The Role of Social Innovation, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Gender Mainstreaming in Nigeria

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Abstract

Half of the population of the world consists of women but their contributions in most areas are not significant. Women have always taken a back seat in economic, political and social structure in any society across the globe. The biggest challenge for any government is the empowerment of women to bring them in to contribute in the mainstream activities. This paper looked at the position of women in development and espoused Gender mainstreaming which emphasizes a society characterized by justice and equality, the concept of gender and the role/social status through which the relationship of gender can be measured. The feminist theory of gender was adopted in order to find out the basis for the different status and roles of both sexes in societies. The paper examined the role of social innovation and information and communication technologies (ICT) initiatives as means of mainstreaming gender into development issues and discussed the challenges faced by women, recommended strategies to address those challenges inhibiting women's empowerment. This paper is based on secondary data collected from sources such as books, journal articles, reports of various government/non-governmental organizations on how to bring about justice and equality in the society.

Keywords: Gender mainstreaming, social innovation, Information and Communication Technologies, Nigeria.

Introduction

Gender mainstreaming is a crucial aspect of achieving gender equality and empowering women globally and Nigeria in specific. It involves integrating a gender perspective into policies, programs, and activities to address the specific needs and interests of both women and men. In recent years, social innovation and information and communication technology (ICT) have emerged as powerful tools in advancing gender mainstreaming efforts. Gender mainstreaming is an aspect of social development, aiming to ensure that the needs and perspectives of both women and men are taken into account in policy-making, planning, and decision-making processes which have played a significant role in advancing gender mainstreaming efforts. Social Innovation stands out to be one of the tools which have contributed to gender mainstreaming through the creation of platforms and initiatives that empower women and promote gender equality. For example, online mentoring programs, virtual networking opportunities, and digital skills training have all helped to bridge the gender gap in various fields and industries. These innovations have not only provided women with the tools and resources they need to succeed but have also raised awareness about gender issues and the importance of gender equality.

This paper explores the role of social innovation and ICT in promoting gender equality in Nigeria, highlighting key initiatives, challenges, and potential solutions. ICT has proven to be a powerful tool in promoting gender mainstreaming. From online campaigns to raise awareness about gender-based violence to mobile applications that provide information on women's rights and services, ICT has helped to amplify women's voices and connect them to resources and support networks. Additionally, the use of big data and analytics has enabled policymakers to better understand the gender dynamics at play in various sectors, leading to more targeted and effective interventions. Overall, the combination of social innovations and ICT has the potential to drive significant progress in gender mainstreaming efforts. By leveraging these tools and technologies, we can continue to break down barriers, challenge stereotypes, and create a more inclusive and equitable society for all.

Literature Review

According to the 1980 United Nations' International Women Conference, Women make up more than 50 per cent of the world's population, yet in every country, without exception, their social position is inferior to that of men. What this means in practice is that they work longer hours, have poorer educational opportunities, poorer health care, less control over their lives. In consonance with this entry submission, Ehigiamusoe (2009) quoted the International Development Agencies (IDA) as stating that "nowhere in the world are women treated as good as men". He further stated that at the International Women's Conference in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 1980, the United Nations released some revealing statistics on the global condition of women as follows:

"Women make up more than half of the world's population, produced 80 percent of its food, laboured for two thirds of its working hours, were paid 10 percent of its income, and owned one percent of its property". In consequence, Ehigiamusoe (2009) further asserted that "these statistics show only a little of the many dimensions of discrimination against and exploitation of women all over the world. In India, for example, women make up over 40% of the labour force while in Nigeria women constitute over 60% of the labour force and participate in close to 90% of all farming activities"

One very basic problem that women face is their apparent 'invisibility'. By this it means that their experience is often assumed to be adequately described by statistics dealing with men, and that accounts of society given by men tell us adequately about the lives of women. According to Morris, 1979, one way of looking at the subordinate position of women is by comparing their educational opportunities with those of men. Literacy is a good indicator of access to education; it is also an indicator of a wider potential for participation in society. The less educated women are, the less likely they are to be able to make their views and feelings public. Thus literacy is an important indicator of their ability to obtain their needs in society. It is undoubtedly the case that colonialism and development have changed the lives of women in the Third World. Colonial governments did

introduce education for women; they did attempt to protect women from some very unpleasant experiences such as female circumcision. But, at the same time, they had their own ideas as to how women should behave and what work it was appropriate for them to do.

