

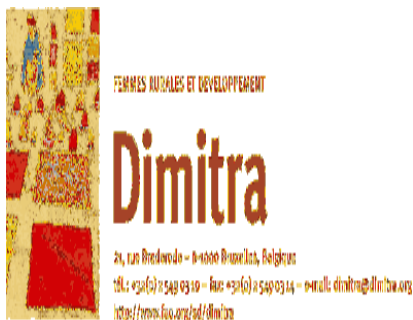
# ONLINE DISCUSSION REPORT

## “STRENGTHENING RURAL WOMEN'S NETWORKS WITH REGARDS TO INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION AND TO COMBAT HIV/AIDS IN RURAL AREAS”

January to June 2006

Hosted by Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET)  
In Collaboration with ENDA Pronat and The Pacific Islands Energy Gender Network

Supported by CTA and The Dimitra Project/FAO



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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS**

AIS	Agricultural Information Service
CTA	Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation ACP-EU
DSC	Development Support Communication
ECA	Economic Commission for Africa
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
HBC	Home Based Care
Hivos	Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries
IC	Information and Communication
ICTs	Information Communication Technologies
IEC	Information Education and Communication
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
RWN	Rural Women Networks
TCP	Technical Cooperation Programme
TDF	Telecommunication Development Fund
WOUGNET	Women of Uganda Network

## **1.0 BACKGROUND**

The six months' discussion was organized and supported by the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation ACP-EU (CTA) and the Dimitra/FAO Project. It was hosted by Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET) at the address <http://www.dgroups.org/groups/cta/rwn/> in both English and French in collaboration with ENDA Pronat, Senegal, and the Pacific Islands Energy Gender Network from 1<sup>st</sup> January to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2006.

The electronic discussion was a result of a joint work meeting held from 13<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> June 2005 in Brussels, Belgium by Dimitra-FAO and CTA, with the goal to strengthen and energize networks working for rural women in the South. This electronic discussion was agreed on as a way to bring together the Dimitra/CTA networks involved in the June meeting as well as other networks interested and involved in supporting the rural networks.

The electronic discussion was conducted with financial support from the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation ACP EU (CTA) and from the Dimitra Project, Gender and Development Service, FAO. The discussion run from December to July 2006 with the funding from CTA and is planned to continue from September with funding from Dimitra.

### **1.1 Objectives of the Discussion**

The objectives of the electronic discussion were:

- To maintain and strengthen links created between partner organisations during the June workshop.
- To strengthen input for the World Congress of Rural Women to be held in South Africa.
- To share information on how the organisations can build on what they have already achieved and ensure the development and sustainability of their networks.
- To explore ways of working together to attract funds and develop strategies to strengthen one another.
- To share experiences on the opportunities and constraints faced while working to fight HIV/AIDS in rural areas.

### **1.2 Themes chosen for the discussions**

The electronic discussion was comprised of two parts:

- Sustainability of the CTA/Dimitra networks
- Impact of HIV/AIDS

Each part was categorized into three main themes, one theme covering a month's discussion as follows.

### **Part 1: Sustainability of the CTA/Dimitra networks**

This part was addressed from January to March and addressed the following themes:

- i) **Experience from networks.** This was aimed at: (i) highlighting concrete examples of successes and failures in sustainability of rural women networks; (ii) sharing examples that show changes in communities and their environment which could be of interest to other local and national groups, and (iii) promoting of gender equality.
- ii) **Funding mechanisms.** This discussed partnerships and mobilization of funds to strengthen rural women's networks. It focused on:
  - Sources of funding
  - Procedures for access to and management of the financial packages from potential funders
  - Fundraising as a collective approach
- iii) **Information and communication strategies:** This reflected on:
  - Appropriate and combined communication channels and services including electronic media, face to face interactions and rural radio
  - Networking and capacity- building for local groups
  - Innovative ICT solutions suited to local contexts

### **Part 2: Impact of HIV/AIDS**

This part was addressed from April to June and covered the following themes:

- i) **Identification of shared problems:** This theme focused on issues like the fact that the agricultural sector is severely damaged by the pandemic on several levels: Increased vulnerability among rural women; manpower: HIV/AIDS affects the most active and productive sectors of the rural society; access and control of natural resources; agricultural knowledge; economic losses; change from labour intensive crops to subsistence farming; nutritional levels are declining.
- ii) **Experience from networks:** In this theme, networks highlighted some factors that could be considered as a start to a process of change on:
  - Recognizing of HIV/AIDS as a reality. Regular and motivated participation of community members in community dialogues and especially women and girls. Identification of innovative experiences: better use of rural community radios, videos and new ICTs
  - Transmission of knowledge

- Dissemination of best practices (community coping mechanisms, community initiatives and organisations)
  - Dissemination of discipline-specific web resources and online training materials
  - Dissemination of research results in appropriate formats.
- iii) **Information and communication strategies.** This reflected on:
- Appropriate and combined communication channels and services including printed and electronic media, face-to-face interactions and rural radio
  - Networking and capacity building for local groups
  - Innovative ICT solutions suited to local contexts

### **1.3 Participation of Organizations and Individuals**

The primary discussion audience was comprised of participants of the Dimitra-FAO/CTA joint meeting held in Brussels, Belgium from 13<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> June 2005. These included participants from North Africa, West Africa, East and Southern Africa, South Pacific, Asia and Europe. The list of participants in the e-discussion is attached as Annex III.

The rest of this report is organized as follows:

- chapters two to four present results of the discussion for Part One, that is sustainability of the CTA/Dimitra networks
- chapters five to seven present results of the discussion for Part Two, that is impact of HIV/AIDS
- chapter eight is the conclusion and recommendations
- an analysis of the participants is presented in Annex I
- the participants' evaluation of the discussion is presented in Annex II

## **PART ONE: SUSTAINABILITY OF THE CTA/Dimitra NETWORKS**

**(January to March 2006)**

### **2.0 EXPERIENCES FROM NETWORKS**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

The month of January marked the beginning of the first half of the discussion that ran up to March 2006, under the common theme of “Sustainability of the CTA/Dimitra Networks” with three sub themes namely: (i) experience from networks; (ii) funding mechanisms and (iii) information and communication strategies.

The discussion theme for January was “Experience from networks”. The purpose of this theme was to highlight concrete examples of successes and failures in sustainability of rural women networks and share examples that show changes in communities and their environment which can be of interest to other groups; local and national and promotion of gender equality.

The discussion was guided but not restricted to the following questions:

- i) What role do rural women’s networks play in today’s information era?
- ii) Give examples that show changes in communities and their environment created by rural women’s networks, which can be of interest to the other groups, local and national and promotion of gender equality.
- iii) Share concrete examples of successes and failures in sustaining rural women’s networks

Results of the month’s long discussions are presented in sections 2.2 to 2.4 below.

## **2.2 What role do Rural Women’s Networks play in today’s Information Era?**

### **2.2.1 Introduction**

*Concept of a network:* The discussion considered the definition of a network given by Oxford English Dictionary as “an arrangement of intersecting lines; a complex system; a group of interconnected people or broad casting stations or computers”. A network was considered to be synonymous with system, set up, set of connections, arrangement, association and group. The discussion worked with networks in terms of people and information communication tools combined and/or each alone.

### **2.2.2 Role of Rural Women’s Networks**

Members acknowledged the role women’s networks play in information sharing, skills and resource sharing in rural areas. The participants noted that:

- Information and communication have the potential to enhance people's quality of life, help protect the environment and create a knowledge-based society that is more responsive to change and development issues.
- Women play key roles in the development of their communities. Therefore, if lasting progress is to be achieved, women and men must have equal access to the resources needed for development and to the benefits it produces. Information and communication was identified as key among these resources.
- Information and communication can lead to the empowerment of women, enabling them to take control of their lives and participate as equals with men in promoting food security, combating HIV/AIDS and driving general rural development. Without information and communication, the voices of rural



women for change will not be heard and development initiatives in one society will not be known and applied in other societies in similar situations.

The discussion categorized rural women networks into:

- i) Resource sharing such as rotational credit and saving groups commonly used as an alternative to bank loans and farm labor groups.
- ii) Knowledge and skills sharing like Mothers Union groups, community and individual development oriented women groups.
- iii) Income generation e.g. drama groups, crafts groups, commercial agriculture.
- iv) Community work like health promoters, HIV/AIDS home care workers, social counseling.
- v) Information and communication sharing. This is indirectly part of all the other groups. This category of networks was identified as becoming more useful for information and communication. With the growing use of information and communication technologies mainly radios and mobile phones women are able to get the information to share with colleagues. E-mail and Internet is also picking up slowly. Radios and mobile phones are steadily growing in popularity and use as sources of information and channels for communication. For example in Uganda, there are over 130 radio stations with one specifically focusing on women's issues, and that is Mama FM<sup>1</sup>. Each district has at least 1 radio station. The mobile phone market is the biggest and has proved to be the fastest-growing market in Uganda during the past six years. There are currently 1,040,127 mobile phone customers against 71,056 fixed line customers (Uganda Communications Commission, 2005).

