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CHALLENGING FACTORS OF IT POTENCY IN SELF-HELPED NOT-FOR-PROFIT-ORGANISATIONS: A CASE STUDY OF EDO STATE WOMEN ASSOCIATION

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ABSTRACT

Information Technology (IT) strategies are intensifying with non-stop expedition to encourage, design and improve its utilization in Not-for-Profit Organisations (NFPOs), as well as strategically facilitate enhanced operation's performance and achievement of set goals. Regrettably, achieving and elevating IT potency in some NFPOs has been a difficult mission over the years, even with the affordability and availability of some IT strategies, as the case of self-helped NFPOs. This research carried out an eight-year empirical and ethnographic study on the Nigeria operations of a self-helped NFPO, Edo State Women Association (ESWA), utilizing interview, observation; convenience and purposive sampling, narrative and thematic analysis methods. The data analysis led to the identification of five (5) key IT potency challenging factors associated with several social, economic and physical issues faced by ESWA: Users', IT Strategy, Location, Access, Security and Maintenance. The interrelations that exist between these IT potency challenging factors are presented and elaborated. The findings suggest that there is still major work to be done in bridging the IT potency gap that exists between well-structured or well-funded and self-helped NFPOs. The research recommends that additional provisions be considered by social responsibility and IT potency role players for the sustainability of self-helped NFPO's projects and operations.

KEY WORDS: IT Potency, ESWA, Self-Helped, Well-Structured, NFPO

INTRODUCTION

Not-for-Profit Organisations (NFPOs) are basically initiated to encourage valuable giving. NFPOs offer charitable and voluntary services in various geographical locations around the world, and to some extent Information Technology (IT) has facilitated this. As a result, social responsibility has taken diverse turns. IT has become a global language for diverse cultures in both developing and developed locations as its strategies and solutions continue to open possibilities for NFPOs. As NFPOs form an integral part of every society, researches on the roles IT play in them have also evolved especially the overwhelming benefits it offers. IT continues to provide NFPOs with access to information required for them to execute their daily charitable or humanitarian activities, operations, events, awareness programmes, advocacy, fundraising, teams and project managements. Also, the digital age evolves with online support solutions enabling more collaboration between NFPOs, partners, stakeholders, donors, beneficiaries, local and global organisations, to provide access to useful support and information for their operations.

Generally, in Nigeria a NFPO can be considered as an association of persons, registered under Companies and Allied Matters Act (CAMA) 1990; established as either companies limited by guarantee or associations with incorporated trustees; set up for the advancement of any religious, educational, literary, scientific, social development, cultural, sporting, charitable and non-profit purpose; receives non-capital tax deductible donations, zero-rate VAT (on certain goods) and tax exemption unless tax payable on business, trading or investment activities; and is obligated to provide regular file reports on all its activities (Olarinde, 2017). However, the outcomes of NFPOs are more contextual than general. Unlike self-helped NFPOs, well-structured or well-funded NFPOs are likely equipped with wider networking, more successful operations, consistent long-term funding to sustain projects, more provisions/support from governing authorities, technologically advanced locations, affordability of incessant physical and virtual presence, more public engagement, more self-motivated/committed volunteers, swift integration of IT strategies, more awareness/presence, affordability of more technical expertise and higher levels of IT potency. Self-helped NFPOs experience more hardship in carrying out their operations with limited, unavailable, personal or short-term funds. However, the uniqueness of each NFPO has a direct impact on its IT potency level.

This paper carried out an eight-year empirical and ethnographic study to identify the IT potency challenging factors that exist in self-helped NFPOs like Edo State Women's Association (ESWA), in its Nigeria location. ESWA is a striving and self-helped NFPO that aims to improve quality of life by providing support services and facilities to underprivileged women and their children with a focus on economic development, education, training, employment and enterprise (ESWA, 2018). Findings showed that despite the

availability of IT strategies, some challenging factors still hinder ESWA from achieving high IT potency.

