

# ICT Update

a current awareness bulletin for ACP agriculture

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Women pick up the video camera to tackle the gender imbalance in ICTs

Text messages help women in Guatemala to report violence committed against them

ICTs improve women entrepreneurs' marketing skills in Zimbabwe



## ICT and women's empowerment

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ICT Update



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# Guest Editor

## Perception and attitude

Women's access to ICTs has grown during the last decade. However, there remains a need to address affordability and the perception and attitude towards the use of ICTs by women.

In the decade since *ICT Update* published an issue on gender and ICTs in 2002, there has been tremendous change in the availability of and access to ICTs. By 2002, it was already clear that ICTs can transform activities in support of improved agriculture and rural development.

Since 2002, the growth of the telecommunication sector worldwide has been explosive. For example, as reported by eTransform Africa, in 2000 there were fewer than 20 million fixed telephone lines across Africa and a waiting list of a further 3.5 million. With the growth of mobile networks

outreach to the primary target audience – women and women organizations in Uganda. Fast forward to 2012, and the range of ICTs has broadened and mobile phones are one of the key ICTs enabling a variety of activities including information alerts and farming tips via SMS, telephone call-ins into radio programmes, and SMS-based advocacy campaigns during the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence.

### Ownership

So the question now is whether there is still a need to focus on the issue of women and ICTs. WOUNET's own experience in addressing the access and utilisation of ICT services in current times can provide us with some answers. In 2011, with support from the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) branch office in Uganda, WOUNET trained three Farmer Field Schools (FFS) in northern Uganda to access market prices using a combination of ICTs – the mobile phone, radio and the use of a Rural Information Centre. Groups of 25 farmers composed of women, youth and men from each of these FFS participated in these trainings.

In the remote villages of Amuru and Anaka, mobile phones are a means of linking up with friends and loved ones. Occasionally the phone is used to call the local radio talk shows to send greetings or to contribute to on-air topical discussions. When WOUNET asked local farmer Angelina if she had ever used a phone, she said 'Yes, I use it to call my relatives and friends sometimes.' Did she own it? 'No', she said, 'it is my husband's phone. When I need to use it, I ask him for it.' So, there is still a problem with ownership, especially in remote villages.

Research ICT Africa (RIA) data from 2007 revealed that in 11 of 16 African countries in their survey, men and women with similar incomes, education and employment status were equally likely to own a mobile phone. In fact, in South Africa and Mozambique,

### *While men spend more on communications than women, women's expenditure on communications is a greater share of the women's income*

over the years, there are now over 500 million mobile subscriptions in Africa in 2012.

This means that more people have access to a mobile phone than to clean water, a bank account or electricity. Similar trends have taken root in the Caribbean and the Pacific where at least 98% of the population is covered by a mobile cellular network, as reported by the World Bank and the International Telecommunication Union.

The growth in accessibility of ICTs, and mobile phones in particular, has led to a plethora of services and applications: for example, for financial services in Kenya, for agricultural market information services in Ghana, for the electronic filing of taxes in South Africa and for sensor-based irrigation systems in Egypt. In 2002, the primary ICTs in use by the Women of Uganda Network (WOUNET), which aim is to promote and support the use of ICTs by women in Uganda, were email and the web, which limited the

women were more likely to own a mobile phone, and only in Senegal and Tanzania were women less likely to own a phone. In all cases, however, the survey found that while men spend more on communications than women, women's expenditure on communications was a greater share of their income. Furthermore, taking into account factors such as age, education, income, rural area, status of employment, membership of a social network and country differences, the RIA survey showed women have less knowledge of the internet and used it less, and fewer women have an email address. The survey also revealed that radio – the primary source of information among low-income and rural populations – is listened to by more men than women.

### Ease of use

During one of WOUNET's training sessions for women farmers, one participant called Christine was told, 'with ICT knowledge you will be able to get your rice to the market very quickly!' She remained reluctant to post the information about her rice on the public notice board set up for the project, however, despite the encouragement. This stresses the importance of perception, attitude and change in addressing the relevance and affordability of ICTs in a gender sensitive manner.

In other words, it is indeed necessary to focus on the issue of women and ICTs and understand people's reasons for deciding to use ICTs, since this has been shown to be different by gender. Where men's use of technology was reported in 2000 to be largely influenced by their perception of usefulness, women tended to be swayed by perceptions of the technology's ease of use. How has this situation changed, now that there is increased awareness of how to use ICTs and improved user-friendliness? What are the implications for software and hardware developers and innovators as they seek to meet the ICT needs of both men and women?

The situation with rural and low-income women in ACP countries is particularly interesting. While technology options have changed significantly over the decade, to a point where we now have a proliferation of mobile phones, Web 2.0 and so on, the key concerns and special needs for rural and low-income

women have not changed as dramatically. In 2012, the GSMA mWomen Programme released a research report, *Striving and Surviving: Exploring the Lives of Women at the Base of the Pyramid*. More than 2,500 women took part in this research from four countries – Egypt and Uganda from Africa, Papua New Guinea from the Pacific and India from Asia.

### Value-for-money

The key research findings, while primarily focused on mobile phone use, are being used to illustrate special needs for ICT access and use by rural women or bottom of the pyramid women living on less than two dollars a day. It first concludes that ICT services and applications need to be accessible and relevant to these women's daily lives. This means SMS services should have a clear value-for-money proposition, as only 37% of the women had used SMS compared to 77% that had made a phone call. Mobile health (and other) applications will need to be well integrated into these women's daily lives in order to generate uptake. Of the 84% of women who were in need of better healthcare information, less than half of these were interested in receiving this information via their mobile phones.

The second conclusion is that a lack of or limited ICT literacy skills hampers the use of ICT services and applications. About a quarter of the women interviewed were not interested in owning phones because they did not know how to use them. About a



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quarter of the women did know of mobile internet, however. Only 2% of these women had ever used mobile internet, so this constrains the potential use of mobile internet-based services. But there is also a need to integrate gender issues into ICT services and programmes so as to promote equitable access for men and women in the community. As has also been highlighted by studies on ICTs and violence against women, over 80% of married women reported that their husbands were very suspicious of them because they owned mobile phones.

So the availability and access of ICTs have grown, as have their services and applications, there remains need to address fundamental issues related to access in terms of infrastructure, relevance and affordability, along with perception and attitude towards the use of ICTs by women in rural communities. There is also a continued need for policy advocacy to ensure gender equitable access to ICTs. ◀



The growth in availability and accessibility of ICTs, and mobile phones in particular, has led to a plethora of services and applications that are useful for women. There remains a need to address fundamental issues related to ownership, ICT literacy skills, affordability and value-for-money.

**M**argaret Wanjiku Mwangi has been a regular user of the Ng'arua Maarifa ICT Centre in the rural county of Laikipia in Kenya since it was inaugurated seven years ago. A farmer, she has acquired computer skills free of charge and regularly borrows books and magazines to discover new ideas to improve yield productivity. For example, she learnt how to preserve various vegetable seeds for planting to enhance food security. It was also at this rural ICT Centre, an initiative of the Arid Lands Information Network (ALIN), that she came up with the idea of making a kitchen garden to grow vegetables in

afraid to come to the Maarifa Centre to ask questions and use its services,' she says. Their hesitancy can be explained by several factors, such as illiteracy, being preoccupied with domestic chores, techno-phobia and uncooperative husbands.

