

Gender Research in Africa into ICTs for Empowerment: What did we learn from GRACE?

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Research for the Future

Gender Research in Africa into ICTs for Empowerment

The GRACE project aims to explore the ways in which women in Africa use information and communication technologies (ICTs) to empower themselves, the external, structural barriers as well as the internal factors which prevent or enable them to use ICTs to their advantage, and the strategies they employ to overcome these impediments.



Research for transformation

No research quest can go beyond the minds that conceptualise and fire it. The minds that are able to phrase the questions that will yield insight into the potential of women's empowerment through ICT participation in the context of the transformation of Africa have to be the minds that are intimately familiar with and affected by the status quo.



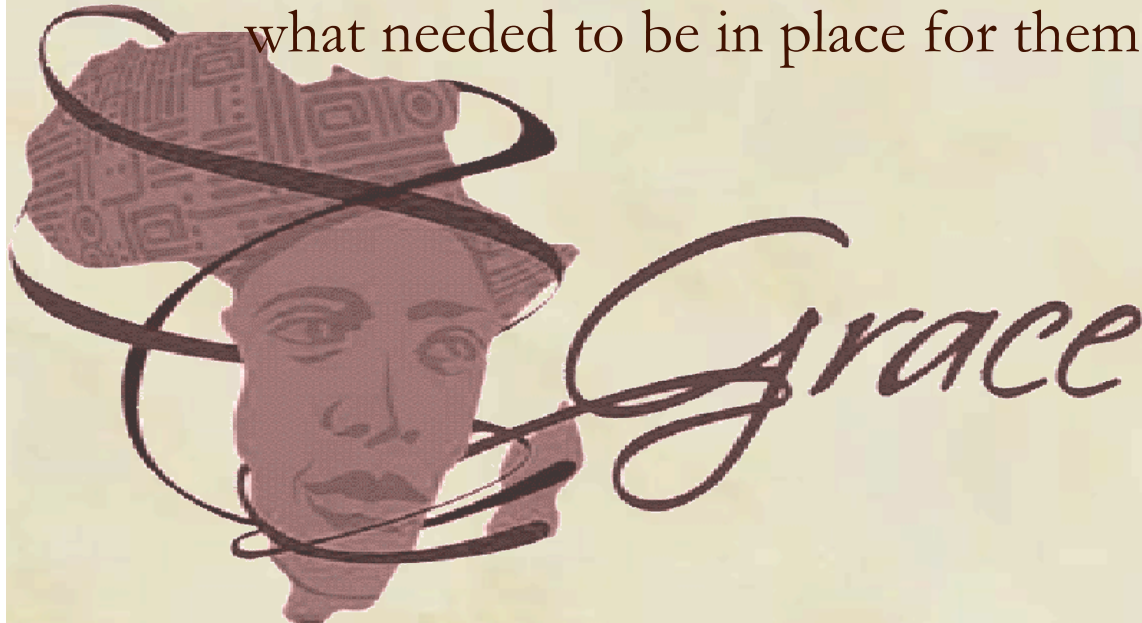
Researchers as “native anthropologists”

The researchers conducted their studies in their own geographic regions, in their communities, at their workplaces, in their local languages or, sometimes, with themselves included among the respondents. They delved into issues they were drawn to due to their own experiences, interests and commitment to women’s equality and social justice, within the overarching theme of GRACE.



Women's agency is key

The respondents were approached as women who see themselves as having the capacity for action on their own behalves, as active agents in determining their own reality. This may seem to contradict the point that women's lives are not well understood and are not setting ICT development directions; however, we wanted to find out how women understood their current situations, we wanted them to think beyond their current realities, and to consider what needed to be in place for them to pursue their visions.



GRACE

The project comprises 14 sub-projects, reflecting 14 research sites in 12 countries. While coherent with the general aim of the overall research initiative, the sub-projects differ from each other greatly in terms of target group and research focus. Furthermore, the concepts of gender and empowerment which frame the project's general direction and commitment do not have unequivocal meaning within the sub-projects.



GRACE Sub-Projects

**Women's use of information and communication technologies
in Mozambique: A tool for empowerment?**

Gertrudes Macueve, Judite Mandlate, Lucia Ginger, Polly Gaster
and Esselina Macome

**Considering ICT use when energy access is not secured: A case
study from rural South Africa**

Jocelyn Muller



GRACE Sub-Projects

Women's use of cell phones to meet their communication needs
– A study of rural women from northern Nigeria

Kazanka Comfort and John Dada

Using ICTs to act on hope and commitment in the fight against
gender violence in Morocco

Amina Tafnout and Aatifa Timjerdine



GRACE Sub-Projects

**When a gender-blind access policy results in discrimination:
Realities and perceptions of female students at the University
of Zimbabwe**

Buhle Mbambo-Thata, Elizabeth Mlambo, Precious
Mwatsiya

An alternative public space for women: The potential of ICTs

Leila Hassanin



GRACE Sub-Projects

Mobile phones in a time of modernity:

