# Final Technical Report
## GRACE 2

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## Abstract

Just as in GRACE 1, the research capacity development in GRACE 2 was the crux of the three longer-term objectives of the initiative: the formation of a gender and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) research network, the establishment of a research base, and public policy influence. The GRACE 2 Project built on the work of GRACE 1 on several levels: 1) the regional scope expanded to include the MENA region bringing the total number of teams to twenty-one; 2) the project's methodological strategy was grounded in an action research logic which accommodated in addition to qualitative research also quantitative and participatory research methods and processes; and 3) endeavors to disseminate the research findings were expanded and intensified. The eight sub-project investigations in Africa, as well as the thirteen sub-projects in MENA focused on a wide range of ICTs and involved a wide variety of different women users, and in some cases developers, who faced very different challenges and opportunities. Explicating the specific nature of each ICT under investigation, the specific situation of the women engaging this ICT, and the way this relationship developed and evolved, enabled us to speak to the interaction between gender and ICTs, and the direction for potential change in concrete, specific and in-depth ways. It also stimulated us to induct mid-level theoretical concepts to approach women, gender and ICT and contribute to the understanding of both women's plights and journeys of empowerment in the Knowledge Society

## 1) The Research Problem

### Gender Research in Africa and the Middle East into ICT for Empowerment

*Information and Communication Technologies - ICTs*

The concept "ICT" covers Internet service provision, telecommunications equipment and services, media and broadcasting, libraries and documentation centers, commercial information providers, network-based information services, and other related information and communication

activities, according to the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (Adeya: 13). The Association for Progressive Communication defines ICTs as "a group of technologies that are key to enabling information gathering and sharing/dissemination and communicating and that facilitate communication and the processing and transmission of information by electronic means" (http://www.apc.org/). The differences between ICTs should however not be glossed over. Many of the problems linked to "new" ICTs, such as illiteracy and costly infrastructure for instance, do not apply to the older ones such as radio and public telephones to the same degree. Furthermore, because different commercial interests might be involved with each ICT, national governments often respond with different policies and approaches to each form of technology.

*ICTs for Development and Women's Empowerment*

The need for gender disaggregated statistical data from developing countries is being increasingly recognized and collected (ITU http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/statistics/Gender/index.html, accessed 7 September 2011, Hafkin and Huyer 2007). There is enough evidence to state that African and MENA women do not have access in the same measure and are not benefiting from the Information Revolution in the same way as men are (Hafkin and Huyer 2007). And yet when women manage to get access to ICT, there is evidence from all over Africa that disadvantaged women use ICTs in innovative ways to empower themselves (Hafkin 2000: 13 and Netgains[1], Buskens and Webb 2009). Additionally, "women are making inroads into higher levels of the IT workforce in Latin America, East and Central Europe, much of Western and South East Asia, and South Africa. Women comprise a significant percentage of software programmers in India and Brazil and at all levels of IT work in Malaysia" (Hafkin and Taggart 2001: 2). Recent research has furthermore confirmed our observations that given the opportunity and with all variables being equal (especially education and income), women in developing countries in the African and Latin American continents make more use of ICTS than men do (Hilbert, M. 2011).

This would counter voices that dispute the fact that ICT can contribute effectively to women's development. It is therefore pertinent and crucial to try and understand at this stage of the ICT development efforts on the African Continent and in MENA countries how gender and ICT impact on each other. These were the main motivations to extend and expand the work and scope of GRACE 1:  GRACE 2 built on the work of GRACE 1, on several levels.

The findings of GRACE 1 confirmed the very real need to change the elements in our selves and our societies that create and perpetuate gender inequalities if women are to benefit from the use, development and design of ICT and enhance their own development and empowerment.

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[1] For a survey of African women's organizations' use of ICTs refer to 'Netgains', a research study undertaken by the Association for Progressive Communications Africa Women's Programme and Femnet in 1999/2000, http://www.apcafricawomen.org/netgains.htm

When development is understood as an emerging system property of people, communities, institutions or societies into unfolding complexity, then development is the natural course of things (Barder, O. 2009). Development understood in this way is very much a 'people centred' form of development where 'being human' implies 'being in development'. As such it differs from, yet resonates with the understandings of Amartya Sen when he formulates development as '…enlarging people's choices, capabilities and freedoms, so that they can live a long and healthy life, have access to knowledge, a decent standard of living, and participate in the life of their community." (Sen, A. http://hdr.undp.org/en/humandev/origins/ )

What does such an understanding of development mean in the context of a Research Network Project that focuses on "Gender Research in Africa and the Middle East into ICT for Women's Empowerment"? And what are the implications of using such conceptualizations in the coordination of a Research Network and the coordination of the Network members' research projects?

As sexism still prevails as a dominant state of mind in many contexts all over the world, and in Africa and the Middle East in sometimes very stark and prominent ways, all of us, both women and men needed to empower ourselves out of our gendered thinking and doing as well as out of other peoples' gendered thinking and doing in order to become free enough to develop into the human beings we valued becoming. This we understood to be a methodological prerequisite. In our striving towards research excellence we needed to evolve as researchers into nonsexist scholarship. But this challenge also became an intimate journey of personal transformation, a daily practice of 'polishing the self' often without any guide or guidance. As Eichler states: "moving toward nonsexist scholarship is comparable to trying to comprehend a dimension that we have not materially experienced. We can describe it in theoretical terms, but we cannot fully appreciate its nature until we are able to lift ourselves out of our current confining parameters. This involves becoming aware of sexism and starting to eliminate it" (Eichler 1991: 03).

An important focus of GRACE has thus been the building of the researcher-selves and their capacities to become the persons and researchers they had chosen to become. Because the researchers' original training and experience had not equipped them intellectually or emotionally for this, the project had to provide them with opportunities to develop their gender awareness, their capacity for social and gender analysis, their research capacity as well as their capacity to use research related ICT effectively. Intensive training and ongoing mentoring and support were provided. The project endeavored to integrate the learning processes of self understanding and self management, research and ICT into a holistic capacity building experience for the participants. Based on the effectiveness of the training and capacity development process in GRACE 1, we continued the GRACE process to extend the capacities of the continuing researchers in Africa, and undertook a similar process in MENA countries.

The GRACE project's research strategy was grounded in the acknowledgment of the importance of women's agency. This stance led us to approach ICT from a user-perspective and increased our understanding of the gendered nature of women's engagement with ICT in concrete, specific and in-depth ways. For the researchers to effectively investigate the user perspective, they not only had to recognize the respondents' agency, their contexts, systemic gender discrimination,

and the influences on their minds, they also had to question at the same time the influences on their (the researchers') own minds and their own way of seeing things.

The GRACE I Africa researchers developed this ability through the training and mentoring offered, and through their own practice of a critical qualitative research approach that required heightened self-awareness and reflexivity, in conjunction with rigorous attention to coherence in all aspects of their research methodology, methods, articulation of findings, and discussion and interpretation of those findings. As a consequence, the findings of their research endeavors could speak to women's perspectives and lived realities concretely and in-depth. It is this capacity achieved by the GRACE 1 African researchers that enabled them to create knowledge bridges between the world of African women research respondents and the world of policymakers. The Network's research discussions revealed how the complex relationships between external and internal factors shaped women's perceptions and experiences of empowerment. This is captured in many of the chapters of *African Women and ICTs: Investigating Technology, Gender and Empowerment* (Buskens and Webb, 2009).

GRACE 2 opened for the continuing Africa teams and the new MENA teams the possibility to engage their research through action research processes. These action research processes were designed with the explicit intent of incorporating an intervention that would bring about change in their respective research contexts. In order to construct knowledge about change that could be transferred to other contexts, the actual processes of personal and social change in these specific contexts would need to be understood in-depth. Where GRACE 1 had focused on qualitative research designs, the methodological framework developed for GRACE 2 could accommodate qualitative, quantitative and participatory methodologies within a design - logic of research for transformation.

The methodological shift from interpretive approaches toward approaches that are transformative and induce change, also and particularly in the researchers themselves, is lodged in two perspectives. In the first place, as women's agency is key to sustainable development and empowerment efforts, the capacity to make this agency visible and engage it appropriately requires that researchers learn to recognize their own agency first and foremost. In all research, but especially in research for change, the researchers are the main research instruments and transformative agents. The recognition of the interplay between a respondent's agency, her context, and the influences on her mind, as made sense of by a researcher conscious of her/his own mind filter, results in a depth of understanding that will be a rich resource for change efforts in other contexts.