So economic and capacity restrictions are not the only matters affecting women's access to ICTs. Especially in rural areas, access to ICTs is not equal for men and women. Depending on the social status of a family, electronic gadgets are generally the preserve of men. When a family or a person in a family owns a mobile phone or another electronic gadget, it

make sure that women are equally represented. 'We try to sensitize men to the issue so they will allow women to become proactive in exploring the use of ICTs to solve their problems,' Kipsang' says. 'We have initiated training sessions targeting all the community members and specifically women. During these sessions, we introduce them to initiatives about online marketing skills, for example, where we train farmers to check market prices from a web-based portal using the internet and mobile phones.'

The portal is called Sokopepe, which loosely translated into Swahili means 'online market' ([www.sokopepe.co.ke](http://www.sokopepe.co.ke)).

# Raising awareness

Two projects, one in Kenya and one in Burkina Faso, show that female farmers have better access to ICTs and are using them to improve their livelihoods. However, there is still a gender digital divide, and some profound problems are preventing women from benefiting from ICTs.

the dry season, and to make fruit juices at home to sell at special occasions and social gatherings.

Mwangi has also attended market access trainings at the ICT Centre, where she has learnt to use her mobile phone and the internet to check market prices. 'Whenever my crops are ready,' she says, 'I use my mobile phone to check market prices in major towns so that I can learn about the current market situation. I share the information with neighbours, and we are no longer exploited by middle men.'

Rural women in Africa, like Margaret Wanjiku Mwangi, are getting better access to ICTs and increasingly making use of it. However, a huge part of the rural female population is still excluded. Mwangi sees this in her surroundings. 'I know women who are

is always the male who controls its access and use. Women therefore face the challenge of having to rely on men to access ICT equipment.

## Proactive

Bett Kipsang', field officer at the Ng'arua Maarifa Centre, witnesses the daily progress of women using ICTs, but also sees how difficult it is to reach female farmers who still are lagging behind in terms of ICT development. He personally has witnessed a case where one woman came to the Maarifa Centre to process a Personal Identification Number (PIN), which is required by the government for tax collection. The woman was accompanied by her husband, and Kipsang' could hear him nagging that she had not informed him of 'what she was doing on the computer'. The woman was so distressed she had to leave before her PIN certificate could be processed. She came back alone the next day to collect her PIN.

Cases like this strengthen Kipsang' to go ahead with projects and services that will help women access ICTs. The Ng'arua Maarifa Centre organises training sessions and workshops to

It was developed by ALIN, for use by local farmers to access market information via the Short Message Service (SMS). The internet portal has been customised to receive SMS and give feedback on the prices of commodities as inquired by the farmers and buyers. The initiative enables farmers to upload their offers online and receive market information from different market centres in order to make informed decisions on where to sell their produce. This marketing system has helped rural women find prices and also discover the location of prospective buyers. 'A farmer in the rural areas of Sipili,' Kipsang' explains, 'can be connected to a customer 300 miles away in the lavish capital city of Nairobi. This has enabled rural women to make use of ICT services to market their produce.'

## Field days

It is not easy, however, to get women to join the training sessions and workshops so they can learn how to use the technology. The Maarifa Centre has learnt over the years that it is easier to reach women by organising

**Bett Kipsang'** ([ngaruamaarifa@alin.net](mailto:ngaruamaarifa@alin.net)) is field officer for the Arid Lands Information Network (ALIN) at the Ng'arua Maarifa Centre in the Laikipia County in Kenya.

**Noelie Marceline Ouedraogo** ([ouednoelie@gmail.com](mailto:ouednoelie@gmail.com)) is founder and head coordinator of the Songtaaba Association.



*'I use my mobile phone now to check market prices in major towns so I can learn about the current market situation'*

field days than by organising workshops at the centre itself, as women are often confined to domestic chores in homes.

The Maarifa Centre therefore organises monthly field days and outreach activities targeting women in remote villages. The activities include exhibitions and demonstrations of best practices in farming, water harvesting and other relevant farming activities, like how to use ICTs. After these visits, women are more likely to take the step of visiting the centre.

Different approaches are needed to get women to use ICTs. Raising awareness is important to make women realize what the benefits of using ICTs are. Most of the women are either illiterate or semi-literate, though, which makes it difficult for them to use ICTs in the first place, and all more so when services are offered in foreign

languages like English. The Maarifa Centre uses the literate members of the women's groups to read and explain the information to the others during meetings.

Videos repackaged in local languages are screened from projectors and iPods introduce new ideas in farming methods, marketing skills and disease control measures. 'The difference in the approach to rural women is the "friendliness" and unsophistication of the ICT equipment to be used by women,' says Kipsang'. And it has helped to increase the number of women to make use of the services of the centre. On average 55 people visit the Maarifa Centre on daily basis. Now about 30% of the visitors are women.

#### **Sales skills**

The Songtaaba Women's Association, an organisation that manufactures shea

butter skincare products in Burkina Faso, uses the same unsophisticated approach to teach rural women how to use ICTs in the domestic shea butter sector. The production of shea butter has been a women-driven activity in Burkina Faso for decades. It is produced with the shea fruit that grows wild in the West African savannah. However, ICTs were introduced in 2005 and have changed the lives of shea butter producers ever since, says Songtaaba's manager Noelie Marceline Ouedraogo. 'We literally dismantled a computer with the help of a trainer to show how it works and what is inside. This is important to give women more confidence to use computers and to learn about computer maintenance and data processing.'

Songtaaba produces two types of butter: the traditional one, Karipur, and the organic one, Karibio. It also makes shea butter soap and aromatic spices, another traditional activity of women in Burkina Faso. The association provides more than 3,100 women in 11 villages with jobs, and incomes have risen dramatically after the introduction of ICTs. The development of their own

In Kenya and in Burkina Faso two projects that focus on empowering rural women by using ICTs show that female farmers improve their livelihood significantly if they get better access to ICTs and learn the skills of using them. However, their experiences also show that there is still a gender digital divide with profound problems to let women benefit from ICTs.

## Related links

### The N'garua Maarifa Centre

is one of the 12 ICT centres established by the regional NGO Arid Lands Information Network (ALIN).

It runs two blogs. One of them is a platform for citizen journalism trainees.

→ [www.alin.net](http://www.alin.net)

→ <http://ngaruamaarifa.blogspot.com/>

→ <http://laikipiaruralvoices.blogspot.com/>

### Songtaaba Association

→ [www.songtaaba.net/](http://www.songtaaba.net/)

Video (French) about the work of Songtaaba Association

→ [www.dailymotion.com/video/x30y72\\_association-song-taaba\\_news](http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x30y72_association-song-taaba_news)



website helped tremendously as well, as it enabled them to improve their marketing and sales skills. The women now update and manage the website and incoming emails themselves. The website was important to show product information and prices to a broad audience and potential buyers of Songtaaba's products. Products can be ordered by sending an email, so communication with international customers, such as distributors in Canada and France for the North American and European markets, has become much more efficient and reliable. The result was that within two years after implementing ICTs, orders went up by almost 70% and have continued rising ever since.