IT POTENCY IN NFPOs

IT potency can simply be regarded as a measurement of the effectiveness of an 'IT Strategy'. NFPOs utilize IT strategies for its vast advantages, some of which include: raising awareness of activities through the internet (Cammaerts & Van Audenhove, 2003); building relationships using websites (Spigelman & Evans, 2004); programme and service delivery utilizing email systems and databases (MAP & Idealware, 2012); reducing cost and time of service delivery through cloud technology (Boles, 2013); communicating easily and delivering programmes timely utilizing text messaging (Rivas, 2017). IT strategies have also been extended to online solutions designed to address collaboration, networking and fundraising challenges faced by some NFPOs and volunteers may be experiencing. For instance, online solutions to assist, support and connect NFPOs with passionate candidates in the sector (CharityJob, 2018); to provide a networking platform to help Charity professionals, trustees and volunteers interact, share ideas and discover new opportunities in the sector charities (CharityConnect, 2018); to provide a giving or crowdfunding platform for individuals, charities, companies, foundations, social sector and next generation; where they can also access fundraising tools, information, training, ideas and support they need to be more effective, expand and improve societies (GlobalGiving, 2018); and to help small NFPOs with services such as skill sharing, mentoring, group support, small charity bulletins, trustee networking and recruitment, help and advice, small charity policy, informative programmes or events, and member promotions (Small Charities Coalition, 2018). Elevating the potency of these diverse IT strategies has the tendency to totally transform an NFPO (Burt and Taylor, 2000); improve its operational processes and services to their beneficiaries and stakeholders (Hopkins, 2010; Boles, 2013), including training and learning processes (Egbokhare and Iyawe, 2012); enhance its independence, integration, and equal opportunities (UNESCO IITE, 2001); improve its communication systems (Techterms, 2010), improve public engagement in its social media platforms (Boles, 2013; Rybalko and Seltzer, 2010); and enhance its staff resource allocation (Jaskyte, 2012).

Ethnographic studies stimulate deep exploration research (Silberman, 2015). The outcomes of such studies have contributed to identifying and elevating IT potency in some NFPOs. Hackler and Saxton's (2007) research agreed that an NFPO's IT mission-related impact will be boosted with enhanced organizational capacities in long-term IT planning; budgeting, staffing, and training; performance measurement; internet and website capabilities; vision, support, and senior management involvement. According to United Nations (2003), public and government policies also play an important role in facilitating and strengthening IT potency through collaborations with transnational and local organisations. In light of encouraging more IT strategy utilization in NFPOs, Kim (2014) designed an authoring system, Sensr, to provide

easy mobile data collection solutions and reduce technical challenges surrounding the creation of mobile volunteerism applications. Rohde (2003) and Rohde (2004) designed Communities of Practice Concept, to electronically network the Iran community. Moreover, Klein et al. (2005) presented a computer supported cooperative learning environment for NFPOs to enable them share their ideas and best practices.

The Guidelines and Principles for Not-for-Profit Excellence (2015) suggested that maintaining a written technology plan and policy integration in short- and long-term strategic goals and operations can enable NFPO services to be accountable, relevant, efficient, confidential, safe, accurate, reliable, cost-effective and legal compliant. However, it is most important to identify the unique underlying challenging factors surrounding some NFPO's inability to achieve and elevate its IT potency. For instance, 'Users' of IT strategies encountering social, economic and physical challenges (UNESCO IITE, 2006), combined with legal, regulatory and policy bodies controlling NFPO's ability to 'Access' resources (ICNL, 2017), can hinder IT potency. Also, although some IT strategies are affordable, acquiring knowledge and skills required to effectively utilize them can be costly (Blackmar and LeRoux, 2012) for some NFPOs. Such NFPOs are likely to give no or less attention to designing technology plans (Huang and Karthikeyan, 2015), nor achieving/elevating their IT potency. Additionally, slow learning of new technologies can be morally driven and constrained in terms of technical expertise and resources (Zhang et al., 2010; Saeed et al., 2011; Napoli et al., 2000). These setbacks likely contribute to some NFPOs being stuck in vicious cycle processes such that they experience inability to achieve and sustain effective resources, successful developments and stability (Bell & Cornelius, 2013). It has been predicted that the NFPO industry experiences the epidemic of increased donation gap and competitiveness between well-structured/funded and more technologically sophisticated NFPOs, and those that lack money, time, and technological expertise (Schneider, 2003). This is an indication of unique IT potency challenging factors contributory to this prediction. However, self-helped NFPOs are likely to fall more behind in sustaining their existing projects (Schneider, 2003) and developing new projects.

