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# ICT as a tool for empowerment in Uganda

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*Abstract: The paper presents a case study, which investigates the role of ICT for women empowerment in Uganda. The study concludes that ICT has played a role for improved livelihood and participation in public life; however the facilitation of new spaces for conversation and collaboration has been just as important, as the technology itself.*

*Keywords: ICT, public sphere, civil society, developing countries.*

## INTRODUCTION

The paper examines how civil society understand and assess the role, which information and communication technologies (ICTs) have played for women in Uganda. The methodological point of departure is the actors own representation of their reality, however some external evaluations are also included as key sources. The entry point is the Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET), a network of womens organizations, who have been active in using and promoting ICT as a tool for women empowerment since 2000.

The analytical outset is a public sphere perspective on ICT usage, which I will outline below. Broadly stated, the analysis focus on whether and how ICT usage has improved the womens livelihood and their participation in public life. The analysis will explore three themes; *access, freedoms, and resources to communicate*, which are analytical categories taken from the public sphere perspective. Further, I will examine how the use of ICTs has influenced *structures of public and private*.

Being located in Uganda, the case study is situated within a context which is essentially different from any study of ICT use in a developed context. Poverty, gender inequality, HIV/aids, and lack of access to even basic resources such as electricity are just some of the backdrops of the study. The study shows that the creative use of ICTs and facilitation of existing structures and resources have improved the involved women's means of communication, with positive effect on their livelihood as well as their participation in public life. However, the majorities of women in Uganda remain without access to means of communication and entangled in structures of inequality.

The study is structured in two parts; one is focused on a rural setting; the Apac district in northern Uganda, the other is situated in Kampala, the capital of Uganda.

## **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

The actors apply a broad understanding of ICT as covering various means of information collection, exchange and distribution, including both conventional and new media. The different media platforms are used in a complementary manner, and suggest a landscape of media diffusion rather than media convergence. Further, the material indicates a somewhat functionalistic approach to ICTs and information, stressing the “sourcing, repackaging and dissemination of relevant information via ICTs”.

The role of ICT varies somewhat from Apac to Kampala. Whereas the actors in Apac particularly stress access to agricultural and health related information, improved communication within the community, and confidence building, the actors in Kampala are more focused on engendering ICT policies, podcast and video as means to share experiences, and the role of internet as a platform for communication, networking and online visibility. The various organizations interviewed in Kampala state that ICT usage, not least the internet, is seen as significant for improving the women's economic and social situation, while internet play a minor role for the women in Apac. In Apac, ICT use is dominated by conventional media, and the creation of spaces for conversation and dialogue seem just as important as access to ICTs as such. The importance of ICT

capacitybuilding, both in the form of training and as knowledge and experience sharing is emphasized in both settings. Also, both settings indicate that ICT has facilitated some changes with regard to public / private domains, thus strengthening womens' public voice, appearance and participation in political life.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The basis of the case study is various reports, articles, evaluations etc. provided by WOUGNET, and a two-week field visit in fall 2007. The field visit is documented through observation notes and app. 20 hours of video recordings, shot in Apac and Kampala, including 28 interviews (cf. appendix a). All interviews were conducted in a semi-structured form using a thematic interview guide reflecting the main themes of the public sphere perspective; access. Depending on the concrete situation and interview person, I allowed for improvisation, thus to follow themes which appeared during the interview, though they were not part of the interview guide. Similarly there were themes which were relevant in some contexts but not in others, and which were therefore omitted in some of the interviews. All the films are available on DVD, and interviews are transcribed, mapped, and analysed thematically.

In my PhD research, I examine the way different conceptual framings inform policy debates on ICT usage. It is my assumption that unpacking the relation between conceptual framings and policy choices is central for scholarly as well as policy debates on how ICT generally and internet specifically may empower<sup>1</sup> civil society<sup>2</sup>. This has led to four perspectives; *Net as Infrastructure*,

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1. By empowerment is referred to a *process, whereby individuals gain strength, confidence and visions to work for positive changes in their lives*. The concept has been used and defined by numerous scholars and development agencies, and the applied definition is taken from Eade 1997, 4.

2. By civil society is referred to *the sphere of institutions, organisations and individuals located between the family, the state and the market, in which people associate voluntarily to advance common interests*. The definition is from the Centre for Civil Society at London School of Economics (CCS 2002, 1).

*Net as Public Sphere, Net as Media and Net as Culture*. In the current analysis, focus is on the Net as Public Sphere perspective, which implies that I examine the material with focus on the democratic potentials of ICT usage. In order to capture the ICTs practices across various media platforms, I have included literature on media diffusion (Bechmann Petersen 2006a and 2006b; Jenkins 2001). By media diffusion, focus is directed towards the role and interaction of the various media across platforms. The term is useful in the context of the case study, since the case represents a mix of old and new media, rather than a convergent tendency towards one common platform: the internet. This is in line with the work presented by Jenkins (2001), who argue that people increasingly use all kinds of media in relation to one another and suggest that this complex media landscape should be the focal point of media related analysis rather than presuming media convergence towards one common platform.

A large cluster of research and case studies relate to the role of ICT and the internet in altering the public sphere, more or less explicitly drawing on Habermas' work on the structural transformation of the public sphere (Habermas 1962/1989)<sup>3</sup>. A core question raised in this line of research is whether and how the internet may contribute to a new kind of public sphere and thus to a new kind of democracy<sup>4</sup>. Broadly stated, research so far suggests that internet usage has had a moderate effect on political deliberations, and some of the research in this field has been criticized for implying that democratic practices emerge from inherent technology features, rather than grow out of social practices (Bohman 2004, 131). With regard to Uganda, a public sphere perspective is applied in a recent collection of research and studies concerning the relationship between digital media and democracy in Africa (Mudhai, Tettey, Banda 2009). The research points to the role of new media in supplementing conventional media, rather than replacing it. "The value of new media thus lies in the extent to which they enmesh with old media to provide multimedia

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3. E.g. Graham (1999), Slevin (2000), Barnet (2003), Bohman (2004), Hoff & Storgaard (2005), Bang & Esmark (2007).

4. Krause and Hoff (2006) present a number of cases related to how technology may foster new democratic practices.

platforms that allow for greater democratic participation, inclusion and expression” (Ibid, 2).

Within the public sphere perspective, the “public” is referred to as the political community, drawing on notions such as citizenship and participation in decision making (Weintraub 1997, 10). The public is understood as a space of politics, a realm in which public debate and deliberations take place, directly or indirectly influencing the distribution of wealth and public services within a society. Citizenship is thus inseparable from participation, direct or mediated, in a decision making community, whereas the role of civil society is to distill and transmit reactions to societal problems from the private sphere to the public sphere (Habermas 1996, 367). In my study, key questions concern transmissions between the private and the public sphere, thus whether ICT and internet are part of a change, where women as voices in the private sphere increasingly appear and express themselves in the public sphere. Rather than a broader focus on civic engagement, gender issues are emphasised as they kept surfacing in the study.

The categories of access, freedoms, and resources to communicate are entailed in my public sphere perspective since they are issues, which are often raised when debating the new modalities for civic engagement, which ICT may facilitate. Framing the analysis within the public sphere perspective thus directs attention to questions such as: who has access to infrastructure, to information and to decision making processes?, how are rights and freedoms related to public life protected?, and how are resources to communicate distributed. The categories have been used as key organizing notions when collecting and examining the empirical material.

As a pretext to the analysis, let me briefly outline their theoretical point of departure.

## **Access**

Structures of access to public spheres are linked to the level of communication infrastructure in a given national setting, and thus closely related to issues of poverty, development, digital divides, pricing schemes etc. (Norris 2001;



Coleman 2003). The current lack of access for a majority of the world's population, often referred to as the digital divide (Norris 2001), is regularly invoked in international ICT policy debates to address inequalities in access to ICT generally and the internet specifically. A key notion in these debates has been ICT4D (ICT for development), which broadly stated express the idea that providing information access to the developing part of the world will foster development. It follows that ICT infrastructure and capacitybuilding should be prioritized as part of development policies. The concept of ICT4D has been strongly criticized for trying to find technological solutions to problems that are essentially socioeconomic<sup>5</sup>.

In relation to access to decision-making processes, scholars have argued that access or non-access to communicative structures is closely linked to decision-making, and thus to power, since it gives access to processes whereby different actors seek to assert themselves as authorities (Krause & Hoff 2006, 11). This relates to political authority in the classical sense but also includes public policy involvement and impact in a broader sense. As argued by Hoff and others, power analysis in the network society differs not so much by the nature of power, but rather in relation to access to power. Since the nature of political authorities is becoming more polycentric and complex, power is increasingly related to access to society's communicative processes rather than access to formal political authority per se (Ibid, 21). From this perspective, access to communicative processes is crucial in empowering civil society to participate in public political life. This is somewhat related to the policy debate on "rights to communicate", which played out during the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) process where civil society groups argued for a broader debate around the resource base of the public sphere, including structures of access to this base<sup>6</sup>.

In the case study, the notion of access is addressed from three angles 1) access to basic infrastructure, 2) access to information, and 3) access to take

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5. See e.g. Pieterse (2005), Thomson (2004), Parayil (2005).

6. See e.g. Hamelink (1995, 2002), O' Siochru / Alegre (2005), Müller / Kuerbis / Pagé (2007),

part in decision making processes. Other aspects of access could have been highlighted, but these were the themes, which seemed most persistent in the material.

## **Freedoms**

In the public sphere perspective, the notion of freedoms is referring to the individuals' ability to act and debate freely in the public sphere, thus to participate in public life. There is not a human right to public life as such, however a number of human rights support individuals rights to public and political life<sup>7</sup>. The first one is the right to freedom of expression, stipulated in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) article 19<sup>8</sup>, and present in all major international instruments protecting human rights. The right to freedom of expression protects the individual's right to freely form and express opinions, and to seek information. The core of freedom of expression is the liberty of the individual to be protected from arbitrary restrictions when participating in public debate. Another aspect of the right to freedom of expression is freedom of information, or the right to know, as it is often called. Freedom of information essentially prohibits a government from restricting a person from receiving information that others wish or may be willing to impart to him (Kortteinen, Myntti and Hannikainen 1999, 413). The notion of a public right to know is related to the citizen's rights right to participate in the conduct

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Barbero (2000).