## Visibility

The Songtaaba Women's Association invested in telecentres in the villages where it operates. The telecentres are managed by rural women trained by Songtaaba, Ouedraogo explains. 'In these centres, women can access telephones, computers and the internet for business purposes, and access information about fairs and regional and international meetings to promote shea butter products,' says Ouedraogo.

The success of the shea butter group does not only rely on improved marketing and visibility on the internet, but also on the use of cell phones for internal communication. Women in each village share a cell phone to communicate with the head office in the

capital, Ouagadougou. Another important ICT tool the women use is GPS to locate organic shea kernels, sesame seeds and groundnut. 'To ensure we meet the standards for organic certification we have to map exactly which trees we use,' says Ouedraogo. 'Therefore, the women have learnt to position and code shea trees by making use of GPS systems on the cell phone and record the data.' This guarantees a better price and income for the women.

## Women's need

Projects like the Songtaaba Association and the Ng'arua Maarifa Centre have been effective vehicles for helping women acquire ICT literacy skills, numeracy skills and various information resources to help them start and build their own businesses, secure their livelihoods, and become socially and politically active.

However, Kipsang' and Ouedraogo both agree that it is also up to software developers and the ICT sector, together with innovators and investors, to be more aware of women's special ICT interests and needs. 'If they focus more on the women and their special needs, for example to assist them in home economics, home management, market access and information on health, nutrition and care, women will be more enthusiastic when it comes to using ICTs,' Kipsang' says. 'Women shoulder a chunk of family responsibilities, so if ICT services were made affordable they would use ICTs to solve most of their daily challenges.' ◀

## Linking rural radio to female farmers

Particularly in rural areas in sub-Saharan Africa, radio is often the only mass medium available, and most households have access to a receiver. However, a study in Benin shows that although rice processors are mostly women, the majority who listen to rural radio agricultural news broadcasting are men rice processors. It also concluded that about 67% of the women rice processors had their own radio set, compared to 87% of the men. The results of this study, *Linking farmers' access to rural radio, gender and livelihoods*, were presented during the

third IAALD Africa Chapter Conference in May 2012 on e-Agriculture. According to the researchers Zossou et al. (2012), this bias between women and men can be explained by the fact that men own more radios than women. Moreover, women work more in rural areas than men. In addition to farming activities, women manage many domestic activities. The timing of the broadcasts during the day or early evening is poor, especially for the women, as they are busy working during those hours.

Read the study: <http://goo.gl/WoukJ>

# Women, video and rural development

In a rural village in the Dominican Republic, women are using video cameras to fight against the community's ICT gender imbalance.

## Women and ICTs

Over the last 15 years, the Center for a Rural Alternative (CAREL) has been helping Dominican villagers create their own future by facilitating access to appropriate technologies. Seeking to rectify the ICT gender imbalance, CAREL designed a one-year media project targeting teenage girls and young women, all residents of El Limón de Ocoa – a marginal, semi-isolated farming community of 350 people located in the mountains in the south-west of the Dominican Republic. The project is called *Visión Hembra* (Female Vision).

An editing station in an unused room of the Telecentre became 'girlspace': boys could not enter without permission! Professional videographers from the nearby provincial capital Ocoa and the capital Santo Domingo were brought in to teach the young women how to use cameras and how to conduct interviews. The girls shot hours of footage. They selected the best clips and edited them to create short videos, which were proudly presented to the community.

In November 2011, a local man died, leaving a widow, two disabled daughters in their early thirties and a 10-year-old granddaughter in abject poverty. The senior members of *Visión Hembra* (ages 18–21) decided to make a documentary about this family, the Minyettys, to raise

awareness of their plight and get them help. They interviewed members of the family and the community, and worked with the Ocoa filmmaker, Ernesto Guerrero, to edit the video. The result was the short documentary *Hoy por tí, mañana por mí* (Today you, tomorrow me). So far, it has raised about US\$600 in cash and material contributions for the Minyetty family, and has helped them get desperately-needed government benefits.

Meanwhile, the younger girls in *Visión Hembra* began to work on a short documentary called *El lavado: antes y despues* (Doing the laundry: before and after). El Limón is about to go from 12 volts of electricity per household to 110 volts – enough to power a washing machine. The 'before' interviews feature local women talking about what it is like to do all their laundry by hand, and how they hope their lives will change when they get a washing machine. The 'after' interviews will take place in 2013, after the women have been machine-washing their laundry for a while.

The *Visión Hembra* participants decided, after their first experiences with video, to work with a professional director and editor to create a substantial work, part documentary, part 'telenovela', a hugely popular form of daily TV drama in Latin America.

Since there were three teen mothers in the group, adolescent pregnancy seemed a natural theme for their 'docunovela'. In 2011, the United Nations Population Fund revealed that the Dominican Republic is the country with the most pregnant adolescents of all Latin America and the Caribbean. Between 67% and 89% of teen mothers abandon school, compared to 14% to 35% of young women who are not teen mothers. The filming commenced with the enthusiastic participation of the community of El Limón.

The first episode was called *Madre Niña, part one* and premiered on May 26, 2012. It is a sensitive, dramatic, at times humorous portrayal of a young girl's leap from childhood to motherhood. But *Madre Niña* also

## Related links

Link to *Madre Niña, part one*:  
→ <http://goo.gl/AhtoK>

Link to CAREL's official website:  
→ [www.el-limon.org/](http://www.el-limon.org/)

includes short interviews with three real-life teen mothers from El Limón.

It has been shown on Ocoa community television and presented to enthusiastic audiences in El Limón, Ocoa and a number of nearby villages. It has also attracted the attention of the Dominican Minister of Women's Affairs, who is considering using it in a campaign to reduce teen pregnancy. CAREL is now in the process of fundraising for the four remaining episodes of *Madre Niña*.

For now, *Visión Hembra* focuses on producing videos related to young women's lives, which could potentially have a far-reaching impact. In the long term, *Visión Hembra* could evolve into an ongoing skills-based training programme where young women will not only learn, but also teach and produce. Their students could be anyone, regardless of gender or age. Much of the teaching and leadership will come from *Visión Hembra*'s first participants: the class of 2011–2012.

These young women in rural El Limón de Ocoa gained experience and confidence in using a camera, conducting interviews and acting. Most of them also gained skills in editing, scriptwriting and publicity. And the ICT gender imbalance in the community was tackled as well. The boys have gained respect for the girls, and the girls are more comfortable using the main computer lab, though it remains primarily a male stronghold. This is not easy to rectify, given the relative freedom of boys versus girls in rural Dominican society. But the girls are moving forward towards a more active role in the telecentre and in the community. ◀

Young women used video cameras to fight against the ICT gender imbalance in the rural community of El Limón, Dominican Republic. They gained experience and confidence in using cameras, conducting interviews and acting. Most of them also gained skills in editing, scriptwriting and publicity.



