AFRICAN CENTRE FOR CITIZENS ORIENTATION
(An NGO in special consultative status with United Nations Economic and Social Council)

TOWARDS IMPROVING ICT ACCESS FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS IN NIGERIA

"Giving women and girls access to the Internet and the skills to use ICTs gives them the opportunity to start new businesses, sell products to new markets, find better-paid jobs and access education as well as health and financial services." *-(ITU Plenipotentiary Backgrounder - Bridging the gender divide)*

Girls Education in Nigeria
According to a 2018 report by Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), there are 13.2 million out of school children in Nigeria, 60% constitute girls i.e. 7.93 million of the total population.

A Look at ICT Access and Use for Women and Girls in Abuja
A critical element of bringing women online and enabling them to use the ICT and its various applications is ensuring that they have unfettered access to devices such as computers. There is a gender gap in computer usage in most countries including Nigeria, ranging from -17% (Turkey) to +4% (Saudi Arabia). Irrespective of whether overall computer use levels are high or low, a gender gap persists, although in some cases the direction is reversed in that there is a higher proportion of female than male computer users. In Africa, the few countries with data show that overall, less than 50% of women use computers but a similar trend pertains of gender gaps ranging from -9% to +3%.

According to the recent research conducted by the African Centre for Citizens Orientation with the support from RISE UP Together for Women and Girls (USA) looking at access and usage which rely on a toolkit for researching women's internet access and use as a result of a collaboration between the Alliance for Affordable Internet, the World Wide Web Foundation, Association for Progressive Communications and the GSMA. 16.36% of our respondents (comprises of 64% females and 36% males) connected to the internet at school while 12.73% connected using library facilities. 76.36% which is the highest, connect or access the internet at home, 10.91% make use of the café at various location to carry out their research, do business or send emails while 32.73 have access via their offices. A critical look shows that many of the respondents especially home connection basically connects to office Wi-Fi to access information.

The most important is not just if the facility or tool is available, but the usage and what do the people use it for; many of the respondents use internet constantly as in now and always as 70.91% confirmed. Only 3.64% accessed the internet in the last three months whole 7.27% used the internet within the last 7days or within the last 30days while 10.91% used the internet within the last 24hours. 54.55% when access the internet occasionally browse the web, 14.55% do online shopping, 47.27 use it for chatting and social engagements while 12.73 watch movies online, 21.82 hunts for jobs, only 3.64 use it for educational and study purposes meanwhile 1.82% carry out marketing activities, a total of 18.18% do a combination of either two or three of the items mentioned earlier.

As water is life, so also is the Internet in our world today as 48% often browse the internet between 1 and 3hours of the day, once a day is 24% and 1 – 2hours; only 4% connected to the internet over 30days ago. Only 4.5% do shopping online in a day while the rest 95.5% do once a month. People do more of chatting within 1 – 3hours; 54.2% watch movie

in just a month, only 4.2% watch movies in a day, this may be due to high cost of data plan as indicated in the survey. There are various things people do use internet for or why they go online, apart from watching movies, play games, lot of the respondents do carry out research online (50%) while some save important (5%) information online (5%), others look for opportunities (5%), hunt jobs (10%), perform legal and business proceedings (5%), while some also use it to add their voices to social issues (5%) and the rest check emails (5%).

Top of the challenges people faced in connecting to the internet is high rate of data plan, 70.91% confirmed this, follow by power which stood at 24.09, and others include environment (7.23%), cost of devices, 16.87% and poor network 4.82%.

The issue of safety for women and girls is as important as the provision for internet and access even though 89.09% of the respondents believe internet is safe for women but 10.91% have strong opinions on while internet is not safe for women and girls as claimed by others. 28.6% will avoid internet because of abuse women and girls experience online, 57.1% are concerned that their identity or other private information will be stolen or misused while 14.3% will not connect to the internet until government find suitable and lasting solutions to harassment or attack on women online.

The following is a combination of those who personally own or regularly the devices mentioned; 28% use desktop computer and other devices while 76% uses laptop computers including iPad, tablet and mobile phone, 25% use mobile phone to connect to the internet and 28% uses tablets/iPad.84% uses mobile network using SIM card to access the internet while 36% uses public Wi-Fi and 52% uses Wi-Fi at working place or at home and 36% occasionally use any of the connection at various time or the other.

