GG3077: Annotated Bibliography

ICT and its role in Gender Empowerment in Africa

This bibliography gathers together a range of materials which discuss Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and its role in gender empowerment. Resources have been gathered from various mediums, including books, journals, websites and videos, in order to provide an accessible overview to the dominant perspectives, initiatives and policies on ICTs, women and gender empowerment.


This paper presents a study on ‘Gendered perspectives and the Digital Divide, IT education and workforce participation’ carried out by the authors in Strathmore University, Kenya and presents interesting findings as it reflects male perspectives which are not commonly heard in IT Gender literature. The respondents seemed to embrace IT as a practical mechanism for entering the male dominated, technological workforce thus reiterating the findings of other studies. However, the authors acknowledge that this study represents the Sub-Saharan “elites” and that future studies should be undertaken in rural areas; overall, a good paper to reinforce the perspectives of people surrounding the Digital Divide and gender empowerment but limited to the top cohort of Kenyan society.


The Women’s Networking Support Program (WNSP) is a part of the Association for Progressive Communication (APC): a global network of civil society organisations which supports, among other things, gender empowerment through the use of ICTs. The program itself is implemented primarily over the internet, making use of online tools such as email and social networks to ‘coordinate, develop action plans, implement activities, support and mentor one another while maintaining and strengthening organisational and personal relationships’. Regional networks have been developed in Africa as well as Asia-Pacific, Europe and Latin America. Evidently, the main drawback of this initiative is its large reliance on internet usage, thus making it limited to helping only those who have internet access.
Alexander Ultahan


Another article by the BBC discussing Macallinka Raadiyaha (Radio teacher): a BBC World Service Trust project set up to aid people in the Somalia Distance Education Literacy Programme (Somdel). The project has directly helped empower over 6,000 Somali women by helping them pass their final literacy examinations. Overall, a good source exemplifying a successful initiative which achieves gender empowerment through distance learning by means of radio communication.


An article from the BBC website outlining the initiative ‘mWomen’, which proposes halving the gender gap between mobile phone ownership in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East within the next three years. The article is particularly informative of the benefits of increased mobile phone ownership among women, such as a mobile phone’s ability to help women develop small businesses, improve literacy rates, and assist health programmes, but is limited in its depth surrounding the limitations of such a scheme. The webpage contains two helpful embedded video clips: Cherie Blair emphasising the advantages of the scheme and a case study of a female small business-owner in Sri Lanka who has benefited personally from the ‘mWomen’ scheme. A relevant article depicting a contemporary ICT4D initiative to help empower women.


This article recognises progress to the empowerment of women as absolutely essential if we are to raise the quality of lives. It outlines contextual information about the digital divide between genders and the main benefits of empowered women more generally as well as identifying the advantages that ICTs can bring about if they are used for this purpose. It is a fairly useful piece as it describes, although not in much detail, the global situation but it lacks the provision of case studies which could help exemplify the problems faced by women that it describes.
Alexander Ultahan


A compilation of the findings from the first phase of the Gender Research in Africa into ICTs for Empowerment (GRACE) project. A highly relevant piece regarding gender empowerment within Africa, exploring the ways in which women are utilising ICTs to facilitate their empowerment. The book is primarily supported by a collection of original primary field research projects which vary tremendously geographically and address a variety of issues such as: ICT as a tool for empowerment in Mozambique, Using ICTs in the fight against gender violence in Morocco, and the effectiveness of mobile phone networks in advocating women’s rights in Zambia. This book is also particularly useful as it provides accounts and testimonies from African women who have challenged the ‘natural order’ of society and experienced a sense of empowerment by ICTs.


This essay discusses a multitude of issues relating to ICT and gender empowerment and addresses Goal 3 of the Millennium Development Goals: ‘Promote gender equality and empower women’ to assess its specific targets. The essay acknowledges that on one hand, ICT is a means to empower people but on the other hand, that in some societies it will promote gender inequalities. In addition, it suggests that ICT projects will be part of a social, economic, and cultural phenomenon but also accepts that it is uncertain whether these projects will add to or counteract the prevailing trends of gender inequality with regard to the larger social, economic, and cultural situation. It includes useful references as well as some helpful statistics which reflect the pure inequality of technology usage and, more specifically, internet usage, throughout Africa and the rest of the world.


This paper addresses, among other things, the gender issues within a rural South African environment and the factors affecting women’s access to education through ICTs as well as strategies attempting to reverse these factors and improve their conditions. The problems and strategies are addressed somewhat in depth and reflect the authors own research in this environment. The paper realises the effectiveness of coordinated women’s groups and ICT learning centres in achieving gender empowerment but understands that without the full support of all citizens, South Africa cannot develop


A short document detailing the outcomes of the WSIS Gender Caucus engagement in Africa since December 2003. Various conferences are discussed as are the specific objectives of each of them as well as present challenges.
Alexander Ultahan

- **GRACE (2010) ‘Gender Research in Africa into ICTs for Empowerment’**

The main website for the Gender Research in Africa into ICTs for Empowerment (GRACE) project which details its research projects, research teams, and other publications. The interactive map which displays the locations of GRACE research projects is a useful tool; clicking on each of the African countries will show the past and present research projects being undertaken by various researchers. At its simplest, the GRACE project aims to explore the ways in which women in Africa and the Middle East use ICTs to empower themselves thus making it an appropriate citation for those seeking an understanding ICT and its role in Gender Empowerment.