In the second place, knowledge that can inform, guide and inspire processes of social change, needs to be grounded in the study of contextualized change processes and the way human actors initiate, engage and obstruct such processes. Merely understanding human actors' perspectives on their lived realities, the rationalities that they have constructed in order to make sense of their realities, will not necessarily give insight into the way these same human actors 'behave in change'. It is important to see respondents 'in action' and where possible engage them in a reflection on their actions and processes of change.

It is the achievement of this depth of understanding that we moved towards mastering with the continuing GRACE Africa researchers and with new members of GRACE in MENA countries, complemented by methodologies, critical thinking and conceptual analytical skills as needed to fully tool the researchers in their endeavors to contribute to sustainable development and transformation. As such, the research capacity development in GRACE 2 was the crux of the three longer-term objectives of the initiative: the formation of a gender and ICT research network, the establishment of a research base, and public policy influence.

## 2) Objectives

As stated in the MGC, the objectives of the GRACE 2 project are as follows:

### Project Objectives

The overall objective of the Project is to continue building research capacity in the GRACE Network (Gender Research in African into ICTs for Empowerment) and to critically examine relationships among women, men, ICTs and empowerment by strengthening individual agency, expanding the network's methodological basis – complementing existing qualitative approaches with elements of action research and quantitative methods – and initiating exploratory activities in other regions, notably Asia and MENA.

The specific objectives of the Project are as follows:

1. to develop / strengthen research capacity among various individuals and institutions throughout Africa and potentially Asia and MENA countries;
2. to influence policy at local, national and regional / global levels through broadening researchers capacities to influence policy; expanding policymakers' knowledge of ICT and gender issues; and influencing formal policy regimes (i.e., documents and processes);
3. to facilitate dialogue and inform key debates on gender and ICTs through effective dissemination of research findings through different mechanisms such as the book launch of GRACE 1 findings, participating at international workshops and conferences and maintaining an accurate and informative account of project activities and outputs on the GRACE website (www.GRACE-network.net);
4. to contribute to the methodological debates on the quality of qualitative and action research processes and research education processes in international ICT-based networks; and
5. to expand and deepen the experience for researchers who will be personally empowered in quantitative, qualitative and action research methodologies, and to reflect on the role of the project's network structure (different types and levels of interaction) in the process.

**1. Developing and Strengthening Research Capacity** among various individuals and institutions throughout Africa and potentially Asia and MENA countries**;**

Through the GRACE researchers many other individuals and institutions throughout Africa and the MENA countries have received research capacity building. The GRACE academic teachers in Tunis, Palestine, Jordan, Egypt and Yemen have trained their students and colleagues into the research methods and techniques they learnt through GRACE. The civil society members in Zambia, Cameroon, Nigeria and Kenya have done like wise and seemed to have focused particularly on the reflexivity and interpersonal capacities of the GRACE research methods. Where possible, the Project Director has given research capacity building to individuals and institutions during her field visits: Qualitative Data Analysis at the University of Tunis El Manar, Tunis, Tunisia; Feminisms and Research with Women at the University of Jordan in Amman, Jordan; Qualitative Transformational Research Methodology at the University of Science and Technology in Irbid, Jordan.

**2. Influencing Policy**

Our approach in GRACE in terms of contributing to policy influence has been, and continues to be, to address social and cultural conditions, right from the level of individual self-awareness and reflexivity, to bring about a change in gender relations and seek greater gender equality and justice.  We act on this approach in a myriad of ways through our research communications and relationships. Many examples are contained in Appendix A, which may seem to largely be a list of communications, but these are communications that are expressive of our approach to creating and conveying a different way of seeing gender relations and the ways in which ICT can contribute to or hinder progress along this path.

One of the primary outputs of the project is to provide rigorous research results that can reinforce and be used in efforts to advocate for gender awareness in ICT policy development and implementation. GRACE 2 not only has produced such research, it has also expanded the pool of highly skilled and experienced qualitative and action researchers, with quantitative capacities as well, who can do ongoing gender and empowerment research in Africa and the Middle East, and contribute to transforming our gendered world through sharing their analysis and contributing to national and international policy dialogues.

On the understanding that the most effective element of policy research is the researcher herself/himself, the project emphasis was on supporting and guiding the mastery of transformative research techniques and methodologies, to the degree that an international network of GRACE researchers in Africa and the MENA region are producing sound, valid research for change.

Research influences policy in complex ways. The influence is mediated by the groups and individuals who promote and present the research, the timing and venues of the presentation of

the research, the nature of the policy making processes one is trying to influence and the particular socio-economic and political conjuncture.

In many cases GRACE research team leaders are prominent scientists and academics in their fields of expertise.  Many are involved in national and international commissions, organizations and consultancies. This information is provided on the GRACE web site as part of each researcher's profile: http://www.grace-network.net/research_teams.php  Through these high-level commitments, GRACE researchers are in positions to contribute to policy influence through such avenues as policy briefs, publications, the formation of national strategies, and research, all informed by their in depth analysis of gender dimensions of their field of expertise. The research capacity development that is central to the GRACE project contributes to the groundedness, reliability and applicability of their contributions. Examples of recent nominations of GRACE researchers to positions of influence are included in Appendix A.

### 3. Facilitating dialogue and informing key debates

GRACE researchers and project coordination team members have been highly active in the dissemination and communication of project and research findings, learnings and analyses that have developed and evolved through their intensive investigation into the nexus of gender, ICT and empowerment. The majority of these activities are listed in Appendix A. To mention a few examples: the GRACE team at the 2011 Women's World Conference in Ottawa, Canada: Anne Webb, Gisele Yitamben, Oum Kalthoum Ben Hassine, Arwa Oweis, Susan Bakesha and Ineke Buskens. Salome Omamo's presentation at ICTD2012; The project director's Conference Response to Martha Nussbaum at the 2011 Human Development Conference in Den Hague, the Netherlands; her participation in four panels at the ICTD2012 in Atlanta: on the Capabilities' Approach, Open Development, Gender and ICT and Human Centered Development; Ineke's participation in the three-person panel for the Bretton Woods Webinar on 'Mobile Technology in the World Bank planning' in 2012 and her Keynote Address for the Rwanda International Conference on Technology in Education in 2012. In all these contributions Ineke drew from the GRACE Network experience and dialogues, bringing the GRACE Network to the world stage and bringing back the learnings to the Network members.

Appendix D is included to show how the GRACE book *African Women and ICT: Investigating Technology, Gender and Empowerment*, an output of the first phase of GRACE continues to inform dialogue and debate, while we are continually evolving our knowledge and practice in GRACE 2.  This avenue for contributing to reflection, learning, discourse and debate has been also been followed in GRACE 2, along with the many other project activities and outputs, with the forthcoming publication of our second book, *Changing Selves, Changing Societies: Women, Gender and ICT in Africa and the Middle East.*

### 4. Contributing to methodological debates on the quality of qualitative and action research processes and research education processes in international ICT-based networks

Book chapters in the second GRACE book will discuss different aspects of the methodological framework for development research and practice that was developed in the context of GRACE, as well as the research, networking and capacity building in GRACE, and the theoretical framework that emerged inductively from the project.

As the GRACE Research Director, Ineke Buskens contributed through presentations, articles and conference participation to current methodological thinking on ICT research processes. A full list of such contributions is included in Appendix A. Additionally, methodological discussions were held during training workshops, during site visits to each team in the MENA region, online between each research team and the research coordination team (Ineke or Anne), and on the GRACE e-lists that all researchers and the research coordination team are members of. The learnings from these conversations become evident and public with the publication of the completed research reports and in the forthcoming GRACE 2 book, *Changing Selves, Changing Societies*.

The research reports and book chapters make evident the methodologies used, but also make apparent the logic and theory of change which informs the researchers' thinking and understanding of the methodology or combination of methodologies they utilized to seek answers to and understandings of their questions. These methodological choices illustrate what works and why, and for which exploration for what purpose. In their choices the researchers consistently adhered to the measures of research quality – validity, reliability, usability and transferability. The effectiveness of the rigor of the researchers, in combination with the emphasis in GRACE on the self-aware, reflexive researcher herself/himself as the crucial element in research for social change, can be assessed by reviewing the reports or book chapters. The reports will be available at http://grace-network.net/wordpress/?category_name=reports-publications. The book proposal has been accepted by the acquisitions team at Zed Books, with a contract stipulating the delivery of the manuscript by 1 March 2013. The book will be co-published with IDRC and available in printed and online formats in 2013.

