

Volume 2 No 2 (61 - 133)

ISSN: 1596 - 9487

Volume 3 No 1 (1 - 76)

LAGOS JOURNAL OF LIBRARY & INFORMATION SCIENCE

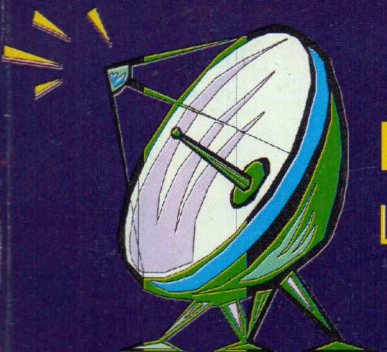
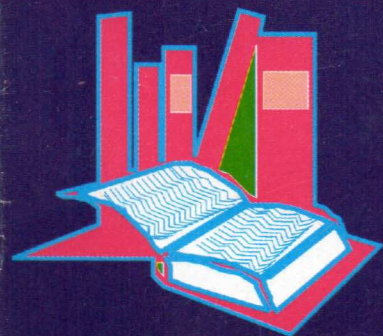
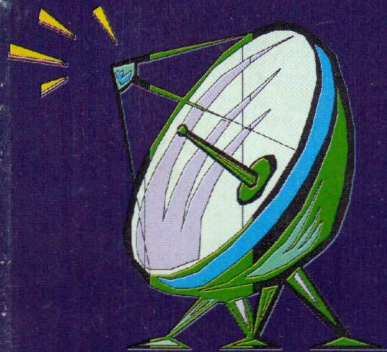
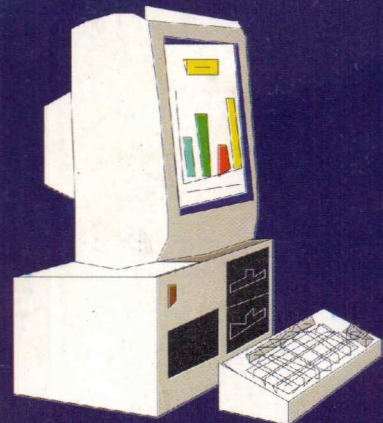
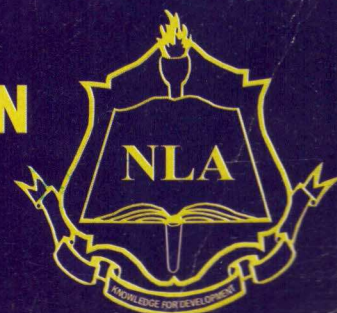
LAJLIS

VOLUME 2

NUMBER 2

2004

NIGERIAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
LAGOS STATE CHAPTER



CONTENTS

- | Volume 2, No. 2 | Volume 3, No. 1 |
|---|---|
| i. Editorial | i. Editorial |
| ii. Eminent Information Professional Column | ii. Abstracts & Keywords |
| iii. Abstracts & Keywords | |
| 61 The Information Needs of Artisans: Case Study of Artisans in Ibadan, Nigeria
<i>Mabawonku, Iyabo</i> | 1 Collaborative Research and Publication by Animal Scientists in a Nigerian Agricultural University
<i>Salaam, M. O.</i>
<i>Agboola, A. T.</i> |
| 77 Information Needs and Seeking Behaviour of Library Users, Result from Yaba College of Technology, Lagos, Nigeria
<i>Oyediran-Tidings, Stella O. (Mrs.)</i> | 7 A Comparative Analysis of School Library Development and Use in Selected Public and Private Secondary Schools in Ijebu and Remo Geo-political Zones of Ogun State
<i>Adetoro, Niran</i> |
| 89 Career Choice Among Nigerian University Students
<i>Abubakar, Tijani</i> | 16 Students' Access Usage and Awareness of Electronic Information Resources at the University College Hospital, University of Ibadan, Nigeria
<i>Ojo, R. A.</i>
<i>Akande, S. O.</i> |
| 96 Use of an Academic Library: A Survey on the Olabisi Onabajo University Libraries
<i>Oyesiku, F. A.</i>
<i>Oduwole, A.A.</i> | 25 Newspaper Collection Utilization Patterns in a Nigerian Academic Library
<i>Oyelude, A. A. (Mrs)</i>
<i>Oshinaike, A.B.</i> |
| 102 Decision-making for Effective Management in Academic Libraries: A Case Study of Three Selected Academic Libraries in Lagos State
<i>Ojo, J.A.</i>
<i>Fijabi, N. M. (Mrs.)</i> | 32 Library and Information Services: The Need for their Promotion in Ogun State, Nigeria
<i>Lawal, W. O.</i>
<i>Amusa, O.</i> |
| 111 Library Automation in Nigeria: The Kenneth Dike Library Experience
<i>Fatoki, Olayinka C.</i> | 43 Information Needs of Local Government Policy-makers: A Case Study of Ijebu-North Local Government of Ogun State
<i>Omagbemi, C. O.</i>
<i>Odunewu, A. O.</i>
<i>Osifeso, F. F. (Mrs.)</i> |
| 119 International Standards and Practices for Monographic and Serial Publications
<i>Nwosu, C. B.</i> | 50 Software Integration on Acquisition and Cataloguing in an Automated Library
<i>Adediji, O. O.</i> |
| 128 Automating Records Management and Information Retrieval
<i>Adediji, O. O.</i> | 56 Multi-dimensional Interventions of Information and Communication Technologies for Women Empowerment in Nigeria
<i>Anasi, Stella N. I. (Mrs.)</i> |
| | 67 Implementing Total Quality Management in Academic Libraries
<i>Egberongbe, H. S. (Mrs.)</i> |
| | 72 Towards an Integrated Records Management in Professional Associations and Societies in Nigeria
<i>Umar, Ibrahim</i> |

