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**USE OF ICT IN CURBING GENDER INEQUALITY AND IMPROVING WOMEN
EMPOWERMENT**

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Abstract

The nature of Nigerian society is characterized with male domination, irrespective of women's effort, they seem to be always under appreciated. The emergence of ICT has given a ray of light and comes with a lot of promising solutions to this inequality, more reason why emphasis has been laid on women empowerment because they are most times at the receiving end of gender inequality. The objective of this study is to explain how ICT can help reduce gender inequality and how women can be empowered through the use of ICT. Although ICTs evidently can play an important role in Nigerian development, it must be emphasized that ICT literacy is what will encourage the usage. The best approach to incorporating gender consideration through ICT is to make sure that women are ICT literate. The first would be to make ICT policies more effective; the second would be to develop comprehensive mechanisms to treat gender issues in all ICT policies and programs. The paper recommends empowering women towards ICT by advocating that an enabling environment should be created, ICTs in education must be part of the curriculum for girls and boys everywhere in Nigeria from an early age; and men and women should be encouraged to develop content relevant to their interests and needs; among others

Keyword: *ICT, Gender Inequality, Women empowerment.*

INTRODUCTION

The idea of Nigerian culture is portrayed with male control, independent of exertion and is by all accounts consistently undervalued. The rise of ICT has given a beam of light and accompanies part of promising answer for this imbalance, more justification for why accentuation has been laid on ladies' strengthening since they are on most occasions at the less than desirable finish of Gender orientation disparity. Gender inequality has been a remarkably different and inescapable, women and men have been inconsistent in every way under the sun in unlimited conditions. Around the world women have been offered less chances for monetary cooperation than men, less admittance to essential and advanced education, more prominent wellbeing and dangers and less political portrayal. Peace Corps (2016) stated that ICT is progressively achieving social change, Information and correspondence innovation has been a driver for information, efficiency and power. ICT has turned into an incredible stage for formative freedom by adding to data spread, giving space to various correspondence courses and expanding admittance to innovation and information among others. Hajara & Mustapha (2013) opined that The cutting edge Nigeria is described with the utilization of ICT in all circles of life, which has made admittance for recovery and dispersal of data to be more straightforward. Ladies as they continued looking for strengthening and cultural acknowledgment has taken on and acknowledged ICT as instrument for headway and strengthening. Ladies have for some time known about the force of data and information sharing as a methodology for activation, progression and strengthening. The greater part of the current world development is an aftereffect of the openness of ICT, its utilization has achieved web which has offered individuals the chance to associate with one another decisively as they are ignorant of one another's personality. Particularly ladies who can show their feelings, perspectives, sentiments and assessment all the more straightforwardly.

Empowerment is a multidimensional word including social, physical, mental, political and psychological dimensions, Bimal & Rajesh (2012). Empowerment also means personal growth in decision making, analyzing critical situations, coping with all circumstances and facing challenges. Empowerment of women is basically the manner of enhancement of social, economic, cultural and political standing of women, the conventionally, the disadvantaged and the neglected ones in the society. Guaranteeing the rights of women and giving them opportunities to reach their full potential is critical not only for attaining gender equality but

also for meeting a wide range of international developmental goals, in this vein, this work sought to look critically into use of ICT and how it can be used to curb gender inequality and improve women empowerment.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study sought to

- i. Examine the use of ICT
- ii. Identify ways ICT can be beneficial in curbing gender inequality
- iii. Give suggestions on how ICT can improve women empowerment
- iv. Provide linkages between ICT, gender inequality and women empowerment

Use of ICT

What is ICT? ICT is short for Information and Communications Technology, and it covers all types of Computer and Communications hardware just as the product used to make, store, send, get, decipher, and control data in its different organizations, for example, voice discussion. Message, pictures, information, pictures, media show and the sky is the limit from there. ICT manages every one of the frameworks engaged with making, putting away, sending or communicating, getting and controlling these sorts of data.

ICT is a term with various significance. Researchers consider it to be a term that includes a few exercises including the securing, stockpiling, handling and scattering of data using proper programming and equipment planned offices for that reason. Anyakoha, Eseyin, Akpore, & Annan (2002). ICT is an umbrella term that incorporates any specialized gadget or application, including: radio, Television, cell phones, Personal Computers (PC), organization equipment and programming, satellite frameworks, etc, just as the different administrations and applications related with them, for example, videoconferencing and distance learning.

