

OVERCOMING GENDER-BASED DIGITAL EXCLUSION IN NORTHERN NIGERIA: A STRATEGY DOCUMENT



**CENTRE FOR INFORMATION
TECHNOLOGY AND
DEVELOPMENT**



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FORWARD

In recognition of the gender digital divide, Centre for Information Technology and Development (CITAD) sought for a subgrant from the Association from Progressive Communication (APC) to implement a Project whose main goal was to raise awareness about the factors that inhibit women use of the internet, develop strategies on overcoming them and pursue the implementation of these strategies while building the capacity of women to understand internet rights and freedoms as well as know how to safely use the internet.

The project consists of three components namely a research undertaking to understand the factor hinder the effective use of the internet by women in the region, capacity building for women to undertake advocacy around the issues of internet rights and a sustained advocacy for gender digital inclusion in the region. The research, as an indicative study, was conducted in four communities namely Doganjije and Azare (Bauchi State) and Dakata and Zaura Baba (Kano State).

Following the research, CITAD recognized the need to prepare as part of the advocacy kits, a strategy document that will guide both the advocates and those key stakeholders that have critical role to play in overcoming the gender digital exclusion in the region.

This document benefits from the respondents of the research at the levels of interviews, focus group discussions and the administration of questionnaires as well as the two stakeholders forums held in both Bauchi and Kano State.

1. INTRODUCTION

Although the right to internet has not been codified into a United Nations ratifiable instrument, the UN does recognize access to internet as a right. This recognition is based on a number of compelling arguments including:

First, education is a right guaranteed in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration for Human Rights. This is further reinforced in article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. This right is today accessible largely through the internet. So those who have no access to the internet are at a serious disadvantage. If internet is the tool to access education, then this tool must itself be right.

Second, Article 21 of the Declaration provides that “Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country”. This is further reaffirmed in Article 3 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Given that political participation cannot be effective without access to information which can be obtained through the internet, internet must be critical to actualizing the right to political participation.

Additionally, Article 21 (2) of the Declaration provides that “Everyone has the right to equal access to public service in his country”. As more and more public service migrates to online, it means that the only way citizens can assert and access this right is through the internet.

Article 19 provides among other things, the right to freedom of expression and to receive and impart information. This is further given force in Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Clearly without access to internet the right to freedom of expression and to receive and impart information would be severely curtailed in the digital era. Making access to internet a right is thus a condition for people to actualize their right to freedom of expression and to receive and impart information.

It is important to note that these rights are also provided for in the African Charter on Peoples and Human Rights as well as in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

It is these compelling arguments of the internet as a right that has made the UN to articulate the campaign – Leave No One Behind as part of the global agenda for digital inclusion. The objective of the campaign is to ensure that all marginalized groups such as women, the aged, people living with disability, etc have access to the use of and benefit of internet. At its core, it aims at bridging all the dimensions of the digital divide. This includes the gender dimension of the divide.

Although in a number of countries the gender dimension of the digital divide has been bridged, this is not so in Nigeria where there is huge differential between men and women in terms of access to and use of the internet. Within the country, it is worse in the states in the northern parts of the country. This is due to a number of factors including culture, religion, education and attitude. This combination weaves a patriarchal frame through which women rights to expression and visibility online are analyzed. This has serious implication in the ability of women to access and use the internet and to express themselves visibility online. For this reason, the bridging of the gender dimension of the digital divide is more difficult in the north than in other parts of the country and requires a sustained advocacy to change mindset in addition to other access related issues. Undertaking such an advocacy needs a clear understanding the factors that shape the discourse of internet in the society.

In an effort to understand why this is so and to develop appropriate strategies for digital inclusion of women in the region, CITAD undertook a pilot research aimed to understand the factors that inhibit the effective use of the internet by women in the north. This research was conducted in Bauchi (North East) and Kano (North West).