Routledge and Kegan 1981 pointed out that, "Worldwide, there are differences in women's position both materially and culturally. Eating last, after the men and boys of the family have finished the meal which she has prepared, is one form of inequality found in most parts of Africa. In the Islamic world, religious edict commands that women are not equal to men, and should be protected and disciplined by them".

"The Koran says: Men have authority over women because Allah has made one superior to the other, and because they spend their wealth to maintain them. Good women are obedient. They guard their unseen parts because Allah has guarded them. As for those from whom you fear disobedience, admonish them and send them to beds apart and beat them." (*The Koran,* translated by Dawood, 1968).

Sociologists and Philosophers have dealt with the concept of gender by addressing the status and roles of women and men in society, and what is expected of them. According to the prevailing culture, and as a result of the development of human societies, starting with the connection of man to the land through the revolutions, the agricultural revolution until the industrial revolution, and the change in the roles required of both sexes and the end of what we are witnessing at the present time of the communications and information revolution. This has been accompanied by the scientific development of human societies with a development in terms of social concepts, including the concept of (gender). According to Oakley, 1972, [a] group of definitions that have been extracted from the literatures have been noted to describe the characteristics of men and women who are socially descended as we know: in contrast to those characteristics that are biologically descended. According to AbuBakr & Shukri, 2002, gender "helps to explain (differentiation, variance, and hierarchical division) the roles of women and men, and this is based on a fixed physiological basis, and accordingly, it is possible to modify and change gender roles and close the gap of distinction between men and women in social status and roles".

The World Bank defines gender as: "the behaviors and expectations associated with females and males that are established by society and learned by the individual and all cultures refer to the

differences between females and males to the set of social expectations about behaviors and activities that are appropriate to the rights, resources, and strengths that they possess. (The World Bank, 2005). The Gender Handbook in Humanitarian Action indicated that "gender" means: the social differences between females and males, which are learned throughout the life cycle even though they are deeply rooted in every culture. However, it changes over time, and it thus determines the status, roles, power and resources of women and men in any society." (IASC, 2006) A group of experts at the Women's Center for Training and Research agreed on the definition of gender that it is: "The different roles, rights, duties, obligations, and status between women and men are determined socially by historical development, and are subject to change through change over time." (Al Kawthar, 2009)

Statements of the Problem

One very basic problem that women face is their apparent 'invisibility'. The degree of under-representation differs from country to country. In most societies, especially in developing countries, women and girls are denied access to life transforming opportunities such as education and are discriminated against in employment opportunities, job securities and other benefits available to their male counterparts. Gender is a social construct which plays a significant role in division of labor and it is strongly seen by the fact that men usually assigned the role of the bread earners and females as the care takers for family and children. The continent of Africa and the countries therein are characterized with complex cultural, religious, and lingual diversity, hence, the issues and evils in societies are not new and have long history. Historically, men subjugated women in all the possible fields. The process of gendering (Gender Socialization), in which people are taught to behave as men and women is done through different forms of rules and regulations which is totally based on socially constructed ideas, some of which are adopted and some have to be viciously enforced. Women are always treated as weak and subordinate to men where men have the privilege and dominance over women. The root of the gender inequality in African countries lies in the patriarchal setting of African societies. Menon (2012) argues that even the surname of the woman is not hers. Such is the irony of patriarchy that women need to attach the surname either of her father or husband. However, we have seen that women are subordinated in all societies. This

subordination is not 'natural', but cultural. The 'founding fathers' of sociology even did not write about women except as part of 'the family', and this invisibility continued until feminist researchers began to make them visible. Their research shows that development can affect women in ambiguous ways, but, by and large, their subordination only changes its form. Perhaps the really major development which has to take place in human society is the empowerment of women.