CENTRO ALTERNATIVO RURAL EL LIMÓN / WWW.EL-LIMON.ORG

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JORGE LOPEZ / REUTERS

# Texting against abuse and violence

A text message-based helpline helps women in Guatemala to prevent and report physical and sexual abuse. Text messages are not only cheap but also much less intimidating for victims of violence in their delicate search for help.

## Women and ICTs

**T**ext-message services on cell phones are the perfect tool to give women a voice to discuss and report social problems, like physical, sexual and emotional abuse, and violence. Women can receive tailored information about where to find medical and emotional help, or how to report violence committed against themselves or against relatives. 'It is much easier for women to passively receive advice and

reflect on it on their own time, than it is for them to make a phone call,' says Kimberly Bautista, who launched the initiative Texting Peace in Guatemala.

'And likewise,' she continues, 'it is much less intimidating for them to send us a simple text message with a request for a reference or to advocate on their behalf, than to pick up the phone and potentially put their identity and vulnerability on the line. Furthermore, text messaging is comparatively much more economically viable and therefore much more accessible for low-income women.'

Texting Peace evolved out of the award-winning documentary *Justice for my Sister* that director and producer Bautista made to explore how the sister of a murdered woman in Guatemala channels the pain from the traumatic

loss and uses it to think about gender power dynamics in her own life. 'The text message-based helpline we operate now is a way for the audiences that saw the documentary to stay in touch after the screenings. Some women have actually left their violent situations after watching the film,' says Bautista.

## Non-invasive

The stigma around violence against women tends to be normalized, not only in Guatemala but in many parts in the world. On some profound level, men who are abusers and women who stay with them know that they are not in an ideal situation. But sometimes, such abuse becomes so normalized that men and women do not question it in their daily lives. Using text messaging is a non-invasive way to continue

Kimberly Bautista is a Los Angeles-based Colombian and Irish-American filmmaker. She was a Princess Grace Award recipient and a Latino Producers Academy Fellow. She produced and directed the documentary film *Justice for my Sister* and is founding member of the Texting Peace initiative. (<http://justiceformysister.com/>)



challenging women to take inventory of their personal attitudes, experiences and actions.

One challenge for texting in Guatemala is the country's high-level of illiteracy. This is why the documentary is an ideal way to reach the masses. At the same time, text messaging is extremely prevalent, according to Bautista. 'While our target audience might not read the newspaper, they do watch television, and they do understand the language of film, and text messaging is one of their foremost means of communicating, getting information and organizing.'

The objective of the initiative is to collect evidence of threats for women who are in extremely abusive

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## *Economic dependence is keeping women in violent relationships*

relationships. Texting Peace also focuses on prevention by sending out SMS blasts – two messages a month and occasionally during campaigns four messages a week – to their audiences with news, inspirational quotes and tips on how to prevent violence.

### **Delicate operation**

Following up on incoming messages is a delicate operation. Women often feel like they have nowhere to turn. In Guatemala, but also in parts of the Caribbean and Africa, there is a sentiment that it does not pay off to report violence, because impunity is rampant. Even if there is evidence and it is known in the community who the perpetrator is, it is very likely that he will not have to pay the consequences. There is a general sentiment of fear because retaliation is also rampant.

'We are very aware of the possible risks that our target audience could face,' says Bautista, 'if they participate in this texting service. When we have our community events and violence prevention workshops, we explain to our audience that it is essential for them to avoid subscribing to this service if they believe that their abusive partner will be monitoring their phone. We encourage them to instead ask a friend, neighbour or community member (such as a church leader) to subscribe on their behalf.'

When Texting Peace receives text messages from women who are not

already on the listserv, they do not automatically add them to the general contact list. Therefore, the women only contact the helpdesk operators when it is safe for them and Texting Peace is not sending them unsolicited text messages when they could be intercepted by their abuser.

### **Communal responsibility**

The text message-based helpline not only encourages women to report violence, but also to foment a sense of communal responsibility. What happens to one woman sets the tone in the community and fosters a sense of empowerment or disempowerment, depending on the outcome of her case. That is why the Texting Peace initiative uses text messages to disrupt the culture of blaming the victim, which perpetuates violence because it silences the victim and justifies the violence.

Justice for my Sister Collective, the organisation behind Texting Peace, is now developing a new campaign for economic independence for women in Guatemala, because it is one of the key things that, outside of power dynamics, threats, and the cycle of violence, economic dependence is keeping women in violent relationships. 'We are currently developing comic book strips that will serve as educational materials to empower women and to educate them about micro-financing,' says Bautista. 'Once we have completed these packets, we will send out a blast message inviting women to send us their home, work or church addresses where we can mail them our packets. In March 2013, we will launch a mini-campaign to blast texts that give tips and references geared towards getting women to consider themselves as viable entrepreneurs.'

### **Operational hours**

The technology used to send and receive messages is Frontline SMS. The data from the cases that the organisation receives will be published on the interactive crowdsourcing map, for which Ushahidi technology is used. Both are open source platforms. From mid-August 2012, free online tools began to be used to send text messages to segments of the listserv. To organize everything well is no mean feat, admits Bautista.

'When we started I had not delegated to the four operators the task of overseeing the system's operations. Part of this was due to funding, and part of this was due to the operators' time

constraints. We had no central office, and we decided it would be best for operators to rotate the computer for three days at a time because the hours of operation were between 3:00 pm and midnight, and it was too risky for our operators to travel home at that time in Guatemala. Holding operational hours at night is very helpful because most of the violence against women occurs in the evenings and at night-time.

So Bautista designated one woman to be the coordinator and supervisor of the service. This will allow her to better systematize the documentation of incoming and outgoing texts. But contact with other organizations and authorities is important too. Texting Peace has held meetings and trainings with the police, public prosecutors and human rights attorney so that they can become more aware of the system. They have distributed maps of all of the subdivisions of the police departments, and directories with all of the phone numbers of the various offices and hospitals throughout the country, which are readily available whenever an audience needs a reference.

Bautista hopes the project will create a template for other organisations abroad to use in their effort to reach underserved populations. The system is already in use by Justice for my Sister's partner organisation, the American-based Survivors Connect, which uses the same technology to empower survivors and grassroots movements against violence, slavery and trafficking. They have launched similar text message-based helplines and hotlines in Cameroon, Ghana and Haiti, as well as several Asian countries. To work together, they can learn from each other's experiences, like how to deal with safety concerns and protocol on responding to messages. ◀

Justice for my Sister Collective collects evidence of threats for women who are in extremely abusive relationships. It also focuses on prevention by sending out SMS blasts to their audiences with news, inspirational quotes and tips on how to prevent violence.



RUDY GRON / WWW.RUDYGRON.COM

# Women's entrepreneurship and ICTs

In Zimbabwe, the cost of cell phone usage remains quite high, but women entrepreneurs have benefited from improved access to mobile communication technology.

## Women and ICTs

With about three quarters of a million inhabitants, Bulawayo is the second city of Zimbabwe, located 439 kilometres southwest of the capital Harare. Agriculture is an important additional source of income for the poor residents in the outskirts of the city, especially for the women who mostly run urban agricultural businesses.

