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PARADIGM INITIATIVE NIGERIA
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NIGERIA**

**WOMEN'S RIGHTS ONLINE
A RESEARCH AND POLICY ADVOCACY INITIATIVE ON WOMEN'S
EMPOWERMENT THROUGH THE WEB**

COUNTRY REPORT

With support from



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Background to the Study

The Nigerian population is thought to be more than 170 million inhabitants, having grown steadily from about 20 million in 1931, to 32 million in 1952/53, 56 million in 1963, and 88 million in 1991. Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa; one of the fastest growing populations in the world, and with one of the fastest pace of urbanization trends in recent times. Nigeria, however, has not escaped the inherent negative implications of rapid population growth and urbanization in social, environmental, economic, political and other dimensions. In many urban centers in Nigeria, the social implication of congestion and overcrowding are obvious and certain, including the inadequacy of all sorts of services. Sustainable urbanization is a critical challenge facing many cities across developing countries of the world, including Lagos, Nigeria's capital city. The Lagos State government has put the current population of the state at around 21 million, which could make it about 12 per cent of Nigeria's entire population.¹ Lagos is the most prosperous city in Nigeria, where much of the nation's wealth and economic activity are concentrated.

Nigeria has overtaken South Africa to become Africa's largest economy and its population is expected to surpass that of the United States by 2050. She has recorded a 200 percent growth in Internet users between 2009 and 2013. In numbers, this translates as 55 million internet users in 2012, the same number of internet users in the UK. By 2013, Nigeria Internet users had grown by 14 percent, at 62.4 million users surpassing the UK with about 57 million (DigitXplus, 2014).² This seats Nigeria at the top of the ladder in terms of growth in number of internet users in Africa. The World Bank and International Telecommunications Union's 2013 report on internet access details how 33 percent of Nigeria's population are internet users and only 10 percent have mobile broadband subscriptions. This suggests that nearly 70 percent of the country's population is still offline.

Broadband access in Nigeria is still relatively expensive and remains unaffordable for many people. A fixed broadband plan costs about N9,000, or 50 percent of national minimum wage of N18,000 (\$110) per month. A mobile broadband plan costs N3,000 or 17 percent of the national minimum wage. The International Telecommunications Union puts the cost of fixed

¹<http://www.lagosstate.gov.ng/pagelinks.php?p=6>

²PIN Policy Brief 004 <http://pinigeria.org/new/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Policy-Brief-004.pdf>

broadband and mobile broadband at 39 percent and 13 percent of average monthly income respectively.”³

According to Alliance for Affordable Internet (A4AI)’s Affordability Report 2014, “almost 60 percent of the world’s population – most of whom live in developing countries – are offline. Close to 70 percent of households in the developing world do not have Internet access, and while Internet penetration rates have increased dramatically in recent years, the pace of change seems to be slowing.”⁴ The report particularly identified that women face some of the highest barriers to Internet affordability. Of the two billion people in developing and emerging countries are priced out of accessing the Internet, women form part of that group least likely to be able to connect affordably.

It has been argued that ‘The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women’ (CEDAW) is the leading modern instrument on women's rights. Adopted on December 18, 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly, the Nigerian government became a State Party to this important Convention when it ratified it in 1985 without reservations, signed the Optional Protocol in 2000 and ratified it in 2004. Thirty years on following the ratification of convention, the Bill is still pending in the National Assembly. Section 12 of the Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 provides that no treaty between the Federation and any other country shall have the force of law except to the extent to which any such treaty has been enacted into law by the National Assembly. Some have opined that the existence of customary and religious laws often means that women’s rights are compromised; stating that CEDAW, which seeks to challenge discriminatory cultural and religious practices is facing resistance and being undermined as a result of this duality of legal systems. Still others see a major challenge for CEDAW advocacy in Nigeria in convincing the male dominated national and state assemblies to make CEDAW legally enforceable in Nigeria in accordance with the constitutional role assigned to them. CEDAW remains the landmark Convention and the most important normative instrument that aims to achieve equal rights for women everywhere in the world.

Background Review of Policy, Legal, Social Context of women and the Web/ICTs

³PIN Policy Brief 004 <http://pinigeria.org/new/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Policy-Brief-004.pdf>

⁴ Affordability Report 2014 <http://a4ai.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/a4ai-affordability-report-2014.pdf>

Various global reports and statistics reveal that women and girls are grossly underrepresented in the field of ICTs. According to the International Telecommunications Union ITU, in developing countries, 16 percent fewer women than men use the Internet, compared with only 2 percent fewer women than men in the developed world (ITU, 2013). In Nigeria, this divide flows naturally from the already existing gender gaps pervading almost every sphere of life.