7. For a brief overview of the history and substance of human rights, as well as the link between human rights and information society policy, see e.g. Drake and Jørgensen (2006).

8. "1. Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference. 2. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice. 3. The exercise of the rights provided for in paragraph 2 of this article carries with it special duties and responsibilities. It may therefore be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary: (a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others; (b) For the protection of national security or of public order (ordre public), or of public health or morals." (ICCPR Article 19).

of public affairs, stressing that the public is only able to participate if they are informed about the activities of the government<sup>9</sup>.

Other human rights related to public life are the right to freedom of peaceful assembly stipulated in ICCPR article 21<sup>10</sup>. The rights of peaceful assembly are closely linked to the right to freedom of expression, and are often presented as the core premise for an active civil society and for any participatory democratic processes (Scheinin 1999, 417). Finally, there is the right to political participation, protected by ICCPR, article 25<sup>11</sup>. Article 25 pronounces the idea of the equal and inalienable rights of the individual in relation to his or her state, and sets minimum requirements for the democratic system of the state. These minimum requirements imply that the authority of the government must be based on the will of the electors and must entail a system of democratic participation whereby every citizen<sup>12</sup> have equal rights to participate (Rosas 1999, 431).

One of the shortcomings to the rights and freedoms mentioned above is the

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9. The UK organization, Article 19, have published *The Public's Right to Know - Principles on Freedom of Information Legislation*, London 1999. See also the global overview of Freedom of Information legislation available at:  
[http://www.privacyinternational.org/article.shtml?cmd\[347\]=x-347-543400](http://www.privacyinternational.org/article.shtml?cmd[347]=x-347-543400).
10. "The right of peaceful assembly shall be recognized. No restrictions may be placed on the exercise of this right other than those imposed in conformity with the law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order (ordre public), the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others" (ICCPR, Article 21).
11. "Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity, without any of the distinctions mentioned in article 2 and without unreasonable restrictions: (a) To take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives; (b) To vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors; (c) To have access, on general terms of equality, to public service in his country". (ICCPR, Article 25).
12. The right to political participation is limited to citizens of the country, which emphasizes that it is a political right endowed to citizens vis a vis their government, and not to any individual residing in the country (Klein 2006, 185).

lack of emphasis on the structures and conditions that shape the public sphere, in which communication take place (Kortteinen, Myntti and Hannikainen 1999, 395). Restrictions on e.g. freedom of expression do not necessarily take the form of censorship, but can also be structured as self-censorship, institutional and/or social constrains, or merely lack of access to communicate. “The regulation of the structures of communication will actually have more impact on communication than direct measures with regard to some specific contents of expression. The most revolutionizing recent change in these structures has taken place as a result of the tremendous advances in information technology. (..)” (Ibid, 396). In my analysis, the debate on freedoms is linked to gender based discrimination and womens role in the public and private sphere, since my findings indicate that the use of ICTs has given women more public voice and appearance, and in this way impacted positively on their ability to exercise rights.

### **Resources to communicate**

The notion of resources to communicate addresses civil society’s resources to take part in the public sphere. As stressed by Barnett, the vitality of a public sphere rests on the existence of a plurality of modes of social organization, as democratic politics is practiced through contested claims to legitimacy (Barnett 2003, 79). Accessing the case from a public sphere perspective thus focus on practices related not only to access and freedoms, but also to civil society’s resources to communicate, share knowledge, and participate in public life. When discussing the womens resources to communicate I use the notion of *capacitybuilding*. In line with notions such as empowerment, the term is widely used but rarely defined. “Most would place capacitybuilding somewhere on a spectrum of ranging from ‘helping people to help themselves’, at a personal, local or national level, to strengthening civil society organizations in order to foster democratization, and building strong, effective and accountable institutions of government” (Eade 1997, 1). In my research, capacitybuilding is understood as a development approach, whereby peoples capacities to determine their own values and priorities, and to act on these, are

strengthened<sup>13</sup>. It follows, that capacitybuilding may take many forms and shapes. Capacities may be developed through training in various forms (e.g. improving concrete skills), it may be developed by experiencing and sharing new practices (e.g. improving abilities to cooperate, solve problems and take part in decision making processes), or it may be developed through various other means such as drama, poetry, music etc. Capacitybuilding is thus one way of approaching the development of communicative resources and uses of ICTs, and how these uses may impact positively on the women's livelihood and engagement in public political life.

## **BRIEF CONTEXTUAL OVERVIEW**

The Republic of Uganda is a landlocked country in East Africa, with a total population of approximately 27 million people. The President of Uganda is both head of state and head of government. The parliament is formed by the National Assembly, which has 332 members. 104 of these members are nominated by interest groups, including women and the army, whereas the remaining members are elected for four year terms during general elections<sup>14</sup>. Following decades of economic and political instability, leaving Uganda as one of the world's poorest countries, the country has commenced economic reforms and growth. In 2008, Uganda recorded 7% growth despite the global downturn and regional instability<sup>15</sup>. Agriculture is the most important sector of the economy, employing over 80% of the work force, and with coffee as the main source of export. Regarding ICT, the government has developed a national ICT Policy framework to support ICT sector development, and the Rural Communication Development Fund has supported infrastructure and ICT development in the rural areas (Wougnet 2006a). Currently approximately one percentage of the population has access to electric power, hence access to

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13. This definition is a slightly rewritten version of the one presented by Eade 1997, 3.

14. Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uganda> (accessed 12.11.09).

15. Snapshot of Uganda's economic outlook. African Economic Outlook, July 6 2009.  
<http://www.africaneconomicoutlook.org/en/countries/east-africa/uganda/>.

internet is some small percentages of one percent (#1)<sup>16</sup>.

Inequalities between men and women remain a major problem in Uganda. Female education has remained considerably lower than that of male causing high illiteracy levels among women (61.3%) with rural-urban differentials (Ochieng 1999 quoted in Kaddu 2007, 3). Despite the Government's efforts to promote gender sensitive policies and laws (i.e. the National Constitution and the National Gender Policy), the inequalities between men and women are still significant (Ibid, 4).

Over 80% of Uganda's population is rural based and depends almost entirely on agriculture for livelihood. Diseases, pests, soil degradation and other factors such as lack of market for easily perishable crops have affected the total national incomes and subsequently the standard of living of people in rural communities. Generally speaking, access to ICTs such as computers and internet is very constrained, compared to conventional technologies such as radio and television. This is due to a range of development issues such as poor telecommunications infrastructure, unstable power supply, lack of ICT skills, high cost of acquiring and maintaining ICT equipment, high cost of making information available in local languages, and lack of sufficient time on the part of women due to gender roles. Further, according to Wougnet's data there is a relatively small amount of women who realise that ICTs are relevant for improving their lives (Mid-term evaluation, 31)<sup>17</sup>. Broadly stated, men dominate decision-making both in the public and private sphere, and many of the efforts conducted to empower women in Uganda essentially concern how to give women a stronger say in relation to their household, to their means of generating income, e.g. via small businesses, and in relation to their participation in public political life.

In the following, I examine the use of ICTs in two settings, which represent more or less the most and least ICT saturated locations in Uganda. The first one

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16. In the following, quotations from interviews are referenced by a number referring to appendix a, e.g. (#1).

17. The evaluation was conducted by John K. Beijuka in late 2006/early 2007, based on meetings and interview with more than 50 people, including the beneficiaries in Apac district.

is a specific WOUGNET project in the Apac district in Northern Uganda, the other address the use of ICT by WOUGNET and some of their members and partners around the capital Kampala. The key questions I examine concern how the women understand and use the notion of ICT, how access to ICT has affected their means of livelihood and participation in public life, the influence of ICT on structures of public and private, and the role of internet vis a vis conventional media.

## **ICT IN RURAL UGANDA: APAC**

### **Short introduction to EAAI**

In 2005, WOUGNET initiated a project on “Enhancing Access to Agricultural Information using Information and Communication Technologies” (EAAI) in the Apac District in Northern Uganda<sup>18</sup>. The aim of the project was to develop and improve information and communication systems in order to enable easy access to agricultural information for rural women farmers. “We are probably the only ones or the most active ones in northern Uganda, because people have normally shade away from that area.(.) we focus on different ICTs or techniques that we can use to reach out to those in the rural areas with the emphasis on rural women” (#1). Prior to the project, WOUGNET had conducted a baseline study in May 2005, targeting 12 parishes in the four sub counties of Apac, Akokoro, Akalo and Bala.

As reported by the local agricultural office, more than 90% of the population in the districts depends on agriculture for livelihood. “Over ninety percent of our population in terms of economic activity are engaged in agriculture so this makes agriculture actually to be one of our key areas of focus” (#27). A wide range of crops are grown, but the major ones are cassava, simsim, maize, beans and millet. Compared to non-farming activities (beer brewing/distilling, roadside stall vending, fish mongering handcraft,

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18. Apac district a total population of 676,222 of whom 51 % are women (Uganda Bureau of Standards: 2002 Uganda Population & Housing Census).

employment, etc), farming constitute 74.1% of the sources of income. The survey identified some of the major constraints to farming activity, and suggested that these could be solved by improving access to agricultural information. The survey found that the women's capacities to increase earnings were limited by time, by customary prohibitions against women's rights to access and control their own economic resources, and by lack of information. "The survey found out that the women are mostly educated in agricultural production and the men did not really help them so most of the work was actually done by the what? By the women. But they lacked extensional services and then they had no access to radios, because when the men go drinking they take the radios with them to the drinking places" (#16). The farmers lacked information on e.g. how to improve production, weather forecast, source of inputs, markets for farm products, credit facilities, and prices for farm products. Lack of such information limited the production levels of the rural farmers, which again led to limited incomes and poverty (Mid-Term Evaluation, 17-18).

