



Emerging Gender Dimensions for Pro-poor Community Driven Networks

by

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Introduction

- Uganda has an established record of a favorable gender sensitive programme
- The Constitution, 1995 and other national legislations (e.g. LGA) provide for addressing specific needs of women and marginalized sections of the society – e.g. women, youth, workers, & children



Uganda's ICT Policy Framework & Gender

- Uganda has a national ICT policy framework which recognises gender mainstreaming as integral to a delivery mechanism that addresses the needs of women and men.
- The policy rationale emphasises the need to “stimulate industrial growth, commerce, infrastructure and linkage of rural and urban communities as well as uplifting of disadvantaged groups, while taking care of gender balance” (Section 2.3).



Gender Objectives

- Policy objective 4.2(x) aims “to ensure gender mainstreaming in information and communication programmes and in ICT development.”
- The policy pledges to “ensure that facilities for communication are provided at levels of cost, which match the ability of their users to pay, so as to reduce gender and spatial disparities in information access.”



Strategies for GM in the ICT Policy

- Taking into account gender information needs and interests of both men and women in all information and communication programmes;
- Developing mechanisms of increasing women's access to information (especially in rural areas) so as to reduce the gender information gap;
- Use non – discriminative gender sensitive language in information and communication programmes;
- And ensure equal participation in all aspects of ICT development



Pro- poor ICT Research

WOUNET has been conducting an action-oriented research focusing on three themes:

- *Pro-poor infrastructure options:*
 - In what way can the provision of ICT infrastructure in rural areas be done to address the needs of women and men?
 - Do the existing approaches to infrastructure development, bring about the empowerment of women and men?
- *Community driven networks and services:*
 - What is the potential of community-driven local ICT networks and services for women’s empowerment?
- *Assessment of development linkages and impact of increased ICT provision:*
 - Are the existing and planned ICT-related policy and strategies, ICT networks and services effective in delivering social change that promotes gender equality?



What is the Progress on Poverty?

- There has been significant reduction in absolute and chronic poverty levels over the past two decades.
- However 35% of Ugandans live below the poverty line and 20% live in chronic poverty.



Who are the Poor in Uganda?

- A recent study identifies the chronic poor as:
- PWDs especially women;
- widows especially those without assets,
- street based children, orphans & other disadvantaged children,
- the elderly, refugees,
- HIV/AIDS affected children, casual, unskilled workers & isolated communities.

A Pro poor ICT programme needs to address the needs of these.

Do our existing ICT activities respond to these?



Feminization of Poverty

- Available information indicates that poverty is highly feminised implying that the females form a dominant section of the poor.
- Similarly any initiative that is pro-poor has to necessarily target women as key in addressing poverty.



What is the Field evidence?

- Costs of rural deployment of ICT infrastructure remains too high making the rural areas to be underserved yet the majority of the poor especially women live there.
- The contributory factor to high infrastructural costs is the failure of the private companies to share certain common infrastructure raising the concern that this model may not fully address the needs of especially rural poor women and men.
- Ownership and management of private sector driven infrastructure is male dominated even for those centres encountered in the rural countryside pointing to lower female control over ICT resources.

