

REPORT ON THE JUNE EDITION OF THE GINKS NORTHERN ICT4D FORUM

TOPIC - WOMEN IN ICT; CHALLENGES, SUCCESSES AND THE WAY FORWARD

Information Communication Technology (ICT) has become a vital tool that is permeating lifestyles of nations, countries and people. In spite of the great advantages that one can gain using ICT, Ghana is still tottering on the way to embracing holistically ICT and using it as a developmental tool. Even though many frantic efforts that are made to give a face lift to ICT studies and use, women are still left behind in this technological age. Many women still have the perception that ICT is the preserve of men and as such they have little or no interest in it. It was to dispel this notion that the Ghana Information Network for Knowledge Sharing (GINKS) through its partner, Savana Signatures organized this forum to examine the challenges, successes and the way forward for women in ICT.

The forum brought participants from the Female ICT Teachers' Association (FICTTA), members of the Regional Library ICT programme and the general public.

Making her presentation, Miss Francisca Demuyakor of FICTTA, lamented the low involvement of females in the manipulation, storage, retrieval, transmission and receiving of information digitally and said this was because of the numerous challenges that confront women both socially and financially. The first challenge she identified as militating against women partaking in the information age was inferiority complex and admonished women to come out of their shell and spend some time and money to build up their ICT skills since it was the only way they could compete favourably with their male counterparts. The inadequacy of personal computers and the stress that the management of the home and children was also identified as a great challenge to women participation in ICT since these usually tie women down and leave the opportunities to the men folk. Miss Demuyakor further said that where there are some opportunities created for women to equip themselves in ICT in the midst of men, there is usually the tendency for intimidation from men folks. She therefore, urged that women resist intimidation and forge ahead to achieve their goals in life. She said the era where women bank on men for everything is over and a new dawn where women need to rule and manage the affairs of their lives is now.

Miss Demuyakor was however very hopeful that all was not lost because there was a great ray of hope in the women involvement in ICT since there are many women role models like Dr. Harriet Somuah who designed the computerized School Selection and Placement System Software which is currently being used by the West African Examination Council. She also acknowledged the work of women bloggers like Madam Kajsa H.A and ICT lecturer, and Freelance Writer and said that 120 women in the Kasena Nankana District have been

trained in the use of the digital camera for documentation of their shea butter activities. She did not forget to mention the great efforts that FICTTA was chalking in empowering and building the capacity of female teachers in the use of ICT to enhance their teaching and learning.

Making the second presentation, Mrs. Dampson Rita of ***Bandisuglo Women Group***, a sheabutter processing women's group at Gupananigu in Tamale, said they have been making shea butter products like soap and pomade but that their greatest challenge was how to expand their market beyond the shores of this country. Later, they found the answer in ICT but were at the same time confronted with the challenge of how to use the internet to widen their operational and market scope. She lamented that even though many NGO's are in the north trying to empower women over the years, many of them have failed to realize that ICT empowerment is the only way women of this time can turn their fortunes around. Savana Signatures, she said, was one of the few organizations that has taken upon itself to train and empower women to fit into the digital world. Mrs. Dampson identified self motivation and commitment as the only key that will unlock the door to excellence and urged all women to get committed and learn to manage their time and make room in their daily lives to take ICT lessons since the benefits are immeasurable. She further admonished women to keep eschew the tendency of using all their earning for clothes and fashionable goods and save some to purchase desktop computers of their own and not think that it is the responsibility of the men to buy one for them.