Lagos Journal of Library and Information Science

ISSN 1596-9487 © 2003 NLA, Lagos Chapter

Mission Statement

Lagos Journal of Library and Information Science aims to be a world class professional and scholarship journal.

Vision Statement

- * To serve as a vehicle for the dissemination of research results.
- * To provide a credible platform for scholarly communication.
- * To promote intellectual discourse among library, information, and other professionals in a multidisciplinary context.
- * To uphold the principles of professional excellence: originality, creativity and integrity.

Editor-In-Chief

Charles O. Omekwu (Ph.D)

Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies
University of Lagos Campus, Akoka, Lagos.
e-mail: omekwucharles@email.com

Editorial Board

Dr. Ibidapo Oketunji - Member

National Library of Nigeria,
Ijora, Lagos.

Mrs. H. S. Egberongbe - Member

University of Lagos Library,
University of Lagos, Akoka, Lagos

Mr. I. O. Ajibola - Member

National Library of Nigeria,
Sabo, Lagos.

Mrs. H.O.J. Akinade - Member

College of Medicine Library,
Idi-Araba, Lagos.

Mr. Toyin Dina - Member

Centre for Management Dev.,
Lagos - Member

Mrs. N. B. Yusuf - Business Manager

National Library of Nigeria,
Ijora, Lagos.

Editorial Assistants

Y. Zaid (Mrs.)

University of Lagos Library,
Akoka, Yaba, Lagos.

F. A. Fijabi

Yaba College of Technology Library,
Yaba, Lagos.

U. Anyaogu (Mrs.)

Nig. Inst. of Advanced Legal Studies Library,
University of Lagos Campus,
Akoka, Yaba, Lagos.

Editorial Advisers

*** Prof. A. O. Aina**

Dept. of Library & Information Studies
University of Botswana,
Private Bag 0022
Gaborone, Botswana.

*** Prof. A. A. Alemna**

Balm Library
University of Ghana
P. O. Box 24, Lagos, Ghana.

*** Dr. S. Olajire Olanlokun**

University of Lagos Library,
Akoka, Yaba, Lagos.

*** Gboyega, Banjo**

Musun Centre, Lagos.

*** Mrs. Oluremi Jegede**

Lagos.

Website Address:

The International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publication has agreed to host LAJLIS at the African Journal Online Website: <http://www.ajol.info>



Designed and Printed by
IKOFA COMMERCIAL PRESS LIMITED
20, Mutairu Street, Pedro-Road,
P. O. Box 459 Shomolu Lagos.
*0802 346 0077

Multi-Dimensional Interventions of Information and Communication Technologies for Women Empowerment in Nigeria

Current Theme

Anasi, Stella M. N. (Mrs.)



The author

Anasi, Stella M. N. (Mrs.) Main Library, University of Lagos, Akoka – Lagos. E-mail: anasistella@yahoo.com

Keywords

Information, Communication, Technologies, Empowerment, Women, Nigeria

Abstract

The paper examines the role of information and information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the socio-economic empowerment of women. It highlights the critical contributions of ICTs towards women development and empowerment.

Socio-economic factors which impede women empowerment as well as social benefits of women empowerment are discussed. Finally, the paper recommends team work approach involving women, government and non-governmental agencies in formulation of policies and programmes. Every woman should endeavour to acquire technological skills and knowledge necessary for maximal utilization of the provisions of ICTs. Women non-governmental agencies in Nigeria should build a network to access local, national and global information, and government should increase access to education for women and the girl-child and ensure that every women development policy has information and communication component.

INTRODUCTION

Information is a vital resource necessary in every facet of the struggle for women empowerment. It

provides the leverage required for economic and political empowerment of women in a male dominated society. The transformation of women folks from the age-long state of servitude, impoverishment and marginalization cannot be conceived and successfully executed without accessing, utilizing and harnessing available information sources.

