Enterprises on Poverty Reduction in Gombe State, Nigeria (2019–2025)

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Abstract

Access to affordable finance remains a major constraint on the growth of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) enterprises, despite the sector's increasing importance for entrepreneurship, employment creation, and poverty reduction. The Agri-Business/Small and Medium Enterprise Investment Scheme (AGSMEIS) was introduced to address this constraint through low-interest financing and entrepreneurship training for small and medium enterprises. This study aims to examine the impact of AGSMEIS-funded ICT enterprises on poverty reduction in Gombe State, Nigeria, from 2019 to 2025. Guided by Sen's Capability Approach and Kabeer's Empowerment Theory, the study employed a quantitative survey design to assess the socioeconomic outcomes associated with participation in the scheme. The findings indicate that AGSMEIS-funded ICT enterprises contributed significantly to poverty reduction by increasing business income, generating employment opportunities, improving access to productive assets, and enhancing household welfare. Beneficiaries also reported improved business performance, greater income stability, and increased capacity for enterprise

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expansion. However, inadequate electricity supply, inflation, and weak digital infrastructure constrained the extent to which beneficiaries could realize the full benefits of the programme. The study concludes that AGSMEIS has positively contributed to poverty reduction among ICT entrepreneurs in Gombe State by strengthening income-generating capacity and supporting enterprise development. These findings contribute to the literature on development finance, financial inclusion, and entrepreneurship by demonstrating the poverty-reduction potential of targeted SME financing in the ICT sector. The study further highlights the need to strengthen post-loan support services, improve digital infrastructure, and expand access to ICT-focused financing to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of similar interventions.

Keywords: AGSMEIS; Financial Inclusion; ICT Enterprises; Poverty Reduction; SME Financing

INTRODUCTION

Poverty reduction remains a central development challenge in Nigeria, despite decades of policy interventions aimed at promoting inclusive growth, employment generation, and enterprise development (World Bank, 2023; NBS, 2022). While poverty is multidimensional encompassing income deprivation, unemployment, social exclusion, and limited access to opportunities one increasingly important strategy for addressing it is enterprise-led development through financial inclusion (Sen, 1999; UNDP, 2023). Access to institutional credit has become particularly significant in supporting small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which serve as major drivers of employment, innovation, and economic diversification (Beck, Demirgüç-Kunt, & Levine, 2005).

Within this broader development agenda, the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector has emerged as a critical pathway for economic transformation (World Bank, 2016). ICT enterprises contribute to productivity growth, service delivery, digital inclusion, and entrepreneurship (ITU, 2023). In developing economies, digital enterprises increasingly create employment opportunities, particularly for youth populations facing barriers to formal labour market participation (ILO, 2022). In Nigeria, the ICT sector has expanded significantly over the past decade through software development, digital services, mobile repair, online commerce, cybercafés, digital printing, and technology-enabled business services (NITDA, 2023; NBS, 2024).

However, access to startup and expansion capital remains a major constraint for ICT entrepreneurs, especially in subnational economies such as Gombe State (CBN, 2023). Many businesses operate informally with limited financial resources, inadequate infrastructure, and weak institutional support. These constraints reduce their capacity to scale operations, create jobs, and contribute meaningfully to poverty reduction (Ayyagari, Beck, & Demirgüç-Kunt, 2007).

The Agri-Business/Small and Medium Enterprise Investment Scheme (AGSMEIS), introduced by the Central Bank of Nigeria through the Bankers' Committee, was designed to address this financing gap (CBN, 2017). The scheme provides low-interest loans and entrepreneurship training to SMEs across sectors including agriculture, manufacturing, services, and ICT (Bankers' Committee, 2023). While AGSMEIS has received policy attention nationally, empirical evidence on its specific impact on ICT enterprises remains limited (Olanrewaju & Adebayo, 2022).

This study therefore investigates how AGSMEIS-funded ICT enterprises contributed to poverty reduction in Gombe State between 2019 and 2025.