The EAAI project is implemented in twelve parishes in Apac District. The project targeted 12 groups of 30 women farmers, but did not exclude men or the youth in the activities. Each farmer group were equipped with a radio cassette and a mobile phone. The Kubera Information Centre (KIC)<sup>19</sup> located in Apac town was established to coordinate implementation of the project, and to ensure a local point of access for the farmers. The four person staffs at KIC all speak the local language, Luo, and were provided with computers, a printer, a television set and video deck, newspapers, and Worldspace Satellite Radio<sup>20</sup>. Information on farming and farm products were posted on the walls in the office. When I visited, there were no internet connection at the centre, and the KIC staff used the services of the Agency for promoting Sustainable Development Initiatives (ASDI) or the office of Radio Apac for internet connection.

Originally, the project was intended to be the first in a series of EAAI

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19. See <http://kic.WOUGNET.org>

20. Download from the Radio and Internet Program website never really worked due to various



projects to be implemented in other districts; however in 2007 WOUGNET decided to keep it more permanently as a best practice example and emphasize knowledge sharing from the project, rather than implementing similar projects in other regions. “We need to be more focused, we need to see the ideal of being more of a model so instead of replicating what we have in Apac which was the original idea in 2005, we get information out about it, we bring people to visit if they are willing to come, we do documentaries about it and things like that, and then people can learn from that without us actually being the ones to do it, and that is a different thing” (#1).

### **The concept and application of ICT**

The project applies a broad conception of ICT covering various means used to collect, exchange and distribute information, including both print, radio, mobile phones, computer and internet. The various platforms are used in a complementary manner, as I will illustrate below.

The ICT strategy and ICT practices applied in Apac reflect a strong focus on providing “information channels”, thus to link information sources (agricultural information) with beneficiaries (farmers), and limited focus on the social processes around information usage. Access to information is prescribed as key to development both in government strategies and in WOUGNETs own strategy. In response, ICTs are prescribed as channels which may improve “delivery” of this service, as illustrated by the quote. “Access to information requires cheap and fast dissemination of information to farmers, and limited resources, including limited telecommunications and energy infrastructure, have contributed to slow implementation of such government initiatives. Consequently, despite being the largest contributor to the country’s economy, the agricultural sector still lacks knowledge dissemination innovations to facilitate timely, accurate and relevant information to farmers” (Okello 2007, 1).

The selection of ICTs in the EAAI project has been based on *available media*, most notably the community radio, combined with mobile phones, and

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technical problems.

to a lesser extent computer and internet. As previously stated, Apac is located in one of the more remote parts of Uganda, and access to ICTs is scarce, to put it mildly. Some households have radio, or are familiar with radio, but often the radio follows the man when he leaves the house, and is thus not available to the women on a regular basis. Also, the level of literacy is very low, and for many farmers oral communication in local language is *the* means of communication. In the initial phase of the EAAI project, a functional analysis was conducted in order to prioritize the farmers information needs and to decide which ICTs would work best. The analysis showed that access to radio was seen as the main priority by the women, followed by mobile phones as second priority, not least to facilitate communication with agricultural extension workers “What came out (of the analysis) was a priority because what they wanted was radio. We said that we could also call them to talk on radio and then they also said, if they could have access to phones, and the computer never came out at that time because many of them had never seen one and did not know how it works” (#16). “They also want to use a radio because it was audio you could listen and then the extension possibility to reach the villages and also the place is quite big so if you have two or three extensional workers in the district they are not able to reach everybody” (Ibid). While emphasising the radio as the best medium for receiving information, the survey also revealed that current radio usage was limited to personal announcements, questions and answer, and greeting programs. Moreover, the women stated that the timing of radio programs often favour men, since they are on when women are busy in the garden or with domestic work, thus women have limited time to listen to radio programs (Mid-Term Evaluation, 15).

EAAI build on the familiarity with the radio, as a means of strengthening the women’s access to agricultural information. The emphasis on community radio<sup>21</sup>, as one of the main ICTs, has meant that a wider audience was reached compared to the direct target group, as illustrated by one of the extension

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21. The community radio used in the project is Radio Apac ([www.radioApac.com](http://www.radioApac.com)), which serves the target district together with Radio Wa (for sub counties close to Lira).

workers<sup>22</sup>, “When there is talk show they call us, we go and talk to farmers, this one makes me have a wider coverage in terms of the information reaching the farmers, because like when you compare medias going to a sub county which is like limited now when I talk over the radio automatically many people not only within Apac district will hear me (..) just recently I was teaching farmers on how to grow citrus and when I came out of the radio talk show they would ask me where can we get what. But if I had not gone to the radio nobody would even know me from other sub counties” (#20).

Furthermore, the location of Kubere Information Center (KIC) in a central market place has been important to facilitate public access to KICs staff and information resources. The distance from the twelve parishes to KIC is relatively long, and currently KIC staff depend on hired transport for periodical visits to the farmers groups.

By building upon existing meeting structures in the community, the farmer’s frequent and informal access to the centre was supported. “Basically what we did, we put up the information centre to be like a link. (.) Twice a month, there is a market so everybody comes around there. They do ride their bicycles when there is a big market like that because people come from the neighbouring districts of Lira and the other far counties.(.). so it is accessible it is easy for them also to come even if it is just to come and say hi, hello, how are you doing” (#16).

In sum, the understanding and use of ICT reflect three key features. First, a focus on providing information channels, thus linking so-called information sources with farmers, primarily via a combined use of radio and mobile phones. Second, an emphasis on making information and advice accessible, both via the information format (translated to local language and in audio format), and via the location of KIC. Third, outreach has been prioritised beyond the direct target group via community radio. In the following, I will return to these features when discussing my findings in relation to ICTs impact on the womens

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22. Extension workers are local agricultural officers who among other tasks provide support and advice to the farmers in the district.

improved livelihood and participation in public life.

### **How access to ICT has affected the womens means of livelihood and their participation in public life**

The issue of access is emphasized time and again by the interwieved, and occurs at many levels. In the following, I focus on 1) access to infrastructure, 2) access to information, and 3) access to take part in decision-making processes.

Access to infrastructure: Regarding access to basic public infrastructure, this is hardly available. On a physical level, roads are few and in a poor condition, there are frequent power supply interruptions, few points of internet access, poor network coverage, and unstable and limited wavelength of the community radio. “One of the major challenges is actually the infrastructure; the poor roads – they are really poor – sometimes we get stuck. Other times when we want to go to dissemination meetings with the rural farmers since they are really established in extremely poor areas we are cut off” (#17). In response to these conditions, the community radio has proven to be a useful tool for communication with the farmers as an alternative to travelling long distances on poor roads. “ICT has improved service delivery because in those days you needed to move from one point to the other to inform farmer X that this is what is happening. Considering the resource constrain that we have, you must ride a motorcycle up to thirty fifty kilometres to go and talk to the community about the changes in production trends (.). Instead of going to do something we just go to the radio and say this is what is on the ground”(#19).

With regard to electricity this remains a major problem, both in terms of frequent power interruptions, and in terms of remote areas, where electricity is not yet supplied<sup>23</sup>. To counter these obstacles, radio shows were recorded on audiocassettes to make them available irrespective of radio signals. Already within the projects first year, more than twenty audiotapes were produced from the radio programs, including translation of radio scripts. With regard to

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23. In the evaluation of WOUGNETs program in 2006/2007 it was highly recommended that alternative means of power supply should be found (Mid-Term Evaluation, vii).

internet access this is available only at few locations in Apac town, e.g. at the office of some of the local organisations and at Radio Apac. The radio station provides a public space, where people in the community may access refurbished computers free of charge.

Access to information: As previously mentioned, access to agricultural information was seen as a key factor for improved livelihood amongst the rural farmers. However, already within the first project year, the project scope was expanded to include also health and educational information, as this was found to be just as important. “Initially it used to be only agricultural information however we realized that they do not only need the agricultural information to survive sometimes they need the information on health and probably even on education, need to learn issues, so sometimes we give them information on health issues like we give women information on nutrition and the last time we did that was focusing on nutrition of pregnant women and then we also discuss HIV health” (#17). The quote indicates an awareness of the interrelation of practices which may foster improved livelihood, hence the conditions for agricultural production is one out of many social practices, which may be empowered by increased access to information.

The emphasis on contextualised information was another key finding reflected in WOUGNETs collaborative strategy. From early on, WOUGNET partnered with local expert sources of agricultural information, stressing that these organisations would have a better sense of information relevant to the farmers<sup>24</sup>. As part of the local collaboration a QAS was established to provide farmers with access to agricultural experts<sup>25</sup>, as well as community wide communication via Radio Apac. “We go around and take market surveys, how

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24. Partner organisations include the Agency for Sustainable Development Initiatives (ASDI) and Volunteer Efforts for Development Concerns (VEDCO), both NGOs based in Apac, FOODNET (an agricultural research and development network), The Radio and Internet Program (RANET), Uganda Metrological Department, and the Apac District Agricultural Office.

25. The QAS is done in collaboration with the National Agriculture Research Organisation (NARO), the Agricultural Research and Extension Network (ARENET) and the local coordinator of Centre for Agriculture and Rural Corporation (CTA's) Question and Answer Service.

much is it within the local market and then compare with the cross district, the cross border markets, so like yesterday I moved around and was making surveys on how much maize is, how much is beans, and how much is soy beans and then compare on radio (.) because sometimes most of our farmers thought there are better markets across borders (.) so this information we convey to them through radios and then we address this at the listeners club as there are groups who can not afford radios” (#19). The collaborative approach has subsequently led to new projects, such as the E-society project and the Hole in the Wall project<sup>26</sup>.

The selection of information considered “relevant” for the farmers was done by KIC and local agricultural partners on an ongoing basis, based on the priority reported in the initial survey<sup>27</sup>. The decisions were informed by ongoing visits to the farmers, to assess their information needs and problems. Due to low literacy rates most information was translated to the local language Luo, and largely communicated through audio and face-to-face meetings (Ibid, v). “We take the task of searching out what is relevant to our farmers, and what is not relevant we leave out. And since we are dealing with illiterate what we do we translate them to the local language” (#17). The initial survey indicated that to a large extent, relevant information was already available in the community; however it was not communicated to the farmers. A key challenge was thus to provide links between information providers and farmers, rather than to produce new content “When we started with the farmers project the district had plenty of information, they were just waiting for an extension worker to go to the field..(..) this is why I think it worked so well. Because for us we did not

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26. The aim of the E-society project is to use ICT to enhance collaboration between civil society and local government to foster development, building on the existing collaboration with the District Agriculture Office. The Hole in the Wall project is targeting primary school children and aim to build their ICT literacy. The idea is to set up an information kiosk, which will have internet access, and to allow the children free access to this computer, so that they may experiment and learn by doing.