In another regard, ICT alludes to the gadgets used to impart between PCs. ICT has incredibly affected and improved worldwide socialization and communications. Truth be told data innovation has taken over practically every part of our day to day routines from trade (purchasing and offering) to recreation and even culture. Today, cell phones, PCs, hand held gadgets, messages and the utilization of Internet has turned into a focal piece of our way of life and society. These innovations assume an essential part in our everyday activities (Oji-Okoro, 2006).

ICT use starts with its ability, one needs to have its abilities before it very well may be applied. To be viewed as an ICT literate, there is need to secure different ICT abilities that incorporates yet not restricted to the following:

- Must understand and be able to use a Computer to perform various tasks such as opening applications, creating and modifying documents, spreadsheets or presentations. Some basic typing skills will be necessary.
- Have the ability to identify various ICT technologies and their uses.
- Understand ICT technologies and concepts and be able to decide which ICT technology will be suitable for a particular task.
- Ability to differentiate between various forms of information and understand how to use or manipulate them.

ICT abilities have made and kept on setting out many works for individuals. An expertise in ICT gives freedoms to individuals to work with each other autonomously to embrace and achieve various things. On account of improvements in ICT you would now be able to create and send messages to loved ones as well as to partners at work with the assistance of electronic mail applications and other ICT devices like the Internet.

The effect of web as a component of ICT can't be overemphasized as it has been a solid potential in changing economies and social orders in more than one way, for example, lessening data and exchange costs, making new communitarian models to build the effectiveness of laborers, advancing development, and further developing instruction and admittance to fundamental administrations Alfonso Arelián (2017). Emotional changes has been seen in all part of lives going from schooling, wellbeing area, power area, world economy and then some, even business people has given declarations on how ICT has been extraordinarily effective in working on their organizations yet our concentration in this review is the manner by which ICT can be utilized to lessen sexual orientation imbalance and further develop lady strengthening.

ICT usage and Gender Inequality

Gone were those days when all ladies were consigned to their kitchen cooking and attending to kids all their entire life, the circumstance of the world currently has called for sexual orientation quality since ladies has truly shown what a man can do, a woman can improve. Sexual orientation equity involve every individual, all kinds of people are allowed to foster their own capacities and settle on decisions

without the constraints set by generalizations, inflexible sex jobs and biases Kehinde Opeyemi (2005). ICT instruments have helped individuals find, investigate, dissect, trade, and present data without segregation; and can give speedy admittance to thoughts and encounters from a wide scope of individuals, networks, and societies. Kwame Odakwa (2010). The growth and uptake of information and communications technologies (ICTs) have the potential to improve access to information and services or enable collective action for social justice. Donnell & Caroline (2018).

To see how ICT can have an effect in Gender issues, and its capability to battle disparity, it will help to dissect with point of view of what is needed to have a telephone and adopting web-based media and going on the web can accomplish it. ICT utilization has been of extraordinary assistance in assisting ladies with adapting more to lives. To completely comprehend both the current effect of ICTs on gender relations and ladies' freedoms – and their capability to propel gender correspondence – seeing what having a telephone or going on the web can really accomplish for the client. With telephone and ICT abilities now, any lady can try to achieve the impossible assuming they so focus on it. ICT use in training has truly affected its approval in the space of gender instruction. Indeed, even ladies that can't be in school because of strict compliance to background are presently offered the chance to practice their fundamental right and school on-line. The new information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as mobile phones and the internet are considered Flynn&Tareeq (2010). Important instruments for advancing socio-economic development throughout the world. According to Arun & Heeks(2004). ICT has offered both young women and men new spaces to express themselves in new ways, forming relationships that start beyond the traditional social networks where families and mutual friends have often played a powerful part. Restrictions that surrounded traditional meetings between single young men and women has been sabotaged Amy O'Donnell & Caroline Sweetman (2018).

Despite the known fact that ICT can be of great help to help combat gender problems, some issues concerning ICT and gender has to be addressed in other to make it achievable. Some of those issues listed by Sida, (2015) are listed below.

