



Report on the National Women’s Circle – Nigeria (2025)

Organized by: Centre for Information Technology and Development (CITAD)

Supported by: Local Networks (LocNet) Initiative

Date: 28 October 2025

Venue: Online

Compiled by: Harira Wakili, National Gender Coordinator (Nigeria)

Introduction

The National Women’s Circle was organized by the Centre for Information Technology and Development (CITAD) with support from the LocNet Initiative, as part of the broader Community-Centered Connectivity Initiative (CCCI). The convening marked one year since the inaugural National Women’s Circle held in October 2024. It provided a platform for women leaders, community network practitioners, regulators, and civil society actors to reflect on collective progress, exchange experiences, and deepen collaboration towards a more gender-inclusive digital ecosystem in Nigeria.

The meeting was led by Harira Wakili, LocNet’s National Gender Coordinator for Nigeria, and attended by representatives from the National Communications Commission (NCC), TechSocietal, DAP Nigeria, ActionAid Nigeria, Women Tech Maker, Nduka Kalu Foundation, CITAD, LocNet, and other gender and technology advocates.

Objectives of the Meeting

The objective of the meeting is to

1. Share the progress made so far in advancing women’s inclusion within the community-centered connectivity initiative in Nigeria.
2. Reflect on lessons learned from the state-level Women’s Circles that have been conducted.
3. Gather valuable input from stakeholders on strategies that can help build an inclusive and enabling ecosystem for women in Nigeria’s digital space.

Opening

The convening was opened with an opening remark by Harira Wakili, who acknowledged that the gathering marked a year of sustained women's engagement in the LocNet ecosystem.

She highlighted that the Women's Circle has evolved into a safe space for women to connect, learn, and advocate for inclusion in community networks. A platform is where women move from being passive users of technology to becoming architects of their own digital futures.

Welcome Remarks

The meeting was followed by a welcome from welcome remark by Kathleen Diga, the co-manager of the LocNet Initiative at APC. In her speech, she welcomed and appreciated the participants for their participation. She highlighted that over a year, specifically since the first gathering on October 22, 2024, in Abuja, a gathering that was a timely and significant moment, as it took place right before the discussion on the national strategy for the community-centred connectivity initiative.

It was an opportune moment because, as women, we did not want to miss the chance to:

1. Deeply reflect on our own experiences and the challenges we each face within the digital gender divide.
2. Contribute meaningfully to shaping an agenda that ensures women's participation and empowerment through digital education, training, and other key activities forming part of the national strategy.

Since then, the LocNet team has remained actively engaged, not only here in Nigeria, where today's learning session draws its focus, but also across seven focus countries working to enable community-centered connectivity. Across all seven countries, including Nigeria, South Africa, and Kenya here on the continent, women's participation and empowerment in the digital society remain at the heart of our work. The Women's Circles have become one of our key experience-sharing platforms and spaces where women exchange insights, foster solidarity, and strengthen collective learning across communities.

She closed her speech with the saying that LocNet firmly believes that if we miss out on women's participation and opportunities in the digital society, we lose half of the social and economic potential available to our countries.

Overview of Gender Integration Commitments in Nigeria

The session was led by Catherine Kyalo, the Liaison Officer for Nigeria and South Africa at the LocNet team. In her presentation, she highlighted the key activities and milestones achieved across phase one and phase two of the project, emphasizing that gender integration has always been central to LocNet's work. The national strategy for community networks in Nigeria identified gender as one of its core thematic areas, focusing

particularly on digital education for women and persons with disabilities (Task 4.2) and promoting gender-sensitive policies (Task 4.5).

During the first National Women's Circle held in October 2024, discussions centered on digital education for women and the co-creation of strategies to operationalize the national framework. The outcomes of the Women's Circle included promoting women's inclusion in digital spaces through literacy and skills development, advocating for supportive policy frameworks, designing culturally and religiously sensitive interventions, addressing social and structural barriers, linking digital literacy to women's economic empowerment, and raising awareness on women's rights for safe and confident digital engagement.

In phase one, implementation activities began in January and focused on four major gender-related initiatives:

1. Capacity building and community engagement, carried out by CITAD through women's circles in Dakwa and Jamare.
2. A mentorship program to sustain engagement among female trainees within the National School of Community Networks.
3. Training and advocacy for gender-sensitive ICT policies targeting civil society organizations.
4. A comprehensive needs assessment to identify women's skills gaps and determine how they wish to engage in digital skill programs.

