

Information Communication and Technology; The Millennium Tool for Entrepreneurial Empowerment of Women

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Abstract

This paper is focused on Information Communication Technology as the millennium tool for Entrepreneurial Empowerment of women. It also highlighted the diversity of information communication and technology, indicators of empowerment. Little success has been achieved in the empowerment of women in Nigeria despite efforts of government and public organisations. This paper identified information communication technology as the missing-link in the education enterprise that should be giving a priority in order to achieve the desired success in the entrepreneurial empowerment of women in Nigeria. The writer recommends among others that there should be public-private partnership to make possible innovative approach in the training of women entrepreneurs in ICT through the sponsoring of e-learning initiatives or peer-peer informal learning strategies for women entrepreneurs.

KEYWORDS: Information communication and technology (ICT), entrepreneur, empowerment, women empowerment.

Introduction

In this new age, it is an obvious fact that women empowerment is a key to national development. As a result many countries are focussing on women by investing heavily in their education, skill development, health and their leadership training. Nigeria can not be left behind especially as a developing country where women constitute majority of the overall population. One of the major steps to achieve this dream is through entrepreneurial education. This involves the acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competencies as equipment for the individual to live and contributes to the development of the society. Entrepreneurial empowerment of women is a veritable tool for national development and transformation. This position is supported by (Olagunju, (2004): Ikechi and Edward, (2009) when they asserted that entrepreneurship act as a tool for income generation, raising productivity through innovation, facilitating the transfer of technology, playing key role in commercialising new products, redistribution of wealth and income, ensuring foreign exchanges and promoting social welfare. From the foregoing, the entrepreneur is the chief coordinator and organiser of the production process.

Concept of Information Communication and Technology (ICT).

The term, information communication and technology, is used in different ways by different people. To some, it denotes the development of devices and systems and their application in the collection, generation, communication, recording, re-arrangement and exploitation of information. By this definition, information communication and technology includes all applications and commodities ever invented by man by which information is transferred, recorded, edited, stored, manipulated or disseminated (Groneman 1995). Though some modern authors view information communication and technology as limited to the application of recently invented computer and telecommunication technologies to capture, storage and dissemination of vocal, pictorial, textual and numerical information, Harrod, (1987); Javis, 1990), it is clear that its realms transcend just these recent inventions. Igbino (2005) defined ICT as the use of skill in combining information and communication process and devices to obtain, analyse, store, recall and transmit accurate information from one place to another at a very high speed. Orimolade (1999) cited in Ayeni (2005) defined ICT as the use of computers and telecommunication gadgets in information processing. Adebajo and Adebayo (2008) perceived ICT to be technological facilities that are used to receive, transmit, create, store and retrieve information. On the other hand, information communication and technology (ICT) is defined as a diverse set of tools and resources used to communicate, create, disseminate, store and manage information.

According to Okpara (2004), information communication and technology is the science of creating, collating, storing, and processing, utilising and disseminating data. Today, there is increasing interest in how computers and internet can improve education at all levels, in both formal and non-formal settings. Older ICTs such as radio and Television have for over forty years been used for open and distance learning, although print remains the cheapest, most accessible and therefore the most instructional delivery mechanism in both developed and developing countries. Information communication and technology (ICT) can be seen as the means of combining electronic and telecommunication devices to retrieve, analyse, create, store, recall and transmit information.

Meaning of Empowerment

There is no universally acceptable definition of empowerment. Empowerment is a construct shared by many disciplines and areas; community development, psychology, education, economics, and studies of social movements and organisations, among others. In recent empowerment literature, the meaning of the term empowerment is also assumed rather than explained or defined. According to Rapport (1984), it is easy to define empowerment by its absence but difficult to define in action as it takes on different forms in different people and contexts. Zimmerman (1984) has noted that asserting a single definition of empowerment may make attempts to achieve its formulaic or prescription like contradicting the very concept of empowerment. According to Bailey (1992), empowerment is a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that foster power (that is, the capacity to implement) in people for use in their own lives, their communities, and their society, by acting on issues that they define as important. These three components of the above definitions are basic to any understanding of empowerment.