Conceptualization:

Social change and its relations to gender

By change, this means: "the difference between the new state and the old state, or the difference of something from what it was during a specified period of time" and when the word "social" is added to mean: "What is related to society becomes social change: the change that occurs within the society or the transformation or change that occurs in the social construction over a period of time". Al-Daqes, & Al-Tanobi 1987 referred to the change as: "that continuous process, which extends to organizations or in social roles" over successive periods of time during which certain differences or modifications occur in human relations, institutions, or organizations. Social change is a general phenomenon that is relatively characteristic of all human societies, and depends on the availability of factors required in its events, and to explain the extent to which gender relations (roles / status) are affected. The society is in a state of mobility, constant change; because the woman is a part of society, what happens to society will happen to her. It is noteworthy that the concept of gender and Its stability is the influencing and effective factor in the productivity of generations and the formation of future generations, and it is linked to the status of women and is affected by conditions and civilization motives, cultural as well as economic systems according to different societies, by changing society as a result of being exposed to new policies that targeted areas which in turn leads to a change in social values and a change in the economic structure. New concepts have emerged that required women's "exit "from its traditional role as the expansion of fields of education and the need for women's productive capacity when they enter social industrialization, as well as due to economic pressures that the family has been subjected to as a result of urban and economic growth related to the family and children and the productive role related to work. As a result, the concept of (gender) has become a prominent concept in various

aspects of life, and it has been a topic of interest to many writers and researchers and conferences, and has recently begun to occupy a great position in the countries of the world, as it has invaded many fields of human endeavors. However, this paper made a frantic attempt to address the importance of gender, and the need to adhere to incorporating it into all aspects of life. Social justice and environmental protection in an ever-crowded planet and identifying pathways to a sustainable future, Job opportunities, more clean energy, greater security and a decent standard of living for all resulted in the "The Future We Want" document. Within the document, there is the Commitment to the sustainable development goals and during three years of discussions between all partners (193 countries), the development agenda was set, currently known as the 2030 Agenda on September 25, 2015, entitled "Transforming Our World" 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to replace the Millennium Development Goals. The framework of sustainable development goals does not distinguish between "advanced" and "developing" counterparts, but all countries will implement the goals publicly, it includes 17 goals, the fifth of which is gender-related. It is gender equality.

 From the foregoing, it can be concluded, how important the gender perspective is in all fields, considering it one of the main goals of sustainable development for the year 2030 and that the need for integration and coherence of goals is a main requirement to achieve the seventeen goals. Thus, the fifth goal of equality between the sexes must be integrated with the sixteen goals to activate it. On this basis, the concept of gender mainstreaming was examined to show the most important and fastest mechanisms and possible ways to achieve and activate the concept until 2030.

Gender Mainstreaming

Mainstreaming implies making a particular idea or opinion accepted by most people (Hornby, 2006). Gender mainstreaming is a strategy for bringing gender issues into the mainstream of society so as to ensure gender equality. Gender mainstreaming was established as a major global strategy for the promotion of gender equality in the Beijing platform for Action emanating from the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995.

The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC, 1997) defined gender mainstreaming as *"the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making the*

concerns and experiences of women as well as men an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated".

The ultimate goal of gender mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality: specifically, gender mainstreaming aim at:

1. Ensuring that the rights, roles and needs of women and men are given equal attention in all programmes and activities

2. Paying attention to the rights, roles, needs and aspirations of women and men.

3. Respecting cultural differences and ensuring the equal participation and protection of rights of all people – women and men alike (ECOSOC. 1997).