The emergence of computers, telecommunications networks and powerful new expert systems has revolutionized every aspect of the social, political and economic life of men and women. With information and communication technologies women all over the world now have fresh choices and opportunities at their disposal. ICT is a boon that offers women opportunity to achieve their dreams and aspirations. As a technology it is more friendly, democratic and participatory for women than the traditional media (television, radio and the press). It also provides increased opportunities for women to have access to education, information and knowledge.

The Nigerian Situation

Research reports and statistics paint a depressing picture of the social, political and economic conditions of women in developing countries in general and Nigeria in particular. Health statistics show that in year 2003 maternal death rate in Nigeria was 37,000. The global report indicated that Nigeria ranks second in the list of countries with high maternal deaths (Anaele, 2003). In 2004, maternal mortality rate in Nigeria was 704 per 100,000 live births. In South West maternal mortality rate was 165 per 100,000 live births while in North East it was 1,549 per 100,000 live births. This is about one of the highest in the world. (Grange, 2004).

Similarly, in Nigeria as well as in other African countries Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) increasingly is becoming a woman's disease. Currently, it is estimated that more than 2.5 million women are living with HIV in West Africa and women make up over 53 per cent of all adults infected. Many African women than men are infected with HIV because women are morphologically more vulnerable to HIV infection by heterosexual transmission. The female reproductive organ with its large mucosal surface normally remains in contact with the sperm for a longer time than the male organ which is

external. Also, untreated sexually transmitted diseases may result in ulceration of the vaginal wall which acts as access point for HIV. Equally, many cultural factors such as wife exchange, wife hospitality, reproductive and care-giving roles of women contribute to the high rates of infection among women. Presently, in Nigeria, more young girls are getting infected than young boys. (Otiye-Igbuzor, 2003; Ogunbunmi, 2004; Muanya, 2003).

In the same vein, statistics on education reveals high level of illiteracy among women. Sani (2001) wrote that in 1996 the total literacy rate among men and women in Nigeria was 56.1 per cent and 41.2 per cent respectively. A gap of about 15 per cent. Also, Otiye-Igbuzor (2003) observed that the total percentage of enrolment in Nigeria for girls was 47.3 per cent and for boys 67.3 per cent. Thus, the education of boys is given priority over that of girls.

Worse still, the denial of women's right to inheritance, the dehumanizing and dangerous widowhood practices based on the idea of the inferiority of women and other discriminatory religions and socio-cultural practices are unacceptable. For example, forced and early marriages, female genital mutilation, domestic violence against women, rape etc. dehumanizes womanhood. Balogun (2004a) lamented that "the extent.... to which the dignity of the Nigerian women is trampled upon by our male dominated society is beyond imagination".

The Nigeria experience shows that politically men dominate the arena of power while women are only used to achieve men's political aspirations. This reflects in the number of women representation in executive and legislative positions. In 1999 there was one female deputy governor and in 2003, two females deputy governors. Among the lawmakers there was 4 per cent female representation in the House of Representatives in 1999 and 6 per cent in 2003, while women representation in the Senate in 1999 and 2003 was 3 per cent. Overall women appointment to executive position was 13 per cent in 1999 and 12 per cent in 2003. (Balogun, 2004a, Udegbe, 2003).

Ironically, majority of women in Nigeria are poor with no access to land and credit facilities yet they contribute 60 per cent of the nation's food produce and constitute about 70 per cent of the rural agricultural workforce. (Balogun, 2004b). The above situation forms the basis for the clamor and agitation for women empowerment.

Interestingly, a number of international and national conferences aimed at advancing the course of women were held. The most successful of all was the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995. In spite of the Platform for Action (PFA) and adoption of the objectives of this conference by most countries including Nigeria, women in this country are still marginalized and sideline in social, economic and public affairs.

The Concept of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTS).

The convergence of computers and telecommunication technologies led to the emergence of a new creation – information and communication technologies. Information and communication technologies according to Hamelink (1997) "encompass all those technologies that enable the handling of information and facilitate different forms of communication among human actors, between human beings and electronic systems, and among electronic systems".

This includes all communication devices or applications such as radio, television, cellular phones, computer and network, hardware and software, satellite systems as well as the various services and applications associated with them like video conferencing, teleconferencing, etc. Hamelink (1997) categorized these technologies into five namely capturing technologies, storage technologies, processing technologies, communications technologies, and display technologies,

- Capturing technologies are input devices that collect and convert information into digital form. Such devices include keyboards, mice, track balls, touch screens, voice recognition systems, bar code readers, image scanners and palm-size camcorders.