In 2009 SNV, Netherlands Development Organisation, started a DFID-funded programme in partnership with World Vision and in cooperation with the farmer-producer association PMRG for the implementation of a poultry, mushroom and rabbitry commercial production and marketing venture in the suburbs of Bulawayo. This programme coincided with a period of comparative political stability in Zimbabwe, which brought prospects for improved economic performance.

ICTs are playing an increasingly important role in this urban agricultural programme because they help to link the production end of the value chain to the markets. The ICT context prior to 2009 can be characterised as poor, with low

outreach. However, significant improvements since 2009 have given farmers better opportunities. In Zimbabwe, national mobile phone signal coverage in 2009 was just 37%; in 2012 it is 93%. The average cost per minute was US\$0.27; in 2012 it is US\$0.09 per minute. The minimum cost of a cell phone dropped from US\$250 to US\$15, while a SIM card cost US\$200 in 2009, as opposed to US\$2 in 2012.

When the project began, farmers, especially female farmers, had limited ownership of mobile phones, nor did they know how to use cell phone technology efficiently. This has changed rapidly and generated opportunities. The average ownership among women entrepreneurs in the project increased in two years from 64% to 98%. And the proportion of women in leadership positions in sales and marketing at PMRG increased from 25% to 56% to 12 women in total due to better access to ICTs and improved ICT skills.

Two-thirds of the participating 635 farmers in the project are women. They are involved in mushroom, poultry and rabbitry production as a complementary activity that generates high-value products and additional income for the households. In Zimbabwe, women generally run these small urban agricultural businesses. Men are more involved in contracted work further away in the city centre or in neighbouring countries.

The farmers use the internet in telecentres and increasingly on their mobile phones to find market data and potential buyers. Participants are using the internet six times more a week than in 2009 in their effort to find market-related information. However, it should be noted that acquiring market information is still time consuming. In Zimbabwe, there is no software on the market that uses SMS technology to give farmers tailored market information. Farmers now spend much time trying to find the right information. This is a challenge for women as they have to combine the

responsibilities of running a business and a household.

The Zimbabwe Farmers' Union is doing the lion's share of the work. It collects market prices from major agricultural output market sources and distributes them at no cost through weekly emails to subscribers. The union's market information distribution channel is expected to grow in popularity, at which point subscribers will be willing to pay user fees to ensure the service's sustainability. However, without SMS services that give tailored data services to the farmers at affordable prices, Zimbabwe is still lagging behind in this area, especially compared to other African countries such as Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa.

It is up to the private sector and the government to encourage such innovative investments. Zimbabweans have not yet fully embraced the use of technology beyond basic conventional uses. However, as opportunities increase thanks to better infrastructure and mobile phone penetration, and increased use, the special needs and niche markets to solve problems and improve services will soon start to take off in Zimbabwe.

This urban agricultural programme clearly shows that access to mobile communication technology directly improves marketing capabilities. This favours women entrepreneurs in particular. But there are still concerns, the more important of which is cost. The cost of mobile communication in Zimbabwe remains high compared to other countries in the region. This is one impeding factor that prevents women entrepreneurs from fully participating in the market. Data services costs US\$35–US\$50 for 1 gigabyte compared to an average of US\$22 in other regional countries.

If these problems are not solved in the coming years, Zimbabwe will continue to lag behind in the region, but more importantly, the female farmers who have benefited the most from recent improvements will not be able to further develop. ◀

Women entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe improved marketing capabilities through access to cell phone technology thanks to an urban agricultural programme. The cost of mobile communication in Zimbabwe remains high compared to other countries in the region and is one impeding factor that prevents women entrepreneurs from fully participating in the market.



Minenhle Ngwenya (mngwenya@snvworld.org) is senior economic development adviser at SNV – Netherlands Development Organisation in Zimbabwe. This article has been written on the author's personal capacity.

# Be aware of your health

**Text to Change sets up cell phone-based programmes for multiple organisations in Africa and South America on healthcare, well-being and issues related to sexual behaviour and family planning that can be particularly helpful in improving women's awareness.**

## Women and ICTs

To boost mHealth initiatives, Text to Change developed a cell phone platform that can be used by civil society organisations, social enterprises and governmental institutions. The aim is to improve knowledge and awareness of issues related to health, HIV/AIDS prevention, malaria, family planning and multiple sexual partnerships. But it also has extended services to other areas of awareness regarding education and agricultural development. It can send out and receive text messages, MMS, voice and data that participants can use for free.

Text for Change was launched in 2008 and has been used since then in more than a hundred projects for different types of programmes. It offers interactive and incentive-based quizzes to educate, engage and empower people, and programmes that use mobile phones for Health Management Information System purposes, SMS data collection surveys and personalised medicine reminder programmes.

Mobile phone technology is useful for improving knowledge and awareness on health issues, particularly for women in developing countries. They take care of other family members, not only themselves. The use of cell phones cuts across literacy levels and reduces the

difficulty of accessing knowledge and timely information, especially for women.

How does it work? The website [www.texttochange.org](http://www.texttochange.org) gives some examples of how the services can be used. The key characteristic of the mobile platform is that it converses with participants by sending out a question asking them to reply by using a specific keyword related to the question. Text to Change sets up a toll-free short code to make it free of charge for end-users. If the reply is correct, additional information is sent to the cell phone. If wrong, participants receive the correct answer with an explanation. This enables Text to Change to assess the knowledge levels on any health topic and disseminate additional information.

Text to Change focuses predominantly on SMS as it has several advantages: cost-effectiveness, scalability, convenience,

## Related links

- [www.texttochange.org](http://www.texttochange.org)
- <http://formhub.org/>

partner's specific needs and still make sure it is easy for the people who need to fill the forms in.

Partners start testing the forms as soon as they have been designed. Text to Change provides them with the appropriate Android devices for this purpose, which can be anything from a cheap Huawei Android phone to a more expensive Samsung Android tablet computer, depending on the project requirements. Testing the forms is an

## *Mobile phone technology is useful for improving knowledge and awareness of health issues, particularly for women in developing countries*

broad reach and widespread popularity in the developing world. Moreover, all basic phones are able to receive text messages. Text to Change uses Interactive Voice Response services (IVR) to overcome illiteracy barriers. To maintain a high response rate, participants can win prizes during special campaigns, such as airtime, mosquito nets, mobile phones, football jerseys and radios.

Questions are sometimes sent out to tackle misconceptions. 'Do you think a healthy-looking person can have HIV?' is an example. If the response is correct, a message is sent back: 'Well done. Someone who looks healthy may be HIV positive and could infect others. To know you and your partner's status, you should test for HIV together.'

Text to Change has developed and uses formhub as one of the software programs for its service. This is a new initiative by the Modi Research Group at Colombia University in the United States. formhub provides a user-friendly way of designing and filling in complex forms. These forms can have all kinds of questions, from simple yes/no tick boxes to GPS information, images and much more. Text to Change can tailor the form to fit their

opportunity to iron out bugs and ensure that everything works as intended, and it is also a chance to train the people who have to fill in the forms so that they understand all of the technology's different aspects.