**5. To expand and deepen the experience for researchers who will be personally empowered in quantitative, qualitative and action research methodologies, and to reflect on the role of the project's network structure (different types and levels of interaction) in the process.**

There are many ways in which the GRACE researchers and project team members have integrated their insights into their own ways of being, the ways they interact, and the activities they engage in on a regular basis in their work places, homes and communities. Some researchers speak of approaching their teaching differently, themselves differently:

"GRACE has touched us in many ways...there are ways that we have been touched by GRACE that cannot be captured by words or cannot be explained...

"I am personally changed in so many ways... how I relate to others and to myself....

"GRACE is a new world view, new lenses by which I am able to see the world more clearly and more beautifully than ever…my relationship with myself is becoming more peaceful, and I grew up ten years in three years. I believe I am a much better person at all levels, socially, professionally and spiritually..." (Arwa Oweis, GRACE researcher and MENA Secretariat).

"Through my (GRACE) research trip I started to see myself as being a valuable person in my society. I valued and accepted myself, I am now able to relax and enjoy myself, without feeling guilty. I accepted that I can change and may change for the better. Talk about these things with my respondents to find out how they see things. I always now remember, it is not what happens to us that causes our distress and stigma, but how we interpret what happens to us. So how do I begin my research journey of self-discovery to improve my self-esteem? I started to write down inspiring quotes, exciting events in my life and my respondents'. Make sure to look at this book daily. Now I believe that everyone draws their own path; we don't have to go a certain way to get to our destination. Everywoman picks up her own marker, and draws the line she chooses to follow. (…..)

"Through my work with my respondents, I would tell them that all things are possible for those who believe in their capabilities and work hard, so I touched my life with them. That feedback shows that giving an example of what I am has influenced my respondents and what they feel and face again influenced me. Finding a good relationship with myself seemed to be an even harder task! Learning to love myself starts with making a conscious decision, an intention to become happy and to overcome the mankind (male dominated) society I always suffer (from). When I do not love myself and suffer from low self-esteem, it is almost impossible to ever reach the potential that I suspect I have. When I started to think kindly and positively, loving myself grows through my respondents. So instead of worrying, I spent time thinking about what I can do to help in the situation which is answered through my work with my respondents. I celebrate myself." (Nagwa Abdel Meguid, GRACE MENA researcher).

"It all started with GRACE.

I am sure of that.

A journey of introspection

and retrospection.

Revelatory of the heart,

of the mind,

and of the eye.

(….)

In search of other voices,

I found my voice,

beginning the work of becoming myself,

coming face to face with myself,

and knowing the address of my heart."

(Rula Quawas, GRACE MENA researcher; for the complete poem see Appendix E).

For researchers' reflections on capacity development see, for example, Susan http://www.grace-network.net/researcher_bakesha.php, Salome http://www.grace-network.net/researcher_omamo.php or Arwa on "Me and my writing" http://www.grace-network.net/vision.php ).

Our sense is that with the researchers increasingly engaging in reflexive, critical emancipatory approaches to research and analysis, there is a sense of cohesion and "oneness" emerging within the Networks. The sense of being a community of inquiry and knowledge construction has been achieved, while still and continually evolving.

## 3) Methodology

The Project's understanding of Development and Women's Empowerment made a focus on agency, of respondents and researchers alike, imperative. This focus on agency influenced all the Project's methodologies on all levels. The Project's methodologies respond to the long-term goals of the initiative:

1. The generation of knowledge that will influence policy and stimulate gender conscious transformation at local, national and regional/global levels.

2. The formation of research expertise in various institutions throughout Africa and MENA that can contribute to the debates around gender and ICT issues.

3. The formation of a research network that can do ongoing gender and ICT research in Africa and MENA.

These goals formed one coherent approach and hence the various methodologies, which we used were inextricably intertwined and often served more than one goal. But for the purpose of a better understanding of their specific contribution and a better insight into our learning, the methodologies will be discussed in relationship to the three above-mentioned goals.

*1. The generation of knowledge that will influence policy and stimulate gender conscious transformation at local, national and regional/global levels.*

Because of the fact that understanding women's agency was of primary importance, it was crucial that the researchers learnt to acknowledge and engage their own agency first and foremost in the research process itself. The decision was made therefore, right at the beginning of the process of formation of the GRACE Network, to allow the research teams to choose their own research question, methodology and target group. This brought with it three substantial advantages: for overextended people to accomplish a challenging research project, it would be important that they would be able to follow their personal passion. And for gender researchers to have a chance that their research findings would be able to influence policy in a patriarchal context, it would be important that they would construct knowledge that was relevant to their own field of work and could work with familiar networks of people who knew them and trusted them. In the third place, as the project's main research approach was qualitative research for social change, it would be preferable to have a wide variety of research topics and target populations over one research design in a variety of countries. Methodological objectivity in qualitative research is interpreted as transferability, the way in which research learning can be transferred to another context, and this is not dependent on the quantity of data or the capacity to compare similar research data between research settings, but on the quality of the insights and the depth of the contextualization of the research findings.[2] And as gender and ICT was still an under-researched topic, it was considered a good strategy to explore the phenomena from as many angles as possible.

The research methods and techniques used in GRACE 1 were grounded on the one hand in ethnographic and qualitative approaches such as depth interviewing, focus group discussions and participant observation and on the other hand in processes of personal and social transformation such as dream drawings and work-shopping. All research methods were chosen and designed to give researchers an opportunity to understand their respondents' perspectives, lived realities and experiences both with the dreams they had for empowerment with or through ICT as well as the internal and external factors they experienced that would either support them or hinder them in the accomplishment of these dreams.

As the GRACE 1 knowledge construction strategy proved successful, it was followed in GRACE 2 but the range of methods was extended. Because the general methodological framework was a

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[2] In quantitative research the striving for research quality, or for methodological objectivity is understood as generalisabiltiy, which requires for its reliability and validity of the research findings random sampling and for comparison of research data derived from various research populations, a standardised research design.

merging of Outcome Mapping Methodology with Action Research, qualitative, quantitative and participatory methods could be accommodated (Buskens, I & Earl, S.). The evolved research approach allowed the researchers to perceive, acknowledge and engage respondents' agency in even more clear and powerful ways.

*2. The formation of research expertise in various institutions throughout Africa and MENA that can contribute to the debates around gender and ICT issues*

The way that development and empowerment were understood within GRACE made understanding women's agency of primary importance. In order to conduct Research for Empowerment appropriately, researchers have to be able to make women's agency visible and where appropriate engage it effectively. Enhancing researchers' capacity to do this was the main focus of the capacity development within GRACE and is the binding force between all the varying research methods and research education techniques. For researchers to be able to recognize and engage respondents' agency, they must be able to recognize and enhance their own. Hence the emphasis in GRACE on the transformational nature of all social research, on the change process within the researchers themselves, and on the various techniques of self management and self care. The mastery of transformative research techniques and methodologies, to the degree that international networks of researchers (in Africa and MENA) are producing sound, valid, gender conscious research for change, that can influence policy and contribute to improving women's lives, was thus a central objective of the second phase of GRACE. This commitment to understanding women's agency for the purpose of learning how to advance this, influenced not only the *type* of research methods that the researchers were trained in within GRACE, methods that would give the researchers the opportunity to become aware of and acknowledge their respondents' agency, but also the *way* the researchers were trained. GRACE researchers were guided in the process of getting in touch with their own agency so that they could perceive and understand their respondents' agency and at the same time open up to how ICT was approached by their respondents, from a user perspective.

*The ICT-Gender relationship from a user-perspective*

In reference to this study, the terms ICT and ICTs are approached from a user-perspective. Regardless of the fact that various ICTs serve similar purposes, the actual use of them will entail a different reality for users in terms of access, maintenance, control and use. For most users, the categorical concept of ICT may not make any sense at all. At the same time however, the inter-dependent use of a variety of ICT tools creates new spaces for communication and information processing which affect human relationships and identities, not only within virtual spaces but also outside of these. Living in a networked world opens new perspectives on human connection and collaboration offering new opportunities and demanding new responsibilities. However, at the same time, there are many pre-existing forms of connection and human relationships that shape and limit the users' perspectives on themselves, their capabilities and their potential use of ICT. These need to be recognized and taken into account in investigations intended to find paths through which women can put ICT to use in pursuing their own interests, needs and visions for a

better future. These are also aspects that need to be investigated if disadvantaged groups are not to remain disadvantaged in their integration of ICT into their daily lives.


