

Chapter 8

Access And Utilization of ICTs by Rural Women in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This chapter on access and utilization of ICTs by rural women looks at the conceptualization of ICTs. Delves into the women's extent of access and utilization of ICTs. It also examines the numerous efforts being made by various bodies to ensure greater access and utilization. The Chapter also looks the hindrances to access and utilization of ICTs and proffers suggestions on the ways to improve access and utilization of these technologies. Further research directions have also been pointed out. The authors analyze literature and reflect on their experiences and their wide interaction with rural women in their diverse daily occupations and their use of ICTs.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to explore access and utilization of ICTs by rural women in Kenya by analyzing literature and the authors' experiences and interaction with rural women in their diverse daily occupations of the use of ICTs which have

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given them useful insights. The chapter covers: definitions of ICT, rural women, access and utilization of ICTs, challenges to access and utilization and suggestions on the way forward to access and utilization. The conclusion following the discussion is that the development of Kenya and the world can only be realized when women are enabled, and facilitated to access and utilize ICTs effectively and efficiently.

Conceptualization of ICTs

There are various definitions of ICT but all the available definitions have some similar aspects in them. Nevertheless an authoritative definition of ICT is a complex and varied set of goods and applications that are useful in the production, distribution, processing and the transformation of information. There is the division of ICT to either traditional or modern.

Traditional ICT constitute an analogue technology that includes television, radio, facsimile machines, and fixed line telephones. Modern forms of ICT include computer and applications useful in the access of data processing such as cellular phones, internet and email (Gurumurthy, 2004)

The Rural Women

In Kenya 51% of the population are women. Rural Women account for 76% (17.442m) of all the women. (Kenya Demographics Profile, 2014). The mainstay of Kenyan Economy is Agriculture. Agriculture accounts for 70% of the labor force and women make 75% of the work force (Mwangi, 2008). The rural women in Kenya combine their agricultural work with their multiple roles of being mothers, wives and caregivers to the elderly parents. Rural women, therefore are significant actors in the socioeconomic development. However, the ICT sector is currently more active in urban areas, resulting in wide regional disparities in the distribution of ICT facilities. (ICT Board, 2010). And yet “ICTs could be tools for women’s active participation in improving their situations. Simple access to information and improved communications can end the isolation of women and promote improved health, access to reproductive services, economic growth as well as the alleviation of poverty.” (Huyer & Sikoski, 2003)

POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPMENT, GENDER AND ICT IN KENYA

The Government of Kenya has a development blueprint – Vision 2030. It has social, economic and political pillars. Its objective is to turn Kenya into a middle income

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