From the above categories, it was evidenced that Rural Women Networks (RWN) facilitate:

- Knowledge sharing among like-minded women beyond social and cultural boundaries
- Skills sharing like entrepreneurship, weaving etc
- Resource sharing
- Income generation for individuals and families
- Information and communication about, for instance, the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Key aims of the Dimitra network are to facilitate the exchange of information and to empower women. Links are continually being strengthened with community rural radios and various activities are underway in Senegal and the Democratic Republic of Congo in this respect.
- Strengthening women's voice against injustices and general awareness: in Nigeria, establishments of networks in the rural areas have enhanced Women's

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<sup>1</sup> [http://interconnection.org/umwa/community\\_radio.html](http://interconnection.org/umwa/community_radio.html)

- Protest Against Chevron Texaco (a foreign oil refinery firm with unfavorable employment policies to women) spread in the Niger.
- Communicating their issues and challenges to policy makers

## **2.3 Changes in Communities and their Environment due to Rural Women's Networks**

### **2.3.1 Introduction**

It was acknowledged that Rural Women's networks have proved effective as channels of information and communication to facilitate learning, feedback and knowledge transfer.

Participants noted that rural women rely heavily on direct and personal networks to access information. These most times comprise of informal networks. To a far greater extent than radio or print media, a woman's friends, neighbors and relatives, her access to networks in churches, markets during market days, or her communication with figures such as retired civil servants or teachers were preferred pathways for receiving agricultural information, current affairs and other types of information.

The next section highlights examples participants shared that show changes in communities and their environment created by rural women's networks. These examples could be of interest to other rural women communities in Africa and beyond.

### **2.3.2 Examples of Inspiring Rural Women Networks**

*Traditional Communication among the pastoral communities of East Africa (Karimojong and Masai):* In these communities, women networks are so strong that “the infrastructure” of the homes rest on their backs”. Through their various groups, these rural women support each other in building their houses (reed huts). In these communities, women are the ones who build. Through their social networks, they know who needs a hand to help them raise the roofs of their houses, who is migrating where, this being a pastoral community. All this is done using the traditional mode of communication. The gold searching sites, wells or just at the verandas of their homes are examples of places where information exchange takes place in these communities. In addition, through such networks, women get to know, which development initiatives/projects are new in the area and what they are doing, etc.

*Women entrepreneurs go global with e-commerce in Latin America and the Caribbean:* Rural women in Latin America and the Caribbean are selling shampoo, textiles, leather goods and other handmade products over the Internet, through an IFAD-supported programme. A web site provides news, as well as information and help on how to start a small business, and useful links for rural microentrepreneurs. Through on-line chat rooms, users can have their questions answered about market access, the

environment, project proposals, business management, quality improvement in rural products and other issues. The web site also has an on-line shop called La Gallina, which enables women micro-entrepreneurs to market and sell their goods online. About 400 rural micro-entrepreneurs market and sell their goods online. The women make commercial contacts through the Internet and currently export most of their products to the United States<sup>2</sup>.

***Sensitization of the rural poor about socio-economic problems through songs and dance in Chhattisgarh India:*** song, dance and skits are helping rural poor communities in the Chhattisgarh tribal region of central India to learn about and find solutions to social and economic problems. These and other traditional forms of entertainment and communication are part of a new IFAD-supported project in the region. Local actors travel between communities to inform and stimulate discussion, especially among women, about male drunkenness, domestic abuse, women's rights, dowries, water-saving techniques in drought areas, the benefits of saving and other issues. Performances are in local languages, one of the reasons why they have been successful in reaching large numbers of people. The groups have reached more than 10,000 households in 300 villages.<sup>3</sup>

***Nabanna Information Network for Rural Women - Baduria, West Bengal, India:*** Kolkata, India's Change Initiatives and its partners have developed a web-based information system with the hope of educating and empowering poor women in Baduria, a rural region in the Indian state of West Bengal. Termed Nabanna, the project uses information and computing technologies (ICTs) and other media in an effort to create a strong network of women with the voice and capacity to participate in society - economically and otherwise.

According to organisers, women in many rural and semi-rural areas such as Baduria do not have structured local communication networks that promote access to information or provide spaces for sharing information and knowledge. As a result, many women do not know how to or are not able to meet even basic needs. Nabanna uses ICTs to enable women in Baduria to build their own local information network. The strategy used involves allowing individual women who have direct access to the tools they need to share their knowledge and skills with others who do not, thus spreading information and reaching beyond the individual. By combining technological and social networks, Nabanna is designed to reach a large number of women and provide local collection and diffusion of information and knowledge.

Nabanna has a research component too. Research is carried out on the members in form of needs assessment and the Internet. The results are published in Nabanna's community newspaper.

Organizers say that Nabanna's biggest achievement to date is having instilled a sense of personal empowerment among the beneficiaries. "The community has found that a more empowered, knowledgeable and confident woman empowers her society by facilitating the process of collective decision-making at the family level and in the community." As a

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ifad.org/events/wsis/phase1/factsheet/factsheet.htm>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.ifad.org/events/wsis/phase1/factsheet/factsheet.htm>

result, organisers suggest, younger women feel they are able to approach the job market with greater confidence. There has also been solidarity - for as the women learn computers together at the ICT centre, they also often discuss their problems, creating a sense of unity among them and also bringing forth their inert leadership qualities. Trainees at Baduria are taking their skills back to the regional centres; for instance, one of the trainees of Baduria ICT centre has been chosen to manage the Arbelia center<sup>4</sup>.

***Women's grassroots organisations lead the fight against HIV and AIDS in Kenya:*** GROOTS Kenya, a network of grassroots organizations offers community-driven, women-led approaches to the HIV and AIDS pandemic. In response to the challenges posed by the pandemic such as the increased burden on households who have to care for orphaned children that have lost one or both parents to AIDS; stigma and mis-education; cultural traditions such as wife inheritance; lack of food and water; and poverty in general. GROOTS community groups help to distribute food and clothes to those who are ill through Home Based Care (HBC) workers. They also provide counseling and assist with household chores. Groups also undertake educational campaigns on anti-retrovirals and the prevention of mother-to-child transmission. Moreover, many attend public gatherings in order to share correct information about HIV and AIDS<sup>5</sup>.

## **2.4 Successes and Failures in Sustaining Rural Women's Networks**

### **2.4.1 Introduction**

Rural women's networks have proved effective as channels of information and communication to facilitate learning, feedback and knowledge transfer as given in section 2.3 above. This was further evidenced in the successes shared by the participants.

### **2.4.2 Successes of Rural Women's Networks**

***Dimitra's Experience:*** The Dimitra network is composed of a wide variety of organizations situated in different regions and countries, with differing languages, traditions, culture, religion and climate. This diversity has become one of the networks' strengths and this has enabled very many different organizations and groups to join and work together with common aims.

By bringing people together to explore synergies and encouraging exchange and sharing of experiences, Dimitra networks have become a powerful force for social change. An example given was the Enda Pronat and the creation of the Rural Women National Network of Senegal. Enda Pronat, with the support of the Dimitra project, has contributed to the setting up of a network of rural women. This network strengthens grassroots organizations through training and information and produces detailed information on the

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.comminit.com/experiences/pds112004/experiences-2739.html>

<sup>5</sup> Women's organizations lead the fight against HIV and AIDS in Kenya by Hayes, S. / Huairou Commission (2005)

experiences of projects led with, and for, rural and peri-urban women, as well as on the methods used by development organizations. The network involves development actors from every level, and ensures that the voices of rural women are heard up to ministry level. At present the network has 130 female association members, which are grassroots organisations, and NGOs and other associations, which are support organisations, bringing together more than 2000 members each, spread across the national territory.

Dimitra reported that successes that have resulted from supporting rural women's networks include a reduction in the isolation experienced by rural women. Joining together in a network gives value to the work, needs, and experiences of these women, and encourages their involvement and impact at national and international level. Having the opportunity to speak out and express themselves gives the rural women more confidence and helps them feel their needs are taken into consideration.

**Burkina Faso:** In a resettlement area for rice growing population in the Western part of the country, a research on communication for development has helped rural women to become experts in land fertility, by using a combination of local knowledge and knowledge got from agricultural experts. Theatre was used as a means of communication. A play, for the first time written for professionals was tried by rural women about negotiations with men to let women go to learn. After two months of hard work, rural women performed that play. The first performances were done in the home village of the actors. The community recognized itself in that play and that was the first success. Performances followed in other areas, and finally the model of land fertilization presented got known by the population which saw their traditional techniques given a new value.

“Through theatre, women could talk in front of a crowd, they were listened to and the message they wanted to give through the play, was well followed”. Through this initiative, a lesson has been learnt that: *“Theatre is a good voicing instrument and a good way to give value to women; that women can also learn agricultural techniques from men, that they have brought a technology that can prevent the problem of land infertility.”*

This play has increased the respect given to women and has proved that they can technically contribute on something, even if it is about agriculture.