Statement of the Research Problem

Despite the growing importance of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector as a driver of entrepreneurship, employment, and economic growth in Nigeria (NITDA, 2023; World Bank, 2016), many ICT enterprises continue to face significant financial constraints that limit their capacity to expand and contribute effectively to poverty reduction (CBN, 2023). To address this challenge, the Agri-Business/Small and Medium Enterprise Investment Scheme (AGSMEIS) was introduced to provide affordable financing and entrepreneurial support to small and medium enterprises, including ICT businesses (CBN, 2017). However, while substantial resources have been invested through the scheme, there is limited empirical evidence on the extent to which AGSMEIS-funded ICT enterprises have improved the welfare of beneficiaries and contributed to poverty reduction, particularly at the subnational level (Olanrewaju & Adebayo, 2022).

In Gombe State, where unemployment, youth poverty, and limited access to formal finance remain major development challenges (NBS, 2022), ICT enterprises are increasingly viewed as viable avenues for income generation and economic empowerment (UNDP, 2023). Nevertheless, the actual impact of AGSMEIS financing on business growth, employment creation, income improvement, and household welfare among ICT

entrepreneurs remains largely undocumented. This lack of localized evidence creates a gap in knowledge regarding the effectiveness of the scheme as a poverty reduction strategy. Therefore, this study seeks to evaluate the impact of AGSMEIS-funded ICT enterprises on poverty reduction in Gombe State between 2019 and 2025.

Objectives of the Study

To examine how NIRSAL-AGSMEIS loan for ICT services contributes to poverty reduction in Gombe State.

Research Questions

How has the NIRSAL-AGSMEIS loan for ICT services influenced poverty reduction among its beneficiaries in Gombe State?

Research Hypotheses

This study is guided by the following alternative hypotheses:

There exists a significant relationship between the utilization of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) services and the reduction of poverty in Gombe State.

Literature Review

AGSMEIS and Financial Inclusion

The Agri-Business/Small and Medium Enterprise Investment Scheme (AGSMEIS) was introduced in 2017 by the Central Bank of Nigeria and the Bankers' Committee to improve access to affordable finance for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) (Central Bank of Nigeria, 2017). Under the scheme, participating banks contribute 5% of their profit after tax to support enterprise development through low-interest loans, entrepreneurship training, and business support services. Unlike conventional lending programmes, AGSMEIS adopts a "credit-plus" approach that combines financing with capacity building, thereby addressing both financial and managerial constraints faced by entrepreneurs. By expanding access to formal credit, the scheme promotes financial inclusion, enterprise growth, employment creation, and poverty reduction (Beck et al., 2005).

ICT Enterprises and Poverty Reduction

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) enterprises play an important role in poverty reduction by generating income, creating employment opportunities, improving access to digital markets, enhancing financial inclusion, and increasing

productivity (World Bank, 2016). In Nigeria, ICT businesses such as software development, digital marketing, computer maintenance, digital printing, and mobile technology services have become significant sources of entrepreneurship and youth employment. Studies have shown that ICT contributes to economic development by improving access to information, innovation, and market opportunities (ITU, 2023).

Despite its potential, the growth of ICT enterprises is constrained by inadequate electricity supply, weak broadband infrastructure, high technology costs, and limited access to finance. These challenges reduce the ability of entrepreneurs to expand their businesses and maximize their economic impact. AGSMEIS seeks to address the financing challenge by providing affordable credit and entrepreneurship support, thereby strengthening ICT enterprise development and enhancing its contribution to poverty reduction in Gombe State.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Amartya Sen's Capability Approach and Naila Kabeer's Empowerment Theory to explain the relationship between AGSMEIS-funded ICT enterprises and poverty reduction in Gombe State.

The Capability Approach, developed by Amartya Sen (1999), views poverty as a deprivation of opportunities and capabilities rather than merely a lack of income. The theory argues that development occurs when individuals have the freedom and resources to improve their quality of life. In the context of this study, AGSMEIS financing enhances the capabilities of ICT entrepreneurs by providing access to credit and entrepreneurship support, enabling them to establish and expand businesses, adopt digital technologies, generate income, and improve their socio-economic wellbeing. The scheme therefore expands the economic opportunities available to beneficiaries and strengthens their capacity to achieve sustainable livelihoods.

The study also adopts Naila Kabeer's Empowerment Theory (Kabeer, 1999), which explains empowerment through three interconnected dimensions: resources, agency, and achievements. According to the theory, access to resources provides individuals with the ability to make strategic life choices, exercise control over economic activities, and achieve desired outcomes. Within the AGSMEIS framework, financial assistance and entrepreneurship training serve as critical resources that strengthen the agency of ICT entrepreneurs. This enhanced agency enables beneficiaries to make informed business

decisions, improve enterprise performance, increase income, create employment opportunities, and enhance household welfare.