2. ISSUES

The research and stakeholders' meetings confirmed that more men use the internet than women in the region. Both the research and stakeholders meetings therefore sought to find out what were key factors hindering the effective use of internet by women in the region. While some of these factors are same for men and women (such as inadequate infrastructure), there are some specific factors that make fewer women to use the internet. From our findings, these factors can be grouped into four:

1. Education Related Factors

Education is taken in its broader sense, from awareness to having deeper knowledge and skills to use the internet. The use of the internet requires digital literacy but digital literacy itself can only be happen when people have basic literacy. In a region in which female literacy rate is less than 40%, it means that over 60% of the women are automatically excluded from the effective use of the internet. For those who are literate, lack of awareness about the internet is a key impediment to its use. Unless one is aware of the internet she cannot be expected to use it. The final aspect of the education related factors is digital skills. Skill for effective use of the internet is a major hindrance to its use by women.

2. Access Related Factors:

Although access is generally within the same level of penetration, for both men and women, women face more problems in accessing and using the internet. Access is in particular shaped by:

- a. Physical Access: access to the internet is limited. Majority of the people access the internet through their smartphones. Not however all can afford smartphones or even the airtime. For many, therefore, they have to go to public cyber cafes. These cafes, as our respondents point, are not culturally sensitive to either married women or to even women in generally. They are usually inhibited by young boys. Consequently most women would rather stay away and get their brothers or sons or even nephews to access and use internet on their behalf than they going there to do it by themselves.
- b. Power: lack of electricity especially in rural communities is a key impediment to the use of the internet. While men could go about to commercial power points where handset are charged for a fee, most women do not want to patronize these for fear of intrusion into the privacy of their handsets while being away.
- c. Languages: many people see disincentive in the use of internet as the content is in languages that majority of women who have not gone to formal western education do not understand
- d. Content: many see inappropriate content that is not relevant to them at best or offensive and offending to their cultural sensibilities.
- e. Cost: the cost of service is a factor to limiting the use of the internet

3. Attitude Related Factors:

By attitude we mean opinions that people hold due to either cultural or religious perceptions. Here we find that 55 % of men do not want their wives to use the internet even as they themselves are using it. Also about 61% said they do want their daughters to use the internet. This means that both husbands and fathers discourage, if not ban, their wives and daughters respectively from using the internet. This means that women are under intense social pressure not to use the internet. There are stories of women whose marriages had collapsed because of the use of the internet. A second problem relating to the above is the widespread percent by men and accepted by women that only women of easy virtue use the internet. To drive home

the pressure a religious angle is added. Over 60% of the respondents believe there are religious and moral concerns about the use of internet. Among the female respondents only, the percentage is even higher at over 62%. With respect to religion only, 67.57% of the female respondents think there are religious concerns while for the male it was almost 80%. On whether they personally agree with this concern, 65% of female respondents and 65.65% male respondents agreed. A number of clerics have preached against the use of the internet. When respondents were asked if they were aware about these clerics, 69.63% and 78.57% female and male respondents respectively said yes. On whether they had personally come across such clerics, 58.92% and 63.44% female and male respondents respectively said yes. Perhaps the higher percentage of male respondents being aware and indeed coming across such clerics has to do with the fact that more men attend religious function such as preaching than women. An important issue was whether they agree with those clerics who preach against the use of the internet. Overall, 54.95 agree that it is wrong for women to use the internet; this percentage is higher for males at 62.25% while for female the corresponding figure is 51.28%. The figure for men is not surprising they majority have said they would not allow their wives or daughters to use the internet. What is surprising is the higher percentage of female respondents who believe with the clerics who preach against the use of the internet. This means that there is not only acceptance of this but also its internalization by women. It is instructive that over 90% of the respondents believe that overall, the internet is useful.

4 . Online Issues Factor

A number of online issues that women face tend to reinforce the attitude related factors. These include:

- a. There is too much of base content, especially in the social media which many women find offensive. Fear of Indecent materials is cited as the third most important factor that discourages women from using the internet.
- b. Women feel that being online undermines their privacy. This fear of lack of privacy can be seen from the fact that more women use whatsapp than other social media and the reason they give is that whataspp is seen as being more protective of their privacy than the others. Among the factors that discourage women from using internet, lack of privacy came first with 28.00%. When the option “exposure to public” (which is also about privacy) is added, the response due to lack of privacy is over 43%.
- c. Online harassment: women cite online harassment as one factor that discourages them from going online. Such online harassment include unsolicited and unwanted messages, sending of suggestive messages, outright sexual harassment and fear of blackmail that they had seen had happened to some other women. Unwanted messages came second among the factors that discourages women from using the internet. When unsolicited message (20.50%) and insecurity (12.00%) are added, the figure here rises to over 50%.

