

Emancipating Women Through Technological Empowerment: Aid to Sustainable Development

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Abstract: The study looked at how the knowledge and positive involvement of women in Information Communication Technology (ICT) can assist in emancipating them. Women are integral part of the population that a country needs in development. However, the women of Nigeria for a long time in the history of the nation's development have not been given their right of place. Information Communication Technology is a potent tool in meeting human basic needs. Unfortunately, the women that are the fulcrum on which development depends do not have good exposure to ICT. The study highlighted some of the problems inhibiting women's effective participation and proffered useful solutions that will assist them in being fully functioning in the use of Information Communication Technology.

Key words: Information Communication Technology (ICT), globalization, growth, barrier, knowledge, conscentization, english language

INTRODUCTION

The world is going through an information technology revolution that is drastically changing the different facets of human life. These facets range from education to politics, economy, entertainment and even industry. The emergence and convergence of information and communication technology has become the mainstay of globalization. The global world is thus being transformed at a very fast pace.

Information technology is a potent tool in meeting human basic needs. It prescribes unique and timely opportunities for all categories of people as it promises better economic mobility and prospects, uninhibited political participation within and outside the world, easy access to information and communication. It is a strong link to the global village that it enhances users ability to acquire education, continue learning new skills, while at the same time updating obsolete skills as a result of new information.

As individuals benefit from Information Technology (ICT), so also do groups and government. ICT is a forceful tool to improve governance and strengthen democracy. The election of President Barack Obama, a black American in USA, watched live is an attestation to the fact above. The election has become a yardstick, a model and even has led to resignation of some leaders in other countries that were not democratically elected. The present challenges has led to a rethink on President Mugabe stand of holding on tenaciously to power as South Africa now enjoys a coalition government.

If development according to Ogundele (2006), refers to processes of gradual growth from within the individual, organization and nation, which results in a better and more desirable state than the previously existing ones, ICT must be integrated to the system to achieve this. ICT according to Nwosu (2006) promotes quality education, which Okafor (1990) refers to as a central hub whose rays invigorate other contemporary human activities.

Alele-Williams (2002) also reiterates that education gives higher degree of efficiency, innovation and self confident that enables the individual to acquire a world class status and mind set. Though, she agrees that it is not a panacea to cure all problems yet she concluded that without it there is no cure for any problem.

Though, Nigeria National Policy on Education according to Fafunwa is built on equal educational opportunities and access to education by every child irrespective of sex, many writers namely: Alele-Williams (1987), Aziza (1996), Adiotomre (1998), Avwata and Adiotomre (2002) have acknowledge zero participation of women in the developmental process. The ugly situation has therefore, made it impossible to achieve government stance on free, democratic, just and egalitarian society. This to a great extent has affected women's ability to utilize the ICT facilities thus retarding the national development and growth.

Statement of the problem: According to Alekho-Oje (2008), while information is changing at a fast pace, information highway in Nigeria is still predominantly male oriented and its even a forum for gender discrimination.

Nigeria women, represent about 49% of the population. Like any other group, they require information because information empowers one to make informed decisions. Women need to have information about themselves personal health information, maintain themselves and their families have economic, political and social information. Besides, the needs, it is the fact that professional women need information about their career. They have to compete with the males and struggle harder because of their triple roles as mothers, wives and workers. They must understand their own career information needs and develop sufficient technical knowledge to be credible professionals and advocates of their views in policy discussions. Unfortunately, most of the positive attributes and goals of information revolution have by passed women in developing countries. It is as a result of these gaps that the study looks at how women can be emancipated and assisted to improve on their communication technology so that they can enhance good qualitative ICT and thereby assist in enhancing sustainable national development.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The method use in the study is based on researchers observations and people findings. As far back as, Yerokun (2002) cried out about the low turn out of women enrolling for computer studies. According to her, the use of computer cuts across professions and the internet has reduced the world into a global village with many benefiting immensely by it. Despite these breakthroughs, the prominent names and juggernauts across the international world are men and none is a woman. In Nigeria also the story is worse, Osuagwu and Okaifor (2001) said the majority of Net users are wealthy, educated young urban men.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The chart of computer education literate society, which tilt unfavourably towards women as shown in Table 1 and 2 corroborated this fact.

Barriers to women active participation in ICT: So, many barriers inhibit women participation in ICT. Women constitute a great percentage of the workforce in Nigeria

but it is sad to note that many of them are yet to realize the relevance of computer/internet to their lives. Because, they lack proper exposure, they assume the learning content of ICT is not directly relevant to their livelihood. They also feel ICT does not value their knowledge, wisdom and experience. Oyedeji and Asiedu (1995) responding to how adults learn reiterated the fact that adults experience must be considered if the programmes slated for them will be successful. Some of the information from radios, television, internet are foreign to the needs of the local women. Lack of local information resources and services further compounds the problems. As a result, they assume that the ICT is irrelevant to their lives.

Many women are illiterates and most of the few leo literates can only read and understand in their local languages not English, the language of computer. There are so many languages in Nigeria alone that it is not possible to think of developing one that the country can use effectively.

