

Paula-Ann Award Recipient 2016

Report on fieldwork

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The Study of the Impact of Technical ICT Training on Women – A
Case Study of AkiraChix in Kenya

MSc Practising Sustainable Development (ICT4D Stream)



Source: Akirachix.com

Since their introduction into mainstream development work, Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) have held the promise of significant improvements to the lives of men and women across the world. ICTs have been viewed as having the potential to provide new ways to tackle global challenges. Recent years have seen the explosion in their use in development interventions for social and economic advancement. ICTs are

now used widely from the response to humanitarian crises, education challenges, improving service delivery, activism, accountability and governance, to confronting climate change and improving energy efficiency. With costs falling precipitously, ICTs have been expected to be the great equaliser, providing a means for developing countries to 'leapfrog' and 'catch up' with developed countries.

A growing area of research and policy has been in the field of gender and ICTs. My research project sought to investigate the impact of technical ICT training on women, focusing particularly on whether such training has an impact on women's empowerment. I used the case of AkiraChix in Nairobi as a case study. This organisation was founded in 2010 and was one of the first locally-run and prominent women in technology organisations in Africa. It runs an annual technical training programme targeted at women from Nairobi's five largest slums. It is a one-year intensive course on programming, design and entrepreneurship. For my research I conducted interviews and focus groups with women from the 2014 and 15 cohorts and some of the staff.

Overall, my research found that the training programme was empowering in that it increased women's choices. However, it is important to note that this was not just because of the training, or the access to new technology. Other important dimensions of the course included access to female mentors working in the technology industry who help challenge ingrained norms around appropriate work for women. Students are also given financial support for travel and food during the course.

Three years ago I co-founded Asikana Network, an organisation that seeks to empower women in the field of technology. After being one of only three female participants at a highly technical yet free training workshop, I was compelled to address issues surrounding the low participation of women in technology in Zambia. Asikana Network now provides girls and women with free training in marketable ICT skills, a platform to interact and share knowledge, access to mentors and opportunities to give back to their own communities. Upon my return to Zambia I will use my dissertation research

findings to build a case for and inform Asikana Network programmes which will reach at least 2000 women and girls in 2017 including those in under-resourced communities.