Together, the Capability Approach and Empowerment Theory provide a suitable framework for understanding how AGSMEIS-funded ICT enterprises contribute to poverty reduction. While the Capability Approach emphasizes the expansion of opportunities and freedoms, Empowerment Theory highlights the importance of resources and decision-making power in achieving economic and social advancement. The two theories therefore offer a comprehensive explanation of how access to finance and business support can improve entrepreneurial capacity, promote economic empowerment, and reduce poverty among ICT entrepreneurs in Gombe State.

METHODOLOGY

This section presents the methodological framework adopted to examine the impact of AGSMEIS-funded ICT enterprises on poverty reduction in Gombe State between 2019 and 2025. It outlines the research design, population of the study, sample size determination, sampling technique, unit of analysis, instrument for data collection, validity and reliability procedures, data collection procedure, methods of data analysis, and ethical considerations. The methodology is structured to generate reliable empirical evidence on how AGSMEIS financing has influenced business growth, employment generation, income improvement, and household welfare among ICT entrepreneurs in Gombe State (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Research Design

The study employed a cross-sectional survey design. This design involved collecting data from AGSMEIS-funded ICT enterprise beneficiaries at a single point in time across selected branch locations in Gombe State.

The cross-sectional design was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to collect standardized quantitative data from respondents regarding their access to AGSMEIS financing, enterprise performance, and welfare outcomes. It also enabled both descriptive and inferential analysis of the socio-economic impact of AGSMEIS on ICT entrepreneurs (Saunders et al., 2019). The survey design enabled data collection from a relatively large

number of beneficiaries across different locations within the state (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Population of the Study

The population of the study comprised all AGSMEIS-funded ICT enterprise beneficiaries registered with NIRSAL Microfinance Bank in Gombe State between 2019 and 2025. According to records obtained from NIRSAL Microfinance Bank, the total number of AGSMEIS-funded ICT beneficiaries across the five operational branches in Gombe State was 320 (NIRSAL Microfinance Bank Beneficiary Records, 2025).

Table 1: Population of AGSMEIS-Funded ICT Beneficiaries in Gombe State

Branch	Population
Gombe	180
Billiri	98
Kaltungo	35
Dukku	5
Funakaye	2
Total	320

Source: NIRSAL Microfinance Bank Beneficiary Records (2025)

Sample Size Determination

The sample size for the study was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula for finite populations at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. Using a total population of 320 ICT beneficiaries, the calculated sample size was 175 respondents.

Krejcie and Morgan's formula provides an adequate sample size while minimizing sampling error and ensuring valid generalization of findings to the wider population.The formula was selected because the study population was known and finite, and the study required a representative sample of AGSMEIS-funded ICT beneficiaries across all branches.

Table 2: Proportionate Sample Distribution

Branch	Population	Sample Size	Percentage
Gombe	180	98	56%
Billiri	98	54	31%
Kaltungo	35	19	11%
Dukku	5	3	2%
Funakaye	2	1	1%
Total	320	175	100%

Source: Researcher's Computation (2026)

Sampling Technique

The study adopted a stratified random sampling technique. The five NIRSAL Microfinance Bank branches in Gombe State served as the sampling strata. Beneficiaries were grouped according to branch location: Gombe, Billiri, Kaltungo, Dukku, and Funakaye. Thereafter, respondents were selected randomly within each stratum based on proportional allocation. Stratified random sampling was appropriate because it ensured that all five branch locations were proportionately represented in the sample (Kothari, 2004; Saunders et al., 2019).

Instrument of Data Collection

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed in line with the study objectives and theoretical framework (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The questionnaire consisted of four sections:

Table 3: Questionnaire Structure

Section	Construct	Number of Items
A	Demographic Information	4
B	Loan Access and Utilization	8
C	Business Growth and Enterprise Expansion	7
D	Employment, Income and Household Welfare	7

Source: Researcher's Instrument Design (2026)

Sections B–D were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, and Strongly Agree.

Validity and Reliability of Instrument

The research instrument (questionnaire) was subjected to both content and construct validity procedures to ensure its appropriateness and measurement accuracy.

