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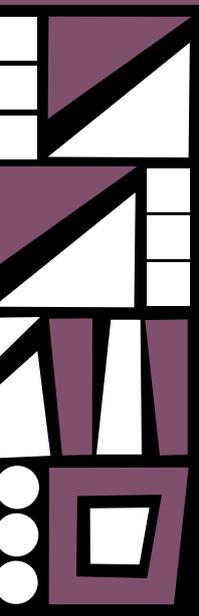
Journal of
AFRICAN HUMANITIES
RESEARCH AND
DEVELOPMENT (JAHRD)

TECHNOLOGY IN FAMILY SUPPORT:
THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
The COVID-19 pandemic and its associated effects have significantly impacted global practices, prompting individuals, organizations, and professions to adopt electronic modes of operation to ensure safety. Although the direct impact of COVID-19 in many African nations was less severe than in Western countries, the importance of workplace safety remains critical. This paper examines the use and relevance of technology in social work practice, with a particular focus on supporting vulnerable children and their families in Nigeria. Data were collected through secondary sources and interviews with workers in Non-Governmental Organisations providing services to vulnerable children and families. Findings indicate that social workers employ various forms of technology in their practice, including radio, telephone, smart applications such as WhatsApp, email, Telegram, and Skype. However, the use of technology in social work in Nigeria remains at a preliminary stage and faces several challenges, including overreliance on foreign technologies, illiteracy, poverty, and inconsistent power supply. To enhance the effective integration of technology in social work practice, this paper recommends the development of local technological platforms and improvements in power infrastructure across Nigeria.

Keywords: Digital technology; Social work practice; Family support; COVID-19 pandemic; vulnerable children; Nigeria; ICT in social services; NGOs; Digital inequality; Technological adoption.

Introduction

Technological development has significantly transformed professional practice across multiple sectors, including education, medicine, agriculture, arts, pharmacy, and social work. Common technological tools include telephones, radio, and various forms of social media, which facilitate more efficient service delivery. The advantages of technology in professional practice are numerous: it allows service providers to reach a larger number of clients in a shorter time, extend coverage to broader geographic areas, and improve communication and documentation. The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated the adoption of technology, as social distancing measures and concerns for personal safety necessitated a shift from traditional face-to-face interactions to digital modes of engagement.

Social work is a profession dedicated to assisting individuals, groups, and communities in addressing life challenges and solving problems. It has been defined as a practice-based profession and an academic discipline "that promotes social change and development, social cohesion and empowerment and liberation of people… under pinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities, and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing' and assist people as individuals, groups and communities to

solve their problems."[1] This definition underscores the dual nature of social work as both an applied and intellectual enterprise, seeking not only to respond to human needs but also to challenge social structures and conditions that produce vulnerability.

Aligned with this framework, the purpose of social work is "to facilitate the inclusion of marginalized, socially excluded, dispossessed vulnerable and at-risk groups of people; address and challenge barriers, inequalities, and injustices that are in society; form short and long term working relationships with and mobilize individuals, families and communities to enhance their wellbeing and their problem-solving capacities; assist and educate people to obtain services and resources in their communities… plan, organize, administer and manage programmes and organizations dedicated to any of the purposes delineated above."[2] This statement emphasizes the profession's commitment to empowerment, social justice, and human rights, highlighting the centrality of relationships, resources, and systematic intervention in achieving meaningful social change.

Social workers operate across diverse settings—including homes, schools, hospitals, communities, correctional institutions, industries, financial organizations, and other formal and informal social environments—applying structured interventions to enhance clients' problem-solving capacities. The social work process consists of seven key steps: engagement, assessment, planning, implementation, evaluation, termination, and follow-up. In this process, social workers collaborate with clients to identify problems, assess needs, develop care plans, implement interventions, evaluate outcomes, and conclude treatment while maintaining opportunities for follow-up. This model, though traditional, remains central to contemporary practice because it emphasizes professional accountability, ethical conduct, and client participation.

