Title: Gender Relations and ICT Adoption in Contemporary Uganda: A Case of Computers and Mobile Telephones

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ABSTRACT

The thesis is about gender relations and adoption of computers and mobile phones in Uganda. The main objective of the study is to assess how gender relations relate to diffusion and adoption of ICT and women’s empowerment under liberalised ICT policy. Specific objectives are to: analyse accessibility and utilisation of computer technology and mobile telephony by gender; examine the influence of gender relations on diffusion and adoption of computer technology and mobile telephony by women and men; assess how adoption of computer and mobile telephone technology influences gender relations at household and community levels; and analyse apparent benefits and opportunities of computer technology and mobile telephony to women and men.

The study that eclectically draws on feminist, neoliberal economic development and diffusion of innovations theory is exploratory and cross-sectional in design. Fieldwork was conducted in two districts of Uganda namely Iganga and Mayuge using qualitative and quantitative methods. Results indicate that gender relations namely gender roles, power relations between men and women and emotional relations have a bearing on a number of aspects that relate to diffusion and adoption of computing and mobile telephony. These aspects include: the diffusion channels or ways, through which women and men access the technology; accessibility to technology which is not automatic even when women could afford to buy them; use which is mediated by considerations of safety especially for women and use which can result into desirable and undesirable outcomes at household or community levels.

Findings show that existing gender structures have been dented and that patriarchy is stressed by adoption of the technologies especially mobile phones leading to transformation of gender relations to an extent. However underlying gender structures though fractured remain largely intact and limit the beneficial impact of ICT, in this case computing and mobile telephony particularly to women. The study finds a strong intersection between use of especially mobile phones and escalation of gender based violence. Further, it is noted that the overall ICT policy regime that is based on a free market ideology bears benefits to women and men as well, but these benefits are limited by the exclusion of certain sections of society particularly women engaged primarily in the agricultural sector which ostensibly is the mainstay of Uganda’s economy.

The overall conclusion is, therefore, that ICT diffusion and adoption and its benefits can be meaningfully enhanced if attention is paid to gender relations at family, community and policy levels. This should involve ensuring that ICT policy is gender responsive and that elements of gender relations that stand in the way of leveraging ICTs for women’s empowerment are attended to by all actors including government, private companies, communities and individuals.