Text to Change uses SMS and IVR in one of its projects for better access to family planning services, the primary target group of which is women. SMS and IVR enable the organisation to reach out to women and check with service providers to find out which women are using family planning. The project is being carried out in the central, western and northern parts of Uganda. It is still ongoing, and the response rate has been very high because women tend to respond fast and because voice messages in four local languages were used to cater to a bigger group of women who are unable to read or write but who can easily follow the prompts on a phone.

Such services will not only provide the beneficiaries with an added-value service, but also empower them to participate in information sharing and networking. This can be replicated for projects in agriculture, education or entrepreneurship. ◀

Multiple organisations in Africa and South America can use the two-way SMS services of Text to Change to boost mHealth initiatives. The aim is to improve knowledge and awareness for well-being issues especially on health, HIV/AIDS prevention, malaria, family planning and multiple sexual partnerships.



## Women and ICTs

### Documents

#### Index to measure women's empowerment in agriculture



IFPRI IMAGES / IFPRI TANGANYIKA

The Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index is an innovative tool composed of two sub-indexes. One of these sub-indexes, the five domains of empowerment (5DE) for women measures women's empowerment in agricultural production and community leadership. The Gender Parity sub-index measures the gap between women and men in terms of empowerment in the household. The index was developed by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), USAID, and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHD).

→ <http://goo.gl/iebH4>

#### ICTs' impact on the lives of women

The Swedish Program for ICT in Developing Regions (Spider) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) published Empowering women through ICT, the fourth report in the ICT4D Series, in 2012. From 2007 to early 2011, Spider supported various gender-focused initiatives that sought to uplift women, particularly in the rural regions of the global South. The report offers an analysis of the impact on the lives of the women that participated in the ICT projects.

→ <http://goo.gl/dSRHx>

#### Women's presence in internet governance

Critically Absent: Women's Rights in Internet Governance is a Policy Advocacy Toolkit published in 2012 to increase the presence of women in internet governance. This toolkit addresses issues regarding women's participation in shaping the internet as a democratic space, where women's freedom of speech is respected and valued, and where they can access and develop crucial information. It is published by the Association for Progressive Communications' Women's Networking Support Programme (APC WNNSP).

→ <http://goo.gl/asGvi>

### Web resources

#### Technology Needs Girls

Girls in ICT is a website by ITU (International Telecommunication Union) to encourage girls to start a career in ICTs. The portal provides practical information on scholarship programmes, internships, training opportunities, online networks and other resources. ITU's 'Girls in ICT Day' on the fourth Thursday of every April, was held on 26 April 2012, when ITU launched the Technology Needs Girls campaign. Five nations in Africa held dedicated events in 2012 to celebrate Girls in ICT Day: Mali, Senegal, Nigeria, Ghana and Liberia. These links give a glimpse of what happened.

→ <http://girlsinct.org/>

→ [www.techneedsgirls.org/](http://www.techneedsgirls.org/)

→ <http://goo.gl/miZV1> (a video from Mali)

→ [www.femmes-tic.gouv.sn/](http://www.femmes-tic.gouv.sn/) (Senegal)

→ <http://girlsday.org.ng/home/> (Nigeria)

#### Gender & ICT Blog

The Gender & ICT Blog is the result of the Gender & ICT research programme, hosted at the Internet Interdisciplinary Institute (IN3) in Barcelona, Spain, which investigates the role of gender in the network society from an international perspective. Its aim is to advance the understanding of traditional forms of gender discrimination. This includes highlighting the continued under-representation of women in different areas of ICT education, employment and research.

→ <http://gender-ict.net/wordpress/>

#### Mobile women online community



GSMA WOMEN

mWomen Connect is an online community for everyone who is interested in increasing mobile access to women in the developing world for their socio-economic advancement. The site pulls together research and information and it is the place to look up the answers to immediate and pressing problems and to post your views and learn from others.

→ [www.mwomen.org/](http://www.mwomen.org/)

### Projects

#### Group decision-making by using SMS

The Jokko Initiative is a collaboration between UNICEF and Tostan, an NGO in West Africa with a long-standing emphasis on the inclusion of women, girls and youth to benefit from technological advances. Jokko aims to become a practical, low-cost system to encourage group decision-making in Senegalese villages. The Jokko Initiative makes it possible to communicate with a network of people by simply sending a text message through Jokko's RapidSMS Community Forum. The Jokko Initiative provides a new generation of girls with access to the valuable tools of communication technology and will train them in its applications for community engagement and positive social change.

→ <http://goo.gl/bSyj6>

#### ICTs as catalyst for women empowerment



NECK LOGAN

FemLINKpacific is based in Fiji and focuses on community media initiatives to empower women in the Pacific. It has developed a range of women's media initiatives, such as taking a radio channel, a magazine and a media centre to increase (young) women's access to new and appropriate information, communication technology as well as community media and information materials as a catalyst for empowerment.

→ [www.femlinkpacific.org.fj/](http://www.femlinkpacific.org.fj/)

#### Gender-aware media and communication

Women's Media Watch Jamaica is a civil society organization committed to reducing gender-based violence. It promotes gender equity and gender-aware media and communications. A new project aims to reduce gender-based violence in Jamaica. A key strategy is to increase citizens' awareness of the causes and consequences of this violence and to enhance access to protections available under the law.

→ <http://womensmediawatch.org/>



**Anne Webb** ([anne@grace-network.net](mailto:anne@grace-network.net)) is research coordinator at the Gender Research in Africa and the Middle East into ICTs for Empowerment (GRACE) Network ([www.grace-network.net/](http://www.grace-network.net/)) and co-editor and one of the authors of the book *African Women and ICTs: Investigating Technology, Gender and Empowerment* (ZED Books, 2009)

Neshawy looked at what it takes for women landowners in Ismaïlia, Egypt, to increase their own say in the management of their land. Kazanka Comfort and John Dada's research team explored how rural women in northern Nigeria use cell phones to meet their communication needs. It appears from the research that significant constraints for women are the values and systems normalized by gender inequality and accepted by men in women's lives, and often accepted, or at least adhered to, by the women themselves as well.

by the title, *Changing Selves, Changing Societies*, what it takes is not a matter of specific products or identifying special needs. It is more about identifying barriers, constraints and supports within our societies, communities and ourselves, and finding solutions that take these layers of our realities into account.

**What approach is needed on the ground in rural areas in local ICT initiatives and projects to facilitate ICTs contributing to women's development?**

## ICT in a gender inequality context

### Women and ICTs

**You are one of the editors and authors of the book, *African Women and ICTs: Investigating Technology, Gender and Empowerment*. Can you summarize it?**

→ One important conclusion is that the use of ICTs can contribute to women's equality and empowerment, but for this to happen we need to critically examine, take into account and change a range of commonly held assumptions and contextual factors. How ICT is integrated is influenced by social, cultural and economic circumstances and relations, and therefore also by existing inequalities. We cannot expect these tools, and the changes they bring, to somehow undo long-standing relations of gender inequality, even when equal availability is ensured, unless there are conscious and effective efforts made to remove or change the sources of that gender inequality.