However, contemporary challenges have disrupted conventional service delivery. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated a global shift toward remote and technology-based interventions, compelling social workers to re-examine the tools available for effective engagement. In Nigeria, additional challenges—such as insecurity, including kidnapping, terrorism, and herdsmen attacks—have limited practitioners' ability to conduct home visits or community outreach safely. These circumstances have made digital technologies an essential mechanism for maintaining service delivery while protecting both social workers and clients.

In response, social workers in Nigeria have increasingly employed technologies such as telephones, radio programs, and smart applications, including WhatsApp, email, Telegram, and Skype, to support families, particularly vulnerable children. Despite the growing adoption of these tools, technology integration in Nigerian social work remains at an early stage and faces constraints such as overreliance on foreign technological platforms, limited digital literacy, poverty, and inconsistent power supply. Nevertheless, these tools offer significant potential for strengthening family support, enhancing reach, and improving professional efficiency.

This paper examines the role of digital technology in family support and social work practice in Nigeria, with a particular focus on strategies for enhancing service delivery to vulnerable children and their families. By analysing both the potentials and limitations of technology, this study seeks to provide insights into how Nigerian social workers can leverage digital tools to

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[1] International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), "Global Definition of Social Work," 2014, accessed April 12, 2021, https://www.ifsw.org/what-is-social-work/global-definition-of-social-work/.
[2] Ibid.

expand outreach, improve efficiency, and maintain professional standards while navigating local structural, socio-economic, and institutional challenges.

Social Work and the Nigerian Family
Social workers engage with families to address problems that affect their everyday functioning and overall wellbeing. A family is an intimate domestic group of people related to one another by blood, sexual mating, or legal ties; it is the smallest and most basic unit of the society and also most primary unit of the society.[3] Families in Nigeria face a wide array of challenges, including abuse, prostitution, poverty, marital conflict, kidnapping, and unemployment. These issues compromise the family's capacity to function effectively and respond to daily demands. Social workers play a critical role in assisting families to manage these problems by performing multiple roles and providing diverse services. They offer counselling to family members in need, help parents access essential resources, provide therapy for children who are stressed, traumatized, or abused, and work with youth facing severe challenges such as substance abuse or mental health issues.[4] In essence, social workers seek to empower families by enhancing their coping capacities and facilitating problem resolution to improve the quality of life for all members.

The Nigerian family, however, exists within a socio-economic and security context that complicates service delivery. Families in Nigeria contend with unemployment, poverty, food insecurity, inadequate health services, crime, and broader societal insecurity.[5] Data indicate that a significant proportion of Nigerian households—approximately 40.1 percent—live below the poverty line.[6] This widespread economic vulnerability constrains families' ability to meet essential needs, including access to quality education and children's training, access to adequate healthcare, and safeguarding members from terrorist attacks and banditry. In addition, contemporary security challenges, particularly kidnappings and attacks on farms by herdsmen, have intensified the socioeconomic hardships experienced by families, increasing both material deprivation and psychosocial stress.

For social workers, these conditions pose dual risks: families remain exposed to harm, while practitioners face threats to their own safety when attempting to deliver services. The COVID-19 pandemic further compounded these challenges by restricting physical access and increasing the health risks associated with face-to-face interventions. Consequently, social workers are compelled to explore alternative strategies for family support, including the integration of

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[3] Puja Mondal, "Family: Meaning, Characteristics, Functions and Types," accessed May 20, 2021, https://www.yourarticlelibrary.com.

[4] Aminu Zubairu Surajo, Abdulkadir Shitu Umar, Jamilu Musa, and Mohammed Jamilu Haruna, "Displaced Persons in North-East Nigeria: Causes, Effects and Roles of Social Workers," *Sociology and Anthropology* 8, no. 3 (2020): 57–65, accessed September 15, 2025, http://www.hrpub.org. https://doi.org/10.13189/sa.2020.080301.

