

How the Association for Progressive Communications aims to contribute to the economic empowerment of rural women in Africa, September 2009

APC and economic empowerment

APC believes that access to information and communication tools and content are a basic precondition to economic, social and political empowerment.

We try to improve poor and excluded communities' access to such tools and content through:

- changing the policy and regulatory environment that affects people's access to ICT infrastructure, and how much they pay for such access
- building their capacity to make most effective use of ICTs, in ways that are relevant them on a day-to-day basis
- facilitating networking between people and organisations so that they can share experiences, learn from one another, and support one another in their advocacy for better living conditions, policies, human rights, gender equality, access to resources, etc.
- capturing learning, and developing re-usable tools and resources, such as evaluation methodologies, training materials and manuals that can strengthen our own practice over time as well as be useful resources for other development practitioners

GenARDIS: capacity building and knowledge-sharing for the economic empowerment of women farmers in sub-Saharan Africa

APC would like to increase the scale of an initiative aimed at empowering women farmers in sub-Saharan Africa that we have been implementing since 2005. The activity itself dates back to 2002 and its effectiveness is proven (refer to the attached evaluation report) but has been limited by lack of sufficient resources to expand it in the ways we believe are necessary to maximise the economic empowerment outcomes.

For more information on GenARDIS and how the grants are benefiting grantees and their communities, please go to <http://genardis.apcwomen.org>

GenARDIS clients

GenARDIS works with two groups of clients, or beneficiaries. (1) GenARDIS grantees: Information and capacity building intermediaries that work with rural women and women farmers and (2) rural women, mostly farmers supported by these intermediaries.

(1) GenARDIS Grantees

Community information initiatives including:

- community radio and radio listening clubs, urban and rural who focus on rural development and women's empowerment;
- non-governmental organizations working in various fields such as water and

sanitation, agricultural services including growing healthy vegetables and researching of crop infestations etc. in rural communities;

- community health practitioners exploring rural health issues including malnutrition and ways of improving crop production for sustainable living and how technologies such as mobile phones, community radio can assist;
- research institutions which have extension services in rural areas and who are researching the impact of mobile phone penetration and how this links to increased productivity;
- university departments, e.g. education, agriculture and information technology who undertake participatory research into areas of relevance to GenARDIS;
- NGOs focusing on women's empowerment in rural development;
- Telecentre initiatives in rural areas linking their services to community development;
- HIV/AIDS organisations using ICTs in rural areas.

(2) GenARDIS's final beneficiaries

GenARDIS beneficiaries are people living in rural areas in Sub-Saharan Africa who are:

- subsistence farmers;
- small-scale farmers producing for their livelihood;
- teachers;
- community leaders or elders in the community;
- agricultural extension officers;
- community health providers;
- women producing and selling in markets;
- participants or organisers of local women's groups.

How GenARDIS contributes to economic empowerment

The work we do in GenARDIS facilitates a process of capacity building to empower communities, in particular women, to use ICTs to improve their livelihoods. GenARDIS small grants are awarded to research programmes, training courses, publications, broadcasts, theatre productions, promotion materials, etc. – whatever need could be addressed by the means available to the many creative grantees. All projects focus on innovative use of ICTs by or for rural women to improve the well being of their families and communities.

There is a broad agreement that rural women, the majority of whom are farmers, are crucial partners in the fight against hunger and poverty. But often factors such as cultural and social discrimination do not allow women equal access to and control of natural and productive resources and they are excluded from policy-making and development activities. Without access to land ownership, development planning, access to credit, marketing facilities, extension services and technology, and other rights that are linked closely to women's role as the architects of food security, women are not benefiting from agricultural production.

With access to ICTs, be these radio, mobile phones, telecentres, rural women are more able to control what they can sell their produce for, understand weather conditions, know what to plant etc. And this way, provide sustainable livelihoods for themselves and their communities.