Empowerment is a multi-dimensional social process. It is multi-dimensional in that it occurs within sociological, psychological, economic, and other dimensions. Empowerment also occurs at various levels, such as individual, group and community. Since it occurs in relationship to others, it is a process that is similar to a path or journey, one that develops as we work through it. Empowerment is a process of increasing the assets and capabilities of individuals or groups to make purposive choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Empowered people have freedom of choice and action. This in turn enables them to better influence the course of their lives and the decisions which affect them Eduwen, (2014).

In actual fact, empowerment speaks to self-determined change. It connotes bringing together the supply and demand sides of development, changing the environment within which poor people live and helping them build and capitalize on their attributes, from education and health care to governance and economic policy and activities which seeks to empower poor people and are expected to increase development opportunities, enhance development outcomes and improve people's quality of life.

What is women empowerment?

Women empowerment simply implies giving opportunities to women who were originally, excluded from participation in matters that impacts on their welfare. This entails enabling women to perceive them as having the capacity and the right to influence their decision area. Moser (1989) defined women empowerment as the capacity of women to increase their own self reliance and internal strength, the right to determine choices in life and to influence the direction of change through the ability to gain control over material and non-material resources. Bakari (2001) stated that in the light of Moser's definition of women empowerment, it is important to note that the process of women's empowerment embraces areas of self-reliance, internal strength and capacity that entail the social, economic as well as political aspects of women's lives. Women must feel that they are able rather than unable to effectively participate in the issues that impact on their lives. From the foregoing, it is very clear that women empowerment is a deliberate policy of making women aware of their situation through raising their consciousness to determine their destiny in life.

Again, women empowerment is best defined as the expansion of agency throughout women's lives so that they become self-reliant, and a bridge to social change and community connectedness. It is on record that government at all levels including Federal, State, Local, International government agencies and non-profit community based organisations created programmes centred on women empowerment. Hence, with women empowerment the future prosperity of nations is guaranteed because these are people that would be actively involved in the economy, handle many offices and functions in government and even invest in our youths who are leaders of tomorrow.

Indicators of empowerment

The indicators of empowerment are multifaceted. According to Bookman and Morgan (1984), some indicators of empowerment are as follows:

1. Confidence and understanding: example of people taking on new

responsibility, chairing meetings, organising events and initiating new activities, keeping clear records and good accounts or the level of contact with local officials concerning issues which are of concern/interest to the local community.

2. Skills in analysis and communication: development and refinement of group aims and objectives, meeting the officials and talking to local schools, letter writing, and contribution to local group newsletters, preparation of group strategies and action plans.
3. Trust, caring and tolerance: evidence of the delegation of responsibility within the group; initiative by the group to involve/contact disadvantaged and vulnerable people in the community, initiatives that encourage open debate and represent minority interest, providing additional facilities for members of the community e.g. organising regular breast cancer screening or visit by specialist in health care, youth work, planning law or community development.
4. Communication and cooperation: attendance at meetings, local group newsletters, telephone trees established for alerting members to important events/developments, evidence of links developing between villages/communities, new joint ventures and,
5. Access to information: acquisition of materials on group development, running small business, legislation etc perhaps held in the local library or resource centre; development of a database of contacts; and use made of the internet.

However, some of the indicators of empowerment can be summarised below:

1. Gaining access to education right from primary to tertiary levels.
2. Ability to aspire to political positions of authority in both government and private sector.
3. Freedom of association and contribution to issues of national discourse.
4. Empowered and skilled women that contributed to national development.
5. Less dependability on government by women for employment.
6. Initiative to mobilise women and youths for development.
7. Contribution to nation building through participation in civic activities, formation of NGOs, and fighting for the oppressed in the society.
8. Access to justice and legal aid.
9. Accountability and transparent honesty in governance.
10. Direct access to information Eduwen (2014).

Relevance of women empowerment

It is obvious that a number of benefits are derivable from women empowerment taking into cognizance the indicator of women empowerment. Below are some of these benefits:

1. Security: With women empowerment, the spirit of patriotism will increase in

them and become security conscious in the affairs of the nation. Today, the armed forces of many nations are made up of women because they have been empowered. Empowered women are useful for information gathering, intelligence reports and protection of citizens.