*3. The formation of a research network that can do ongoing gender and ICT research in Africa and MENA*

"At the July 2005 inception workshop, the initial Africa group set out the following values for the network as an expression of how they wanted to experience themselves and each other in order to accomplish what they desired to do:

> Discovery, Warm Space, Exploration, Sharing, Empowerment, Learning, Innovation, Voice (giving), Transformation, Change, Interaction, Team Work, Visual Space, Hard Work, Challenging, Direction, Wish, Adventure, Growth, Reflection, Network, Friendship, Social Change, Relaxation.

No mention was made of openness as a value amidst these 26 descriptors. However, from a network management perspective, openness was understood as an important strategy for stimulating research competence and enhanced group learning: the network members would need to open up and feel free to share, so that they could give and receive support from each other and produce the research findings that their countries needed. The following quote from one of the network members illustrates this: "Since the first meetings, I realized that I was discovering a beautiful family, marked by the opening to each other, friendliness, complicity, respect, I realized that GRACE is a space of discussion, exchange of information, sharing of knowledge, know-how, soft skills.

"Since this first workshop in July 2005, a shared understanding about the purpose, the intent, and the scope for the network itself has emerged through ongoing debate and questioning. Openness was embraced as a strategy, as a means to the ends of research collaboration and research capacity development: in order to do their often path-breaking gender research in their respective countries, the GRACE researchers needed a safe space to grow and connect with each other. This applied to the female as well as the male researchers, although their challenges were different. One of the main drivers in the network was therefore trust. Trust in oneself grew through expanding research competence and gender awareness that brought with it a growing confidence in one's own position within one's own social environments. Trust in one another within the network grew through allowing and appreciating the diversity in theoretical, methodological, gender and spiritual perspectives that stimulated growth on an individual and group level.

"Yet even within this container, open sharing between the researchers had to be mediated by their need for safety. Women are being killed for being known to be feminist in this world, for speaking up for their own and for other women's human rights. GRACE researchers are never only GRACE researchers -- they play a lot of other roles and are members of many social systems in their countries of origin, as well as regionally and internationally. These forums are very diverse and not all share enlightened perspectives on women's empowerment and gender equality. The GRACE social platforms were therefore managed through a rhythm of openings and closures: research questions that were politically sensitive were not immediately shared with

all members of the network, and some of the dialogues between the researchers were conducted via special research mailing lists and not the general GRACE list to which non-GRACE members had access." (This section is cited in entirety from Buskens 2011: p 74).

The network in MENA started with drawing a great deal from the expertise and experiences from GRACE 1 in Africa. But in the beginning each network charted its own respective course and maintained its own discourse and sharing space. It took a while before the researchers were comfortable sharing across the regional networks.

A key element in the development of a sense of connection was the annual face-to-face workshops. These were intensive learning and sharing events at which all those who could attend were deeply engaged in their thinking processes, and in engaging each other's thinking processes. These intense periods of working together built rapport, trust and connection between each other and this helped to form a platform from which communication continued on-line.

Having a researcher from "the other region" participate in regional capacity building workshops helped considerably in the opening up towards each other. Whilst the networks are retaining their own network lists, at the moment the general GRACE Meta list is the one most in use and this has enhanced the opportunities for sharing, learning and supporting one another. The values that were formulated by the Africa group in 2005 continue to lead the way how the dialogues between the researchers are moderated. This list will be sustained for a year following the completion of GRACE 2, recognizing the role this venue for connection and communication is playing within the Network.

At the heart of the GRACE Methodology is the focus on agency, the agency of both researcher and respondent and the intricate and sometimes inextricable relationship between these two. Rula Quawas, one of the Jordan GRACE researchers, summed the effect, which the GRACE approach has had on her personally and on her work as follows:

> *I think you know that I am a feminist by heart and soul. I always was, and I will always be no matter what. Feminist thought is deeply embedded in my consciousness, and women's striving for empowerment on all levels is my creed and politics of ethics. When I became a Graciousness, I 'came into voice,' an embodied voice that led me to self-discovery and to self-affirmation. GRACE touched my life and resulted in a greater awareness of feminist issues. Being a Graciousness made me recognize the inextricable relationship between theory and practice, between scholarship and activism. It made me engage in praxis, a mode of action and human togetherness.*

## 4) Project Activities

**Activities supported**

The project process is outlined in the project work plan (see the "GRACE 2: Gender Research in Africa into ICTs for Empowerment" proposal http://www.grace-network.net/publications/GRACE%202%20Proposal-Feb%2014,%2008,%20final.pdf). This work plan was updated in July 2009, to itemize the schedule for both the Africa and MENA regional networks moving forward. This was updated further with the three extensions agreed to by IDRC. The main activities of each reporting period are described in the Synthesis for Period, and in the Project Implementation and Management section in each semi-annual technical report submitted.

GRACE 2 supported initially 25 research teams once it expanded to include the MENA region. Of these, 21 teams have continued to be active members of GRACE and have produced research reports and book chapters on their research investigations. Each research team was provided with research grants and ongoing extensive support and research and writing training in workshops and online throughout the research and writing processes.

To summarize the activities, the first GRACE MENA workshop was held in December 2008 in Aden, Yemen. This workshop is detailed in the second technical report. The second workshop was held in August 2009 in Lebanon, and is summarized in the Third Technical report. The workshop in Tunis, held in May 2010, is explained in 5th report, and a report on the final Amman Hiding and Writing workshop is attached to 6th report.

A Research Proposal Development workshop was held at the end of September 2008 with the continuing and new members of GRACE Africa. This workshop took place just after the 8th International Conference on Human Choice and Computers conference and the International Federation for Information Processing Working Group's workshop: Towards an ICT Research Agenda for African Development, in Pretoria, South Africa from 23 – 26 September. Several GRACE researchers and the Project Leader presented their GRACE 1 work at these events. At the subsequent Methodology Training and Research Design Workshop (Dar es Salaam, May 2009), researchers shared how they wanted to evolve their research projects with a new research question and possibly additional research approaches. In consultation with the GRACE Africa research coordination team, the researchers undertook the writing of their new research proposals.

Based on the experience with GRACE 1 where an additional writing workshop needed to be organized to support the researchers with writing their findings into book chapters, it was decided that a Research Sharing and Writing Workshop would be held once the researchers had reached the point where they were able to write up their findings. This was held in Livingstone in August 2010.

Mentoring and capacity building took place throughout the project, with the capacity building starting with the initial workshops in each region held early in the first year of GRACE 2. These workshops also were the starting point of the emergence of the GRACE MENA network, and the actualization of the GRACE Africa network. Site visits were made by the Research Director in all the seven MENA countries. The Research Director and Research Coordinator worked closely with each research team in the design and implementation of the teams' varied research strategies, and with their regular reporting. This continued as the researchers wrote and finalized their research reports and chapters. Results were documented through updates to the GRACE web site, in professionally edited online publications, and in written, digital and video documentation of the GRACE events and processes.

Starting from the planning phase of the project the network's broader policy transformation goals have been considered and dissemination activities that recognize the GRACE process and results have been regularly engaged. These activities are listed in Appendix A.

Each of the sub-projects is exploring the gendered nature of women's engagement with ICT and the implications for women's empowerment, in the interest of achieving change. The depth of understanding and connectedness emerging from the research approach and processes used, and from focused, self-reflective and skilled unpacking of findings, are key to identifying and designing interventions with respondents, and key to achieving the changes women find are needed for them to act on their own capabilities.

**Learnings**

*Researching within one's own context*

The GRACE researchers were located within their research contexts – sometimes they were even working and living within these settings. This brought enormous advantages to their knowledge construction processes and it confronted them with considerable challenges. Because most of the researchers were close to their respondents, the rapport was excellent and the understandings that were derived had depth and poignancy. But as they often shared their respondents' cultural and religious gender perspectives, identification with these perspectives could form a constant threat to the quality of their observations and reflections. Furthermore the chaos that processes of personal and social change evoke was often shared by researchers and respondents alike. It is not easy to reflect on change processes in others and society when one is in a process of change oneself.