The most often used device remain mobile phones which is 90.91% while 6.21% uses laptop and 1.06% use desktop computers most often; 1.82% either use iPad or Tablet to access the internet or for other important use.

In another related research carried out about those who have not heard about the internet, more than 90% will use the facilities if government can provide ICT with internet enable and training for them to leapfrog out of poverty. The set also in various locations where government claimed to have established ICT or Knowledge Centres are not aware or have seen such. Many women and girls, mostly out of school or drop-outs promised to make use of such facilities for their personal development, social involvement and changing their economic situations.

The State of ICT Development in Nigeria

Over 1200 ICT and Knowledge Centres
Since the year 2006 to 2016, Nigerian government through its various ministries, departments, agencies and offices has established over 1,216 ICT Centres including knowledge centres, resources centres, e-libraries and health informatics in schools, communities and hospitals in about 740 Local Government Areas of Nigeria.

Nigeria ICT Roadmap 2017-2020
A roadmap which provides integrated framework for ICT development in Nigeria has been developed by the Federal Ministry of Communications standing on four pillars of Governance; Policy, Legal & Regulatory; Industry & Infrastructure; and Capacity Building.

New National Broadband Plan
The 5-year national broadband plan expired last December 2018, efforts are ongoing to design a new national broadband plan in order to surpass the present achievement of 30.9% broadband penetration.
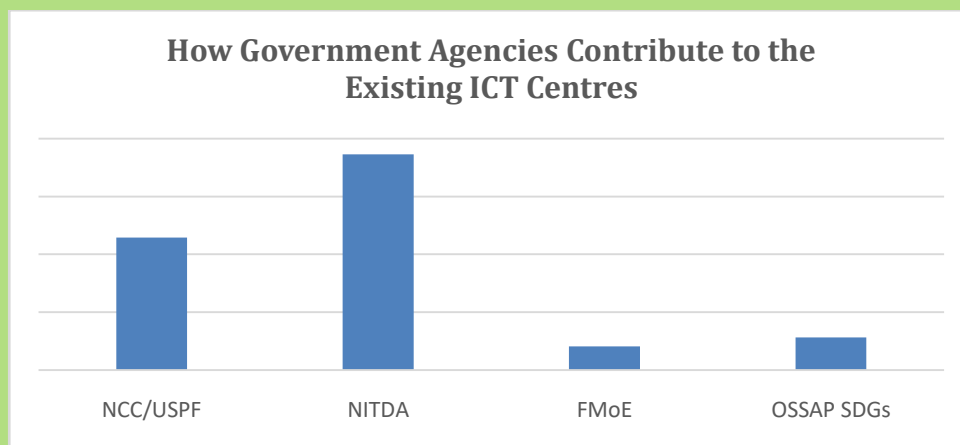
National ICT Policy
A new National ICT policy is being developed which will cover ICT infrastructure, internet and broadband, local content development, legal and regulatory framework. Stakeholders including regulators, telecommunication operators, civil society as well as legislators are meeting and consulting on what direction the new policy should go.

Active internet subscribers
According to the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC, Nigeria Internet users increased marginally to more than 111.6 million in December 2018.

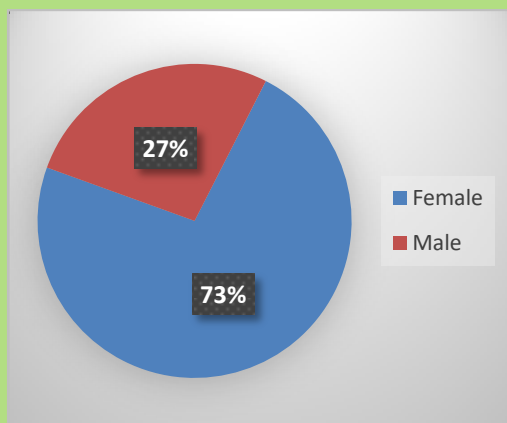## How Government Agencies Contribute to the Existing ICT Centres

