ABSTRACT

Since the 1990s, a lot of resources have been invested by the government’s bilateral and multilateral donors and other international organizations to support ICT for poverty reduction initiatives and projects. The results have been mixed and some projects have been downright failures. Whereas various reasons have been advanced for this state of affairs, researchers have confirmed that there exists insufficient knowledge on the process of converting the ICTs to capabilities, especially the contextual circumstances and facilitating conditions that enable the conversion, leading to poverty reduction outcomes. This research sought to address this gap with a view to explore how conversion takes place.

The research was inductive and utilized revelatory multistage studies and micro-ethnography. The cases study involved semi-structured interviews of informants and a focus group, while for the micro ethnography, the researcher visited the location of the projects in the cases and stayed there for some time, interacting, observing, interviewing. This happened in three stages over a period of one a half years the two cases were located in Western Kenya and involved basis ICTs skills training to poor rural communities. The informants were beneficiaries of the training projects who had gone on to utilize their knowledge to improve their wellbeing. After collection of the data, transcription was carried out followed by analysis, which led to carefully written accounts of the cases.

The research established that conversion involved three stages: decision to acquire knowledge to utilize ICTs, establishing whether the ICT enabled functioning opportunity is valuable, and determining the ability to achieve the function. The research opened the black box of conversion and traced the interaction of the different factors resources and ICTs. It mapped out how ICTs and other resources interact and affect each other, how conversion factor affect each other and resources and the influence resources have on conversion factors, and how this enabled or constrained conversion.

In conclusion it became clear that personal conversion factors affected the key determinants of each stage of the conversion process, and hence played a key part in conversion. This is reinforced by the fact that even where the same ICT intervention is availed to the community, the actual capability an individual converts from ICTs depends on the characteristics of the individual. Social conversion factors clearly have an influence on each of the identified stages in the conversion process. On the actual capabilities converted from the ICTs, it became clear that they are not all basic: They are mixed (basic and non-basic) and the basic capabilities were not necessarily prioritized by the poor.

From the research findings it is recommended that conception and design of ICT-for-poverty-reduction initiatives and projects should be capability-sensitive: They must take personal and social conversion factors into consideration. They must also consider the resources that are required.

From the research the following recommendations can be made for ICT-for-poverty-reduction projects:

- Work with community to identify valued basic capabilities that the interventions will seek to achieve.
• Identify the social and personal conversion factors at work in the community, and the availability of resources that are likely to affect the adoption, use and conversion of ICTs to valued capabilities
• Adopt capability-sensitive designs
• Awareness creation and community engagement to address negative discourses on ICTs, and education to give the required ICTs knowledge may be necessary.