*Forming a body of knowledge*

Whilst the research approach of investigating one's own context and following one's own passion, and hence the imperative to allow a wide range of research topics to emerge in two widely varying geographical regions yielded indeed rich and in-depth knowledge, it presented a two fold challenge: in the first place, bringing together knowledge sets of such variety into dialogue with each other required deep analysis and the creation of a new theoretical framework. And yet, before one could 'form' 'a body of knowledge that could influence policy and stimulate gender conscious transformation at local, national and regional/global levels,' it was essential to do justice to the knowledge diversity and understand the various knowledge contexts in depth. This process took more time than anticipated: it was difficult to assess the time it would take as there was not a model or known precedent for how much time such activity takes and because the researchers' learnings were not all presented and shared within a certain period.

In the second place, allowing researchers to follow their passion often resulted in researchers choosing as yet uncharted pathways of research and knowledge construction. Ill equipped intellectually and emotionally for their research undertaking of choice, they presented the Project leadership with a steep challenge in terms of research capacity building and mentorship. This also took a lot of time and effort, especially as we had to let go of a third support person: the research coordinator for MENA because of the way the project was expanded in 2009 without additional funding provided. However as the first GRACE book is still being used and referenced in various fora all over the world, in fields varying from ICT4D to Women and Gender studies, this approach seems to provide the type of knowledge which the field needs and we have good reason to hope that the second book will make an equally worthwhile contribution.[3] Fortunately we were able to extend the length of the project by cutting various training activities and reducing expenses, to allow for the time needed for the evolution of the reflection, analysis and writing processes. Recognition of the additional time needed and ensuring its availability has been essential to the success of the project.

*Contextualization*

A further element that became increasingly apparent was the importance of being aware of the complex contextual interconnections that are part of any gender-technology relationship, and integrating these understandings into one's analysis of local and specific research findings. This was facilitated through discussions online, through the sharing of relevant readings and analysis, and through the project leadership consistently drawing each researcher's attention to evidence of normalized power and inequality thinking and behaviour embedded in their research context, their respondents, and themselves.

*Communication*

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[3] To date, African Women and ICT has been cited 31 times according to Google Scholar. For an insight into the variety of referencing publications, see Appendix D.

In a project focussed on research capacity development, the formation of a research network focussed on gender and ICT in Africa and MENA, and the generation of knowledge that will influence policy and stimulate gender conscious transformation at local, national and regional/global levels, we have had a lot to communicate.  Internal communication has been swift and constant among the researchers and project leadership, and external communication in the form of presentations, writing, media and other activities has been plentiful. However, a project of this scope and depth would benefit from a designated communications person who creatively ensures that the Network is communicating with and known to a wide audience. Who takes on the role of understanding where and with whom the knowledge being generated in the project should most suitably, usefully and effectively be shared. This was attempted in a few different ways, but in each case it became evident that such a role needs dedicated attention.

## 5) Project Outputs

GRACE outputs are listed, and linked where possible, in Appendices A and B.
A is organized according to the following categories:

- International and national conferences
- Book publication related events
- Policy influence and interventions
- Media coverage and use
- Research dissemination workshops and meetings
- Evaluation: Monitoring and evaluating our thinking, writing and speaking

B comprises GRACE publications, presentations and reports in bibliographic format.
GRACE 2 research reports are included in Appendix B. The forthcoming book chapters of *Changing Selves, Changing Societies* are included in Appendix C. Furthermore, a partial list of citations of the first GRACE book, *African Women and ICTs* (Appendix D), indicates the breadth of use being made of our analytical case studies and unique, crucial insights. This work is clearly filling a gap and providing needed understandings of the nexus of gender, empowerment and ICT, as emphasized by "critics of development [who] have highlighted … the importance of situated, local knowledge as opposed to the representational knowledge of professionals, but stressed that all too often it is the latter which, as 'legitimate' discourse, comes to shape interventions" (Thompson 2004:104).

*Research*

The research reports will be published on the GRACE web site in the coming months, once the editing and final revisions are complete.  It is expected that 4 of the 21 research teams will not finalize reports for various reasons. One team substantially changed the focus of their work midstream due to a civil conflict situation that overtook their local context; other teams found that with a shortage of time in their lives to complete all deliverables, it was important to focus

on the finalization of their book chapter. All teams are finalizing their book chapters, and the period of November 2012 to February 2013 has been designated as a final period for the manuscript completion process, with IDRC approval for the time and use of funds for this completion process. The *Changing Selves, Changing Society* book proposal received strong reviews and is has been accepted by the Zed Books acquisitions team. An e-book co-publication agreement with IDRC is being explored.

All these outputs have contributed to a formal body of knowledge in ICT4D, integrating gender analysis, and bringing to light the gender-blindness of current mainstream thinking concerning the potential for ICT use to facilitate development efforts. In so doing, these publications and activities have the *potential to influence* current thinking regarding how ICT use can contribute to development and women's empowerment.

The GRACE interventions expose how existing (gendered, inequitable) socio-economic lived realities, norms and assumptions run counter to apparent or claimed development goals and visions. Alternative relevant pathways are envisioned, soundly researched and presented. This exposure has the potential to influence people's thinking, over time and space, and subsequently their practice.

The GRACE "products" are examples of intended and unintended (unexpected) positive activities and outputs that are logically aligned with the changes (outcomes) individual GRACE sub-projects, and the overall GRACE Project, want to see; they are envisaged to have the potential for future influence, continuing and beyond the influence we see already, that will really make a difference by changing how people understand and think about current realities, what is possible, and what is needed for sustainable (equitable) development.


*Capacity*

Twenty-one research teams completed the GRACE 2 project which involved extensive research capacity development and the full range of skills, techniques, self-awareness development, writing and other aspects that are necessary to envision, undertake and analyze in depth social research for change. As researcher capacity building was one of the central objectives of GRACE 2, this aspect in terms of what was achieved, milestones, sustainability and lessons learned is discussed in detail in the sections considering the Project Methodology, Project Activities and Outcomes.




### Research findings

For a summary of the research findings, please see the attached documents (for internal use only):

Research findings summary, Ineke Buskens and Anne Webb

THE GRACE 2 STORIES, Capturing the central essence of each chapter in the forthcoming *Changing Selves, Changing Societies: Women, gender and ICT in Africa and the Middle East* , edited by Ineke Buskens and Anne Webb

*Changing Selves, Changing Societies: Women, gender and ICT in Africa and the Middle East* book outline submitted to and accepted by Zed Books for publication.

These three documents may be posted on IDRC data bases only once the book has been published and released.


## vii) Project Outcomes

**Internal and External Outcomes**

Because of the capacity building objectives of GRACE, outcomes are of an internal and an external nature. Behaviour change in the Network members is an outcome in itself as well as an output that will bring about an outcome of behaviour change in other individuals, organisations, communities and networks. In the following we will therefore discuss internal outcomes, the interrelationship between internal and external outcomes and the external outcomes.


*Internal Outcomes*

GRACE places emphasis on the transformational nature of all social research, on the change process within the researchers themselves, and on the various techniques of self-management and self-care. This research capacity development is the crux of the three longer-term objectives of the initiative in both regions: the formation of a research network, the establishment of a research base, and public policy influence.

We are seeing substantial developments in both regions in these directions as

- the researchers increasingly share their work and thinking with each other, and provide input to their GRACE network colleagues;
- the research team members, based in various institutions and organizations, are increasingly equipped with skills, dispositions and ability to undertake qualitative, quantitative and action research of the highest standards in their field of ICTs and women's empowerment research;
- the types, reach and frequency of public and targeted activities raising awareness of women's empowerment in relation to ICT use, access and design increase.

Examples of public activities undertaken by the GRACE researchers are included on the GRACE web site, particularly in the section that links to GRACE publications in various formats. Other examples of public activities are noted in the News section of our web site.

The first writing released on each teams' research will be in the form of a forthcoming published book. The findings of the research endeavours are succinctly captured in the chapter précis prepared by each research team to express the central insights and arguments of their chapters. These are included in the book proposal that has been accepted by Zed Books, and thus are for internal viewing only at this time.

Additional outcomes from the overall GRACE 2 project are observable also at this stage. The GRACE researchers in the MENA region are scientists with varying degrees of familiarity with social sciences, gender research, and researcher self-reflexivity. Through their research proposals, monthly research reports and other correspondence, workshop participation, research reports and evaluations, and book chapters it is apparent how they are moving past previous boundaries to examine their own way of engaging with research participants, and of contemplating what they are observing, hearing and seeing. If we understand research contributions to knowledge as including contributions to self-knowledge, the work of the new members of the GRACE Network, being the GRACE-MENA researchers, is noteworthy.