METHODOLOGY

A combination of qualitative interview and observation methods was utilized for this study. Observation can be described as a way of collecting data through observing and is classified as a participatory study, due to the immersion of the researcher in the settings of the participants', while taking notes and/or recording (Dudovskiy, 2018). While interview is beneficial for the retrieval of contextual factors that govern values, beliefs, feelings, understanding, experiences and perspectives of a subject (Save the Children, 2014). Utilizing Convenience sampling the interviews were hosted through telephone call, chat and email for easy accessibility and for participants to respond at their convenient times, as well as for the validation process. Convenience sampling is the selection of subjects that are more readily accessible (Etikan et al., 2015). A letter requesting consent (see Appendix V) to conduct the study along with the

interview questions was sent out to ESWA's key partners and directors through text and email. Consent was then given by ESWA's key Director to carry out the study and interview. The interviews were scheduled to take place from July to August 2018 and conducted via telephone call, as participants' easy way of communication, and at their convenient times. An unstructured interview with probing questions (see Appendix V) was utilized to gather background information of ESWA; examine its structure, projects, operations; attain participants' subjective views of ESWA's project sustainability requirements, social, economic and IT potency challenges. A combination of qualitative Convenience and Purposive sampling techniques was utilized to subjectively select participants for the interview. Purposive sampling starts with the study purpose and the sample is accordingly selected to include people of interest and exclude those who do not suit the purpose, with the expectation that each participant will provide unique and rich information of value to the study (Etikan et al., 2015). The sampling of participants was drawn from a small pool of ESWA's UK and Nigeria teams who have full knowledge/experience of and key role(s) in ESWA's projects, decision making, operations and IT potency challenges since its initiation. The selection included two participants: one (1) Director and one (1) Voluntary Member/Partner of ESWA of age groups between 35 and 60 years. ESWA's beneficiaries were not selected for the interview participation due to sensitive, privacy and knowledge limitation reasons. There was more perspective-focus on ESWA's Empowering Women into Sustainable Earnings (E-WISE) (see Appendix I) and Training into Employment (TIE) (see Appendix II) projects. E-WISE was first designed in 2006 to work with small scale business women in Edo State of Nigeria and working mothers in the UK to offer financial literacy training, one-on-one business mentoring sessions and access to affordable savings/credit scheme ESWA (2018). TIE was first designed in 2005 to address the epidemic of Nigerian youths who have either been deserted by their parents, lack proper child care, trafficked, lack educational support or life's skills training, and who are faced with the challenge of moving forward in their career aspirations (ESWA, 2018).

The study gathered qualitative data based majorly on ESWA's IT potency challenges in these project operations. The data collected included field notes from the eight-year volunteering and field observation on ESWA's virtual (website, social media and online crowdfunding activities) and physical locations (Nigeria and UK collaborations) from year 2010 to 2018, as well as data from participants' responses to the interview questions from telephone call, chat and email mediums were both written down and collated to form transcripts. The interview transcripts were analyzed using Narrative and Thematic Analysis. The combined analysis was carried out as a subjective and contextual approach. Utilizing Narrative analysis an effort was made to comprehend the relationships that exist between the experiences of the participants and their social structure, by listening to each story (Jonas, 2005), as well as in interviews conferring meaning onto objects in the daily world situations, in a subjective and interpretive manner (Bamberg, 2012). Utilizing thematic analysis, data was examined to extract core

themes that could be distinguished both between and within transcripts (Bryman, 2012) through the process of coding. Coding entails breaking down data into component parts and labelling them, after which recurrences of these sequences of coded text within and across cases is sought to identify links between different codes (Bryman, 2012). A code is a word or a short phrase used in data reduction and interpretation that descriptively captures the essence of elements in the data (Save the Children, 2014). The qualitative data analysis first involved familiarization and evaluation by repeatedly reading the transcripts formed from the data collected. Summarizing the transcripts entailed coding the transcripts to identify basic themes and issues discussed. Utilizing a network approach (see Appendix III), the basic themes were organized to form five (5) global themes (Attride-Stirling, 2001), which formed the IT potency challenging factors in ESWA. The network paths of the global themes were re-checked to ensure it reflected the data in the transcripts. The transcripts were emailed and discussed with the interview participants to achieve reliability and validation of the information for the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The outcome of the observatory study showed that ESWA has a poor IT potency level. In addition, the reoccurrence of some IT potency challenging factors was discovered while rechecking the networked themes. This aided in the identification of five (5) key IT potency challenging factors in ESWA: Users', IT Strategy, Location, Access and Security and Maintenance. The findings also present and elaborate on the interrelations of these IT potency challenging factors in ESWA self-helped NFPO (see Appendix IV).

