Chapter 4

Information and Communication Technology

ICT has become an important aspect of everyday life for people worldwide, as an influential tool in providing access to information and communication, especially through technologies enabled by the internet.

Having access to ICT services is now considered a universal right (Borzekowski, 2006), and usage of ICT has been the topic of much discussion, especially with respect to youth development. ICT applications house opportunities for fostering youth development through the creation of income-generating activities (Halewood and Kenny, 2008). Additionally, ICT skills are increasingly becoming a requirement in today's job market (Garrido et al., 2010). ICT platforms like LinkedIn have been integral to the creation of digital employment identities, which in turn enable skills recognition and job acquirement on a wider scale. ICT usage also positively affects youth populations through enabling access to information, and is understood to increase civic participation among the youth demographic (Halewood and Kenny, 2008; AU, 2011). In essence, ICTs remains an influential tool that can enable positive youth development, through advancing opportunities in areas such as education, employment and civic engagement.

4.1 ICT and youth development in Ghana

4.1.1 ICT culture

ICT has become an important part of the Ghanaian way of life. Ghana was the second country in sub-Saharan Africa to have full internet connectivity by 1995 (Quarshie and Ami-Narh, 2012). By 2003, Ghana had over 750 internet cafes; by 2004, the number had increased to 500–1,000 in the capital city alone (Burrell, 2009; Quarshie and Ami-Narh, 2012), with the youth demographic representing the most prevalent users (Burrell, 2009). While data on how youth are using ICT is limited, evidence suggests that, in Ghana, 45.6 per cent of the working population who use the internet use it frequently for educational purpose, 33.75 per cent frequently use it for news and 6.35 per cent frequently use it for commerce (Quarshie and Ami- Narh, 2012). More specifically, Ghanaians are using a platform called Tonaton.com to buy and sell items and to acquire information on health matters (Borzekowski, 2006).

Six out of ten students in Ghanaian high schools own a mobile phone (Kaledzi, 2016). Through engagement in social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp, Ghanaian youth are able to maintain communication with family and friends and participate in public discussions – an opportunity that is especially important in a culture that assumes they are too young to have worthwhile opinions. Thus, ICTs have created an enabling space that facilitates youth participation in public dialogue.

Box 4.1 Convergence between ICT, youth, Agenda 2063 and the SDGs

Agenda 2063, a vision for African achievement by 2063, considers ICT an important development tool and plans to increase investments in technology (AUC, 2015). Both Agenda 2063 and the SDGs view ICT as a way of promoting youth development, and both frameworks envision youth as agents or drivers of change (AUC, 2015; ITU, 2018). Agenda 2063 and the SDGs plan to link ICT and youth development by focusing on promoting an 'education and science, technology and innovation driven skills revolution' (AU, n.d.). This will result in not only better quality of education for youth through an increase in access to technology but also a decrease in youth unemployment (AUC, 2015).

Ghanaian youth face several challenges in accessing the internet, including unreliable or unavailable connections outside of major cities and cost. At about $0.20/minute, access can be out of reach for many Ghanaian youth. For youth without access to a mobile device, internet cafés are the only choice, but this may mean travelling a far distance. As females are often thought to be too vulnerable to walk and stay in cafés alone, most internet cafés are male-dominated. Additionally, GES has initiated a campaign to ban the use of mobile phones in basic and high schools, arguing that they are a waste of money and a distraction from academic work (Kaledzi, 2016). Furthermore, increased access to ICT can also expose young people to 'negative uses of ICT', including cyber bullying, cybercrime and online extremism.

4.1.2 Current policy initiatives for youth development through ICT

As ICT has the potential to generate employment opportunities for the youth demographic, it has been suggested that it be widely promoted throughout Ghana (Braimah and King, 2006). GoG has also acknowledged the importance of ICT through the initiation of a plan to provide internet access to all secondary schools and training colleges in Ghana (ibid.).

The ICT for Accelerated Development Policy is widely recognised as one of the main policy initiatives. This is aimed at engineering ICT-led socio-economic development to transform Ghana into a middle-income, information-rich, knowledge-based and technology-driven economy (MOH, 2003). Although it focuses on the entire population, youth are included, especially with respect to improvements to the education system through the integration of ICT (ibid.).

The NYP 2010 is another important policy that speaks to ICT initiatives. The main focus is to ensure all Ghanaian youth have access to ICT resource centres equipped to provide them with opportunities to obtain ICT skills (MOYS, 2010), with the goal of achieving a more educated population that is better equipped to compete in the current job market.

Another current initiative is the Margins Youth Empowerment Initiative, created in 2017 to foster youth development and empowerment through ICT usage. The programme plans to promote ICT usage among youth populations in order to

Box 4.2 Artificial Intelligence and the future of education and work

As technological advancements continue, Ghana is increasingly able to exploit the potential gains of Artificial Intelligence (AI). In fact, Google recently opened its first Africa AI research centre in Accra. There are many interesting avenues to explore in AI related to education and employment opportunities. As Ghana continues to transition into the use of digital data, equipping young people with the skills to process big data using AI will be critical.

However, there are still concerns surrounding the use of AI and technology. For instance, it is capital-intensive, it has yet to solve privacy issues and it is becoming increasingly recognised that too much screen time is problematic.

Establishing partnerships with tech companies and educational institutions to explore how AI is changing the future of work as well as how educational institutions can prepare students while mitigating any associated risks will become increasingly important.