[5] Benjamin B. Omoniyi, "An Examination of Causes of Poverty on Economic Growth in Nigeria," *Africa's Public Service Delivery and Performance Review* 6, no. 1 (2018): 2310–2152, accessed 2018, https://doi.org/10.4102/apsdpr.v6i1.175; Cleopatra Oluseye Ibukun and Abayomi Ayina Adebayo, "Household Food Security and COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria," 2020, accessed February 10, 2021, https://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/AEC/2020/presentations/household_food_security_and_covid_19_ibukun_and_adebayo.pdf; Awucha Emmanuel Nwoke et al., "Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Consumers' Access to Essential Medicines in Nigeria," *The American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene* 103, no. 3 (2020): 1630–1634, accessed 2020, https://www.ajtmh.org/view/journals/tpmd/103/4/article-p1630.xml.

[6] National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), *2019 Poverty and Inequality Report in Nigeria* (2020), accessed February 17, 2021, https://taxaide.com.ng/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/2019-POVERTY-AND-INEQUALITY.pdf.

digital technologies to maintain continuity of care. The necessity of employing technological tools is particularly acute in the Northeastern and North Central regions of Nigeria, where persistent attacks from terrorists and herdsmen have displaced communities, forcing many families into Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps. In these contexts, technology-mediated interventions are not merely convenient but essential for safeguarding both families and practitioners while ensuring access to critical social services. By combining professional expertise with adaptive technological solutions, social workers can navigate the intersecting challenges of poverty, insecurity, and public health crises, reinforcing their role as critical agents of family support and social protection in Nigeria.

Technology and Social Work Practice

Technology has been broadly defined as "the application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes, especially in industry." In the context of social work, it is defined as "any electronically mediated activity used by Social Workers in the administration and evaluation of social services as well as in Social Work education."[7] Technology in social work is utilized across a wide range of settings, including health institutions, families, schools, and correctional facilities. Social workers employ various software and digital tools in service provision, including smartphones, WhatsApp, Skype, Telegram, Electronic mail, Zoom, Facebook, YouTube, and videos.[8] These tools serve multiple purposes, such as electronic advocacy, interactive distance education, online group work, e-counselling and e-therapy, telephone counselling, videoconferencing, self-guided web-based interventions, electronic social networks, mobile applications, automated tutorials, email, and text messaging. Additionally, technology supports telehealth, research, management, employment, education, assessment, care plan creation, progress tracking, and report writing.[9]

In the domain of case management, technology facilitates the organization, monitoring, and evaluation of client services. Software tools such as Casewatch Millennium (for direct service provision and monitoring care providers), Client Tract (for gathering and reporting client information), Juna Care (for organizing client contacts and information), and Charity Tracker (for recording interactions, setting goals, measuring outcomes, and making referrals) are increasingly employed in professional practice.[10] The benefits of using technology in treatment include borderless and paperless operations, rapid information dissemination, reduced communication costs, expanded reach to large client populations, and improved access for rural dwellers.[11] In the

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[7] National Association of Social Workers and Association of Social Work Boards, *NASW & ASWB Standards for Technology and Social Work Practice* (2005), accessed January 10, 2020, www.socialworkers.org/practice/standards/NASWTechnologyStandards.pdf.

[8] Frederic G. Reamer, "Social Work in a Digital Age: Ethical and Risk Management Challenges," *Social Work* 58, no. 2 (2013): 163–72, https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/swt003; Dianus Josephat Ishengoma, "Community Radio in Breaking the Silence of Gender-Based Violence in Tanzania: An Analysis of Sengerema Community Radio," *Journal of Applied Journalism & Media Studies*, published online February 5, 2024, https://doi.org/10.1386/ajms_00128_1.

[9] Haiying Dong, Han Qu, Peipei Liu, and Oberiri Destiny Akpue, "The Effectiveness of Using Interactive Visual Multimedia Technology Intervention in Improving the Literacy Skills of Children in Rural China," *Learning and Motivation* 86 (May 2024): 101964, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lmot.2024.101964.

[10] GetApp, "Social Work Case Management Software," 2020, accessed January 13, 2021, https://www.getapp.com/government-social-services-software/social-work-case-management/; MastersOfSocialWork.org, "25 Essential Software Applications for Social Workers," 2020, accessed February 17, 2021, http://mastersofsocialwork.org/25-essential-software-app/.

[11] Athena Mandros, "How Technology Is Changing Case Management," 2017, accessed September 13, 2020, https://www.openminds.com/market-intelligence/executive-briefings/technology-changing-case-management/.

context of the COVID-19 pandemic, these technologies have additionally served to minimize disease transmission between service providers and clients.