Key outcomes from these activities included the production of a documentary capturing women's success stories, a needs assessment report highlighting women's preferred engagement models, and a review of the National School of Community Networks, which recommended the inclusion of a dedicated gender module on women's participation in community networks. Findings further revealed the need for localized training content, more female trainers, the linkage of digital skills to economic opportunities, improved access to devices and data, and the mitigation of cultural barriers to women's digital inclusion.

In phase two, LocNet and its partners are deepening their gender-focused efforts by mapping barriers to women's participation, identifying local technology needs, and developing a gender module for integration into the national curriculum. CITAD has conducted six Women's Circles across six states, while TechSocietal is addressing the lack of community-generated data through case studies and evidence-based advocacy. These efforts aim to influence ICT policy frameworks, particularly contributing to the forthcoming National Broadband Plan (2026–2030).

In conclusion, LocNet's gender integration work in Nigeria demonstrates a strong and continuing commitment to ensuring that women are not just beneficiaries of connectivity but active co-creators in shaping inclusive, community-centered digital ecosystems.

Through collaboration, evidence building, and sustained advocacy, LocNet and its partners continue to advance women's digital empowerment across Nigeria.

Update from CITAD

CITAD provided an update on its continuous commitment to gender inclusion within the Community-Centered Connectivity Initiative, highlighting progress across mentorship, Women's Circles, local assessments, and capacity-building efforts.

1. Mentorship Program

The first phase of the mentorship program ran for three months and included participation from women both within and outside the community network ecosystem. Women who were not previously part of the initiative joined to learn more about the project and explore how their knowledge and professional experience could contribute to the initiative in Nigeria. With the first phase completed, CITAD plans to extend the program through a national peer-to-peer mentorship model for interested women across Nigeria.

2. Women's Circles Across Six States

Women's Circles were conducted in Abuja, Bauchi, Kano, Kaduna, Lagos, and Port Harcourt. While Abuja has been part of the project since its inception, expanding to additional states provided deeper insight into the diverse needs and contexts of women. A major concern across the circles was the need for safe spaces for women to engage in community development conversations.

For example, women in the Kafanchan community reported being responsible for most family and livelihood tasks but still being excluded from decision-making processes. Some communities requested women-only cafés or designated access times for ICT centers to ensure safe and inclusive digital participation.

3. Local Assessments and Data Collection

During each Women's Circle, CITAD conducted assessments to understand women's perspectives and needs. A total of 78 women completed guided assessment forms that examined:

- Access to devices and infrastructure
- Digital literacy levels
- Training needs and barriers

Key barriers identified included:

- High device and training costs, with women advocating for government subsidies on smartphones, laptops, and tablets.
- Low awareness of digital opportunities and existing programs.
- Time constraints, particularly for mothers, who recommended being involved in training schedules from the planning stage.
- Poor infrastructure, including limited electricity and unreliable internet. Some communities rely solely on solar and generators, and one Abuja community reported receiving a transformer that was never installed.

Women stressed that improving these infrastructural gaps is crucial for meaningful digital literacy and inclusion.

4. Gender-Specific Preferences and Insights

Most women preferred women-only training environments, noting that such spaces allow them to participate more confidently. They also emphasized the need for gender-responsive program design, insisting on being included in planning processes so that initiatives align with their daily realities and local contexts.

5. Adoption of the Women's Circle Model

Several communities expressed interest in integrating the Women's Circle model into their existing local structures. These circles will serve as platforms for discussing digital inclusion, education, connectivity challenges, and power/electricity issues.

6. Capacity Building and Advocacy Skills

CITAD expanded its mentorship program to include advocacy training, equipping women not only with technical and entrepreneurship skills but also with the ability to advocate for their rights and community needs. Many participants benefited from this component through advocacy and entrepreneurship sessions facilitated by TechSocietal.

Update on LocNet–NCC Private Workshop

Kathleen Diga (APC) highlighted a major milestone in advancing the national strategy: a collaborative Government–Private Workshop held in June between LocNet and the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC). The workshop brought together NCC officials, partners, and international contributors to build a shared understanding of community networks within the Nigerian context. Participants learned from experiences in

Kenya, Mexico, South Africa, and other regions, gaining insights into community-centered connectivity globally.