- Storage technologies are variety of devices use to store, and retrieve information in digital form. Among these are magnetic tapes, floppy disks, hard disks, RAM disks, optical disks (such as CDROMS) erasable disks and smart cards (credit-card, cards with memory and processing capacity for financial transactions or medical data).
- Processing technologies are the systems and applications software that is required for the performance of digital ICTS.
- Communications technologies are devices, methods and networks to transmit information in digital form. They include digital broadcasting, integrated services digital networks, digital cellular networks, local area networks (LANs), wide area networks (WANs) such as the internet), electronic bulletin boards, modems, transmission media such as fibre optics, cellular phones and fax machines, and digital transmission technologies for mobile space communications (the new Low Earth Orbit satellite voice and data services).
- Display technologies are variety of output devices for the display of digitized information. Such devices include display screens for computers, digital television sets with automatic picture adjustment, set-top boxes for video-on-demand, printers, digital video discs (which might replace CDROM drives and audio CD players), voice synthesizers and virtual reality helmets.

The Concept of Women Empowerment

The word empowerment has become synonymous with women's quest and struggle for economic and political empowerment. The verb to empower, according to Whetten, Cameron and Woods (1996) means "to enable; it means to help people develop a sense of self-efficacy; it means to overcome causes of powerlessness or helplessness; it means to energize people to take action" Empowerment is therefore both self-initiated and initiated by others. It is "an act of building, developing and increasing power through cooperation, sharing responsibility and working together. (Oni, 2001).

Buttressing the above view, Batliwala (1995) as cited by Medel-Anonuevo (1997) asserted that "empowerment is the process...whereby the powerless or less powerful members of a society gain greater access and control over material and knowledge resources, challenge the ideologies of discrimination and subordination, and transform the institutions and structures through which unequal access and control over resources is sustained and perpetuated. This implies that empowerment is dynamic and revolutionary in nature. It liberates and breaks social and cultural boundaries.

On the other hand, women empowerment "is the process by which women gain inner power to express and defend their rights and gain greater self confidence, self identity, self esteem and control over their own lives, personal and social relationships". (Sani,2001). But, Bhasin (1992) argued that women empowerment implies "empowerment of a feminist thinking and ideology, empowerment of feminine principles". She maintained that women empowerment means:

- recognizing women's contribution, women's knowledge;
- helping women fight their own fears, and feelings of inadequacy and inferiority;
- women enhancing their self respect and self-dignity;
- women controlling their own bodies;
- women becoming economically independent and self reliant;
- women controlling resources like land and property;
- reducing women's burden of work, specially within the home;
- promoting qualities of nurturing, caring, gentleness not just in women but also in men.

The process of women empowerment articulated by Centre for Development and Population Activities (1997) are in four major stages. These are access, conscientization, action and equity.

- Access is the stage at which women are able to gain access to all types of resources on an equitable basis with men.

- Conscientization is the stage at which women have become aware of their rights and recognize gender inequities. This understanding enhances women's ability to take control over their own lives and take advantage of development programs targeted at women.
- Action is the stage at which women increase their participation in decisions and activities that directly affect their well being.
- Equity is the stage at which women have fair and appropriate access to and control of resources and their distribution. This implies that women have gained the ability to participate fully in decision making and to set an agenda that responds to their specific needs.

Women empowerment is therefore a dynamic and ongoing process. It is a process in which women empower and get empowered. The goals of women empowerment are:

- (a) to challenge and transform the ideology and practice of women's subordination;
- (b) to transform the structures and institutions which have upheld and reinforced this discrimination such as the family, caste, class, ethnicity, and the social, economic and political structures and institutions including religion, education systems, the media, the law, top-down development models etc. and
- (c) to gain access and control over material and knowledge resources. (Medel-Anonuevo, 1997).

Indeed, women empowerment cut across social, economic and political empowerment. It entails the removal of all discriminatory barriers against women which impede their self development and ability to contribute meaningfully to local, national and global development.

Information and Women Empowerment

Information is undoubtedly a powerful tool required in all stages of women empowerment – access, conscientization, action and equity. It is the battle axe vital in the struggle and fight for women emancipation and freedom. Historically, for example, in 1929 information (rumours) reached Aba

women that the British Colonial masters and their warrant chief are about to impose stringent and inhuman taxation on women, the Aba women leaders sensitized and mobilized other women through their strong unions and efficient market networks to resist such obnoxious idea. The protest was successfully prosecuted and the colonial masters were forced to change their position. Thus, the taxation of women was stopped, many warrant chiefs were dismissed and some prosecuted and also a few women court members appointed. (Nwankwo, 1996).

What then is information? Information is an elusive and complex concept. Professionals from different background have tried to define and explain the information concept. According to Webster (1983) information is news or intelligence communicated by word or writing, facts or data; knowledge derived from reading or instruction or gathered in any way. This connotes that testimonies, rumours, propagandas and stories shared among friends, neighbours or read from printed media constitute information.

