



Report on e-Debate (Draft)

“Enhancing Young Women’s engagement in ICT and Agriculture”

16th April – 7th May 2014

Organised by CTA in collaboration with AYF, in the framework of the International Girls in ICT Day

Report prepared by the African Youth Foundation (AYF)

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Introduction

The International Communication Union (ITU) launched the “Girls in ICT Day” in 2011 to celebrate girls’ interests and strengths in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), and to encourage them to choose a career in this area. Since then, this day is being celebrated on the 4th Thursday in April, through different events organised globally. In this context and in the framework of its ARDYIS project, the Technical Centre or Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA), in collaboration with the African Youth Foundation (AYF) organised an e-debate on Young women in ICT for Agriculture: roles, issues and perspectives.

The objectives of the e-debate were to:

1. Discuss the objectives and the use of ICT by young girls and women in the agricultural sector and share experiences from various ACP countries;
2. Discuss the opportunities, challenges faced and perspectives concerning the use of ICT by young women agricultural or ICT entrepreneurs offering services for the agricultural sector; and
3. Contribute to the celebration of the International Girls in ICT Day.

The e-Debate took place on the discussion group of the ARDYIS project (<https://dgroups.org/groups/youth>) from **16th April – 7th May 2014**.

The primary target groups for this e-debate were youth (15 to 35 years) interested or involved in ICT or Agriculture, especially young girls and women. This included women agropreneurs and women developing ICT solutions for agriculture. Organisations supporting young women in these activities were also targeted, as well as any person or organisation interested or working in this area.

The discussion witnessed participation from the members subscribed on the discussion group. At the time of the e-debate, over 500 people were subscribed to the mailing list. The different contributions came from Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Dominica, D.R. Congo, Ghana, Jamaica, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Nigeria, Tanzania, The Netherlands, Trinidad and Tobago, United Kingdom, Uganda and Zambia.

Each week of the e-debate focused on specific themes and questions and the following points emerged from the discussions that took place during the 3 weeks.

The use of ICTs in Agriculture by young girls and women

Collective data points to the fact that the educational levels of the women who tend to use ICTs spanned from basic school education to some form of tertiary level. Rural dwellers are often at a disadvantage compared to urban dwellers due to Internet connectivity constraints and lack of awareness of benefits from deploying ICTs in agriculture. Most of the young women entrepreneurs in this sector (especially those developing applications) are highly educated young professionals. They mainly form part of cooperatives or community farmer-based organisations (FBOs).

There are various examples of how young girls and women use ICTs in different capacities along the agriculture value chain. These include the use of web 2.0 and social media tools for various purposes such as research and learning, sharing information, collaborating, networking and information management.

Agricultural women entrepreneurs use ICTs in Agriculture to enhance their business. They use

mobile phones to inform themselves on food prices, food availability and market days. Thanks to ICT, they also have access to right information about inputs, cultural practices, land preparation pest and disease management, harvest, and market prices among others.

ICT tools are also being used for marketing their products and sourcing funds. Emails and mobile phones are particularly being used for making money transactions, communicating with potential business partners, suppliers, contractors and employees, saving time and money. The mobile phone also enables young women entrepreneurs to have real-time information on the progress of activities in the fields, which help them make management decisions and instruct employees.

Furthermore, through the Internet, they are able to raise purchase orders from clients who are for the most part of production companies, providing information on available stocks, exchange with partners and investors collect information on modern farming techniques and interact with experts.

Some women are blogging and using web platforms to share or search for information and opportunities in agriculture, by subscribing to teams for support. Other women have also been using ICT tools for mapping out farm plots and document ownership of land to help solve title deed issues. Lastly, young women are using ICT to delimit fields using GPS.

Despite having all these new ICTs, many young women, especially those in remote/rural areas, are still relying on traditional ICT tools like the community radio to have useful information on events related to agriculture, such as rainfall, fairs, the period of sowing etc.

On the other hand, many young women are running start-ups and developing mobile applications for Agriculture for example the mFarm in Kenya (more initiatives and examples in the Annex).

The challenges

1. Mindset / stereotypes:

The mindset that some young girls and women have is that smart and hard work is only for men. Cultural and societal restrictions on the Girl Child are a big barrier for women to access ICTs. It is this picture therefore, that stereotyped the poor peasant girl, who perceives the opinion of educated girls, who then assert that the sector is not profitable and then refuse to undertake the studies in this direction. Awareness of the stereotypes of rural areas is necessary to stop the bad influence to rural agriculture.

