

Harnessing ICT Use in Poverty Reduction: A Case Study of Rural Women in Keiyo South Constituency

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Abstract

Information and communications technologies (ICTs) are powerful tools that boost economic growth and improve social development. However, despite an increase in ICT use, the socio-economic status of rural women in Kenya is still low. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to establish how ICT can be used to improve the social status of rural women in Keiyo South constituency, Elgeyo/Marakwet County, Kenya and recommend the best practices for improving the social well-being of rural women in Kenya. The primary objectives were; to establish the social benefits of ICT use among rural women in Keiyo South Constituency and find out the influence of ICT use on the social welfare of rural women. The study was informed by Harris Info-Mobilization theory. Using a descriptive survey research design, 141 respondents were drawn from a target population of 3070 women in Keiyo South by first stratifying the constituency into divisions and locations and then using purposive and snowball sampling techniques to obtain the actual respondents. Data was collected using semi-structured interview schedules supplemented by document review and observation and analyzed using descriptive statistics. The study found that the rural women of Keiyo South have limited access to ICT Technology and infrastructure which has impacted negatively on their socio-economic and political status. Access to information was principally through informal sources such as friends and neighbors; they lacked education and training to provide them with knowledge and skills for accessing ICT information which can help them improve their social status. The study concluded that use of ICT has contributed to improving the social status of rural women through economic empowerment and has enabled the rural women to obtain new life skills. Also, ICT has allowed them to participate in political election online. With appropriate ICT infrastructure and policies in place, ICT should be used to improve the socio-economic and political status of rural women in Keiyo South. In a bid to enhancing women participation in development, the study recommends that the county government enact policies and projects that support the development of ICT infrastructure and media information literacy competencies of the women. These would empower the women to develop better strategies for poverty reduction.

Key Words: ICT, Poverty Reduction, Rural women and Keiyo South Constituency

INTRODUCTION

The fact that poverty can be chronic or temporary, poverty has frequently been associated with inequity, and correlated with vulnerabilities and social exclusion Lok-Dessallien, (2000). Increasingly empirical evidence shows a positive correlation between ICT usage and social economic development of a society. The ICT sector consists of segments as diverse as telecommunications, television and radio broadcasting, computer hardware, software and

services and electronic media, such as the internet and electronic mail. While ICTs have great potential in development and poverty reduction drives, impeding factors such as social and political inequalities of sharing information which can exist between the rich and poor, urban and rural, men and women, skilled and unskilled can hardly be underrated (Kwake & Ochola, 2007).

Report by the Kenya Bureau of Statistics indicates that Kenya's absolute poverty reduction efforts and achievements have been wavering since the country's independence, Keiyo District Education Report. (2001). Further, that nearly half (45.2%) of the country's population lives below poverty lines. 75% of the county's population live in the rural areas which constitute about 18% of the country's territory. Majority of these rural communities depend on subsistence agriculture for their livelihood. Such high density has overstretched the merger resources for any meaningful returns. In the recent years, the erratic weather patterns experienced in the country has put a lot of strain on the rural communities' agricultural productivity. A correlation of poverty levels and urbanisation reveals that only three in ten people in urban areas are poor compared to nearly one in two people in the rural areas).

Although, females constitute 51% of Kenya's population, the country is largely a patriarchal society. The male members of the community dominate access to opportunities in most spheres and sectors of the county. This is partially exemplified by statics that puts poverty levels of female headed households higher than their counterpart male headed 46.8% and 44.6% respectfully. Despite the affirmative policies, interventions and legal frameworks proposed by the government, statistics suggest that the women in the country still face different forms of gender disparities owing to a myriad of factors. Chief amongst these factors include limited access and control over productive resources, insufficient access to education, lack of skill, limited access to technology, inherent traditional cultural values Kipruto *et al.* ,2015), Iiboudo (2003) & Iten (20001). Similar poverty and human development indicators have been recorded for the study area Elgeiyo/Marakwet Integrated Development Plan (2013-17) statics put these at 57 percent of the county population living under poverty level. These demographic characteristics and in particular the un-equal participation of women and men in economic activities raise challenges to overall development processes (Chowdhury, 2000)

