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COMMUNICATIONS

**POLICY
BRIEF**

**Promoting
Women
Participation
in Digital
Policy-Making
in Nigeria**



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Promoting Women Participation in Digital Policy-Making In Nigeria



Published by

Centre for Information Technology and Development (CITAD)
Plot 4, Isma'ila Adamu Gano Street, Adjacent NSITF Building,
Off Social Insurance Road, Behind Trade Fair Complex,
Gandu Layout, Kano. P. O. Box 10210, Kano, Nigeria.
GSM: +234-8068078282, +234-8030978777
+234-8065429784
E-mail: info@citad.org
Website: www.citad.org

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INTRODUCTION

The gender digital divide in Nigeria has persisted despite efforts by both state and non-state actors to bridge it. There are two reasons for this. One is that efforts tend to target improving access to and providing more opportunities for skills acquisition by women and girls. While these are important, in themselves, they do not address systemic factors that hinder the effective utilization of digital technology by women and girls in the country. This lends credence to the fact that the digital divide is not just about differential in access to and skill to use digital technology. The second reason is that the policies and initiatives are inappropriate because they do not mainstream gender sensitivity in their articulation and design.

The implementation of the policies and initiatives is the result of the specificity of the policy-making machinery. Policies are the outcomes of deliberation at the policy decision-making tables. When that table is inclusive, it takes on board the various interests and aggregates them into a policy response that looks at the given problem from a multi-dimensional perspective. The result would be an outcome that transcends the different interests represented at the decision-making table.

One of the key challenges with addressing the gender divide is that it has not acknowledged a peculiar dimension of the gender digital divide which is the unequal access of women to digital policy decision-making in the country which makes the policy processes and structures to be dominated by men and to be driven by patriarchal values. In spite of their benevolence, the fact that men do not experience digital marginalization, they lack the insights to respond to it appropriately and effectively. On one hand, because women are distanced from the structure of policy-making, their voices and influence are feeble and their capacity to influence them is low. In addition, because women suffer digital exclusion, they have limited experience with what is to be on the positive side of the divide and hence they are at a loss as to what precisely they should advocate for.

This policy briefing is the result of the engagement that CITAD undertook with the view to developing digital policy analysis capacity among young women with the hope that they provide a seeding for them to be engaged in the area, while at the same time, they have the capacity to speak clearly and competently on digital issues such that their advocacy voice can create traction both within and outside government.

Marginalization of Women in Digital Policy Making

The gender digital divide is usually articulated around differentials in access to and the use of digital technology along gender lines. Conventionally, this is expressed in terms of indicators such as the respective numbers of men and women having access to internet, smartphones, broadband subscriptions, etc. In this content, we will go beyond such indicators and look at certain salient measures that are often made invisible by the tele-statistics.

These include:

1. Access and presence of women to digital leadership and policy making instruments and structures
2. The relative proportion of women in the national digital workforce
3. The rate at which women participate in STEM training programmes in comparison to men and their relative completion rates
4. Extent workplace policies, practices and environment that either support or inhibiting the recruit and retain of women digital professionals
5. The location and siting of digital infrastructure and how the sites contribute to either enhancing or otherwise inhibiting inclusive access
6. The appropriateness and effectiveness of laws, policies and regulations to deal with harmful contents, especially targeted against women and girls, and how government deals with abuse such as privacy and child protection online.

The project starts with the observation that women are poorly represented in the digital policy making space in the country. However while this is an obvious fact, there has been no empirical data to substantiate it. In fact, the detailed computation of the Nigeria's network readiness index (NRI) for the year 2023 as released by the Portulans Institute shown that Nigeria was scored zero in the Gender gap in Internet use sub-pillar, indicating that there was either no data or the data was not sufficient to award any point for the country in that important sub-pillar. It was for this reason that we decided to take a head count of women participation in the digital decision making processes in the country.

State of Women Participation in Digital Policy Making

During the period, we assessed the presence of women in the eight national ICT agencies. The findings were sobering. For example, out of 19 board members of NITDA, only two were females, and out of 21 management heads, only four were females. Similarly, for Nigerian Data Protection Commission (NDPC), out of 42 management members, only eight were women. The Universal Service Provision Fund (USPF) has a Board of 11 members with only one female member while for the management, the number is similarly 10, where only one is a woman. The sector regulator, Nigerian Communication Commission does not do better as out of its 17 board members, only one is a female.