**What are the conditions in rural Africa in which women access ICTs?**

→ Some GRACE researchers have focused on how rural women can benefit from ICTs. For example, a researcher called Saneya

Further exacerbating the situation is the reliance on private and multinational ICT companies seeking to maximize profits. With limited or no public access to phone services, for instance, cellular costs can be a financially punishing option that heightens problems arising from inequalities. Adherence to current free market thinking predominates over a focus on the potential of ICT advances to enhance community resiliency, individual capabilities and sustainable development.

ICT can contribute to women's empowerment and more equitable development and change when the contextual economic and social power relations are recognized, and when these relations are made more equal. Thus, from my perspective ICTs contributing to development and change is both context specific and dependent upon broader socio-economic relations and values.

**Is it not time now to focus in research on the circumstances in which women can benefit from ICT?**

→ GRACE researchers have repeatedly found that availability is assumed to mean access, but often access is more complex than mere availability. Even when ICT is made available, women's social roles, cultural norms and economic position may limit the time and place, and amount of use they can claim, even when it is highly apparent to women how they can benefit from ICTs. My sense is that a limitation of the focus on women's exclusion is a decontextualized emphasis on 'access' and 'use', for example in the sense of not fully recognising the issue and complexities of inequality.

In our forthcoming book, the researchers write about their understanding of what works, as shown by their research: what it takes for women to benefit from integrating ICT into their visions for themselves, their families and their communities. As indicated

→ What we found particularly effective in understanding if and how ICTs can contribute to women improving their lives was centring the research inquiries around the women research participants and their visions for themselves and aspects of their societies, while bringing into focus what

*ICTs can contribute to women's equality when contextual economic and social power relations are recognised*

they expected from ICT use, what their actual experiences with ICT were, and how the use of ICT could contribute to the fulfilment of these visions. This involves the women becoming self-conscious of their own intentions and the barriers they experience within themselves and within their societies, while also increasingly recognizing their own capabilities and agency. At the same time, we took into account that women would have 'adapted' what they think of as realities and possibilities to the norms and images of their specific contexts.

Perhaps because of the many layers of reflection and analysis involved, this approach used by GRACE brought to the fore what is needed and what works in terms of ICTs contributing to women enhancing their capacities and taking their place in the process of building more sustainable communities. The potential of ICTs to contribute to human-centred, equitable and sustainable development becomes apparent through its intentional application to reducing current socio-economic, cultural and political inequalities. ◀

How ICTs contribute to development and change is both context specific and dependent upon broader socio-economic relations and values.





## Connecting entrepreneurs in rural areas

A high-quality and reliable broadband connection for small, remote businesses is still a problem in large parts of Zambia. Two companies, SkyeVine and Realtime Zambia, are now taking advantage of a gap in the market and want to connect entrepreneurs in rural areas – such as lodges, mines and farms – with VSAT (Very Small Aperture Terminal) connectivity.

The VSAT connectivity works with a two-way satellite ground station and has a dish antenna that is smaller than three metres, designed for home and business use. The station accesses satellites in geosynchronous orbit and relays data from small remote earth terminals.

SkyeVine provides ubiquitous, prepaid, unshaped internet coverage throughout sub-Saharan Africa governed by a pricing model based on use. The company uses the New Dawn geostationary satellite infrastructure to ensure seamless coverage with a 90 cm subscriber terminal. This internet gateway and teleport equipment is used to provide Africa-to-Africa connectivity.

The partnership between Realtime Zambia, a local internet provider, and SkyeVine has opened a niche market with a service that is unavailable through any other vendor. Demand for high-quality broadband in remote locations will continue to drive service delivery, they believe.

→ Read the original articles: <http://goo.gl/2MQFa> and <http://goo.gl/WCWrb>

## Maximizing mobile

The World Bank and infoDev, its technology entrepreneurship and innovation programme, have released a report on the consequences for development of the emerging 'app economy', especially in agriculture, health, financial services and government, and how it is changing approaches to entrepreneurship and employment.

The full title is *Information and Communications for Development 2012: Maximizing Mobile*, the third report in the World Bank's series on Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for Development. It states that around three-

quarters of the world's inhabitants now have access to a mobile phone. The number of mobile subscriptions in use worldwide, both pre-paid and with contracts, has grown from 1 billion in 2000 to over 6 billion. Five billion of those live in developing countries. It suggests that the number will soon exceed the human population thanks to ownership of multiple subscriptions, which are becoming increasingly common.

It also states that more than 30 billion mobile applications were downloaded in 2011 and says that this software extends the capabilities of phones to become mobile wallets, navigational aids and price comparison tools. The World Bank and infoDev are optimistic

## Gmail through SMS

Google's Gmail created a new mobile service called Gmail SMS that is available in Ghana, Nigeria and Kenya. People can use Gmail SMS to send and receive emails as SMS messages using the cell phone without necessarily having to use an internet connection, like WIFI or 3G. Google is hoping this service will attract more Gmail users in Africa. Gmail SMS is therefore useful for the many people who do not have an internet connection on their cell phones or computers to receive and send emails. Gmail SMS works on any phone, including those that only support voice and SMS. Users can not only receive but also write new emails as SMSes and send them to any email address by using commands such as MORE, PAUSE and RESUME. The service can be activated through a simple setting on the Gmail account that can be found under your profile at the top of the page.

→ Read the Google press release: <http://goo.gl/fUVNM>



about developments in developing countries, where citizens are increasingly using mobile phones and downloading apps to enhance their lifestyles, while governments are increasingly using them to improve service delivery and citizen feedback mechanisms.

The challenge is to enable people, businesses and governments in developing countries to develop their own locally relevant mobile applications. The World Bank has established five mobile innovation laboratories in Kenya, South Africa, Armenia, Vietnam and Pakistan with funding from Finland to develop locally relevant apps.

→ Read the full report on <http://goo.gl/6RhuW>

## Data recovery for handsets



CAMILLO RUEDA LÓPEZ / WWW.KOZUMEL.INFO

Data that is lost on mobile devices can be a big problem, especially for businesses, organisations and individuals. The Nairobi-based East Africa Data Handlers unveiled in July 2012 their new software, designed to recover lost data on mobile devices caused by system failures, formatting, power surges, accidentally

deleted files and cdata corrupted by viruses. The software is capable of retrieving information lost as long as five years, from almost all types of handsets. Android, iPhone, and Blackberry mobile devices can recover data including SMS, MMS, email, passwords, browser bookmarks, cookies, contacts, blue tooth pairings, memos and location caches. However, that comes at a cost that not all Africans can afford to pay. The minimum cost for the data recovery service is KSh6,500 (US\$77).

→ Visit the website: [www.datarecovery.co.ke/](http://www.datarecovery.co.ke/)

→ Read the original article: <http://goo.gl/IloTk>

## Mobile web atlas



WWW.MHEALTHAFRICA.COM

When it comes to growth in mobile web browsing, few regions in the world can compare with Africa. Therefore, the Norwegian company Opera Software launched the webpage Africa's mobile web atlas. Their Opera Mini browser is the world's most popular mobile browser and they took in June 2012 a detailed

look at Africa's use of mobile websites. One of the conclusions is that across Africa, data growth seems to outpace page-view growth. This fact suggests that Africans are browsing larger pages and most likely, using richer, more advanced websites.