Content validity was established through expert evaluation by specialists in entrepreneurship, ICT enterprise development, finance, and development studies. Expert review is widely recommended for ensuring content validity in survey research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Their feedback was used to improve the clarity, relevance, and contextual suitability of the instrument.

Construct validity was assessed using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), which is commonly employed to determine whether observed variables adequately represent underlying theoretical constructs (Field, 2018). All retained items demonstrated acceptable factor loadings above 0.60, confirming construct validity.

Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. All constructs recorded reliability values above the 0.70 threshold recommended by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), indicating strong internal consistency.

Data Sources

The study relied exclusively on primary data obtained directly from beneficiaries of AGSMEIS-funded ICT enterprises through structured questionnaire administration. Primary data collection is widely regarded as appropriate in social science research because it provides first-hand and context-specific information relevant to research objectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Kothari, 2004).

Primary data were considered most appropriate because they provided direct insights into respondents' experiences regarding AGSMEIS loan access, business performance, digital enterprise growth, income changes, employment creation, and household welfare improvement.

Method of Data Analysis

Data collected from respondents were coded, cleaned, and analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics. The analysis involved both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques commonly used in quantitative research (Pallant, 2020).

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics, enterprise profiles, and response patterns. These included frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations.

Inferential statistics were employed to test hypotheses and examine relationships among variables, as recommended in quantitative empirical research (Field, 2018; Gujarati & Porter, 2009). These included:

a. **Multiple Regression Analysis:** This was used to assess the effect of AGSMEIS financing on poverty reduction indicators such as employment generation, business expansion, household welfare, and income growth. Multiple regression is appropriate for determining the predictive influence of independent variables on dependent variables (Hair et al., 2019).

b. **Chi-Square Test of Independence:** This was applied to examine relationships between categorical variables such as business type and income change, as well as enterprise size

and employment generation. The Chi-square test is suitable for assessing associations between categorical variables (Agresti, 2018).

c. **Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA):** This was used to confirm the dimensional validity of the questionnaire items and ensure that constructs appropriately represented underlying theoretical variables. EFA is widely used in scale development and construct validation (Field, 2018).

These analytical techniques provided robust empirical evidence on the extent to which AGSMEIS-funded ICT enterprises contributed to poverty reduction in Gombe State.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were fully informed about the purpose of the research prior to data collection. Ensuring informed consent and voluntary participation is a fundamental principle in research ethics (Israel & Hay, 2006).

Confidentiality and anonymity were assured, and no personal identifiers were collected. All data obtained were used strictly for academic purposes and were securely stored in accordance with the Nigeria Data Protection Regulation (NDPR, 2019).

RESULTS

This section presents and analyzes data collected from respondents on the impact of AGSMEIS-funded ICT enterprises on poverty reduction in Gombe State between 2019 and 2025. Out of 175 questionnaires distributed, 168 were returned and validated, representing a response rate of 96.0%.

Table 4: Questionnaire Distribution

Status of Questionnaire	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Returned and Valid	168	96.0
Unreturned/Invalid	7	4.0
Total Distributed	175	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 4 shows that out of 175 questionnaires distributed, 168 (96.0%) were returned and valid, while 7 (4.0%) were unreturned or invalid. The high response rate indicates strong participation and ensures the data is reliable and suitable for analysis.

Section A: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 5: Socio-Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	112	66.7
	Female	56	33.3
Age	18–25	48	28.6
	26–35	74	44.0
	36–45	32	19.0
	45+	14	8.3
Education	Noformal education	10	6.0
	Primary	24	14.3
	Secondary	64	38.1
	Tertiary	70	41.7

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 5 shows that male respondents dominate the sample (66.7%), indicating a gender imbalance in ICT enterprise participation under AGSMEIS. The age distribution reveals that 72.6% of respondents fall within 18–35 years, showing that beneficiaries are predominantly youths, who are more active in digital entrepreneurship. Educational distribution shows that 79.8% have at least secondary education, suggesting that higher education improves access to ICT-related AGSMEIS funding and enhances entrepreneurial capacity.