27. a) how to improve production, b) weather forecast, c) source of inputs, d) market opportunities for farm products, e) credit facilities, and f) price for farm products (Mid-Term

have the information that we wanted to give, for people who had this information, we had all these channels to disseminate the information, the radio programs, you know whatever. And so you know it is like basically getting married, you know everyone was fitting together, but you know what brought us together was ICT” (#1). As illustrated, the approach to ICT was rather functionalistic, emphasising the ICT “channels” used to distribute packages of relevant information. Below I will illustrate some of the communicative practices, implemented to improve information access in the community.

Radio shows organised by KIC and conducted via Radio Apac proved to be an important platform for providing agricultural information to the community, e.g. the weekly radio shows *Farmer News* and *Womens Voice* where current issues raised by the farmers were debated, often with participation of extension workers or the farmers themselves. “All along we have been conducting radio talk shows as required, as a need is brought by the farmers we work with, because we go down and ask for their needs, what information do you need that you don’t access, so they give us their needs, like many times they have been conducting radio shows on crop animal, health and nutrition” (#19). “We also called like the successful farmers. People who work successful to come and show the community and also the people who had failed, because we felt that people can learn from the what? From the lessons others had done, why did they fail and what could have been done better?” (#16). Issues and questions were raised during the shows, via text messages or phone calls from the farmers, or via direct participation in the programs. “For example we call a farmer to come and discuss something with the banana, like improved variety as opposed to the local variety so these people come, and the experts come and talk about this, they also come and discuss on the disease that effect the crops and the solutions to this problems” (#17). Several of the interviewed stressed, that the radio shows played an important role both as information provider and in terms of dialogue within the community.

Another key mechanism was the Question and Answer Service (QAS),

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Evaluation, 17).

whereby farmers could pose questions to agricultural experts. The questions typically concerned where to get quality inputs, information about prices and markets; and when to clear gardens and plant (Mid-Term Evaluation, 22). The service was coordinated by KIC, who collected questions, communicated them to experts, and provided the farmers with the answers. “For the QAS we have given different groups question forms in which the farmers fill out the forms without their leaders on any question that may arise or any problem, and they send it back to the information center here, whereby we process these forms, send them to the experts who answer the questions and we send the answers back to the women. Depending on their urgency we may send the answer by sms, we may deliver the forms by hand or we may make a phone call” (#17). The answers were recorded on audiotapes, and used for meetings with the farmer group, thereby providing a space for common listening and dialogue, e.g. addressing topics such as group marketing and access to farm inputs. “We also record (radio shows) on audio tape because some of the women are not sitting around and listening at that time, because of the women roles. So when we go for the field visits we take the tape to the listening groups and they do the listening and record questions that is send back to the centre.(..)” (#16).

With regard to the farmers livelihood, the material indicates that the new communicative practices have improved access to information needed to improve their production. For example, the farmers increasingly use mobile phones to get information about groundnuts improved seed variety, pest control and spacing. Also, the women increasingly realize that access to information is a prerequisite for better incomes and for general improvement of their rights (Mid-Term Evaluation, 22). “They now know information about marketing about crop pest about new technologies coming in, like new research project, new diseases, (.) like banana bacteria there was no way we could communicate on one like this either going to the radio and informing the masses that please take care there is an epidemic, (.) in fact that was the emphasis and many of them took it serious and they take on to destroy the affected plants and then managed and now the disease is reducing, it is like on marketing information they can now not sell their products to this middleman they are now going to



bargain their products because they know if you stay like for know it is floods” (#19). Also, the farmers increasingly change crop, if a certain crop is not profitable. This has resulted in farmers prioritizing their farm products, and has led to some new practices. In the farmer group I visited, bee-keeping was conducted as a new farming enterprise, done as a profit-sharing activity within the group. The profits from the first two years of bee-keeping had been used to pay entrance for a local youth at university level (#22)<sup>28</sup>.

When asked about the value of increased access to information, the farmers stressed that currently the “information resource” is more accessible than other resources, such as e.g. seeds and implements. This has led to some frustration, since information access has limited value, if other resources are not available or if working practices seem difficult or impossible to improve beyond a marginal level. “When we look at an evaluation which was done of the relevance of the information to the women farmers, we realize that they were confessing that they have got enough information to work in their fields but what they lack are inputs and implements. So what remains now is for them to get the farm inputs and implements. For example they may need improved seeds which they can use to apply the knowledge that they have got” (#17).

In sum, the farmers access to information has improved, however the value seem to derive just as much from new spaces of collaboration and problem solving as from use of ICT. WOUGNETs strategy presents a very optimistic note as to how much ICT access may contribute to development, while being less attentive to factors, which are not delivered via ICTs. It may be stretching the point to claim that access to information in itself has limited value, however judging from the material it is merely one out of many conditions necessary to improve the farmers livelihood.

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28. In their October 2009 newsletter, WOUGNET report that the project is “now progressing at a rate they (the rural women farmers) believe would drive them out of poverty”. As example is mentioned one of the groups who has expanded from 6 goats to 40 goats, and has bought 30 bee hives from income generated by farming activities. The group has also bought an accumulator, which helps them charge the group phone and power the radio while listening to the weekly shows on Radio Apac. See <http://kic.WOUGNET.org>

Access to take part in decision-making processes: Regarding access to participate in decision-making processes, the use of ICT has had a positive impact on gender divides in the district. While EAAI started by targeting women farmers, men soon participated, and sat side by side with the women (or on the few chairs available) at the dissemination meetings, debating on equal terms. Also, several of the men explicitly asked to be part of the project (Mid-term evaluation, 18-20). “You know that the women are in some places and men in some places but now when they go to for example to the dissemination meeting, you have both men and women they are both in the same place, maybe the only difference is that the men sit on the chairs and the women sit down you see, but then you have a discussion and you see then you have a discussion and everyone can contribute to that” (#1). Moreover, the men were frequent users when it came to visiting KIC<sup>29</sup>. As such the project has helped to merge gender divided spaces, and has brought the women closer to decision making processes such as what to grow, how to tackle various crops diseases, bad weather, or varying market prices. It has also more generally improved the farmers access to extension services (Mid-Term Evaluation, 22). Further, as part of the group structure, the women increasingly negotiate market prices as a collective, which has strengthened their bargaining power towards middle men buying their products. As part of EAAI, the women have been connected with the district farmer association, linked to the World Food Programme, which has made buying arrangements with several of the farmers groups, at a price more favourable for the farmer. “It was the kind of work that I really liked, because it was helping them directly and they were trying to put all their products together and then bring it to the district level and then the World Food Program would pay them. And a better price than the farmers who go to the middlemen” (#16).

The womens increased access to decision making processes have also had a positive impact on the private sphere and the spending of family income.

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29. Local women and men regularly visit KIC to read newspapers on politics, current affairs and sports and men/boys for job opportunities (Okello 2007).

“Family income are increasingly spent on household needs, school fees, medical bills, and most of the surplus is ploughed back into farming activities before alcohol by the husband” (Mid-Term Evaluation, 32). The strengthening of existing group structures appear as a key element in the improved access to decision making processes. Another factor has been the new means of communication, which have improved the womens’ ability to influence their own situation, and has countered some of the previous communication divides in Apac. Prior to EAAI, few women in the region had access to radio or mobile phones, and there were clear gender divides in terms of influence on decision-making processes. “We all know, you also know that information is power. When you have access to information, then it helps you to make right decisions it helps you to be aware of what is around you. (.). so information is very vital for human development and community development” (#17). However, the concrete ICT uses are still restricted by practical obstacles such as lack of money to buy cards to charge the phone, though the women share the cost of running the phone amongst group members. Also, many of the women are still challenged when it comes to use of the mobile phone or radio, as I will return to below.

In sum, the farmers perceive their livelihood as being somewhat improved by the increased access to information and to structures of communication within the community, most notably the radio and the ability to ask for support and advice via the mobile phone. Obviously, access to basic infrastructure remains a problem, but with regard to information on products, weather, market price etc., it is reported that there is now relevant information available, however lack of resources needed to make use of the information.

## **Freedoms**

In the public sphere framework, freedoms are essentially addressed as lack of state violations in freedoms such as freedom of expression, freedom to assemble, and freedom to political participation. In North America, Asia and Europe there has traditionally been a strong focus on civil liberties, also in the online sphere, and on countering various types of censorship. In the Apac

context the main issue is not state interference in fundamental freedoms, but rather structures of poverty and inequality which impact negatively on the women's ability to exercise rights, especially to raise their voice, to own land, and to be politically active. "For example we talk of women's rights here in Kampala but when you go down and up in the villages, then what there exist is what? What my husband tells me to do, that is what I do. If I question him, those are the beatings. I have to submit to everything, he tells me to do" (#13). According to the Uganda Participatory Poverty Assessment from 2002 women are still regarded as property by their husbands, thus men have control over women's lives, their access to information, and their participation in politics, social groupings and training (Bakesha 2008, 1)<sup>30</sup>.

Concerning participation in public political life, one of the results of EAAI has been the empowerment of some of the women to the extent where they now aspire for leadership positions at local council (sub county) level. "When there were elections most of the women participated in political elections, local elections, and we had a number who came up to the council.(.) we think it is because of the empowerment they got out you know talking in the group...yeah more confidence even value as women because you know our culture is really not very nice..(.) the men really you know they make you feel that you are nothing" (#16). Through interaction with Radio Apac, the women have gained practical experience with public appearance, e.g. being on air, raising issues, posing questions etc. "Like when I call for questions during talk show women also say like, hi I am called so and so, I am a farmer, a woman farmer from such a sub country I want to know about ABCD" (#25). As such, the communication within the groups, and with KIC, extension workers and Radio Apac, have helped to build confidence, both in terms of mastering concrete skills and at a more personal level by building self esteem. "If you are not educated and everything you can definitely feel that you are nothing, so I feel that this project has empowered the women because first of all they start talking.. (..).so that gives

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30. This was addressed by a local poster in APAC, which stated that "Women are not property, but land is property, which women may own".

you a bit of confidence building and then we change into the local politics, they are now going to compete with men and they have actually gone through, so I really think to some extent it had empowered what? the women, though that was not the intention of the project” (#16). However, the presence of women in public political life, be it as council members or as public voices more generally speaking, is still relatively limited compared to male representation. Moreover, as a result of the project, men in Apac increasingly allow their wives to attend group meetings and to control farm resources such as credit and land; which is yet another indicator of gender divides. In principle, women may own land but very few do so, due to the relatively low income of women. As womens income increase, they start buying land; though this is a slow process. “Very few women own land, because most of the land is in the male hands because also the income levels of women are low. But you can buy land if you have money, it is within the law” (#16).