3. STRATEGIC AGENDA

a. Preamble

On the basis of the problems and issues identified from the research, we held two strategy sessions with stakeholders on how to respond to these issues and problems in an effort to promote digital inclusion of women in the region. We also held follow up FGDs and interviews to get the opinions of others who could not be at the stakeholder meetings. What follows here, placed in a broader perspectives of bridging the gender digital divide in the north, is the outcome of these consultations and interaction.

b. Vision

Universal access to a free, safe, affordable, transfer and secure internet

c. Mission

Undertake sustained advocacy, awareness building efforts and training initiatives to ensure that all stakeholders key in to the strategic commitment to deliver access to a free, safe, affordable, transparent and secure internet digital inclusion of women in northern Nigeria

d. Goal:

The goal is to promote the digital inclusion of women in Nigeria, especially in the northern part where culture, religious and education have combine to create conditions that make effective use of the internet by women more difficult

e. Objectives

- i. Enhance public understanding of the importance of internet to women
- ii. Increase the number of women who access and use the internet in the region
- iii. Contribute to the digital inclusion of women in the country
- iv. Facilitate the mainstreaming of the voice of women in the Internet Governance Forum
- v. Contribute to the articulation of a national digital inclusion agenda

4. STRATEGIES

In order to address the various issues identified and lead to the achievement of the objectives set, it is proposed that all stakeholders be mobilized to collectively and individually implement action, initiatives, programmes, projects and policies that will be delivered by the following strategies:

- Conducting public enlightenment to educate women about the importance and benefits of the internet
- Implementing appreciation programme for men to understand that the use of internet is not the cause of family problems
- Enacting policies that will improve accessibility and affordability of access to internet especially for women
- Conducting training for women to know how to make effective use of the internet
- Promoting the achievement of universal digital literacy among women in the country
- Articulating and implementing a national digital inclusion agenda and strategies that will ensure that no one is left behind in harnessing the benefit of the internet
- Encouraging service providers to implement strategies that will respect and protect the privacy of users and ensure their safety and security
- Conducting advocacy to ensure that those holding negative perceptions about the internet are made to understand and support efforts to deploy the use of
- Improving educational infrastructure to position schools provide all with digital literacy
- Encouraging IT professionals, content providers and other professionals to provide appropriate and relevant content that incentivize going online
- Supporting efforts at protecting children and women online
- Supporting efforts to ensure the effective implementation of the national

curriculum on education which makes computer studies compulsory at basic level and compulsory and examinable at secondary school.

- Encouraging populating the internet with relevant content in local languages
- Facilitating the emergence of voices of women particularly in the north around internet policy making, including participation at all levels of the internet governance forum
- Deepening of the involvement of grassroots in the internet government process

5. ACTORS, ROLE AND ACTIVITIES

	Actor	Role	Activities
1.	National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA)	Federal government agency responsible for the promotion of the development and use of ICT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Promote local content development on the internet · Promote use of local languages in the internet by supporting academia and IT professionals should work to promote greater insertion of our local languages online • Support e-based entrepreneurship to incentivize going online for women
2.	Nigeria Communications Commission (NCC)	The national telecommunication regulator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Support initiative that will promote awareness and skills building for women · Develop initiatives that will help to bring out cost of internet • Provide proactive regulatory oversight that will help users to hold providers accountable for poor quality of service
3.	Universal Service Provision Fund (USPF)	National agency for promotion of access to rural and underserved communities funded from profit tax by telecommunication license holders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Should step up its bridging initiatives with particular emphasis to reaching rural women · Consider women in general as an underserved category and provide support subsidized rollout for women • Support training of rural women on use of ICTs