Over all, the exercise awakened people on land infertility and on techniques to be used to prevent it. It also changed the way in which women were considered within the community, and people started to consider women in important decisions making for the good of the village.

### **2.4.3 Challenges of Rural Women Networks**

Despite the successes registered, it was noted that a number of challenges were still hindering the progress of rural women networks.

Dimitra identified the following as the main challenges facing their networks:

- Difficulties are faced in terms of varying levels of commitment and interest in the actions or objectives of the network. Some partners will have a more dynamic approach and more contacts at grassroots level, enabling them to create strong synergies at local level, while others will not fully realize the potential for the network to drive change simply by combining the strengths of its members. Good will, enthusiasm and strong commitment are essential factors.
- Strong links to local organizations and the community are very important if the network is to address issues of importance to the situation of rural women, such as illiteracy, lack of control over resources, isolation, lack of access to information, etc. If a partner organization does not have these links then it is impossible to collect and disseminate information effectively at the grassroots level and support the creation of rural women's networks.
- Limited access to funds: most rural women networks still face challenges in mobilizing funds. The Dimitra contributor lamented that funders continue giving funds to more NGOs that operate in the urban areas compared to those in the rural areas where the reality is more profound.

Abantu for Development, a local partner with Dimitra outlined some problems encountered in Ghana:

Abantu reported that very little success has been achieved regarding the Dimitra Project in Ghana. The existing networks were utilized to discuss the project and to get them to provide information about their work. Many of these organisations are looking for immediate financial and material resources to build or strengthen their work. Thus, even though there is a sense in which they recognise the value of information, they did not prioritise the project as being of major importance for them. Various platforms were used to talk about the project and get organisations to participate but this provoked little interest."

Because Abantu had few links with grassroots organizations, Dimitra has started working through the Gender Development Institute (GDI) in Ghana with a hope to reach and involve more rural women organizations.

Other challenges identified by the participants included:

**(i) Poorly researched content:** Some information and communication networks provide general information that is not backed by research information.

**(ii) Lack of action strategies:** The participants concurred that getting information is one thing and putting it to use is another. Some information and communication networks lack action strategies in their information and communication mechanisms. In other words, Rural Women Networks should start thinking and working on how to transform

information into actions that can be performed by every one, regardless of their status. In Nigeria they have used a strategy referred to as "Peer group educational strategy to empower the young people in the effort to educate each other since there is a lot of peer pressure in the society. The positive aspect of this strategy has been the contributions of these youths at home in empowering their parents, especially their mothers. The other proposed action strategy is to encourage youths to participate in Radio and or other Communication networks in speaking up programmes whereby the adults whose cultural and traditional settings do not favour the women to express themselves freely with their immediate family and in public. The best example given was the fact that women, particularly rural women, are not able to negotiate safe sex with their husbands, although both know what needs to be done to avoid HIV/AIDS. Youth radio and ICT programmes can serve as an empowering strategy.

**(iii) Lack of sufficient funds to run their activities effectively.** Most rural women networks lack enough funds at the grassroots level to facilitate their activities. Hayes gives this as a major problem facing the GROOTS network in Kenya.

**(iv) Low levels of education** among women as compared to men and social-cultural barriers. Majority of the rural population especially women are illiterate and can't effectively read and write in both their vernacular and the official languages.

In terms of ICTs for information and communication, the following were given as the main obstacles:

- Lack of backbone infrastructures such as electricity, radio and TV masts, telephone lines, road networks.
- Lack of access to family owned ICT tools like radios that are controlled by men who most times move with them.
- Lack of time to listen to radio programmes for much of the day women are busy struggling to fend for the family.
- Lack of funding for rural ICT projects. ICT initiatives are still given low priority.
- ICT services are till expensive to the rural communities as independent services and a strategy to integrate ICTs into other community services like set up ICT units in hospitals, churches, buses, schools was proposed.

#### **2.4.4 Possible Solutions**

The discussion raised the following propositions on how the identified challenges can be solved:

- Combining Technological and Social networks: Nabanna Information Network for Rural Women, a project in Baduria, West Bengal, India has solved the

problem of lack of structured local communication networks by applying this strategy that has enabled them reach a large number of women and provide local collection and diffusion of information and knowledge.

- Increase funding for rural women networks: there is need to increase the funding of rural women networks. Hayes asserts that tackling the AIDS Pandemic in Kenya needs increased funding at the grassroots level where the primary response to AIDS is taking place.
- Use or adaptation of local languages to reach as many people as possible: in Chhattisgarh tribal region, India, performances of sensitization programmes on socio-economic problems are in local languages, a strategy that has proved successful in reaching large numbers of people especially rural women.
- Purposive selection of information and communication media: Information communication technologies (ICTs) such as radio and the newer digital technologies like computers, mobile phones and the Internet, have tremendous potential to effect real change in the lives of rural poor people in developing countries. However, to be effective they must be not only accessible, but also meaningful. ICTs in themselves do not guarantee benefits to rural poor people.
- Introducing revenue generation projects/activities, e.g., starting commercial services of rural women network radio projects to provide financial sustainability beyond the donor funding cycle.
- Institution of gender sensitive legal frameworks to guide gender sensitive ICT infrastructure development. Such a framework would also protect women's ownership and use of family owned ICT tools such as radios and encourage women to own individually or contribute to family owned ICT tools such as radios and mobile telephones.

The Sustainable Department of Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) prescribed the following guidelines to ensure successful communication in development efforts or for the advancement of rural women:

- The planning phase should include a communication component, designed to reflect the perceived needs and special conditions taking into account women's active participation in traditional communication networks.
- The Communication component should be allocated sufficient resources to create sustainable national capacities for applying communication skills and tools to improve the status of women.



- Communication efforts should begin with development planners listening to women and carefully considering their perceptions and needs, their knowledge and experience and their culture and traditions.
- A holistic approach: Communication efforts should cover all the multifaceted aspects of life in rural areas affecting women.
- Multichannel approach: Modern and traditional media and channels available and appropriate technologies and media should be applied according to the prevailing cultural, social and economic conditions.
- Access to new ICTs: A concerted effort should be made to harness the potential of the new ICTs for sharing information and knowledge with women in rural areas.
- Training in participatory communication skills at all levels - from fieldworkers to trainers and planners.
- Monitoring and evaluation during the project's lifetime to capture perceptions and understanding of audiences composed of illiterate rural women.
- Advocating gender-sensitive communication policies to get policy-makers to take rural women's specific needs into account and involve them in decisions regarding application of such technologies.

### **3.0 FUNDING MECHANISMS, PARTNERSHIPS AND MOBILIZATION OF FUNDS TO STRENGTHEN RURAL WOMEN'S NETWORKS**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

Funding mechanisms was the second theme discussed. The purpose of this theme was to exchange ideas and share experiences on partnerships and mobilization of funds to strengthen rural women's networks. The January discussion had identified lack of/insufficient funds as one of the challenges facing rural women's networks. The February discussion was used to deliberate more on the challenge and share experiences on how the challenges could be addressed.

The discussion was guided but not restricted to the following questions:

- i) Where can rural women organizations get funding for their projects?
- ii) How can they win access to these funds? What are the procedures for access to the financial packages from potential funders?
- iii) How can/are rural women's networks manage/ing funds?
- iv) What are the possible mechanisms that can be used for fundraising as a collective effort?

Results of the month's long discussion are presented in sections 3.2 to 3.7 below.

### **3.2 Where can Rural Women Organizations get Funding for their Projects?**

Participants acknowledged that funds are available out there from various organizations such as United Nations bodies; however accessing them was not easy.

The funding sources were categorized into government and non-government as follows:

- i) Government as part of rural development initiatives
- ii) Development agencies of foreign countries, e.g., International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Humanistic Institute for Cooperation with developing Countries (Hivos)
- iii) Multi-national Agencies e.g. World Bank, EU
- iv) Professional and Social Charities, e.g., Global Fund for Women, African Development Fund
- v) UN bodies e.g. United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), United Nations HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- vi) Foreign embassies and bilateral cooperations

An example of a government initiative as a source of funding for rural projects was given in Uganda as described below:

*The government of Uganda has set aside funds to support rural based initiatives. One such beneficiary is the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF). NUSAF aims to empower communities in Northern Uganda (part of the country that has been ravaged by war for the last 20 years) by enhancing their capacity to systematically identify, prioritize, and plan for their needs and implement sustainable development initiatives that improve socio-economic services and opportunities.*

*One of the components of this fund is the vulnerable group support component, which identifies the vulnerable groups and civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, and private sector agencies in order to develop strategies likely to contribute to their poverty reduction. It also provides support and encourages communities to identify innovative ways for community reconciliation and conflict management using traditional and non-traditional approaches, based on indigenous knowledge, the way communities have in the past managed conflict so that it did not lead to open warfare, and helping communities reclaim this knowledge for use in modern-day living in Uganda.*

*A number of rural women community based organizations have accessed this fund. They have been funded to drill boreholes and carry out sanitation and community health promotion programmes.*

## Case Studies of funding bodies for Rural Women's Networks:

The following case studies were given to be among the common funding agencies for Rural Women's Networks.

