

# INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) AS IT RELATES TO WOMEN EDUCATION AND EMPOWERMENT

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## **Abstract**

*The paper looked at information and communication technology (ICT) as it relates to women education and empowerment. Women have been called the weaker sex, although the responsibilities left for the women are enormous, leaving them little or no time for education. Education has been variously conceptualized, but the common agreement by authors is that women education has been to a large extent sacrificed on the alter of discrimination. Since any development cannot be complete without the involvement of women, they need education to be appropriately empowered for development, which is a process of change to a better, more advanced and highly organized situation that can be enhanced by the use of the information and communication technology (ICT). With the introduction of information and communication technology women now have better chance of accessing information from any part of the world to empower themselves. Any woman can now have free access to as much knowledge, education and enlightenment as she wants, and stop to 'crying wolf' where she fails to plan for the future.*

Women have been called all sorts of names including the 'weaker sex'. Weaker sex indeed! A woman wakes up at 5 o'clock in the morning with a baby strapped on her back and begins to clean-up the house, prepare the breakfast, and get the older children ready for school before preparing for work herself. Meanwhile, the husband is fast asleep, only to get up at 7 o'clock and demand for hot water to bathe before proceeding to the table for his meal, and off he goes to work. In the rural areas

of Nigeria, a mother with a bundle of fire-wood on her head and a child strapped on her back is a common sight. In Germany over 70 percent of mothers feel stressed.

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About 51 percent have complaints involving the spine and intervertebral disks; over a third is constantly tired and despondent, while 30 percent suffer from headaches or migraines (Awake 2002).

Akanu (2007) gave a pathetic illustration of the work load on women in Nigeria, in which she showed a typical woman saddled with various responsibilities like nursing children, going out to look for daily bread, fetching fire wood and water, cooking, washing clothes and dishes and serving the food among others. The tasks connected with the home are the fundamental tasks of humanity, if a mother does not do her duty, there will be no next generation, or a next generation that is worse than none at all. With even a limited education, a mother can make a difference. The saying is true that when you educate women, you educate a nation. Women tend to be more sensitive to issues of affiliation, inclusion, loneliness and acceptance. They have greater tenderness, understanding and better control of emotions. Their role in the survival and continuity of any society is certainly not under contention. What has remained an issue of serious concern is that in spite of the acknowledged role women play in nation building and development; various societies have continued to treat them as second class citizens. Women are hardworking, dependable, obedient and when given the chance, are accountable in handling positions of trust.

### **Women Education**

Education has been variously conceptualized. Fafunwa (1974) saw it as the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or young adult develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour which are of positive value to the society in which he lives. Peters (1980) viewed education as the transmission of what is worthwhile to those who become committed to it, Chauhan (1981) saw it as shaping of behaviour or modification of the behaviour of the individual for adequate adjustment in the society; while Ukeje (1991) declared that it is the only potent instrument for social reconstruction, Maduabum (2002) concluded that education is an aggregate of all the processes by means of which a person develops abilities, attitudes and forms of behaviour that enables him/her to live effectively and efficiently in the present society so that he/she may be able to advance or improve it.

The implication of these definitions is that there must be a positive and total development of the behaviour and values of the individual in relation to their environment; and education aids the development processes; which is a life long process, but must be started early enough. Any nation, therefore, that seeks development, relevance, and global recognition cannot afford to neglect education of its citizens, including women.

The truth of the matter is that before the 90's in Nigeria the girl child had lower schooling opportunity. During the buoyant economic era, the oil boom of the *Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as it Relates to Women Education and Empowerment- Dr. Stella Ngozi Nduka-Ozo and Nduka Ozo*

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mid 1970s, Nigeria recorded significant increase in female graduates compared to their male counterparts. But female education as Fafunwa (1974) observed is generally skewed towards subjects considered to be of least resistance, higher competition and in lower demand, excluding them from their interests abilities and capabilities which are the three indices of career choice (Nduka-Ozo, 2009). In a study carried out by Uwalaka (2011) on impact of women education in national development in Aba North Local Government Area of Abia State, she found out certain factors responsible for lack of education for women which include: parents inclination to educate males first, harsh economic conditions, get rich quick syndrome which sees education as time consuming and early marriage. A similar study by Eze (2012) on factors affecting female education in Ohaukwu Local Government Area of Ebonyi State, showed similar findings. She listed: cultural beliefs, early marriage, poor economic status of parents and poor parental attitude towards female education as factors that contributed to lack of or low female education.