As a result of traditional gender roles assigned by the Nigerian culture, many women see technology as primarily the preserve of men. According to a research conducted by the University of Ibadan on Gender Differences in Computer Literacy among selected students in the Southern Nigeria, “on whether there was equality of access between the women academics and their male counterparts,” 199 (97.1 percent) answered in the negative while only 6 (2.9 percent) respondents confirmed that there was equality of access.”⁵

Nigeria currently has a national framework, the National Broadband Plan (2013 – 2018), governing ICT policy, with a National Broadband council responsible for its implementation. At the core of the plan is a goal to increase broadband penetration in Nigeria five-fold by 2018; from 6 percent in 2013 to 30 percent in 2018.⁶ Alongside the strategies for deploying infrastructure, the plan concludes that the digital divide in broadband adoption and utilization is mostly created by awareness and affordability challenges, and prescribes initiatives that encourage target populations which are lagging behind, and are less likely to embrace the use of broadband services without some form of training or facilitation. The policy specifies that “FMCT (Federal Ministry Communications Technology) shall monitor specifically the number of women without access to the internet; provide incentives for private educational centres and civil society organizations to train more women to use the Internet, and have dedicated centres at Local government headquarters to serve as safe technology access centres for women. Courses on safe use of the internet for girls will also be delivered using ICT.”⁷

Government agencies and stakeholders, including Ministry of CommTech, NITDA, NCC, High-tech Centre for Women and Youth, W-Tech and WITIN (Women in Technology in Nigeria) are all involved in ICT capacity building initiatives for Nigerian women and girls. However, these initiatives are not part of a comprehensive government-wide policy for gender inclusion and ICTs, but rather undertaken in an ad hoc manner or where supported by donor agencies.

⁵Gender Differences in Computer Literacy Among Clinical Medical Students in Selected Southern Nigerian Universities <http://www.webpages.uidaho.edu/~mbolin/ikolo-okiy.htm>

⁶Nigeria’s National Broadband Plan
http://www.researchictafrica.net/countries/nigeria/Nigeria_National_Broadband_Plan_2013-2018.pdf

'Smart-Woman Nigeria' (by WITIN - Women in Technology Nigeria), '1000 Girls in ICT' (by the Ministry Communications and Technology, supported by Huawei Nigeria) and 'ICT Girls Club Initiative' (by Ministry of Women's Affairs, Ministry of Communications and Technology and selected civil society groups) are some of the laudable programs that have been created. Yet scalability, poor publicity and buy-in, along with the fact that these independent efforts often lack momentum beyond the first year and suffer from non-continuous funding, are all aspects which have impeded the success of these programs.

The policy landscape pertaining to the use of ICTs in Nigeria is varied. The country's 1999 constitution lists as one of the fundamental objectives of the government of Nigeria, to ensuring there are equal and adequate education opportunities, promoting science and technology, and eradicating literacy (Article 18). The constitution also enshrines the rights to privacy (Article 37) and freedom of expression and information (Article 39).

Nigeria was the second country in Africa to enact access to information legislation, in the form of the Freedom of Information Act 2011. Nigeria is a member of the Open Government Alliance and the government's Action Plan specifies the following three priorities: 1) fighting administrative corruption, 2) increasing public accountability and integrity and 3) increasing innovation in government entities, civil society organizations and small business to better exploit increasingly available government data.⁷

The rise of the internet on the back of mobile revolution has given voice to a new class of Nigerian citizens that are vocal and increasingly interested in public policy. However, trends in the last few years suggest that in response, the Federal Government might be resorting to extreme measures to subvert the free activity of Nigerian citizens online. On July 26, 2012, while speaking at a media retreat, the then President of the Senate of the Federal Republic of Nigeria called for a clampdown on the use of social media on Nigeria.

The house of assembly in one states in South- West Nigeria also made a similar call following rumors concerning the governor's wife. In Nigeria's Niger Delta area, another state embarked on a campaign to ban rumours spread online. The acquisition of surveillance technologies by the Nigerian government has been widely reported.⁸ On April 25, 2013 a Nigerian online newspaper, Premium Times, reported that the Nigerian government had signed a \$40 million contract with Israel-based Elbit Systems to monitor Internet communication in Nigeria. In a related development, Nigeria was shown to be among the latest set of countries to have joined the league of 36 nations that have active Finfisher Command and control servers.

⁷<http://www.pocg.com/nigeria-open-government/>

⁸<https://www.privacyinternational.org/?q=node/372>

Finfisher, as described by the distributing company has only one purpose; to help governments with Information Technology intrusion and remote monitoring solutions including spying on the private internet activity of their citizens.⁹ the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) released the draft *Lawful Interception of Communications Regulations*.¹⁰ The draft has been met with stern criticism from civil society and Nigerian ICT journalists who have described it as an attempt to retroactively jury-rig a regulatory framework around surveillance activity via secondary legislation, which is not subject to the scrutiny of the National Assembly. Of course, legislative regulation of surveillance activities is an essential component of any democratic society. However, this proposed legislation seeks only to rubber stamp surveillance which is already going on outside of pre-defined legal frameworks.