**a) African Women's Development Fund (AWDF).** AWDF funds local, national, sub-regional and regional organisations in Africa working towards women's empowerment. It is currently supporting many women organizations in Africa including rural women networks like:

- i) Gender Violence Survivor Support Network (GVSSN), *Ghana*
- ii) Network for Women's Rights (NETRIGHT), *Ghana*
- iii) Association Dushirehamwe, *Burundi*
- iv) Disabled Women's Network and Resource Organisation in Uganda. (DWNRO), *Uganda*.
- v) Bayira Rural Women's Development Association (BARWODA), *Uganda*<sup>6</sup>

**b) Global Fund for Women.** This is a grant-giving foundation supporting women's human rights organizations around the world working to address critical issues such as gaining economic independence, increasing girl's access to education and stopping violence against women<sup>7</sup>

**c) Global Giving.** Founded by two former World Bank executives who decided to use the Internet to create a highly efficient marketplace, the Global Giving platform enables more funding to reach projects throughout the globe, and, at the same time, provides a more transparent, engaging way for donors to give. Their work involves facilitating donors to give directly to projects to know exactly where their money is going<sup>8</sup>

**d) Hivos Gender, Women & development Funding Programme.** This programme is aimed at promoting equal balance of power between men and women. This is dependent on the empowerment of women, which means that women are increasingly enabled to stand up for their own rights, needs and wishes, both individually and in an organized context<sup>9</sup>

**e) Others** that were cited are Technical Centre for Agriculture and Rural Cooperation (CTA) and FAO/Dimitra.

### 3.3 How can Rural Women's Networks Win Access to Funds?

Participants observed that funding agencies usually advertise in various media like radio, newspapers, online like on mailing lists such as wougnet-l@wougnet.org, apc-foss@lists.apc.org, arth@lists.kabissa.org, cangoonline@lists.kabissa.org.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://awdf.org/awdf/db.php>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.globalfundforwomen.org/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.globalgiving.com>

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.hivos.nl/english/english/themes/gender\\_women\\_development](http://www.hivos.nl/english/english/themes/gender_women_development)

The funding information is also normally available among the organization's published material like newsletters, brochures and websites.

Other ways rural women groups can get access to funding information include:

- networking with colleagues and partners
- attending community meetings, government workshops/seminars
- contacting local women representatives at the local councils
- checking the local media such as radios and newspapers
- visiting the offices of funding organizations or contacting them via e-mail, telephone or fax

Funding information can also be searched on the Internet using search engines like Google<sup>10</sup>, Excite<sup>11</sup> to find out about potential funders depending on a particular organization's activities. Those with out Internet access can seek assistance from existing women networks or organizations or from individuals. In Uganda, Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET)<sup>12</sup> provides support to its rural members with a variety of developmental information, including funding, through a monthly print newsletter in addition to the online electronic version and individual consultations on phone or physical interaction whenever necessary. A related initiative in Tanzania is the Tanzania E-Women Network<sup>13</sup>.

### **3.4 Procedures for Access to the Financial Packages from Potential Funders**

This session focused on the common practices of applying for funding from various donors especially those that support rural women network initiatives.

It was realized that different funding bodies have different funding objectives, which largely determine their funding criteria. Examples of funding objectives are economic empowerment, social empowerment, education of the girl child, reproductive health etc. This information is normally contained in the organization's profile or advertisement for funding. For example global fund for Women has listed on its web site the kind of organizations it supports.<sup>14</sup>

Most funders have their defined guidelines on how to present a funding proposal. Most times, these procedures can be got from the funding advertisement.

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.google.com>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.excite.com/>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.wougnet.org/>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.tanzaniagateway.org/ewomen/search.asp?Cat=5>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.globalfundforwomen.org/3grant/>

### **3.5 Challenges that Hinder Rural Women Networks' Access to Funds**

It was alleged that some funding organizations tend to have their “pet” projects and “pet” nations, which lay the ground rules to access these funds.

Dimitra/FAO was given as an exception to such conditionalities. CTA has also joined forces with Dimitra/FAO to assist networks access funds from the European Union and other foundations working with them to support some of the rural women networks in Africa. Unlike, many funding agencies, which require that for an organization to be funded, they are first known to them or other big funding agencies, CTA is able to follow an organization from the grassroots level, investigate their core values and capacity, and finally develop trust to base on whether to fund such an agency or not.

### **3.6 How can Rural Women's Networks Manage Funds Effectively?**

This session looked into how rural women networks can manage funds effectively once awarded. Participants observed that it is every funders' requirement to account for the funds obtained.

Recipient institutions are mandated to account for the funds received. Most often this is the basis for consideration for another round of funding. If an organization has successfully implemented its programmes, it always stands high chances of being considered for another round of funding.

In addition to the funding criteria, funding information normally includes guidelines on how to utilize the funds. An example is the Global Fund for Women (GFW)'s call for funding.<sup>15</sup>

### **3.7 Possible Mechanisms for Fundraising as a Collective Effort**

The participants exchanged views on the possible mechanisms that can be used for fundraising as a collective effort. It was noted that informal mechanisms have been in use and can be adopted to raise funds for supporting rural women networks namely:

**Donations:** Used by many funding charities like Oxfam and Global Fund for Women as the main avenue of raising money they give out as grants.

**Fundraising galas/workshops, walks, dinners:** Used by both local development agencies and funding agencies to raise money towards facilitating a particular cause such as supporting women widowed by HIV/AIDS, AIDS infected expectant mothers, women in conflict zones and so on.

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.globalfundforwomen.org/3grant/>

## **4.0 INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this theme was to exchange ideas and share experiences on Information and Communication (IC) strategies to strengthen rural women networks such as appropriate and combined communication channels and services including electronic media, face to face interactions and rural radio, networking and capacity building for local groups and Innovative ICT solutions suited to local contexts.

The discussion was guided but not restricted to the following questions:

- i) Why is it necessary for Rural Women Networks (RWNs) to have IC strategies?
- ii) What should comprise an IC Strategy of a RWN?
- iii) Share examples of successful IC strategies of RWNs.
- iv) What are the challenges faced by RWNs in formulating and implementing IC strategies?
- v) How can these challenges be overcome?

This topic was discussed in March 2006, and the results of the month's long discussion are presented in sections 4.2 to 4.6 below.

### **4.2 Necessity for Rural Women Networks (RWNs) to have IC Strategies**

The discussion defined an information and communication strategy as the plan for achieving information sharing or imparting information. It was acknowledged that:

- Information and communication have the potential to enhance people's quality of life.
- Information and Communication (IC) can lead to the empowerment of women, enabling them to take control of their lives.
- Without information and communication, the voices of rural women for change will not be heard and development initiatives in one society will not be known and applied in other societies.
- IC can also play an important role in making an organization more transparent and accessible to the targeted beneficiaries or customers and the general public.

Having information and communication (IC) strategies enable:

- RWNs to use appropriate and combined communication channels and services including electronic media, face-to-face interactions and rural radio packaged in formats appropriate to the target.
- Networking and capacity building for local groups
- Democratization of information access to varied groups involved e.g. women and children. A village information and communication strategy will ensure that urgent considerations as a result of the national policy process are also considered and implemented at local level there by democratizing access by rural dwellers to

the Information Society. The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)<sup>16</sup> devised this strategy for African nations on the premise that majority of Africa's people live in rural areas and form 60 to 70 % of the population.

ECA gives the following advantages of having Information and Communication Strategies at the rural level<sup>17</sup>:

- Allows more people living across the country to have an input to the information society building process;
- Buy-in of the process at the local government level, sharing and spreading the responsibilities of policy-making across the political ladder;
- Provides the opportunities for 'champions' at the regional/local levels in ICTs; Enables effective faster implementation of the policy if regional and local governments are involved;
- Democratization of the policy process spreads further knowledge of the role of ICTs in development throughout the country;
- Offers opportunities of scaling up and implementation of universal access goals.

#### **4.3 What should comprise an IC Strategy for RWN?**

It was noted that today there are a number of media categories at our disposal. An IC strategy can choose to use either one medium or a combination.

In rural development, the media categories commonly used were identified to include: Broadcast (television and especially radio); group (video, tape-slides, sound film-strips, audio-cassettes, overhead projections, flip-charts, posters, pamphlets, and leaflets; as well as traditional folk media such as puppets and live-theatre); and interpersonal channels (community leaders, contact farmers, extension workers).

The general rule of thumb emerging from field experience is to use multiple channels, wherever possible, so that each medium reinforces and multiplies the importance of the others in an integrated network. For instance, radio is particularly widely available in most rural areas in Africa and good at reaching a mass audience, quickly, with simple messages; print media like posters and pamphlets are good reminders or reinforcers of broadcasts and interpersonal sources who provide opportunities for discussing information inputs are most useful for adding credibility to media content, shifting attitudes and prompting behavioral practice changes.