As part of the objective of research capacity building, the GRACE project from its inception identified the emergence of gender research networks as a mechanism that would complement individual capacity development. Our sense is that with the researchers increasingly engaging in reflexive, critical emancipatory approaches to social research and analysis, and increasingly feeling that there is a sense of cohesion and "oneness" within the network, the sense of being a community of inquiry and knowledge construction has been achieved, while still and continually evolving. We have seen a definite increase in the communication between researchers on the GRACE-meta-list (which includes all research teams and the project leadership) regarding their perspectives on issues, sharing of resources (readings, calls for abstracts, conference announcements for example), ideas and concepts relating to their GRACE research, on the regional political upheavals, or regarding successes in their lives and their projects. Individuals are supporting each other as they face various challenges in their professional and personal lives as women committed to increasing their own self-awareness and reflexivity, and to women's rights and equality in difficult contexts and circumstances.

The researchers throughout the network are experiencing a deepening of their know-how and self-reflexivity capacity and this is affecting their ways of doing and contemplating their research processes, the contributions of the research participants, and their analysis and interpretation of their own ways of thinking, being and doing. The experience is increasing the depth and complexity of the questions posed and responses offered, and the ways of understanding responses.

According to one research team:

At Fantsuam Foundation, we prided ourselves as making the global, locally relevant while transmitting the local to the global. This GRACE research has taken this assignment to a new level for John and myself. As we tackle the local gender ramifications of our research, the various postings on GRACE [e-lists], makes us appreciate that we are part of a global re-awakening. We are able to see the link between the difficult decisions we have to make on a daily basis, often reflected on a global basis: we see bits of Kafanchan in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Wall Street, London etc. We find ourselves as part of that drop that will coalesce with other drops and become a swift clean river of equity for all women and men in the world. This research makes us, more than ever, feel that our local concerns matter globally, and we are children of this universe. (Kazanka Comfort, Nigeria research team)

*Internal Outcomes leading to External Outcomes*

The logical alignment and coherence between what we achieve within our selves and publicly, and the impact of this, is poignantly captured in one of the researcher's reflections on what it means to her to be a GRACE researcher, and how it has changed her (http://www.grace-network.net/researcher_MENA-hibatulla_ali.php ). She speaks of the impact of the Network on her recognition of her capabilities and the development of her capacities, and how this personal impact is contributing to her work for women's empowerment.

Furthermore, from Kiss Brian Abraham in Zambia: *"The reflexivity we learn in GRACE allowed me to maintain focus which saw me through the project without breaking down. Constant self-reflection and morning pages helped to keep me focused on my task.*

*(....) GRACE has armed me with the skills to integrate my external work and personal life with the research work I was doing.*

*Through GRACE I had been privileged to interrogate beneficial systems for GRACE's communications infrastructure and the skills learnt through this process have benefitted the various organizations and networks where I am involved. I have helped to develop gender sensitive communications systems for many organizations. These include World Vision, Zambia Civic Education Association and the Zambia Governance foundation to name a few. Their work in development requires communications which communicates prejudice out of their message and this is not easy without the lens through which one can see patriarchy as has been armed in all GRACE researchers.*

*Cartooning is one area where I used my GRACE experience. I used this as a visioning exercise to clarify on some of the complex concepts within the context where I'm working and after crafting the images writing descriptions of these mental pictures. Many organizations in Zambia have recognized this process in my work and have consulted me to integrate it in their communications infrastructure."* (Personal communication with the Project Leadership)

*External Outcomes*

A few examples will show the influence of GRACE work and activity on what is valued and recognized as legitimate knowledge, and how this is affecting what is valued in public discourses and spaces.

GRACE Contribution to scientific research and knowledge innovation:

- Our GRACE book *African Women and ICTs* continues to sell, is cited in numerous related publications, and is being used in university courses as required reading, such as the ICT4D master program at the University of London, Royal Holloway. (Appendix D). During the "International Federation for Information Processing WG9.4, the Social Implications of Computers for Developing Countries 2011 Conference in Nepal, the book was referred to as an example of sophisticated research into the issues.

- The proposal for a Gender and ICT4D conference track developed by Ineke Buskens and Gloria Bonder for the 2013 Social Implications of Computers in Developing Countries conference (IFIP WG9.4) to be held in Jamaica, was accepted. http://www.ifipwg94.org/ifip-conference-2013 The track, the first of its kind, is entitled "Infusing Gender into ICTD: Innovating Research, Practice and Policy." This track seeks to explore how a gender perspective grounded in equality as well as in the recognition of diversity can contribute to ICT becoming a driver of sustainable development. It is however at this point unclear whether the track will continue as planned, given the limited amount of papers submitted.

- Ineke has been asked to contribute the entry on "ICT4D and gender" for the ICT4D section of the International Encyclopedia of Digital Communication and Society, edited by Professor Peng Hwa Ang and Professor Robin Mansell, which is to be published by Wiley-Blackwell in collaboration with the International Communication Association. This is the first occasion that ICT4D will be mapped, as an entire field, for an international encyclopedia.

GRACE contributions to changes in behaviour, capacities, actions, or relationships of researchers, networks, or research institutions:

- Professor Rula Quawas, one of the Jordan GRACE members has started two blogs to which students of the University of Amman contribute: Femtales.com and unlearningtonotspeak.com.

GRACE Contribution to changes in behaviour, capacities, actions, or relationships of research users or those affected by the research process or findings:

- As an outcome of lead researcher Prof. Dr. Nagwa Abdel Meguid's GRACE project, "How can ICTs be used to enable mothers of disabled children to combat the stigmatization they experience in Egypt?" the construction of a new center was undertaken to care for children with special needs that is unique in Egypt and possibly in the Arab world. The initiative came from a research project participant, the funding was donated from several sources, and the Governor of Suez governorate took the precedent setting step of donating the needed land. There is currently an inequitable geographical distribution of services provided to intellectually disabled individuals in Egypt. Most of the services are situated in Cairo, although 64% of the mentally challenged live in rural areas. Opening up a care center that is for children with special needs, where the land was donated through the governor at Suez Governorate's policy decision is a move toward reducing the inequitable distribution of services.

- Sudan research team leader Ikhlas Ahmed Nour was invited to become a regular contributor on a radio series about the behaviour changes of the youth and university students and also community changes starting in mid-September 2011. The invitation resulted from Ikhlas's ground breaking GRACE research project ( http://www.grace-network.net/research_sudan3.php ) that questions the taboo issues of premarital sex and the use of ICTs. This is the first time in Sudan that issues such as this are being discussed publicly. Ikhlas' first radio show, and the facebook site she developed, were part of her GRACE action research project. This led to this society-changing radio feature. The program is on radio FM 100 SUDANESE HOUSE, SABAH ELBUIT program, broadcast at 8:30 to 10:00 am (Mecca time) and will continue every Sunday at the same time.

GRACE Contribution to Policy influence (e.g., expanded policy capacities of researchers; broadening policy horizons of policymakers; and affecting policy regimes).

Policy influence and interventions are included in Appendix A. This is not seen as a complete listing for a number of reasons. One is that we are aware that many researchers are contributing to policy influence in ways that even they do not recognize as shifting the parameters of what is possible in their communities and work environments, given the multifarious ways in which policy is influenced and developed. In relation to this, the coordination team is not always made aware of the changes and achievements that the researchers have contributed to. However, the examples listed give an indication of the types of influence taking place. Influencing policy is further discussed above, under the section on Objectives.

- Einas Ahmed was invited to join the Sudan radio program broadcasted by North Kordofan State radio on the international day for the elimination of violence against women on 25 November 2011. The program focussed on female genital mutilation as a form of violence against women and the importance of drafting legislation to prohibit this practice in Sudan. Einas's GRACE research team investigated "How can ICTs contribute to getting a law against FGM, accepted in Sudan?"