Linking back to the public / private perspective, it appears that EAAI has given the women a stronger public say, and made them more visible both as participants at meetings and as voices on the radio. Also, it has given them a stronger say in decision-making related to the household and the family income. Whereas men traditionally dominate decision-making in both the public and private sphere, this is slowly changing. As the women start to own more land, associate, negotiate, and participate in political life, existing structures of public and private as male dominated domains are altered, and women increasingly participate in decision making processes both in the private and public sphere. In this regard the application of ICTs in Apac has a more long term impact than simply being access to a radio and a mobile phone.

In sum, in the context of Apac the public sphere emphasis on freedoms is related more to social structures, which impact negatively on the womens ability to acknowledge and exercise their rights, and less to state restrictions. This is due to the cultural context, where structural inequality between men and women is a more pressing problem than state restrictions in civil and political rights.

## **Resources to communicate**

In the following, focus is on the farmers' capacity to make use of ICTs to improve their livelihood and participation in public life. The notion of resources to communicate is stressed in the public sphere perspective because it is presumed significant in order to gain democratic benefits from the application of ICTs.

Training as a form of capacitybuilding has been an integral component in EAAI from the very start, however at a limited scale. Already within the first year, it became clear that ICT training had to be upgraded since the farmers were not using the mobile phones to the extent that KIC had expected. "After a year we realised that they needed training because they were not using the phone as much as they should have been using it. (.) sometimes the chair person would store the messages on the what? On the phone and not send it out, it had not be delivered, so and then she said they did not know how to respond back also to the centre" (#16). Many of the women had never touched a phone or radio, seen a computer, or had access to audiotapes, so basic training was crucial in order to give the women basic ICT skills as well as to build their confidence. The training had to be ongoing, due to changing group members, and included practice in how to use the radio, mobile phones and computer. Besides skill training, the women were encouraged to use the mobile phone to ask questions during radio shows and to reach extension workers for agricultural advice. "Like this old women (..), initially when we got on ground she even feared to phone but now the phone is part of her, she can send us a message, she can tell us this is the problem, of course in the local language not in English. (.) And there are some of them who now can get to the centre and use our computer" (#18). "its hard to get them to use ICTs like the mobile phone even to make a phone call or to send a message. However, we have singled out a few women who are fast learners and we have made them trainers so they train their fellow women" (#16).

As part of the initial capacitybuilding, more than forty listening clubs and dissemination meetings were held in the district. The first meetings focused on introducing the project and how it was going to work with the communities,

whereas the subsequent meetings involved explanations of how the QAS and dissemination meetings would work. Also, radio and magazine training were conducted for a couple of women from each parish, including live presentations on radio. “They do the theory and also they go on air. They teach them like the basics in a five days training what would you first do when you go on the radio, you greet people you say, you introduce yourself” (#16). “we have trained these women on radio talk and magazine training where they get on the radio and share their experiences” (#18). The aim of the training was to develop the women's capacity and understanding of media, facilitated by Radio Apac (WOUGNET 2006b). Training was also carried out to improve the production capacity of Radio Apac and KIC staff involved in the agricultural radio talk shows, as well as training on the World Space Radio in order to provide information to partner organisations. Moreover, a video training workshop was held for KIC staff and two of the farmers, with the aim of learning video production and to produce a promotional video of the project. Originally, participatory video production was meant to facilitate knowledge sharing amongst the groups, thus have the women produce videos to illustrate how problems were solved within the group. Though the participatory approach was emphasised as a good way of sharing experiences, it was never realised due to lack of resources. “The idea was that suppose we did a video where the women themselves were doing some activity, they are narrating themselves..(..). When you take it to another (village), you don't even need to worry about translation or anything (..) I think it would have more of an impact than me doing the exercise because they would immediately relate to that person by looking at who is doing what, they would really get to the puzzle, without the barriers. Without the oh ya what do you from Denmark know about my problems, or you sit in Kampala, what do you know about my problems and you know this type of things” (#1).

Summing up on the findings related to capacitybuilding, emphasis is placed on the situations where dialogue takes place, e.g. when the farmers discuss and share experiences amongst themselves and with other local experts. Especially the radio shows where farmers participated, group demonstration plots, and

visits to other farmer groups were emphasised as factors leading to better farming methods. The fact that it is local people who share experiences and advice is stressed as essential in order for the farmers to acknowledge them as experts knowledgably within the specific context of Apac. “..we have taken them for exchange visits where most of them have actually benefited a lot they have got new ideas from other people from out of the district also like we took them to Kayunga district where they have also got a lot from farmers, like we have one of the groups in Akalo there are now dealing in pineapple drying because they got it from other districts which is not the Apac district” (#18). However, capacitybuilding remains a major challenge, and many of the women are still challenged when it comes to public participation in radio shows or using the radio or mobile phone (#17).

The material points to two main conclusions with regard to capacitybuilding. First, training of the various actors in the project, in the different forms outlined above, has been a crucial component both to provide basic ICT skills and to build the confidence needed to actively use the technology to communicate day to day problems and seek advice. EAAI was highly dependent on building capacity in the community, as even basic knowledge of ICTs was needed amongst the majority of the farmers. Second, capacitybuilding focused on disseminating of information, e.g. at “listening clubs and dissemination meetings” plus training in specific ICT skills, and less on how farmers may become more capable in communicating and sharing experiences to improve their livelihood, as was the intention with the participatory videos. The latter would imply a stronger focus on the daily uses of information, as perceived by the women, rather than the functionalities of the various technologies. As such, capacitybuilding appears as both a very crucial and vulnerable element of EAAI.

### **The role of new vis a vis conventional media**

The case is an example of how creative use of ICTs may contribute positively to local development and gender equality. It also illustrates how different ICT platforms co-exist and supplement one another, each playing their role in



building an effective communicative environment. Both radio and mobile phones proved to be effective ICT platforms since they were more readily available in the community, compared to computer and internet, and since the audio form responded well to the low level of literacy amongst the farmers. Further, the combined use of radio and mobile phones strengthened the participatory element, thus providing the radio talk shows with a strong element of interaction and user defined agendas. As such the project reflects a division of labour between the various ICTs. Whereas “new” media (the internet) primarily was used by KIC staff and local organisations to source and translate information from outside the local context, conventional media (radio and mobile phones) was used to generate and communicate content within the community. As such, the project presents an example of “user generated content” within a platform of old media, since the farmers themselves contribute to the content communicated via the radio programs, as well as participate in those from time to time. In contrast the internet is used primarily as a “passive” library of information, where information is collected and subject to further contextualisation before put to use. In sum, in the context of Apac, the combined and creative use of community radio and mobile phones perform a lot of the interactive, participatory functions that are usually associated with the internet, making internet access less crucial.

## **Conclusion**

If we look at the findings derived from the project, the women and the local organizations generally indicate that the new means of communication and information access has led to increased production, though there are few actual numbers on this. Some concrete outcomes may be highlighted from the previous sections as indicators of change, i.e. improved farming methods, more women in control of economic resources, collective bargaining for market prices, greater participation of women farmers in public life, e.g. in community radio and local politics, and some merger of gender divided spaces e.g. at the dissemination meetings. With regard to communication mechanisms, the utilization of structures that were already present in the community, e.g.

farmer groups, the community radio, and the farming organizations, have eased local ownership of the project, and have helped provide information, which was relevant in the specific context. The applied notion of ICT stressed the role of various ICTs to “disseminate” information, and seemed to presume a direct link between improved information access and better livelihood. This causality was not justified in the findings. The somewhat functionalistic approach to ICT approach also influenced the local capacitybuilding, hence emphasized ICT training, and focused less on the social practices and experiences surrounding ICT use.

The public sphere framework used in the analysis focused on issues of access, freedoms and resources. The notion of access; to basic infrastructure, to information, and to take part in decision making processes, seemed a relevant category for examining the project. The analysis confirmed that access to information was seen as important for local development; and directed attention towards substantial access divides, related to poverty, lack of infrastructure, and gender inequality. However, the analysis also stressed that access is merely one of out several factors to improve livelihood. As such the ICT design seemed too optimistic as to what improved information access may contribute, if other resources are still lacking, and given various restrictions related to gender roles. The EAAI project had a strong focus on information access and its presumed link to development; hence I found it useful to have an analytical framework, which supplemented the debate on access with categories of freedom and resources to communicate. With regard to freedoms, this category pointed to some of the cultural factors constraining womens participation in public and political life. In the context of Apac, this was especially pointing to structures of inequality, which impact negatively on the womens ability to exercise rights, rather than state restrictions in the ability to exercise civil and political rights. Finally, in relation to resources to communicate, the case affirmed the central and necessary role of capacitybuilding to gain benefits from ICT usage, but also pointed to the somewhat narrow approach in the project, focusing almost entirely on ICT skill building.

Summing up in relation to the role of ICT for improved livelihood and increased public participation by the women farmers, the case indicates that the women's means of influencing their own situation have been improved, as new avenues for production and bargaining have been created. Also, with regard to structures of public and private, greater participation by women in public life can be noticed e.g. increased political activity and an increasing amount of women voicing issues of concern at community meetings and in local radio shows. However, the positive effect cannot merely be ascribed to access to ICTs, but appear as a combined result of giving women public voices, building communicative capacity, encouraging sharing within the groups, and countering gender divides more generally. In the context of Apac, the empowerment factor thus seems to derive from the creation and harnessing of new spaces for conversation, decision-making, and participation in public life, provided by relatively simple ICT structures. As such it seems fair to conclude that the new spaces for participation and sharing was just as important as ICTs in empowering women in Apac.