2. Growth of entrepreneurs: Women empowerment facilitates the growth of entrepreneurs in the country. Thus women entrepreneurs are individuals that mobilise resources to achieve desirable results. They constitute the core of the private sector that drives the economy of the nation towards national development. Buttressing the above, Igbokwe (2006) asserted that the strength of the American economy is largely due to the contributions of its private entrepreneurs. Essential lessons to be derived from this assertion in Nigeria are as follows:
 - a. The private sector, not government drives the economy.
 - b. The giants grew from rags to riches.
 - c. They had good managerial skills
 - d. They hired the best of staff and keep operational cost low.
 - e. They were meticulous, hardworking and risk-takers.
 - f. They all had passion and true talent for their work.
 - g. They do not allow constraint to dominate their opportunities.
3. Technological development: Women empowerment facilitates technological development. Important discoveries in community and other sectors of the economy is made possible because women are empowered. There is no gain saying that empowered women create something different with value by devoting the necessary time and effort, assuming the accompanying financial, psychic and social risk, and receiving the resulting rewards of monetary and personnel satisfaction.
4. Poverty eradication: Women empowerment assists in the reduction of poverty among nations. When women are empowered financially, they invest in different businesses that generate profit to sustain the family, assist other relations who are poor and invest for future development.
5. Good governance: Good governance is achievable with women empowerment. The empowered women would do everything possible not to betray the confidence reposed in them during training, and transfer the leadership skills to leadership positions in the society. Again, with women empowerment on leadership, corruption and embezzlement of public funds by top officials of government and managers of industries will be grossly reduced if not totally eradicated.
6. Crime reduction: Crime is a barrier to national development. A number of people including women are involved in crime because they are not empowered. Therefore, any nation that is desirous of crime prevention and control should

invest massively in women empowerment. The basic fact is that if women are taught the evils and consequences of crime, there is every tendency that they will shun the unwholesome act. In essence, the empowerment of women should be seen as a priority to check crime in the society.

7. Good standard of education: A major problem facing many nations today is the failure to invest in the education of the women. The empowered women can contribute to the growth of education sector by donating generously to educational facilities in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions that are begging for the attention of the government. In addition, the women who are empowered academically accelerates the spirit of patriotism, award scholarship to students and be appointees of government into political positions.

Empowerment Strategies for Women

There are a number of women empowerment strategies that have been put in place by government, private individuals, international organisations and the civil society. According to United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (2010), there are seven strategies priorities necessary for women empowerment. These seven inter-dependent priorities are the minimum necessary to empower women and alter the historical legacy of female disadvantages that remains in most societies of the world;

1. Strengthen opportunities for post primary education for girls while simultaneously meeting commitments to universal primary education.
2. Guarantee sexual and reproductive health and rights.
3. Invest in infrastructure to reduce women and girls burden.
4. Guarantee women's and girls' property and inheritance rights.
5. Eliminate gender inequality in empowerment by decreasing women reliance on informal empowerment, closing gender gaps in earning and reducing occupational segregation.
6. Increase women's share of seats in national parliaments and local government bodies.
7. Combat violence against girls and women.

Jokes (1997) is of the view that women empowerment should focus on three key intervention areas; i.e. increasing girls access to education, increasing women access to economic resources, and increasing access to and the quality of reproductive health services. Furthermore, women empowerment can be achieved through the following ways:

- a. Create Public Avenue where women can voice their opinions and be heard.
- b. Win over local community leaders in order to promote gender equality.
- c. Use men as ambassadors to advocate for women rights.
- d. Inform women about means of public participations in respect of how to obtain a job, information about colleges and their programmes investment opportunities and legal aid.

- e. Focus on removing exploitation, suppression and the general mobilization bias in other to enable women express their interests in the decision making process.
- f. Invest heavily in the education of the girl-child from primary to tertiary institution.
- g. Counsel parents not to compel their girls into early marriage.