Online technology offers anonymity, which is absolutely essential when speaking out on sensitive issues which might endanger a woman's safety. Women need online spaces where they feel safe from harassment, enjoy freedom of expression and privacy of communication and protection from electronic snooping. The powers contained in the draft lawful interception regulation raises issues of the possibility of grave abuse. These powers include the ability of the Nigerian government to demand the disclosure of encryption keys, undermining the ability of internet users to trust in secure encrypted communications. While it could be argued that the Nigerian Government is doing all of these against a backdrop of increasing security concerns, it is also important to avoid possible abuse considering the context of Nigeria's maturing democracy.

The extension of surveillance powers is of further concern due to the lack of data protection and privacy legislation in Nigeria. Two aborted attempts to enact data privacy legislation – which is not only essential to protecting women's right and preventing powers from being abused, but a critical element of any burgeoning economy which seeks to compete for business with European entities whose data protection standards are extremely high – not only failed to pass parliament, but were criticized for pertaining to only private, and not public, bodies.¹¹

⁹ PIN Policy Brief 001 Making a Case for enduring Internet Freedom
<https://www.pinigeria.org/download/pinbrief001.pdf>

¹⁰Nigeria Communications Commission, "Draft Lawful Interception of Communication Regulations," http://www.ncc.gov.ng/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_download&gid=328&Itemid

¹¹<https://www.article19.org/resources.php/resource/3683/en/nigeria:-personal-information-and-data-protection-bill>

The Cybercrime Bill 2013, signed into law in May 2015, addresses aspects of cyber-crime and cyber-security issues in Nigeria.¹² However, broader conversations on issues of cybercrime are focusing on how to protect the internet freedoms of citizens and organizations. Paradigm Initiative Nigeria is currently lobbying for the passage of the Nigeria Digital Rights and Freedom Bill, which would guarantee a free digital environment in Nigeria and ensure compliance with established rights and freedoms; thereby promoting active participation of citizens towards socio- economic development. While the Cybercrime Act contains provisions criminalizing cyber stalking, it doesn't not penalize harassment or other violence against women online, and anecdotal accounts establish that police are rarely willing to pursue claims of online harassment or violence, in the event that such claims are made.¹³

Research is pertinent to highlighting women's ICT access and use issues, but there has been a lack of disaggregated data on women's access to and use of web-enabled ICTs in Nigeria. What we do know is that although Africa has recently seen rapid growth in internet access, women are vastly underrepresented in technology. Becoming technologically skilled can play a major role in getting jobs, being competitive in the job market and enabling women overcome poverty. Access to web-enabled ICTs can be essential for women entrepreneurs in starting and growing a business and overcoming barriers they face. In some countries, ICT has been used in the fight against gender-based violence (GBV). Organizations combating violence against women have used social media to help raise awareness and educate the public about GBV. Thanks to the power of the Internet, a new wave of activism has emerged through social media. One recent case that illustrates this phenomenon is the international mobilization around Boko Haram's kidnapping of school girls in Nigeria. Across the continent, women's groups mobilized on social media through the hashtag #BringBackOurGirls' to campaign for the release of the schoolgirls.

The dynamics of public institution participation particularly for women in urban poor populations reveal a thought-provoking pattern. While analyzing qualitative data collected from a focus group discussion (with 13 girls between ages 18 – 30) for the purpose of this study, it was observed that while most of them already use the internet to one degree or other, fewer still understood the benefits of web-enabled ICTs beyond social interaction. Not one of the girls had ever made a complaint about a government service that perhaps was not working in their neighbourhood or reported corruption such as a government official demanding a bribe, even though all the girls had witnessed this to one degree or other. None of the girls who participated in the discussion had a blog. When asked the reason for this

¹²Cybercrime Bill 2013 <https://www.pinigeria.org/download/cybercrimebill2013.pdf>

¹³<http://www.nairaonline.com.ng/online-harassment-in-nigeria/>

'silence,' silence filled the room. In many African cultures, girls are raised to be subservient and accepting. They are not expected to 'raise' their voice or be heard. This 'culture of silence' by itself is responsible for the perpetuation of many forms of discrimination against, and abuse of, women and girls.

There are a number of CSOs in Nigeria working to improve women's sexual and reproductive health such as the Association for Reproduction and Family Health or the Society for Family Health (SFH) Nigeria but most of these interventions only reach a limited locality offline. Websites and social media handles are mostly used as News Blogs. May 28th 2015, 'Project Alert' (a foremost CSO working to stop gender based violence) put up a link on their Facebook page for reporting GBV directly to the Nigerian Police Force. There hasn't been a single 'like', 'comment' or 'share' on this post as of the time of this report (August 2015). Information provided by the central government about women's health, rights and other services that promote their wellbeing is nearly non-existent. Furthermore, most web pages are in English, a language that women with limited education are less likely to be able to read or understand. This generally results in further obscurity and isolation of many women in under these conditions.