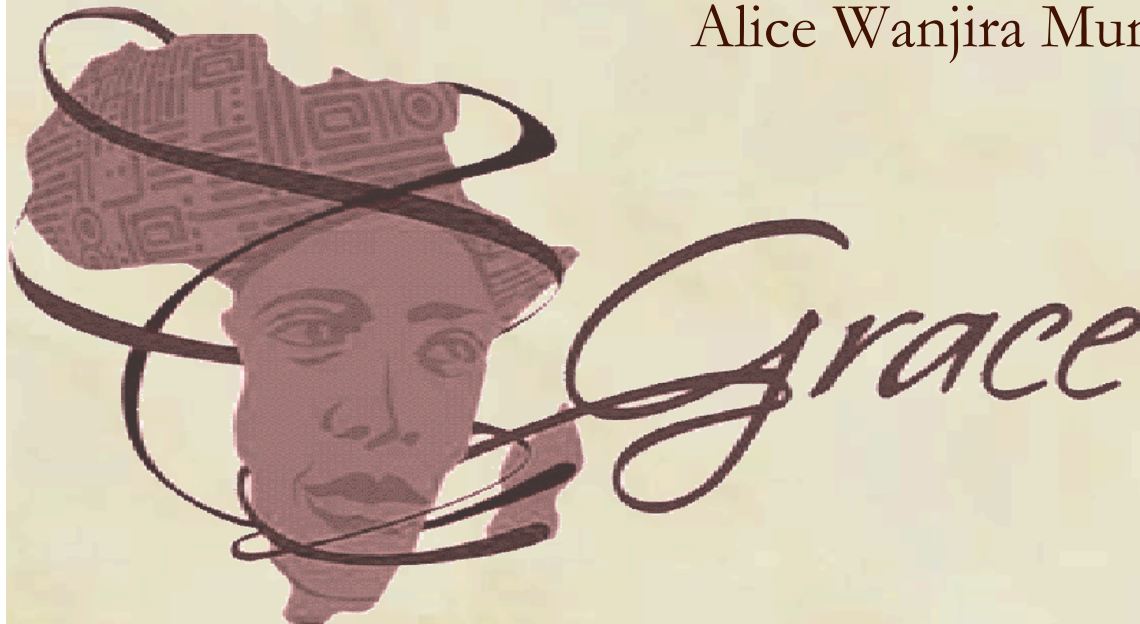
**The quest for increased self-sufficiency amongst women
fishmongers and fish processors in Dakar**

Ibou Sane and Mamadou Balla Traore

Women entrepreneurs in Nairobi:

Examining and contextualizing women's choices

Alice Wanjira Munyua



GRACE Sub-Projects

The names in your address book: Are mobile phone networks effective in advocating for women's rights in Zambia?

Kiss Abrahams

Internet use and empowerment of women entrepreneurs of the textile sector in Douala

Gisele Yitamben and Elise Tchinda



GRACE Sub-Projects

ICTs as an agent of change: A case of grassroots women entrepreneurs in Uganda

Susan Bakesha, Angela Nakafeero and Dorothy Okello

The mobile pay phone business: A vehicle for rural women's empowerment in Uganda

Grace Bantebya-Kyomuhendo



GRACE Sub-Projects

Professional women empowered to succeed in Kenya's ICT sector
Okwach Abagi, Olive Sifuna, Salome Awuor Omamo

**Reflections on the mentoring experiences of ICT career women in
Nairobi, Kenya: Looking in the mirror**
Salome Awuor Omamo



GRACE Sub-Projects

Our journey to empowerment: The role of ICT

Ruth Meena and Mary Rusimbi



GRACE Research Question

On the basis of the totality of these research questions, a general research question was formulated to form a “container” for them all:

“How do women in Africa use ICTs for empowerment?”



GRACE Research Capacity Building Methodology

The approach was to guide the research learning in such a way that researchers would be able to design their research in response to their interpretation of the purpose of their endeavour, and initialize the actions that needed to be taken when and where appropriate, whilst adhering to accepted methodological criteria of striving for quality.



What we learned:

I

A certain level of supportive internal and external factors has to be in existence for a woman to be able to use ICTs to make her life better.

Research has to focus on how ICTs can be integrated into specific development efforts that take into account women's dreams and realities.