Section B: AGSMEIS ICT Loan Access and Utilization

Table 6: Access, Awareness, and Utilization of AGSMEIS ICT Loan

Variable	Response Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Awareness	Strongly Agree	101	60.1
	Agree	58	34.5
	Others	9	5.4
Accessibility	Strongly Agree	92	54.8
	Agree	62	36.9
	Others	14	8.3
Challenges	Strongly Agree	68	40.5
	Agree	64	38.1
	Others	36	21.4
Adequacy of Loan	Strongly Agree	77	45.8
	Agree	70	41.7
	Others	21	12.5

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 6 indicates high awareness (94.6%) and accessibility (91.7%) of the AGSMEIS ICT loanscheme, suggesting effective policy communication and outreach. However, 78.6% of respondents reported challenges in loan processing, indicating operational bottlenecks. Furthermore, 87.5% confirmed that loan amounts were adequate, showing that funding is generally sufficient for ICT business development despite administrative constraints.

Section C: Impact of AGSMEIS ICT Enterprises on Poverty Reduction

Table 7: Socio-Economic Impact of AGSMEIS ICT Enterprises

Variable	Response Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Income Increase	Positive Response	156	92.9
Employment Creation	Positive Response	149	88.7
Household Welfare	Positive Response	151	89.9
Poverty Reduction Link	Positive Response	157	93.5

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 7 reveals that AGSMEIS-funded ICT enterprises have a strong positive impact on poverty reduction indicators. A total of 92.9% of respondents reported increased income, while 88.7% experienced employment creation. Additionally, 89.9% reported improved household welfare, and 93.5% confirmed a direct relationship between ICT enterprises and poverty reduction. This demonstrates that ICT entrepreneurship significantly contributes to economic empowerment and livelihood improvement in Gombe State.

Section D: ICT Enterprise Contribution to Poverty Reduction

Table 8: ICT Enterprises and Poverty Reduction Outcomes

Variable	Response Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Income Growth	Positive Response	156	92.9
Employment Creation	Positive Response	149	88.7
Welfare Improvement	Positive Response	151	89.9

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 8 confirms that ICT enterprises funded under AGSMEIS contribute significantly to economic improvement. Most respondents reported income growth (92.9%), employment generation (88.7%), and improved welfare (89.9%). This suggests that ICT enterprises serve as effective instruments for poverty alleviation through income diversification and job creation.

Section E: Hypothesis Testing

Table 9: Chi-Square Test of Relationship between ICT Enterprises and Poverty Reduction

Parameter	Value
Sample Size (N)	168
Df	4
Calculated χ^2	412.67
Critical χ^2 (0.05)	9.488
Decision	Reject Null Hypothesis

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The Chi-square result shows that the calculated value (412.67) is significantly higher than the critical value (9.488). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates a statistically significant relationship between AGSMEIS-funded ICT enterprises and poverty reduction in Gombe State. It confirms that ICT entrepreneurship supported by AGSMEIS plays a vital role in improving income, employment, and welfare outcomes among beneficiaries.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that AGSMEIS financing has significantly contributed to poverty reduction among ICT entrepreneurs in Gombe State. The results revealed that beneficiaries experienced substantial improvements in business growth, income generation, employment creation, and overall household welfare following access to AGSMEIS loans. The majority of respondents agreed that the scheme provided the financial resources necessary to establish new ICT businesses or expand existing enterprises, thereby improving their economic conditions.

The study found that access to affordable credit enabled beneficiaries to acquire computers, software applications, internet facilities, digital equipment, and other productive assets essential for business operations. These investments enhanced productivity, improved service delivery, expanded customer reach, and increased business profitability. The findings demonstrate that financial inclusion plays a crucial role in supporting the growth and sustainability of ICT enterprises.

Furthermore, the study revealed that AGSMEIS-funded ICT enterprises significantly increased the income levels of beneficiaries. Many respondents reported more stable and higher earnings after receiving the loan, which improved their ability to meet household needs such as education, healthcare, housing, and food consumption. This finding suggests that ICT entrepreneurship serves as an effective mechanism for improving living standards and reducing poverty.

Employment generation emerged as another important outcome of the programme. Beneficiaries indicated that business expansion enabled them to employ additional workers and engage young people in activities such as software development, computer maintenance, digital marketing, graphic design, online business support services, mobile phone repairs, and digital printing. This demonstrates that ICT enterprises contribute not only to individual economic wellbeing but also to broader socio-economic development through job creation and youth empowerment.