In addition to digital literacy and lack of information, affordability is a clear barrier. Despite the fact that Lagos State reached an agreement with the Federal Government of Nigeria ahead of other states in the country to slash the prices of RoW (Right of Way) to telecom operators in building critical infrastructure for broadband services so as to lower the cost of internet access, many urban poor communities in the state still find access unaffordable. In Nigeria, there are no specific legally enshrined rights or policies to promote free or low-cost public internet access such as budget allocations for internet access in public libraries, schools or public centers or provisions for spectrum use by community Wi-Fi.

Digital literacy in women in Nigeria declines considerably when looking at older age groups as contrasted with younger ones. In a focus group discussion in Ajegunle community of Lagos, Nigeria, in February 2015, involving 23 women between the ages of 30 and 50, only 3 of the women use the internet to one degree or other, and only one of them uses it regularly for social interaction and for staying informed. The other 2 of the 3 who use the web go after it only when they need information. Four of the women own smartphones and only one of them owns a desktop computer. Over half of the group struggled to comprehend the meaning of such words as "the internet," "the web" or "browsing." One of the women asked, as we struggled to describe web-enabled ICTs, if we were speaking of a typewriter. It would seem that in one of the most popular and most populous slums in Nigeria, the majority of the women go about their struggle for survival, completely cut off technology and the web.

On the other hand, while in discussion with girls younger than 30, only two girls of a group of 13 girls between ages 15 and 28, were not on the internet, and for one of the two, it was a deliberate choice. While most of them already use the internet to one degree or other, they identified cost of data as the main constraint to their use of the web. While it was observed that much of the older group may not meaningfully adopt ICTs without some form of facilitation and training as they demonstrated a great need for digital literacy and public access, the younger girls demonstrated more need for digital rights literacy and affordable private access. "It doesn't make sense anymore." Abigail, a young female musician said expressing deep frustration at her limited access to web-enabled ICTs during the focus group discussion. "Not being able to access the internet anywhere and at any time of the day does not make sense. I depend on the internet for my studies, for opportunities, for staying in touch with friends and for nearly all information." She was echoing the exact sentiment of all the other younger girls on the internet.

Interestingly, our research revealed that women in urban poor populations face similar barriers as those living in rural areas in ICT access and use. Perhaps the biggest of those barriers are illiteracy and the high cost of internet access. Inability to access or use technology further deepens the cycle of discrimination and limitation that women face. This research is useful for closing the gender gap in ICT data and policymaking towards the empowerment of women and girls' through ICTs.

There can be no real empowerment for women without quality access to information. Access in this context even goes beyond availability of ICT infrastructure and web-enabled devices to include understanding the benefits of web-enabled ICTs, and having the skills required to access, manage, integrate, evaluate, or create online information. One of the strategies that can be adopted to increase access of women and girls to web-enabled technology is the development of public access centers such as telecenters or information centers, especially as part of existing institutions such as health centers, schools and community centers. 'Women 2000 and beyond,' a journal of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs which reported the benefits for women of an ICT centre in India thus; "Women became involved in the Baduria ICT Centre in West Bengal, India. They reported that they gained more respect in their local communities as a result of the ICT skills acquired at the centre—learning to use a computer and accessing and distributing information to local people. This resulted in greater respect at both the family and community levels. Younger women felt they were able to approach the job market with greater confidence. There was also an emergence of solidarity;

since women learned to use computers together at the ICT Centre, they often discussed their problems, creating a sense of unity among them and bringing forth leadership qualities.”¹⁴

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS ON QUATITATIVE SURVEY

The World Wide Web Foundation commissioned Ipsos MORI to conduct a household face-to-face survey in urban poor residential areas in 10 countries. The survey was conducted in the capital cities or main economic hubs of each country which included: Cairo, Egypt; Bogota, Colombia; Jakata, Indonesia; Kampala, Uganda; Lagos, Nigeria; Manila, Philippines; Maputo, Mozambique; Nairobi, Kenya; New Delhi, India; and Yaounde, Cameroon.

A quota sample of 1,000 face-to-face interviews was completed in Lagos with 307 men and 828 women between the ages of 18 and 60 living in urban poor areas. The focus of the data collection was on women, hence the larger sample of women and smaller sample of men. The latter – albeit relatively small sample – is useful for comparative purposes and to provide indication of the gender gap in ICT and internet use in each city.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics affecting Women’s Empowerment Through the Web

Age: Of a total sample size of 1135 respondents, 46.2 percent were between ages 18 and 29. 36.7 percent of the respondents were between ages 30 and 44 while 7 percent were in their late forties. Only 10 percent of respondents were between 50 and 60 years. 49 percent of the female respondents were between the ages of 18 and 29, while 35 percent were between ages 30 and 44. Only 14 percent are between 45 and 60 years. While majority of those who responded to the survey were under the age of 45 years, it is also important to note the differences in internet access and use among differing age groups.

