

MAKING ICT WORK
for
THE POOR

**Uganda Country Study on Open Access and
Community Driven Networks**

BY WOUGNET

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Report Overview

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Introduction

● Background:

The following is a brief outline of the draft report on Uganda country study. The goal is give you an overview of the study & its findings to involve you in the discussion & contributing tonow and through a planned online forum.

This research is one component of a programme supported within the context of UNDP's programmatic focus on *making ICT work for the poor*.

Aims:

- a). Contribute to identification & documentation of evidence-based ICT4D policy options
- b). Strengthen advocacy & capacity for policy change to leverage such options.

Themes:

- *Pro-poor infrastructure options*: to enhance bandwidth & ICT access in rural areas with a view to enhancing the empowering local communities, & strengthen rural development opportunities.
- *Community driven networks and services*: assessment of the case for and the potential of community-driven local ICT networks and services, using innovative models and technologies and focusing on supporting community empowerment.
- *Assessment of development linkages and impact of increased ICT provision*

Main output:

- An action-oriented research report on the above themes

Terms of Reference:

Specified Tasks :

- To develop a detailed Workplan jointly with the International Consultant.
- To identify & assess official and unofficial documentation relevant to the Project.
- To identify a location (a poor community) that might support and benefit from a community driven network and service enterprise, to undertake a field trip to interview local stakeholders and assess the available resources and needs.
- To undertake additional interviews, group meetings, focus groups, presentations or others activities as required for all aspects of the research;
- To organise and participate in a national Seminar/Workshop on the research findings;
- To participate and, if required, assist in organising a Workshop of Programme teams.
- To define the most relevant and useful advocacy, capacity building and national and cross-country networking activities, and to assist in locating and securing partners for these.
- To liaise closely with the advocacy partners at all times, with a view to maximising the value of the work for that advocacy.
- To liaise and collaborate with other teams in the broader initiative.
- To consider future activities that could be undertaken in pursuit of these themes.
- To write-up the final report covering all aspects of the research.

Methodology:

The study was carried out in 6 main stages.

- i. Literature Review**
- ii. Preliminary review of ICT4D status in 3 locations selected from different regions of Uganda.** This included interviewing opinion leaders and/or key players in ICT4D activities as well as observation of what is on the ground (see sample slides).
- iii. In-depth study at one of the sites (Mbale) comprising:**
 - a needs & available resources assessment
 - establishing community views about open access.
 - evaluation of networked approach to ICT4D.
 - evaluation of feasibility of a community driven network.
 - propose necessary policy adjustment to support a pro-poor open access that can result in desirable development impact.
- iv. Evaluation of national applicability.**
- v. Preparation of Report.**
- vi. Presentation of Findings in a national workshop**

Literature Review - Outline

This involved review of official & unofficial publications (UNDP, IDRC, several web sources & other studies) relevant to the project.

Literature reviewed included (among others):

- **Global & National Development agendas (MDGs & PEAP).**
- **The role that shared-access centres play in providing universal access to information and communication technologies (ICT) – lessons from Uganda & South Africa [by Sarah Parkinson © IDRC] .**
- **Community-based networks & innovative technologies [by Sean O Siochru & Bruce Girard © UNDP] .**
- **Previous + evolving ICT legislation & policy in Uganda.**
- **Funding and Implementing Universal Access © Uganda Communications Commission.**
- **Pro-poor IT in community-based rural micro finance institutions (computerizing village banks) [by L. Mutesasira et al © Koncepts Unlimited 2005].**

Literature Review .. Global Development Agenda

- **MDGS (Recap):**
 - **Eradicate extreme poverty & hunger**
 - **Attain universal primary education**
 - **promote gender equality & empower women**
 - **Reduce infant mortality (by 2/3)**
 - **Improve maternal health**
 - **Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria & other diseases**
 - **Ensure environmental**
 - **Evolve a global partnership for development**

Literature Review... (Uganda's Development Strategy)

Uganda Development Strategy (Rev.2000) called the Poverty Eradication Action Plan [PEAP] specified 4 major goals:

- Fast, sustainable economic growth & structural transformation.
- Good governance & security.
- Enhanced ability of the poor to raise their incomes.
- Improved quality of life for the poor.