Statement of the Problem

Poverty has recurrently been associated with inequity, and correlated with vulnerabilities and social exclusion (Lock-Dessalien, 2000), With only 29 percent (25-64 years) of the population engaged in active employment. The poverty status of rural women in Keiyo South constituency goes beyond the view of income level to include powerlessness, noiselessness, vulnerability, and fear. Majority of women in the constituency are living in object poverty, are illiterate and dependent mainly on unreliable sources for information. Men here are said to own ICT equipment like radio, TV and mobile phones, while the few women who might have access do not have time to listen or utilize the equipment because they are always busy supporting the family core activities when their men are busy in development activities, (Hafkin & Huyer, 2007). The nature of ICT access and use by these rural women is said to be mainly influenced by discriminatory practices that exclude women.

The county gender inequality index reflects gender-based disadvantage of women in three dimensions, namely; reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market. These disparities are undermining the economic and social participation and contribution by the

majority of the population in the county. The literature show that ICTs have the potential to reduce poverty and improve the well-being of rural women and their families if only the problem of illiteracy, access, skills and poverty could be addressed, (Adeya, 2002, Hafkin & Huyer, 2007 and Hudson, 2001). Working on the premise that best way of leveraging the benefits of ICTs for social economic development is by analysing current problems and associated contextual conditions, this research undertook to explore how rural woman of Keiyo South constituency could be assisted to tap the potential benefits of using ICT for socio-economic development within the prevailing conditions. The study was based on two assumptions: first that the parameters of ICT use, information access, and social development are essential in a study on social empowerment of rural women that will be covered in the study; Secondly, that a reasonable number of rural women in Keiyo South Constituency have access to, and make use of, different forms of Information and Communication Technologies.

The study focus

The aim of the study was to explore ways of harnessing ICT use in poverty reduction among rural women in Keiyo south constituency, Elgeyo Marakwet County, Kenya and make recommendations for the best practices for utilizing ICT use in promoting the social welfare of rural women in Kenya

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the potential role of ICT on social welfare of women in Keiyo south?
2. What is the influence of ICT use on the economic welfare of rural women in Keiyo south?
3. What is the effect of ICT on political empowerment of women in Keiyo south?

LITERATURE REVIEW

From a broad perspective, ICTs has been defined as “tools that facilitate communication, processing and transmission of information and the sharing of knowledge by electronic means” (Odini, 2012) the convergence of information technologies – hardware and software and communication technologies are playing an increasingly important role of broadening global social-economic opportunities. ICTs have been used to directly and indirectly improve the way education, healthcare, community development, communication, and employment are provided and used (Kombo, 2006), Kimani, & Kombo, (2010). & McNamara, (2003) found ICTs to transform rural women socio-economic status including health education and livelihoods (Gurumurthy, 2004), In the Kenyan context, the social influences of ICT use in poverty reduction were highly regarded by other scholars ;(Kwake & Ochola, 2007) and Ochieng, 2011) who affirmed the positive influence of ICT use in rural women social and economic development and in poverty reduction. They upheld the mobile phone in the critical role it has played in communication and in providing easy access to mortgage and loans. However, they cautioned that these benefits are difficult to gauge in most African countries and may lead to policy makers not giving priority to creating effecting ICT strategies.

Economic benefits of ICTs in Poverty reduction

Demonstrating the social benefits of ICT, researchers; (Kimani & Kombo, 2010, Kipruto, 2017, McNamara, 2003, Ochieng, 2011, Sophia *et al.*, 2007) have strongly supported the initiative, however there are raised scepticism regarding how ICT could be used to reduce poverty among rural communities in developing countries. For instance, (Chowdhury ,2000), argues that “ICTs do not have any more to do with poverty and food security in the developing countries than rain dances have to do with food”. They noted that the problem of poverty alleviation is complex and efficient production systems and physical infrastructure

could be a few of the necessities in rural areas like Keiyo south. There are also researchers with conflicting views on ICT programs that provide women access and those that empower them through ICTs. With respect to (Gurumurthy, 2004) reiterate that ICT activities for women should be effective in addressing poverty issues; and should go beyond issues of access and infrastructure to consider the larger social context and power relations. It has been suggested that strategies to achieve these could include enacting gender specific ICT policies, subsidizing tariffs for low incomes regions, and providing special incentives for companies that invest in rural areas Hudson (2001),