Only 47 percent of all surveyed owned or had access to a smart phone, and of those with access to smart phones; 70.3 percent are between the ages of 18 and 34 while 18.9 percent are between the ages of 35 and 44. Only 10.8 percent are between the ages of 45 – 60. In a similar trend; while 74.1 percent of all respondents who claimed to have accessed the internet in the last six months on any device were between ages 18 and 34, only 9.5 percent of those above the age of 45 answered the same question positively. Generally, seniors have historically been late adopters to the world of technology compared with the younger generation; and a lot depends on factors such as their level of education, income, and state of health.

¹⁴<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/public/w2000-09.05-ict-e.pdf>

Education: Only 4 percent of the female respondents on the survey had completed tertiary education although 57 percent claimed to have completed secondary education. Two-thirds of the world's 870 million illiterate people are women with the lowest literacy rate in 13 African countries.

60 percent of the 100 million school age children in the developing world are girls who grow up without access to basic education.¹⁶ 18 percent of women who participated in the survey and do not use the internet said that the main reason they do not currently use the internet is because they do not know how to use it.

Marriage: Again, majority of all respondents were married. 65 percent of the female respondents were married, while 46 percent of the male respondents were married. 16 percent of 18 – 24 respondents were married. According to a world-bank publication on urban poverty and slum upgrading; 'urban poverty is not just a collection of characteristics, it is also a dynamic condition of vulnerability or susceptibility to risks.' Perhaps one of such risks proven by this data is limited access to education, (with a high school drop-out rate) which may not be unrelated to the risk of early marriage, especially for the girl child. Only 35 percent of those who were married on the survey owned or had access to a smart phone, but 67 percent of respondents who said they were single and had never been married either owned or had access to a smart phone. According to the United Nations Trends and Statistics on the World's Women (2010), "In some less developed countries and several other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, the average age at which women first marry is still below 20. Early marriage and high fertility limit such women's opportunities for education and employment and can severely diminish their chances for advancement in life. Once constituted, maintaining families and caring for family members lies primarily on the shoulders of women, who spend, on average, more working hours per day than men."¹⁷ It is far less likely that women under these conditions can invest in ICT access.

16. http://www.apcwomen.org/gemkit/en/understanding_gem/icts.htm

17. [United Nations Trends and Statistics on the World's Women \(2010\)
https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/worldswomen/WW_full%20report_color.pdf](https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/worldswomen/WW_full%20report_color.pdf)

Employment Status/Income Levels: While 30 percent of the men are wage-employed (full time or part-time) only 9 percent of the women are wage employed. 64 percent of women who earn an income earn daily and up to 95 percent of them earn in cash. Only 5 percent of the women earn directly to the bank. But 24 percent of their male counterparts earn daily and up to 48 percent of the men earn monthly. Only 16 percent of women earn monthly, and up to 10 percent said that they earn irregularly. Only 1 percent of male respondents who claimed to earn said that they earned irregularly.

According to a UN report on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, “Despite steady improvements to women’s and girls’ access to education and health in many of the world’s poorest countries, progress on women’s economic empowerment is badly off track. In developing countries, women consistently lag behind men in formal labour force participation and entrepreneurship, earn less than men for similar work, and have less access to credit, and lower inheritance and ownership rights than men do.”¹⁸ Even though 67 percent of women on the survey said they were self-employed, only 42 percent owned or have access to a smart phone, and only 30 percent of them have accessed internet in the last six months leading up to the survey. Meanwhile 66 percent of the men had accessed the internet in the same period. A total of 25 percent of women who had not accessed the internet in the last six months gave cost-related reasons as the main deterrent. Another 19 percent gave reasons of simply not having the time.

Though the conceptualization and measurement of poverty continue to be challenging due to its multi-dimensional nature; according to World Bank (2009), poverty is the lack of food, shelter, access to healthcare services, basic education, employment opportunity, clean water and social exclusion. The study of urban poor demographics in Lagos Nigeria suggest that household income levels falls below the minimum level of human basic needs. For instance, 92 percent of the households involved in the survey use kerosene as cooking fuel while only 4 percent use gas. 1 percent use electricity as cooking fuel. 84 percent of household have between only 0 – 5 hours of electricity per day, and 73 percent have no means of transportation. According to the African Development Bank Briefing Notes on Demographic Trends, _____

¹⁸. Paper for the partnership event on September 25, 2008: MDG3 – gender equality and empowerment of women
http://issuu.com/undp/docs/innovative_approaches_to_promoting_women_economi

"Many poor urban dwellers are now at par with those of the countryside. However, return migration is impossible and urban poverty is now a permanent feature of most economies."¹⁹ Intel's report 'Women and the Web,' proposes that on average across the developing world, nearly 25 percent fewer women than men have access to the Internet, and the gender gap soars to nearly 45 percent in regions like sub-Saharan Africa.²⁰ This submission seems to have been supported by the survey. Only 36 percent of all female respondents on the survey had accessed the internet using any device in the last six months leading up to the interview while 60 percent of the men had accessed the internet within the same period of time. Qualitative data collected from underserved communities in Lagos Nigeria through focused group discussions and random interviews suggests that many women in urban poor populations are not connected to technology and the web, owing to poverty and little or no education. Digital literacy is a major factor limiting women's access to and use of the web. So is cost; the cost of devices and cost of internet access.