One approach advocated for by Coldevin (1990) is use of campaigns. Campaigns stimulate action on problems requiring short-term or simple solutions, which in turn often serve as the thin-end of the wedge towards embarking on broader, long term development goals. As such, they are normally information-intense with messages being repeated over

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.uneca.org/aisi/NICI/>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.uneca.org/aisi/NICI/village.htm>

and over in “high frequency” advertising fashion, using a diversity of channel formats from radio spots and jingles to field worker demonstrations.

Of all the media, radio was identified as a powerful medium for rural communication and information sharing. Radio provides both the reach and the relevance that local broadcasting can achieve by using participatory communication approaches. Remote rural communities can use rural radio to improve the sharing of information. Participatory communication techniques such as listener’s groups can support information and communication efforts especially using local languages and rural radio to communicate directly with rural listeners. A format that combines a drama performed by local actors with corresponding thematic discussions is a good information and communication approach for rural audiences. Targeted audience research can help to determine programme content, broadcast schedules and the preferences of listeners regarding the mix of information and education in the format.

#### **4.4 Examples of Successful IC Strategies of Rural Women Networks**

The following were given as examples of successful IC strategies:

***Communication Strategy for rural development in Lesotho:*** This is a case study about Lesotho that demonstrates the use of communication to support rural development. It was derived from two FAO/ Technical Cooperation Programme projects (TCPs) carried out by the Development Support Communication (DSC) Branch during 1987 and 1988. The overriding goal was to prepare staff of the Agricultural Information Service (AIS) to design, implement, and evaluate multi-channel communication campaigns, one of the most effective strategies in the arsenal of DSC delivery mechanisms<sup>18</sup>.

***Pag La Yiri Rural Women Network, Zabre, Burkina Faso:*** Pag La Yiri set up a radio to overcome the information and communication gap between Zabre and the rural villagers while the internet and email are used to facilitate the exchange of and the search for relevant information. Pag La Yiri which means well being of man in the local Mossi language offers agricultural information and training programmes, agricultural transfer services and pharmaceutical services to women and men farmers in this region<sup>19</sup>.

***Rural Women in Africa: Ideas for Earning Money CD-ROM, Uganda:*** This project presents a CD-ROM succeeding as a media strategy for information and communication for rural women. The project was guided by the principle that the CD-ROM would be used on basic computer systems at rural telecentres, require minimal technical know-how to operate, and not rely on access to the Internet or worldwide web. Other than the medium, one other aspect of learning value about the project is the type of content and its presentation. Both the subject matter and its presentation were tailored to the needs of the target group (rural women farmers/entrepreneurs). “The educational requirements were

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<sup>18</sup> [http://www.fao.org/documents/show\\_cdr.asp?url\\_file=/docrep/U1320E/u1320e01.htm](http://www.fao.org/documents/show_cdr.asp?url_file=/docrep/U1320E/u1320e01.htm)

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.iicd.org/projects/articles/iicdprojects.2005-06-28.0488713541>,  
<http://www.iicd.org/projects/articles/iicdprojects.2005-06-28.0488713541>



that the content material be accessible to an audience with little or no reading skills, be seen as having immediate value and be in the language of the community. Furthermore, and from a practical perspective, the new tool needed to be affordable in cost and adaptable into other languages to ensure widespread replicability and viability”. It was developed based on Uganda but the idea is adaptable to other environments. It’s available in both English and Luganda (the widely used local dialect in Uganda). In Uganda, It has been used extensively by telecenters and other ICTs for rural development initiatives targeting both men and women<sup>20</sup>.

**National Rural Women Network of Senegal:** While implementing a project on HIV/AIDS, the National Rural Women Network of Senegal has adopted a set up of information units through neighborhood organizations strategy for the promotion of the prevention of the mother-to-child transmission of HIV among young girls of reproductive age and pregnant women. This training is intended to help women avoid the transmission of HIV by counseling and testing and hence improve maternal and infant health. The units’s activities comprise conversations, drama, and Information education and Communication (IEC) activities open to the public.

**ICT National Strategies in Africa:** ECA in partnership with other partners has assisted over 28 African countries to develop Information Communication Technology (ICT) national strategies to accelerate their social economic developments and is working with a number of these countries to develop implementation plans. It is also supporting the development of sectoral and village level policies and liaising with regional economic communities to develop regional plans<sup>21</sup>.

## **4.5 Challenges faced by RWNs in formulating and implementing IC Strategies**

### **4.5.1 Challenges**

Participants identified a number of challenges still hindering successful formulation and implementation of IC strategies as follows:

- Access to and the cost of ICT tools and services continue to be a major obstacle, particularly in the developing world
- The infrastructure is either old or non-existent in most countries in Africa.
- Lack of relevant content and or lack of capacity to generate it
- Affordable access and availability of infrastructure
- Cost of access and lack of affordable solutions
- Lack of gender awareness in telecommunications and ICT policy
- Social, cultural and economic factors like language and content limitations addressing women’s needs.

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.wougnet.org/News/cdupdate.html>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.uneca.org/aisi/NICI/>

#### **4.6 Strategies to overcome the challenges**

To overcome some of the identified challenges, the following strategies were proposed:

- Providing community access to ICT
- Get familiar with and take advantage of Telecommunications Development Funds (TDF) and other universal access policies
- Advocate for and develop government funded training programs
- Develop special interest content in local languages
- Gender-aware participatory methods to assess the ICT needs and demands of women. If IC strategies for RWNs are to be formulated and implemented successfully, ICT policy and programs must address the needs of women and the poor in general.

## **PART TWO: IMPACT OF HIV/AIDS**

**(April to June 2006)**

### **5.0 IDENTIFICATION OF SHARED PROBLEMS**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

The month of April marked the beginning of the second half of the discussion that ran up to June 2006, under the common topic “Impact of HIV/AIDS, and divided into three different themes namely: Identification of shared problems, experience from networks and information and communication strategies. The discussion theme for April was “Identification of Shared Problems”

This theme focused on issues like the fact that the agricultural sector was severely damaged by the HIV/AIDS pandemic at several levels: increased vulnerability among rural women; manpower: HIV/AIDS affecting the most active and productive sectors of the rural society; access and control of natural resources; agricultural knowledge; economic losses; change from labour intensive crops to subsistence farming; declining nutritional levels.

The discussion was guided but not restricted to the following questions:

- i) Why should vulnerable rural women have knowledge and access to markets of agricultural produce in the face of the Aids crisis?
- ii) Death of a household head is often followed by culturally sanctioned property grabbing, including farm tools and land. Would adoption of high yielding, low cost highly marketable practices alleviate the problem of shrunken farm size. In

what ways could this alleviate the plight of a vulnerable rural women and her family.

- iii) How could the promotions of labour saving, high value, marketable crops improve food security and farmers incomes?
- iv) Why should the promotion and cultivation of indigenous crops be preferred to furtherance of hybrids for women in the face of AIDS?

Results of the discussion in April are presented in sections 5.2 to 5.6 below. The results for the following sections are presented according to the different sub themes that emerged from the discussion.

## **5.2 Recognition of HIV/AIDS as a Reality**

The discussion noted that the epidemic had affected all aspects of human life and the agricultural sector deserved special attention. Most of the population in the developing world is rural subsistence farmers, using labour intensive techniques, which is largely provided by women. Available statistics indicate that by 2015, of the nearly 3 million women who would die of HIV/AIDS related illnesses, 72% would be in Africa (ILO, 2005). This therefore has an effect on subsistence agriculture, especially at household level where replacement of agricultural labour would be nearly impossible.

## **5.3 Access and Control of Natural Resources**

It was noted that control and access to resources affected women in many ways. This had been worsened by high rates of death resulting from HIV/AIDS. Property grabbing and loss of control over family assets following the death of a spouse had brought home the reality of HIV/AIDS. This was so because the widow was sometimes deprived of family property, farm land, crops and farm tools. Land being a major primary factor in food production, deprivation of it affected food security, household income and nutritional levels. Widows in the developing countries generally had fewer claims to common property, as cultural practices predetermined.

## **5.4 Change from Labour Intensive Crops to Subsistence Farming**

It was noted that in the developing world, women provide much of the labour force in agriculture. Since women are the most affected by this epidemic, there was an emphasis on shifting from labour intensive crops to labour saving techniques. Such methods included crop diversification, intercropping with legumes, mulching that helps to suppress weeds, water harvesting techniques to save on the time women spend moving long distances to look for water, introduction of lighter ploughs and tools that can be used

easily by women, children and the elderly. Emphasis was put on crops that could give the family a balanced diet as well as fetch some income for the home from the surplus.

### **5.5 Strategies to Address Declining Nutritional Levels**

It was learnt that in Zambia, farmers were being encouraged to plant crops like mushrooms, which mature early, had a ready market and provided a dependable source of protein. Bee keeping was given as another low cost but highly paying enterprise that yielded all year round. Beehives could also be made from local materials. Honey and bee wax were two high value products of bee farming. In addition honey had nutritional value and medicinal attributes.