Egberendu (1999) conceives information as a process which enables us to make informed decisions and judgements. He stated that "information is the process by which the events of the external world are received and it gives us the opportunity to form judgement and take decisions." Burch and Grudnitski (1989) view information as data that have been put into meaningful and useful context and communicated to the recipient who uses it to make decisions Data are processed through models to create information. In other words before processed data could qualify as information it must be able to enhance the degree of decision accuracy of an individual or organization. Alabi (2004) asserted that the real value of information is completely dependent on its usefulness in increasing knowledge, diminishing ignorance and in enhancing decision-making.

From a broader perspective, Schramm and Roberts (1972) maintained that information is not limited to news or facts or what is taught in the classroom or contained in reference books. It is any content that reduces uncertainty or the number of alternative

possibilities in a situation. It may include emotions, it may include facts, opinions or guidance or persuasion. Information, therefore, assists to minimise the degree of uncertainty in any given situation.

Unfortunately, most Nigerian women are either completely ignorant of their roles in the success of development programmes planned for them or under-informed on the benefits of such programmes or how best to utilise them to improve their lives. For example, the Better Life Programme for Rural Women was introduced in 1985 by Mrs. Maryam Babangida. The main thrust of the programme was alleviation of rural poverty and improvement of the quality of life and status of the rural women. (Sani, 2001) Regrettably, the programme was hijacked by elitist women at the corridors of power and used for self-glorification and self-aggrandizement.

Therefore, women need information. They need to know what information is being disseminated about them and how to influence such information. Women need information that will assist them in analyzing the possibilities for improving their livelihoods and to empower themselves in order to assume responsibility at different levels of decision-making, management and planning processes.

No doubt, access to information will provide women with opportunities to exchange opinions engage in dialogue and constructive communication with government and policy makers and more importantly participate in the management of women affairs as well as influence policies and decisions that affect them. Information will give women the much needed economic and political power and also create opportunities for them to develop their potentials beyond performing the traditional domestic tasks so that they can take their place in community, national and global development.

Information and Communication Technologies and Women Empowerment

Advances in information and communication technologies have great potentials for empowering women. They offer opportunities for women to

achieve their social, political and educational aspirations. A survey conducted by Isis International Manila in 2000 indicates that women's organizations are increasingly using electronic medium (internet) to put forward their advocacy and build solidarity. For example, in China the percentage of women users if internet increased from 12.3 per cent to 30.4 per cent from 1997-2001. They have also established their own portals and websites. The survey also reveals that the more educated and articulate urban women organizations have greater visibility and often take the initiative to mobilize grassroots women through their organizations. (Women Action, 2000).

However, there is no statistical data immediately available to show the exact number of women non-governmental organizations in Nigeria who are accessing the internet for information. But certainly many of them have been accessing the internet for information on donor assistance and international and regional activities relating to women" cause, and re-packing such information to achieve their noble objectives. Nwokolo (2003) maintained that African Women through internet and mobile phones have access to information which has brought them out of the cocoon and helped them to form organizations to advance their course.

No doubt access to the internet resources which for now remains the best democratic way to search for information as well as the cheapest means of communication if harnessed will help women to see unlimited possibilities to express themselves and to argue for changes needed in our socio-cultural milieu. Indeed, information and communication technologies (ICTs) have assisted women's' organizations with different interests and agendas to converge both at national, regional and global levels to address issues that affect them.

In addition, the Food and Agricultural Organization (2000) asserted that "with access to information and communication technologies, women are empowered, their skills enhanced, their knowledge increased and thus, their sphere of action is extended". They further contented that information as means of empowering women will depend on the following measures:-

- Identifying national networks that disseminate information, for and with.... Women, and supporting their connection to regional and global networks in order to strengthen South-North and South-South dialogue;
- Analysing the information transmitted (content and format) and the mechanisms for its diffusion in order to improve interactive communications strategies;
- Creating an environment in which Women are encouraged to join networks that enable them to make their opinions heard and to voice their priorities in their own terms with their own modes of communication.
- Examining the capacity of these networks to package and disseminate information for women;
- Using both modern and traditional means of communication particularly radio, to strength women's participation in decision making processes;
- Creating women-specific information centres that focus on providing documentation, advice and research and emphasize the knowledge and skills of women (through exhibitions, debates, films, publications, etc.);
- Training ... women in information technologies that are tailored to their own environment.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and Women Education

Information and communication technologies break socio-cultural barriers such as purdah and certain discriminatory widowhood practices which hitherto restrict the freedom and movement of Nigerian women thereby hindering access to conventional educational institutions and facilities. Through online teaching and learning women can acquire skills and attain the highest level of education from their homes. Omekwu (2001) noted that information and communication technologies have created a completely new world of learning and teaching via computer-based teleconferencing, web school, web teachers, online learning modules and courses. These provide unlimited opportunities for women education and development. He cited Peat and Fernandez who affirmed that:

Computer learning packages and the web can offer a variety of opportunities for learning, ranging from non-interactive content provision to highly interactive student-centred learning experiences. The learning materials ... including information websites, computer learning packages as tutorial or revision material, computer learning packages made by students, virtual field trips, simulations, and virtual laboratories. In addition, students and teachers are using the web for communicating amongst themselves via e-mail, newsgroups and discussion lists, video conferencing for both local and global communications, and tele-collaborative projects.