Affordability

While almost all the women interviewed owned or had access to a mobile phone and used them for voice calls nearly every day, only 50 percent use a combination of voice calls and SMS, and only 34 percent use a combination of Voice calls, SMS and internet based communication. Only 2 percent of women interviewed use their mainly internet based communication. This could have a direct relationship with cost, with about 67 percent of the women seemingly able to afford only ~~₦50~~ – ~~₦800~~ (\$0.25 – \$4.00) of airtime weekly. 1GB data plan costs about ~~₦2,500~~ (\$13.8) on the average on Nigeria telecommunication networks, with 1GB data plan on MTN Nigeria (Nigeria's most widely used mobile network) costing around ~~₦3,500~~ (\$19.4)

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- ¹⁹. African Development Bank Briefing Notes on Demographic Trends, <http://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Policy-Documents/FINAL%20Briefing%20Note%204%20Africas%20Demographic%20Trends.pdf>
- ²⁰. Intel's report 'Women and the web,' <http://www.intel.com/content/dam/www/public/us/en/documents/pdf/women-and-the-web.pdf>

Freedom House in its 2013 Freedom on the Net reports asserts that 57.9 percent of the Internet traffic in Nigeria is via mobile phones, which is largely accountable for the surge in its penetration rate from 27 percent in 2011 to 33 percent in 2013.²¹ Male and female respondents on the survey who used the internet had similar patterns in where they accessed the internet, with up to 66 percent of access via mobile phones. Only 1 percent of male or female respondents who use the internet have had to do so using someone else's phone.

Again, only up to 3 percent of both male and female respondents have had to use paid public access, and only 2 percent have had a chance at free public access. Both men and women on the survey identified cost as the main barrier to access, with up to 18 percent of women having to depend on their spouse to pay for their internet access.

Social Interaction of Women through the Web

Although only 36 percent of women on the survey had accessed the internet in the last six months leading up to the survey (while 66 percent of the men had), all respondents with access to the internet reported high level of social media usage, with 92 percent of women on Facebook and 95 percent of the men on Facebook. 75 percent of the women also used Whatsapp, while 17 percent are on twitter and only 9 percent on YouTube. The men recorded similar trends, with 80 percent using Whatsapp, 28 percent on Twitter and 15 percent on YouTube. The low numbers on YouTube may be attributed to the volume and cost of data required to stream videos. Up to 52 percent of women with access to the internet say they use Facebook every day and up to 94 percent of the women affirmed that they used social media mainly to stay connected to family and friends.

These suggest that the women who have access to the internet use social media on a personal level to a good degree and have the choice to interact freely on the internet, with 94 percent of the women confirming that apart from their families and the people they work with, they communicate with people of the opposite gender online. But this pattern of use of the internet may also suggest that internet experience is limited to social media, mostly Facebook. For instance, 26 percent of those who use Facebook have not followed or opened a link from Facebook to an outside webpage in the past six months. In a similar trend, less than half (only 45 percent) of female respondents who have access to the internet have a functional email address (60 percent of the men do).

²¹. Freedom on the Net Report 2013 <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2013/nigeria#.VdPZQvIViko>

Individual agency and social interaction have implications for women's empowerment but the internet has even more enormous potential for the empowerment of women and girls. It can impact on the ability of women and girls to find user-friendly information about reproductive and sexual health, demand and claim their rights, or to reach out and mobilize at the grassroots level in campaigns against gender-based violence, or even organize public actions and reach out across borders to mobilize international support.

Women's Agency and Safety Through the web

Malaria for an instance, has remained a major public health problem in Nigeria, highly endemic and one of the leading causes of morbidity and mortality in the country. The Lagos State ministry of health asserts that Malaria accounts for about 63 percent of all visits to public health facilities, 25 percent of infant mortality and 11 percent of maternal mortality.²² Yet only 13 percent of women interviewed have ever sought information on malaria through the web. 37 percent of the women have sought information through TV and/or Radio, and 54 percent from hospitals or a clinic which suggests that this happened when they were already sick. 19 percent of all the women interviewed had never sought this type of information!

Again, only 10 percent of all women who participated in the survey had sought information on sexual and reproductive health on the web. Incidentally, twice the same percentage of men had. While 73 percent of men had sought these sorts of information through the TV and/or Radio, only 33 percent of women had. 36 percent of women who participated in this survey had never sought this type of information. Perhaps even more disturbing is the dismal 5 percent of women who had sought information on Gender Based Violence (GBV) on the internet, compared to 17 percent of men. While only 32 percent of women on the survey had sought information on GBV through TV and/or Radio, 73 percent of their male counterparts had. Even far more troubling is the fact that a whopping 64 percent of women on the survey have never looked for this type of information!

