

GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2013

Women's rights, gender and ICTs



ASSOCIATION FOR PROGRESSIVE COMMUNICATIONS (APC)
AND HUMANIST INSTITUTE FOR COOPERATION WITH DEVELOPING COUNTRIES (Hivos)

Global Information Society Watch

2013

Steering committee

Anriette Esterhuysen (APC)
Loe Schout (Hivos)

Coordinating committee

Janine Moolman (APC)
Monique Doppert (Hivos)
Valeria Betancourt (APC)
Mallory Knodel (APC)

Project coordinator

Valeria Betancourt

Editor

Alan Finlay

Assistant editor

Lori Nordstrom

Publication production

Mallory Knodel

Proofreading

Valerie Dee
Lori Nordstrom

Graphic design

Monocromo
info@monocromo.com.uy
Phone: +598 2400 1685

Cover illustration

Matías Bervejillo

Financial support provided by

Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries (Hivos)
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands Funding Leadership and Opportunities for Women (FLOW)



Global Information Society Watch

Published by APC and Hivos

2013

Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Licence
<creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0>
Some rights reserved.

ISSN: 2225-4625
ISBN: 978-92-95102-06-4
APC-201310-CIPP-R-EN-DIGITAL-197

TANZANIA

Innovative use of mobile phones for women's empowerment in Tanzania



Collaboration on International ICT Policy in East and Southern Africa (CIPESA)

Lillian Nalwoga
www.cipesa.org

Introduction

Women's development has been placed at the core of development in Tanzania, at least in theory. It is reported that women, especially in rural areas, provide 80% of the labour force and contribute 60% to food production.¹ Women are reported to be the main producers of cash crops as well. It has also been observed that gender patterns in Tanzania are changing and women are now venturing into more market-oriented activities.

However, despite these reported successes, gender inequality still exists in Tanzania. Women still face challenges in economic development and continue to be marginalised. For instance, women are not allowed to own property, are more likely than men to be poor and illiterate, are subjected to gender-based violence, have no say in their reproductive rights, and encounter job discrimination. Traditional or Islamic customs that discriminate against women still prevail in family law. The 2009 Gender-related Development Index² ranked the country 125th out of the 155 countries measured, while the 2008 Gender Empowerment Measure put it at 48th out of 108 countries. Further, women's rights are constitutionally guaranteed but not uniformly protected. Human rights groups have sought laws to bar forced marriages, which are most common among Tanzania's coastal peoples.

In this context, there has been an increase in women embracing technology to aid their empowerment drive. Information and communications technologies (ICTs), especially the internet and mobile telephones, are being used to provide services especially in health, as well as to boost entrepreneurial skills for Tanzanian women.

Policy and political background

The 1977 Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania (Articles 12 and 13) guarantees equality between men and women and supports women's

full participation in social, economic and political life. Gender equality and women's empowerment is also recognised in the country's National Poverty Reduction Strategies (MKUKUTA II³ on the mainland and MKUZA II in Zanzibar)⁴ under the goals on governance, education and health. For instance, the MKUKUTA II strategy streamlines strategies on improving the quality of life and social well-being, focusing on the poorest and most vulnerable groups, including women. On the other hand, among its goals concerning good governance and national unity, the MKUZA II strategy calls for "empowering and increasing representation of women in policy and decision making."

Tanzania has signed international commitments to women's rights, such as the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979); the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989); the Convention on the Political Rights of Women (1952); the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) on women's economic and political empowerment, education and training; the Cairo Declaration on Population and Development (1994); the Millennium Declaration and Development Goals (MDGs), including MDG 3 on gender equality and women's empowerment; the Universal Declaration on Democracy (1997); United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) and Resolution 1820 (2006) on gender equality, protection and participation of women in conflict resolution, peacemaking and state building.

The government has passed several laws in favour of women, such as the Sexual Offences Special Provisions Act of 1998, which protects women, girls and children from sexual harassment and abuse; and the Land Law Act of 1999 and Village Land Act of 1999, which repeal and replace previous legislation on land matters, enabling women to enjoy equal rights with men in access, ownership and control of land. Nonetheless, women's civil rights are limited by the existence of a dual legal system which includes both statutory and religious and customary laws. In addition, the 1971 Marriage Act includes provisions in respect to women's property and

1 www.tanzania.go.tz/gender.html

2 hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR_2009_EN_Table_J.pdf

3 www.povertymonitoring.go.tz/Mkukuta/Mkukuta%20English.pdf

4 zanzibar.go.tz/admin/uploads/MKUZA%20II%20Final.pdf

inheritance rights. However, in many cases, women, especially in rural areas, do not have access to land due to cultural and tradition restrictions existing in the customary land laws that deny them independent land ownership rights.

Projects that use mobile phones for women's empowerment

ICTs, including the internet and mobile phones, can potentially play an important role in reducing gender disparities in communities. And in Tanzania there are some illustrative examples of this. Way back in 2002, the BBC ran a story on how women in Tanzania were increasingly accessing the internet to seek business opportunities as a result of the increase in internet cafés in the country.⁵ At the time, it was observed that as more women in Tanzania were beginning to use the internet, women's groups were also beginning to look at ways of expanding its use and making it work better for women.

More recently, there have been an increasing number of women's organisations in Tanzania focusing on the use of technology for empowerment. One such organisation is the Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP),⁶ which embarked on establishing knowledge centres across Tanzania aimed at giving grassroots women and men access to ICTs. Key to note is that these centres aim to empower both women and men in using ICTs to become more involved in gender advocacy. The TGNP is also working on networking these centres under its "Jamii Voices" project. The project uses SMS and push-to-talk voice messaging to allow local activists to send messages about their work to various audiences. It is hoped that the project will allow grassroots activists to create a bigger, more active and more powerful network for action on gender issues and other community challenges impacting upon women in Tanzania.