Exemplary initiatives in Kenya aimed promoting ICT access and uses include; the establishment of the private owned “Pasha Centers” established in 2010 under the ICT Board of Digital Village Project (DVP) funding. The aim of the project is to bridge the disparities of ICT potentials between urban and rural areas. Although this project was expected to have bared fruits by 2013 in all the counties, to date those projects have not reached most rural areas in Kenya like Keiyo South. Instead, they are concentrated in major urban cities like Nairobi; leaving out the rural areas to suffer the brat of digital divide. Another notable example is the application of mobile telephone to provide business opportunities such as savings and loans and mobile money. Two initiatives by mobile phone providers in relation to this are the M-Pesa, Mobile Banking and the M-swari (Kipruto, 2017; Wanyonyi *et al.*, 2015 and Institute of Economic Affairs. 2008). there is also the recent development of” HUDUMA” centres in every county to bring government services closer to the people but the rural women are still disadvantaged in skills and they still need to be assisted.

Previous studies on ICT use for poverty reduction have focused on ICTs as communication channels and information resource for empowering rural women. But very little regard was placed on harnessing ICT use for the rural women to improve their social status. Areas of social exclusion and digital divide were given very little coverage. The present study was set out to investigate and identify how ICTs can be harnessed to improve the social status of rural women by developing strategies for exploiting ICTs in an African rural environment. As the study is a case study of Keiyo South Constituency; a rural area in Elgeyo Marakwet County in Kenya, but the findings can be applied to other rural set ups in any African Country.

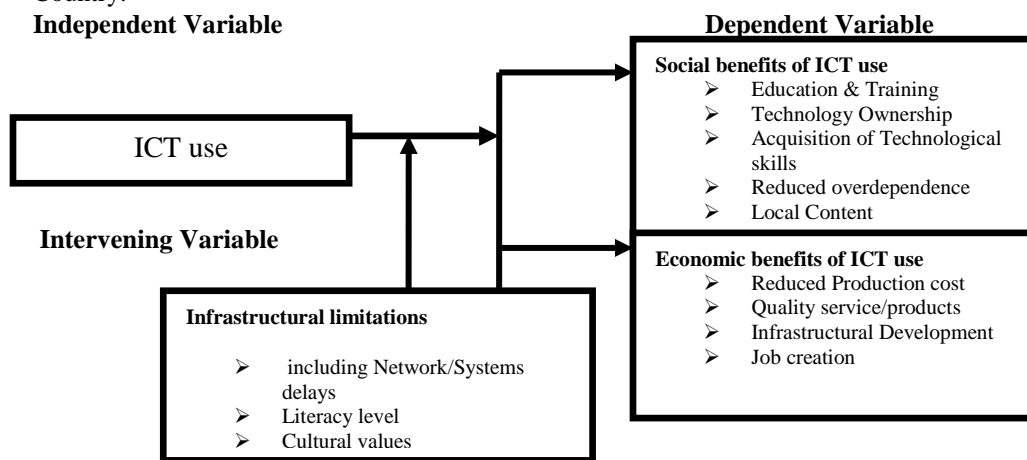


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive research design which was most appropriate for the study. This was because the purpose of study was to create a detailed description of the use of information communication technology and poverty reduction (Mugenda, 1999). Some aspect of quantitative method was employed in simple statistics expressed in frequencies and percentages were used to explain demographic characteristics of the respondents and Qualitative data was used to analyze data thematically.

Study Area

The study was conducted in Keiyo South Constituency Elgeiyo/Marakwet County. The Constituency is one of the two constituencies of the former Keiyo District in the North Rift region. It borders Uasin-Gishu County to the West and Koibatek to South. The constituency lies between Latitude 00 10” to 00 52” North and Longitude 350 25” to 350 45” East with the highlands having altitude between 2400 to 2700m above sea level.