Interestingly, e-learning system will soon replace the age-old e-chalk and board tradition of teaching in Nigerian Universities. For instance, the University of Nigeria Nsukka has launched its N500 million e-learning project and will acquire over 3,000 computers in all the faculties. Also the University of Lagos has put in place the fibre-optics infrastructure, VSAT and Visual Data Centres, Sun Microsystems as well as UNILAG Radio 103.IFM. Other institutions such as University of Ibadan, University of Ado-Ekiti, University of Port Harcourt, University of Maiduguri University of Benin, Ahmadu Bello University, Yaba College of Technology, Adeniran ogunsanya College of Education etc. have drawn up plans to introduce virtual learning. (Edukugbo,2004). Similarly, African Virtual University (AVU) has become a reality in three Universities in Ghana University of Legon, the University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, and the University of Cape Coast. All these imply that women can have access to unlimited educational resources from their homes.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTS) and Women Employment

Women have discovered the liberating of information and communication technologies and their rich possibilities. Reports point to the fact that ICTs have given women employment. Omekwu (2001) writes that internet provides an avalanche of information on job opportunities through web-based job agencies that match job seekers curricular vitae with employment vacancies. For example, South

Korean women are now seeking employment outside the home and are also making their presence felt in the traditionally male-dominated world of business particularly in the area of information and communication technology (Women Action, 2000).

Supporting the above view, Nwokolo (2004) observed that there is a shift in emphasis from public sector employment to informal sector employment among women. Women are now defecting from jobs that take them away from their family to set up their own business as a result of wide opportunities created by the internet. There are now female consultants, website designers and many more use the web for businesses. And for those who are still in public sector employment, internet and e-mail has made it possible for them to work from their homes. Also, physical offices are being replaced by digital or virtual ones via teleconferencing. This makes it possible for a woman to live in New York and be working in California hence face-to-face communication is becoming less imperative.

Information and Communication Technology and Caretaking of Children

Naturally women nurture children and take care of adolescents. Omekwu (2001) observed that information and communication technology institutions and professionals have tools, techniques, and creativity to get young people excitingly engaged. For instance, Farnet Systems Ibadan introduced e-vacation – an online learning programme for pupils and students from age six upwards on summer holiday. Apart from academics, the programme offers young ones opportunity for leisure and relaxation through online chats, e-cartoons, e-games, e-jokes, e-pals etc. While the students are busy with the e-vacation programme, their mothers are free to engage in more productive economic activities.

Information and Communication Technology and Reproductive Health Care

Through the internet women can obtain medical counselling and prescriptions. Access to medical information on family planning, pre-natal and postnatal care, reproductive health right, nutrition,

breast-feeding etc. abound in the web. Such information and services help to reduce maternal morbidity and mortality.

Information and Communication Technology and Social Interaction

Unlimited opportunities for social interaction abound in the net. Women even those who are restricted by socio-cultural and religious practices can communicate and interact with other women through e-pal, Lister, newsgroup, online chat etc. These provide avenues for women to know what is happening within and outside their immediate environment.

Information and Communication Technology and Women Research

A number of research on women and women related issues such as breast cancer, infertility among women, prevention and management of HIV/AIDS in women, Vasico Vagina/Fistula (VFF), disabled women etc. is being carried out by individuals, government and non-governmental agencies. Undoubtedly, ICT is expanding the frontiers of research and publishing globally. The internet and world-wide web provide extraordinarily rich and varied content which serve as highly flexible platform for the support of research activities. Women especially in academics benefit from internet by having almost unlimited access to information and new advances in research. Commenting on the profound impact made by information and communication technologies on research, conferences and publishing, Dada (2000) quoted Nottage (1998) who affirmed that:

Information technology provides the researchers with information without the restriction of time, space or format. Large information is obtained from single CD-ROM. A researcher in Faculty of Education can visit the libraries of Universities of Oxford or Harvard and from his desktop conduct literature searches relevant to his work. He can download, print or order online needed materials. Moreover, with search engines like Google, Mama, Alta Vista, Lycos and Yahoo, researchers can obtain information on almost all subjects from all over the world.

Social Benefits of Women Empowerment

Sani (2001), Emunemu and Ayeni (2003) articulated the benefits that will accrue as rewards of women empowerment thus:

- Increase in economic productivity, growth and development;
- Slow down in population growth;
- Greater participation in national development'
- Decrease in child mortality and improved family wellbeing;
- Increase in access to education of children.