### **5.6 Challenges Faced in Addressing the HIV/AIDS Epidemic**

The following challenges were given as some of the main hindrances to combating HIV/AIDS and its impact on rural women:

- Culture is still strongly rooted in many African societies and some of the practices and norms sabotage the efforts towards combating the spread of the disease.
- Most of the land laws especially in developing countries do not favor women.
- High poverty rates in developing countries escalates the spread of HIV/AIDS and its effects.

### **5.7 Strategies to help Rural Women and Farmers in the face of the HIV/AIDS Epidemic**

The following strategies were proposed:

- Knowledge and access to markets of agricultural produce
- Diversification of crops grown from cash crops to subsistence crops of high nutritional value.
- Production of highly marketable crops that have high value.
- Advocate for women to have more access to land in terms of ownership and rights.

## **6.0 EXPERIENCES FROM NETWORKS**

### **6.1 Introduction**

In May 2006, the discussion was centered on highlighting factors that could be considered as a start to a process of change on:

- Recognizing of HIV/AIDS as a reality. Regular and motivated participation of community members in community dialogues and especially women and girls.

- Identification of innovative experiences: better use of rural community radios, videos and new ICTs
- Transmission of knowledge
- Dissemination of best practices (community coping mechanisms, community initiatives and organisations)
- Dissemination of discipline-specific web resources and online training materials
- Dissemination of research results in appropriate formats

The discussion was guided but not restricted to the following questions.

- i) HIV/AIDS is a reality in our communities. How have girls and women participated in community dialogues on HIV/AIDS?
- ii) How has HIV/AIDS knowledge been transmitted in your community using the rural community radio, videos and other new ICTs?
- iii) Discuss examples of how your community has come up with initiatives to cope with the disease, for example, community support groups in the villages, organisations including Government, etc.

Results of the month's long discussions are presented in sections 6.2 to 6.6 below.

## **6.2 Integrated HIV Programmes**

The discussion noted that HIV/AIDS is no longer a health issue alone but also carried cultural, social, economic and political implications. Therefore interventions required a concerted effort by all stakeholders. The role of the private sector, International organisations, governments, NGOs, and the community were highlighted. It also noted that most countries had National AIDS programmes.

## **6.3 Transmission of Knowledge**

The discussion highlighted that HIV/AIDS knowledge was transmitted through various channels, both formal and informal. The informal channels were noted as being friends and relatives. This was also noted as the channel that is known to most rural women. Some of the formal channels noted were the Churches, Government campaigns, International and non-governmental organizations.

## **6.4 Community Coping Mechanisms and Initiatives**

It was noted that communities have come up with various coping mechanisms and initiatives to curb the spread of HIV/AIDS. For the adolescents and the young school going age group, anti-Aids clubs have been started in the schools. Initiatives also targeted commercial sex workers, where they are trained in AIDS education and condom usage promotion. Various church based and non-governmental organizations offer counseling services, preventive strategies, positive living and health care education services.

## **7.0 INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IN RELATION TO THE IMPACT OF HIV/AIDS**

### **7.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this theme was to exchange ideas and share experiences on information and communication (IC) strategies on the impact of HIV/AIDS.

The discussion that was held in June was guided but not restricted to the following questions:

- i) Are anti-HIV/AIDS information and communication strategies of any benefit to rural women?
- ii) What should an anti-HIV/AIDS information and communication strategy comprise?
- iii) Share examples of successful anti-HIV/AIDS information and communication strategies that have addressed rural women's needs.

Sections 7.2 to 7.6 present the results of the discussion on this subject.

### **7.2 Benefit of anti- HIV/AIDS IC Strategies to Rural Women?**

The discussion considered the definition of an information and communication strategy as the plan for achieving information sharing or imparting information. This was the same definition that was used during the month of March that focused on IC strategies for the sustainability of rural women's networks (presented in Section 4 of this report). While the discussion in June was focused on HIV/AIDS, a lot of the issues presented in Section 4 were highlighted as relevant.

The discussion acknowledged that Information and Communication (IC):

- Can lead to the empowerment of women, enabling them to take control of their lives and participate as equals with men in promoting food security, combating HIV/AIDS and driving general rural development.
- Can help to fight HIV/AIDS by changing people's behavior through educational schemes. During the eighties, American AIDS advocates co-opted the phrase 'silence equals death' from the environment movement, to describe the danger of a lack of information and communication around HIV/AIDS (Forman, 2003).
- In fighting the HIV/AIDS scourge, stakeholders such as governments, health workers, health promoters and community members can use IC to:
  - (a) Combined communication channels including electronic media, face-to-face interactions and rural radio packaged in formats appropriate to different target groups for more effective communication and information

sharing. Radio was particularly widely available in most rural areas in Africa and good at reaching a mass audience, quickly, with simple messages; print media like posters and pamphlets were good reminders or reinforcers of broadcasts and interpersonal sources who provide opportunities for discussing information inputs are most useful for adding credibility to media content, shifting attitudes and promoting behavioral practice changes.

- (b) Network with relevant bodies and groups to share experiences, best practices such as the open approach and learn from each other.
  - (c) Democratize information access to varied groups involved for example women and youth. An HIV/AIDS village information and communication strategy will ensure that urgent considerations as a result of the national policy process were also considered and implemented at local level there by democratizing access by rural dwellers to the Information Society. ECA<sup>22</sup> devised this strategy not for HIV/AIDS specifically but as a general information and communication strategy for African nations on the premise that majority of Africa's people live in rural areas and form 60 to 70 % of the population.
- More effective communication about the HIV/AIDS disease, and greater flows of information were central to the success of AIDS strategies, and for reducing the vulnerability that flows to and from HIV infection. Information and communication are sources of power in an epidemic characterized by lack of information especially in developing countries. Information and communication confers the power to protect against infection, to influence decision makers, and to live lives of dignity and equality once infected. For example in Africa, a region often characterized by resource limitations and fragmented infrastructures, information and communication are two of the most critical and abundant resources available in the fight against HIV/AIDS.
  - Success in countries like Uganda, Senegal and Zambia in lowering infection rates, and in the multitude of civil society and community initiatives and projects that are having tremendous local impact throughout the African continent is due to their effective information and communication strategies. In countries with massive infection rates and limited financial resources, strong leadership and the participation and involvement of all social and economic sectors, and especially affected communities were critical elements of an effective response to HIV/AIDS. This participation was largely dependent on free flows of information and communication.
  - Information and communication (IC) holds vast potential for effective HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment and care and protection of human rights especially for the husbands' infidelity.

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<sup>22</sup> <http://www.uneca.org/aisi/NICI/>

- IC offered potential solutions to misinformation and myths, silence and denial, and stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV and AIDS (PLWHA). For example it was effective information and communication that helped quickly dispel the false belief among some sections of society in South Africa in 2005 that sleeping with a virgin would cure HIV/AIDS.
- IC was also key to a civil society response to the epidemic, enabling advocacy, mobilization, empowerment, participation and facilitating greater accountability.
- Plays, educational sessions and announcements on Radios and Televisions and in the print media are today used to counsel the infected and affected and educate the public including the rural women about getting treatment. With global support initiatives such as global fund, some health centres in developing regions like Africa have anti-retro-viral medications, some of which are available free of charge. In addition, due to public education and sensitization, the public including young women and men are coming out to support and promote best practices for prevention and positive living.
- Rural women are empowered through information and communication to safeguard themselves and their families.
- Although in the past, information and communication was seen as stigmatizing people, the opposite is now the case.

However, the discussion also noted that there are still a number of *challenges hindering realization of the full benefits of using IC strategies* in relation to the impact of HIV/AIDS namely:

- Availability of anti-retroviral drugs in all poor countries
- Difficulty in accessing the grants from the Global Fund by poor countries
- Unrealistic funders conditions like abstinence versus condoms
- Women's weak bargaining power about sex options. Even if women are informed about the dangers of unprotected sex with a spouse with multiple partners, it didn't mean that they are all able to say no to sex or negotiate with their roving sexual partners the use of condoms, femidom or the use of the spermicide gel. According to available statistics from the United Nations, 60% of the HIV/AIDS newly infected population are rural women. The Catholic Church in South Kivu has made a small stride on this matter. When one of the legal spouses is infected, the church allows them a special relationship, whereby they are authorized to use condoms to protect the spouse who is not yet infected. But how about the non-Christians, the Christians who are not committed members of the church and the rest of the people in other areas?

In addition to the need to address the above challenges, the discussion also noted that there was need to put more effort and resources to sharing information and communicating about the HIV/AIDS scourge. Hopefully at one point, everyone will know about HIV/AIDS and how to avoid becoming victims.



### **7.3 Composition of anti-HIV/AIDS Information and Communication Strategies**

It was noted that today there are a number of media categories at our disposal. An anti-HIV/AIDS IC strategy can choose to use either one medium or a combination.