### **Women Empowerment and Development**

“Study after study has shown that there is no effective development strategy in which women do not play a central role. When women are fully involved, the benefits can be seen immediately: families are healthier and better fed; their income, savings and reinvestment go up; and what is true of families is also true of communities and, in the long run, of whole countries”. ( Annan 2003)

Egwu (2007) also observed that countries all over the world have been acknowledging the logic that no full development can be attained without utilizing the potentials of the women population that constitute the substantial fraction of the total population. This truth underscored the Federal Government's promulgation of Decree no. 11 of 1995 establishing the National Centre for Women Development in 1992 in Abuja. Continuing Egwu lamented that in the past, women, despite their noble roles in the development of the society, have not always been well treated due to low or no education. They have indeed been denied equal rights to basic education, economic advancement, always alienated in matters of governance through discriminatory and often times harmful traditional practices that have deliberately humiliated them.

Development is a process of change to a better, more advanced and highly organized conditions (Osim 2007). Development is not only the provision of infrastructure, but a gradual process of advancement which include mental, physical, economical and social condition of a people. It is on this premise that students are given scholarship, workers are given in-service training; other forms of support are

given in order to empower individuals for their development and advancement. Development is seen as a continuous process, and as long as women exist, their

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contributions to the growth of the nation will continue if given the required education. They have been involved in all facets of development in spite of the apparent neglect, lack of appreciation of their efforts and inhibitions by cultural and religious beliefs. With the introduction of information and communication technology any woman can have free access to as much knowledge, education and enlightenment as she wants.

### **Information and Communication Technology (ITC) as it Relates To Women Education and Empowerment**

Okenwa (2000), defined Information and communication technologies (ICTs) as the various modern devices and applications, such as cable, satellite, the online network and telemetric applications that facilitate the circulation of ideas and create a link between data and human beings.

Amadi (2011 p.142) observed that “Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are simply communication gadgets, equipments or facilities that improve the manner in which message is shared, relayed, disseminated, preserved and recalled for meaningful communication purposes. It is also the soft and hardware innovations for normalizing and enhancing interaction in the society”.

Information and communication technology include films, slides, video tapes, audio tapes, radio and television programmes, computer, CD rom and internet which are used as E-learning facilities in schools. The Internet according to Encarta (2009) is composed of many interconnected computer networks. Each network may link tens, hundreds, or even thousands of computers, enabling them to share information and processing power. The Internet has made it possible for people all over the world to communicate with one another effectively and inexpensively. Unlike traditional broadcasting media, such as radio and television, the Internet does not have a centralized distribution system. Instead, an individual who has Internet access can communicate directly with anyone else on the Internet, post information for general consumption, retrieve information, use distant applications and services, or buy and sell products. This media can now make education easier for women, the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) could enhance their efficiency. Any woman who still feels discriminated against, even with the access to ICTs is merely ‘crying wolf’. We now live in the world of ICTs. As McWilliams (in Nkwocha, 2004: 13) observed “those who don’t bother about computer don’t bother about the future and the future is where we are going to spend the rest of our lives.”

### **Conclusion**

The potentials of women to a great extent have remained unutilized and underutilized as a result of subjugation by certain cultural practices hindering women from achieving gender equity. Women education has been grossly neglected in many parts

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of the country for reasons ranging from economic hardship to cultural discrimination. Women education should be encouraged to empower them for the development of families and the nation. The few women who have made it to the top like Margaret Thatcher, the ‘iron lady’ of Britain, Emelda Marcos of Philippines, Prof Dora Akunyili of Nigeria have all proved their mettle. Egwu (2005) opined that International Women’s Day Celebration should transcend the romanticisation of the female gender to the celebration of women as strategic vehicles for the socio-economic and political development of the society.

With the advent of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) women now stand a better chance of improving themselves through the services available to them. As observed earlier, the Internet has made it possible for people all over the world to communicate with one another effectively and in a less expensive way. Any individual who has Internet access can communicate directly with anyone else and get all information required. In order words as they say in Igbo “Ihe di woro ogori agba na ahia” meaning that some of the things a husband denies his wife can still be bought in the market by the wife, if she has the where withal.

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