Study Population

The study population refers to a group of individuals, objects or items from which samples are taken for measurement. It also refers to an entire group of persons or elements that have at least one thing in common (Kombo, 2006) for example the case of rural women of Keiyo South Constituency together with their demographics such as; age, marital status and class. Keiyo South was targeted for the study because it covers the largest area of 900.1 sq.km and had the highest population of rural women who live below one dollar per day and they form the majority of households. According to Kenya Bureau of Statistics; (Elgeiyo Marakwet, 2013-17), Keiyo south constituency has a total of 8577 women population of rural women households, drawn from the 17 (seventeen) administrative locations as indicated in Table 1

The population which was studied consisted of rural women aged between 18-60 studying, working and living in Keiyo South Constituency of Elgeyo/Marakwet County. The word “rural” is intended to mean places with rural characteristics, such as: low levels of service (e.g. transport, water and medical services), low settlements structures and high incidences of poverty (Okunna,2004 and Kwake & Ochola, 2007). These are the women within the productive age and who can attest to the feel of poverty.

Table 1: Population of rural women in Keiyo South Constituency

Division	Location	Female Population
Chepkorio	Marichor	450
	Nyaru	472
	Kabiemit	567
	Kitany	480
	Mosop	580
	Kaptarakwa	570
Metkei	Tumeiyo	464
	Maoi	460
	Kapwosor	504
	Kapkwoni	480
	Metkei	541
	Kachalwo	450
	Chemoibon	425
Soy	Kibargoi	479
	Soy	524
	Epke	580
	Chpsigot	551
Total	17	8577

Source: (District Statistic Offices, Iten, 2001)

Sampling Procedure

The study employed different sampling techniques which were in line with this particular study and to provide information which was sought from the rural women of Keiyo South and the policy and decision makers of the county. Stratified systematic random sampling and purposive sampling methods were applied. These methods gave the women in the locations, sub-location and villages in the constituency an equal chance of inclusion in the sample.

Stratified Systematic Sampling and Purposive method

In the first stage the researcher stratified the Elgeyo/Marakwet County into four constituencies and purposely selected Keiyo South because it is one of the densely populated divisions and productive areas compared to the other four divisions (County Government of Elgeyo Marakwet, 2013).

Six locations were Purposely sampled because of their high representation leaving one location which was sparsely populated and un accessible this formed the sample frame. These are Kapwosor, Marichor, Kaptarakwa, Epke Chepsigot and Chemoibon and each of the three divisions; Chepkorio, Metkei and Soy. The rural women from every location were grouped according to three sectors of occupation; formal, informal and household and interviewed. Purposive sampling was applied on the side of decision and policy makers.

Sample Size

The population of the rural women studied was sampled from the six locations; (Marichor, Kaptarakwa, Kapwosor, Chemoibon, Epke and Chepsigot), which had an estimated population of 3070 women. According to (Mugenda, 1999) between 10-15 % of population can be taken in for a sample size. Therefore, the study took 10% of rural women, who were

purposively selected from the six locations depending on the roles they played in the society and which the researcher found resourceful formed the sample size. These included for example women group leaders, women in formal employment, religious leaders and Housewives. This provided a sample size of 141 women interviewed. Snowball sampling was used to get the list of women groups available in every location and their leaders. The study focused on rural women because they play a very important role in socio economic development only if they are provided with education and relevant up to date information, they can minimize poverty.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation

Completed interview schedules were analysed according to selective coding and categories were developed that reflected on the response from the respondents. Finally, data were presented in form of text, tables, pie charts and percentages.

DISCUSSIONS AND FINDINGS

The study sought to examine whether the rural women of Keiyo South Constituency are aware of the social benefits of using ICT to improve their social status. The interviewed women were drawn from three divisions namely: Chepkorio, Metkei and Soy. Two locations were selected for interview from every division, giving a total of six locations, Chepkorio and Metkei divisions where majority of the respondents were drawn from. Each division is represented as follows. 59(45.3%) from Metkei, 62(47.8%) Chepkorio and Soy division had 20(6.9%).