There is no doubt that an empowered woman has skills, relevant and strategic information, more self-determination, a sense of self-efficacy and self-confidence to be a better mother, a productive worker and an enlightened citizen. Empowered women not only possess the wherewithal to accomplish something, they also think of themselves differently than they did before they were empowered.

Barriers to Women Empowerment in Nigeria

Disempowerment of women is an age long issue which is entrenched in all facets of our socio-economic and political life. Nwankwo (1996) captures this scenario more appropriately. She declared that "the first strand of this disempowering and restraining web is usually woven at home, and many a time, with the help of women themselves" Worse still, Balogun² (2004) lamented that "our traditions and cultures ... regard women as appendages or subordinates of men even where women have excelled in education, ability and performance". Constraints to women empowerment therefore abound in all spheres of our society. A few of them will be discussed here.

1. Poverty:

In most developing countries and in Nigeria in particular, poverty is feminized. A survey of female poverty in 114 developing countries by International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in 1992

showed that out of 939 million rural poor, women represent the majority – 565 million rural women, 16 million of these rural women care for 80 million others and are landless and unable to rise above poverty level. (Ogundipe, 1993). In Nigeria, 70 per cent of the population are believed to live below the poverty level and majority of the poor are women. Women have no access to credit facilities, no access to land and family inheritance and all their reproductive and domestic responsibilities are not monetized. (Ogunbunmi, 2004). Otive-Igbuzor (2003) declared that "it is quite absurd that though women are looked upon to reproduce and replenish the workforce of nations they are expected to pay rather than be paid for rendering this service."

2. Illiteracy:

In Nigeria, according to UNESCO estimates, the rate of adult illiteracy in 1995 averaged 42.9 per cent. For males, it was 32.7 per cent and for females 42 per cent. (Mabawonku, 2001). This implies that women have limited access to education which is one of the most important tools for women empowerment. Sani (2001) observed that "in most institutions of learning, a high number of drop-outs are girls who resort to street hawking or who are given out in early marriage."

3. Technophobia:

Most Nigerian women are on the other side of the digital divide without access to information and communication technology. Internet and its technology continues to intimidate many women and some of them considers it an area best left to the men. This is because science and technology education continues to be biased against women and girls. In most schools the girl-child and women are encouraged to pursue careers relating to their roles as caregivers such as catering, teaching, sewing, secretarial studies etc. Only a few are in engineering, computer systems administration and technical development. Thus most women have no knowledge and skills to utilize information and communication channels. If they will benefit from the new technologies they require training in computer and internet literacy. (Women Action, 2000, Otive-Igbuzor, 2003, Balogun, 2004a).

4. Inadequate Infrastructure:

Most rural communities where a majority of Nigerian women reside lack information and telecommunication facilities. And where they are available they are not easily accessible due to poor road networks. Also, the high cost of computer equipment and connections as well as erratic electricity supply further exacerbates the situation.

5. Women's Low Readership:

Nwankwo (1996) stressed that studies indicate that women read much less than men. Their relatively lower readership makes them less knowledgeable about what is going on in the public and private sectors and the world around them. This invariably makes them feel incompetent and inadequate about commenting on issues that affect them.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing discussions, it does appear that women empowerment is imperative if they will contribute their quota towards socio-economic development of Nigeria. Information and communication technologies proffer a veritable platform for the empowerment of women. It creates varied opportunities and possibilities for the actualisation of this noble objective. With information and communication technologies women can attain the highest level of education and they can have flexible job arrangements which allow them to work from home and have less busy work schedule. With education and employment, women will have the economic power to participate actively in Nigerian politics. The benefits that will accrue as a result of full participation of women in socio-economic and political activities in Nigeria cannot be quantified.

In order to achieve these, women, government and non-governmental agencies should come together as team to formulate policies and programmes that are geared towards women empowerment. Women should no longer sit on the fence and watch things happen, they should come out of their cocoons and speak out their minds on issues that affect them. Women should acquire necessary technological skills and knowledge in order to face the challenges

of the digital age so as to maximally utilize the benefits of its provisions in the campaign for their empowerment. Women in various professions should be gender sensitive. Female writers, scholars and information experts should carry out in-depth research on women and women-related issues with aim of documenting the contributions of women to national development and also paint a better picture of womanhood rather than reinforcing age-old stereotypes and presenting negative images of women.

In addition, women non-governmental organizations in Nigeria should build a network that will give them access to information on local, national and global issues so as to enhance their performance. They should also collaborate with government agencies created to handle women affair to ensure that limited resources are optimally utilized to achieve set objectives.