IT POTENCY CHALLENGING FACTORS IN ESWA

1. Users' Factor

ESWA's teams, volunteers, key actors, partners, donors, stakeholders, beneficiaries and governing authorities are users who directly or indirectly engage in its IT strategy and in turn facilitate its IT potency. Findings showed that ESWA relies heavily on volunteers and while its projects lacked this category of users its projects often fail to reach expected performance, especially its TIE and E-WISE projects. Findings showed that there is no differed gratification or willingness to commit to projects by some users as most of the beneficiaries are more concerned about getting on-the-spot financial help and less interested in gaining finance and technology training/literacy. For instance, there exist poor user engagement and performance in IT strategies exhibited by the Nigeria teams, volunteers and beneficiaries through mismanagement of technology resources, ineffective collaboration between ESWA UK and Nigeria teams, fear of technology, non-appreciation of technology, as well as display of illiteracy, culture, practices, and beliefs. Besides unavailability of technical expertise/knowledge, findings reveal that ESWA's poor IT potency level was also contributed by users' background challenge of unwillingness to commit and biased poverty bound mind-set. These two users' background challenges are linked with the factor of location being social, economic and physical related challenges. This indicates that the local governing

authorities are partly role players in ESWA's IT potency level. However, ESWA's IT potency is challenged with the psychological effects of poverty displayed by its prospective volunteers/beneficiaries; barriers and limitations; governing laws, legislations and policies regulating ESWA and its operations; as well as environmental and geographical obstacles in Nigeria.

2. IT Strategy Factor

Results showed that ESWA lacks committed long-term technical expertise, effective users' engagement/performance and technology plan, even with its ability to afford and match inexpensive IT Strategy to meet user's and project needs. IT strategies utilized to meet ESWA's day to day operational needs include mobile phone technology, emailing, social media, online campaign and computer system. However, ESWA has need for online campaigning expert/marketer and Distant Management System to monitor/mentor volunteers. Findings revealed that remote access; effective real time collaboration via internet conference calls; and live streaming of project activities or training sessions between ESWA team locations is extremely difficult and unachievable due to existing location challenging factors, such as security and privacy of information; poor data, mobile, Wi-Fi or internet service connection and very limited power supply from Nigeria power provider, both at extremely high user maintenance cost.

3. Location Factor

This factor is categorized into Virtual and Physical locations. ESWA's Virtual location encompasses its internet or online presence such as online advertising or campaigning, social media, and websites. ESWA, being a self-helped NFPO, is unable to afford continuous placement of online and media adverts, so utilizes free economical mediums such as flyer distributions, word of mouth, awareness events, social media and online NFPO support organisations. For instance, ESWA utilizes GlobalGiving, LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook websites and mobile applications to set up its online group and event pages or platform; connect with its members, donors and partners; raise awareness, and promote its projects.

ESWA's physical location encompasses its physical presence such as on-the-ground operational office, awareness or fundraising event. Results showed that ESWA is unremittingly bordered by economic, social and physical challenges and discouraged provisions from governing laws and policy in its physical location, hence affecting its IT potency level. Firstly, the location challenge of ineffective communication networks, poor power supply and remote access, are inescapable physical and economic issues that inhibits ESWA from properly and effectively utilizing IT strategy. Secondly, besides tax exemption and controlled unlimited fundraising opportunities in both ESWA's virtual and physical locations, results showed that the ability of ESWA to access long-term funding for effective technological support that can elevate its IT potency is influenced by the location challenge of

the nations' historical background, security and venality, and not necessarily the outcome of its online crowdfunding campaign. Also, the existence of these location challenges in conjunction with earlier discussed users' challenges, is indicative of the need for an open policy or law that incorporates a truly effective, adaptable and sustainable technological provision that would be useful for ESWA's IT potency elevation on the long run.