## **THE ROLE OF ICT IN AN URBAN SETTING: KAMPALA**

### **Background**

The second case address the role of ICT for empowering women and women's organisations around the capital Kampala, based on the work of WOUGNET and some of their member and partner organisations. As part of my stay in Kampala, I visited and interviewed a number of organizations, who directly or indirectly are linked to WOUGNET (cf. appendix a). Whereas the Apac project is targeting women in the rural area through a combination of media platforms, this part is targeting organisations with internet access, and represents some of the services, which WOUGNET has provided since its inception in 2000, primarily via their Information Sharing and Networking program. The activities includes administration of a member's mailing list, providing information resources, facilitating forums and advocacy, and interfacing with the international gender and ICT community. WOUGNET have members throughout the country, however

the majority of member and partner organizations are located in Kampala, and many of them have used the internet for several years. Outside Kampala the leaders of the womens organizations are aware of ICTs but usage is minimal. However even the most resourceful and ICT literate organisations interviewed in Kampala operate in a context where resource constraints are immense (e.g. lack of infrastructure, high prices for connectivity, unstable power supply), thus making ICT usage non comparable to conditions in the developed part of the world. Regarding websites, a few WOUGNET members have an online presence but lack the necessary skills to update and upload information, whereas the majority do not have their own website but download information from WOUGNET.org and other websites (Mid-term evaluation, 13).

In the following I examine how WOUGNET and partner organizations have used ICT to empower women, drawing on the categories of access, freedoms and resources to communicate. In line with the Apac analysis, the notion of access is discussed as 1) access to basic infrastructure, 2) access to information, and 3) access to take part in decision making processes.

## **Access**

Access to basic infrastructure: As previously stressed, the development context of Uganda makes access to basic infrastructure something, which is not generally available. In relation to internet, the interviewed in Kampala stress the lack of an affordable infrastructure, which reaches all parts of Uganda. Currently prices for connectivity are relatively high, and considerably higher than internet connection in e.g. Western Europe, mainly due to structures of ownership by foreign companies. Also most rural areas are underserved, as they are not commercially viable. As part of the official ICT policy, a national back bone in the form of a fibre cable as well as satellites has been in the pipeline for some years. “Satellites and our networks are still being set up, so we still have to pay the owners of this infrastructure a lot of money. And the owners are usually from the western world, Europe, America and maybe Japan and the Far East” (#7). In July 2009 the first undersea fiber optic cable to bring high-speed internet access to East Africa was launched by African-owned Seacom. Some

observers assess this as the single most important infrastructure investment in eastern Africa since the construction of the Uganda Railway<sup>31</sup>. It remains to be seen whether the new cable will lead to lower prices and to improved internet access in the rural areas.

Access to information: Concerning information access the urban/rural divides within Uganda is mentioned time and again, both as an infrastructural and informational divide. The majority of WOUGNETs members are based in Kampala and generally have access to computers and internet, hence access to various online resources. Also, for several of the members online advocacy and networking is somewhat comparable to their counterparts in the developed world, keeping in mind the contextual constraints. However, also in Kampala there is a divide between the more professional WOUGNET members such as Council for economic empowerment for women of Africa, Uganda chapter (CEEWA-U), Women's International Cross Cultural Exchange (ISIS), and the East African Sub-regional Support Initiative for the Advancement of Women (EASSI), which have used ICTs for years, and small organisations or micro enterprises, which do only have an online presence in the context of WOUGNET and their online resource base. Members interviewed in 2006/2007 reported an information-sharing problem within the member organisations, since newsletters and invitations to WOUGNETs conferences, workshops etc. tended to end up with the group officials and not be disseminated further down the organisations (Mid-term Evaluation, 13). It was also stressed that in many cases, the organisations failed to provide information, which was needed to update their profiles, and to circulate the various material amongst a broader audience. These problems concerned some of the primary mechanisms used by WOUGNET to interface and share experiences with their members, and indicate that the member organizations do not provide channels for women to access information to the extent WOUGNET anticipated (Ibid). The evaluation further revealed that WOUGNET was relatively unknown within Uganda, even among their own members, which may partly be explained by the lack of efficient communication

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31. Presentation by Calestous Juma, Berkman Center for Internet and Society, 15 October 2009.

from the chairs who interface with WOUGNET, and further on to their constituencies. In contrast, WOUGNET is well known internationally, possibly due to their WSIS participation. “Our networking internally maybe has some gaps(.) how can we make ourselves either create a niche for ourselves or make ourselves more valuable to our members” (#1). It is also reported that limited information on ICT is available for members to exploit easily, and that members would like WOUGNET to provide more training in ICT use and applications (Ibid, 10, 29).

When interviewing people in and around WOUGNET about WOUGNETs role in facilitating information sharing and network, practically all the interviewed stress the role of the mailing list, and the frequent use of information distribution via this mailing list. “Especially the mailing list we used it a lot to disseminate information and also to get information and we have quite benefited from that list” (#12). “WOUGNET they have that mailing list and on that platform that is where we share our ideas with women when for example there is a training opportunity”( #13). “WOUGNET also provides kind of an interconnecting link so to speak so it brings together so many people” (#14). The information distributed via the mailing list is typically information about the various activities and priorities within the member organisations, thus facilitating a common memory and communication channel for gender and ICT related advocacy within Uganda. E.g. information on new publications and documentaries, call for participants or contacts in relation to specific projects, information on research grants, and more personal announcements. ICT partners rely on WOUGNET for gender specific knowledge, whereas the women organizations stress WOUGNETs ability to combine gender and ICT politics. WOUGNETs mailing list is also mentioned as a good resource for keeping informed about the various advocacy initiatives at national level in relation to ICT. Moreover, some political discussions have taken place on the mailing list e.g. in relation to sensitive topics such as female genital mutilation or womens right to abortion; “well there are some strategic discussions (on the mailing list) one that really brought created a lot of interest was the one on abortion on female abortion and peoples different takes on that. Given our society different

cultures different believes try kind of conflict with human rights issues so to speak(.) I felt that was important to know that even though we are gender sensitive and we are feminists in one way or another and we do want girl and women's rights promoted, there are several areas that are sensitive. That are not clear cut in terms of yes or no. whether or not it is a human right.(.)" (#14).

Generally speaking, the mailing list appears more as an information provider than an actual tool for policy coordination. When it comes to coordinating policy advocacy at national level, there are several references to the civil society coalition (Uganda Women's Caucus on ICT), which WOUGNET chairs and its role in the years 2003-2005 especially as an advocacy group in relation to the national ICT policy framework and the Uganda Communication Commission (UCC); the regulator of the communications industry in Uganda. "So we have been having one voice, doing policy advocacy as a team. Because as an individual you may achieve less and what we are looking at here is the universal access. How do you make them (ICTs) accessible to everyone, especially the rural communities" (#12). There were however few references to more current coalition activity. When asked about the benefits from WOUGNET membership, the larger organisations emphasized common sharing of information, whereas the smaller organisations focused on exposure and access to information. "It has helped them so much, when I link them (rural based micro organisations) with WOUGNET so they also come and participate in the workshop they also get communication they get newsletters so there is a very good strengthening capacity" (#10)

Access to take part in decision making processes: As previously mentioned, gender inequality remains a major problem in Uganda, and takes many forms such as uneven access to economic resources (land), poverty, domestic violence etc. "Domestic violence is also an issue but it is somehow related to poverty because in ordinary homes you find that a man will beat a wife maybe because he think you wasted the salt and salt costs like 200 shilling and he would say like, why did you use all the salt in just few days. So I believe if there is a system of money power to some extend domestic violence can be reduced(..) for example a women think that if I leave this man he is beating me everyday

how will I survive.(..) so somehow people are tolerating violence because of poverty” (#17). Also the representation of women in decision making is still relatively low, with less than 30 % female representation in parliament. “I would say that if women were more involved in decision making a lot would be emplaced, bills will be past and legislation will be in favour of women but because the women decision making is minimal, then in a sense policies that favour women concerns do not pass to reach women.(.) In Uganda we are slightly less than 30%” (#14). The work of the womens organisations all target this inequality one way or the other, typically with the aim of strengthening womens economic power and access to take part in decision making processes. Many women are the primary providers for households, either responsible for doing much of the agriculture work, or running a small business. Despite this role as providers, it is usually the men, who have access to credit and local business exchanges. One of the organisations which seek to rectify this situation is CEEWA-U who has a number of activities which aim to improve womens social and economic rights, e.g. empowering women to be more economically active, more in control of economic resources and more able to sustain themselves. This includes initiatives in the area of micro financing, entrepreneurship development, and business training, thereby providing the women with relevant information about how to gain credit, how to access markets, how to run a small business etc. “We are looking at transformation how do you transform this grass root women to a micro entrepreneur, the so-called economical active women, how do you transform her” (#12). It also includes training of policy makers in order to make agricultural and economic policies more gender sensitive. In relation to CEEWAs work, especially local telecentres was emphasised as spaces for information access, training and knowledge sharing, thereby improving the womens decision making power. An important part of CEEWA-U's work with the telecentres has been to locate information which is relevant to the community and to make it available in an assessable form, e.g. in local language and in audio form. The telecentres are also used to train women to find new sources of credit and to access market price information over the internet. Women that receive training are subsequently used to train other rural women. “The idea of



the telecentres was if you have a telecentre with all the ICT tools, you can use them for the economical empowerment of the communities. They come and they use ICT tools to enhance their enterprises” (#12)<sup>32</sup>.

Another example of ICT utilised to improve access to decision making processes is the online resources provided by the annual agricultural knowledge fair, organised by Busoga Rural Open Source and Development Initiative (BROSDI) as part of the Collecting and Exchange of Local Agricultural Content (CELAC) project<sup>33</sup>. The Knowledge Fair is an event where farmers meet and explain what they have achieved so that others may learn from them. Podcasting (iRiver) is used to facilitate learning and communication from the knowledge fair to a wider audience. Via podcasting the farmers’ experiences is recorded, such as difficulties they face, successes they have achieved and advice they would want to give others engaged in similar practices, e.g. whether it has made any change in their livelihood. Most interviews are done in local languages, converted to MP3 and uploaded for further distribution. “It is interesting but true, the generations that cant write(..) We do podcast, then we do the blogs so they can sit and listen to the voice and learned based on the voice that they listen to” (#9). Farmers without internet access receive CDs so they may access the material from a stand-alone computer (Ibid, Basajjabaka 2008).