Technology in Social Work Practice is integrated into all stages of the social work process, which consists of seven steps: engagement, assessment, planning, intervention, evaluation, and termination.[12] During engagement, social workers establish a working relationship with clients. The assessment stage involves collaboratively examining client problems to determine both immediate and remote causes and identifying potential solutions or treatment strategies. The results of this assessment inform the planning stage, where social workers and clients co-develop an action plan with specific strategies. Intervention involves implementing the plan within the agreed timeframe. Evaluation assesses whether objectives have been met and identifies obstacles to success. Finally, termination concludes the process once goals are achieved.[13]

Technology enhances multiple aspects of social work practice. In communication, tools such as Google Sheets, SMS, smart applications like WhatsApp, and email enable the dissemination of information to large audiences efficiently. In service delivery, social workers provide online counselling and therapy via Skype, telephone, video conferencing, automated tutorials, and text messaging.[14] These methods allow practitioners to conduct assessments and deliver counselling without face-to-face interaction while monitoring client progress and behavioural changes. For recording purposes, social workers employ electronic data management (EDM) systems, electronic medical records (EMR), electronic health records (EHR), and note-taking applications such as Colour Notes to maintain accurate client records.[15]

Technology also supports research and advocacy. Social workers utilize platforms such as email and WhatsApp to raise awareness, gather community input, and coordinate responses to social justice issues, including child abuse and COVID-19.[16] In family support, case management is central because no single agency can address all the needs of children and their families. Case management is defined as "the process of identifying individuals vulnerable to certain risks, assess their needs and strengths, ensure that their rights are met, set goals in participatory manner with clients, provide direct and referral services, follow up, evaluate and terminate the case when the goals have been met."[17] Key steps include identifying at-risk children, interviewing and assessing needs, developing individual case plans, providing direct support or referrals, conducting follow-ups, ongoing monitoring, and case review and closure. Digital tools are applied throughout this process to enhance efficiency and coordination.

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[12] Elizabeth March Timberlake, Michaela Zajicek Farber, and Christine Anlauf Sbatino, *The General Method of Social Work: McMahon's Generalist Perspective* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2001), 1–351.

[13] Karen K. Kirst-Ashman, *Introduction to Social Work & Social Welfare: Critical Thinking Perspectives*, 3rd ed. (United States: Brooks/Cole, 2010), 93–110.

[14] Frederick G. Reamer, "The Challenge of Modern Technology," *Social Work Today*, accessed May 28, 2020, https://www.socialworktoday.com/news/eoe_100101.shtml.

[15] National Association of Social Workers and Association of Social Work Boards, *NASW & ASWB Standards for Technology and Social Work Practice* (2005), accessed January 10, 2020, www.socialworkers.org/practice/standards/NASWTechnologyStandards.pdf.

[16] Our Lady of the Lake University, "How Social Workers Use Technology," 2020, accessed 2020, https://onlineprograms.ollusa.edu.

[17] National Association of Social Workers and Association of Social Work Boards, *NASW & ASWB Standards for Technology and Social Work Practice* (2005), accessed January 10, 2020, www.socialworkers.org/practice/standards/NASWTechnologyStandards.pdf.

Globally, digital technology has been widely adopted in social work and family support. In England, a study on Digital Social Care (April–June 2020) among 176 caregivers found extensive use of virtual conferencing for patient care.[18] In the United States, programs such as AdoptUSkids (initiated in 2002) leveraged social media to recruit, retain, and connect foster and adoptive families, resulting in over 30,000 registered children and 25,000 families, with approximately 15,000 adoptions. Planned Activities Training employed cell phones to train mothers on parenting skills, while the Mobile Device Assisted Dad (mDad) smartphone application provided fathers with accessible educational content on child development and parenting activities.[19] These initiatives demonstrate that mobile phones and social media can expand outreach, improve service delivery, and engage clients who might otherwise be excluded due to time constraints or social roles.

