

**ICT LIBERALISATION IN UGANDA:
THE IMPACT OF MOBILE TELEPHONY
ON WOMEN'S SOCIO-ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT**

**GRACE PROJECT RESEARCH REPORT
UGANDA**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Table of Contents	ii
Abbreviations/Acronyms	iv
Executive Summary	v
Chapter One	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 The Problem and Research Justification	2
1.3 Study Objectives	3
1.3.1 Specific Objectives	3
1.4 Study Design	4
1.5 Study Area	5
1.6 Methods	5
1.6.1 Quantitative Survey	6
1.6.2 Qualitative Survey	6
1.6.3 Other Data Sources	7
1.7 Data Analysis	7
Chapter Two: Literature Review	8
2.1 Overview of ICTs and Development	8
2.2 ICTs and Gender	9
2.3 ICTs and Empowerment	11
2.4 The Context of ICTs in Uganda	14
2.4.1 ICT Policy Framework and Interventions	14
2.4.2 The Mobile Village Phone	15
2.4.3 Women’s Utilisation of ICTs for Empowerment	15
2.5 Research Gaps	17

Chapter Three: The Study Findings	18
3.1 Introduction	18
3.2 The Mobile Village Phone Business – an Option for Economic Survival	18
3.3 Ownership of the Phone Sets and Businesses	20
3.4 Women’s Phone Business Operations – a Rocky start; the Benefits	22
3.5 Women’s Phone Business Operations – Gender Tension	25
3.6 Women’s Phone Business Operations – Implications for Personal Status	30
Chapter Four: Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations	33
4.1 Discussion	33
4.1.1 Women’s Phone Business Work and Domestic Virtue	33
4.2 Conclusions	38
4.3 Recommendations	40
References	42

ABBREVIATIONS/ACRONYMS

CBO	Community-based organisations
CEEWA	Committee for Economic Empowerment of Women of Africa
CELTEL	Cellular Telephone Network
FM	Frequency modulated
GRACE	Gender Research in Africa into ICTs for Empowerment
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
IICD	International Institute for Communication and Development
ITU	International Telecommunications Union
MCT	Multipurpose community telecentre
MTN	Mobile Telephone Network
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
PEAP	Poverty Eradication Action Plan
PMA	Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture
RCDF	Rural Communications Development Fund
UCC	Uganda Communication Commission
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNSCT	Uganda National Council for Science and Technology
USA	United States of America
UTL	Uganda Telecom Limited

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research was about women and the mobile village phone. Launched in Uganda in 2003 by the MTN Company, the mobile phone became instantly popular, especially among poor, cash-strapped women, for the business opportunities it provided. Despite its numerous advantages, the introduction of commercial mobile telephony has taken place in a haphazard, headlong fashion, ignoring the social relations, power dynamics and gender aspects of the arena within which the women operate.

This study was located within the wider focus on gender and empowerment which informed the greater GRACE research project that broadly sought to explore the ways in which women could empower themselves using ICTs. It focused on how Ugandan women have exploited the opportunities created by the phones to become village phone operators, the impact of their phone businesses on their livelihoods, the gender impediments they face in both family and community settings, and internal factors which they experience within themselves, which might be the result of internalised cultural images of 'proper womanhood'.

Since much of the fieldwork was qualitative, even ethnographic in nature, the study adopted an exploratory qualitative design, which enabled easy capture and documentation of the women's lived experiences on their own terms. However, much as the broad gender perspective favoured a qualitative approach, quantitative techniques were used to a limited extent to generate statistical evidence where it was required to substantiate, quantify or clarify issues that did not come out explicitly through the qualitative approach.

The key finding is that although the village pay phone business has provided women with a way out of desperate economic situations, enabling them to meet their pressing personal and family needs, at the same time this has not changed the existing gender power relations and the women's social status within the domestic and community contexts. On the contrary, it has only served to flare up gender tension and conflicts, in the process bringing the hitherto latent

gender inequality to the fore. Most problems arose out of the ongoing expectation, central to domestic virtue thinking, that the women - irrespective of the pressures of their teleworking activities - are to assume full responsibility for caring for their families and children.

Although deeply held beliefs about core issues like gender identities and domestic relations are difficult to change, the research has shown that gender formulations are flexible, and that they can and do respond to shifts in the material environment around them. In this context a key recommendation is that a number of goals should be set to shape interventions to weaken the negative features of domestic virtue thinking and to promote the development of gender norms that provide enhanced flexibility in male and female roles. Achieving these goals requires implementation of a long-term education campaign led by government and introduced simultaneously by the mass media, Ministry of Gender and Social Development, non-governmental and community-based organisations.

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Introduction

The information and communication technology (ICT) liberalisation which commenced in Uganda in the mid-1990s is conceived by the Government of Uganda and other key stakeholders in the ICT sector as key to any development process, and instrumental in attaining national development goals. Subsequently, in the past decade Uganda has received substantial support from various agencies in the area of ICTs for development. The country was, for instance, a focus of both the Canadian International Development Research Centre's (IDRC) Acacia initiative and The Netherlands International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD) ICT programmes. This has translated into a myriad of ICT projects being implemented in different sectors of Ugandan society, most notably in rural infrastructure, education, livelihoods and health.