An additional BROSDI initiative is the citizen journalist project, which focuses on capturing stories and promoting local development via ICT. The project started with a survey among the farmers asking them about their specific challenges with regard to agricultural information. The survey revealed that the markets were diminishing and that there was a need to collect agricultural expertise not least the experiences collected over past generations. Accordingly, the project started to collect agricultural content that was critical for development in the communities, but which went unnoticed in the

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32. Some of the experiences with the telecentres use of CD-ROMs to empower women entrepreneurs are reported in Bakesha, Nakafeero and Okello 2008.

33. BROSDI is not a member of WOUNET but a partner. The project addresses men and women farmers equally.

mainstream media. The information was translated and distributed using various web 2.0 technologies (blogs, Google Maps, wikis, online documentation, chatrooms). Additionally the farmers were encouraged to write blocks in the local language, which was then uploaded and translated into English for wider outreach. Farmers with internet access printed out the information and posted it on their notice boards for people without connectivity to access. “..so what we did was, we developed a project with the farmers which is to collect existential agricultural content. But largely it is on the content that the past generations used in agriculture where there were no pesticides where there was no fertilisers and so on how did they deal with agriculture how did they insure there plantations or whatever they planted was yielded better” (#9). The information was collected via farm discussions, where farmers share experiences and identify people, who are experts within a given area. Besides translating and posting the information online, summaries were sent via text messages to farmers all over the country.

In relation to some of the smaller organizations, one of WOUGNET's member organizations, St. Bruno Doll Making Group, has used the WOUGNET membership to get an online presence, and to make their enterprise visible to the world. “When we got connected to WOUGNET they put us on the website so from that time I have been getting people calling me even from outside Uganda(..) it is all through the website, because we are as you see a bit outside Kampala” (#15). The micro enterprise produces art and craft specializing in Doll Making, produced by rural women from their homes. The online presence has raised the enterprise income essentially, via increased foreign exposure and sales, but has also given the owner increased knowledge on how to run a business, via studying other micro enterprises on the internet. “Because whenever I open (browse) some organisations, I find out their prices and the how you can send them and get your money, which is easier, because I know the internet thing the web site checking and seeing what other people do” (Ibid).

In sum, the Kampala case provides various examples of the role ICT has played in increasing information access, both in terms of relative simple measures such as the WOUGNET mailing list, or the online presentation of

members, and in terms of more comprehensive information sharing initiatives such as the agricultural knowledge fair and citizen journalism project. As with the Apac case, the analysis points to access divides at both geographical (rural/urban) and gender level. It is stressed that WOUGNET has filled a gap in providing information on, and linking, gender and ICT issues in Uganda, including their role in promoting gender sensitive ICT policies. However it is also reported that there is an information-sharing problem thus communications from WOUGNET to member organizations tend to stay with the relatively few women that interface with WOUGNET. As such the information sharing and networking facilitated by WOUGNET benefit a relatively limited amount of women.

## **Freedoms**

As with the Apac case, the issue of freedoms, or lack of such, is related to a culture of gender inequality, rather than to direct state restrictions. The interviewed make no mentioning of state interference in access to information or in rights of expression online, and generally speaking state censorship is not a big issue in Uganda. However, many women are hesitant to raise their voice, to associate and form alliances, and to participate in public life, e.g. attend meetings, training etc. It is emphasised that women have little awareness of their right, besides the small, educated elite. “It is only the elites the educated women who know their rights they might also not implement them or practice them, but at least they know that they have rights where.. but the rural women most of them still don’t know, even if they know they have to consult their husbands (#16). “In the relationship we should know if I have an idea, there is a man who will say. Can a woman tell me something? She can not. I have to tell her, do this do that, they still exist those tings out there” (#13). Several of the interviewed state that increased access to information via ICTs has had a positive impact on womens right in Uganda, especially in terms of confidence building, and by fostering more economically active women due to increased information on markets, prices, crops etc. Also, ICT training has been used as an opportunity to bring men and women together, and to sensitise men towards the

usefulness of ICT and information access for enterprise development. “Because you know here women sometimes they have to get permission from their husbands to go for like a training at the telecentre, the nature of there roles, you cant just leave home. So what we were like lets integrate some men, so when they realise the benefits of this capacitybuilding activities and the role of information in their enterprises they will encourage other men to participate and also allow their wives to participate“ (#12). As indicated by the quote, womens rights are very constrained, and the attempt to merge gender divided spaces as part of ICT training illustrate the tremendous cultural barriers that will have to be countered before women enjoy the same rights and freedoms as men. Linking back to the public / private perspective, the telecentres represent a kind of transmission between the private and public sphere, hence a space where female participation is accepted on equal terms with their male counterparts.

Regarding ICTs influence on the public sphere / public debate more generally, there is limited online debate in Uganda. However there are examples of thematic debates such as a mailing list set up by WOUGNET partner I-Network, which represent some level of public debate and where top officials such as the ICT minister and his officials participate and gain feed back on concrete policy initiatives. “In fact the ministry itself have said that they listen very closely to what is coming out on our mailing list. (..), because it is a channel for them to get some feed back. (..) they would know it is a really good way for them to get in touch with what people are feeling and thinking about their policies or their services or their products” (#1). “It definitely has changed a lot of debates, a lot of perception on what? on the facilitation you know of day to day communication and day to day living so to speak, a lot have changed. (..) because now they realise that this is such a powerful tool not just for easy communication friendly communication but it is such a powerful tool to send important messages across which in effect in the long term can change policies” (#14). As illustrated by the quote, the mailing list has started to change peoples perception of the internet, thus besides being seen as a tool for effective communication, it is also seen as change factor influencing the way

politics are carried out. Whereas internet primarily was used as an information library in the Apac case, its role as a platform for public communication has started to slowly take off in Kampala.

In relation to ICTs role in terms of public / private changes, there were two points which especially surfaced when I reviewed the material from Kampala. One concerns the fact that ICT strengthens the womens ability to work from home, either directly via an internet connection or indirectly, as illustrated by the example from St. Brunos Doll Making, where local women are subcontractors to a micro enterprise selling art and handicraft via the internet. In a context where traveling even over small distances is difficult and expensive, and gender roles keep many women at home, the possibility of reaching out from your home via internet may benefit women and provide them with opportunities of improving their economic and social rights while at home. “Physical takes a lot of time and it cost a lot of resources but here if I have internet and I can communicate the whole world in a short time that is better” (#2). The other point touches on the enhanced means for networking and gaining visibility, which online spaces provide. As example is mentioned APC, which have their staff and members scattered around the world, and where daily cooperation, network and problem solving is almost entirely online based. Despite a relatively small staff and lack of a physical office, the organization appears visible and influential in many parts of the world due to their online workspace and presence. In the physical world the staff may be private women in their homes, however in the online world, they are public nodes, and part of a larger network. “You know what when people talk about APC, they think that APC is a huge building, but it is a small office so basically you know working the workspace online is really large but people who don’t know ICT cant appreciate it. People can even sit in their home at their dining table when you have connection and talk to everybody and do work..(..) I admire APC because I have gone to their office it is just a small office, but she communicates to the whole world” (Ibid). The point stresses that online spaces is seen as something, which may add new opportunities for both professional and social life and networking, which is relevant not least for the many womens organizations in Uganda who

seek to improve womens access to decision-making processes in private as well as public life.

## **Resources to communicate**

In the following, I examine the role played by WOUGNET and some of their member and partner organizations with regard to ICT capacitybuilding for empowering women in Uganda. Building capacity amongst women, policy makers, media, ICT experts etc. has been part of WOUGNETs activities from early on, and is a key component in practically all their programs. It is also a major component in the work of most of the organizations, I spoke to in Kampala.

ICT capacitybuilding takes many forms such as ICT training in telecentres across the country (CEEWA), ongoing ICT workshops and specific educational programs, training at in-house net café (ISIS), technical support, providing refurbished computers<sup>34</sup>, and providing ICT resources online, just to mention a few. ICT training was first initiated when womens organizations such as WOUGNET, CEEWA, ISIS and EASSI started to focus on ICT around 2000-2002. “We decided to set up women’s internet café because we realised that there was a gender dictive gap between girls or women and men in Uganda and we decided to create a space for women, where women can come freely and also have a feel of the technology. (.)We trained young girls most of them had never touched a computer, they did not know what a computer looked like, but we trained them and they were able to speak out, to share their voices with other people (.) Most of the women had their first touch on computers here at Isis yes” (#13). Today quite a few organizations provide ICT training. ISIS is still very active with their net café and has established an online library for information and training resources. They also use ICT to document womens stories, not least during armed conflicts. CEEWA-U report that they have up till now trained more than 1200 men and women in ICT for enterprise development. Some of the

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34. By the end of 2006, WOUGNET had distributed more than 600 refurbished computers to civil society organizations, schools, WOUGNET members, and other non-for-profit organizations

smaller organizations stressed the role of ICT training in building the women's self-confidence and promoting ICT literacy towards their children. "This learning, adult learning is so interesting that even if they may not physically be using this computers they will be able to promote it to their children. So when they talk to their children about it and if the children learn that my mum is 35, 40 or 50 can be able to touch the computer then it will be enough motivation for the children in order also to access ICTs" (#10). "Training for the ICT...yeah it gives you confidence because most of the women fear to go and get that knowledge and most of the knowledge we get now in business and even developing now our communities it is now all in the internet. So when you get trained at least you get confidence because they allow you to trust your work in computer" (#15). When asked about the specific training and how it had helped to build confidence, it was stressed that the trainers were creative in "translating" ICT terminology not only to local language but also to relate it to local concepts, as illustrated by the quote. "Yeah they always use local languages okay. Like the website the world web, they were teaching us like a spider web, so the way it connects so from there you would say, it is a way, it is like a spider in our language, which they call, I forgotten the name, but they know the spider they know how it works, then the mouse they were calling it a rat, which is a messy so they would say now touch your messy (.), then it brings the web and then you see what is there, so from there during the fun making, the talk, everybody could speak what is coming. They went for the practical part, everybody was interested to touch the rat which doesn't bite and the web you could see, you put there on what, then everything comes. So in the end everybody was told to open up an email and then we send an email to each other so everybody was happy to say at least we can write. We were about 40 but at least 25 of them still communicate. That is the good thing I got from there" (Ibid).