- Nagwa Meguid participated in the Current Challenges in Women's Health Care and Medical Research conference and round table, Cairo University, Conference Center 6-8 December 2011. During the discussion about women with disabled children Nagwa addressed her GRACE research: How can ICTs be used in Egypt to enable mothers of disabled children combat the ensuing stigmatization? http://bioethicsnetwork.wordpress.com/2011/12/11/outcomes-of-the-first-conference-of-the-network/ This Network also features related women's empowerment and ICTs research being undertaken by Nagwa: http://bioethicsnetwork.wordpress.com/2012/01/01/violence-against-women-with-infertility/

- The compilers of the 2012 UNCTAD Information Economy Report have consulted Ineke intensely on the Report's gender section.

- GRACE Yemen project leader Prof. Rokhsana Ismail, with cooperation of Association for Deaf and Mute and active graduate students from the Engineering Faculty, Aden University, started to work with the following project "ICT for Hearing and Speech Impaired." The first workshop to announce this project was held in January. The project includes a set of programs in information technology related to individuals with hearing disabilities. The programs are concerned with educational, functional, social and cultural matters and aim to integrate participants into multiple realms of life, including the development of information technology, and contribute to the provision of various requirements needed by the student in scientific research and to communicate with others, to break the barriers and difficulties which they experience in the exchange of information and communication with the world. Rokhsana traces her work on this project, and to setting it up as a network, to her involvement in GRACE and with the IDRC's work with ICT4D: *my understandings were strengthened, as a result I found myself well positioned to work with our students and our association and we are working now in one network…the project will be the first step for our target group who are starting their academic life; I'll encourage them to connect their knowledge with social problems and issues, and teach them how ICT could be used to change their life, how to explore the impact of ICTs on their social life."*

- Ineke has been invited to participate in the Women and ICT for Development Forum hosted by the UN Women and the U. S. Secretary of State's Office of Global Women's Issues. This meeting will be held on Jan 10 -11 2013 in Washington DC, USA. This will be a very interactive, hands-on working meeting focused on identifying opportunities for collaboration as well as defining common high-level frameworks and goals.

## *6) Overall Assessment and Recommendations*

We recognize that the type of behaviour change that really makes a difference, and opens pathways to realizing the vision of women to make use of ICTs to their advantage and empowerment, is a very complex process. Contributing to sustainable behaviour change through "research for change" requires contributing to the knowledge base of researchers, decision-makers and communities. It has to deliver knowledge that other parties can transfer to their contexts. In "research for change", a great amount of energy and research expertise of the researchers has therefore to be focused on the construction of transferable knowledge. Thus the capacities of the researchers, who may appear to be "upstream" from the vision, are crucial to the realization of this vision.

The most important focus of evaluation that could do justice to development research (especially in the area of women's empowerment and gender relations) would be assessing the potential for (future) influence. In such an evaluation format, researchers can demonstrate their project's progress towards the change they want to see through aligning their activities, outputs and outcomes to this change in a logical way. This may mean that certain activities and outputs (without actual outcome yet) could be given a more prominent place than an actual outcome. A project's real potential for (future) influence where it really matters, would be assessed through an understanding of the outputs (such as articles, presentations, books and contributions to policy discussions) and how such outputs are aligned with and are seen to lead to the envisioned outcomes and ultimate impact.

Thus, when considering GRACE outputs in relation to the central objectives of GRACE, one finds the outputs are situated and have the reliability needed to influence thought, recognizing this change in thought may lead to change in behavior. The references to and interest in GRACE outputs indicate changes in the degree to which gender issues and women's empowerment are being recognized within and integrated into thinking about and understandings of ICT and development. When our intent is to influence developmental discourse and subsequently shape interventions, including policy, recognizing the unequal power relations embodied in both development discourse and practice, the uptake of our writing and participation in multifarious venues indicates development impact.

We can see how the central objectives of GRACE 2 -- research capacity development, network development and policy influence --- are all being attained by recognizing how GRACE outputs are placed and being used.

*In relation to research capacity development*, the GRACE contributions are being created by those equipped with skills, dispositions and ability to undertake social research for change of the highest standards. Consequently not only are GRACE members contributing reliable information, new insights, and valid questions, but in some cases they are being sought out to do so, and public responses are very positive.

The recognition of the interplay between a respondent's own agency, her context, and the influences on her mind, as made sense of by a researcher conscious of her/his own mind filter, results in a depth of understanding that is a rich resource for change efforts aimed at achieving a more equitable and empowering world (for researchers' reflections on capacity development see, for example, Susan http://www.grace-network.net/researcher_bakesha.php, Salome http://www.grace-network.net/researcher_omamo.php or Arwa on "Me and my writing" http://www.grace-network.net/vision.php ). This resource for change is increasingly reaching those who recognize that current inequalities are unsustainable and who are seeking a deep understanding of what is happening, and what needs to change to make women's and their communities lives better.

It is anticipated that the researchers will continue to use their increased research capacity to support the development of junior researchers (as is the case with research teams in Zimbabwe and Nigeria, for example) and that they will increasingly be able to lead or provide consultation to other (IDRC funded) projects on gender awareness and gender research. We are witnessing such activities at the moment and hope that this will be the beginning of a definitive trend (for example, Violence against women with infertility, Nagwa A Meguid and Osama Azmy http://bioethicsnetwork.wordpress.com/2012/01/01/violence-against-women-with-infertility/ ).

In connection with this, we also see an increased expression of locally identified development issues and recommendations (contained in the research reports). The focus of GRACE on the gendered nature of social and economic issues develops the potential for women's realities to gain greater profile, and for increased awareness of the changes that are needed and possible to increase women's equality.

*In relation to network development*, a key element in the formation of the GRACE Network has been the annual face-to-face workshops. These are intensive learning and sharing events at which all those who can attend are deeply engaged in their thinking processes, and in engaging each other's thinking processes. Furthermore, these intense periods of working together build rapport, trust and connection between each other and this forms the platform from which communication continues on-line until the next opportunity to meet.

*To be part of GRACE is a great event in my life. I learn from the experiences of women in six Arab countries in addition to the African countries who did their research in the first phase of the GRACE project. So this rich experience means a lot for me; I learn how we have to work for social change, and to be scientist is not enough if you couldn't do something for social change.*

*Meeting all of the GRACE members in person and online has been of great influence on the way I see the world and changed my understanding of how people interact and can maintain a long-term relationship with virtual friends and colleagues.*

Being part of the network has been experienced as a substantial resource in a number of ways, as indicated by some of the researchers:

*The knowledge and resources we get through this network are amazing, and I consider this learning activity equivalent to a doctorate program of education.*

*GRACE provided our team the most regular and reliable source of information on ICT-related gender issues. We would never have been aware of some of these resources without GRACE.*

*Networking strengthens my sense of female collective empowerment. Besides, I learn from others' conversations, discussions and the knowledge they pass and share.*

An aspect that we did not foresee is how the Network has become a supportive environment emotionally as well as intellectually. The emergence of this unintended, positive aspect of the Network is very logical: those who want to transform their world are actually critiquing their environment and this can be a very lonely, alienating project. Those who want to do research for change and are prepared to change themselves need an environment that will grow with them and which becomes a point of reference for them. Such an effect of the GRACE Project process and objectives speaks to the validity of the Project's design.

*I now believe that it is possible to find connection in the midst of alienation, to find inspiration in the midst of cynicism, to find nourishment and meaning in the midst of impoverishment, to find hope in the midst of despair, to find wholeness in the midst of fragmentation, to find peace in the midst of conflict. As GRACE researchers, we share this hope for a new vision of reality.*

The sense of shared purpose held among researchers whose dreams and intentions are to contribute to the achievement of a different vision for the future, a vision of a sustainable future free of gender discrimination and all forms of inequality and injustice, will be considered in a forthcoming chapter in *The Spirit and not the Letter: Creating a human space for Development*, edited by Ineke Buskens, Matthew Smith and Mark Thompson. This chapter considers the GRACE network, an international network of gender researchers, as an example of an intentionally initiated network with evolving and expanding influence and potential, in the interests of better understanding the repercussions and implications of such a network in terms of contributing to development ("Exploring the GRACE network as an evolving 'intelligent community' of shared purpose," A. Webb).