Similarly, the government should:

- give women and the girl-child increased access to education and training (formal and functional) for sustainable development;
- enhance information flow among women by organising conferences, workshops, symposia and seminars;
- give access to credit facilities and other support mechanism for women investors;
- provide adequate information and telecommunication infrastructures in both rural and urban areas;
- co-ordinate information generated and disseminated by key stakeholders in every sector;
- ensure that every women development policy should include an information and communication component;
- integrate all available sources of information to enhance accessibility and visibility of information needs of women;
- increase budget allocation for women and women related programmes and agencies.

However, it is necessary to point out that information and communication technologies alone cannot change oppressive socio-economic and political systems unless they are utilized correctly and imaginatively, they can narrow the gap between men and women.

REFERENCES

- Alabi, B. (2004, April 30).** Evolving role of ICT in teaching, research. *Nigerian Tribune*. p. 30.
- Anaele, A. (2003, October 29).** Maternal mortality: Nigeria ranks second in the world. *The Punch*. p. 43.
- Balogun, A.A. (2004a).** The role of women in public administration in Nigeria. *The Constitution: a Journal of Constitutional Development*. 4(2), 31-36.
- Balogun, S. (2004b, January 9).** FG will empower Women. *New Age*. p. 6.
- Bhasin, K. (1992).** Education for women's empowerment: some reflections. *Journal of Adult Education and Development*. 39, 11-25.
- Burch, G.C. and Grudnitski, G. (1989).** Information Systems: theory and practice. (5th edition). New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Centre for Development and Population Activities. (1997).** Women on the move. Lagos: Centre for Development and Population Activities.
- Dada, T.O. (2000).** Information strategies for legal education and administration of justice in West Africa. (Paper presented at West African Legal Education Association, Abuja, December 2000), 18-19.
- Edukugho, E. (2004, December 23).** Varsities, Polytechnics in rush to acquire e-learning system. *Vanguard*. p. 26.
- Egberendu, M. (1999, March 25).** Library, Archives, information in Nigeria. *Nigerian Tribune*. p. 25.
- Emunemu, B.O. and Ayeni, A.O. (2003).** The Social benefits of educating girls and women in Nigeria. In J.O. Babalola and S.O. Adedeji (Eds.). *Contemporary issues in educational management A book of honour*. pp. 137-148.
- Ibadan: Department of Educational Management, University of Ibadan.
- Food and Agriculture Organizations (2000).** Gender and food security: The role of information-strategy for action. Rome Food Agriculture Organization.
- Grange, A.O. (2004, December 23).** Let the milk of human kindness flow that our children may live. *Vanguard*. pp. 28, 29.
- Hamelink, C.J. (1997).** New Information and communication technologies, social development and cultural change. General: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.
- Mabawonku, I. (2001).** Educating women for environmental development in Nigeria: The role of information agents and NGOs. *Ibadan Journal of Educational Studies*. 1(1), 197-214.
- Medel-Anonuevo, C. (1997).** Learning gender justice: The challenge for adult education in the 21st century. *Journal of Adult Education and Development*. 49, 81-90.
- Muanya, C. (2003, October 16).** Study highlights nutritional care and support for women with AIDS in Africa. *The Guardian*. p. 43.
- Nwankwo, N. (1996).** Gender equality in Nigerian politics. Lagos: Deutchetz Publishers.
- Nwokolo, C. (2003, November 18).** Women's role in an age of dot.com. *The Punch*. p. 16.
- Ogunbunmi, K. (2004, December 12).** How AIDS may impede Nigeria's growth, by UNDP. *The Guardian*. p. 7.
- Ogundipe, S. (2004, March 16).** When people like me come out, you see the face of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. *Vanguard*. p. 30.
- Omekwu, C.O. (2001).** Advances in information technology: implications for the future of education in Nigeria. A paper presented at the first Faculty of Education Annual Conference at the Conference Centre, University of Ibadan, 31st July-3rd August, 2001. 13p.
- Oni, A.A. (2001).** Women political empowerment in a democratic Nigeria: Can education solve

it? *Ibadan Journal of Educational Studies*. 1(1), 182-196.

Otive-Igbuzor, E.J. (2003). HIV/AIDS in Nigeria: re-thinking women's vulnerabilities beyond the biomedical paradigm. *Nigerian Journal of Health and Biomedical Sciences*. 2(1), 1-6.

Sani, H. (2001). Women and national development. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited.

Schramm, W. and Roberts, D.F. (1972). The process and effects of mass communication. London: University of Illinois Press.

Udegbe, I.B. (2003, August 12). Gender, power and political leadership in Nigeria. *The Comet*. p. 32.

Webster Reference Dictionary of English. (1983). New York: Delair Publishing.

Whetten, D.A.; Cameron, K., and Woods, M. (1996). Effective empowerment and delegation: developing management skills. London: Harper Collins Publishers Ltd.

Women Action (2000). Women and media for social change: communications initiatives worldwide. Canada: Women Action.