Source: African Centre for Citizens Orientation Rural ICT Sustainability Projects 2013-2014

Understanding the Girls' Issues in ICT
While technology is becoming more of an integral part of our lives, the gender divide is widening and women and girls are still under-represented in terms of access and use. They still lack access to ICT skills and unable to operate computers due to factors such as poor management of budget allocation/provision for ICT education by government agencies saddled with this responsibility, lack of adequate infrastructure most especially within and among the communities, lack of awareness and training, mindset and cultural barriers, poverty and low income, family and too much religious activities, academic orientation, insecurity (both online and offline), establishment of ICT infrastructure in male dominated schools including lack of adequate policy and programmes for women and girls, lack of female mentors and teachers in ICT education, lack of early introduction to ICT education, mode of teaching/content and curriculum resulting into low self-esteem on the part of women and girls, low productivity, and early child marriage. This limits their ability to enter the global economic market. There are also socioeconomic constraints to owning ICT equipment, inconvenient location of community ICT centres and lack of confidence. Although there has been a steady increase in the number of female ICT professionals, a large number of women and girls still fear using ICT tools.

The share of Nigerian females in the ICT workforce by population

Source: National Bureau of Statistics (Labour Force Statistics Quarter 3 2017 VOL. 2)

Beyond Digital Literacy

Improving ICT access for women and girl in Nigeria is beyond digital literacy but majorly on building digital competences and up-to-date ICT education. Digital competence encompasses the knowledge and skills required for an individual to be able to use ICT to accomplish goals in her/his personal or professional life. It is perceived as not only concerned with technical skills, but more focused on cognitive and social and emotional aspects of working and living in a digital environment. The notion is a complex one, and beyond digital literacy, implies the ability to understand media, to search for information and be critical about what is retrieved, and to be able to communicate with others using a variety of digital tools and applications. Digital competence is a multifaceted moving target, which is constantly evolving as new technologies appear.
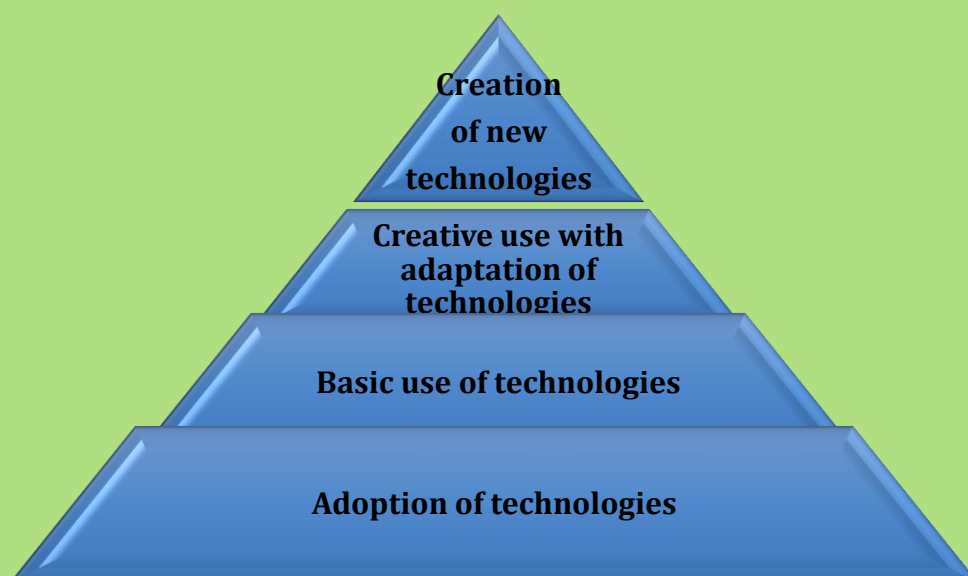
Different categorizations of digital skills

Job- ready digital skills for decent jobs (International labour Organization and International Telecommunication Union) (ITU)	Advanced digital skills (coding and other algorithmic knowledge) Basic digital skills (related to the use of technologies) Soft skills (such as communication and leadership) Digital entrepreneurship (online market research and using financial platforms)
Work related skills (World Economic Forum)	Abilities (cognitive and physical) Basic skills (content and processing skills) Cross- function skills (social systems, complex problem-solving resources management and technical skills)
Future of work (OECD)	Technical and professional skills (specific and often industry- specific skills such as installation and operation of robots) Generic ICT skills (skills needed to understand, use and adopt technologies) Life- Learning (ability to adopt to technology changes) Complementary ICT soft skills (creativity, communication skills, critical and logical thinking, teamwork, digital entrepreneurship)

