

Chapter 13

Women and Nigerian ICT Policy: The Inevitability of Gender Mainstreaming

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ABSTRACT

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is the bedrock for national survival and development in a rapidly changing global environment. Little wonder, every progressive country has a national IT policy and an implementation strategy to respond to the emerging global reality so as to tap from the numerous potential associated with these technologies. However, global reports and statistics reveal that women and girls are grossly underrepresented in the field of ICTs. The International Telecommunications Union (ITU) in 2013 reports that there are currently 200 million fewer women online than men, and this gap could grow to 350 million in three years. The report also reveals that globally women are coming online later and more slowly than men. Out of the world's 2.8 billion Internet users, only 1.3 billion are women. The report also states that women account for fewer than 20% of ICT specialists in developing economies and estimated that, by 2015, 90% of formal employment across all sectors will require ICT skills. The report additionally stated that 21% of women are less likely than their male counterparts to own a mobile phone – representing a mobile gender gap of 300 million. In Africa, only about half of the female population makeup the number of men connected to the internet. This gender divide calls for gender mainstreaming in respect of ICT policy. This chapter examines Nigeria Information Technology Policy and possible areas of encouraging gender mainstreaming in order to encourage and boost the ICT engagement for women empowerment. Thus, having looked at the Gender mainstreaming and Nigeria's IT policy this chapter concludes that there is need for the mainstreaming of the following areas in the IT policy, the issue of access particularly for women to help bridge the gap between men and women, the issue of establishing ICT training centers for women in the rural areas to train them on ICT skills.

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INTRODUCTION

Information Technology (IT) is generally seen as the basic tool for national survival and development in a rapidly changing global environment. The realization of this inevitability ICT to societal growth has spurred countries to formulate national IT policy and implementation strategies to respond to the emerging global reality so as to harness the enormous potentials associated with these technologies. While, gender issues in ICT policy has been on the international scene for only four years. Gender issues in ICT first came into international consciousness with a series of papers on gender issues, particularly in policy, presented at the World Telecommunications Development Conference organized by ITU in Valletta, Malta in 1998. The push to get the issue on the WTDC agenda came from UNIFEM, the United Nations University Institute on new Technologies and the Government of Canada, through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). Governments, including several African countries, also presented papers on gender issues. The presentations had considerable impact on the conference, and resulted in ITU's establishment of the Gender Task Force. From the gender side, the issue first appeared internationally the same year at the ECA Fortieth Anniversary Conference on Women and Economic Development. One of four tracks at the Conference was gender and ICTs, with an important highlight on gender in ICT policy (Marcelle 1998).

Advocacy for gender issues in ICTs gained further international momentum at the fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. Dumas (2006) points out that the Beijing Platform for Action contained strategic objectives and actions for governments and interest groups to implement so as to increase gender equality in information and communication technology among other critical areas. Article 234 of the Beijing Platform Section J acknowledged the inevitability for gender equality in information and communication technology: advances in information technology have facilitated a global network of communications that transcends national boundaries and has an impact on public policy, private attitudes and behaviour, especially of children and young adults. Everywhere the potential exists for the media to make a far greater contribution to the advancement of women (Dumas 2006). Section J defined two strategic objectives that address issues of access to and participation in ICT and media development. J.1. Increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision making in and through the media and new technologies of Communication (Dumas, 2006). According to Dumas (2006) these positions or declarations affirmed the importance of gender inclusion in ICT policy development at local, national, regional, and international levels. By 2000, policies to direct the ICT tools, so celebrated for their potential to effect change in developing nations, were only sparsely implemented toward programmes for women's development.

The debate on gender equality in the scheme of things has been on for quite some time in Nigeria. The proponents of these debates have argued that there is under-representation of women in virtually every sector of the Nigerian society. This explains why there is continuous agitation for more women representation in government. This however got a boost with the appointment of more women by former President Goodluck Jonathan. Among these appointments was the appointment of Ms Mobolaji Johnson the Minister of Information and Communication Technology.

Although the appointment of a woman as the Minister in charge of the ICT sector in Nigeria, gave boost to women participation in ICT, with specific initiatives such as the ICT Girls Club (Government collaboration with a private sector entity (Huawei) to train 1000 girls) and the Smart Women Nigerian

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