Another major area of capacitybuilding has been awareness raising and knowledge building amongst policy makers and journalists. From official side

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(Mid-Term Evaluation, 25).

there is an increasing ICT awareness, and a dedicated ICT Ministry has been established. However, when it comes to gender policies, and understanding the specific challenges related to gender and ICT, the womens organizations report an ongoing need to sensitise policy makers. As such, improved cooperation between ICT and gender at policy level is emphasized as something, which could strengthen the general appreciation of ICTs in Uganda “The problem with the gender people is that they are gender people but they don’t understand ICT issues, they only have one element, which is gender, they don’t see the connection so we really have to have capacity in ICT” (#2). “I think the most important initiative would be if they could improve the gender and the ICT policy, those two. If they could link up, because most of the policies are done independently. Because we have at the parliament level, we have each of these committees of gender and a committee on ICT” (#16). WOUNETs activities done in this area include specific training targeting policy makers and journalists, but also commenting on draft legislation, policies and action plans proposed by the government, e.g. through the Uganda Women’s Caucus on ICT. “Actually some awareness has been created through the trainings like the sensitisation workshops for policy makers, ICT experts and then the journalist and after that we also build their capacity in undertaking gender analysis or how to find the gaps in ICT policy processes or in documents (#6).

When asked whether ICT has changed the way women work together, the interviewed stress the distinction between the few who has internet access and the many who do not. The relatively few, who are connected, increasingly use the internet to link up, share resources, and network more generally. “It gives me information it allows me to communicate, (.) I use it a lot and I don’t know if I can work without the internet really. You feel you want to die” (#16). However for the majority, the mobile phone is still the most accessible media. Further, it is stressed that for many people the physical meeting or phone bears more weight than email communication. The importance of seeing the other physically in order to build trust and exchange services and advice is thus emphasised as a cultural characteristic. “I think that is our culture, people feel much more when they see somebody physical. (.) you know our ancient thinking,



we still think that we have to be physical. And when you are not physical you are not available” (#2).

In terms of building ICT literacy, it is suggested that the government may play a key role since they represent the biggest ICT consumer and may lead a development towards more online services, which would help advance ICT literacy. This would however need to go hand in hand with other initiatives such as creating affordable access across the country, and a general focus on education, so that the young generation, boys and girls alike, grow up understanding and appreciating the role of technology. It is also stressed that ICT capacitybuilding must be coupled with concrete uses, e.g. promoting entrepreneurship, improving farming practices, making government services more effective etc. since it is in the concrete uses that value is experienced. “ICT should be linked to something, you cant just have ICT alone that is why CEEWA have integrated it with the entrepreneurship movement and it has really worked, this combination” (#12).

In sum, ICT capacitybuilding is stressed as crucial amongst practically all the actors I spoke to in Kampala, and is presented a resource which has already developed considerably over the past years. Generally speaking, capacitybuilding has evolved from basic ICT training (how to use a computer, email, word processing, internet etc.), to use of new collaborative tools, wikis blogs, podcast, etc. to share experiences and best-practices, as demonstrated with BROSDIs citizen journalism project. With regard to WOUGNET, their role in terms of ICT capacitybuilding appear to be more at policy level and less in terms of concrete training targeting their member organisations. This is somewhat contradictory to the need expressed by their members in the mid-term evaluation from 2006/2007, however it is in line with their strategic aim of prioritising the implementation of role-model projects.

## **Conclusion**

Summing up on the role which ICT has played for women in Uganda with regard to improved livelihood and participation in public life is not an easy task. On the one hand, the contextual constraints are immense given the lack of

infrastructure and the very small percentage of people and organizations that have access to ICTs. Also there is very little documentation of progress which may be directly attributed to ICT use. On the other hand, there are organisations, such as the ones presented in this material, who have made considerably progress in illustrating how various ICT platforms may be put at the service of people. A project like the EAAI project in Apac, or BROSDIs CELAC project, are both examples that impress by the way ICT – in old as well as new forms – is used and combined to facilitate communication and sharing of experiences, thereby improving the farmers ability to access information, to debate and to make decisions concerning their livelihood. They may affect relatively few people, but the impression that last after having visited and talked to women and men in Apac and Kampala is that for the people involved it has made a difference. It has facilitated structures of debate and exchange, it has increased information access amongst the rural farmers, and it is slowly enhancing the womens ability to control their own economic resources, to associate, to seek relevant information and to speak their mind. As such, there are indicators of women gradually reclaiming decision-making power both in relation to the private household and in relation to public political life. Further, as women increasingly appear as public voices, issues that were previously dealt with in the private sphere, e.g. domestic violence and lack of womens rights, increasingly become matters of public concern.

In relation to WOUGNET and their role vis a vis the two cases, a few points are worth emphasising. First, the material indicate that WOUGNET is a recognised resource centre on combined gender and ICT advocacy, especially around Kampala, and especially in relation to their mailing list, which is one of the few common exchanges on this topic. Second, they have played an important role in terms of raising ICT awareness and appreciation amongst womens organisations in Kampala, most notably from 2000 to 2003. Third, they have played a key role in relation to ICT policy both nationally and internationally, whereas their role in terms of ICT capacitybuilding amongst womens groups in Uganda is relatively limited. With regard to their rural project in Apac, this has been strong on local collaboration, use of existing structures in

the community, and application and combination of various media platforms to create new spaces for participation and sharing. It has however had a more limited focus on developing these new spaces. As such the project is more focused on “repacking and delivering information” through various ICTs, than to explore and strengthen the social practices, whereby farmers use information to improve production, share experiences, negotiate market prices etc. In Apac, the creation of “information channels” were given first priority, which is somewhat understandable given the prior situation.

In relation to the various ICT platforms used in Apac and Kampala, there are some essential differences. In the Apac project focus is on the combined use of radio and mobile phones, which are used to generate and communicate content within the community. The focus on these media, and not the internet, is primarily due to their local availability, relatively low cost, and audio form. Internet access is limited to a few access points and primarily used by KIC staff and the local organisations to source information, which is then “repackaged” before being communicated via the other media platforms. The case presents a division of labour between the various ICTs, with internet playing a less important role, and conventional media performing many of the functionalities, which is often ascribed to internet. In fact, some of the terminology applied to web 2.0, such as user-generated content, collaboration, and information sharing, could easily be applied to the communicative space, which radio and mobile phone have facilitated in Apac. In the Kampala study, internet usage play a more dominant role, since many of the people and organisations spoken to have internet access and use it on a regular basis. This also implies a higher level of literacy compared to Apac. Internet is primarily used to collect, present and communicate information, including experiences and best practices, in written or oral (podcast) form. Another role played by the internet is to provide visibility for smaller organisations / enterprises, and to facilitate public debate via thematic mailing lists. As with the Apac project, the internet is used in combination with other media, such as notice boards, radio, and mobile phones, which are accessible to a broader audience. Linking back to the concept of media diffusion, the case illustrates how old and new media platforms are used

to complement one another, remixing some of the roles that are often assigned to new vis a vis conventional media. The study thus points to the multiple ways in which various platforms may be combined, even within a context of relatively limited ICT access.

Regarding the analytical framework, and its categories of access, freedoms and resources (capacitybuilding), this provided a useful but also somewhat abstract reference for the analysis. The notions of access and resources to communicate seemed relevant when discussing ICT usage from a public sphere perspective, thus emphasising the potential empowering role of technology with regard to communication, decision making and participation in public life. The category of freedoms was important given a context where gender based inequality limits womens exercise of civil and political rights, e.g. their ability to speak at meetings, organise, control economic resources, and be politically active. Finally, in relation to structures of public and private, there was some indication of change, mostly in terms of women increasingly having a public appearance facilitated by ICT usage. The examples include women speaking publicly at community meetings and in radio shows, online exposure of micro enterprises, and policy advocacy targeting gender and ICT policies. I would be hesitant to draw strong conclusion on the changing public / private dynamics, based on the material; however the above examples point to increased participation in public life by women in Uganda. Summing up on the initial question concerning the role of ICT for improved livelihood and participation in public life for women in Uganda, the answer is that ICT *has* played a role for local empowerment; however the facilitation of new spaces for conversations and dialogue has been just as important as the technology itself.

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## **APPENDIX A: PRIMARY DATA – INTERVIEW**

Staff of WOUGNET (#1, #2, #3, #4, #5, #6)

Representatives of I-Network, WOUGNET partner (#7, #8)

Representative of Busoga Rural Open Source and Development Initiative (BROSDI), WOUGNET partner (#9)

Representative of Ntulume Village Women's Development Association / NVIWODA, WOUGNET member (#10)

Representatives of Counsel for economic empowerment for women of Africa, Uganda chapter / CEEWA-U, WOUGNET member (#11, #12)

Representative of Women's International Cross Cultural Exchange/Isis-WICCE, WOUGNET member (#13)

Representative of East African Sub-regional Support Initiative for the Advancement of Women/EASSI, WOUGNET member (#14)

Representative of St. Bruno Doll Making Group, WOUGNET member (#15)

Representative of Mamas Group, former WOUGNET/Apac staff (#16)

Staff at Kubera Information Centre / KIC (#17, #18)

Representative of Volunteer Efforts for Development Concerns (#19)

Agricultural Officer, Apac (#20)

Representative of Women and Children Advocacy Network (#21)

Representatives of St. Luke Farmers Group (# 22, #23, #24).

Representatives of Radio Apac (#25, #26)

Administrative officer, Apac (#27)

Representative of International Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries/ HIVOS (#28)

Journalist from Kampala visiting the Apac project (#29) Notes only.



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The Centre for Internet Research was established in September 2000 with the aim of encouraging research in the social and cultural implications and functions of the internet. More information about the centre and its activities can be obtained from [www.cfi.au.dk](http://www.cfi.au.dk).

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