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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Communication Technology, Gender and Rural Development in Nigeria: A Case Study of Ajingi Local Government of Kano State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper highlights the alienation of rural women from New Communication Technology in Nigeria using the women of Ajingi Local Government of Kano State of Nigeria as case study. Scholars in the fields of New Media and development communication have noted the importance of the female gender in national development and as a necessary variable in the development process, particularly in Africa but alienating and isolationist approaches and biases still strive to undermine women in rural communities in Nigeria. Studies have also shown that women, both in traditional and modern social structures, have always been the victims of innovation. More often than not, when technologies are imported, rural women are often not prepared, and do not have the chance to use and access these technologies. Thus the benefits are accrued almost exclusively to men. This can be viewed from the processes of technology transfer, which does not consider socio-cultural base, sexual relation, gender roles and the need for adequate skill training and acquisition for rural women. This paper therefore draws attention to the implication of not carrying rural women along in the technology circle in Nigeria.

Introduction

This paper starts on the premise that everyone has the right to the means of communication for exercising their right to freedom of expression. This right is enshrined in article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that:

> Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and import information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers.

The right to communication and information can easily be argued to be the touchstone of all other human rights. It is only in societies where information is accessible to all, without discrimination, that individuals will be able to actively protect their rights and also recognize the rights of others. Communication technology has played an immense role in broadening and opening up a lot of frontiers particular in the 21st century. This situation is driven by the ongoing evolution of the Internet, personal computers, mobile technologies and the consequent high penetration rates of information, goods and services.

Thus, the importance of availing every Nigerian citizen, including rural women, the opportunities that these new information technologies provide cannot be over emphasized. There is no gain saying that Nigerian women, particularly women living in rural communities in Nigeria, have been systematically excluded from the benefits of communication technologies through a series of deprivations. More so, women from northern parts of Nigeria are even worse off compared to their counterparts in the South. This can be viewed from complete lack of necessary education and infrastructure in rural communities, coupled with socio-religious beliefs and the processes of technology transfer, which does not consider socio-cultural base, sexual relation, gender roles and the need for adequate skill training and acquisition for rural women.

This paper therefore draws attention to the implication of not carrying rural women along in the technology circle in Nigeria using the rural

women of Ajingi community in Kano State as a case study. It is pertinent at this point to discuss the general issues concerning technology in Africa, Nigeria in particular, and the place of rural women in the developmental calculation of the Nigerian society.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this research are to

i. Determine the accessibility of ICTs amongst the women of Ajingi Local Government of Kano State.
ii. Ascertain the extent of gender inequality in access to communication technology among the people of in Ajingi LGA.
iii. Establish the reasons for gender disparity in gaining access to ICTs among the people of in Ajingi LGA.

Literature Review

The Digital Divide and Nigeria

It is plausible to argue that most third world countries suffer from developmental issues compared to developed countries. Thus, in most African countries, discussions of communication technologies are often located within the discourse on digital divides and socio-economic development. The idea of the digital divide is one that brings to the fore issues of technological disparity, accessibility and Internet literacy. While the divide is present within countries, between countries and between continents, the most prominent disparity seems to be between Africa and the rest of the world (Oyelaran et al., 2005). The report of the World Summit on the Information Society (2005) indicates that less than three out of every 100 African use the Internet, compared with an average of one out of every two inhabitants of the G8 countries (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, UK and US).

Africa had some 22 million Internet users in 2001, an Internet penetration of just 3% while Europe's Internet utilization is 11 times higher. The statistics also show that there are more than eight times as many Internet users in the United States than the entire African continent. Despite the fact that the African continent is home to 57 countries, it is reported to have fewer Internet users than France alone (State of the Internet, 2012). This explains why "many people in the West still see Africa as a vast offline or non-Internet compliant continent" (Fosu, 2010, p.4).