In Japan, digital platforms such as KuradashiKuradashi, Loss Zero Loss Zero, and Olio Olio have facilitated food distribution to vulnerable families, reducing waste and improving access to essential resources.[20] In Israel, client information has been computerized to streamline access and ensure security, although informal communication channels such as WhatsApp remain outside formal policy coverage.[21] In Australia, digital technologies were critical in supporting domestic violence victims during COVID-19, using encrypted calls, emails, web-chats, messaging services, and women-run ride-sharing to ensure safety and provide counselling.[22]

Within Africa, similar technological interventions have enhanced social work services. In Malawi, smartphones under the Community Victim Support Units program were used to report domestic violence cases. In Zimbabwe, WhatsApp and GPS-enabled mobile applications facilitated supervision of community workers. In Uganda, Dev Tract compiled available community services. In Tanzania, radio programs and the Digital Champions (DC) project addressed gender-based violence and enabled counselling, referrals, and mapping of villages. In Ghana, the PASS project used radio and virtual platforms to educate and empower at-risk

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[18] UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO) and Maestral International, *Integrating Case Management for Vulnerable Children: A Process Guide* (2017), accessed October 10, 2020, http://www.socialserviceworkforce.org.

[19] Grace Whitfield and Kate Hamblin, *Technology in Social Care: Review of the UK Policy Landscape* (Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 2022), accessed September 15, 2025, https://centreforcare.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Technology-in-social-care-report-Dec-2022_FINAL.html; Katty Ledesma and Vanesa Casavant, "Enhancing the Reach and Outcomes of Child Welfare Programs through Social Media," in *CW360: Child Welfare and Technology*, ed. Traci Laliberte and Elizabeth Snyder (University of Minnesota: Centre for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare, Spring 2011), 10, accessed September 17, 2020, https://chde.umn.edu/ssw/cascw/; S. Schneider and M. Evans, "Mobile Technologies and Child Welfare," in *CW360: Child Welfare and Technology*, ed. Traci Laliberte and Elizabeth Snyder (University of Minnesota: Centre for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare, Spring 2011), 16, accessed September 17, 2020, https://chde.umn.edu/ssw/cascw/; and Shawna J. Lee and Tova B. Walsh, "Using Technology in Social Work Practice: The mDad (Mobile Device Assisted Dad) Case Study," *Advances in Social Work* 16, no. 1 (2015): 107–24.

[20] Alice Marie Yama-Ledoux, Osamu Saito, and Keiko Hori, "Exploring the Challenges and Opportunities of ICT-Mediated Food Sharing in Japan," *Sustainability* 15 (2023): 4584, accessed September 12, 2025, https://doi.org/10.3390/su15054584.

[21] Michal Segal, Omer Lens, and Ayelet Gur, "Perspectives on Social Work in the Digital Age," 2025, accessed 2025, https://doi.org/10.1080/17496535.2025.2517104.

[22] Natasha Cortis et al., "Adapting Service Delivery during COVID-19: Experiences of Domestic Violence Practitioners," *British Journal of Social Work* 51 (2021): 1779–1798.

adolescent girls on early marriage and female genital mutilation, reaching approximately 13,000 girls.[23]

The global experiences reviewed demonstrate that digital technologies in social work provide significant benefits, including broader outreach, enhanced service delivery, and increased access to marginalized populations. However, challenges remain, such as high resource requirements, digital literacy gaps, and limitations in assessing clients without physical contact. For optimal effectiveness, mixed-method approaches that combine technology with face-to-face engagement, along with context-specific adaptations, are recommended.

Study Methodology
Data for this paper were collected through a combination of secondary sources and interviews with Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) workers engaged with vulnerable children and their families in Nigeria. The secondary sources included government documents, organizational reports, and scholarly works by other researchers. The NGO workers interviewed were Auxiliary Social Workers (ASWs) who provide community-based services at the grassroots level, assisting families in Nigeria with social support and intervention programs. These workers are trained to engage directly with families to address social challenges and improve wellbeing.