Social Innovation

The term social innovation is used in different and overlapping ways in different disciplines as the definition of innovation has no limits. This is partly due to the novelty of the term, or perhaps the increasing interest in it, and also due to the nature of the field of social innovation. The concept of Social Innovation entails new strategies, ideas and systems that seek to enhance the ways and methods of work of institutions, government and non-governmental organizations by focusing on meeting social needs, finding sustainable solutions to community challenges, and developing vital sectors. It has been defined more precisely by Phills & Deiglmeier, 2008, as "a new solution to a more effective social problem." The concept of social innovation refers to the creation, development, adoption and integration of new concepts and practices that put people and the planet first. Social innovation solves social challenges, it changes systems, perceptions, behaviors, and structures that previously led to those challenges. It is pertinent to posit that the distinctive concept of social innovation espouses doing something good (in/for) the community, changing social practices and/or social structure, and contributing to societal development, reorganizing work processes, instilling technological innovations in a cultural sense, and making changes in the field of work social and innovative through digital communications. Caulier-Grice et al (2012) pointed out that this field (Social Innovation) is not sufficiently understood, the authors pointed out that Social innovation goes beyond sectors (public, private and the third sector - civil society), as it creates new roles, builds new relationships, it is an open and collaborative concept and represents

a distinct subset of business, science innovation and technology, and it has been emphasized that it is a process that has stages.

It is imperative to state that at a time when interest in social innovation is growing, the gender equality movement continues to gain prominence and support. The International Center for Women's Research (ICRW) has pioneered research on how innovation advances gender equality. In "Innovating for Women Empowerment," they describe areas of innovation in promoting women's empowerment which include the use of technology, hence, based on this assertion, this paper X-rayed the role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in mainstreaming gender.

Social Innovation for Gender Mainstreaming

Social Innovation for Gender Mainstreaming: Social innovation refers to the development and implementation of new ideas, strategies, and solutions to address social challenges. Hence in the context of gender mainstreaming, social innovation plays a vital role in creating inclusive and gender-responsive policies and programs. For instance, initiatives such as women's empowerment centers, gender-focused entrepreneurship programs, and gender-sensitive healthcare services are examples of social innovation in Nigeria. These initiatives aim to address gender disparities, promote women's economic empowerment, and enhance access to essential services.

ICT and Women Empowerment

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for Gender Mainstreaming: ICT has revolutionized the way information is accessed, shared, and utilized. In the context of gender mainstreaming, ICT plays a crucial role in bridging the gender digital divide and empowering women. ICT tools such as mobile phones, internet connectivity, and social media platforms have enabled women to access information, connect with networks, and participate in decision-making processes. For example, ICT-based initiatives like online training programs, e-commerce platforms, and digital financial services have empowered women entrepreneurs and enhanced their economic opportunities.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) entails the use of a diverse set of electronic technologies and technological tools and resources used to communicate, create, store, disseminate

and manage information. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is one of the best ways to include women in the process of empowerment. It involves and integrates them in the economic, political, technological and social environment of the world. ICT has now become the integral part of our life. Jones (2010) stated that technology travels with people. Akude & Ajuzie, (2011) in their study mentioned that **"**Information Communication Technology like videos, televisions, multimedia and computer software which combines text, sound, and colorful moving images can be used to provide challenging and authentic content that will engage the people in the learning process". Information and communication dissemination is done very easily through various technologies like radio, T.V, Mobile etc. Hence we can say that information and communication technology has impacted the life of the people to a greater extent**.** Mastoor and Zorkarkar observed in their paper that ICT has hastened the process of women empowerment by providing the women with better education, information, and knowledge, training, occupational opportunities, market information, financial services, information about the government programs. Hossieni and Manjunath (2016) stated that the relationship between technology and masculinity is so deep-rooted that women are mostly excluded from technical education and also from technical jobs. Therefore there is a need to involve parents and make them aware about the effect of gender bias within the family, society and nation as a whole. Mohan (2014) in his study observed that ICT based Enterprises lead to positive empowerment of women.

Gender Status and Social Roles

Social status simply entails the position that an individual occupies on the social ladder, which depends on the set of roles he/she plays in society. It is considered a part of the individual and is granted after performing his/her tasks, activities and duties to society. The role according to Merrill, (1969) is "a type of expected behavior that is designed for a specific social situation in society". The role of the individual is determined by the conditions of society and its social controls. The more flexible these controls are, the more positive and dynamic the roles will be. Having defined the concepts of status and role, it becomes clear that gender roles are those roles that society defines for both women and men on the basis of values, controls, perceptions and expectations for the status of each of them.