However, over the last 12 years, the digital divide is said to have shrunk in terms of Internet users (Fosu, 2010) even though accessibility in most African countries like Nigeria is largely restricted to urban areas, particularly in higher institutions and the business sector (State of Internet, 2012). According to Jensen (2003), "Africa has the world's lowest use of the Internet and information technology, yet, these offers the greatest hope for the future. The primary commodity of the 21st century will be information; information translated into knowledge, education and savoir-faire" (Jensen, 2003, p.5). Sachs (2010), supports Jensen when he says, "I actually think that we've turned the corner on the digital divide… a gap that seemed to be widening pretty relentlessly is now going to be narrowing in the coming years and I think narrowing quite quickly" (p.98). Sachs's statement can be corroborated by the rate of new Internet subscribers that are signing up with mobile phone services in Nigeria. Most people can now make monetary transactions using their smart phones and students can now also search their university websites for information, check their email and Facebook pages using Internet compliant smart phones.

On the whole Africa and Nigeria does appear to see an increase in access to Internet services. This development of course cannot be divorced from the rapid growth witnessed in the telecommunication sector. For instance, there was no mobile phone firms operating in Nigeria in the year 2000 but by 2005 there were four: MTN, ZAIN, MTEL and Globacom, which is locally-owned. With a mobile phone of less than 4000 Naira, individuals can connect with families and friends anywhere in the world. This development has in so many ways boosted the growth of different sectors of the

Nigerian economy, particularly educational and rural development. According to Al-Basheer (2011),

> I think the fundamental premise is that if people have access to information and people can communicate better, there is a general principle that they can better their living. In a global world today, it's really about being able to use your brains. If you're able to expose people to access to information in a global platform a lot of interesting things can happen.

Unfortunately, the facts on ground among women in most rural communities do not buttress the euphoria and successes attributed to the gains of communication technologies due to their inadequacy or complete absence.

Women in Ajingi Local Government

Ajingi is one of the smallest local governments in Kano State. It consists of about 10 council wards with 175,000 thousand population from the 2006 census report. The people of Ajingi are Muslim Hausa speakers and their primary economic activity is mostly subsistence farming. This activity is done mainly by men while most of the women engage themselves in backyard planting and petty trading of household goods. The two villages that served as case study for this research i.e Gurduba and Balere are both situated within a religious and patriarchal traditional society, where women are not particularly active within socio-political and economical sphere. They mostly serve as caregivers for children and housekeepers (Cooking, cleaning, gathering of firewood and looking after domestic livestock like chicken and goats). Most of the information in this paper on Ajingi emanated from the initial baseline survey carried out by the Isa Wali Empowerment Initiative (IWEI), which is a non-government and non-profit organization aimed at empowering women and children through capacity building initiated projects. The outcome of the initial IWEI projects with the people of Ajingi back in 2010 highlights the vulnerability of women and their disadvantaged position compared to their male counterparts.

While the baseline report of IWEI covers a variety of issues, this particular research is intended to document the information and communication needs of the women in Gurduba and Balere villages of Ajingi Local Government of Kano State as articulated by the women themselves. While the literature on gender, ICTs and development is extentive in some parts of the developing world such as India, surprisingly little data exists that documents needs and concerns of women in Northern Nigeria regarding ICTs in the context of rural development. Yet, communication technology has been identified as one of the most effective tools to bring about gender and economic development simultaneously (Friedman, 2005; Goyal, 2005; Mitter, 2005).

The UNDP report (2008) also affirms that "New computer technologies offer a whole new field for women to participate in the workforce and play their part in developing the new, technologically based economy on which future development depend". Indeed, the annual UNDP Human Development reports of 2003, 2004, and 2005 consistently show a direct correlation between the level of gender empowerment in a society, measured on the basis of women's literacy and education rates, access to health care, capital, means of production, and degree of women's participation in public and professional life and that country's level of economic, social and political development. The reason is clear: countries that effectively exclude women from learning, health care, and the public sphere deprive themselves of the creativity and productivity of half its citizens, and will find it nearly impossible to close the economic gap with advanced developed nations. According to Sharma (2003):

> ICT … opens up a direct window for women to the outside world. Information flows to them without distortion or any form of censoring, and they have access to

> the same information as their counterparts. This leads to broadening of perspectives, building up of greater understanding of their current situation and causes of poverty, and initiation of interactive processes for information exchange. Furthermore, such forms of networking open up alternate forms of communication… (p.1).