Findings
Application of Technology in Family Care Services in Nigeria
In Nigeria, technology is increasingly integrated into social work practice, particularly in family support services. UNICEF's Rapid SMS platform is utilized for birth registration, enabling agents to report weekly birth data from their centres through the Rapid SMS dashboard. This system ensures up-to-date information on child births across regions. Additionally, Auxiliary Social Workers reported using mobile phones to provide online counselling to families affected by terrorist attacks in Northeastern Nigeria. As one ASW noted, "we contact our clients and give them advice on what to do. We cannot go to the communities for fear of attack and possible kidnapping."[24]

Social welfare agencies also rely on mobile phones and radio broadcasts to communicate with clients and disseminate information about available services. For example, the National Cash Transfer (NCT) Programme, also known as the Household Uplifting Program (HUP), leverages digital technologies to assist vulnerable families. Launched in September 2016 as a social safety net

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[23] See UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO) and Maestral International, *Integrating Case Management for Vulnerable Children: A Process Guide* (2017), accessed October 10, 2020, http://www.socialserviceworkforce.org; Dianus Josephat Ishengoma, "Community Radio in Breaking the Silence of Gender-Based Violence in Tanzania: An Analysis of Sengerema Community Radio," *Journal of Applied Journalism & Media Studies*, published online February 5, 2024, https://doi.org/10.1386/ajms_00128_1; Chandler Klein, Patty Kostkova, Herry Kasunga, and Janet Chapman, "Smartphones, Citizen Science, and the Fight Against Gender-Based Violence in Rural Tanzania," *Frontiers in Global Women's Health*, published May 30, 2025, accessed 2025, https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/global-womens-health/articles/10.3389/fgwh.2025.1490918/full; and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UNICEF, and Data-Pop Alliance, *Review of Technology-Based Interventions to Address Child Marriage and Female Genital Interventions: Executive Summary, Ghana Case Study* (March 2023), accessed September 15, 2025, https://datapopalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Tech-based-Interventions-Adress-Harmful-Practices-2023-v2.pdf.
[24] Auxiliary Social Worker, interview, Maiduguri, Nigeria.

programme, the NCT provides targeted support to poor households through three components: base cash transfer, state-determined top-ups, and livelihood support. Beneficiaries are selected from the National Social Registrar (NSR) and verified at local government enumerator centres. Successful applicants receive ₦75,000 in three tranches of ₦25,000 via online banking, with notifications sent through bank alerts to beneficiaries' phones.[25] Despite its promise, only 36 percent of the intended 15 million households have benefited from the programme, and challenges include doubts about the selection process and incomplete data on vulnerable families.[26]

Barriers to Effective Deployment of Technology in Nigeria

While technology offers significant potential for improving social work services, its implementation in Nigeria faces several obstacles. Data collected from ASWs highlighted the following key challenges:

1. **Lack of Locally Developed Technology:** Many social workers rely on foreign technologies that are often ill-suited to the Nigerian context. One ASW remarked, "We rely on the foreign technologies to work with families, but this is difficult as most of these technologies are difficult to use in Nigeria."[27]
2. **Poverty:** Socioeconomic constraints limit both access and effective use of technology. As another participant stated, "poverty in the country is a major problem. Most of the families we work with are poor; they can hardly feed and cannot afford to buy the appliances required for use in treatment. They cannot afford to pay for electric bills and also buy airtime required for treatment."[28]
3. **Power Outages:** Inconsistent electricity supply hampers both social workers and families. One ASW explained, "there is poor supply of power here; we find it difficult even to charge our phones. This is also a challenge to the families, as those that have phones find it difficult to use due to inability to charge the phones when it is needed."[29]
4. **Digital Illiteracy:** A high proportion of the Nigerian population lacks the skills to use digital appliances effectively, including smartphones, computers, and platforms such as WhatsApp, Zoom, and YouTube. One ASW observed, "some parents in the communities we serve cannot operate the phones and rely on their children or neighbours to guide them."[30]

These challenges collectively hinder the effective delivery of digital social services to families in Nigeria, underscoring the need for locally appropriate technologies, digital literacy training, and infrastructural improvements to maximize the impact of technology in social work practice.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that social workers in Nigeria make use of various forms of technology to provide services to families. These technologies include mobile phones, Zoom, video conferencing platforms, Skype, radio broadcasts, and social media applications such as Facebook. However, the extent and sophistication of digital social service delivery in Nigeria