An overview report for BRIDGE: the specialized gender and development research and information service within the Institute of Development Studies (IDS). The report discusses, among other things, the multiple identities of women – for example class, ethnicity, race, age -which can also, in conjunction with gender, affect their access to technology. In addition, useful case studies are provided throughout, for example an outline of the short history of women’s pirate radio in several European countries and how these women empowered themselves through ‘free radio’ addressing issues such as abortion and prostitution. The report also discusses previous themes in Gender and ICTs discourse and highlights key political milestones in the advocacy of Gender issues and new ICTs between 1992 and 2003, such as the Gender and Digital Divide Seminar Series in 2000. Although this report is not specific to Africa, it provides some useful information with regard to a number of African Gender-ICT initiatives – for example Grain Africa, a non-governmental organization (NGO) in Kenya.


This book is a particularly relevant piece in regard to the empowerment of women; who should be able to fully utilize ICTs as tools for their own empowerment in the era of knowledge society. While not strictly limited to Africa, this book provides a meaningful insight into how ICTs can contribute to women’s empowerment, improve their lives, and increase their well-being. It also highlights the need for the development of measurable performance indicators to accurately assess the impact of donor-funded ICT projects on the lives of women and girls, as well as discussing the recent advances to the collection and analysis of statistics and indicators of gender and ICT. Overall, this book provides a helpful framework which offers suggestions for new directions and possibilities to increase the empowerment of women through the use of ICTs.
Alexander Ultahan


This book closely examines how gender empowerment can be achieved through accessible education. Using a wide array of case studies, including examples from locations such as Niger, Ethiopia and Tanzania, the book focuses on empowerment of women in a variety of ways. A useful book for one engaging specifically in how the consequences of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) impacted education and reinforced the gender gap in Africa, as well as this gender gap can be eliminated.


This paper is a synthesis of the discussions and background papers from the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) Virtual Seminar Series on Gender and ICTs in 2002 and is based on INSTRAW’s Collaborative Research Project on Gender and ICTs. The paper regards ICT as a tool for the empowerment of women and cites the Uganda CD-ROM project as the most prominent example of an individually-based empowerment approach. It then proceeds to discuss the project’s impact on the empowerment of women and the positive changes ICTs can initiate. In addition, the paper refers to the findings of a variety of other researchers, such as Hafkin (2002) and Martinez and Reilly (2002). A helpful synthesis of the success stories of the implementation of ICTs and their effects on the empowerment of women in areas such as Africa, Asia and Central America.


The International Taskforce on Women and ICTs (ITF) works to ‘increase the economic, social, and educational opportunities for women and girls in the knowledge society in a measurable way’. The ITF regard ICT as a means to achieve an information society for equitable and sustainable global development for all its members. The taskforce represents a broad number of initiatives and works in conjunction with many global stakeholders such as Microsoft, IBM, and Dell.

This report is a summary of an online discussion entitled ‘ICTs and their Impact on and Use as a Tool for the Advancement of Women’. It was held in 2002 by the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (UNDAW). It recognises ICTs as a potentially powerful tool for women’s empowerment and highlights successful case studies, for example a Zimbabwe School-net project which runs telecentres in peri-urban areas and reports that 70% of its patrons are women. In addition, it looks at strategies to further integrate gender perspective into national ICT policies.


This project investigates ICT4D in Jamaica and the wider Caribbean: it suggests that the diffusion of ICTs has, in many ways, been successful although there are a number of challenges which remain. The study acknowledges the high potential for ICTs and development but also the need for fresh gender-sensitive policies to ensure equal access, social equality and the protection of the rights of those who need it. Although the study is limited to telephony and internet access within the Caribbean, its fundamental findings can also be applied to Africa where gender-sensitive policies and appropriate training will also be beneficial.


This book focuses on specific cases involving African countries and concepts and strategies of gender empowerment within a framework for development. It analyses the concepts and issues of Gender and ICTs throughout Africa and the problems associated with implementing gender into its ICT policy. Chapters 6 and 7 in particular outline how women’s access to ICTs can be improved and how ICTs can be used as tools of democratization and empowerment. In addition, chapter 8 details a case study in Kenya explaining the steps which have been taken in the Kakamega and Makueni districts to try and enhance women’s participation in governance.
Alexander Ultahan


Although concerned with the Caribbean, this paper examines e-voices and how this method of ICT4D can empower vulnerable groups such as women, therefore making it relevant to ICT gender empowerment within Africa. The paper regards ICT as a means to increase civic participation, particularly among vulnerable groups, and notes that in order to achieve E-Governance, the process must be free of state interference. If successful, such a project could be implemented throughout Africa in the hope that it would achieve gender empowerment there. It is also noted that e-governance projects must be sensitive to the issues of rural communities otherwise a wider digital divide may emerge.