Presentations included the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), which demonstrated the link between digital inclusion and financial inclusion, and Steve Song (Internet Society), who emphasized understanding backhaul costs, mapping fiber infrastructure, and adopting innovative pricing models that do not disadvantage rural areas. The Association of Elton stressed community ownership of infrastructure, drawing parallels with how rural communities often collaborate to build schools.

The workshop successfully deepened stakeholder understanding of community networks and highlighted how communities can identify their connectivity needs, make informed choices, and take ownership of local infrastructure. Senior NCC management opened the event with remarks reaffirming Nigeria's commitment to collaborative progress and the development of a national framework for community networks. The session exemplified strong collaborative leadership, especially among women driving the digital inclusion agenda.

While Hauwa Buba Wakili (NCC) added that from a regulatory standpoint, the workshop was instrumental in identifying foundational elements required for community networks in Nigeria. A key focus was the absence of a specific licensing framework. Discussions with the Licensing Department led to the development of a new General Authorization Framework, which introduces a sandbox and proof-of-concept mechanism—a first in Nigeria's telecom sector.

Spectrum allocation was another major issue addressed, with the Commission exploring options for affordable and dedicated spectrum bands, including TV white space. Funding models were also examined, with the Universal Service Provision Fund (USPF) playing a central role in shaping sustainable financing options. Additionally, the need for a comprehensive study to guide the development of a national framework was recognized, and steps were initiated to engage a consultant for this purpose.

The workshop emphasized scalability and collaboration, with key contributions from CBN and the Rural Electrification Agency (REA), given that access to power remains a significant barrier for many communities. Further strengthening of multilevel cooperation took place during a Business Roundtable with State Governments, aimed at building strong state-level partnerships.

In summary, the workshop advanced regulatory innovation, improved stakeholder coordination, and laid essential groundwork for developing an inclusive, sustainable community network ecosystem in Nigeria.

Update from TechSocietal

By Gabriel Odunsi

TechSocietal provided an update on its contributions to the project, now in its second phase. During the first phase, the organization focused on two main areas: developing a comprehensive needs assessment toolkit and conducting capacity-building sessions on gender-sensitive policy advocacy.

Needs Assessment Report

The report examined digital skills and knowledge gaps among women community network operators in underserved regions, including Kaduna, Kano, Port Harcourt, and additional states. Using qualitative and participatory methods, such as interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires, the study explored the realities and challenges faced by women in these communities.

Key Findings:

1. Skills and Knowledge Gaps:
2. Many rural women lacked foundational digital and technical skills required to manage and sustain community networks.
 - Gender stereotypes that position ICT as “male-dominated” discouraged women from pursuing technical training.

Despite challenges, many women expressed a strong interest in learning skills such as digital marketing and agricultural e-commerce tools.

3. Socioeconomic and Cultural Barriers:
 - Barriers included poor electricity, unreliable internet connectivity, and high data costs.
 - Some women walked long distances for stronger network signals or to charge devices.
 - Cultural norms limited participation, with some needing male permission to attend trainings.
 - Domestic and caregiving responsibilities restricted women’s available time.

- High device costs further prevented access.
 - An example of progress was noted through the Francois Foundation, which integrated digital training into village savings groups.
4. Preferred Learning Methods:
- Women preferred peer-to-peer learning and training led by female facilitators for comfort and confidence.

Recommendations from the Needs Assessment:

The report recommended expanding internet connectivity in rural areas, forming public-private partnerships to lower data costs, creating blended learning programs that fit women's schedules, offering training in local languages, and addressing cultural resistance through safe learning spaces, childcare support, and increased female trainers.

Capacity-Building Workshop

As part of Phase 1, TechSocietal hosted a workshop on gender-sensitive ICT policy with 27 participants from civil society, academia, and government. Sessions examined gender gaps in ICT policies and included a panel on women in community networks and policy co-design exercises.

Three working groups were formed:

1. Policy Advocacy
2. Research and Data Collection
3. Community-Based Training

Key outcomes were strengthened capacity for gender-inclusive ICT policy advocacy and improved cross-organizational partnerships for follow-up actions.

