

# ICT Access for Rural Women: Policy and Advocacy

Session: Facilitating collaborative participatory  
communications involving rural women

by

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## International Workshop

Advancing Rural Women's Empowerment: ICTs in the service of good governance,  
democratic practice and the development of rural women in Africa

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# Outline

- Empowerment of rural women using ICTs
- Information sharing and dissemination:  
WOUGNET
- Opportunities for Women and ICTs in  
Uganda
- Policy/Advocacy activities of WOUGNET
- Concluding Remarks

# Empowerment of rural women using ICTs

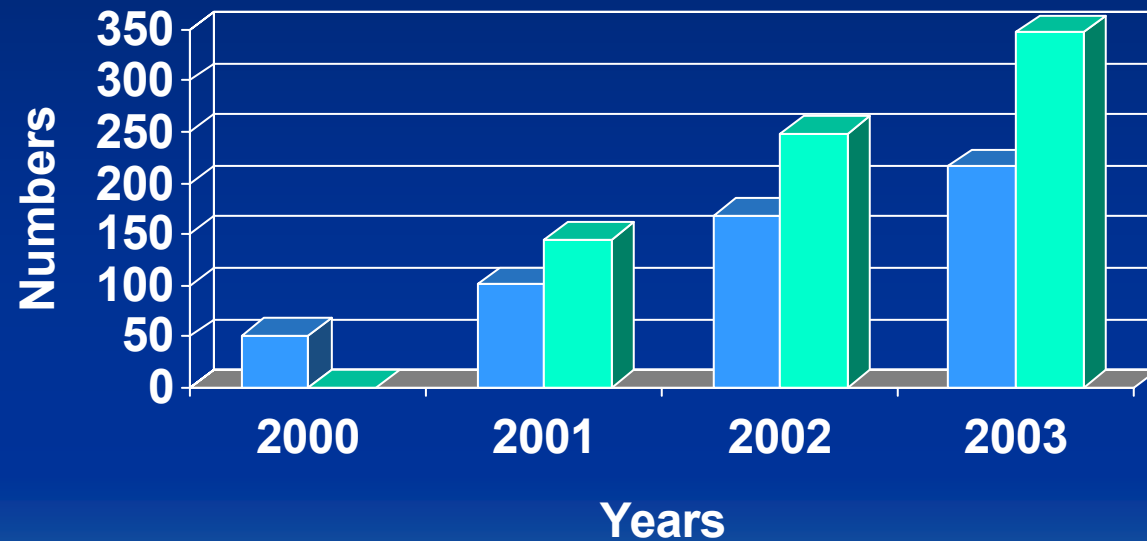
- **Access to accurate and timely information by rural women can result in enhanced economic and social development**
- **Example: Uganda government recognizes that information is key for programs such as the Poverty Eradication Action Plan and the Plan for Modernisation for Agriculture.**
- **Note: Information is of limited use unless it is appropriately packaged and communicated.**

# Information sharing and dissemination: WOUGNET

- **NGO established in May 2000 by women organisations in Uganda. WOUGNET website <<http://www.wougnet.org>> and mailing lists are hosted by Kabissa.**
- **Mission: “To promote and support the use of information and communication technologies by women organizations as well as individuals so as to improve conditions of life for Ugandan women by enhancing their capacities and opportunities for exchange, collaboration and information sharing”**
- **ICTs: Primarily email and the web, with interest in integration with traditional means such as radio, video, print for wider outreach.**

# WOUGNET ...[2]

Trend of subscription to WOUGNET mailing lists



■ WOUGNET mailing list ■ WOUGNET Update Newsletter

# WOUGNET ...[3]

## Challenges of ICT usage among women in Uganda

- Language is a constraint to information access especially to the non-literate. Furthermore, most information is in English and little has been translated into local languages.
- Lack of access to ICT equipment and services. Whereas there are efforts to package the information on CD-ROMs that are user-friendly, these are still limited.
- The multiple roles of women impose heavy time constraints that are prohibiting them from visiting ICT centers even when they are given free services.
- Lack of ICT skills. WOUGNET information is available through the new ICTs like the Internet as opposed to traditional ICTs such as radio. However, this tends to exclude those that lack the skills to use computers.
- Technophobia especially among women and girls.
- Gender issues like the control by men over women's decisions also impact negatively on women's effective participation.
- Irrelevant content - where by most of the information being disseminated is not addressing the local needs of the people, which has created an information poverty society.
- Lack of infrastructure especially in rural areas.

# Opportunities for Women and ICTs in Uganda

- **Energy for Rural Transformation (ERT) Programme**

The ERT is aimed at improving the rural quality of life and facilitating rural non-farm income by accelerating electrification and other forms of energy. Under this programme, sub-county information centres will be established in each of Uganda's 56 districts.

- **Formulation of the National ICT policy**

Gender mainstreaming is one of the specific objectives of the National ICT policy. The consultative formulation approach adopted offers advocacy space for gender/women advocates to articulate ICT-related gender concerns. Under guidance of Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST), formulation of national implementation plans has begun.

- **Rural Communications Development Fund (RCDF)**

Rural Communications Development Fund (RCDF) is in place to promote ICT service provision in rural and/or underserved regions in Uganda. The RCDF is managed by the Uganda Communications Commission, <http://www.ucc.co.ug>.

- **Active gender advocates**

There are a number of active individual women/organizations gender advocates with skills and experience in policy advocacy. Recently, the Uganda Women Caucus on ICT (UWCI) has been established with WOUGNET as the secretariat.

# Policy/Advocacy activities of WOUGNET

**Hosting online (email) forums to gather information on issues around ICT access for rural women and for Ugandans in general**

- ❖ **In June 2002, WOUGNET hosted a 3 -week email based conference “Information Access for Rural Women” with a purpose to facilitate the exchange of ideas and experiences on enhancing access to information for rural women.**

**<http://www.wougnet.org/Events/iarw.html>**

- ❖ **In April 2003, WOUGNET hosted an online conference on “Information Society for Uganda” with a general objective to facilitate contributions to the WSIS working documents and to Uganda’s input to the WSIS from a civil society perspective.**

**<http://www.wougnet.org/WSIS/ug/isug.html>**



# Policy/Advocacy activities ...[2]

Participation on the Uganda WSIS National Taskforce (NTF)

<http://www.wougnet.org/WSIS/ug/ugandawsis.html>

- **The NTF was chaired by the Uganda Communications Commission and included government (Ministry of Works, Housing and Communications; Uganda National Council for Science and Technology) and private sector (MTN Uganda)**
- **Opportunity for direct input to Uganda's submissions to the WSIS**

# Policy/Advocacy activities ...[3]

**Initiation of the Uganda Women Caucus on ICT (UWCI), of which WOUGNET is the secretariat**

- **UWCI's mission is to engender the ICT policy process in Uganda. The UWCI is comprised of women/gender practitioners on the issue of women and ICTs in Uganda.**
- **UWCI developing briefing paper on gender concerns with National ICT policy and with implementation stakeholder matrix**
- **UWCI lobbied to join implementation strategy sector working groups. To-date, invited to e-government and e-information (content). Other groups are e-commerce, e-education, e-health**

# Concluding Remarks

- **Currently, many activities are online based and supported largely by volunteer support**
- **Alternative media and channels of communication require various sources of funding and support. External and internal (member/volunteer based) sources being considered**
- **Formulation of the Uganda ICT policy and implementation strategy is moving along at a fast pace – can we too?**