*In relation to policy influence*, the number and range of public contributions made by GRACE members to the field of women's empowerment and ICTs has been substantial. These national and international presentations, publications, media coverage and ICT resources are itemized in Appendix A. Not only did the public contributions increase during the project, they were created in an expanding spectrum of media and continually reached new audiences, as well as providing further evidence to those who are already working towards purposes shared with GRACE. We see these contributions as having the potential to influence policy by way of influencing the thinking that informs policy. For example, our first book, *African Women and ICTs*, has been highlighted as a sophisticated approach to this issue during three key note addresses at

international conferences that we know of so far. The book is being cited by a broad range of authors in this expanding field (see Appendix D). GRACE members are speaking at and participating in gender empowerment and equality related events around the globe (Appendix A) and being invited to create new spaces for knowledge development and sharing, such as through designing a conference track on "Infusing Gender into ICT4D: Innovating Research, Practice and Policy" for the IFIP WG9.4 to be held in 2013 (forthcoming at http://www.ifipwg94.org/call-for-papers).

We intend our second book, our research, our analysis, our processes and the knowledge we are constructing to reach as many people as possible.  We see our work contributing to another way of seeing and understanding the nexus of women's empowerment and ICTs, contributing to perspectives and actions that improve the situation of women and move us all towards an integration of ICT potentialities into visions for a better world.

We intend to continue sharing our work through publishing, conferences and other public forums, and electronic media, and to sustain avenues to exchange perspectives and experiences with those who want to contribute to and use our work.

The recognition of the significance of GRACE's research, evidenced by the many public contributions and interventions being made by GRACE members throughout the regions where we are located and beyond, indicates the interest in and desire for transformative use of information and communication technologies, as is possible when engaged from a position of empowerment.

We have considerably evolved as a network and we feel that we have taken our place within the various ICT research and policy communities we want to influence in many parts of the world. This exposure has also given us the scope to make our thinking more and more relevant for the questions around gender and ICT and more pertinent to the communities we intend to influence in order to make life for women in Africa and the Middle East better.

We are very focused on moving the thinking, analysis and subsequently policy initiatives forward in relation to gender and ICT understandings and directions, beyond those captured in our first book: *African Women and ICTs: Investigating Technology, Gender and Empowerment*. Much of the success of our first book seems to derive from the fact that the innovative approaches in GRACE in terms of knowledge construction, capacity building and network management have led to GRACE contributing knowledge of an in-depth, yet wide scope that would be difficult for other parties to produce. We were indeed able to offer substantive new insights to keep policy makers and the ICTD community moving the significant gender-related issues and ICT for development potential forward further. This has allowed us to have real influence not only in academia but also with policy makers. We now feel that it is also our responsibility to explain through various forums, including writing that will be published beyond our own book, how we were able to come to this point so that we can empower other role players in the field with the capacity to master the skills and capacities for themselves. To this end we have submitted a proposal for funding for a period of 2 years that will enable us to implement

our content learning in educational modules, extend our networks for collaboration and share our process learning in the areas of research, research education and network management.

We feel confident that our second book will build another bridge between the change we are working for and the people who have the power and the influence to make a difference. We continue to evolve as a network and we feel that we have taken the opportunity that IDRC has offered us and done well with it. The three central objectives of GRACE 2 -- the formation of a research network, the establishment of a research base, and public policy influence – are very effectively progressing, as indicated in Section 4, above.  But to have this deepened thinking crystallized enough into well-balanced chapters has taken more time than we anticipated. We sincerely appreciate the extra time IDRC has granted us in the form of multiple extensions.

*Unforeseen Challenges*

A factor that complicated issues was the wider context of social transformation in which we found ourselves and our work embedded. The revolutions in the Middle East, the upsurge of a new democratic awareness all over the world, various uprisings in Africa and the subsequent Islamisation movements in North Africa, challenged quite a few researchers to find new social, theoretical, and normative positions in order to make sense of what was going on around them.

'Making life better' for the women in their country acquired a new meaning for the researchers in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Nigeria and Jordan and consequently, because of the intensive discussions on the GRACE mailing lists, for all researchers. Such a social-political awakening is, from a theoretical and methodological perspective, a valuable opportunity for growth as social science researchers and hence for excellence in our work. But it did take time, research and vigilance from the coordination team to guide the discussions appropriately and effectively and it took time, reflection and expansion from the researchers to gain new coherence and integration in their thinking and writing. Arriving at a position of coherence and integration in these circumstances would be a challenge for any social scientist who wants to be responsive to the context and the time she / he lives in, but for 'beginning social scientists' this is a complicated task.

Another unforeseen issue has been the backlash against women's empowerment that is taking place in Africa and the Middle East. This has been and is still affecting GRACE researchers and their work directly and indirectly. We here just mention the latest incidence, which has already entered the public domain.

One of the GRACE researchers, Professor Rula Quawas, has been removed from her position as Dean at the University of Amman which has been linked to the fact that her students posted a video on YouTube featuring the sexual harassment they experienced on campus:

http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/8072/letter-concerning-removal-of-professor-rula-quawas

http://www.facebook.com/intifadat.almar2a/posts/364388553649370

http://www.articolo21.org/2012/10/le-donne-fanno-tremare-anche-amman/

http://es.apocalisselaica.net/varie/attualita-cultura-satira-e-umorismo/le-donne-fanno-tremare-anche-amman

http://ilmondodiannibale.globalist.it/Detail_News_Display?ID=39198&typeb=0&Le-donne-fanno-tremare-anche-Amman

http://chronicle.com/blogs/ticker/dean-at-u-of-jordan-is-reportedly-removed-over-sexual-harassment-video/51338?cid=gn&utm_source=gn&utm_medium=en

We therefore think that it would be a worthwhile endeavour to conceptualize and initiate programs that could address this and maybe even prevent regressive outcomes of social change endeavours.

*Leading GRACE has been a challenging and worthwhile endeavour.*

To characterize in a few sentences why leading GRACE has been both so challenging and worthwhile:

GRACE addressed a very pertinent and controversial issue in that its focus has been gender inequality and women's empowerment in regions that are characterized by sometimes very stark patriarchal mindsets and settings.

GRACE worked with researchers who were located in and deeply connected with their research settings and research respondents and although this did enable them to get unequalled access, both logistically as well as psychologically, they were often in mind, body and soul interwoven with these patriarchal mind sets and settings;

Although exactly the above characteristics made researchers well positioned to contribute to meaningful change in their specific settings and countries, they were not necessarily well equipped intellectually and emotionally for the type of critical gender research that required deep introspection, critical self directed awareness and the capacity for in-depth social and gender analysis.

To create a knowledge base of Gender and ICT and create a researcher base of researchers who can address such issues and impact their various environments, the idea to form a Network was indeed a very appropriate Methodology. For this innovative vision IDRC needs to be recommended. As Gender and ICT was a new research field, and the regions concerned were characterized by patriarchal mind sets and habits, the Network became not only a space for shared research dialogue but also for emotional and social support for the individual researchers. At this moment, judging from the frequent and daily use of the GRACE mailing lists and the

depth of discussions and sharings taking place, The GRACE Network has indeed evolved into a community of knowledge and learning that will find ways to continue beyond the ending of the Project itself.

Looking back, the most important recommendation would be to give such a project no less than 8 years and more support staff. A period of 8 years would give the Network the opportunity to mature, but it would also create the space for the Network's contributions to find their way to the various sectors in need of such. And this in turn, would strengthen the Network: it was and is after all in the alignment with the purpose of women's empowerment through gender research into ICT for empowerment that this specific constellation of individuals has found each other and continues to collaborate.

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# Appendix E

**The Journey Within**



It all started with GRACE.

I am sure of that.

A journey of introspection

and retrospection.

Revelatory of the heart,

of the mind,

and of the eye.


Traveling into the mindscape of GRACE,

I entered the abyss of myself,

fought the demons in my head,

shed the albatross about my neck,

and dived into the crevices of my heart.

I discovered myself.

Figuring out who I am,

and being OK with it;

growing and thriving in the core of my being,

in the love and light of GRACE,

and embracing this new me.


An evolutionary journey,

In the silence of my presence,

Within the womb of GRACE,

A world of possibility.


In Aden, Broumana, Tunis, and Amman,

we walked the path,

self-creating and self-making:

selves, living realities, and

embodied lives.


In search of other voices,

I found my voice,

beginning the work of becoming myself,

coming face to face with myself,

and knowing the address of my heart.

GRACE, a geography of the soul,

souls in growth,

in deep wisdom.

A beyond within.


GRACE, a winged song,

a meshed harmony,

a craft of knowing, and

a journey within.


Forging words of truth,

writing, re-writing, and un-writing.

That is us:

A law of the universe.


GRACE, a new birth

To ourselves,

To Graciousnesses.


Rula Quawas

October 28, 2012