- **POVERTY:** Women globally earn less than men for equal and have less access to financial assets such as land, or to credit facilities. This limits their possibilities to use all forms of technology, including ICT.
- **ILLETRACY:** Women and girls make up nearly 2/3's of the world illetrates. This limits their use of ICT

- **LANGUAGE:** In rural areas and among ethnic minorities, language is a barrier to internet and mobile use. Where women and girls mostly have lower education and less exposure to the surrounding society and international arena. As a result, they face difficulties when trying to get access to internet and using mobile as the main language is English or national language and the Roman alphabet.
- **CYBER LAWS:** When new laws concerning internet are introduced, this is often done through some groups without consulting women's organization, and also government has been slow in responding to internet violence.
- **DIGITAL SAFETY:** Women and women's activist needs to be digitally safe. Women has been experiencing lot of cyber bullies and threats, and this may change their attitude towards ICT use. Online gender based violence must be tackled and women need access to the tools.

ICT usage and Women Empowerment

ICT can enable women and young ladies if the current gender orientation aberrations like absence of framework, instruction and abilities, monetary assets, power and navigation, social and social predisposition related with ICT usage among Nigeria ladies are recognized and wiped out. ICT can possibly reduce a portion of the hindrances looked by women Sida (2015).

Osubor & Konyeha(2015). ICT can likewise engage provincial women financially by decreasing exchange twists, kill destitution, enable more fragile portions, expanded usefulness, get data about market costs, and so on It can be as it may, conceivable provided that a country follows sound ICT procedures and arrangements Okiy & Esowo (2011).

In spite of the fact that ICTs clearly can assume a significant role in strengthening Nigeria, it may be stressed that they are just apparatuses. Arrangement of telephone utilities to regions is a starting point in utilizing these instruments and one that has been broadly perceived as being of focal significance. The advantages are more in the area of utilizing telephone, enhancements for social administrations/services and farming. In particular, ICTs, for example, phones can assist with connection with people living distant locations. Maybe rather hopefully, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) distinguished the accompanying results (USAID 1996):

- Reduced migration to urban areas, owing to improved possibilities for small-business and microenterprise development in rural communities;
- Rapid access to assistance during civil emergencies or natural disasters;

- Improved access to health extension services (telemedicine, with remote diagnosis and treatment advice);
- Increased access to market and price information, reducing the opportunity costs for local farmers and traders; and
- Improved educational services, including distance learning.

Traditionally, women are the custodians of indigenous information so critical to family and community welfare, particularly in the areas of health, environmental management, local sciences and religion. As communities urbanize and modernize, this type of information will disappear, unless women are integrated into modern systems of information production, transfer, and consumption.

Over the years, researchers has advocated the following from literatures to ensure that the gender gap in ICT infusion among gender is closed. That ICT access and training should be encouraged in the following areas by government and NGOs most especially for the Girl-child;

- To store, transfer, and retrieve information related to their lifelong-learning activities in health, education, business, farming, elections, etc;
- To easily and quickly get in touch with each other across the country and talk to each other, interact, and develop plans, decisions, and strategies to improve their women's participation in electoral politics (for example, knowing which female candidates to vote for during the election, etc.);
- To conduct personal business, such as searching for employment, looking for markets for farm products or crafts in other countries and regions, and receiving orders;
- To prepare training materials, such as posters, and improve or change them to suit women's needs; and
- To provide training, communication, and duplication services among others.

Priority areas for ICT intervention for Women Empowerment

The girl of today becomes a woman tomorrow, this led to the reason why the initiative of Civic education was introduced, as it is important to catch them young. Poverty has largely resulted from women's failure to access key resources. Marginalization of women is related to their low representation in decision making bodies, especially Parliament and local government. Although

women have an increasing level of civic awareness and are participating more in the electoral process, they remain poor and geographically isolated and fail to network, engage in peer support, or formulate a common political agenda. Women's use of ICTs would bridge their geographic isolation and promote interaction, networking, sharing, and formulation of common strategies to address their interests.

Small-scale enterprises have the greatest potential to generate employment, especially among women. They should be introduced to ICTs to enable them to transform this sector with information on supplies, quality control, raw materials, pricing, markets, and technologies. Such information would enable these enterprises to contribute more to the growth of the region and to women's management of this sector.