In rural development, the media categories commonly used were, as previously identified, to include: Broadcast (television and especially radio); group (video, tape-slides, sound film-strips, audio-cassettes, overhead projections, flip-charts, posters, pamphlets, and leaflets); as well as traditional folk media such as puppets and live-theatre); and interpersonal channels (community leaders, contact farmers, extension workers).

The general rule of thumb emerging from field experience was to use multiple channels, wherever possible, so that each medium reinforces and multiplies the importance of the others in an integrated network.

One approach advocated for by Coldevin (1990) is use of campaigns. Campaigns often serve as the thin-end of the wedge towards embarking on broader, long term development goals. They are normally information-intense with messages being repeated over and over in "high frequency" advertising fashion, using a diversity of channel formats from radio spots and jingles to field worker demonstrations.

Of all the media, radio was identified as a powerful medium for rural communication and information sharing. Radio provides both the reach and the relevance that local broadcasting can achieve by using participatory communication approaches. Remote rural communities can use rural radio to improve the sharing of information. Participatory communication techniques such as listener's groups can support information and communication efforts especially using local languages and rural radio to communicate directly with rural listeners.

A format that combines a drama performed by local actors with corresponding thematic discussions is a good information and communication approach for rural audiences. Targeted audience research can help to determine programme content, broadcast schedules and the preferences of listeners regarding the mix of information and education in the format.

The discussion proposed that an anti-HIV/AIDS IC strategy could comprise of one or more of the following:

- Online and off-line workshops and courses.
- Coherent information and ICT training schemes adapted to regional contexts and directed to disadvantaged women groups such as rural women, widows, infected and affected mothers.
- Creation of women and youth information centers.
- Content production, design and launching of specific web-sites on HIV/AIDS prevention
- Developing information materials and media campaigns on HIV/AIDS prevention

- Use of radio to deliver audio versions of written messages

#### **7.4 Successful anti-HIV/AIDS IC Strategies addressing Rural Women's Needs**

The following were given as examples of successful anti-HIV/AIDS IC strategies:

***Encouraging community dialogue on social norms in Namibia:*** This is a large-scale community mobilization program in Namibia aimed at encouraging people in their communities to talk openly about HIV/AIDS and to identify the underlying factors driving the epidemic. This has led to a marked turn around in the sense of ownership of the response to the epidemic and at times painfully honest community reflection regarding the role of each peer group in both being vulnerable to and contributing to the epidemic.

***Increasing health care worker and client knowledge in South Africa:*** In South Africa, the National Health Channel's program, Mindset, reaches 185,000 health care workers and clients and is increasing knowledge and capacity in HIV/AIDS service delivery via special television programs directly delivered into clinic settings via satellite. The information provided to remote and underserved health care workers and settings, provides detailed guidelines on counseling, treatment and care for people living with HIV.

***The country's first PMTC Communication Strategy in Mozambique:*** HCP supported the MOH PMTC efforts to develop their first Communication Strategy to orchestrate and guide more than 30 local and international partners nationwide. The team building approach taken has paid off as the first phase of the strategy is already underway and is preparing health providers to establish caring and respectful client-provider interaction overcoming HIV/ AIDS stigma and discriminatory attitudes in the workplace.

***ICT National Strategies in Africa:*** ECA in partnership with other partners has assisted over 28 African countries to develop Information Communication Technology (ICT) national strategies to accelerate their social economic developments and is working with a number of these countries to develop implementation plans. It is also supporting the development of Sectoral and village level policies and liaising with regional economic communities to develop regional plans<sup>23</sup>.

***Memory Project by National Association of Women Living with AIDS in Uganda:*** National Association of Women Living with AIDS in Uganda (NACWOLA), a local women NGO in Uganda by and for HIV positive women in Uganda, on realizing the importance of communicating with children to help them cope with their situation formed the Memory project. Under this project, positive mothers are trained with the skills to communicate about HIV and eventually disclose their positive status to their children. According to Annet Biryetega, the National Coordinator, NACWOLA, developing these

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.uneca.org/aisi/NICI/>

skills gives families time to talk about all the issues that come with having HIV in the family<sup>24</sup>. It gives children the opportunity to plan ahead; it helps them find ways to cope while their parents are still living. “The success of the enterprising Memory Project in Uganda has prompted a huge amount of interest from organisations across Africa. Plans are now in place to expand the project into Ethiopia, Tanzania and Zimbabwe and to strengthen partnerships in Kenya and Uganda”<sup>25</sup>.

## **8.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **8.1 Conclusion**

The discussion generated important issues regarding sustainability of Rural Women Networks and the Impact of HIV/AIDS. Significant among these are that:

Information and communication can lead to the empowerment of women, enabling them to take control of their lives and participate as equals with men in promoting food security, combating HIV/AIDS and driving general rural development.

By bringing people together to explore synergies and encouraging exchange and sharing of experiences, Dimitra networks have become a powerful force for social change. A play by Burkina Faso women on modern agricultural techniques earned them increased respect in their society. Through the play, they proved that they could technically contribute on something, even if it was about advanced agricultural techniques.

The other significant issue raised in the discussion was that radio is still a powerful medium for rural communication and information sharing. It provides both the reach and the relevance that local broadcasting can achieve by using participatory communication approaches.

The discussion also noted that HIV/AIDS is still affecting majority households in Africa hence impacting negatively on food security and income levels for most families. Culture and poverty still play a big part in escalating the spread and effects of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Effective information and communication strategies such as use of multiple channels, combining technology and social networks, exploiting the fairly wide availability of communication technology tools like radios in rural areas are vital to the efforts to reduce the spread and containing the effects of HIV/AIDS in rural areas.

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<sup>24</sup> <http://www.healthlink.org.uk/world/ewa02stories.html>

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.healthlink.org.uk/world/ewa02.htm>

## **8.2 Overview of Participation**

The list had 39 registered participants. During the six months' discussion, 27 participants gave contributions in English or French (8 in January, 6 in February, 3 in March, 2 in April, 1 in May and 7 in June). Some members were able to post messages in both English and French. Postings in one language were translated and the translated versions posted to the discussion list. The month of January registered the highest number of contributions (eight representing 21%) and May registered the lowest (one representing 3%). An analysis of the participants highlighting their experience with the use of email and prior participation in electronic fora is provided in Annex I. Details of participants' evaluation of the discussion are in Annex II.

## **8.3 Challenges Faced**

Overall, there was low contribution from participants to the discussion. Some members identified a general problem to be lack of Internet/email access by some members of the rural women networks. In Senegal, an alternative was used to involve participants from rural areas in a face-to-face meeting, from which their views were gathered and shared on the discussion list. The variation of the contributions between months could be attributed to different levels of interest in the themes covered.

The other challenge faced during the discussions was technical problems with the mailing list during which some members could not post and were not receiving messages posted. This was a recurring problem on the Dgroups mailing list used for the discussion.

## **8.4 Moderators' Comments and Recommendations on Participation**

Inclusion of more participants from rural women networks outside the Brussels 2005 meeting membership could enrich the participants' diversity and amount of contributions.

Participants seemed more interested in Part Two of the discussion "Impact of HIV/AIDS" as compared to Part One "Sustainability of the CTA/Dimitra networks". Future discussions could consider giving more significance to the HIV/AIDS themes.

Organisers should also envisage financial support for face-to-face meetings in rural areas to facilitate contributions from groups which have limited access to ICTs.

Sharing monthly summaries of the discussions with participants could be useful to inform participants about discussion outcomes, as well as their weaknesses and strengths. In addition to giving participants timely discussion outcomes, this could be used as a strategy to call for more participation especially the times when contributions are low.

Future discussions could consider using WOUGNET's mailing space as the host. This could avoid or lessen the effects of technical problems that could be experienced again with the mailing list space during the discussion.

## **8.5 General Recommendations**

The following general recommendations were made in the discussion:

- In future, if a related discussion is held, including more rural women network participants from different countries outside the Brussels 2005 meeting could enrich the participants' diversity further.
- In future related discussions, other rural women networks in other countries can adopt Senegal's approach to collect views of their members with no Internet access through a face-to-face meeting and later share them on the list.
- Rural women networks need guidance on how they can access the available funds from relevant supporting agencies. In this context, a guide on fundraising strategies and funding sources adapted to such networks will be useful.
- There is also need to sensitize development partners and funding institutions to include in their priorities funding rural women network projects.
- As an action point of the result of the six-month's online forum, the individual rural women networks could merge into regional groups to form recognizable entities better placed to apply and stand chances of winning funding. This funding could later be shared out.

Another recommendation was the need to meet regularly face to face as a better way to bond together and plan future actions together.

## Annex I: Analysis of participants in the CTA/Dimitra electronic discussion

### 1. Introduction

A participation evaluation form was sent to the list at the beginning of the discussion. Of the 39 participants, eight (33%) completed and returned the participation forms. The participants who responded were from the following countries.

Belgium	2
Senegal	2
Burkina Faso	1
Kenya	1
Uganda	1
Fiji Islands	1

Details of the analysis of the responses are given below.