2. ICT Infrastructure and access

Lack of adequate ICT infrastructure and ICT access remain an issue. But it is also heavily dependent on electricity supply, which stands alone as an infrastructure. Even telecommunication companies are having trouble with issues related to electricity. In terms of access, it has been claimed that men have better access to and made more use of ICTs compared to women because most ICT infrastructure was in the urban areas, whereas majority of the women lived in the rural areas. In fact, most of the farming population in

Africa live in rural areas without any Internet access or service provider. The most available form of ICT reaching out to these populations is through telephone network. Girls and women outnumbered men in rural areas. In addition, they do not have access to all ICT tools and are not really using all these technologies. For example, some of them do not have access to the Internet to be more informed. As well as some people do not realise that there was more they could do with their phones rather than just communicating via voice and text messages.

3. Gender roles and responsibilities

Women have multiple roles and heavy domestic responsibilities. Therefore, they have less leisure time and need tools that can effectively reduce the distance between them as individuals and institutions, thereby making access and sharing of information and knowledge easier. Furthermore, women's low levels of literacy and education as compared to men and the negative attitude towards girls' achievement in science and technology also contribute to the gender dimension of the digital divide. Land ownership is dominantly male, which means that they control its access and use. Many believe that only men understand the intricacies of ICT and women are blocked out. In a situation where in a family there is only one gadget, it would be in control of the man. This applies to other ICT related services such as access to internet services.

4. Lack of training and capacity building opportunities

There is a lack of training and capacity building opportunities to strengthen the knowledge and skills of young women on the use of ICTs and using phones which are not multi media.

5. Need for stronger leadership among women developers

In order to make their application a priority for the organisation and promote their visibility, stronger leadership is needed by women running start-ups that are developing applications for agriculture. They should be able to present and share their masterpiece at different instances. They should also be able to mobilise different actors to use their application and lastly, they need advocacy capacity to the competent authorities for the use of ICT in agriculture.

Recommendations

1. Organisation of capacity-building workshops and ensure women representation

There were various ways put forward to address the gaps/challenges facing young girls and women using ICT in agriculture. Some of them can be the organisation of the workshops in which the organisers ensure that representatives of women's associations are invited and that they disseminate the results once back home. Also, the government can organise workshops and in-service training to reach out more women and help abreast with the latest know-how in agriculture and ICT.

2. Produce and disseminate content in local languages

Another area would be designing applications for agriculture in local languages whereby national or international organisations can sponsor such kind of projects. This will help reach out to more women and enable them to use these applications, irrespective of their literacy levels.

3. Creation of women agricultural cooperatives to regroup them

The creation of various agricultural co-operative ventures could do more to regroup and enhance women's capacity in ICT4Ag.

4. Gender mainstreaming in e-Agriculture policies/strategies.

When developing and implementing national e-Agriculture strategies, women should be mainstreamed. For example, Governments through their respective Ministries and agencies can help create a support framework (policy-wise) to encourage ICT apps development and use by young women entrepreneurs in agriculture to improve productivity and incomes. There should be modalities to measure the impact of such policies to be developed. They should ensure good policies that are enforced and affirmative action and equal opportunity are upheld. On the other hand, Development Agencies and Development organisations with special focus and interest in such areas such as CTA could initiate market-driven projects for our young women to develop viable and scalable ICT solutions to address myriad of challenges across the agricultural value chain.

5. Increase technical and financial support for women application developers

In order to increase the support to young women providing solutions for agriculture and address the challenges faced, initiatives should be supported technically and financially to scale through a competitive medium. e.g agribusiness hubs. The supported young women entrepreneurs in agriculture ICT initiative should however demonstrate viability, financial sustainability and technical feasibility.

6. Reward and Recognition

Women need to see the success of their heroes so as to affirm the fact that gender doesn't count when it comes to using our talents and knowledge. Recognitions or awards for such initiatives help in both publicity and awareness. Competitions were identified as another way of encouraging participation.

7. Raising awareness

Field-based activities for awareness creation and capacity building activities could be initiated to bring such technologies to rural farmers and other potential clients. There is always a need for such innovative ICT solutions to be marketed to the rural households and urban folks. Farmer organisations and Value Chain Organisations could be engaged to help create opportunities for member farmers, who are young women to make use of productive ICT tools to address productivity constraints and reach larger markets.

Conclusions

From this e-debate, it is clear that many young women are using ICTs in agriculture, and there are some existing initiatives and programmes that are encouraging and supporting them. However, looking at the number of challenges that these young women from different countries and regions are facing (including the stakeholders working/interacting with them), it is evident that there is still a lot to be done in this area. From awareness raising through providing opportunities and creating an enabling environment to involve young women in ICT4Ag, every stakeholder involved should realise how important and crucial their involvement is, and special attention should be given to young women when dealing with the “youth, agriculture and ICT” question.

It is hoped that recommendations that came out from this debate will be taken into account by policy makers and other actors along the agriculture value-chain.

The objectives of the **ARDYIS thematic e-debate series** are to:

- support knowledge building of young people on ICT for agriculture issues;
- support their professional engagement in agriculture value chains;
- facilitate networking and the sharing of youth experiences on ARD and ICT within the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) regions.