4. Access Factor

Results showed that ESWA's poor IT potency is mostly contributory to no access to long-term funds and provisions to address the challenging factors of users', IT strategy, location and security and maintenance. Findings also show that ESWA has carried out several major changes to some of its projects due to access challenges, which is interlinked with users', IT strategy and location. One important finding was the discontinuation of ESWA's year 2010 awarded City & Guilds Centre Approval to run its Training into Employment (TIE) Project in Nigeria, owing to the challenge of inaccessible committed technology expertise and effective IT strategies to provide feedback and online reports to ESWA UK location and City & Guilds stakeholder. The recruitment of long term paid technical expertise was unachievable due to ESWA's short term funding. As a result, ESWA TIE initial project design for all young people was restructured to support motherhood. Although ESWA has access to short-term funds, this is not effective enough as project sustainability can be costly, such as maintaining accessible online crowdfunding campaign solutions, operations, volunteers or staffing, security and physical fundraising or awareness activities. The effectiveness of access can consequently be determined by its ability to achieve project sustainability.

5. Security and Maintenance Factor

It is vital to have technology plans that accommodate and sustain effective security and maintenance structure to elevate IT potency. However, achieving and sustaining technology plans requires long-term funds, amongst other requirements. Findings show that ESWA's security and maintenance activities is carried out by itself or by its temporary volunteers who are not necessarily technical expertise and include: set up or periodic renewal of password and administrator rights for one or two computer system's and social media platforms; installation and update of antivirus software; and employment of temporary security guards to safeguard its project sites. Fortunately, there exist effective donors' information and data security offered through ESWA's outsourced online crowdfunding support. However, findings show that the existence of users', IT strategy, access and location challenging factors hinder ESWA from achieving effective security and maintenance. For instance, it is challenging for ESWA to maintain health and safety of volunteers during fundraising/awareness activities, control abuse or misuse of its social media access, offer effective technical training to volunteers/beneficiaries, effectively utilize security cameras, access long-term funding, employ committed technical expertise, access uninterruptible power supply, and easily recover

from or resolve loss of resources, especially with the existence of venality protection system in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

Self-helped and well-structured or well-funded NFPOs both commonly make contributions to the continuous development of societies. However, their IT potency levels differ, amongst other characteristics, mostly contributory to deeper social, economic and physical issues. It is essential to address these issues as an effort to bridge the gap between self-helped and well-structured or well-funded NFPOs. The study has identified the unique challenging factors that restrict the self-helped NFPO, ESWA in elevating its IT potency, as being Users', IT Strategy, Location, Access, and Security and Maintenance. IT potency challenging factors are crucial and not limited to those identified in this study. However, this study anticipates motivating deeper contextual ethnographic studies in this direction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Social responsibility is for everyone: government, profit organisations, researchers, NFPOs, individuals, IT solution providers and developers. In recommendation, local and international educational awarding bodies, governing laws, instruments and policies should consider the IT potency factors identified that directly or indirectly affect the sustainability of self-helped NFPO operations and that are useful for the development of their nation. Considerations should include provisions for positive psychological intervention to address the issue of 'Users' biased mind-sets. More so, online support providers of NFPO collaboration, networking and fundraising should extend their existing provisions to accommodate the unique nature of self-helped NFPOs.

