

**Parallel Session 16: Are Internet expectations being accomplished?**

**THE FACILITATING ROLE OF AN ITC CENTRE FOR RURAL  
AFRICAN WOMEN. AN EMPOWERMENT EXPERIENCE**

*Gideon de Wet*

*Department of Communication RAU, Johannesburg, South Africa, PO Box 524,  
2006. Cell: 0832904566, E-mail: [gdw@rau.ac.za](mailto:gdw@rau.ac.za)*

**Abstract**

Empowerment includes transformation and liberation processes in complex contexts, including personal, interpersonal, group and society levels. The aim was to investigate the facilitating and empowerment role that an ICT centre played in the lives of rural South African women.

**Methodology, Results and Conclusions**

This research was qualitative. The data analysis was done through Morse and Fields' approach.

ICT did play an important role in their empowerment. It manifested at various integrated levels, with emotional, personal, interpersonal and community consequences. Technology and religion also came together in an interesting way.

**Key words:** Empowerment, women, communication, ICT, facilitation

**Context**

Nelson Mandela (1996) said that the legacy of oppression weighs heavily on women that as long as women are bound by poverty and as long as they are looked down upon, human rights will lack substance.

The United Nations Fourth Conference on women (Beijing, 1995) can be regarded as a giant step in favour of the empowerment of women worldwide. (United Nations, 1995). Participating governments declared inter alia that the empowerment of women and equality between women and men are prerequisites for achieving political, social, economic, cultural and environmental security among all people (United Nations, 1995:14). The question is what role does ICT play in this respect as facilitating system?

Many scholars describe empowerment as an ongoing, fluctuating, lifelong transformation and liberation process involving positive changes in the

individual's psychological well-being (self-esteem, self-concept), the development of meaningful social relationships (friendship, informal and formal support) and the pursuit of positive experiences. (Arai, 1997:1-5; Gutiérrez, 1995:229; Engberg, 1995:95).

### **Methodology**

The study was conducted at the ICDL Centre in rural South Africa with 30 conveniently selected women with a grade 12 educational level

### **Research question and objectives**

How do women get empowered through ICT communication facilitation processes as experienced at the ICDL Centre in order to contribute towards community development?

To analyse the experiences of facilitation and empowerment of women through ICT at the **intrapersonal, interpersonal, family and community levels.**

### **Analysis of data: Morse and Field's approach**

Four integrated qualitative data analysis processes were applied: comprehending, synthesising, theorising and re-contextualising.

### **Findings and discussions**

#### **Empowerment at the intrapersonal and interpersonal levels**

The process of empowerment of women at the intrapersonal level operationalised on interrelated levels, such as at skills, technical and at social value levels. Technical skills indicate, for example, the ability to apply computer skills, which makes a difference to their practical performance in the work place. Social skills involve skills like the ability to communicate effectively within a certain group or to maintain oneself. Values indicate the importance of something in comparison with others. It also indicated certain standards or principles, which were accepted by a particular group and thus added particular value to a person as a human being.

The mastering of these skills led to personal fulfilment and self-confidence and a sense of empowerment. Gaining of these skills also led to the fact that the women started functioning on a higher level and that, in turn, resulted in a higher level of acceptability in the community. A total of more than 50% of the respondents indicated that they had learned certain computer skills and they felt that they were computer literate and well qualified.

Religion plays a very dominant role in the lives of these women because the overall majority indicated that they took part in religious activities. Out of the importance of their religious principles flowed their service to the community, to

serve the community through skills that they have learned (e.g. on the administrative level). As already mentioned, one respondent indicated that some people felt more comfortable asking help from women.

The role models of the respondents are predominantly female (mother, aunt, pastor's wife, political figures) and could be regarded as empowered women themselves due to their profiles in society.

When comparing the different sources of information at the interpersonal level, in the empowerment process, namely the family, husbands/boyfriends, children, colleagues, friends, the facilitator and fellow students it appeared that fellow students acted as the biggest source of information and input of knowledge in this regard. One possible reason for this is because of the act of sticking together tightly, to share knowledge and motivate each other. The fellow students form part of the educational environment at the study centre and played a very important role in the empowerment process. They served as a strong information source and served as a very positive reference point.

### **Empowerment at the community level**

It appeared as if the organisations in the community, especially the church as institution, were not facilitating agents on the level of practical skills, in the process of empowerment. The reason could be that the majority of the respondents indicated that they did not obtain information about the course from talking to people at the organisations to which they belonged.

### **Conclusions**

The most evident empowerment aspects were:

The personal fulfilment, improvement of quality of life, more self-confidence and could get a better job and higher status in the community.

Close relationships within family and a higher level of emotional support.

Role models are predominantly female, especially the maternal figure which places a very high value on education.

Relationships with friends and colleagues for emotional support.

Religion and a sense of serving the community as a God given instruction

The role of the fellow students played a major role in the empowerment process because of the relative same frame of reference and the group cohesion that exists.

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