Over the years, government has introduced a number of women empowerment strategies. According to Abdulganiy (2012), selected economic policies geared towards entrepreneurial empowerment in Nigeria are shown in the table below:

Selected Economic Policies Geared Towards Entrepreneurial Empowerment

S/N	Programmes	Objectives
1	Agricultural Development Programmes (ADP)	The main purpose of the ADP is to stimulate increased food production and enhance the income of the rural population.
2	National Directorate of Employment (NDE).	Responsible for vocational skills development and small scale enterprises programme designed to combat unemployment.
3	National Economic Reconstruction Funds (NERFUND).	Provides long-term loans at concessnaire interest rates to promote small and medium scale industries projects.
4	Family Economic Advancement Programmes (FEAP).	Established to provide micro-credit facilities for entrepreneurs.
5	Micro finance Bank and Community Bank Programme.	Designed to make banking services more accessible and extend credit to the poor.
6	Better Life Programme/Family Support Programme (BLP/FSP).	Aimed at providing micro-credit facilities for women entrepreneurs.
7	National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP)	Aimed at providing vocational skill development and small scale enterprises programmes designed to combat unemployment.
8	National Empowerment and Economic Development Strategy (NEEDS).	To eradicate poverty and unemployment.
9	Youth Enterprise with Innovation (YOUWIN).	Business plan competition aimed at job creation by encouraging and supporting aspiring entrepreneurial youth in Nigeria to develop and execute business plans.
10	Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P).	Aimed at empowering youths and women to check poverty and unemployment.

Source: Abimbola (2007)

Youwin is added to the table as an update by Abdulganiy (2012).

Sure-P is added to the table as an update by Eduwen (2014).

In the same vein Bakari (1998), asserted that a lot of policies and programmes have been adopted as a means through which women empowerment can be achieved. These include the “Better Life for Rural Women” and the “Family Support Programme” initiatives. Other efforts include the creation of Ministry for Women Affairs at the Federal and State levels.

Importance of Information Communication and Technology for Women

Empowerment

It is obvious that women need information communication and technology in the process of their daily activities and adjustment to life situations. However, it is very sad to note that in spite of various policies and programmes aimed at women empowerment in Nigeria, little success has been achieved. A major factor responsible for this failure is the lack of awareness and the need to embrace the use of information communication and technology as a veritable tool for women empowerment.

Information communication technology is highly necessary in any empowerment programme, be it at the local, state and especially at the federal level. This is because it is very crucial to educate the would-be-entrepreneur on how to manage entrepreneurial resources at their disposal; to charge in them to develop an entrepreneurial mindset and to give them orientation to uncover the trick and dynamics of entrepreneurship. Information communication technology can facilitate the empowerment of women in the internet activities through individual and group counselling. The growing access of the web in the late 20th century has allowed women to empower themselves by using various tools in the internet. With the introduction of the World Wide Web, women have begun to use social networking sites like Facebook and Tweeter to start online activism (Sutton & Pollock, 2000).

Information communication technology can amplify women and girls opportunities in education and employment and can bring greater access to health services. Women and girls embrace of technology creates benefits to their lives, the lives of their family and their community. It can also help women to succeed in all areas of their lives including education, business, career, politics and health. It can improve mobility, save time and enable collaboration which is the key for the lives of millions of women across the world.

Information communication technology helps in the collection and analysis of sex disaggregation data that can contribute to a better understanding of the needs, opportunities and the challenges of women and girls in a knowledge society. It can also have the potentials to provide services for women and girls, especially for those living in the remote areas.

Conclusion

Information communication technologies have come to stay. There is no doubt that women empowerment is crucial to national development especially in the developing countries where women constitute majority of the overall population. Adult educator should embark on information communication technology programmes of enlightenment and orientation of parents, teachers, students and government to develop positive attitude towards the education of women right from primary school to tertiary institutions. This will increase women's capacity to be active participants in politics and question the wrong notion that women are inferior to men in the society. A proper use of information communication and technology for women empowerment should focus on health, vocational skills, agriculture, education, home rearing practices, education and leadership training for self-reliance and self-actualisation.

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