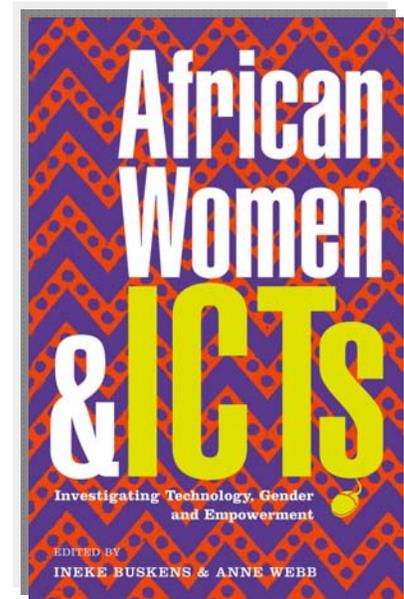


African Women and ICTs: Investigating Technology, Gender and Empowerment

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Endorsements

Graça Machel

This book questions how women in Africa use ICTs for empowerment. The chapters bring to light the strength and the resilience of the women who spoke with the authors, yet also the slim margin there is for true empowerment within the context in which they live: a context that is defined by pervasive power differentials that are rooted on the one hand in the inherently unequal world-economic monetary system and on the other hand in the inherently unequal gender images and norms that still plague Africa and the world. Even in this context African women are finding ways to access and use ICT tools and spaces to make their lives better and at times even succeed in transforming themselves and their environments. Yet the authors are indeed justified in wondering whether women's efforts can be considered as true empowerment when these efforts confirm existing power differences.

Reading the book leaves one wondering how Africa, or even the world, would look if women could grow up and live in the measure of freedom that is needed to freely express themselves and use ICTs to their fullest potential.

A gender-sensitive and gender-just use of Information and Communication Technology will contribute to the world of openness, connection, equal opportunities, sharing and prosperity for which Africa and the world at large are waiting.

I commend the authors for this valuable initiative. Above all I salute every single African woman, young and old, who is boldly navigating these troubled waters.

Nancy Hafkin

Starting from the premise that ICTs are tools that can facilitate people's efforts to transform their realities, the authors investigate how and if ICTs contribute to women's empowerment in Africa. The investigation is done using Ineke Buskens' unique contribution to cultural anthropology methodology combining focus, meditation, and non-judgmental observation that includes examination of the subjects' as well as the researchers' values and dreams. Focusing on women's agency as defined by Amartya Sen, the 31 authors, all of whom are highly qualified and experienced researchers from or working in Africa, use Buskens' pioneering emancipatory research methodology to guide their investigations. Chapters run the gamut from cases where ICTs affect women only passively, to where women benefit from women-only spaces, to ICTs transforming their personal and professional life, and to women designing technology and content. Those interested in women's empowerment and its relationship to technology will find this book a highly innovative approach to the subject, combining a unique perspective with case studies from a wide variety of African countries and settings.

Amartya Sen

For the advancement of economic development today, nothing is as important as the participation and leadership of women. Despite the importance of the subject, its value is persistently underestimated, and the psychological and social coordinates of women's participation are also much neglected in the theory and practice of development policy. By providing a deeply researched investigation of the role of African women in the society and in the specific sphere of information technologies, the authors of this study have substantially enriched our understanding of development problems in general and African development in particular. We have reason to be grateful.

Margaret Walters

A detailed and absorbing account of how African women are using new technology to transform their lives - a major contribution to African Women's studies. This important book celebrates their remarkable achievements, and explores how technology both enriches and complicates African society.