Phase Two Activities

The second phase focuses on research and policy development through case studies and policy briefs built on community-level data, to inform Nigeria's next National Broadband Plan. Data collection has taken place in Bauchi, Kano, and Port Harcourt, with focus groups and key informant interviews. Remaining deliverables are being finalized to ensure a complete evidence base.

The overarching goal is to raise awareness among civil society and media actors about the need for gender-sensitive approaches to digital infrastructure development.

In summary, TechSocietal's work continues to promote digital inclusion by identifying barriers, strengthening advocacy, and amplifying women's voices to ensure they are not left behind in community-centered connectivity efforts across Nigeria.

During the meeting, two organizations shared updates on their ongoing work supporting gender inclusion and community connectivity, aligning with LocNet's objectives.

Starting with Suwaiba Muhammad Dankabo- Deputy Country Director, ActionAid Nigeria

Suwaiba reflected on previous engagements and appreciated the updates shared. She explained that ActionAid Nigeria has focused on automation and virtual engagement, upgrading internal systems and integrating virtual sessions with women's groups and communities. This has increased women's participation and helped them better understand the importance of digitalization and internet access.

Their approach is needs-driven, helping women recognize digital inclusion as a global movement relevant to their livelihoods. Women are increasingly using digital platforms to market goods, and ActionAid works with CITAD and community-based organizations, including farmer groups, to strengthen digital access and participation.

She highlighted progress from earlier "seed-planting" efforts in Abuja, where communities now take ownership of digital centers, which serve as hubs for information and internet access. These centers are supported in collaboration with FCDO, CITAD, and local partners.

Women's improved digital access is directly contributing to their economic empowerment, especially among those in village savings and loans schemes. A new digital center in Enugu has also been established, adding to existing facilities.

Suwaiba emphasized the importance of the Women's Circle as a learning platform and noted plans to expand digital participation to young women and persons with disabilities, ensuring inclusion for women with disabilities. She thanked the group and apologized for diverting briefly from the agenda.

Followed by Mary Uduma, Dom Digital Foundation (CSR arm of NiRA)

Mary began by reflecting on the long gap since the previous meeting. She introduced the Dom Digital Foundation's focus areas:

1. Online safety
2. Active digital participation
3. Digital education for women, girls, boys, and children

She emphasized her commitment to women's inclusion. Over the past year, the foundation partnered with CITAD, reaching about 4,000 young people, including many girls, through cybersecurity and ICT capacity-building programs.

The foundation contributed to the launch of an ICT lab in Abuja and conducted ICT literacy and digital skills training across Sokoto, Abia, Rivers, Benue, Anambra, Enugu, and Lagos.

Mary highlighted plans to increase women's participation in the domain name industry, noting that many are unaware of the opportunities. Becoming a domain name registrar or reseller can be a flexible, home-based business for women.

The foundation has sponsored women in cybersecurity initiatives, including supporting the female leadership of NACOS and contributing to events for Cybersecurity Week. They also work with secondary and tertiary school girls and partner largely with women-led organizations at the community level.

Mary is personally working to establish a new women-led community communication center in her local government area, following the collapse of an earlier facility. Discussions with the local government chairman are ongoing.

She raised several questions about the recent LocNet meeting with the NCC, asking about:

- Policy outcomes
- Any policy briefs or communiqués
- Clear next steps

She noted that past NCC frameworks for grassroots connectivity have faced challenges and expressed hope that this recent engagement will lead to better results.

Mary concluded by proposing improved communication within the Women's Circle to ensure all members are aware of ongoing programs. She mentioned missing a TechSocietal activity because it was held physically, and she was not aware early enough.

Recommendation:

During the meeting, participants recommended the following:

1. Josephine
 - Suggested ensuring that research and dialogues inform institutional frameworks for government and partner support.
 - Recommended that future work should translate findings into policy and regulatory frameworks that strengthen gender integration.
 - Encouraged continued peer-learning platforms like women's circles across different states.
2. Kathleen Diga:
 - Recommended implementing targeted interventions for women-led workshops based on needs assessments.
 - Proposed translating assessment findings into implementation projects, like digital training modules.