The full result is shown in the table below. It seen that, although the percentage varies, overall, the presence of women is less than 15%, far short of the 31% threshold suggested by the National Gender Policy.

WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN ICT RELATED AGENCIES IN NIGERIA					
Institution	Entity	Total Number	Representation by Gender		Percentage
			Male	Female	
Ministry of Communication Innovation and Digital Economy	Board Members	15	11	4	26.67%
	Management Staff	15	9	6	40%
National Information Technology Development Agency	Board Members	19	17	2	10.53%
	Management Staff	21	17	4	17.5%
Nigerian Communication Satellite Limited (NigComSat)	Board Members	10	5	5	50%
	Management Staff	4	3	1	25%
Nigerian Postal Service (NIPOST)	Board Members	8	6	2	25%
	Management Staff	23	18	5	21.74%

WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN ICT RELATED AGENCIES IN NIGERIA

Institution	Entity	Total Number	Representation by Gender		Percentage
			Male	Female	
Nigerian Data Protection Commission (NDPC)	Board Members	Nil			
	Management Staff	42	34	8	19%
Universal Service Provision Fund (USPF)	Board Members	11	10	1	9.09%
	Management Staff	10	9	1	10%
Nigerian Communication Commission	Directors	17	16	1	5.56%
	Assistant Directors	255	152	103	40.39%
National Identity Management Commission (NIMC)	Board Members	17	15	2	11.76%
	Senior Management Staff	3	1	2	75%

Factors Responsible for the Digital Marginalization of Women

The Digital Marginalization of Women is part of the marginalization of women across all spheres in the society. This marginalization is rooted in the many years patriarchy has raised, resulting in the internalization of many of its assumption and values which have continued to shape social relationship in the society, including the way technology is developed, deployed and used in the society. While this overarching narrative explains its specific manifestation and resilience, addressing it will require understanding its concrete pillars that should be subjected to appropriate policies and initiatives that can bridge the gender digital divide in the country.

The gender digital divide is an aspect of the broader gender development gap. The broad development gap has cast women on the negative side of the spectrum of development. Women are educationally disadvantaged, as a result of which they are not able to achieve high educational accomplishment and progress to the top of the professional ladder to find themselves at the digital decision making tables.

The broader development divide also means that women are politically marginalized. This political marginalization makes women's access to power and decision making

difficult. They are not able to access and influence either the process or the structures of policy making in the country.

As a result of the broader development divide, women are also economically marginalized. The consequence of this is that they lack the resources to allow them rise to the top, especially in a country where access to education, political and social progress is dependent on means.

Secondly, broader underpinning of the digital marginalization of women is the normalization of patriarchal norms, values and practices which have contributed to the subordination of women. This subordination of women constrained women from independent and autonomous action. Three areas where this subordination manifests in substantive terms impact negatively in blocking women from occupying policy making institutions in the society. One of these is the normalization of women seen as inferior and not deserving to be trusted with important and sensitive roles such as those of decision makers. Cultural constructs which normalize the subordination of women agency by men are articulated and expressed in religious terms which are highly regarded in a society that is highly religious. This is particularly more in the Muslim communities where the gender digital divide tends to be wider.

Another area of subordination is the communication sphere where patriarchy exerts significant influence in controlling the communication practices of women. Norms and practices place constraints on the ability of women to freely express themselves. This is why even among educated and professional women, they suffer spousal discouragement from using the social media. Instances abound in which once a young lady get married, she surrender her handset to her husband who would either buy a new one for her or delete all her pre-marital contacts and social media accounts and profiles so as to cut her off from all pre-marital online contacts.

The last of the constraint that women face that makes digital equity so difficult to attain is that they are overburden with unpaid and unremunerated care duties which leave them with little or no time to pursue professional career outside the informal economy. Since women remain largely outside the formal institutions and economy, they find it difficult to access and influence formal processes and structures, including providing leadership in the digital sector. Added to this burden is the fact that when women eventually manage to venture out into taking paid employment in the formal sector, the work environment is often not friendly and supportive of women with children. Their ability to work at two fronts at the same time in the absence of formal institutional support, tends to undermine their productivity in both fronts and threaten both their career and family life, the result of which is to sacrifice the career in favour of family.