However, despite this encouraging success stories, profound gender differences remain in the technology world but perhaps far glaring in Northern Nigeria where rural women continue to face barriers such as high illiteracy rates, lack of access and general approaches that do not reflect the needs of women.

The problem of women both rural and urban not benefitting from communication technologies as much as men is not new, considering the patriarchal nature of most African countries. Indeed, scholars like Hafki (2000) and Saunder (2003) have erstwhile asserted that the introduction of technologies was implicitly designed to meet the needs of men but not of women. Studies in Liberal feminist theory such as Esther Boserup's research titled "Women's Role in Economic Development" (1970) have long shown how women's socio-economic status in African countries declined after the introduction of technologies particularly in the agricultural sector. The women in Boserup's research criticized the "Dependent Welfare Recipient approach" towards women – a system that was perpetrated through what Boserup described as the "paternalistic perpetuation of existing gender roles and its dependence on the patriarchal power of the state and the family rather than individual autonomy" (p.74). While one can argue that a lot has changed in Africa and in Nigeria from the period in which Boserug made her argument, it is also true that very little has changed for certain communities and some of these patriarchal world view still dominate development policies to this day.

However, what is essential in this research is not to generalize and promote the notion of a single globally shared women's experience of oppression and discrimination that can only be changed by both liberal capitalism and technology. Instead this research intends to create awareness and recognition of the positive roles of women as productive contributors to rural and national development. Women's empowerment must be understood as a "Multi-dimensional concept which encompasses enabling women to build the skills and abilities and capacity, through education, health case, access to and control over capital and means of production- to participate effectively in the public and private sphere, make informed decisions, increase their self-sufficiency and, ultimately, enable them to act in their own self interest" (Boserup, 1970, p.45). The implication of this discourse is to stress the need that particularly for rural women projects should be designed and deployed in a gender and culturally sensitive way. According to Sheriff (2005),

> Most important, effective ICT4D projects must take into account women's particular socio-economic environment, not the least, women's need for information, also structured according to their gendered roles and responsibilities, which, in turn influences their participation and response to knowledge networking.

Methodology

The research methodology adopted for this research is the qualitative approach. The motivation for doing a qualitative research stems from the fact that it allows the researcher to understand people within their social and cultural context, which in this paper is the women of Ajingi Local Government of Kano State. This approach also suits the objectives of the research.

According to Yin (2002, p.2), the choice of research methods has always influenced the way in which the researcher collects data. Specific research methods also imply different skills, assumptions and research practices. Indeed, some research

scholars have suggested combining one or more research methods in one study. This process of multiple techniques in the gathering of data can easily strengthen the study by providing opportunities for triangulation during the analysis phase of the study.

Method of Data Collection

The secondary data for this study is derived from library source. This process is based on documentary analysis of relevant information from textbooks, journals, magazines, newspapers etc. This approach is important because it provides the researcher a broader understanding of the study variables.

The primary data were collected via the interview method. Critical issues were raised through semi-structured interviews with 16 women from Gurduba village and 16 from Balere ward, making it a total of 32 interviewees.

The Case Study Method used in this study is used to describe a social unit, i.e. A person, group of persons, a family, an institution, an organization, cultural groups or the entire community. Yin (2002) defines case study as a particular method of qualitative research, which, rather than using large samples and following a rigid protocol to examine a limited number of variables, uses in-depth examination of a single instance or multiple instances or events. Case studies rely on multiple sources of evidence and benefit from the prior development of theoretical propositions (Yin, 2002, .6).

Data Analysis and Discussion

Table 1 indicates a fair distribution in the age of the Interviewees across the two communities. A majority of them have western education up the primary school level while only 4 women out of 32 obtained secondary school education. None has tertiary education. All of the women have Islamic education but in various levels which cannot be easily categorized. Most of the respondents attained one form of education or the other – at least a primary school education. If the educational background of rural women can be improved from the status quo, it will go a long way in enhancing their efficiency in the use of ICT since modern ICTs like Computer/Internet require some form of education or skills.