The ARDYIS project is an initiative by the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA). It aims to raise youth awareness and capacity on agricultural and rural development issues in ACP countries through ICTs. It is implemented in collaboration with an Advisory Committee which comprises FARA, AYF, CAFAN, SPC-PAFPNet, Yam-Pukri, ANAFE

More information on our activities: [Dgroup](#) - [Facebook](#) - [Twitter](#) - [Linkedin](#) - [Storify](#)
www.ardyis.cta.int - ardyis-project@cta.int



Annex: List of initiatives and programmes on women and ICT4Ag

1. AgroMarketDay, Uganda. URL: <http://bit.ly/VtqmNh>
2. MFram, Kenya. URL: <http://mfarm.co.ke/>
3. iCow, Kenya. URL: <http://icow.co.ke>
4. Victoria Seeds, Uganda. URL: <http://www.victoriaseeds.com/about.htm>
5. Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET). URL: <http://wougnet.org/>
6. Mkulima Young, Kenya. URL: <http://www.mkulimayoung.co.ke/>
7. Access agriculture. URL: www.accessagriculture.org.
8. Mobile money service by MTN in Benin. URL: <http://www.mtn.bj/index.php?item=490>
9. VACID Africa, Kenya. URL: www.vacidafrica.or.ke
10. xol Uganda, an online platform that enables one to sell and buy items directly with the seller/buyer
11. Hehe ltd, Rwanda. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SiftXCMUkQ>
12. Console Mutuyemariya an agronomist and extension worker supporting embaraga federation's 50,000 plus farmers in the musanze province of Rwanda (90% of whom are made of women groups)
13. FAM&COMM : "Femmes en zones cotonnières, AMélioration de leur contribution dans les chaînes de valeur non vivrières, de la production à la COMMercialisation ». It aims to test the impact of a bilateral information system to improve the marketing by women's association.
14. Infoladies of Bangladesh. URL: <http://bit.ly/VtrPTN>
15. Farmers basket, Zambia. URL: <http://bit.ly/TpbGJ>
16. Success stories of ICT use: https://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict_stories/themes/e-rural.html –.
17. Training young men and women to use social media: <http://www.web2fordev.net/en/> -
18. GenARDIS initiative. URL : http://genardis.apcwomen.org/uploads/Genardis_EN_web.pdf-1.pdf
19. TradeNet platform (developed by esoko under a USAID financing in 2005);
20. Rural Enterprise Projects in Ghana financed by The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and Government of Ghana. URL: <http://bit.ly/1rGS03q>
21. West African TradeHub financed by USAID. URL: <http://www.watradehub.com/>
22. Rose Funja's web farm GIS project in Tanzania. URL: <http://bit.ly/1wFi2a4>

23. Rural e-Market is an application developed by a young girl Malagasy student computer scientist interested in the agricultural sector. E-Market (www.etsena.net) software allows the dissemination and exchange of market information on the web.
24. WOUGNET's experiences with rural women farmers - and this started with a CTA-funded project in 2005. At the time, for many of the communities we were engaging with, the mobile phones provided with the project were the first phones to be readily available in those communities. And indeed women in agriculture can leverage ICTs to their advantage as this story on one of our experiences shows. URL: - <http://bit.ly/TpcrWG>
25. A good example of how such a practice can even be done with an income-generating model is the Grameen Community Knowledge Worker (CKW). The CKW serves as a kind of extension worker within their respective communities - gaining access to information and sharing out information as required by the community. URL: <http://bit.ly/1nP4sdA>
26. AgriHub Ghana (Twitter: @agrihubghana) will be launched in 2014 and will basically serve as a physical co-working space for agribusiness entrepreneurs and agribusiness consultants in Ghana. It will also serve as a resource centre to make available hard publications from CTA, USAID, The World Bank, youth-oriented Organisations, etc.
27. WOUGNET has partnered with Outbox (a tech hub) for the Women Passion Program (WOPA) – URL: <http://bit.ly/1IUDGn2> . WOPA is supported by supported [by Google for Entrepreneurs](#) , under the [#40Forward initiative](#).
28. At global level is the Technovation Challenge in which a number of African countries are beginning to participate. URL: <http://www.technovationchallenge.org/home/#2014-teams-map>.
29. The other program that has been run by the College of Engineering at Makerere University in Kampala is regional and national robotics challenges. URL: <http://bit.ly/1lvEOhf>
30. In Cameroon the TECHNIPEDIA project Polytechnic Cameroon encourages development application in many field including agriculture and food processing.
31. In some countries, there are agribusiness incubation centres such as those put in place by [Infodev](#) or “agrihubs” that Agri-Profocus has helped put in place in various countries in Africa. URL: <http://www.agri-profocus.nl/agri-profocus/how-we-work/>.
32. Agri-Hack initiative. URL: <http://bit.ly/>