Literature Review .. (Highlights)

Lessons from Uganda & South Africa:

1. Access centres are generally not adequate by themselves to build local demand.
2. Because access to ICT is difficult to achieve in rural areas through market means, and may not by itself be a primary development goal, it should, where relevant, be carefully harmonized with larger rural development strategies.
3. Any attempt to implement ICT access centres will be strongly constrained (or enabled) by the national telecommunication market.
4. Universal access for telephone requires strategies different from those needed for other ICT since the former usually enjoys immediate demand while the latter does not.
5. ICT access centres are an important but politically weak part of the access chain. They often fall short in terms of service quality and cost. This undermines their *sustainability*.
6. Affordability is still a major barrier to access (*for the poor*) in both countries.

.. Literature Review .. (highlights contd.)

7. Where ICT is available & used, not all uses yield *economic benefit* for users or their communities. Thus, certain ICT uses, whilst benefiting large, often foreign telecommunication and equipment providers, may impede local economic development. Therefore, the presence of ICT within communities cannot be presumed to indicate development, except where there is evidence of *impact*.
8. The relationship between the market & initiatives set up by external partners varies according to factors such as infrastructure & local economic activity. Market factors are often *not well assessed or understood* before a project is implemented. This can result in funded projects which, driven by their own sustainability requirements, emulate rather than complement their market counterparts.
9. Sustainability *entails* managing costs & complexity. Embedding ICT services *into* existing institutions is one of the best ways to do this. It can also help maximize the development impact of services.

.... Literature Review .. (highlights contd.)

10. One of the biggest impacts of ICT-use (*in rural areas*) seems to be the maintenance of links between geographically dispersed family members. This may help to equalize other *distortions created* by the introduction of ICT since *those* with better education, ICT skills and related job opportunities usually share economic benefits with extended family members who would otherwise *not* benefit.”
 - Four factors emerged as important for the success of shared access centres in achieving universal access and maximizing development potential and these are *scalability, sustainability, reach (coverage) and use (meeting real needs)*. They cumulatively contribute to the development impact of such centres.

Literature Review ...(legal & policy environment)

- **Evolution of ICT Legal & Policy Environment:**

Uganda Communications Act, 1997: It established UCC & emphasized government none interference in the communications sector.

Rural Communications Development Policy (RCDP), July 2001 established the RCDF.

National Information and Communication Technology Policy, July 2002

Literature Review ... (grassroots observations)

The paper by Koncepts unlimited documents observations made during their field work (with village banks) that has informative observations.

- Good plans & decisions will make it possible for very many rural people to benefit from IT just by solving the challenge of the perennial poor book keeping.
- Uganda at the time (2004) had 1500 community-based micro-finance institutions (CBMFI) serving only half a million clients in rural areas where about 80% of the population (of almost 25million) lives. Rural access to appropriate ICT solutions can make a big contribution to rural microfinance outreach, increasing it from present low levels to much better rural coverage (impacting thousands of households) with good financial performance.
- At locations studied, deployment of basic IT solutions resulted in increased productivity of cashiers, serving at least 5 times more clients than when using manual procedures. The improvement would enable the CBMFI to allocate more time to user-support activities and pro-active portfolio management that would result in greater geographical and household coverage.

.. Literature Review ... (Grassroots Observations)

- **Improved access to accurate performance information would enable development partners of CBMFI to make coverage growth and management intervention decisions.**
- **A village bank will typically need an ICT package comprising specialised MMIS software, means of data transportation to/from support office, data cleaning services, low energy basic computer, off-the-grid power supply and user training.**
- **ICT deployment should carefully manage the potentially explosive social-technical complexities that are characteristic of such exercises especially in a rural setting.**
- **It is important to identify, consult and involve key stakeholders to avoid possible failure of the project. A supportive stakeholders' representative body is an asset and should help identify a local ICT champion.**
- **When well planned & implemented ICT for village bank support will not only result in wider service coverage but also lower cost of services to the end beneficiaries because of the resulting reduction of operating costs.**

Issues emerging from literature review

- **There is a need to rethink the ICT4D delivery models to ensure pro-poor access that effectively serves development objectives.**
- **Such models should minimize cost of service say through cooperative ownership, be driven by community needs (rather than profit) and where investment cost is shared, communities can contribute non-cash resources and address key success factors (scalability, sustainability, reach (coverage) & use etc).**
- **It is necessary to use an integrated approach to planning & delivery of pro-poor ICT access.**
- **Pro-poor open access would benefit from a stronger regulation environment emphasizing open access (at all possible levels) and “discriminates” in favour of the poor.**