Among the Key questions asked were their demographic characteristics which included the level education, age occupation and sources of information for the rural women. The findings revealed that majority of the rural women are uneducated, young and do not have reliable sources of income. Most of them consult unreliable sources of information such as their neighbours, friends, husbands or village elders to access information for social and economic empowerment: Fig.2, Table 2 and 3

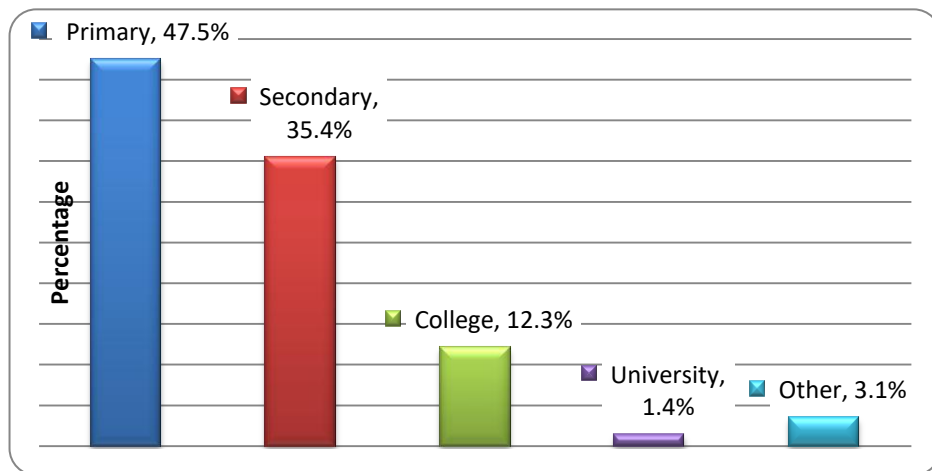


Figure 2: Education level of respondents

Source: (Author, 2015)

As illustrated in the figure above it shows that majority of the rural women are able to read, write and possess numerical skills that help them in book keeping of their business or harvests. Although they demonstrate to have the numerical skills, majority have primary education only. This could be an indication of high rate of poverty, because majority of them cannot qualify for formal employment. In addition, they are limited from accessing meaningful information because they are unable to determine their information needs. Their inability to determine relevant economic information can lead to high rate of poverty among rural women. According to the information provided by the education officer, majority of school enrollments are female students but as they continue learning majority of them dropout along the way. This was attributed to some social problems for example; early pregnancies, lack of school fees, orphaned or both. These have negatively impacted on the number of women who have access to Tertiary or University Education thus reducing their chances of employment opportunities. In emphasizing the importance of education (Burtch, 2006) referred education as a “major force in economic, intellectual, social and cultural empowerment” and this is widely recognized as essential to processes of poverty reduction.

Table 2: Rural Women Occupation

Status	Frequency	Percent (%)
Opinion leader/traditional leader	2	1.4
Teacher	2	0.7
Women group leader	1	0.7
Subsistence farmer	61	46.2
Government officer	12	9.2
House wife	45	34.6
Business	7	5.0
Total	130	100.0

As shown in table 4.1, 60(46.2%) were farmers and 45(34.6) were housewives and the rest 25 (19.2%) were in formal employment or business.

Table 3: Sources of information available to rural women

Source	Frequency	Percent
Government offices	22	17.0
Radio/TV broadcast	19	14.6
Public meetings/barazas	35	27.0
Village elders	30	24
Other: Neighbours	24	18.4

Out of the 130 rural women, 22(17%) indicated that their source of information was from government offices, while 19(14.6%) obtained information from radio/TV broadcast, 35(27.0%) obtained their information from public meetings/barazas, 30(24%) obtained from village elders and the rest 24(18.4%) from their neighbours. As shown above the major source of information for rural women in Keiyo South is public meetings/barazas and village elders.

The second question sought to find out socially attributed causes of poverty among rural women. The findings are summarized in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Socially attributed causes of poverty among rural women

	Frequency	Percent
Illiteracy and low education	27	21
Gender discrimination	41	31
Single parenting/widowhood	27	21
Over dependent on women	13	10
Role of Women in the society	22	17
Total	130	100.0

Table 4 shows that illiteracy and gender discrimination are the main causes of poverty represented by; 27(21%) and 41(31%) respectively. Single parenting and widowhood 27(21%) are relatively contributing to poverty, similarly high rate of dependence 13(10%) further inflate the situation. Also the role of women in the society 22(17%) has contributed to their level of poverty, (Burtch, 2006) affirmed that education is a major force in economic, intellectual, social and cultural empowerment. Another aspect which was noted to be very vital cause of poverty was gender discrimination (Odini, 2012) noted that restriction to women's right to land ownership as a factor that can fuel poverty among rural women. This fact was found as a reality in Keiyo South such that women are the main cultivators of land, undertaking 80% of work in food storage and transportation, 90% of the work hoeing and weeding and 60% harvesting and marketing but the proceeds belongs to the family.