Addressing Women Marginalization

Addressing the marginalization of women in the digital policy making institutions and structures of the country is an important aspect of bridging the digital divide. It is a necessary condition for the articulation, design and implementation of policies and initiatives that can be effective in bridging the digital divide. Government and other agencies must therefore work on this. Some of the key challenges we observed from this study and interactions include:

1. **Salary Disparities:** Notably, there exists a salary difference between female and male counterparts. Raising questions about gender-based income gaps is very important when trying to adjust the gender divide.
2. **Multi-dimensional Digital Divide:** The digital divide manifests in diverse ways, even within the same environment and sector. Factors such as skills disparity contribute to varying income levels.
3. **Technological Impact on Lives:** An exploration of how technology impacts people's lives emerged as a key theme during the discussions, shedding light on the broader implications of technological advancements.
4. **Limited Connectivity Access:** Participants highlighted the challenge of limited access to connectivity, emphasizing the importance of addressing this barrier to ensure equal opportunities for all.
5. **Knowledge Gap:** It was observed that there is a knowledge gap among certain individuals who should be well-informed. This gap poses a hindrance to proposing effective solutions, as awareness is essential for addressing issues related to the digital divide.
6. **Emphasizing the Significance of Training and Skills:** It is imperative to encourage more women to acquire digital skills and entrepreneurship capabilities. In a dynamic world, where values and access continually evolve, the emphasis lies on creativity rather than mere certificates or networking.
7. **Transition to Creativity as Currency:** The currency of success has shifted towards creativity, and individuals play a crucial role in deploying it for their survival. Capacity building is integral to enhancing creativity and allowing it to thrive.

8. **Importance of Data for Measurement:** Without data, it is challenging to measure progress. Gathering data at various levels is essential to understand the impact of initiatives and the prevalence of a positive attitude toward change within our environments.
9. **Challenges Faced by Girls in STEM:** Understanding the challenges faced by girls entering STEM fields requires careful examination of enrollment, completion rates, and progress. Data on the number of women engineers and other related metrics are crucial for informed decision-making.
10. **Acknowledging Gradual Change:** Change is a gradual process, and underestimating its pace can lead to disappointment. Advocacy efforts should be persistent, adapting to lessons learned along the way.
11. **Creating Supportive Working Environments:** Advocacy is needed to establish conducive working environments. Unmarried women may manage toxic environments, but as responsibilities increase, women tend to drop out. Creating an encouraging environment that values individual abilities and interests is crucial.
12. **Advocating for Representation Tracking:** Establishing a dashboard to systematically track the representation of women is crucial for ensuring gender diversity in various fields.
13. **Overcoming Hostility and Demands:** Dealing with hostile gatekeepers who may demand incentives can be challenging. Anticipating and persevering through difficulties is essential. Continuous adjustment and demand are part of an ongoing process, with each engagement providing valuable lessons.
14. **Emphasizing Engagement, Reflection, Learning, and Change:** Active engagement, reflection, continuous learning, and adapting to changing environments are integral to finding effective solutions.
15. **Addressing Victim-Blaming:** The society often blames the victims, highlighting the need to advocate for policies that address this issue and create a supportive framework

Recommendations

Governments:

1. Should come up with a gender digital inclusion agenda.
2. Should come up with accelerated schemes to enhance the capacity of women in digital leadership.
3. Address in systematic ways, the challenges of gender violence online.
4. Expand access to digital safety, hygiene and privacy protection skills for women in particular.
5. Take proactive steps to increase women's participation at both board and management levels of digital agencies and authorities in the country.
6. Capacity-building for women should commence from secondary school, addressing the lack of confidence stemming from limited knowledge.
7. Direct all IT national and state agencies to have an organizational gender policy.
8. Government should address systemic workplace practices that make it difficult for women with children to remain at work and in particular promote work environment that are children-friendly and free from gender stereotyping for nursing mothers to feel comfortable to continue to serve.
9. Penalize employers and managements especially in the public sector who discriminate against women in employment and promotion practices.
10. The National Assembly should quickly pass the Digital Rights Bill for the President to assent it.
11. Government should integrate gender sensitive digital literacy programs in formal education, starting from primary schools to higher education institutions.
12. Government should implement a monitoring and evaluation framework to assess the impact of policies and initiatives on increasing women's participation in digital policy making.
13. Address the salary disparity between working men and working women in both government and private sectors.
14. Provide support in terms of monetary incentive to nursing mothers.