Source: ITU, 2018, ILO-ITU Digital Skills for Decent Jobs for Youth Campaign to train 5 million youth with job- ready digital skills; OECD, 2016, Skills for a digital world, Policy Brief on the Future of Work; World Economic Forum, 2016, The Future of Jobs: Employment, Skills and Workforce Strategy for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Geneva)

Four different levels of digital skills are needed during the process of adoption, use and domestication of technologies: those required to adopt technologies, those needed in the basic use of technologies, those necessary for the creative use and adaptation of technologies, and those essential for the creation of new technologies. These categories can be further grouped into two categories: skill sets for all and skill sets for ICT professionals.

Pyramid of digital skills

Source: Commission on Science and Technology for Development - Twenty-first session (E/CN.16/2018/3)

Categories and levels of digital skills

Category	Level	Skills
	Adoption	Basic education and literacy Familiarity with technology devices and services
Digital skills for all	Basic or generic use	Basic understanding of technologies, software and applications Knowledge of digital rights, privacy, security and permanence of data Ability to make use of information and data, ranging from basic issues of Data storage, management, and organization to construct calculations and answer questions [a] Ability to using digital technologies to collaborate, communicate and create
	Creative use and adaptations	Basic computing skills Familiarity with basic algorithms
Digital skills for ICT professionals	Creation of new technologies	Sophisticated programming skills; knowledge of complex algorithm

Source: Commission on Science and Technology for Development – 21st Sessions (E/CN.16/2018/3)
[a] Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development, 2017

Recommendations

A. INFRASTRUCTURES

1. With over 1,200 existing ICT centres in schools and communities (and in 740 local government areas) established by the federal government, the Ministry and other agency, commission and Office; the Ministry should make adequate provision to bring sustainability into all the ICT, libraries, resource and knowledge centres;

2. Bringing sustainability into the existing centres to include providing free, fast, affordable, safe place for Internet access to all the centres;

3. Improvement on the already existing ICT centers and separation/renovation of some centers to be used strictly by women and girls;

4. Have designated Girl Centres, which is safe place with all indicators and system to suitable and friendly for girls. such as signages, female topics advisory, etc;

5. Reduced cost of accessing ICT devices, discounted prices for laptops, computers, on a favorable installment;

6. Provision of Internet facilities to state libraries for research purposes and other positive benefits and impact on women and girls and the society.

B. EDUCATION AND HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT

1. Design and implement specific, up-to-date, tailored ICT education and digital skills for women and girls in the following areas:
   - Entrepreneurship, Trade and e-Commerce
   - Agriculture
   - Coding and programming (basic understanding of technology, basic computing skills)
   - Networking and Telecommunication
   - ICT and Open Apprenticeship/Mastercrafts
   - Internet Governance & Digital Rights
   - Data Science
   - Cybersecurity
   - e-Health
   - And other related areas

2. Create necessary awareness on the existing government ICT centres and enlighten women and girls on ICT and its benefits via radio, television, jingles, IEC materials (stickers, flyers, infographs), etc;

3. Organize Digital skills training for teachers including Nigeria Colleges of Education students, this will depend on a baseline assessment and evaluation of their basic needs;

4. Design and develop women and girl's friendly ICT curriculum and materials on e-learning and ICT courses, create coupons and subsidy for women and girls to access the platform;

5. Set up a Gender Desk in the Ministry with adequate manpower, skills, training and funding;

6. Organize advocacy programs targeting parents, religious leaders, traditional rulers and community gatekeepers in ensuring women and girls access ICT centres and use the facilities for personal growth, community development and civic engagements;

7. Provide a safe and protective measure for women and girls to prevent online gender violence, girls bullying and online harassment;

8. Create safe spaces, guidelines and best practices for online safety for women and girls to access and use internet facilities.