Needs assessment – National overview

- **Initially, 3 locations (of national representation) were selected to carry out an initial assessment for suitability to do an in-depth study. Apac (north), Nakaseke (central) and Mbale (east) were identified. The questions used to select the one best suited for in-depth assessment were in 4 categories:**
 - **What is on the ground & operational experience**
 - **Scalability & repeatability.**
 - **Human networking potential.**

Assessment was done by interviewing opinion leaders, people involved in management of ICT4D activities or umbrella development organisations.

After this initial assessment process, Mbale was selected for the in-depth study. The outcome of the assessment is summarised in the table below.

Table summarizing initial assessment

	Nakaseke	Mbale	Apac
I. Op. experience			
District Population	New, so no figures	~ 1,120,000	~ 700,000
Site Population	N/A	~ 100,000	~ 20,000
Econ. Activity	Agric.	Trade, agric, tourism	Agric
ICT Access Centres	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number / Type	1 (multi-purpose TC)	At least 4 APs	3
Operation Period	> 5 years	2 – 4 years	2 – 3 years
Services offered	IT, CR, Fx, GS, Int, Tr	IT, FM, Fx, Int, Gs, Tr	FM, Int, Gs, Tr
Econ impact	Medium	High	Low
II. Scalability			
Radius served	~ 15 km	~ 24km	~ 16km
Potential extension	Fair	High	Fair
Replicable?	Good	Good	Good
Comm. Awareness	Fair	High	Low
Utilization	Medium	Medium	Low
Sharing potential?	Fair	Good	Good
III. Networking			
Networking tools?		Workshops	Workshops
Tech. Support?	None	Yes	None
Orgs to share?	Yes, a few	Yes, many	Yes, many

Needs assessment ... (Mbale in-depth study)

- The needs assessment was undertaken by use of two processes namely a questionnaire and a features focus group discussion. Below is a summary of questions use in the FG:

List and prioritize the greatest development needs for the communities around Mbale district and to explain why they are considered to be the most pressing.

- § What type of information the group considers to be very important for development
- § What benefits are associated with community needs –driven ICT services and the challenges that may arise from such services?

What are the benefits of using a co-operative model in setting up and utilizing infrastructure in regard to ICT4D & what challenges are anticipated?

What is the group's opinion about having an open access approach to sharing resources in terms of cost, sustainability, volume and capacity?

Identified Community needs

- The main needs identified included:- *education, health, market information, intra-community communication, agricultural production improvement, reducing gender disparity (in all aspects of community life), changing restrictive cultural practices, highlighting deficiencies in basic life-preserving requirements (clean water, immunization, food security etc).*

Recommendations

1. In light of the inability of large sections of the community to access ICT services, a *community-driven* approach would ensure a much greater reach & use.
2. Open access methods need to be adopted at all levels (e.g: local infrastructure sharing) as one way to reduce the cost of ICT services delivery.
3. A strategy that ensures *sustainability needs to be adopted*:
Focusing on **community-serving entities** (schools, health units, NGO etc) whose services cover what have been identified among community needs will ensure much more effective ICT4D utilization & faster development impact.
Human networking across sectors, enabled by a broadly accessible & scaleable network infrastructure will enhance reach & sustainability. The network structure needs to be geared to *sharing of content at the local level* (say school to school, administration units etc)
4. Using an integrated and rationalized approach to delivery of ICT4D services.
5. Ensuring that communities can participate meaningfully in ownership & governance process say through locally established cooperatives.
6. Concurrently addressing other causes of disparity (e.g: gender inequity & development impeding factors like some cultural aspects)

Proposed Networked community-driven model

Statement of Parameters

Ownership model: **A cooperative of community-serving entities.**

Financing : Partnership

Governance: **Board of trustees elected by cooperative members.**

Management: **Professional business management.**

Service delivery: **ICT enabled human networking for knowledge & information sharing.**

Type of services: **Choice & Priority based on community needs.**

Key characteristics: **Partnership, community participation (in resource mobilization, support work & content generation).**