

Combining quantitative and qualitative methods in ICT and sustainable livelihoods research

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Abstract

The efficacy of information and communication technology (ICT) projects and initiatives in developing countries, and how they may contribute to sustainable livelihoods and improve the quality of life for communities is still a topic of much debate. This paper aims to further the debate in this field by discussing how quantitative and qualitative research methods were used to conduct a study on ICTs and sustainable livelihoods in the selected rural areas of Tanzania. The study utilized case study research design with the use of multiple data gathering methods including structured interviews, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and observation method.

The paper further discusses how the combined methodology approach was integrated in all aspects of the research such as in formulating the research design and the theoretical framework of the study, in data collection, in data analysis and in ensuring validity and reliability of the study.

The study established that both methods have strengths and that even greater strength came from their appropriate combination. A combined methods approach further provided a better understanding of the research problem than either of the approach used alone. The paper further demonstrates how the quantitative and qualitative methodological triangulation led to more rich data on the link between ICTs and rural livelihoods, access and use of ICTs by people in the rural areas, their ICTs use patterns and their information needs and seeking behavior.

Key words: ICTs, sustainable livelihoods, rural areas, quantitative methods, qualitative methods, research