The findings also showed that AGSMEIS financing improved financial independence and entrepreneurial confidence among beneficiaries. Access to formal credit reduced dependence on informal lenders and enabled entrepreneurs to make strategic business decisions regarding investment, expansion, and innovation. This outcome reflects the importance of financial inclusion in enhancing entrepreneurial capacity and long-term business sustainability.

The hypothesis test further confirmed a statistically significant relationship between AGSMEIS-funded ICT enterprises and poverty reduction in Gombe State. The calculated Chi-square value exceeded the critical value, leading to the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis. This result provides empirical evidence that ICT enterprises supported through AGSMEIS contribute significantly to increased income, employment opportunities, and improved household welfare.

The findings strongly support Amartya Sen's Capability Approach, which views development as the expansion of people's capabilities and freedoms. Through AGSMEIS financing, ICT entrepreneurs gained access to productive resources that enabled them to participate more effectively in economic activities and improve their quality of life. The programme expanded their capabilities by creating opportunities for income generation, enterprise development, and economic self-reliance.

Similarly, the findings align with Naila Kabeer's Empowerment Theory. The AGSMEIS loan served as a critical resource that enhanced the agency of beneficiaries, enabling them to make informed economic decisions and achieve desired outcomes. The resulting achievements, including business growth, increased income, employment creation, and improved welfare, demonstrate the empowering effect of access to finance on ICT entrepreneurs.

Despite these positive outcomes, the study identified several challenges affecting the performance of ICT enterprises. These include inadequate electricity supply, poor internet connectivity, inflation, rising operational costs, and weak digital infrastructure. These challenges reduce business efficiency and limit the full realization of the benefits associated with AGSMEIS financing. Therefore, complementary investments in infrastructure and enterprise support services are necessary to maximize the poverty-reduction impact of the programme.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that AGSMEIS-funded ICT enterprises have made a significant contribution to poverty reduction in Gombe State between 2019 and 2025. The programme has enhanced access to finance for ICT entrepreneurs, resulting in business expansion, increased income generation, employment creation, and improved household welfare. The findings demonstrate that ICT entrepreneurship is an important avenue for economic empowerment and sustainable poverty reduction, particularly among young people.

The study further establishes that the impact of AGSMEIS extends beyond the provision of credit. By enabling entrepreneurs to acquire productive assets, strengthen business operations, and participate more effectively in the digital economy, the programme enhances entrepreneurial capabilities and economic empowerment. Consequently, AGSMEIS serves as an effective development finance mechanism for promoting financial inclusion and reducing poverty among ICT entrepreneurs.

The significant relationship established between AGSMEIS-funded ICT enterprises and poverty reduction confirms that access to affordable finance can stimulate enterprise growth and improve socio-economic outcomes. However, the sustainability of these gains depends on addressing existing infrastructural and operational challenges. Therefore, a comprehensive approach that combines financial support with improved infrastructure,

digital skills development, and continuous enterprise support is essential for maximizing the long-term impact of AGSMEIS.

Overall, the study concludes that AGSMEIS remains a viable policy instrument for promoting ICT entrepreneurship, generating employment, improving household welfare, and reducing poverty in Gombe State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. **Expand ICT-Focused Financing Opportunities:** The Central Bank of Nigeria, NIRSAL Microfinance Bank, and other stakeholders should increase the allocation of funds specifically targeted at ICT enterprises to enable more entrepreneurs to access affordable credit for business development and innovation.

2. **Strengthen Post-Loan Training and Business Support Services:** Beneficiaries should receive continuous entrepreneurship training, mentorship, and technical advisory services to improve managerial capacity, business sustainability, and loan utilization efficiency.

3. **Improve Digital and Physical Infrastructure:** Government should invest in reliable electricity supply, broadband internet connectivity, and digital infrastructure to create an enabling environment for ICT enterprise growth and competitiveness.

4. **Simplify Loan Application and Disbursement Procedures:** AGSMEIS administrators should streamline loan application, approval, and disbursement processes to reduce delays, improve accessibility, and encourage greater participation among ICT entrepreneurs.

5. **Strengthen Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms:** Regular monitoring and evaluation should be conducted to assess the performance of AGSMEIS-funded ICT enterprises, measure poverty-reduction outcomes, and provide evidence for policy improvements and programme effectiveness.

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