^{22.} http://www.lagosstateministryofhealth.com/programme_info.php?programme_id=6

According to the National Population Commission's 2013 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS); "45 percent of women who have experienced any type of physical or sexual violence have never sought help and never told anyone about the violence. 12 percent never sought help but told someone that they were victims of violence. Only 31 percent of women in Nigeria who have ever experienced any form of physical or sexual violence have sought help from any source. Women who have experienced only sexual violence are more likely not to have sought help (51 percent) than women who have experienced only physical violence."²³ Yet the numbers may be much worse, considering that this was information provided by women who were bold enough to overcome inherent fears and answer correctly on the survey. The culture of silence around GBV in Nigeria is largely due socio-cultural and religious stereotypes where women are seen as the compliant partner, and also due to the lack of support for victims and weak laws. These are no easy hurdles for the woman. But online technology has huge potential for women's empowerment in this regard, offering anonymity which is absolutely essential when speaking out on sensitive issues which might endanger a woman's safety.

Identity and online privacy did not seem to be significant deterrents for online participation based on the survey, and most women (75 percent) strongly agreed that people should have the right to express controversial views freely without risking being harmed as a result. 66 percent strongly believe that people should have the right to debate any subject online without government interference. The absence of data privacy and lawful interception laws raises issues of the possibility of grave abuse. Women especially, (and men alike) need online spaces where they feel safe from harassment, enjoy freedom of expression and privacy of communication. 9 percent of women on the qualitative survey have experienced threats or direct bullying in the last two years through their phones or the internet. On the qualitative survey (focus group discussion with 13 girls ages 18 – 30), 6 of the girls had experienced harassment and/or bullying online to one degree or other, but none of the victims had neither reported this nor confronted the perpetrator(s). Except there are laws in place defining and penalizing ICT-based and online harassment of women and girls, this scenario is sure to worsen and become a major deterrent negatively impacting on women's use of web-enabled technologies in Nigeria.

²³: <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR293/FR293.pdf>

Public Institutional Participation

When it comes to seeking information related to rights, a worrisome trend is also observed. Only 4 percent of women on the survey have sought information online about a development project in their communities. While a few others have sought this type of information from the TV and/or Radio, 60 percent of women on the survey had never sought this type of information. Whereas 68 percent of women who access to the internet assert that they find the internet very valuable for posting comments on social, economic or political issues; 71 percent of women on the survey have never made a complaint about a government service not working in their neighbourhood online or anywhere else, 77 percent of women on the survey had never reported corruption online or anywhere else, and 66 percent had never reported nor expressed opinions about important issues facing their communities.

Access to Economic Opportunity

65 percent of women who have access to the internet on the survey affirmed that their use of the internet has not increased their income in anyway. 81 percent of them had never used the internet to look for a job. The Lagos State Ministry of Women Affairs and Poverty Alleviation, in their 2013 – 2015 Medium-Term Sector Strategy (MTSS) document, listed five laudable goals and fifteen programs aimed at alleviating unemployment and poverty issues amongst women in Lagos State. None of these programs includes empowerment through web-enabled ICTs. Generally, the role of technologies in empowering women and girls is yet to be fully appreciated on the African continent. Becoming technologically skilled can play a major role in enabling women to overcome poverty.

Policy Recommendations

There is need for the ICT policy in Nigeria to prioritize issues related to bridging the gender gap in ICT access; with concrete targets aimed at achieving equity beyond mere rhetorical commitment. According to Nigeria's immediate past Minister of Information and Communication Technology, who received the GEM-TECH Awards 2014 for initiating policies and programs empowering women and girls via ICTs, "with the under representation of women and girls in ICTs, especially in emerging economies like Nigeria and the growing importance of ICTs for national socio economic development, closing the digital divide has now become a development priority for Nigeria." Unless there are measurable and time-bound targets to include specific interventions or programs (with adequate budget allocation) encouraging increased access, training and use of the Internet for specific groups of women and girls who are most likely to lack internet access and/or skills, the impact of this commitment will never be felt. Instead, the gender gap in ICT adoption may continue to widen.

There is an increasing need for all players to actively address the issues of cost, speed, reliability, and quality of services, affordable devices and competition in the country. As part of the Broadband plan goal, the NCC recently auctioned the 2.3GHz spectrum to Bitflux Communications to deliver high speed internet to Nigerians. It also announced its plans to license six geo-political Infrastructure companies (InfraCos) that will improve provision of broadband services through the use of critical ICT infrastructure across the country. However, there are flaws within these plans – such as with the subsidization as well as regulator indicated pricing. Nevertheless, it is imperative that there is the political will supporting the National Broadband Plan. "For Nigeria to become one of the world's leading economies by year 2020, high-speed broadband networks that will provide every Nigerian with fast, reliable and affordable internet access is a fundamental requirement."