Information packaging

Africa is presently a net consumer of information packaged in other societies. Access to such information could improve productivity. In addition to using existing information packages, the project should assemble and package information on indigenous systems of production and services familiar to women and make it more generally accessible to women.

Addressing the cultural dimension

Women are familiar with the indigenous communication systems dominant in the rural areas and have some control over them. These systems also have a lot of gender biases and prejudices embedded in them. We need to identify and understand these biases and prejudices and to sensitively repackage the information so that it portrays women and the girl child in a positive view.

Female Community-based information centres

Setting up Community-based information centres are designed to deliver a wide range of information services within communities. This initiative is highly technological and may target women and the girl child as a disadvantaged group but also encompasses the social, economic, recreational, and governance activities in every sector of society. This involves ICT diffusion, which in turn involves computerized equipment and microelectronic product design and related know-how. Successful use of ICTs also requires technical change to enable us to adapt a number of given technologies, make continuous improvements, and meet a widening range of needs.

Infrastructure

Developing community based access to postal services, electricity, and all-weather roads, alternative sources of energy, such as solar, will be used in areas without electricity (Summit Strategies 1998). Telephone lines, power, and roads for access are the needed infrastructure for e-mail and the Internet in rural communities.

Policy

An effective ICT policy will empower and protect the rights of the girl child, increase women socio-economic opportunities and contribute to ICT innovation and research; and promote broader equity with emphasis on providing adequate access to democratization and political resources, information and education tool Osubor & Kunyena. Developing gender friendly policy that promotes female participation and ICT. Such programmes would enable more women to develop special interest in ICT related courses and fields.

Radio and television

Radio and television are major sources of information in the developing world. Having special programs geared towards ICT knowledge would go a long way to boost female interest in ICT

Education programs must be directed to developing both gender equity and equality.

According to Nancy, Hafkin & Sofia (2007). Education remains the single most important factor in improving the ability of girls and women in developing countries to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by information technology.

In line with education, Allison & Ricardo(2010). asserts that ICTs and public access to computer with internet connectivity can assist community development efforts and in turn bridged the so-called gender digital divide.

Women must develop skills to design and shape information systems appropriate to their needs. She suggests that the private-sector can assist by emphasizing the participation of women in their own information-infrastructure development.

Recommendations to empowering with the Use of ICT

- *Enabling environment* — Women and other members of civil society need to join forums to convince policymakers of the importance of an enabling environment in which communication and communication technologies can flourish.
- *ICTs in education* — ICTs must be part of the curriculums for girls and boys everywhere in Nigeria from an early age.
- *Content production* — Men and women should be encouraged to develop content relevant to their interests and needs.
- *Information facilitators* — Owing to the growing complexity of the technology, information facilitators are needed to interface with communities to help them meet their information needs.
- *Private-sector commitment to sustainable development* — As a vital partner in extending connectivity in Nigeria, the private-sector needs to realize the importance of access to ICTs for all groups in society, including women.

These issues identify the salient areas in which much work continues to be done to ensure that women in Nigeria are able to use ICTs for their own economic and social benefit

Conclusion

Specific attention need to be emphasized to gender in order for Nigeria to achieve gender- equality and empowerment of women through the use of ICT. Women’s empowerment and inequality are inseparable and necessary components for the realization of sustainable socio-economic development .Kari (2012). According to statistics from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the vast majority of women in Africa are still illiterate (as of 1995, the figure was 54% for women older than 15), and even today, most girls are not receiving more than primary education (in 1996, 45% of students enrolled in first-level schooling in Africa were girls, but many of them did not even complete this level). So how can they be expected to operate within an emerging new knowledge-based world order driven by information technology? Even in this 21st century with the striving platforms of digital technologies in this new millennium, most Nigerian women have not entered the digital information age. What does this mean for the future of Nigeria? the question is how can the country survive and attain its full potential when ICT is

not part of the women's lifestyle and allowed to play its course in education and women's access to, and understanding of, ICTs. Knowledge can help to increase options and choices in one's life, but an information infrastructure is also needed. This includes physical infrastructure, as well as a minimal level of knowledge and skills to make use of the equipment. New technologies may also offer women opportunities in distance learning, which is more flexible than traditional educational approaches. In policy formulation, it is also important to consider the girls-child access to knowledge of ICTs, computers, and their use. The relationship between the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and gender remains largely unexplored in Nigeria.

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