

IT Education and Workforce Participation: A New Era for Women in Kenya?

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Abstract

While Sub-Saharan African women have historically assumed the roles of both housewives and subsistence farmers, they have had few opportunities to participate in the modern economies of the region. However, this trend is changing with the exponential growth of information and communications technologies (ICT), giving many Sub-Sahara African women access to computers, the Internet, and other related technologies. Based on the work of a four-member research team from Kenya and the United States, this article examines the integration of female college students into the formal ICT work sector in Kenya. We do so by examining major bottlenecks and enablers to such integration from historical and contemporary perspectives. Using an interpretive approach, we conducted 32 interviews with women in an ICT program offered by a university in Kenya. Our findings indicate that women were highly optimistic, embracing ICT as a practical mechanism for achieving entry into the labor market. However, they perceived significant structural barriers, such as public policies that failed to facilitate the development of the ICT sector, gender discrimination by employers, and training that provided them with insufficient technical skills to enable them to effectively perform in the workplace. These findings largely confirm the gendered perspectives found in similar studies conducted in other countries. However, what appear as global perspectives are informed by the local causes.

Keywords: information and communications technology, information society, Kenya, Sub-Saharan Africa, women

Fulltext:

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