Chapter 13

Gender and National Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Policies in Africa

Stella E. Igun
Delta State University, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses the importance of incorporating gender aspects into the national ICT policies in Africa. The mention of gender issues in national ICT policies in Africa is still very scanty (where they exist). Many countries in Africa have no clear gender aspects incorporated into their national ICT policies. The chapter focuses on the imperativeness of ICTs to the livelihood of women in Africa, the need and urgency of increasing and encouraging women participation in all aspects of ICTs. The enactment and implementation of ICT policies and strategies targeting women population in both rural and urban areas is inevitable. Thus, status of gender inequality of ICT in Africa, strategies geared towards addressing gender inequalities in ICT in Africa and gender and ICT perspectives were discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Gender/national information and communication technology (ICT) policy was first discussed at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. Some governments of African countries presented papers on *gender issues* mostly on national ICT policies at the World Telecommunication Development Conference organized by *International Telecommunication Union (ITU)* in Valletto, Malta. (Hafkin, 2002). The conference

result brought positive impact that made the ITU to establish Gender Task Force. Following this move, there were gender issues and policy presentation at World Bank Digital Divide Seminar Series. Many other expert groups have been meeting to work towards the maturity of *gender issues* in ICTs and the issues always being discussed in World Summit on the Information Society.

African countries also participated in the fourth United Nations World Conference on Women (UNWCM) that inaugurated the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA). Beijing platform for Action is one of the strongest and most comprehensive

international agreements on women's equality. The Beijing conference is a spring board which encouraged women to use ICT facilities such as the Internet., computers and others for information gathering, dissemination and networking. Women were then inspired to be using ICTs in the work for social change, *gender justice*. *Women in Africa* do not share equally in the world's resources and do not have equal access to opportunities. *African women* need to have greater use of ICTs for the empowerment of women by calling for gender-sensitive policies and to ensure sustainable change noting the following:

- African women should realize that ICTs are powerful tools and that women are under-represented in civil society, commercial and legislative where policies on ICT are decided and distributed.
- African women should note that, *policy guiding ICTs* are many and so, all the range of ICT policy should be gender-redistributive.
- Since information dissemination is mostly through the use of ICTs and it is important for the women in Africa to be part of decision making.
- It is important to note that women in Africa do not have *equal access to ICT* as men. The creation, use and distribution of ICTs are in hands of African men. This challenge originated from the fact that education of girls and women have not been encouraged generally in Africa.
- In this era, ICT tools have become the major measure means of information sharing globally; therefore it is crucial for women to have access to ICTs. African women need to be assisted in networking, sharing information and generation of income.

ICT policy has not been fully engendered for it to benefit women and girls in Africa. The most important area of securing the benefits of the information age is engendering ICT policy. There is always the fear that women are reaping the benefits of ICTs in the information age. Advances for attention to gender issues have been in progress; gender neutral has been gaining roots in ICT issues. (Gender neutral means policy that implies that men and women are the same or should be treated the same in gender issues). Marcelle (2000) stated that *policy making* in technological fields often ignores the needs, requirements and aspirations of women unless *gender analysis* is included. There should be specific attention given to women in ICT issues since it is usually women who are left out.

Jorge (2001) noted that the evidence lies in the fact that women are vastly under-represented in government, business, political and social institutions. Men still hold most of the management and control positions in telecommunication companies and regulatory or *policy making bodies*; regulatory decisions are made without any impact analysis; service licenses are attributed to companies without equal opportunity policies and control mostly by men.

The ICT sector has not fully opened to gender perspectives. Policy makers in African countries especially, are ignoring gender in national and ICT policy to a great extent. Even with gender analysis advancing in recent time; in social fields such as health and education and fields such as agriculture and rural development; projects hardly put into consideration gender issues. The major challenge is the extension to the main fields of information and communication technologies.

Generally women are worst hit by poverty level in Africa and other developing countries. Access to ICTs is supposed to provide women with economic empowerment, increased learning opportunities and improved market access. The major problem is that most women in Africa have limited or no access to ICTs. These challenges hinder women from reaping the benefits of ICTs. African countries have realized the beneficial role ICTs can have in reducing poverty rates in women's

Related Content

Common Core Standards for Mathematical Practice and TPACK: An Integrated Approach to Instruction
Jayme Lintonand David Stegall (2015). *Standards and Standardization: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications (pp. 92-107).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/common-core-standards-for-mathematical-practice-and-tpack/125287

Key Challenges in the Design of Learning Technology Standards: Observations and Proposals
Adam R. Cooper (2010). *International Journal of IT Standards and Standardization Research (pp. 20-28).*
www.irma-international.org/article/key-challenges-design-learning-technology/46110

Analysis of ISO 9001 Paradox of Knowledge Codification Using the Activity System Model: Tensions in Practices and Expansive Learning
Hiam Serhanand Doudja Saïdi Kabèche (2017). *International Journal of Standardization Research (pp. 37-56).*
www.irma-international.org/article/analysis-of-iso-9001-paradox-of-knowledge-codification-using-the-activity-system-model/202987

Advancement on Damage-Less Watermark Extraction Using Non-Linear Feature Extraction Scheme Trained on Frequency Domain
Kensuke Naoeand Yoshiyasu Takefuji (2012). *Information Technology for Intellectual Property Protection: Interdisciplinary Advancements (pp. 98-132).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/advancement-damage-less-watermark-extraction/60553

Patent and Antitrust Problems Revisited in the Context of Wireless Networking
Gary Lea (2006). *Advanced Topics in Information Technology Standards and Standardization Research, Volume 1 (pp. 149-165).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/patent-antitrust-problems-revisited-context/4662