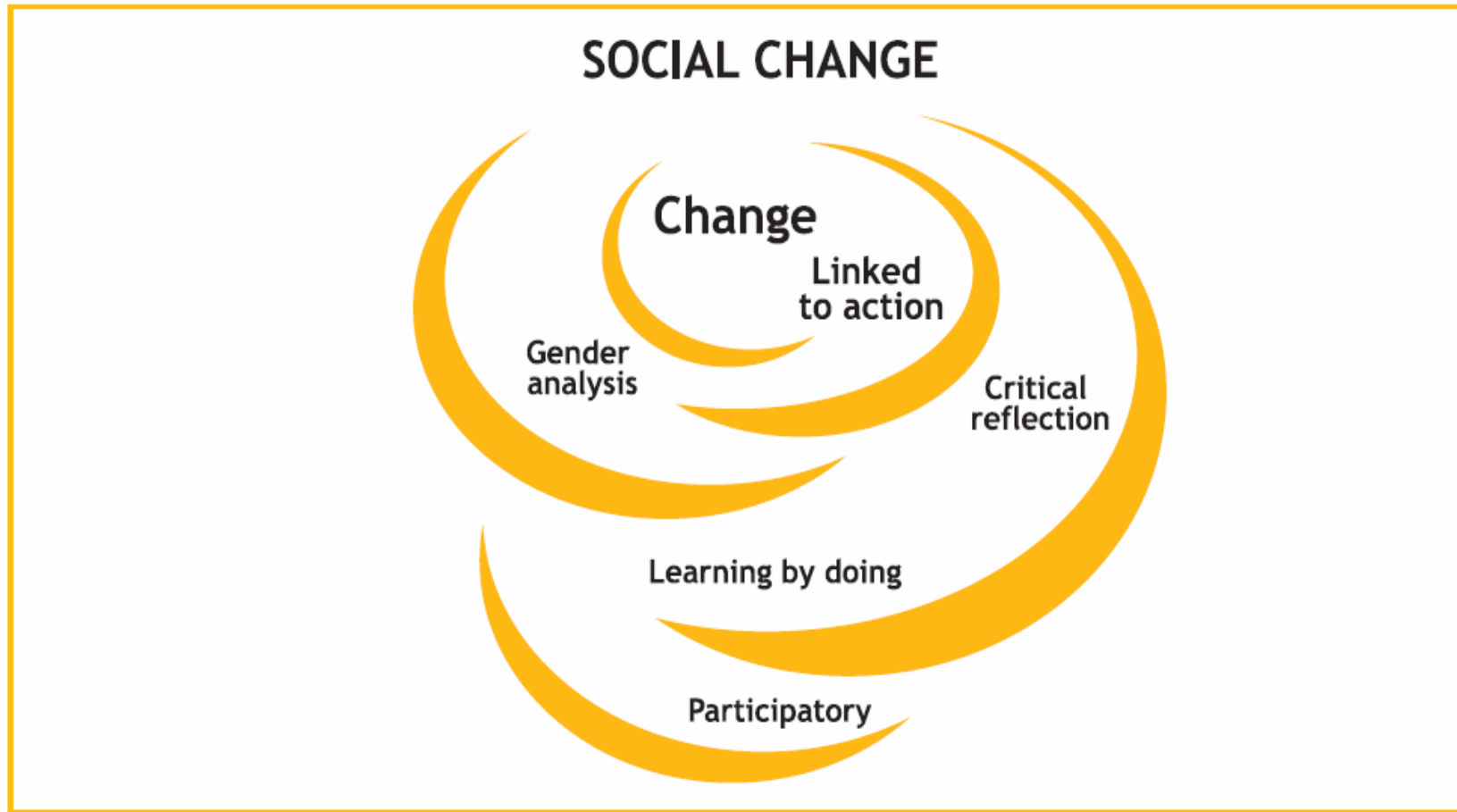


Field Evidence/1

- Use of ICT facilities was and is male dominated with women often focusing on uses that integrate ICT in their already existing purposes more than for entrepreneurial activities. The later uses are known to generate higher returns than the former.
- Many of the current ICT initiatives have not focused on how the services can catalyse social transformation and change gender relations to achieve equality.



Model for Social Change



“GEM Reference: The Betel Chew Ritual” [Wood, Peregrine]



Field Evidence...../2

- Often men and women's specific needs are not taken into account in the design of policies such as the RCDF or specific ICT projects. There is need to evolve a truly community oriented model that addresses needs of women and men.
- There has been failure of the liberalised regulatory framework (even when there have been some benefits) to impact the lives of the poor, the majority of who are women. This partly explains the wave of regulation for the underserved geared to compensating major operators against unprofitable operations. Telecommunication development has traditionally followed a top down approach to the exclusion of some sections of the population the majority of whom are women and girls



Field Evidence/3

- There is effort in Uganda towards Universal Access. According to the Uganda government, the universal access has been achieved or exceeded. However, this is not being pursued within a gender sensitive framework. A gender sensitive monitoring evaluation framework does not exist. There is need to include gender targets, monitoring and evaluation indicators in any pro-poor ICT initiatives.
- By allowing tariff flexibility, operators can charge up to 50% more than prevailing urban rates in rural areas. This means that the poor who are mostly women and the rural poor people pay more than the urban, where the majority of the wealthy reside.



Field Evidence...../4

- Since much of the affordability problem relates to lack of competition, the highest priority is to liberalise the market and especially to allow different technologies such as VOIP. However, market failure arising from liberalisation has been a contributory factor to gender inequality in access to and use of ICT and this is where government and other critical actors need to take note and design appropriate interventions.
- Community ownership model has the potential for more social exclusion especially if not informed by gender considerations in the design of especially the “human” based networks.



Field Evidence5

- In-depth field assessments indicate that women have development information needs that are similar to but different from those of men. If ICT initiatives have to be implemented in a gender sensitive manner, it is important to take into account the different needs of men and women as well as the social-cultural context
- Women play a significant role in existing community networks especially the CSOs. This provides a useful potential to build on. Women are also critical in the informal business sector. There is need to ensure participation of women's organisations, informal sector, and the rural and peri-urban areas



What should Pro-poor Gender Sensitive ICT Address?

