

Gender and ICT: a good mix

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The International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD) assists people in developing countries in benefiting from information and communication technology to improve their livelihoods and quality of life. In focusing our work on the less privileged, special consideration is given to reaching people in rural areas with low incomes. Women constitute a substantial part of the members of this target group. Attention for gender issues is therefore paramount for the programmes to be effective and sustainable.

Gender refers to the "socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women."¹ The relationships and roles women and men may assume are culturally and institutionally embedded. In the African and Latin American countries IICD works in, women generally hold lower education levels and possess less economic and political power than men. Combined with domestic responsibilities, these factors hinder women in obtaining access to new communication technologies.

Gender equality has always been a guiding principle in IICD's work. To ensure that the information and communication technology (ICT) projects supported are not contributing to gender *inequality*, focus on gender aspects is an intrinsic part of the projects, from inception to implementation. Moreover, the Monitoring & Evaluation system includes measurement of satisfaction and impact of the activities in gender and disaggregates data by sex.

The following are some examples from IICD's work that specifically address and target gender.

Kari&TIC: ICT for shea butter producers in Mali

The Zantiébougou Women Shea Butter Producers Cooperative (Coprokazan) and the Malian Association for the Promotion of Youth (AMPJ) were jointly seeking solutions to the problems they encountered with the marketing of shea butter at the national, regional and international levels. Shea butter is made from the fruits of the shea or karité tree, and is widely used in cosmetics as a moisturizer and emollient.

To generate higher sales and improve women producers' livelihoods, promotion activities needed to be strengthened. The



Coprokazan member recording an activity.

project set off to install electricity and computers, train women in the use of software and office tools (e.g. presentations for trainings, handling orders from abroad by email, and bookkeeping), create a website, and advertise on radio and television. Picture animated presentations take place in surrounding villages, sharing knowledge among women on how they can improve the quality of their shea butter. As a result, the quality and sales of shea butter have risen considerably.

www.iicd.org/projects/burkina-mikropa

Women and ICT Group in Mali

In Mali, women cannot easily express themselves on violence cases they are victims of, as this is still a taboo due to religious and customary traditions. In order to help those victims of violence, the Women and ICT Group of Mali initiated in 2008 a sensitization trajectory which includes training women on the use of ICT (video, radio, Youtube, website) to assist victims and sensitize the wider audience on cases of violence against women in the country. In 2008, after a national contest for stories on this theme, the group organised a digital story telling workshop and benefited from a multimedia skills training, resulting in the production of a video made by women victims of violence. In 2009, the Group will further work with

¹ Definition from World Health Organisation, WHO, www.who.int/gender/whatisgender/en/



multimedia tools to continue raising public awareness and assisting women on this theme, helping them acquire knowledge on their rights, reduce violence against women, and increase audiovisual content.

Meanwhile, the Group plans to work with more rural women on the use of radio and web tools to increase their visibility, link their socio-economic activities to other groups in Mali and elsewhere, and thereby improve their livelihood opportunities.

www.mali-ntic.com, rubrique Femmes&TIC.

Rural women's information network in Zabré, Burkina Faso

A community radio station and an Internet connection are being installed at the Pag La Yiri women's association office (11,000 members) based in the information-deprived area of Zabré, an agricultural region in eastern Burkina Faso. The region lacks good transport and communication infrastructure, hampering its development. Currently, within a catchment area of 130 kilometres, there is only one radio station that broadcasts topics about the region in their own local languages. The new community radio station and Internet access is expected to help overcome the information and communication gap between Zabré and the surrounding rural villages, as well as significantly reduce the amount of time and money of sending and receiving information (such as the latest health newsletters or agricultural information) from the Pag La Yiri headquarters in Ouagadougou to the Zabré office.

The project's main objective is to provide market price information for the 20,000 farmers around Zabré. The market prices will be collected via the Internet through partnerships with parties that are experienced in marketing agricultural goods. Indirect and direct economic benefits are expected once the radio is on air in mid-2009. The project has a large capacity development component and is specifically stimulating women to use ICTs.

www.iicd.org/projects/burkina-pag-la-yiri

WIDNet: building ICT capacity of women in Zambia

Low education level is one of the reasons only a small percentage of Zambian women holds a formal job. To contribute to their socio-economic development, the Women's Organisations Information for Development Network (WIDNet) started an ICT capacity

building programme in 2004. By operating a computer training centre and developing a website and e-bulletin, the initiative wants to strengthen the status and position of women in Zambia. ICT is enhancing collection, sharing and dissemination of information that is relevant to women and is maintaining an information network among women's organisations to enable advocacy and lobbying on women's issues. The project is run by the Zambian Association for Research and Development (ZARD). A WIDNet website was launched and a Women's IT Literacy Training and Resource Centre was opened. An increasing number of women are writing articles for the e-bulletin and regard it as a tool to speak up.
www.iicd.org/projects/zambia-widnet