GenARDIS is a Small Grants Fund to address Gender Issues in Information and Communication Technologies for Agricultural and Rural Development in Africa, the

Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP Countries). GenARDIS is a partnership between HIVOS, IDRC (International Development Research Centre), CTA (Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation), IICD (International Institute for Communications and Development) and APC. It is facilitated and implemented by APC. It was initiated in 2002 to support work on gender-related issues in information and communication technologies (ICTs) for Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) in agricultural and rural development. The programme was developed in recognition of the constraints and challenges encountered by rural women with respect to ICTs.

Since 2002 GenARDIS has grown in scope, reach and content. In 2007, APC was commissioned to evaluate the first two rounds of GenARDIS. The recommendations of the evaluation are being implemented in the current round 3. These interventions are aimed at strengthening the grantees ability to benefit the communities that they serve which are largely rural women.

Some of the interventions include:

- Increasing the grant allocations from Euro5, 000 to Euro7, 000
- Awarding 15 instead of 10 grants
- Hosting 2 instead of 1 capacity development and knowledge sharing workshops
- Including short-listed candidates in the first capacity development workshop
- Providing gender training as well as project formulation training
- Creating an animated and facilitated online working space as a way of mentoring grantees during project implementation
- Accessing events, opportunities and potential funding sources for grantees
- Supporting grantees applications to further opportunities such as journal publications, conference and networking opportunities
- The GenARDIS website is a place for grantees to promote their projects, communities and organisations

Who has benefited from the grants?

Three rounds of grants have been offered since the fund came into being. The response to both rounds has been overwhelming. This indicates a huge need in supporting projects that facilitate rural women's access to relevant and timely information and the tools to do this. In 2005, more than 310 submissions were received in a period of two months and in 2008 a similar number were received. This is a clear indication that there still is a real need for support in the field of 'gender and agriculture in the information society'.

Projects which receive the small grants implement activities which aim to change the lives of rural women through the use of ICTs that are useful, appropriate and sustainable and which will assist the women to access food, water and thus change the lives of entire families and villages.

Projects include:

- Improving women's crop marketing chain and farmers' household income through using ICTs in the Uluguru Mountains of Tanzania
- Exploring the potential of SMS technology as an information tool to empower rural women in agriculture to make more effective use of the limited resources available to them and to access development initiatives that they might not otherwise be aware

- of.
- Establishing agricultural information system (question-answer system) to increase the accessibility of effective, appropriate and personalised responses to the primary concerns of women's groups in Benin, such as new growing techniques, processing methods, market research, micro-finance partners and organisations with affordable terms.
 - Empowering women farmers in Ghana to broaden their economic opportunities and reduce their vulnerability to diseases and hunger through the use of ICTs (internet, radio cum telephone (digital radio), market information centres, audiocassettes and video cassettes) to access information on healthy vegetable production.
 - To build the capacity of rural communities in information processing, accessing and its dissemination for health improvement, nutritional and agricultural development, poverty alleviation, knowledge acquisition, gender equity, ICTs and general literacy in Kenya.

An example from GenARDIS of a project in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), which was awarded a Small Grant Fund, is called Sisters Informing and Supporting and Sisters. The project aims to empower rural women farmers in Uvira to take control of and use ICTs for economic empowerment.

The SISSI Project in DRC (Democratic Republic of Congo) is implementing various activities.

It has provided a platform to provide correct and up to date information on mosaic and how to protect against it. Mosaic is a virus that destroys crops and has caused a lot of terror to farmers in DRC. The origin of the virus was not known.

Women farmers have been trained in the use of ICTs through the Mentoring programme. Rural farmers have been paired with women mentors from urban areas. These mentors have been identified as successful female urban farmers who have integrated ICTs in their agri- food businesses. This mentoring programme has promoted inter-rural markets sales of products made by women farmers and given urban mentors to access products from their rural farmers counterparts and link them with the necessary resources they need to advance their businesses

So far, eight months into the project, the impact of the SISSI Project is being felt. At least 300 community members have been reached through the 30-minute radio talk show at Radio Mitumba. 60 women benefited through planning and conducting radio talk shows. There is now increased community awareness on the importance of using ICTs for agricultural productivity and sustainability.