Theoretical Framework

The explanatory theory of the concept of gender which attempts to extract indicators related to the roles and social status of both men and women which in turn affects the state of equilibrium or lack of it thereof with the gender relationship are thus examined as follows;

Feminist Theory

In recent years, a lot of research has been done by women working within a feminist approach. Feminism is not only a social and political movement aimed at improving the position of women. It is a set of theories, a new language for talking about the world. It begins from the assumption that history and society can be such as looked at from the viewpoint of women, where previously the male perspective has dominated and excluded that of women. Some feminists have argued that although the unequal treatment of women can be partially explained by Marxist sociology, such as looking at women's relations to the means of production, such an approach does not go far enough. For this reason, they have rejected Marxist theory. Instead they argue that in all societies, women are subordinate to men. This subordination is not something which appears with the development of capitalist society. It is found in all societies. It is true of subsistence farming societies in which women take the major part of the work-load and receive (along with children) the least return, as well as in societies such as the Soviet Union or China, where despite the disappearance of capitalist production relations, women receive lower wages than men, and occupy fewer positions of influence. In response to this evidence, some feminists suggest that the real problem which must be understood is **'patriarchy'**, the general relationship whereby women are subordinated to men in all places and times. Feminist theory refers to: Supporting women's political and legal rights to equality with men. As for the broader meaning of the theory, it examines the problem in the context of the relationship between the two poles of society, describing it as inequality, in which one party practices subjugation and oppression towards the other (Gamble, 2003). On the other vain, Rayan, (2005) defines the term feminism as: "a group of ideas and movements aimed at the liberation of women and improving their conditions in all areas", and several trends have emerged from the feminist perspective, and differed in the interpretation of the reasons for the lack of equality between men and women, including: the liberal trend, which tends towards the belief that: "The patriarchal (patriarchal) society is based on the

belief that the appropriate role for women is to exercise a range of limited professions as a result of the mental and physical ability of women. "The interrelationship between capitalism and patriarchy was both the cause behind the lower status of women than that of men" (Hoso, 2008,). Proponents of radicalism have pointed out that: "Patriarchy is the basis for discrimination and it can be concluded that: The gender relationship is in a state of imbalance at the expense of women, and the result is an occupation where the man has a superior position, while the woman takes a secondary position in most societies. That is, gender is linked to women, thus as a result of the different status of women, the roles differed, which were often associated with the domestic sphere and the care of the family and children.

Challenges in Women Empowerment through ICT

Hossini and Manjunath (2016) outlined various factors that affect and create obstacles in the empowerment of the women through ICT as discussed under:-

Poverty: poverty is considered to be the biggest threat to the peace in the world. Most of the people live in rural area of the countries in Africa where they do not have access to ICT and many cannot even afford it.

Illiteracy among the women: Illiteracy leads to unawareness of rights and lack of self-confidence. This difference in education attainment among the women makes them economically, socially, politically disadvantaged and makes them marginalized.

Social Evils: The various social evils like domestic violence, dowry, and early marriage harden the life of the women. Crime Records revealed a total of 244,270 incidents of crimes against women were reported in Africa in 2020, compared with 228,650 in 2019, an increase of 6.4%. As women are already a burden to their families, introducing them to the ICT field means the family has to bear the extra burden which families are not ready for as she is just a liability and going to someone else's home after marriage.

Language Barrier: This is one of the hurdles that most of the content which is available on the internet is in English. There is a lack of material available in the internet in regional/local languages which creates the challenge among the women to access the information therein.

Ownership: Menon, 2012, posited that even the surname of the woman is not hers. Such is the irony of patriarchy that women also need to attach the surname either of her father or husband. Most of the ownership related to the land assets and other things is only occupied by the men.