National ICT Related Agencies

1. Develop and implement organization gender policy to ensure all their programmes, initiatives and regulations as well as practices to mainstream gender issues.
2. Conduct a thorough gender audit of their staffing, management, board and policies and regulations to make them gender sensitive and to propose ways to speedily address identified gaps with respect to addressing gender concerns in their organizations and their work.
3. Support programmes, initiatives and activities that will contribute to mainstreaming effective bridging of the gender digital divide in the country.
4. Support the convening of the annual Women Internet Governance Forum as a platform for discussing policy issues around gender and technology.
5. Establish mentoring programs to connect experienced women leaders with younger professionals in ICT fields.

Civil Society

1. Champion gender equality and collaborate with legislators to advance the five gender bills proposed to the 10th assembly.
2. Conduct more awareness campaigns to highlight the issue.
3. Campaign and advocate for the implementation of the National Gender Policy 2021.
4. Support calls for the tweaking of the law establishing the USPF and its strategies to ensure that it support women-led community access programmes to bridge the digital divide in the rural and underserved communities in the country.
5. Cooperate and support the Convening of Women in Tech in a form of Community of Practice; a room where people with communality can come together for a common goal. Such forums should be a workshop of all top women leaders in ICT agencies.
6. To undertake Gendered review of all digital policies, regulations and laws in the country.

Media

1. Support efforts of civil society to raise awareness around the issues of gender digital divide.
2. Provide space for the reporting of digital rights abuse of especially women and girls, such as technology assisted gender-based violence, gender specific hate speech and exclusionary practices that target women access to and use of digital technology in the country.
3. Conduct investigation into the ways in which practices, policies and regulations of ICT agencies that negate or support gender digital divide and policies and publicize such reports.
4. Showcase digital leadership of women in the country to help in inspiring and motivating other women to acquire the competence and confidence to be digital champions.
5. Support campaign for raising awareness for digital rights and provide space for the advocacy to legislate on the Digital Rights Bill.

About CITAD

Centre for Information Technology and Development (CITAD), is non-profit and non-governmental organization that focuses on the use of technology for the promotion of good governance, human rights, education, peace building and development in general. With its head Office in Kano, it has other Offices in Federal Capital Territory, and three other Offices in Bauchi State. CITAD's vision is a knowledge-based and self-reliant democratic society. Its' mission is to empower citizens for a just and knowledge-based society that is anchored on sustainable and balanced development using ICTs, Capacity Building, Research and partnership. It was established as a single project (Computer Literacy Project) in 1996 but was expanded in 2000 to include other projects. Now it incorporates six different thematic units.

- **Main Office:**
Plot 4, Isma'ila Adamu Gano Street, Adjacent NSITF Building, Off Social Insurance Road, Behind Trade Fair Complex, Gandu Layout, Kano.
P. O. Box 10210, Kano, Nigeria.
GSM: +234-8068078282, +234-8030978777 +234-8065429784
E-mail: info@citad.org
Website: www.citad.org
- **Abuja Office:**
Plot 149 Cadastral Zone BO2, off American International School, Abuja.
GSM: +234-8181384131, +234-7068749068
- **Bauchi Office:**
Maiduguri Road, Opposite Soroman Filing Station, Near Majiya Guest Inn, Bauchi, Bauchi State. GSM: +234-8064867312
- **Azare Office:**
Central Office Building, Emir's Drive, Opposite Emir's Palace, Azare, Bauchi State. GSM: +23480-64867312.
- **Jama'are Office:**
Jama'are LGA Secretariat, Hanafari Road, Jama'are Local Government Area, Bauchi State. GSM: +234-7055527766, +234-8068711032
- **Itas Office:**
Itas Local Government Secretariat, Bauchi State. GSM: +234-7033088297

