

Learning Report 2006

Ghana National ICT4D Network

Addressing the needs of members

The Ghana Information Network for Knowledge Sharing (GINKS) was established in 2002 to provide space for individuals, groups and institutions interested in using information and communication technology (ICT) for their businesses and development to share ideas, knowledge and skills for the promotion of their mutual and collective interests.

The specific objectives of GINKS are:

- To provide information and knowledge that will facilitate capacity building for ICT products and services
- To create, identify, synthesize and disseminate information and knowledge on ICT and development
- To promote the use of ICT throughout the country

As an interest-based network, GINKS has also assigned to itself responsibilities for research, advocacy, lobbying, and other capacity building initiatives that create the enabling environment for the development and use of ICT in all spheres of work in Ghana.

In furtherance of these objectives, the criteria for membership of GINKS have been defined in very broad terms, purposely to create space for a broad range of actors to participate in the activities of the Network. Currently, members comprise of ICT practitioners, researchers from Universities and other professional institutions, individual students and workers, policymakers, etc who are attracted to the practical and policy dimension of the role of ICT in business and development.

The International Institute of Communication and Development (IICD) has been the main funding and technical support partner of GINKS since its inception. Since then, GINKS has been making efforts to spread its support base among its members, as well as, other local and foreign technical and financial support partners.

In the course of 2006, GINKS and the Development Alternative Services Foundation, Ghana's partner for Monitoring and Evaluation, performed an evaluation exercise to find out how members perceived the operational efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the network. The evaluation was



based on data provided through an online and paper-based survey carried out among members of GINKS, as well as discussions held by members and the Network coordinators during a Focus Group meeting. In all 51 respondents participated in the survey.

The evaluation of the network indicates that although respondents have expressed satisfaction with the structure and diversity of members of GINKS, the membership of the network remains largely urban-based, skewed in favor of the highly educated, and highly dominated by the middle age participants. It is also noticeable that women are under-represented in survey, accounting for less than a third of the total number of respondents in the survey. If this is reflective of the participation rate of women in the activities of GINKS, GINKS could pay special attention to having more women participate.

For existing members, the study finds that GINKS has made satisfactory progress in meeting the information and social needs of its members. However, the acquisition of greater awareness, knowledge and skills on the use of ICT in business and development has not necessarily translated into the practical application of such cognitive capacities to improvement of business

practices and productivity. This may be because of the existence of certain barriers that impede the translation of knowledge into action. It could therefore be interesting to focus attention on identifying these barriers to behavior change and offer effective solutions that would enable its members make maximum use of their acquired knowledge and skills.

A major challenge that GINKS faces is the nature of participation of its members in its activities. In general, member participation tends to be high when GINKS organizes meetings and learning events. However, the results of the evaluation show that the role of members in initiating and sustaining actions in support of GINKS initiatives has tended to be on the low side, as members rarely take the initiative on their own. Also, participation in activities that consider more "action" from the side of the participants, like participation in lobbying and advocacy activities, get a lower participation rate than those that can be considered as more "passive", like attending meetings.

To enhance the work of the network, the management board of GINKS and the Focus Group, both of which received provided input into the draft evaluation report offer the following recommendations:

The use of thematic subgroups approach to building the network infrastructure is highly recommended as a way of addressing the cognitive alienation of members to the activities of the network. Focus Group members agreed that strong and effective subgroups that address the immediate interests and needs of smaller groups of members will not only increase internal cohesion of the members of the subgroup,

but will also create a larger sense of belonging and purpose for all members, especially if platforms are created for interactions between the subgroups. For instance, a subgroup interested in the application of ICT in promoting extension delivery for the production of an identified crop will not only keep the members in that subgroup together in a more structured and consistent way, but it will also create opportunities for interacting with subgroups that are interested in using ICT for promoting market access to farming communities. This bridge in interests will enhance the overall effectiveness and perceived utility of the network among members.

The Management Board and members of the Focus group also acknowledged that the network needs to do more to spread out its activities into the rural areas and to the less educated for whom the gulf in the digital divide is widest. Participants at the Focus Group in particular emphasized that special and urgent attention must be paid to bringing women into the digital age. It was agreed that the use of interest-focus subgroups, as recommended above, would be one way to create space for increased women's participation in the ICT programs.

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