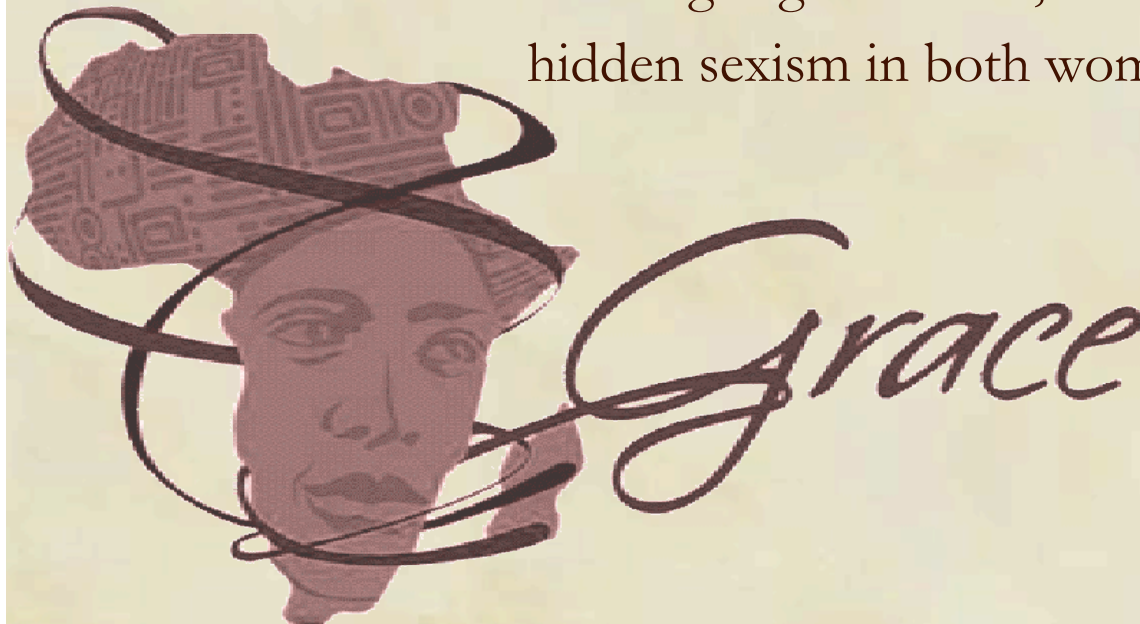


What we learned:

II

Access to ICTs is an individual experience influenced by socio-cultural norms and political-economic realities and processed through internalized belief systems about the self (in relation to others).

Research that aims to contribute to women benefiting optimally from ICT use in existing organizations, has to recognize the obvious and hidden sexism in both women and men.



What we learned:

III

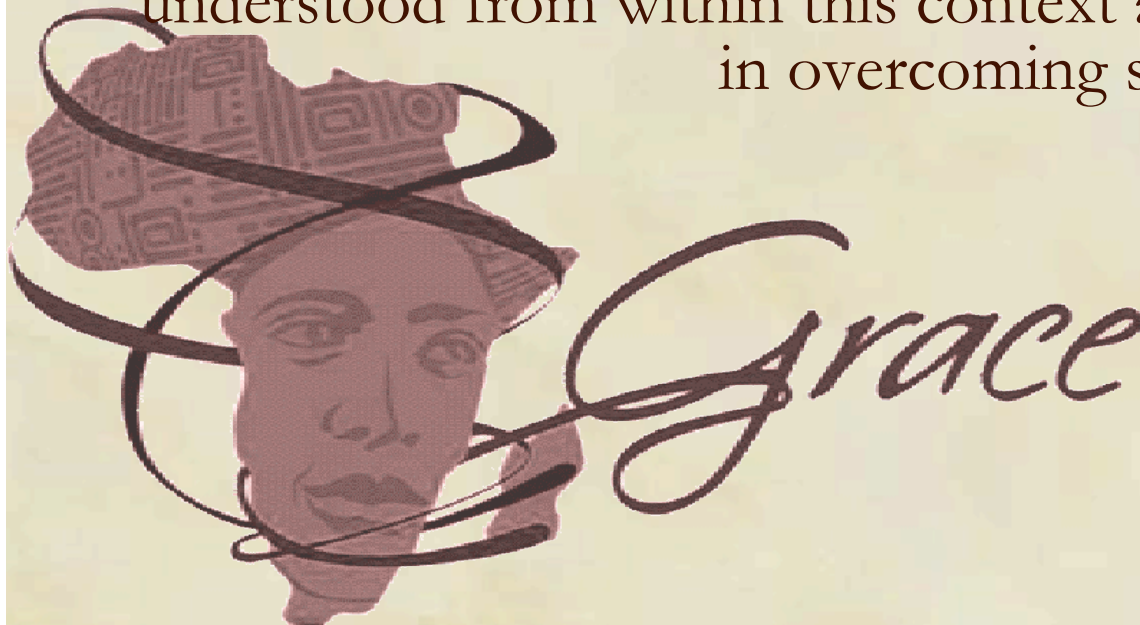
ICT research that aims to contribute to women's empowerment needs to recognize the global, national and local power structures that limit their economic, political and socio-cultural expansion, and needs to find ways to enhance the emerging new knowledges and new spaces that women create for themselves using ICT's.



Gender Research in Africa into ICTs for Empowerment

Women's access to and use of ICTs cannot be understood in isolation of their gender positions and identities and how these positions and identities interact with their political economic situation.

Even women's struggles to overcome the limitations of their positions and identities through the use of ICTs have to be understood from within this context and likewise their victories in overcoming such.



Thinking for the Future

We have also ended up with some uncomfortable questions:

Is there an alternative global political-economic model where women would have more margin to empower themselves through the use of information and communication technologies?

How does the world at large need to look for women to be able to contribute to their societies as fully empowered members of the information society?