4.	Ministry of Communication	Federal Government establishment with responsible on communication policies	<p>ÊÕÀÀÒÏ ÔÏÏ ÎÏÏÏ ÕÏÏ implementation of the National Broadband Plan AÏ ÒÏ ÏÏÏÏ ÏÏÏ ÏÏ: ÏÏÏ ÏÏ ÏÏÏÏÏÏ ÏÏ ÕÏ bring down the cost of internet ; the country</p>
5.	Ministry of Education	Establishment with responsible on education policy at all levels	<p>ÆÏÏÏÏ ÔÏÏ ÎÏÏÏ ÏÏÏ implementation of the new education curricula that made ICT compulsory from basic level ËÏÏÏÏÏÏÏÏ ÏÏÏÏÏÏÏÏ ÏÏÏ ICT tools and infrastructure in public institutions, especially in girls' schools ËÏÏÏ ÏÏ ÏÏ ÕÏÏ ÔÏÏ implementation of the ministry ICTs in Education Policy ÆÏÏ ÏÏraging states that do not have ICT in Education Policy to develop one and to fully implement them</p>
6.	Federal Ministry of Science and Technology		<p>ËÏÏÏÏÏÏÏ ÎÏ ÒÏ ÏÏÏÏ: ÎÏ ÏÏÏÏÏ local content that can make internet meaningful to women ËÏÏÏÏÏÏÏ ÏÏ ÏÏ ËÏÏÏ ÏÏÏÏÏ agenda implementation at the national level ËÏÏÏÏÏ ÕÏ ÔÏÏ ÕÏÏ ÏÏÏÏÏ internet as part of its science and technology popularize programme</p>
7.	Federal Ministry of Information	Establishment with responsibility for governance public information	<p>ËÏÏÏÏÏÏÏÏÏ ÏÏ ÏÏÏÏ ÕÏ ÏÏ awareness of women about internet ËÏÏÏÏÏÏÏ ÏÏ ÕÏÏÏ ÏÏ ÕÏÏÏ government agencies to address the impediments</p>

		<p>to effective access to and use of internet by women</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage media agencies under it to join the campaign the campaign for greater access to the internet by
8.	Federal Ministry for Youth and Women Affairs	<p>Establishment with direct responsibility for mainstreaming of gender issues in governance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a gender including digital agenda for the ministry • Support advocacy for increased access to internet by women • Support ICT training, especially for rural women • Support the campaign against gender harassment online • Promote the participation of women in policy making discussion around internet , including the internet governance forum
9.	National Orientation Agency (NOA)	<p>A Federal government agency for public enlightenment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage in public sensitization on the importance of internet for women and help to address misconceptions among the parent and husbands about the internet • Support CSOs advocacy for promote awareness about internet among women • Promote the campaign for local content as well as against harmful content and practice online

12.

Media	Both private and public	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support for advocacy, public enlighten and education on internet and women issues• the campaign for the protection of child online and against and other harmful practice online
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CITAD (www.citad.org) is a capacity building civil society organization whose activities covers research, advocacy, training and publicity in all areas of ICTs. Its vision is; a knowledge-based democratic society free of hunger while its mission is; using ICTs to empower citizens for a just and knowledge-based society that is anchored on sustainable and balanced development.

MAIN OFFICE:

3rd Floor, NSITF Building, No.1A, Social Insurance Road,
behind Trade Fair Complex, Zaria road, Kano.

P.O. Box 10210, Kano, Nigeria.

Tel: +234806 8078282, +234806 5429784

E-mail: info@citad.org

Website: www.citad.org, www.citad4peace.org.ng

Facebook: Centre for Information Technology and Development

Twitter: @ICTAdvocates

JIGAWA OFFICE

Flat B, Aduwa House, behind Old Market, Dutse,
Jigawa State

BAUCHI OFFICE

NUJ Complex, Ahmadu Bello Way, Bauchi,
Bauchi State

AZARE OFFICE

Central Office Building, Emir's Drive, Opposite
Emir's Palace, Azare, Bauchi State

JAMA'ARE OFFICE

Harafai Road, Jama'are LG Secretariat,
Jama'are, Bauchi State

CITAD.....*A Knowledge-based Democratic Society Free of Hunger*



Designed by Sufyan Lawal Kabo,
CITAD CREATIVE DEPARTMENT