- The critical gender issues in ICT.
- Address men's and women's empowerment



Critical Gender Issues in ICT

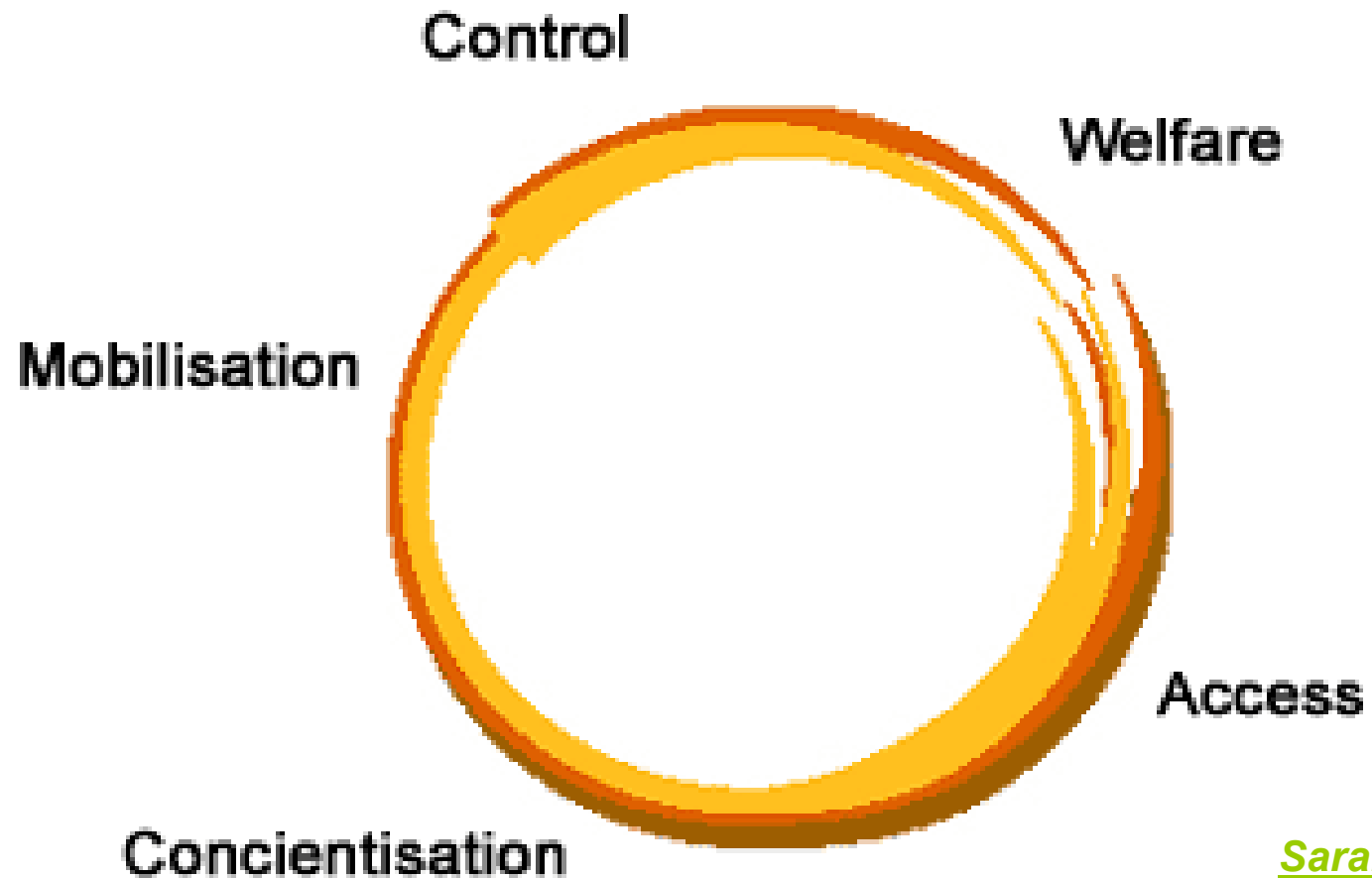
- socio-cultural and institutional barriers
- access, control and effective use
- cost, time and mobility
- education, training and skills development
- absence from decision-making
- ICT policy and governance
- content and language
- pornography, trafficking, Violence Against Women
- censorship
- gender segregation in employment
- privacy, security, and surveillance

To what extent are we addressing these?



Where are we?

Women's empowerment cycle



*Sarah Longwe
Framework*



Conclusion

- There is need to develop strategies and to generate best practices for the integration of the community driven model into national pro-poor gender-sensitive access strategies.
- There is need to ensure participation of women's organisations, informal sector, rural and peri-urban areas.



Conclusion..... /2

- If ICT initiatives have to be implemented in a gender sensitive manner, it is important to take into account the different needs of men and women as well as the social-cultural context
- There is need to include gender targets, and monitoring and evaluation indicators in any pro-poor ICT initiatives.
- Any initiative that is pro-poor has to necessarily target women as key in addressing poverty.