Need For Women Empowerment through ICT

The study of Rowlands (1995) stated that empowerment is more than simply to have access to decision making, it also includes the processes in which the individuals perceive themselves as decision makers. Kishore (1997) observed that empowerment is self-confidence and being able to take decisions and act according to one's own interest. Lillykutty (2003) observed the relation between education and empowerment of women with the quality of life. She stated that empowerment of women is when she is politically active, economically productive and independent and able to make decisions in matters that affect her. When one has command over wealth, education, social status, skill etc. and has access to formal financial services, then one can boldly boast of true empowerment. Bukhari and Sharma (2014) stated in their study that to challenge the inequality between the genders, developmental organizations play a vital or important role. They also gave the reference of the report by world bank entitled, "Attacking Poverty" which revealed that "we have tried a lot to accomplish by now in the name of gender equality but it is also true that there is no region of the world where both women and men are equal in legal, social and economic rights". The World Bank developed two strategies in 2001 to eradicate poverty in the underdeveloped and developing countries which are as follows;

1. Investment in underdeveloped & developing countries

2. Empowerment of underprivileged people.

By empowering the people who are underprivileged brings about positive development in a country. In simple words if we encourage empowerment among the underprivileged people, especially women, we directly or indirectly encourage development of the country as a whole. Laizu, Armarego & Sudweeks (2010) in their study, mentioned that women constitute half of the population in the world but due to the extreme discrimination and subjugation, they remain underprivileged as a result. International trade center in their Gender mainstreaming policy 2010 stated that Gender mainstreaming is a strategy to achieve equality between women and men. It

also states that there would be the possible integrated policies and programs in the gendered perspective. To achieve the fifth sustainable goal it is necessary to empower all women and give them practical support in all the major fields. The United Nation Division for the Advancement of Women (UNDAW) also stressed ICT as the tool for the upliftment of women.

Despite the potential of social innovation and ICT in promoting gender mainstreaming, several challenges persist in Nigeria. Limited access to ICT infrastructure, low digital literacy rates among women, and cultural barriers are some of the key challenges. To address these challenges, it is crucial to invest in ICT infrastructure development, provide digital literacy training for women, and promote gender-responsive policies and regulations. Additionally, partnerships between government, civil society organizations, and private sector entities can facilitate the implementation of innovative solutions and ensure sustainability.

Conclusion

Social innovation and ICT have the potential to significantly contribute to gender mainstreaming efforts in Nigeria. By leveraging the insight availed in this paper on the concepts of Social Innovation and ICT, policymakers, organizations, and individuals can address gender disparities, empower women, and promote gender equality. However, it is essential to address the challenges associated with limited access to ICT infrastructure, low digital literacy rates, and cultural barriers. Through collaborative efforts and innovative solutions, Nigeria can harness the power of social innovation and ICT to create a more inclusive and gender-responsive society.

Gender-sensitive social innovation can contribute to broader knowledge about societal innovations and the possibility of designing more inclusive policies. Gender does not refer to women nor does it refer to men, but to the relationship between the sexes, and to the ways in which this relationship is formed. Gender relations are determined by economic, social, cultural and other factors and are influenced by the change in these factors. Gender represents the relations between women and men formed by society and this relationship is revealed through both the concepts of status and roles. Although women empowerment is a complex and multidimensional concept but somewhere it can be achieved through the proper use of ICT. Women require such an environment where they have full freedom to take decisions for themselves, their family and the society. In order to attain

development in Africa, there is the need to empower each and every person in the society. ICT is a revolutionary step to achieving women empowerment. There is a need for adequate research on the role of ICT in women empowerment mostly in developing and underdeveloped countries.

Recommendations

As stated earlier in the foregoing, despite the potential of social innovation and ICT in promoting gender mainstreaming, several challenges persist in Nigeria. Limited access to ICT infrastructure, low digital literacy rates among women, and cultural barriers are some of the key challenges. To address these challenges, it is crucial to invest in ICT infrastructure development, provide digital literacy training for women, and promote gender-responsive policies and regulations. Additionally, partnerships between government, civil society organizations, and private sector entities can facilitate the implementation of innovative solutions and ensure sustainability amongst other measures as adumbrated thus;

1. ICT awareness programs for women should be organized on a regular basis in local languages.

2. Internet facilities should be available for women in every part of the society and it should be available at cheaper prices.

3. Building a fair and adequate sector for research and training on gender issues, encouraging local experiences and transferring expertise in gender mainstreaming in community innovations.

4. Free computer training centers should be opened for women by the government and non-governmental agencies.

5. Promote gender-based initiatives through social media and technologies to maximize participation.

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