Strengthening the capacities of female indigenous leaders in Bolivia

Since 2002, The Organisation of Indigenous People in Bolivia (CIDOB) has been using ICT for gathering information on land use and land rights to support their lobbying activities. After embedding the use of computers and the internet into their daily activities, CIDOB's female indigenous leaders requested to enhance their ICT capacities to increase their participation in lobbying and decision-making processes. In parallel, a national chapter of CIDOB for indigenous women was set up and launched in early 2008, targeting ICT and leadership. The project focuses on the development of ICT competencies, including Web2.0² tools, of a core group of 100 indigenous women from all regions. This will enable them to be better informed and to participate in indigenous and political rights discussions, support them in gaining leadership positions in the organisation, and facilitating their direct participation in national policy processes. The women learn how to communicate by email or Skype³, and also how to collaborate online by using a Wiki⁴. The core group will then train another 500 indigenous women in the skills obtained.
www.iicd.org/projects/bolivia-cidob

² The term "Web 2.0" refers to a perceived second generation of web development and design, that aims to facilitate communication, information sharing, interoperability, and collaboration on the World Wide Web (Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org>)

³ a software that allows users to make telephone calls over the Internet

⁴ A wiki is a page or collection of Web pages designed to enable anyone who accesses it to contribute or modify content (Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org>)

Online domestic violence consulting service in Bolivia

Domestic violence is usually kept silence by the prevailing 'machismo', fear, and by the passivity of the women who find themselves unable to react and break free from the cycle of violence. These women tend to become isolated and not to participate in any groups. As a result, existing institutions assigned to address problems of domestic violence often fail to reach their target group. Long distances further complicate reaching and uniting the women.

The 'Ondas Libres' (Spanish for: 'Free Waves') programme in Bolivia offers women victims of domestic violence an online network, a website with relevant information, online consultation and legal advice, and develops and broadcasts regular radio programmes featuring stories of victims of domestic violence. To complement this, three communication centres, run by women's organisations, were set up in three different districts, offering training in ICT skills, online consultation skills and legal issues.

The use of communication technologies in the Ondas Libres programme is making possible to address problems where conventional methods failed. Moreover, the use of Internet and email saves time, bridges physical distances and allows the women to participate anonymously. Casa de la Mujer, a womens' movement in Bolivia with political influence that lobbies for womens' rights and the right for women to live without violence, manages the project.

www.iicd.org/projects/bolivia-casa-de-la-mujer

School for Strengthening Local Management Capacities of Rural Women Leaders in Ecuador

The Asociación Mujeres Juntas Parroquiales Rurales del Ecuador (AMJUPRE) project focuses on the development of capacities of women who act as representatives of marginalised rural communities in the called 'juntas parroquiales' (provincial boards). The objective of the project, which started in early 2008, is to create a School for strengthening local management capacities of rural women leaders. Three learning modules have been planned on ICT, local management and planning, and financial administration for government officials. Equipped with ICT tools, these women representatives are able to guarantee to their communities effective, participatory and democratic local management in their rural juntas parroquiales. This is also

helping place local governance by women leaders in Ecuador on the map, and reducing gender differences, increasing self esteem of rural women. So far, almost 100 female leaders of juntas parroquiales in rural areas have been trained in the use of ICT.

www.iicd.org/projects/ecuador-amjupre



Participants in a focus groups meeting in Ecuador.

PSO and IICD

PSO (Capacity Building in Developing Countries) is supporting IICD in increasing the participation of women in ICT4D projects in Bolivia, Ecuador and Zambia. The project is funded by the Innovation Fund of PSO, a fund aiming to stimulate Dutch NGOs to work on finding new approaches, methodologies and ways for strengthening capacity development.

<http://www.iicd.org/articles/collaboration-with-pso-deepened/>

GenARDIS

In recognition of the dilemma between a potentially powerful set of tools - ICT - and their failure to reach the majority of the poor - rural women -, CTA, IDRC, Hivos and IICD set up GenARDIS, a Small Grants Fund to address Gender Issues in Information and Communication Technology for Agricultural and Rural Development in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific. GenARDIS supports innovative activities that contribute to the understanding of gender issues in ICT and to the gender-sensitive application of ICT in agricultural and rural development.

www.agricta.org/about/genardis.htm

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