Age and Educational Background of Interviewees

Age	Gurduba	Bali
1-20	6	5
21-40	8	7
41-60	2	4
Total	16	16
Educational Background	Gurduba	Bali
Formal Education	10	13
Primary School level	7	12
Secondary School level	3	1
Tertiary Education level	Non	Non
Islamic Education	16	16

Distribution of respondents according to access to ICTs

ICTS	Gurduba	Bale
Radio	15	16
Television	5	7
GSM	2	2
Computer/Internet	Non	Non

In Table 2, the women dominantly have access to radio and television. While literature indicates a high user rate of GSM in rural communities, however, only a total of 4 Interviewees have access to GSM in both Gurduba and Balere. This result generally indicates a low access for women.

Result in Table 3 shows that cost of possessing and accessing ICTs is the dominant reason for low participation of the Interviewees in ICTs. This is followed by gender prejudices. In this case, the women indicate that their husbands have more access because they are more financially independent. Since their husbands limit their

activities, they are therefore unable to access ICTs as their male counterparts, which amounts to the gender prejudice – the second factor. Illiteracy is the third factor, particularly lack of western education. Language barrier came fourth while the women said there were no religious barriers to their access to ICTs. This implies that women have more constraints in gaining access to ICTs than their male counterpart while the financial implications of ICTs are the major reasons for gender disparity in access to ICTs.

Reasons for gender disparity in gaining access to ICTs

Reasons	Gurduba	Bale
Language Barrier	2	1
Cost of possessing and accessing ICTs	7	9
Gender Prejudice	4	3
Illiteracy	3	3
Religious Barrier	Non	Non

While the above tables are self-explanatory, it is important to state that the interviewees in both communities believe that they can better impact their communities positively if they have access to ICTs, particularly for product prices since most urban dwellers exploit them by buying their products at very cheap rates. The need for proper training in ICT and skill acquisition was also mentioned as a need.

Conclusion

The new ICTs have the potential of getting vast amounts of information to rural populations in a more timely, comprehensive and cost-effective manner, and could be used together with traditional media. However, focusing on the use of ICT alone in rural communities does not mean gender empowerment and sustainable development in Nigeria. The most effective route to achieving the benefits of ICTs is to concentrate on re-thinking development activities by analyzing current problems and considering ICT as one of the ingredients for rural development. In doing a bottom-up approach to development, rural women like those in Ajingi Local Government should be allowed to construct their own agenda for ICT-assisted development, prior to introducing the technology.

The female interviewees in the research stated that information is essential for facilitating individual and rural development. Unfortunately, the women in both Gurduba and Balere communities of Ajingi Local Government have little access to information and communication technologies as reflected in the results of this research. Through the use of ICTs such as the GSM telephone, transaction costs of many Nigerians particularly in rural areas who are poor have drastically been reduced. People make calls before traveling and for business transactions. The technology has led to increase service innovation, efficiency and productivity. ICTs also provide options for women, including overcoming illiteracy, creating opportunities for entrepreneurship, allowing women to work from home and care for their families and enhancing and enriching their quality of life. But since very few women within this research own a GSM phone they are automatically excluded from its benefits. This inequality in gender access to ICTs in this research can be addressed by the following recommendations.

Recommendations

1. Nigerian government must encourage rural women both in and out of school to be part of the ICT process.
2. There is a need to develop ICT strategies for rural areas taking into consideration differences in languages, culture, socio-economic conditions and infrastructure.
3. There is also a need to encourage the private sector to invest in the design of ICTs appropriate for use in rural areas.
4. Local initiatives should be encouraged to explore the opportunities presented by ICTs and incorporate participatory communication and learning processes.
5. There is the need for a constant and painstaking

review of the poverty eradication policies in order to make them relevant to the contemporary realities through the use of ICT.

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