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APPENDICES

Illustrations

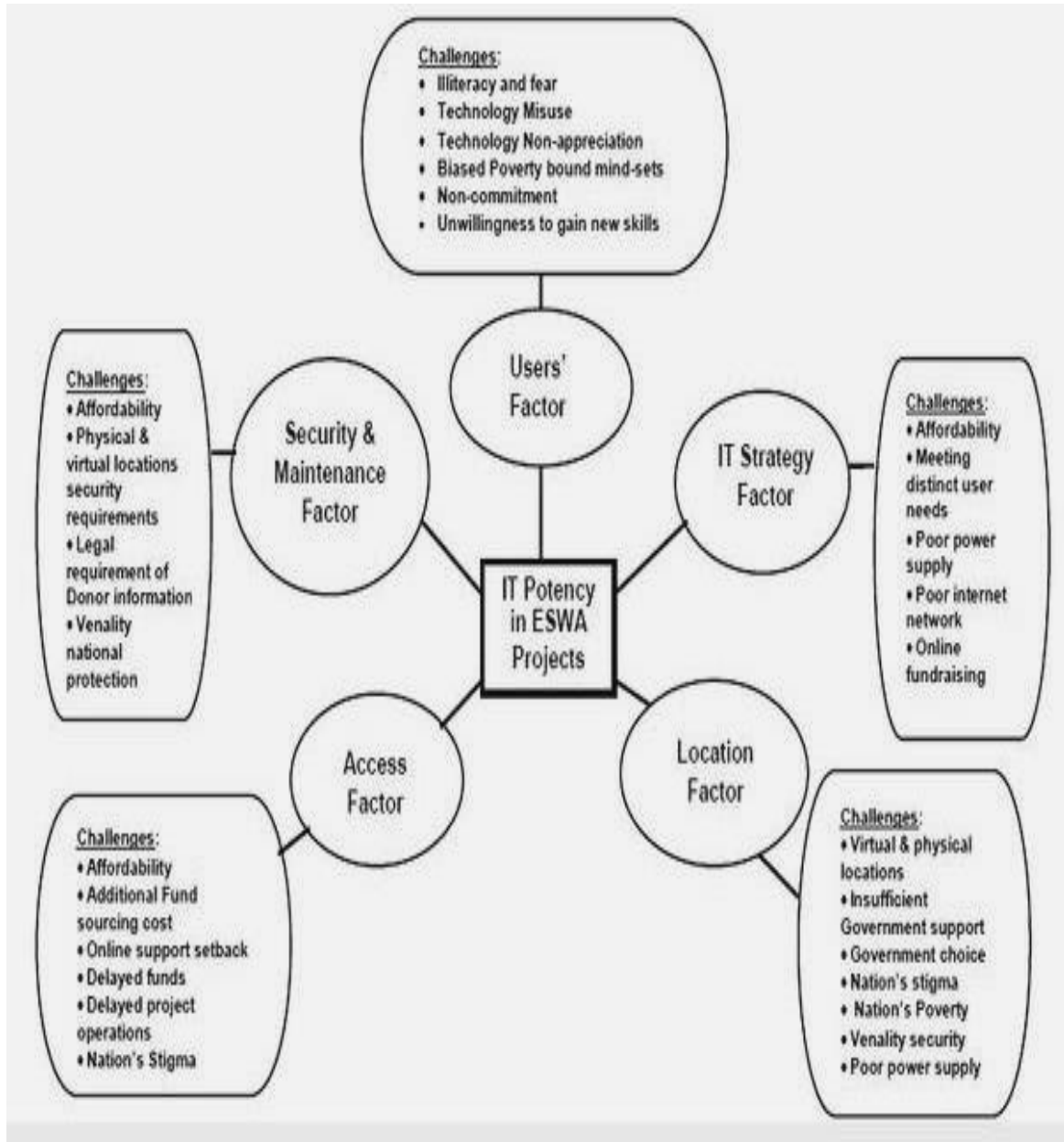
I. ESWA E-WISE Project, Nigeria. (Source: Edo State Women Association, 2018)