Social Benefits of Using ICT in Reducing Poverty

The first objective sought to find out the impact of ICT use on the social lives of rural women in Keiyo South. An item was posed in the questionnaire which sought to find out the role of social benefits of using ICT; the findings were summarized in Likert scale as shown in Table 4.4 below

Table 5: Social Benefits of Using ICT in Reducing Poverty**KEY: SA-Strongly Agree, N-Neutral, DA- Disagree**

Human and Social Benefits of Using ICT in Reducing Poverty		SA	N	DA
Obtain new skills by using new ICTs, and new products on the mobile such as mobile banking	Freq.	87	5	38
	%	67.4	3.6	29
Get information, especially from the radio, relevant to improving agriculture	Freq.	54	32	44
	%	41	24.6	34.4
Obtaining new skills (learning to use the computer; getting skills to improve agriculture (radio)	Freq.	27	19	84
	%	20.6	14.6	64.8
Children able to get educational programmes (radio)	Freq.	86	6	38
	%	66.1	4.6	29.3
Communicate with friends and family	Freq.	120	0	10
	%	92.2	0	7.8
Participate in local government decisions	Freq.	48	20	62
	%	36.8	15	48.2
Avoid face to face communication with political and social opponents	Freq.	41	36	53
	%	31.5	27.7	40.8
Use the mobile to get assistance during need and in emergencies	Freq.	114	10	6
	%	87.7	8	4.3
Increased ability to communicate socially with friends and family	Freq.	39	13	78
	%	30	10	60
Increased ability to participate in discussions on political decisions (mainly radio)	Freq.	91	6	33
	%	70	5	25

The findings above show that most of the selected women have embraced the use of ICT technology especially the use of radios, TVs and mobile phones to enhance their quality of life. However, it was noted that most of the rural women have not fully utilized ICT in obtaining new information. They do not think the use of ICT has provided them with new knowledge and skills or enabled them avoid face to face communication with political and social opponents. Few of them agreed that the use of ICT has increased ability to communicate socially with friends and family. Similar findings were reported Iiboudo, (2003) came out in support of radio to have the capacity to enable the broad participation of women of a local community and is the cheapest of all mass communication tools and one that rural people can easily afford. Panos, (2004) has also confirmed the findings of this research about the capability of ICTs, more especially on the mobile phone. This modern technology is said to have greatly simplified the provision of service among other rural women. It was noted that the mobile phone had contributed towards development by facilitating social change and economic activity; improving the quality of life, bringing cost benefits in rural social service delivery, and promoting good governance and transparency.

Economic benefits of ICT use among Rural Women

The second objective sought to find out the Benefits of ICT in Economic life of Rural Women in Keiyo South. An item was included in the interview which sought information on the influence of ICT on the social life of rural women. Table 4.5 summarizes the findings of the study

Table 6: Economic Benefits of Using ICT

Key: A-Agree, N- None, D-Disagree

Economic Benefits of Using ICT		A	N	D
I Use ICTs to reduce travel time and costs for social and business communications purposes	Freq.	85	16	29
	%	65	12	23
I Network with friends to look for information about jobs	Freq.	82	23	25
			17.2	
	%	63.1	1	19.42
I Use ICTs for getting new products and business clients	Freq.	69	7.7	51
	%	53.1	22.1	39.2
I Use mobiles to send and receive money	Freq.	79	11	40
	%	60.8	8.2	31
I use mobile to save money	Freq.	63	24	43
	%	48.8	18.2	33
I use ICT to obtain climate information	Freq.	23	2	105
	%	18	1.2	80.8

Table 6 above revealed that majority of the respondents, 85(65%) agreed that they use ICTs to reduce travel time and costs for social and business and communications purposes while 29(23%) disagreed. Out of the 130 women 82(63.1%) agreed that they use ICT to Network with friends to look for information about jobs, 25(19.42%) disagreed, 69(53.1%) agreed that they use ICTs for getting new products and business clients, 51(39.2%) disagreed. In addition to this, 79(60.8%) of the selected women agreed that they use mobiles to send and receive money, 54(31%) disagreed. The findings also revealed that 63(48.8%) agreed that they use mobile to save money, 43(33%) disagreed. It was noted also that 23(18%) agreed that they use ICT to obtain climate information, while 105(80.8%) disagreed.