Another organisation, Comprehensive Community Based Rehabilitation in Tanzania (CCBRT), is using mobile money, commonly referred to as M-Pesa, to help provide rural women with access to treatment for vesicovaginal fistula (VVF), also known as obstetric fistula, a hole in the birth canal caused by difficult or frequent delivery. The mobile phone-based cash transfer system allows these women to receive funds to undergo treatment for this condition. Although the treatment itself is offered free of charge at the Dar es Salaam hospital involved in the initiative, patients need to pay for transport to

access the centre. For many rural women, transport and accommodation costs were hindering access to this free service. However, CCBRT sends money via M-Pesa to fistula survivors to cover travel and accommodation costs to the hospital in Dar es Salaam for their repair surgery. The money is sent via SMS to fistula volunteer ambassadors, who may be former patients, health workers, or staff of non-governmental organisations, who identify and refer women suffering from fistula for treatment. The ambassadors retrieve the money at the local Vodacom M-Pesa agent and buy bus tickets for the patients. When the patient arrives at the hospital, the ambassador receives a small incentive, again via M-Pesa. It is reported that in 2010, 268 fistula surgeries were performed at the CCBRT hospital, of which 129 were on women who travelled on transport paid for through M-Pesa.⁷ The organisation reports that 314 fistula surgeries were conducted between January and June 2013.⁸ However, it not stated how many of these were conducted as a result of the facilitation from M-Pesa transactions. M-Pesa, a service provided by Vodacom, is by far the biggest mobile money service in Tanzania, with 9.5 million subscribers out of the 27.6 million mobile subscribers. Further, 38% of the national SMS traffic is exchanged via the same network, making it the leading telecom provider in Tanzania.

Still in health, yet another initiative championed by the government in partnership with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Foundation and other health development partners is called Wazazi Nipendeni – meaning "Parents, Love Me" in Swahili.⁹ This is a national Healthy Pregnancy and Safe Motherhood multimedia campaign, which allows expectant mothers to receive free text messages and appointment reminders in Swahili. This service also remains accessible to mothers of newborn babies up to 16 weeks of age. Supporters of the mothers such as husbands, friends and family and general information seekers are also able to access the service. The service uses the short-code 15001, which is listed in all campaign materials of the initiative. Therefore anyone interested in receiving healthy pregnancy information and appointment reminders is free to send the word MTOTO – meaning child – to the short-code 15001 in order to start receiving the free texts. The initiative was launched in November 2012, and it has been reported that "125,000 registrants were reached in April 2013

5 Dickinson, D. (2002) Tanzanian women get online bug, *BBC*, 18 November. news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/2487821.stm

6 www.tgnp.org

7 www.unfpa.org/public/home/news/pid/7697#sthash.SnH9Vk3W.dpuf

8 www.ccbt.or.tz

9 www.cdcfoundation.org/what/program/mhealth-text-messaging-campaign-tanzania

and more than four million text messages were sent to those who signed up for the free healthy pregnancy and safe motherhood information.”¹⁰ It has also been reported that the service continues to add an average of 7,000 registrants weekly.¹¹ This service is aimed at reducing Tanzania’s maternal mortality rate, which was estimated at 454 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2010 – a figure still higher than the target of 265 by 2015.¹²

The mobile revolution in Tanzania is also attracting projects aimed at improving women’s entrepreneurship. The most recently launched is the Business Women service run by the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women in partnership with the ExxonMobil Foundation, Nokia and the Tanzania Gatsby Trust. The initiative allows women to access vital business tips via their mobile phones.¹³ Tanzania is the third country into which Business Women has been rolled out following successful launches in Nigeria and Indonesia. “When a women subscribes to Business Women, she receives a series of messages (one per day) over a 12-month period, containing a broad range of useful entrepreneurship information tailored to both women and the country in which she has subscribed,” notes Matt Strickland, the mobile technology programme coordinator at the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women. In addition, the foundation is targeting 140 Tanzanian women entrepreneurs who will receive specialist entrepreneurship training over a two-year period.

Conclusions

Technology, especially mobile telephones and the internet, can empower women to make positive contributions to development in their communities. Although there is no reliable information pointing

to the number of women accessing the internet, internet use in Tanzania has increased from 4.9 million users in 2011 to 5.6 million as of June 2012. The number of mobile subscriptions as of March 2013 stood at 27.4 million. In addition, the government is constantly trying to boost connectivity in the country. It is reported that in October 2012, the Tanzanian government borrowed USD 170 million from the Chinese government and raised a further USD 80 million to build a vast fibre-optic cable network, stretching 7,500 km in a ring around the country. However, the cost of access for both mobile phones and the internet is still high. In a country where gender disparities are high and women’s rights are still a challenge, there is a need for strong policies aimed at enabling women to access services via ICTs.

Action steps

There is a need to promote the adoption of innovative technologies that can be used to empower women and to encourage entrepreneurship. The private sector needs to become more innovative in developing applications – especially mobile applications – that can be used to reach out to more women. Women also need to be encouraged to join simple start-up groups that can be used for providing training in the adoption of technological tools.

Massive sensitisation on the potential of technology in empowering women is needed. There is a need to make simple technological tools available that can aid in reaching out to women so that their voices can be heard. Awareness campaigns need to be developed so that women can use technology to demand the fulfilment of their rights. ■

10 www.texttochange.org/news/scaled-nationwide-mhealth-campaign-pregnant-women-tanzania

11 www.cdcfoundation.org/what/program/mhealth-text-messaging-campaign-tanzania

12 tz.one.un.org/index.php/what-we-do/health-and-nutrition

13 www.cherieblairfoundation.org/launch-of-business-women-in-tanzania