

WOUGNET

Until 2000, there was no organization in Uganda facilitating information exchange from within and abroad among women and women's organizations. WOUGNET (Women of Uganda Network) has emerged to fill this need by capitalizing on the opportunities available with email and the internet. WOUGNET is an NGO promoting and supporting the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) by women's organizations and individuals, with the goal of improving the conditions of life for Ugandan women.

WOUGNET operates primarily online and most of its members are based in Kampala where it is relatively easy to gain internet access compared to other places in Uganda. However, there are a few members who are based in rural areas or who otherwise lack internet access. These members have colleagues or other contacts who have internet access and who are able to serve as information intermediaries, or else they interact with WOUGNET by alternative means such as by telephone, fax, post, or at the WOUGNET office.

WOUGNET conducts various activities to promote and support the use of ICTs. These are broadly classified into email based, web-based and on-the-ground activities. Through email, WOUGNET administers a mailing list for members to exchange and share a variety of information, including conferences and workshops being conducted, requests for information on current developments in gender, health, agriculture and technology, as well as postings from potential volunteers for various activities.

The organization produces a monthly electronic newsletter and has hosted two online forums, 'Information access for rural women' and 'An information society for Uganda'.

WOUGNET has a website at <http://www.wougnnet.org>. It currently profiles Ugandan women's organizations and their activities, including health organizations. The website also

contains information on a variety of development-oriented topics and provides links to national and international projects. In May 2003, the WOUGNET website was awarded the African Information Society Initiative (AISII) Media Award in the International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD) – Local Content Category. WOUGNET also has a web design programme to donate websites to WOUGNET members.

WOUGNET's on-the-ground activities include outreach activities that have enabled it to increase membership by reaching out to women's organizations in Uganda that do not have ready internet access. A World Space Satellite Radio Programme was initiated to make information available to members with difficulties accessing Internet. WOUGNET has participated in a number of national and international events including the World Summit for the Information Society.

Currently WOUGNET has just carried out a UNDP-WSIS project 'ICT for poverty reduction: a multistakeholder approach'. The main aim of the project was to investigate a multistakeholder approach for the implementation of ICTs for poverty reduction in rural Uganda.

Clearly there are a number of challenges in making WOUGNET relevant to more women in Uganda. To get over these WOUGNET encourages its member organizations to translate their information while passing it on to the communities they serve, and links potential donors of computer equipment to recipients. For example, WOUGNET is in partnership with Computers for Africa, which in 2003 donated complete computer laboratories to 18 schools and NGOs across the country. In addition, the Tech Tips programme addresses members' computer-related queries online.

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Aquifer depletion could force cities to relocate

'With most of the nearly 3 billion people to be added to the world's population by 2050 living in countries where water tables are already falling, and where population growth swells the ranks of those sinking into hydrological poverty, water refugees are likely to become commonplace', says Lester Brown of the Earth Policy Institute (EPI).

Until now, most 'water refugees' have come from villages, but eventually whole cities might have to be relocated, such as Sana'a, the capital of Yemen, or Quetta, the capital of Pakistan's Baluchistan province.

The World Bank expects Sana'a, where the water table is falling by 6 m a year, to exhaust its remaining water supply by 2010. At that point, its leaders will either have to bring water in from a distant point or abandon the city. Quetta, originally designed for 50 000 people, now has 1 million inhabitants, all of whom depend on 2000 wells pumping water deep from underground, depleting what is believed to be a fossil or non-replenishable aquifer. Like Sana'a, Quetta may have enough water for the rest of this decade, but then its future is in doubt. In the words of one study assessing the water prospect, Quetta will soon be 'a dead city'.

Villages in north-western India have been abandoned because of over-pumping of local aquifers. The 4000 residents of a village in the western reaches of Inner Mongolia were forced to leave because their aquifer was depleted. Millions of villagers in northern and western China and in parts of Mexico may have to move because of a lack of water.

EPI-Water Scarcity Spreading,
<http://www.earth-policy.org/Indicators/indicator7.htm>

<http://www.earth-policy.org/Updates/Update33.htm>

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