The Industry Working Group (IWG) on Multiple Taxations has also sought the discontinuance of illegal taxes/multiple regulations on telecommunication infrastructure as a strategy to deepen ICT Penetration and improve the Quality of Service (QoS), National Security and overall socio-economic development of the country as well as facilitate the designation of such infrastructure as Critical National Infrastructure (CNI). The government, at all levels and their agencies, need to see telecom operators as partners in progress, and the National Assembly should also yield to the pleapay of attention to stakeholders' call for telecom infrastructures to be declared as critical national infrastructure. Government should implement policies that will promote innovations, stop or at least discourage monopoly, and improve the advocacy affordability.

It is very important that broadband becomes a universal service at a very low cost to the people because of its impact on education, health and other basic aspects of life, including employment and income. Cheaper internet access will amount to more women and girls online, thereby empowering them and improving their quality of lives.

The Federal Government in its gender empowerment drive has launched initiatives such as 'Smart-Woman Nigeria' and the 'Digital Girls Clubs' in Secondary Schools, but these programs mostly promote knowledge, learning and empowerment among women and girls who already have access. Evolving programs and initiatives that provide basic digital literacy skills and access to web-enabled technologies for women and girls least likely to have access and skills is important to meaningfully bridging the gender gap in ICT policy making in Nigeria in the short run.

Since basic literacy skills has been identified as a major limitation for many women and girls currently offline; relative and adequate training initiatives should be established, especially on State and Local Government Levels. Again, existing digital literacy initiatives (could be public, private or hybrid) with potential to reach vulnerable women and girls should be identified, promoted and supported with funding in other to scale. Partnerships should also be sought with existing public institutions such as libraries and other educational government agencies as well as CSOs to execute digital literacy programs focused on women and girls.

The following concrete steps should be taken by the Nigerian government:

1. Revise the draft Lawful Interception of Communications Legislation to ensure that surveillance powers are in line with human rights obligations and protect and promote women's security and privacy online;
2. Pass a Nigeria Digital Rights and Freedom Bill;
3. Enact data protection and privacy legislation;
4. Redouble efforts to publish information about women's health, rights and other services that promote their wellbeing, using a variety of media including the internet and ICTs.
5. Collaborate with Civil Society organizations that are focused on Women and Girls in ICT; leverage on existing access to the women living in under-served communities through the CSO's
6. Review and update the National ICT Policy to reflect deliberate and concrete steps, (including timelines and budgets) for digital literacy initiatives and public access targeted at women and girls in urban-poor/rural settlements.

7. Replicate efforts in federating units of Nigeria: The States and Local Government must commit to take similar measures alongside the Federal Government for meaningful results

APPENDIX

Methodology (Qualitative Research)

Paradigm Initiative Nigeria embarked on qualitative research aimed at buffering findings from the qualitative survey. The study took two different forms, focused group discussions and random interviews carried out in one of most popular and populous slums in Lagos, Nigeria. Though digital divide (the gap between demographics and regions that have access to ICTs and those that don't or have restricted access) is often generally associated with rural-urban divide, these studies suggest that in fact digital divide does exist on a troublesome scale in urban centers in Nigeria. The study aimed to identify the salient factors limiting the access and use of ICTs for women and girls living in underserved urban communities.

The study involved a field survey and two focused group discussions to collect primary data from respondents. While the former consisted of interviews conducted in the respective work areas or homes of respondents; the latter featured discussions with young (18 – 30 years) and older (30 – 50 years) groups of females in a pre-arranged locations. During the interviews and group discussions, there was a watchfulness to observe the respondents to ascertain their willingness or reluctance to divulge relevant information and these observations were taken into consideration during analysis.

Using both randomly conducted structured interviews and focused group discussions to collect data provided richer and more comprehensive information, and a better understanding of the phenomena being investigated as a result. On one hand, the interview with residents highlighted how the lack of resources, awareness and education had limited their access to web-enabled ICTs and its many benefits. The focused group conversations on the other hand which took place among two separate female age-groups revealed how the disparity in their levels of literacy impacted on access to ICTs. The participants for the focused group were selected using the purposive sampling method. Similar characteristics included gender, location and age group.

Despite one-on-one interviews where women were only interviewed by other women and men interviewed men, it was observed that some female respondents still felt uncomfortable with answering certain questions. For them, the conversations seemed to bother on prying into their privacy. In some other cases, female respondents whose spouses were around showed reservation in answering or giving further required information about certain questions.

It was a bit difficult getting the full attention of respondents who were interviewed on their trade, or even housewives attending to the children returning from school. This led to an eventual disinterest somewhere along the line of the interview, although none of the participants dropped off the interview.