### 2. Experience in ICT use

The analysis of the completed forms showed that, 50% of the respondents had some experience in ICT use, 25% have extensive experience and 25% worked in ICT-related areas. This therefore indicated that, all the participants who returned the forms were regular ICT users and had experience in ICT use. It could also explain why these particular forms were returned and not the rest.

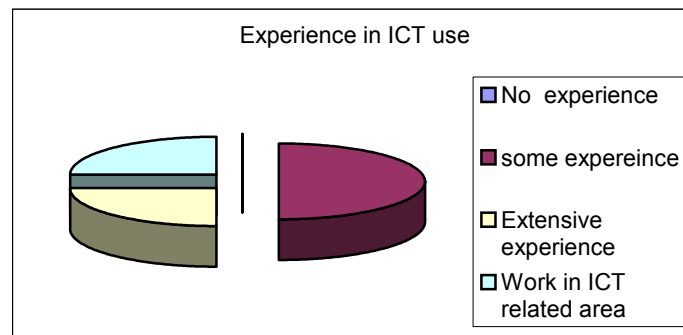


Fig 1: Experience in ICT use

### 3. Use of email

The majority of the respondents, 86% had used email for more than three years and only 14% had used it for more than one year but less than three years. From the graphical illustration, it was clear that a high percentage of the participants had a wide experience in email use.

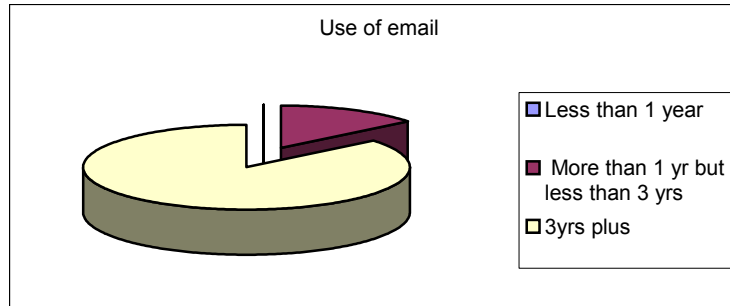


Fig 2: Use of Email

#### 4. Type of web browser used

49% of the respondents were using Internet Explorer compared to Mozilla which had a low percentage of 13%. None of the respondents were using Netscape and 38% used either Internet explorer or Mozilla which is illustrated in the graph below.

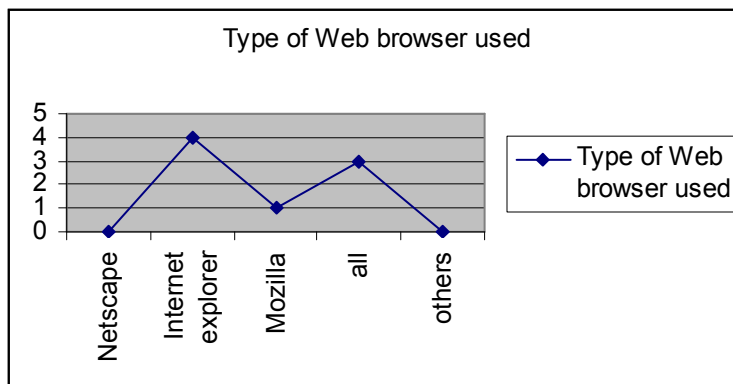


Fig 3: Type of Web browser used

#### 5. Knowledge of downloading Data or Files

All the respondents (100%) had knowledge of downloading data and files.

#### 6. Previous participation in an electronic discussion

The analysis indicated that the majority of the respondents, 87% had taken part in an e-discussion before. Only 13% had never participated in an e-discussion.

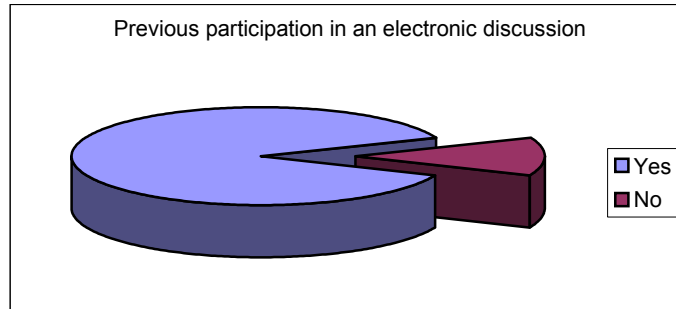


Fig 4: Previous participation in an e-discussion

### 7. Reason for interest in the CTA/Dimitra e-discussion

The majority of the respondents indicated that the main reason why they were interested in the discussion was for the need to continue to strengthen the links between networks and exchange experiences. The themes for the discussion were also reported relevant to the work of the respondents. To others, it was the personal commitment to the advancement of rural women whereas other respondents were interested in the recommendations that would arise focusing on Information and Communication strategies and the Networking opportunities.

### 8. Concluding Remarks

The above analysis was made basing on only eight participants who returned the forms compared to the thirty (30) participants who attended the June workshop and were subscribed to the electronic discussion. This may therefore not give a true reflection of all the participants in the discussion.



## **Annex II: Participants' evaluation of the electronic discussion**

### **1.0 Introduction**

An evaluation questionnaire was sent out to the list in the last week of June 2006. The questionnaire covered:

- How long participants had used email
- If they had participated in an electronic discussion before
- Why they were interested in this electronic discussion
- What they had liked about the discussion
- And what they would do differently next time for such an electronic discussion

Of the thirty nine registered participants, only five completed and returned the questionnaire. Section 2 presents a summary of the feedback.

### **2.0 Results of the Evaluation**

#### **2.1 Email Usage**

Majority of the participants were familiar with email usage. Of the five responses, four had used email for more than three years and only one had used it for more than one year but less than three years.

#### **2.2 Participation in electronic discussions before**

Similarly, of the responses received, majority (four out of the five respondents) were conversant with working with electronic discussions.

#### **2.3 Reasons for participating in this electronic discussion**

Participants gave varied reasons as to why they were interested in participating in the discussion. Most outstanding (given by 40%) were:

- The themes that were discussed were topical issues that were pertinent to rural communities and most especially rural women. The most interesting theme was the impact of HIV/AIDS
- They were interested in seeing how other rural women networks share information and the communication strategies they used at the grass root level

Other reasons included:

- The discussion allowed sharing of ideas and experiences from various networks
- Strengthened and expanded the networks

- Thought it was a very educative discussion group targeting Rural Women Networks.
- Thought it a good strategy for personal enrichment
- Wanted to share the information from the discussions with members of their NGO and other collaborators in the Rural Projects especially the issues about HIV/AIDS and Women
- It was a concretization of Brussels workshop.
- Thought it very educative for those involved or planning to get involved in virtual networks.

#### **2.4 What participants liked about the discussion**

This question generated diverse responses as follows:

- The experience of being a part of the discussion
- Direct exchange of ideas
- The richness of ideas and experiences shared
- The themes that were chosen for discussion.
- Discussion composition including people working in rural settings, with rural networks and with Rural women
- The Moderation. It was on time and even when the discussion was at its lowest, this did not dampen the moderator's spirit.
- Fulfilled the request of all the participants from the DIMITRA Meeting held in Brussels.
- The Coordinator of the Programme was very systematic in the planning and implementation of the Project
- The weekly/monthly discussions by all those who registered was truly informative and enriching as a source of useful information worth communicating to other partners with out online facilities
- The use of multi-language system ensured that the Francophone network as well the Anglophone group got the same information shared over time.
- Portrayed an example of a collaborative strategy in achieving joint activities.

#### **2.5 What participants would do differently next time for the electronic discussion**

This section generated pertinent points most of which re-emphasized the recommendations earlier raised. These included:

- Since the themes being discussed involved rural women, next time, having the voices of the real rural woman on the themes would enrich the discussion. For example future discussions could consider having community meetings with rural women concurrently with the e-discussion and share the results on the list.
- Future discussions should find ways to motivate participants to participate more actively especially on the HIV/AIDS topic

- Make the duration shorter.
- Next time it might help if the Network invited Youths to take part too
- It may also help if non Network members both women and men could be encouraged to make their voices heard, especially those who are already victims of HIV/AIDS
- Publish the summaries of the results of the discussion as a publication that CTA/FAO/DIIMITRA can circulate in book form.
- To better prepare interventions
- To involve participants from the beginning, which means from the choosing of themes for the discussion
- To involve other focal points like in Mauritius, Seychelles and Comoros.

### Annex III: List of participants - Electronic Discussion, January – June 2006

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26	CTA Team	Ms. Catherijne Van Melle, Ms. Pierre Paul Misigaro, Ms. Isolina Boto		39 rue Montoyer-1000 Brussels	Brussels	Belgium	(+32) (0) 2 513 74 36 direct	(+32) ( 0) 2 511 38 68
27	FAO	Ms. Sophie Treinen, Mr. Jean Pierre Ilboudo, Ms. Clare O'Farrell, Ms. Alexandra Hostier			Rome	Italy		