- Emphasized continuation of collaboration between LocNet and NCC to operationalize the national strategy on digital education and mentorship by 2026.
3. Dami Sowemimo:
 - Suggested synergizing ongoing projects (e.g., Blue Sapphire Foundation, Fronton Foundation) to address cultural barriers collaboratively.
 - Recommended building linkages between stakeholders working on gender digital inclusion in Northern Nigeria.
 4. Laraba Adegbenro:
 - Recommended fostering collaboration and sustainability within the stakeholder network.
 - Encouraged exploring replication of successful initiatives beyond Northern states.
 5. Mary Uduma:
 - Recommended working together across regions and organizations to expand digital inclusion nationally.
 - Called for coordinated efforts to bring digital justice across Nigeria.
 6. Hauwa Buba Wakili:
 - Recommended that Community Networks join the National Broadband Alliance to leverage partnerships with governors and state-level actors.
 - Suggested that such collaboration will enhance policy visibility and adoption for community networks.

Comments:

Some of the comments that came out toward the end of the meeting.

1. Josephine Miliza:
 - Noted the strong link between digital skills, economic empowerment, and policy advocacy.
 - Praised ongoing work and women's circles as powerful peer learning platforms.
 - Commended the progress across different stakeholders, from grassroots to high-level government actors.
2. Dami Sowemimo (DAP Nigeria)
 - Expressed appreciation for the meeting and highlighted how much work is ongoing.
 - Shared that some organizations' efforts are difficult to track due to the volume of initiatives.
 - Introduced her organization's partnership with Blue Sapphire Foundation, working in Kano, Jigawa, and Katsina on addressing cultural barriers to women's digital access.
3. Laraba Adegbenro (DAP Nigeria)
 - Reinforced Dami's points on collaboration and sustainability.
 - Highlighted the importance of scaling beyond Northern Nigeria to other regions.
 - Stressed that replication and partnership are key to sustainability.
4. Mary Uduma:
 - Expressed willingness to collaborate with other partners in the meeting.
 - Emphasized expanding beyond the northern region for nationwide digital inclusion.

- Reaffirmed the goal of bringing digital justice to people wherever they are.
5. Hauwa Buba Wakili
- Provided updates on the National Broadband Plan (NBP 2020–2025), which is nearing expiration.
 - Noted the start of the third iteration led by the Ministry of Communications, Innovation, and Digital Economy.
 - Mentioned the National Broadband Alliance of Nigeria and encouraged Community Networks to join for collaboration and policy alignment.

Question:

1. Mary Uduma:
 - Asked about follow-up outcomes or communications from the LocNet–NCC Private Workshop (whether there was a communiqué or documented outcomes).
2. Dami Sowemimo:
 - Asked whether there will be a comprehensive documentation or summary report capturing all the initiatives presented during the meeting.
 - Placed a question in the chat for “Catherine” regarding her updates and progress reports.
3. Hauwa Buba Wakili:
 - Indirectly posed a question on whether Community Networks in Nigeria are members of the National Broadband Alliance, encouraging them to join for broader collaboration.

Annexes

Annex A: Convening Agenda

Introduction of participants- All

Opening remark and objective of the meeting -Harira

Welcome Remark- Kathleen Diga

Overview of Nigerian integration- Catherine Kyalo

Update from CITAD- Harira

LocNet/NCC Private Workshop- Kathleen Diga and Hauwa Buba Wakili

Update from TechSocietal- Gabriel Odunsi

Input/update from participants - Suwaiba Dankabo and Mary Uduma

Q&A- All

Closing- Harira

Annex B: Participant List

1. Kathleen Diga - LocNet
2. Catherine Kyalo - LocNet
3. Suwaiba Muhammad Dankabo - ActionAid
4. Josephine Miliza - LocNet
5. Harira Wakili - CITAD-LocNet
6. Risper Arose - Afralti -LocNet
7. Rebecca Rykitimbo - LocNet
8. Dami Sowemimo - DAP Nigeria
9. Laraba Adegbenro- DAP Nigeria
10. Mary Uduma-
11. Josephine Ojo-
12. Safiyya Daba - Women Techmaker
13. Mary Gichuki- Afralti -LocNet
14. Sanah A Muaz - Department of Software Engineering, Bayero University, Kano
15. Cynthia El Khoury - LocNet
16. Gabriel Odunsi- TechSocietal
17. Yesmin Salako- CITAD
18. Hauwa Buba Wakili - NCC