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[25] Adamu, "Tinubu Palliative Registration Portal: FG 25000 Cash Transfer (CCT 2025)," accessed September 18, 2025, https://www.palliative.ng/tinubu-palliative-registration-portal/.
[26] Oluwakemi Abimbola, "Only 36% of 15m Households Benefit from Cash Transfer," *The Punch*, August 22, 2025.
[27] Auxiliary Social Worker, interview, Maiduguri, Nigeria.
[28] Auxiliary Social Worker, interview, Maiduguri, Nigeria.
[29] Auxiliary Social Worker, interview, Maiduguri, Nigeria.
[30] Auxiliary Social Worker, interview, Maiduguri, Nigeria.

remain limited when compared to developed countries such as the United States, Japan, and China. Higher levels of digital literacy, stable electricity supply, and higher income levels in those countries enable citizens to adopt and utilize digital platforms with relative ease.

The study further revealed that some African countries—such as Ghana—show more effective use of digital technology in family service provision due to more stable power supply and stronger governmental commitment to digital literacy initiatives. In contrast, Nigeria remains at an early stage of integrating digital tools into social work practice. The technologies most commonly used by social workers are mobile phones and radio, largely due to structural limitations including widespread poverty, low levels of digital literacy, and persistent instability in electricity supply.

The irregular supply of electricity is a major impediment. Social workers often find it difficult to maintain consistent communication with clients, while families—particularly those in rural locations—struggle to charge devices needed for online engagement. This results in delays in carrying out interventions and can even lead to the abandonment of treatment plans. Poverty further constrains the use of technology. The acquisition of digital devices, payment for electricity, and purchase of airtime are financially burdensome for many families. With approximately 40 percent of the Nigerian population living below the poverty line, many households are unable to afford essential digital tools required for online service provision.

Another challenge relates to public trust in service providers. Distrust of community workers and governmental programmes deters some families from participating in digital social service initiatives, as seen in the case of Nigeria's Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) programme. A similar situation was recorded in Tanzania under the Digital Champions Project, where community members boycotted initiatives due to lack of trust in service providers. These findings underscore the importance of engaging trusted community workers to facilitate effective service delivery.

Conclusion

Providing support services to families is essential for promoting family stability and ensuring overall well-being. These services include counselling, child welfare interventions, domestic and gender-based violence services, family life education, and the provision of material resources such as food, clothing, financial assistance, and shelter. Traditionally, these services were delivered through face-to-face interactions. However, technological innovations and public health concerns—particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic—have prompted many service providers to adopt digital and online tools to reach families more effectively while minimizing health risks.

Global evidence indicates that while digital tools enhance accessibility and efficiency, relying exclusively on online service delivery is limiting. A hybrid model that combines digital and physical methods remains the most effective approach to social service provision. Nigeria is still in the early stages of adopting digital technologies for family support services. Challenges such as unstable electricity supply, widespread poverty, absence of locally developed technologies, and high levels of digital illiteracy continue to hinder progress. Based on these challenges, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Poverty Reduction and Economic Empowerment: Government and development partners should intensify efforts to reduce poverty and empower households economically.

Improved financial stability will enable families to purchase digital devices and participate more effectively in online service delivery.

2. Improvement in Electricity Supply: Agencies responsible for electricity generation and distribution should work toward achieving a more stable power supply. Reliable electricity will enable both families and social workers to make consistent use of digital tools during service delivery.

3. Promotion of Digital Literacy: Government should expand digital literacy initiatives, particularly at the grassroots. Free or subsidized community-based digital training programmes will help families—especially those in rural areas—acquire the skills necessary to navigate digital platforms.

4. Adoption of a Mixed Model for Data Collection and Service Delivery: Given the scarcity of reliable data on vulnerable families and the financial constraints faced by many households, a hybrid approach that combines the work of Auxiliary Social Workers (ASWs) with digital systems is recommended. ASWs should be trained in digital data collection and deployed to communities to gather accurate information on vulnerable families. Such a system will offer government a reliable database for planning and implementing digital social service programmes.