Launched in 2005, the Gender Research in Africa into ICTs for Empowerment (GRACE) project, with IDRC support, is among the most recent ICT research projects being undertaken in Uganda. Other participating African countries include Cameroon, Egypt, Kenya, Mozambique, Morocco, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The project broadly seeks to explore the ways in which women could empower themselves through ICTs, the external barriers they face in their respective environments and the internal factors which they experience within themselves, which might be the result of internalised cultural images of 'proper womanhood'.

The Uganda project, entitled 'ICT Liberalisation in Uganda: The Impact of Mobile Telephony on Women's Socio-economic Empowerment', focuses on women and the mobile 'village' phone, more especially how the women have exploited the opportunities created by the phones to become village phone operators, the impact of their phone businesses on their livelihoods, the gender impediments they face at both

family and community level, and the overall implication of their teleworking activities for their empowerment.

In the context of this study, the term 'empowerment' will refer to an individual's capacity to make effective choices, and the capacity to transform these choices into desired actions and outcomes. In other words, empowerment will be seen as both a process (of empowering individual women) and an outcome (a woman who is empowered (Ruth Alsop and Nina Heinshohn 2005)). The lessons learnt will be shared with policy makers and all relevant stakeholders in the form of contextualised and specific recommendations.

1.2 The Problem and Research Justification

The mobile village phone was launched in Uganda in November 2003 by the Mobile Telephone Network (MTN) Company, and instantly became popular - especially among poor, cash-strapped women - for the business opportunities it provided. The village phones are now available in most districts in Uganda, and there has been an influx of women from all walks of life who have joined as freelance village phone operators. MTN and other phone network providers offer special reduced airtime rates to the village pay phone operators.

Despite its numerous advantages, the introduction of commercial mobile telephony among the rural populace has taken place in a haphazard, headlong fashion, ignoring the social relations, power dynamics and gender aspects in which the women operate. Thus to date not much is known about how the adoption of commercial mobile telephony in the rural settings fits into the social context of the families and communities of the teleworkers. The phone businesswomen's own lived experiences as they operate their businesses remains a grey area. Emotional factors which they experience within their innermost selves, which may stem from perceived and

entrenched cultural images of proper womanhood, before or after engaging in phone businesses operations, remain unexplored.

The level of social and economic empowerment resulting from the women's teleworking business activities, its impact on gender relations and women's overall emancipation/advancement, is not known. Not least, the constraints the women teleworkers face, how they cope and their future aspirations are not articulated. Nevertheless, increased employment opportunities are known to create new and unique tensions in women's domestic lives Rodriguez Bastillo 2001-

It is against this background that this research was undertaken, with the findings expected to provide gender-specific evidence that despite its advantages, women's participation in commercial mobile telephony is not context-free, and has created new and unique tensions in women's lives which need to be urgently addressed.

1.3 Study Objectives

In order to pursue our key area of enquiry (gender and empowerment), we found it imperative to develop a picture of the women teleworkers' respective lives. In this context it was essential to pursue the following specific objectives:

1.3.1 Specific Objectives

- To find out the factors that motivate the women to engage in the mobile village phone business.
- To document the different uses the women phone operators put their phones to
- To assess the women's own lived experiences as they operate their phone businesses with specific reference to:

- Impact on their livelihoods and family members.
- Impact of the women's teleworking activities on domestic gender relations (decision-making, division of labour, access to and control of resources) and vice versa.
- Identification of intrapersonal factors (inner emotions, debates, conflicts, tensions) that impact on or constrain women's optimal use of the phone businesses for empowerment.
- Identifying external barriers (structural, logistical) that prevent women's use and appropriation of their phone businesses for their empowerment.
- Documenting women's own views on addressing the barriers (intrapersonal, gender and external), and how they are striving to cope with or overcome them.

1.4 Study Design

Within the broad focus on gender and empowerment which informs the wider GRACE research work, the study mainly adopted an exploratory qualitative design. It was envisaged that since much of the field work is qualitative, even ethnographic in nature, this design would enable easy capture and documentation of the women's lived experiences on their own terms during the course of the research.

However, much as our broad gender perspective favoured a qualitative approach, we were not averse to quantitative techniques, which were used (albeit to a limited extent) to generate statistical evidence in instances where it was required to substantiate, quantify or clarify issues that did not come out explicitly through the qualitative approach.

1.5 Study Area

The research was conducted in the district of Hoima, located in mid-western Uganda. It is bordered by Lake Albert to the west, Kibaale district to the south, Masindi district in the North East and Kiboga district in the East. Hoima is the successor to the powerful Bunyoro-Kitara kingdom of the turn of the century. This district, with an area of 5775 km², has a population of 341 700 people (less than 1.5% of Uganda's population), and comprises two counties, 11 sub-counties, 43 parishes and 532 villages. The district headquarters are located in Hoima town, which has a residential population of less than 10 000. Ethnic Banyoro are the predominant tribal group and Runyoro is the most widely spoken language. Hoima as a research area also provided a language advantage for the researchers, who hail from there and are fluent in Runyoro.