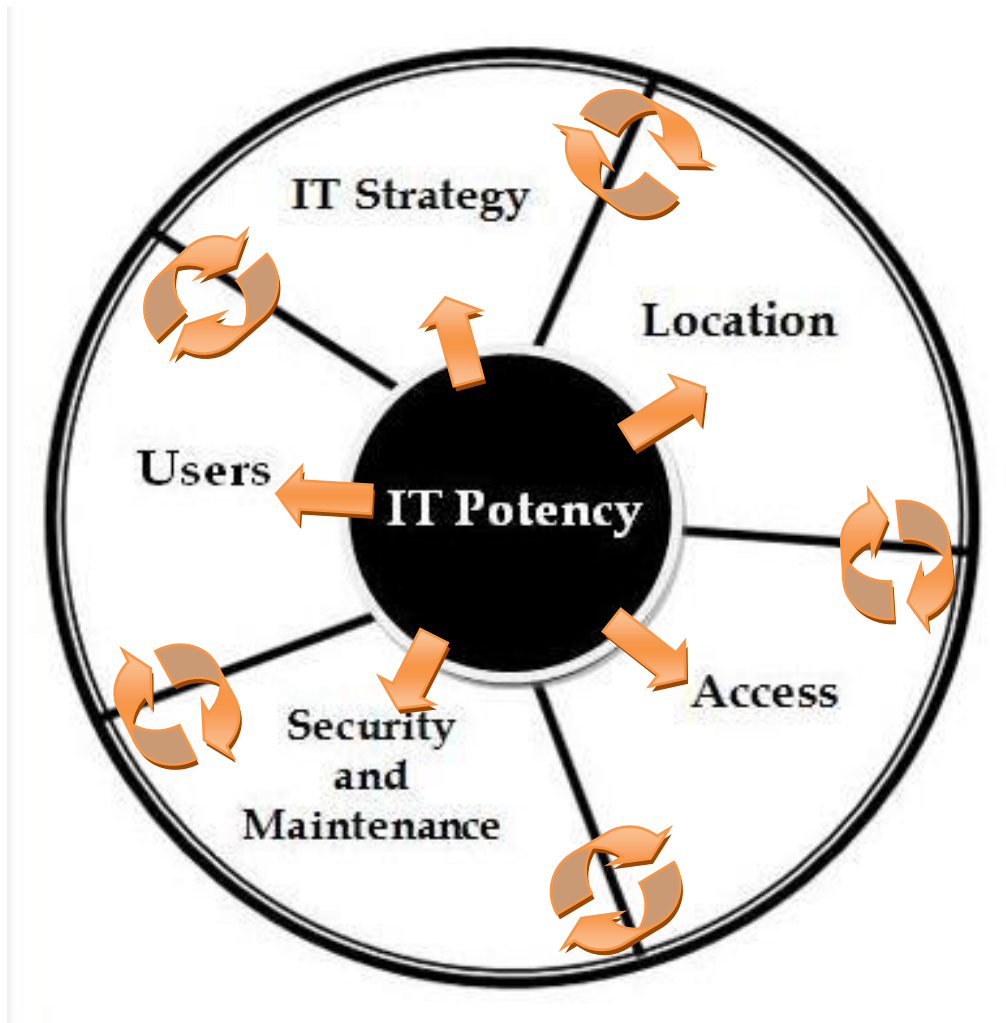
II. ESWA TIE Project, Nigeria. (Source: Edo State Women Association, 2018)



III. Summarized Network of Themes



IV. Interrelations of IT Potency Challenging Factors in ESWA Self-Helped NFPO



V. Letter of Request for Consent and Interview Invitation

Dear Sir/Madam,

Request for Consent and Interview Invitation: Challenging Factors of IT Potency in Self-Helped Not-For-Profit-Organisations: A Case Study of Edo State Women Association

I wish to request your consent to carry out an empirical and ethnographic study on ESWA. The aim and title of this study is to identify the: 'Information Technology (IT) potency challenging factors in self-helped NFPOs'. It is important to identify and evaluate the IT potency challenges being experienced in ESWA's projects operations in Nigeria and diaspora, to motivate deeper studies of self-helped NFPOs. An interview would also be conducted for the study to gain more in-depth background knowledge about ESWA, your experiences working with ESWA, the technology related and other challenges that exist in ESWA.

Your participation in this study and interview processes would be highly appreciated. On your acceptance of the interview invitation and study consent, we would schedule interview times and communication settings convenient for you. Kindly find the proposed interview questions attached.

Thank you for your support.

Yours sincerely,

Bernadette I. Hopkins

Email: tinoryan@yahoo.com

Proposed Interview Questions:

Please,

1. What is your role in and how long have you been working in ESWA?
2. How has ESWA contributed in the societies?
3. What projects currently exist in ESWA and in what 'Location's'?
4. What Information Technology (IT) plans or strategies exist in ESWA?
5. How does ESWA raise funds for its projects?
6. How does ESWA use IT in its project activities and operations?

7. What technology or IT potency challenges is/are being experienced by ESWA in its project team 'Location's'?
8. What other challenges is/are being experienced by ESWA in its project team 'Location's'?
9. Does ESWA have any long-term finance and technology support?
10. Does ESWA receive any government support or other support from its residence 'Location's', besides reduction of tax?
11. What part of UK or Nigeria laws would you like to see changed that can effectively support ESWA in sustaining its projects?
12. What are the future plans of ESWA?