Language specialists have been finding it difficult to give exact number of the Nigerian languages alone. Elugbe (1990) puts it between 394-400, while Bamgbose (1978) puts it as 513. In the global village English according to Rainer (1998) enjoys hegemony as the main communication and business language. If the indigenous languages cannot be used to access the world as asserted by Ativie (2007), it becomes obvious that women in Nigeria cannot participate well in the global communication because they lack the tool to operate ICT efficiently.

Lack of technical infrastructure is a barrier to women. Computers and the internet facilities are usually concentrated in urban centres and are common in work places than at homes. Unfortunately for women, mobility to cities and big towns where these infrastructure are available is highly restricted. Many women become saddled with child bearing at very early age so they are forced to remain in the villages. Besides, finance is a serious handicap. Not many towns have these facilities not to talk of villages. In towns, where they have these facilities as in Ozalla, one of the town in a LGAs, the facilitators are usually not available. The middle class women in management posts have very little access to the internet and e-mail services due to high cost of purchasing the facilities and even that of maintenance.

Table 1: Students enrolment in polytechnics for computer studies by sex

Year	1990/91	1991/92	1992/93	1993/94	1995/96	1996/97	1997/98
Male	193	423	1180	1488	2124	2270	2454
Female	70	170	558	738	1196	1412	1219
Total	263	593	1738	2226	3320	3682	3671

Annual Abstract of Statistics, 1999

Table 2: Students enrolment in colleges of education for computer based courses

Year	1992/93	1993/94	1994/95	1995/96	1996/97
Male	464	496	512	1043	1328
Female	224	209	278	460	837
Total	718	705	790	1503	2165

Statistical digest for colleges of education, 1999

Communication infrastructure is also a barrier. The satellite installation cost is overpowering, especially in Nigeria where, only a handful of wealthy people can afford its cost. The government has not seen the need to have these infrastructure installed for the people's use. The few private owned ones breakdown frequently because of poor handling, bad maintenance culture and poor electricity supply. Thus, the few users are commonly men and the very negligible high social economically empowered women. Often times these people (the high socio economically powerful women) cannot explore the Net effectively. Just a few understand how to explore the internet, even these few are often limited by the applications that can be used. This is so because some areas cannot be accessed on the web due to lack of subscription. The charges for subscription is so high in most cases and these are in foreign money. Besides, the nation faces obsolescence because in most cases what she has on ground are the technologies of days/years gone by in the developed countries. These make repairs difficult as many of the spare parts are no longer available.

Women lack the needed skills. Studies have shown that very few women are interested in mathematics and science-related courses. These are the bedrock for acquiring computer skills. Women are also afraid of exploring because they do not want the gadgets to breakdown nor can they afford the cost of repairs. These fears inhibit women's use above it all is the fact that they lack computer skills and language. English is the language of computer, but they cannot read well or understand English language so understanding the use becomes compounded.

They lack access to information. Women lack information about the available training courses. A lot of them cannot afford the cost of newspapers that advertise these programmes. Most of the advertisement on radios and television that could benefit women come up when they are busy preparing meals for the family, while in the kitchens. Most of the advertisement are dominated by men. In most cases, women are presented as stereotype and in servitude, so, they see them as further perpetration of manhood. Besides, women need to know where they can access ICT equipment and training and when such programmes will take place. They need information about the broader issues around the importance of ICT. Its potential relevance and capacity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The need to make education relevant to life in the ever changing world cannot be over-emphasized. Computer learning should be designed to meet the needs of the nation especially, the women in order to sustain national development.

Computer literacy and application should not only be taught to children but at all levels of instructions with particular attention to women. In service training should be encouraged to make all adults computer literate and relevant. There is also the need for vibrant and stimulating computer literacy programme that is abreast of the day-to-day changes in computer technology as they occur.

Conscientization is a potent tool in development. The level of people's awareness have very positive impact on their participation. Government should use this tool generously in designing programmes that will encourage women's involvement. The availability of women support staff and trainers can further facilitate women's improved use of these gadgets.

Government should provide public access such as telecentres, cybercafés and information centres. These telecentres can be part of existing institutions health centres, schools, community outreach even in market places and agric extensions. The graduates of these programmes should not be discriminated against when it comes to getting employment.

To increase the usage of ICT, there should be reduction in cost. The way to do this is to share the resources at government, institutional or local levels. When, the telecentres are established, nominal fees should be charged if they cannot be rendered free. Provision of information and support is necessary to enable women know about ICT and the training involved. Socio-cultural barriers should be addressed especially in areas where women are not allowed free access.

Women should engage in lifelong learning in order to maximize their creative and innovative skills as opposed to the craze for certificate acquisition. Women should realize that the time has come when they must take their own destiny in their own hand. They should arise and join the forward march developed countries if they will become relevant in decision making process of their families, communities and the nation at large. When, women are technologically emancipated and empowered the result is that the nation's development will be sustained as we have in the developed countries.

CONCLUSION

Knowledge is the bedrock of development. A nation that does not encourage and promote the intellectual

development of women cannot be said to be developed. In order to develop and sustain growth, government must assist her citizenry to concentrate on developing her human resources using technology to reach out to the world.

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