The project also managed to sensitise the community on the social and cultural aspects of the utilisation of ICTs by women.

What we have compiled in the table below is a listing of some of the GenARDIS 2008 grantees and their projects to give a sense of the scope and breadth of the small grants fund. The organizations implementing the projects have listed the number of beneficiaries participating and benefiting from their projects.

Country and location	Project Title	No of Implementers	No of beneficiaries
Gwagwada Junction, Chikun Local Government Area of Kaduna State, Nigeria	Majalisa Mata Manoma: A meeting place for Women Farmers connecting with Radio and Mobile Phones	8 women 3 Men	1. 41 women and 7 men participate weekly in Listeners' Club and Theatre for Development; 2. Phone calls during weekly radio program average 9 male and 7.5 female callers to seek information 3. Radio program airs on the AM and shortwave bands each week on Sundays at prime time in the indigenous Gbagyi language It is estimated that not less than 150,000 Gbagyis tune in and listen to the program weekly.
Kassena-Nankana East and West Districts in Upper East Region of Ghana	Gender Issues and Women Livelihood Improvement Project (Phase 2)	6	86 Women 13 Men 13 and there may be others via the FM Station discussions
Uvira Eastern Province of Democratic Republic of Congo	Sisters Informing and Supporting Sisters Initiative	12	520 Women 100 Men
Abrhatsbha and Maybrazio (Region Tigray, Northern Ethiopia)	Women learning Women (WLW) Women-led Documentation and Community Information Centers in Tigray Region, Northern Ethiopia	9	200 women 50 men
Kpele-Akata (Region Des Plateau), Togo	Strengthening rural women's access to ICTs in Kpélé-Akata, where ICTs are understood as tools for economic and community education development	5	125 Women 5 Men
Western Highlands of Cameroon : Districts of Bafoussam, Bangang, Kamna and Santas	Promoting the use of ICT for market information exchange among women producers in Cameroon	8	287 Women 78 Men
Commune de Bopa (Sud Ouest du Bénin)	Renforcement des capacités de production du groupement féminin ALLODO de Bopa par l'amélioration de leur système d'information et de communication	5	40 Women 5 Men
Kabarole & Kyenjojo District of Rwenzori Region, Western	Increasing Small Scale Women Farmers' Revenues in Kabarole & Kyenjojo Districts in Rwenzori Region, Western Uganda Using	10	49 Women 21 Men

Uganda	ICT-Enabled Production & Marketing Tools.		
Arulogun area in Ibadan Oyo State Nigeria	Building the ICT capacity of women teachers in a rural community in Nigeria to communicate agricultural information	12	15 Women 7 Men
Northern Ghana	eWomen in Development Leadership	30	420 Women

So far GenARDIS has awarded 35 small grants in 18 African countries amounting to Euro 175,000. With the current round, APC would have disbursed around Euro 280,000 (USD 405,000 at current exchange rates – September 2009).

"This prize will be of great help to us in building our capacity to promote the rights of women farmers through the demystification of new information and communication technologies (new ICTs), and through gender advocacy. This prize will have a real impact on our support activities for women farmers in the sectors of agriculture, breeding, handicrafts, and in helping them to learn about their rights via their literacy efforts. Such capacity building will increase our usefulness to other women, and to our entire community." Campaign to support and build awareness of rural women of Uvira about the promotion of ICTs for gender advocacy. DRC

"Cell phones are only available to 30 out of every 1000 Basotho. It is a luxury good for poor families. The GenARDIS project, will make the cellular phone an indispensable piece of communications equipment between the women in the Eyking project, the officers of the cooperative and the market. Having a phone and controlling it to enhance the profitability of their SMEs will enhance the role of women." Creating and using a dedicated cellular phone network to add information, value and dignity to the work of women in Lesotho's agricultural sector. Lesotho.

Stories about GenARDIS grantees and beneficiares are available on the GenARDIS site and on APC.org:

<http://genardis.apcwomen.org/en>

<http://www.apc.org>