Another interesting new informative website is dedicated to promoting mobile technologies applied to healthcare, called mHealth Africa. The idea was developed to become a portal with information about projects, documents and apps regarding mHealth in Africa. The first episode features, WinSenga in Uganda, Cell-Life in South-Africa, and MedAfrica in Kenya. On the website, there are two very interesting and catchy infographics: one about the innovation centres in Africa, the other one about the African cell phone market.

→ Visit [www.mhealthafrica.com/](http://www.mhealthafrica.com/) and <http://goo.gl/LW3Bq>

## Narrowing the digital divide

The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) released a new report about the opportunities of expanding broadband connectivity in Latin America and the Caribbean. The conclusion is that the region still lags behind the world's most advanced nations in terms of coverage, access and adoption of ICT services delivered through fast networks.

The report is titled *Bridging Gaps, Building Opportunities: Broadband as a Catalyst for Economic Growth and Social Progress in Latin America and the Caribbean*. It includes a common position statement with recommendations on how to accelerate the deployment and use of fixed and mobile broadband services in the region. It cites an IDB study that found that a 10 percentage point increase in broadband penetration in the region could boost gross domestic product by an average 3.2 percent and raise productivity by 2.6 percent.

Improved broadband connectivity and ICT services are in particular important for small and medium-sized companies, but it also provides citizens access to more efficient government services, educational opportunities and healthcare, especially for people in remote areas or in underserved segments of the population, the report states.

The Bahamas are ranked last in the Western Hemisphere for mobile broadband internet penetration, even below the poorest country in the region, Haiti. In fixed broadband Internet lines, it is Jamaica and the Dominican Republic that are lagging behind. The IDB report was published ahead of a meeting of Caribbean Telecommunication officials to discuss the need to develop the ICT sector to be able to meet the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals by 2015. IDB announced at the meeting that there would be further funding for ICT projects in the region. The funding would facilitate wider adoption and deployment of ICT in small and medium-size enterprises.

→ Link to IDB report <http://goo.gl/CXJ5u>

→ Related articles <http://goo.gl/n5F3D> <http://goo.gl/f7inZ>



DIGITAL DEMOCRACY'S PHOTOS TEAM

**1.8** billion mobile handsets were sold in 2011; that's more than all the PCs that were used around the world in 2011. <http://goo.gl/XLP08>

**20** % of households in developing countries had internet access in 2011, compared to 70% in developed countries. <http://goo.gl/vKTzq>

**23** % less likely for a woman to own a cell phone than a man in sub-Saharan Africa. That's less than the Middle East and South Asia. <http://goo.gl/Pk4c2>

# Office away from the office

### Online library

ICTs are an intense and extensive part of my daily routine. There is no way Woodside Africa Group could have been founded, and launched successful programmes, in just under four years without ICTs! I started off with a laptop, a mobile phone and a big idea. This personal experience has totally convinced me that if other women are exposed to ICTs, they too can engage in a variety of business endeavours, at whatever level, and create something special. This inspired me to set up the i-LIKE AFRICA programme, which aims to link one million women in each African country to ICTs.

I want to encourage women to make use of ICTs because I have experienced the benefits. Websites I visit daily without fail are Yahoo, Facebook and Google. Daily updates for Woodside's Programmes are made on the relevant Facebook pages. I use my personal Facebook space as a kind of online library – where interesting items are posted not just for sharing with online friends but saved for future reference and leisure reading. My email address is Yahoo-based, necessitating frequent daily visits to this site.

ICTs – particularly Skype and AIM – have also enabled 'mobile offices'. I use Skype to communicate (chat, talk and video) with local and international friends, relatives and long-term business associates with whom I am on familiar terms. Strictly

formal communication is confined to phone calls and emails.

→ [www.aim.com](http://www.aim.com)

→ [www.skype.com](http://www.skype.com)

### Being up-to-date

If you want your global social enterprise to deliver effective programmes, products and services, you have to do a great deal of research. You also have to keep up with global trends in social entrepreneurship. Acumen, Echoing Green and Ashoka Changemakers provide sustainable business approaches that I use for my own business. These organisations' websites provide valuable information for social enterprises, ranging from feasible business models to funding sources. The various corporate social responsibility annual reports are also very informative and stimulating reads. The reports are retrieved from the relevant organisations' sites.

I agree with Steve Covey, American educator and businessman, whose 7th habit reads 'sharpen the saw'. Continuously improving business acumen is a key priority, you have to keep track of the current and planned global business events, trends and thinking. Online subscriptions and feeds to top business magazines serve this purpose. Some of the sites I frequently visit include: [economist.com](http://economist.com), [forbes.com](http://forbes.com), [businesstrade.org](http://businesstrade.org), [africa.com](http://africa.com), [entrepreneur.com](http://entrepreneur.com), [barrons.com](http://barrons.com), [smartmoney.com](http://smartmoney.com) and [wsj.com](http://wsj.com).

### ICT devices

Smart phones have been a godsend for me! A typical day requires being in at least six places – the office, a couple of external meetings, a school run, home, supermarket, health club and 'stuck-in-the-traffic' time! The mobile phone makes it easy to access information anywhere, anytime. I would prefer to use a laptop all the time, but it is simply not convenient. The smart phone is handier because you tend to use it more often for text messaging, internet browsing, emails, pictures, music, money transfers and Google maps. I consider the mobile phone 'my office away from the office'.

I have numerous apps on my mobile phone that largely remain idle. The one I



**Sheida Mutuku**

([woodsidemarketing@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:woodsidemarketing@yahoo.co.uk)) is a social entrepreneur, CSR consultant and a motivational speaker. She is the chief executive officer of Woodside Africa Group, which runs the i-LIKE AFRICA ([www.facebook.com/ILikeAfrica](http://www.facebook.com/ILikeAfrica)) programme.

To be a global social entrepreneur that delivers effective programmes, products and services, you have to do a great deal of research. You also have to keep up with global trends in social entrepreneurship. ICTs help to collect, share and store the information.

use constantly is WhatsApp Messenger, a cross-platform mobile messaging app that allows you to exchange messages without having to pay for SMS services. I can also create groups and send other users unlimited images, video and audio media messages.

Other mobile devices I use regularly are my Garmin GPS device when travelling long distances, and an iPad for meetings, photos, taking videos and playing music. I store all the information I need online on Safaricom's cloud back-up service.

→ [www.whatsapp.com](http://www.whatsapp.com)

### Positive mindset

A mind-reader would be a dream device. Imagine capturing all your random thoughts 24/7 on some sort of monitor for later review! But imagine a mind-reader that could also capture other people's thoughts. That would certainly help to shorten sales cycles! However, all the ICTs in the world would be pointless if men and women failed to have positive mindsets, if they failed to get up and act, if they failed to take charge of their lives.

That's why Theodore Roosevelt's speech, 'Citizenship in a Republic', constantly inspires me. He famously said a person 'who knows great enthusiasms' and 'who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly' is better off than the 'cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat'. ◀



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