The findings showed that most of the women agreed that they use ICTs to reduce travel time and costs for social and business communications purposes hence improving their lives. They also agreed that they use ICT to Network with friends to look for information about jobs, to get new products and business clients. Majority of them agreed that they use mobiles to send receive and save money.

Information from the key informants interviewed, from the ministry of educational officials indicated that ICT especially has been used by rural women in obtaining information on how to improve their farm products through tailored programs especially on channels broadcasted in their local dialect.

Effects of ICT Use among Rural Women

The study sought to find out whether rural women are aware of any benefits that can be derived by using ICT in poverty reduction. Among them 25(19.2%) responded that ICT can be used to create markets for their products and services, 13(10%) said that it can reduce

travel time and cost to the markets. They also know that through ICTs such as Radio, Television and Internet they can get updates on the best farming practices. Some 44(33.8%) said that ICT use can help them develop networks and links with other International women and also help them to have a voice in political appointments. While the rest believed that .ICT use can help the access information about their nutrition and health and to improve their livelihoods in various ways. Researchers like Slaymaker (2002) also affirmed the immense growth in rural women economic development through ICT use and recommended that ICT can be used to “overcome rural women’s isolation, give them a voice to improve governance and advance gender equality”.

Table 7: Challenges to Effective ICT Use among Rural Women

Source	Frequency	Percent
Reduce travel Time to Market and businesses	13	10
Provide updates on market prices	25	19.2
Access information on the best farming systems	12	9.2
Network& links with other women organizations	44	33.8
Information on health and nutrition	32	24.6
Updates on election practices	4	3.1
Total	130	100.0

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study established that rural women can be empowered through the use of ICT to reduce poverty mainly in social and economic aspects. The findings about the social benefits of ICT in table 4.4 showed that most of the selected women used technology especially the use of radios, TVs and mobile phones to enhance their quality of life. It was also noted that most of them have not fully utilized ICT in obtaining new skills and few of them agreed that the use of ICT has increased their ability to communicate socially with friends and family. This fact was also supported by the Education officials interviewed who confirmed that ICT has improved self- confidence which can be seen to be one of the most important influences among women of different ages. ICT especially radio, TV and mobile phones has enabled the rural women gain access to new and useful knowledge, information and awareness about a range of issues; including health, Education, Agriculture and business.

In economic empowerment it was noted that most of the women in Keiyo South agreed that they use ICTs to reduce travel time and costs for social and business communications purposes which has improved their living standard. They also agreed that they use ICT to Network with friends to look for information about jobs, to get new products and business clients. Majority of them agreed that they use mobiles to send receive and save money. Majority of the interviewed ministry of educational officials opined that ICT especially the use of radios and TV as well as mobile phones has been used by rural women in obtaining information on how to improve their farm products through TV and radio channels broadcasted in their local dialect.

In conclusion social benefits of ICT use among rural women could be used to reduce poverty through social, economic and political empowerment. This was supported by majority of the women who were of the view that ICT has enabled them to reduce travel time and costs for social and business communications purposes because they can use mobile phones to get in touch with their clients. They also indicated that the use of ICT has enabled them to get new products and business clients as well as a market for their products.

Mobile phones have been utilized by the rural women to send receive and save money through M-pesa platform. While others have admitted that ICTs has enabled them to access and communicate with their leaders with ease.

The study recommended the use of ICTs such as radio, TV and mobile phones to create awareness and to serve as a tool for community development, especially in sparsely populated areas. These technologies have proven to be effective in transmitting information about poverty reduction such as; new farming techniques, insecticides use and application, marketing and selling prices, stock market and weather forecast. Only the synergy rested in packing and presenting information in both formal and local language and equipping them with the necessary skills and training

The study further recommended county government to enact policies that promote the social and economic welfare of rural women through ICT use. Such policies are those that can lead to establishment of community projects for rural women, training centres as well as income generating projects. Women can acquire the skills and money derived from the proceeds of the projects 'to improve their livelihoods. They should also provide incentives to private investors in order for them to be motivated to set up ICT projects in local areas that can enable rural women access information on social and economic information in their regions.

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