



Changing Selves, Changing Societies: Women, Gender and ICT in Africa and the Middle East

By: Ineke Buskens and Anne Webb

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Final Technical Report
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Project Coordination: Ineke Buskens and Anne Webb

Ineke Buskens
PO Box 170
ELGIN 7180, South Africa
e-mail: Ineke@researchforthefuture.com
Tel / fax: + 27 21 8591030

Anne Webb
49 rue Moncion
Gatineau, Quebec, Canada
Anne@GRACE-Network.net

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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. Through the **Research Support Grant** we have brought together the understandings and analyses that emerged in GRACE 2 into a book manuscript that will be published by Zed Books, and co-published online by IDRC.

Keywords

GRACE Project: 'Gender Research in Africa and the Middle East into ICT for Empowerment' Project

ICT: Information Communication Technology

ICT4D: Information Communication Technology for Development

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1. The Research Problem

With the completion of GRACE 2 in 2012 we met our project objectives, but required additional time to complete the book manuscript, an initiative that is highly regarded by both the research project teams and the project coordination team. The book proposal includes 23 chapters written by the research sub-project team leaders and the project coordination team (Ineke Buskens and Anne Webb). The chapters delve into a specific aspect that was found to be particularly significant in the research in relation to women's empowerment and ICT. Thus the chapters bring a level and complexity of analysis to the data that goes much beyond that recorded in the research reports completed by the teams.

At the end of GRACE 2 we were both very close to completion of the manuscript, and in need of additional time and funds for this purpose.

The first book from the GRACE network, *African Women and ICTs*, published by Zed Books, IDRC, UNISA Press, and in a French edition by Less Presses de l'Université Laval, has sold well, receiving on-going citation, and is highly regarded internationally <http://www.grace-network.net/book.php>

The proposal for our second book, *Changing Selves, Changing Societies: Women, gender and ICT in Africa and the Middle East* has been accepted by Zed Books and a contract issued to the editors, Ineke Buskens and Anne Webb. A co-publication agreement has been arranged between IDRC and Zed. We are initiating a process to hold a GRACE conference at which we will launch our forthcoming book.

2. Objectives

This Research Support Project provided the resources needed to complete the finalization of the GRACE manuscript for the second book from this Network. The objectives were to complete the revisions to the chapters by each research team, to have these chapters edited and translated (where needed), for the book editors to prepare/complete their chapters and the book introduction and such that the completed manuscript is ready for submission to Zed Books. As of the end of this project all of these objectives have been moved forward substantially and the manuscript is due to be delivered to Zed Books by mid August 2013.

3. Methodology

The process followed in this Research Support Project involved ongoing support to the researchers in their chapter writing and analysis development by email, and at times by skype, phone or in-person, by the project leaders. The project leaders

provided a steady flow of comments, questions and suggestions to support the writers in reaching the depth of complexity in their chapter needed for it to be included in the book manuscript. Relevant articles and other reference materials were shared on an ongoing basis. The GRACE meta-list was maintained as a forum for discussion and sharing among the Network. The GRACE web site continued to be used for updates regarding the GRACE members' activities and achievements.

4. Project Activities

Manuscript finalization activity plan: 15 December 2012 to 15 June 2013

Who	Date	Activity
Ineke and Anne	Dec-June	Guide the finalization of all researchers' chapters
Researchers		Final submission of chapters by researchers
Anne and Ineke	May - June	Write/complete our chapters
Ineke and Anne	June	Write introductions
Editor (Leverne)	Jan 15-June 15	Chapters are edited
Translator (Kristina)	Jan 15-June 15	Chapter translation as required
Researchers	Feb 15-June 15	Chapter editing reviewed and chapters complete

Details regarding the activities of the consultants are as follows:

Translation:

- The translators worked with chapters that were written in French and translated these into English. While Ineke can work with French, we needed all final chapter versions to be fully coherent in English. This required that a chapter be translated into English more than once as the content and meanings became fully developed and clarified in consultation with Ineke and Anne.