Sources: Asemota (2018); Adeoye (2019).

reduce unemployment, create additional jobs and achieve a positive socio-economic impact (Enablis, 2017). Under this initiative, learning spaces will be created for youth to receive information and training from chief executives, accountants and human resource managers. This initiative will also certify successful candidates on completion of the programme as well as fully finance the candidate who presents the best ICT business-oriented proposal.[1]

Furthermore, the minister of communications in Ghana recently announced GoG's aim to provide young people with critical ICT skills in order to equip them for the 'digitizing world of work' (GhanaWeb, 2019). Through technology and innovation

Box 4.3 Empowering young people with critical thinking skills and digital literacy to counter fake news and online extremism

In the current era of fake news and online extremism, it is not enough to ensure access to ICT tools; it is vital also to ensure that these tools are not abused to the point that they threaten democracy. In the complex online world of Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and WhatsApp, youth can be vulnerable to misinformation. Consequently, education and empowerment become critical to enabling competent online citizens. Educational institutions, technology companies and the information sector as a whole can collaborate in this effort through the development of a digital literacy toolkit that allows young people to gain digital literacy skills and think critically. While online extremism and hate speech has not been a major concern in Ghana, as ICT usage increases GoG should learn from other countries and put in place preventive measures.

hubs, mobile labs and other similar initiatives, GoG hopes to enable access to education and future employment.

Finally, the Digital Jobs Africa Programme in Ghana is another initiative that focuses specifically on providing youth with digital employment opportunities, through education and training on digital topics such as business process outsourcing, freelance online jobs and digital entrepreneurship. Like the other initiatives, this programme hopes to influence positive development by equipping youth with the skills to acquire jobs as well as create sustainable livelihoods.[2]

4.2 Gender

There is a significant gender divide in relation to access to and use of ICTs, whereby females have less access and therefore more limited usage compared with their male peers (Hafkin, 2002). One reason for this gender divide could be cultural and social dynamics at play in Ghana – more specifically, negative attitudes towards females studying or using information technology (ibid.). The viewpoint that females are unable to cope with or understand technology is prevalent, with the idea that it is too 'mechanical' or 'technical' for them (ibid.). Consequently, women may experience barriers in exploring the full development benefits of ICT initiatives.

In Ghana, it has been suggested that it is mostly young males who are attracted to ICT jobs, and that not only do males have greater access to resources, training and leisure time in which to pursue these subjects, but also it is males who are at the very helm of ICT policy-making and institutions (Braimah and King, 2006; Steeves and Kwami, 2012). In rural regions of Ghana, ICT centres are often located in areas to which women are not comfortable going, providing yet again another barrier to female access. Furthermore, the cultural 'domestic' norm whereby women are saddled with

Box 4.4 Gender and ICTs – thinking beyond coding

Worldwide, there has been growing interest in teaching females to code, and Ghana is no exception. Soronko Solutions (a Ghanaian social enterprise) has set up workshops and initiatives that focus on teaching girls this skill. Given this widespread recognition of the benefits of engaging girls in coding initiatives, it has since been suggested that coding represents the extreme end of the spectrum in terms of digital skills and that it is also important to recognise that a large share of the female population are not even getting basic digital skills (Alleman and Chriscaden, 2019). Simply teaching girls to use a keyboard, write an email or fill out an online form can 'further open doors to digital banking and other business services' (ibid.). It is thus important to think of basic digital skills as an important tool for positive youth development, which can open many opportunities for youth, especially girls. While initiatives that provide females with coding skills are a good first step, they should not mask the continued inequity in ICT with regard to gendered rights.

domestic responsibilities in comparison with their male peers may serve as a barrier to female participation in ICT (Hafkin, 2002).

4.3 Summary points

1. ICT usage is understood as having a positive impact on youth development, especially with respect to employment, education and civil participation opportunities.
2. Internet usage has become an important part of everyday life for Ghanaian youth. It is used primarily for educational purposes, more specifically to acquire knowledge on health-related issues. Youth mostly access the internet through internet cafés and mobile devices.
3. Numerous policies and initiatives that target ICT and youth development in Ghana have been created – namely, the ICT for Accelerated Development Policy, the NYP, Margins Youth Empowerment Initiative and the Digital Jobs Africa Programme in Ghana, as well as other initiatives by the Ministry of Communications and GoG.
4. Cultural and stereotypical views on gender influence the way young women and men access and participate in ICTs. Males are in the favourable position, having more leisure time and access to ICTs.

4.4 Recommendations

1. ICT policies, especially youth development ICT policies, must have an in-depth focus on and strategy to combat the gender inequalities present in ICT. Deliberate interventions that target females and address stereotypes, gender biases and problematic cultural norms should be put in place to increase opportunities for female youth to access ICT resources and education.
2. Support for the NYP's plan to discourage the 'negative uses of ICT' should be fostered, with increased data collection on misuses (cyber bullying, cybercrime and online extremism) in order to inform policy frameworks designed to mitigate the impact of misuse.
3. While digital identities are often an integral part of the ICT world, education is critical in preventing youth populations from falling victim to privacy invasion, identity theft, online scams and exposure to offensive content and fake news. Programmes to increase awareness of these dangers and risks should be supported in order to make them widely accessible.
4. Policy-makers should remain cognisant of the dynamic and continuously evolving nature of the ICT world through the implementation of initiatives that teach digital skills as they become relevant. Flexibility and adaptability are key with respect to educational initiatives, to provide Ghanaian youth with up-to-date digital skills relevant to the job market.

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Notes

1 https://www.marginsgroup.com/margins-youth-empowerment-initiative-csr/

2 https://www.britishcouncil.org/education/skills-employability/what-we-do/entrepreneurial-africa/news-events/digital-jobs-africa