C. COLLABORATION

1. Train and work in collaboration with Women from the Ministry of Women Affairs and other Agencies to train women and girls in rural communities;

2. Collaborate with private-owned hubs to get statistics of women and girls' access and present same to the Ministry as proof to improve and model government-owned ICT centres;

3. As an organization and network, collaborate with the Federal Ministry of Communications and others on issues related to girls in ICT, ICT facilities and management.

D. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

1. Setting up under the Gender Desk Office within the Ministry, a Monitoring and Evaluation Committee to review regularly the use of the ICT centres by women and girls and project sustainability;

2. Design Monitoring and Evaluation Frameworks to monitor and evaluate access and use of the existing ICT centres in the FCT and other States of the Federation.

E. FUNDING

Facilitating ICT access for women and girls in Nigeria depend on consistent and adequate funding, provision of resources and promoting innovative programs. Universal Service Provision Fund (USPF) as an Office under the Nigerian Communication Commission (NCC) should annually allocate 50% of their total budget to implement specific areas mentioned above and support other programs targeting women and girls' ICT education, training and orientation.

USPF – Utilizing the Unspent Funds

The Universal Service Provision Fund (USPF) was established by the Federal Government of Nigeria to facilitate the achievement of national policy goals for universal access and universal service to information and communication technologies (ICTs) in rural, un-served and under-served areas in Nigeria. The Fund is being managed to facilitate the widest possible access to affordable telecommunications services for greater social equity and inclusion for the people of Nigeria. The Nigerian Communications Act (NCA) No 19 of 2003, Part IV established the Universal Service Provision (USP) and mandated the Board to supervise and provide broad policy directions for the management of the USP Fund.

According to a research conducted by the Web Foundation over 68% of countries in Africa have a Universal Service Access Fund (USAF) in place; just of the 37 countries with USAFs have universal access policies that explicitly aim to connect women and girls through the fund (Nigeria not inclusive); just 23 African countries openly publish details of their USAF activities, there is US$177 million sitting unspent in USAFs across the 13 African countries where these financial details are available, across all 37 USAFs in Africa, unspent funds total an estimated US$408million. This amount could bring approximately 6million women online, or could be used to provide digital skills training to nearly 16million women and girls, disbursement rates for USAF funds are low, averaging around just 54% in 2016. Just four of the USAFs studied carry a zero balance including Nigeria (http://webfoundation.org/docs/2018/03/Using-USAFs-to-Close-the-Gender-Digital-Divide-in-Africa.pdf).

Conclusion
Efforts be made by the Universal Service Provision Fund (USPF) and the Federal Ministry of Communications to provide digital skills training beyond digital literacy we have known most of our schools and private institutions teaching ICT and other related courses, the Ministry should work with stakeholders in and out ICT field to understand the situation and develop content and curriculum fit into today's ICT world. In addition, USPF Office should develop a strategy for reducing the high cost of ICT devices such as laptop, mobile phone, etc to enable women and girls participate fully in this Information Age. Efforts should be made across board to provide a safe space, girl's centres or hubs for women and girls to enable them learn new skills and develop personally, socially and economically. Broadband access must be provided in rural communities to enable women and girls, school children and persons with disabilities to access, free, fast, safe and affordable internet access.

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African Centre for Citizens Orientation (ACCO) is an NGO in special consultative status with United Nations Economic and Social Council with a mission to build active citizens for a better and just society. ACCO is out to promote the good and welfare of African citizens, most especially women, young people including girls and persons with disabilities on the principles of freedom, equality and justice, and for the purpose of consolidating the unity and culture of our people. African Centre for Citizens Orientation is a coalition of five community and grassroots organizations namely Women Initiatives Nigeria (WIN), Youth Alliance on ICT for Development, Youth for Youth in Support of Peaceful Elections, Secure Africa - Africa Regional Youth Crime Prevention & Development Conference and Youth Crime Watch of Nigeria.

We focus on Citizenship Education, Empowerment & Development; Women's Rights & Health; Gender-Based Violence & Human Rights; Peace building, Crime Prevention & Community Safety; Rule of Law & Democracy; and ICT for Development/CivicTech& Digital Inclusion.