This article discusses Women’s Net: a women’s initiative to develop South African women’s capacity to use ICTs for online social activism. The project aims for gender empowerment through ICTs by acting as a platform for women’s voices and facilitating the dissemination of information. The article also thoroughly describes the services provided by Women’s Net, who it would benefit, the challenges it faces, and how challenging policies is a major concern facing advocates of gender empowerment (For a video source see: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z8dLvgnC1Sk)


The main website of the Swedish Program for ICT in Developing Regions (SPIDER) enables users to browse through the organisation’s various projects and offers information regarding areas such as e-Governance, e-Health and e-Learning. The ‘Browse Projects’ web page is well detailed, outlining each of the project titles, the country in which the project is being carried out, partners involved with the scheme, the amount of funding and the field of ICT4d the project is concerned with. This site links to gender empowerment within Africa because one project in particular, Women’s Digital Baskets in Rwanda, aims to empower women by creating the opportunity for enterprise and development among women in Rwanda with the help of ICT.

This website briefly outlines the 2004 ICT4D National Policy in Gambia; a valuable insight into the policies being proposed by just one of the governments in Africa. A limited description of the sectors of Gambia that ICTs can improve such as agriculture, education, and health, is provided, and gender empowerment: more specifically, empowerment of rural women, is cited under most of these sectors as being a beneficiary of an improved ICT infrastructure. The website also contains ICT4D policy information on other African countries such as Kenya, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Nigeria, thus offering a useful overview into African ICT4D policies and their link with gender empowerment more generally.


This thesis examines the constraints on women as environmental resource managers and in sustainable development. Feminist strategies are suggested to enhance and increase women’s productivity in natural resource management and sustainable development. The case studies provided are mostly based in Africa making this thesis particularly relevant to ICT and its role in gender empowerment in Africa.


This declaration recognises that ICT provides enormous opportunities for women and should be used as a tool to ensure women’s empowerment and full female participation in all spheres of society. The document then sets out the main principles of the declaration, which centre on strategically implementing ICT in order to achieve gender equality. Unfortunately, the declaration itself seems to utilise a top-down approach and this has many disadvantages thus undermining and limiting its potential scope.


This website, for the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) set in 2000, is an important structural overview of how we are attempting to tackle global poverty. An important site to consider in any research regarding ICTs and development as each of the eight goals represent the objectives of many different development projects worldwide. The site is made relevant to gender empowerment and ICTs by the third MDG: ‘promote gender equality and empower women’. The site contains various documents which include relevant data regarding each MDG. Although not specific to gender empowerment and ICTs in Africa, this site is useful because it represents the commitment of global actors such as the UN to tackle worldwide poverty and improve global and local gender disparities through mediums such as education and ICTs.

This book is a vital piece in the understanding of global ICT initiatives and their impact on different groups as well as their role in achieving gender empowerment. A wide range of locations are drawn on for case studies, for example, Chile, China, Jenin and countries within Africa such as the case study concerning ICT and education in Rwanda (Chapter 7: 217). In particular, chapter 8 outlines the relationship between gender and e-health, acknowledging women’s need for “specialized health websites and services that are relevant to their areas of interest and concern. Unwin investigates information and communication in development practices and explains how ICTs can be used to help poor and marginalized people and communities make a difference to their lives.


Chapter four of this book discusses the information revolution in Sierra Leone and how women’s access to ICTs, an emerging issue in this revolution, reflects pre-existing gender relations whereby social expectations restrict women to non-technological roles and careers. The chapter also provides an in-depth explanation of ‘development through radio’ (DTR) and how radio can empower local people whom usually go unheard. In addition, the chapter also reflects how women are becoming more involved in DTR, outlining how one such DTR club involves interaction with women on development perspectives. A brief case study of Sierra Leone is then given, describing how the Forum for Africa Media Women (FAMW) are aiming to set up, with the help of Forum of Conscience (FOC- a human rights NGO), a DTR project run for and by women.


This piece strongly recognises the influence of gender empowerment initiatives on social structures. It provides examples of how women can enhance their skills through literacy and cooking programs and explains that this can create an intimate link which enables them to talk and share information thus enhancing the social aspect of ICT4D initiatives.
Alexander Ultahan


  A panel discussion at Google headquarters with program managers who work with the Women in Technology (WIT) initiative in the Middle East and North Africa. WIT aims to empower women through ICTs by enhancing their marketable skills and increasing women’s participation in building pluralistic societies. This is a useful albeit lengthy reference to find out about the WIT program in depth, the issues facing women, how ICTs can be beneficial to gender empowerment, and the different areas currently aided by the program.


  This short video outlines the threat that Africa faces of being left out of the digital revolution. The video includes an interview with well-known author Aida Opoku-Mensah who offers an insight into why Africa has been left out of the previous agricultural and industrial revolutions and will suffer if left out of the digital revolution. Some useful case studies are provided, particularly in Uganda where a laptop and the use of CD-ROMs have enabled an illiterate teacher to teach uneducated rural women how to use computers, generate income and learn about saving money, agriculture and healthcare. The video explains that the teacher was able to achieve this through a telecentre run by the Ugandan government and supported by UNESCO.