Ineke and Anne:

- We were working with 21 researchers to finalize their chapters. This entailed providing detailed comments, suggestions and revision of each of the chapters, several times each.
- We were writing the Introduction to the book, as this had to wait until the chapters had each reached clarity regarding the central point of their insights and analysis.

- We were each writing chapters that are central to the book, regarding the research process and situating the significance of the GRACE research in relation to understanding women's empowerment and ICTD in the current political-economic global context.
- We were processing funds for the researchers; making arrangements with our publishers; processing the editing of the chapters.

Explanation:

Our work at this stage required creating a "container" for the book so that the chapters captured not only the essence of the respective research processes and research results, but also so the book "held them all" in a coherent container, which only could be created once each had reached clarity regarding the central point of their insights and analysis.

This container needed to be communicated continuously to all the researchers in ways that they could understand and relate to so that they kept ownership of the book.

And so the writing of the introduction and indeed, both of our chapters were processes too; they needed to be grounded in a "to and fro" between us, the leaders, and the researchers.

Otherwise we would fall in the same trap so many Northern research leaders working with researchers from the south fall into: creating a meta analysis that is not recognized by the contributors. This is the highest form of intellectual alienation that is possible; it is still part of the neo-colonial history.

And GRACE was set up in such a way as to create a different reality, a more empowering and democratic reality, whilst still adhering to its mandate of delivering first class research, from the South to the world.

This means that we also needed to know the languages, theories and concerns of the global ICTD field and the gender and development field in general, but also to a more detailed level we needed to focus on the specificities of the respective projects and assist the researchers in finding the theories that assisted them in unlocking their data.

As most GRACE researchers have a political aspiration with their research project -- the African group with the Transformation of Africa and the MENA group with changing the status and position of women in the Islamic / Muslim/ Arab world -- these were also discourses that had to be understood and analyzed to bring them into the debates in a coherent and critical way.

All of this needed to come together during this Research Support Project, as the thinking and writing was fine tuned.

5. Project Outputs

As a result of the Research Support Grant we were able to complete the manuscript for the book *Changing Selves, Changing Societies*, with all GRACE 2 researchers completing a chapter that was of the quality required to be included. This would not have been feasibly achieved without the Research Support Grant. All the chapters were edited by the contracted professional editor and translation was completed as needed. The manuscript was prepared for submission to Zed Books, as contracted with that publisher.

6. Project Outcomes

The achievement of a second complete manuscript from the GRACE Network, and the inclusion of all the research teams in this forthcoming book both have significant implications, and both were achieved during this Research Support Project. Not only have the GRACE researchers conducted and completed cutting edge research regarding the nexus of women's empowerment, women's inequality and the potential for ICT and ICT spaces to be worked with as conduits for and of personal and social change, they have also taken the analysis of their research to greater levels of clarity and understanding through their chapter writing, the finalization of which was made possible by this Research Support Grant. The chapters provide a level and detail in understanding the tensions and relations between personal change and social change that will make a substantial contribution to the current and past literature, thinking and theorizing of this crucial aspect of working towards a better world, with a particular focus on women's empowerment, agency and capacity to visualize and pursue desired change. The completion by all GRACE 2 researchers of a high quality book chapter was a key priority for the GRACE leadership and this has now been achieved.

7. Overall Assessment and Recommendations

The funding made available to GRACE through this Research Support Grant is highly appreciated and has been used effectively to bring about the completion of a key dissemination tool of the seminal IDRC funded research: our second book, *Changing Selves, Changing Societies: Women, gender and ICT in Africa and the Middle East*.

The ability of IDRC to arrange this final grant upon explanation of why GRACE was in the position of needing the additional time and resources illustrates a responsiveness and understanding of research processes and of the high value of dissemination of in depth, innovative and cutting edge research for development.