Otherwise, selection of Hoima district was not based on any rigid socio-economic, demographic or other criteria, although it is known to be predominantly rural. Here, as in all areas of Uganda, prevailing patriarchal structures coupled with the predominantly rural environment influence the way households function, especially gender division of labour, power relations and access to and control of resources. Hoima, like other districts in Uganda, has not been spared the proliferation of ICTs - especially mobile village phones - in the past decade. Although the teledensity of the area is not known, several village phone businesses are well established within Hoima town and its environs, and are predominantly operated by women.

1.6 Methods

While our broad gender perspective informed our choice of exploratory, mainly qualitative research methods (in-depth interviews), other methods (quantitative survey) were used (albeit to a limited extent) to generate statistical evidence in instances where

it was required to substantiate, quantify or clarify issues that did not come out explicitly by applying the qualitative technique.

1.6.1 The Quantitative Survey

After a three-day pilot survey conducted among six women village phone business operators, where their socio-demographic and teleworking circumstances were explored, we decided to conduct a quantitative survey involving 50 women commercial teleworkers to further explore these issues and map out the emerging trends. Initially the survey was purposive, targeting only married phone businesswomen residing with their husbands, but this was soon abandoned due to the fluid nature of the marriages and the large number of single respondents who, in one way or another, were cohabiting with men on an irregular basis. However, even without purposive sampling vis-à-vis marital and cohabitation status, many respondents turned out to be married. The 50 respondents corresponded to 85% of all the business teleworkers formally registered with the Town Council, a sample sufficient to make statistically binding inferences vis-à-vis the issues under investigation.

1.6.2 Qualitative Survey

The qualitative survey constituted in-depth interviews conducted with 12¹ purposively selected women from the quantitative survey sample. Criteria for selection included, among others, the ability of the women to grasp the study concepts and willingness/motivation to openly share their private, intimate lived experiences which are normally not spoken about, less so with strangers.

Due to their time-consuming nature, 'the in-depth' interviews were conducted in a multistage manner, sometimes using memory aides. This nevertheless yielded

¹ Due to inconsistencies in their narrations, the findings of two respondents were not included.

unexpected advantages, in that the breaks enabled the interviewer to accord the respondents respectful and genuine attention, which turned out to be not only a novel experience for the women, but also an empowering one where they lost all inhibitions about sharing personal, intimate gender- and work-related experiences with us. By the end of the interviews we were not only friends with our respondents, but also their close confidantes.

1.6.3 Other Data Sources

Secondary data sources included both published and unpublished relevant literature, media reports and web postings.

1.7 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using simple descriptive statistics in MS Excel. The analysis was univariate, aimed at generating frequency tabulations in respect of selected variables. Due to inexperience with the *in vivo* package, qualitative data were not analysed using this method as initially planned. This made it difficult to allow the introduction of external theoretical concepts as well as to stimulate inductive theory construction in the analysis. However, we were still able to make sense of the data using the content analysis method.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 OVERVIEW OF ICTs AND DEVELOPMENT

The spectrum of what may be seen as ICTs to date includes “a complex and heterogeneous set of goods, applications and services used to produce, distribute, process and transform information” (Marcelle 2000:5). The ICT sector is seen as consisting of segments as diverse as telecommunications, television and radio, computer hardware and software, computer services and electronic media like the Internet, as well as the content of these media. The last decade (1990s) saw the power of these technologies emerge as instruments for advancing economic and social development that create new types of economic activity and employment opportunities.

Mansell and Wehn (1998) focus on how ICTs can be harnessed for purposes of meeting development goals. Brown (2001), however, argues that ICTs are simply tools; that significantly, no single tool can solve a global development problem such as poverty, which has such complex and multiple causes. The author refers to examples where ICTs can play a significant role, such as in the creation of jobs and reduction of distance between correspondents. However, he points out that it would be preferable if the labour force were educated in this information age.

Based on his knowledge of rural telecentres, Anderson (1999) argues that in the rush to ‘wire’ developing countries, little attention has been paid to conceptual frameworks or to guidelines for ICT utilisation. Thus no lessons have been learnt from negative past experiences of technology transfer that did not benefit local people. The author’s basic argument is that the focus should be on people, organisations and processes rather than on the technologies themselves.

Heeks (1999), in reference to the question of whether ICTs can help alleviate poverty in low-income countries, suggests that ICTs play a role mainly as communication technologies rather than as information processing or production technologies.

2.2 ICTs and Gender

Women are generally the poorest and least educated in the developing world. Many women are still excluded from access to information, which essentially means access to power. With the development of ICTs, concern is being raised that although ICT development is an area in which women can actively participate, if certain issues are not taken into consideration the marginalisation of women will continue (Sharma 2001).

Sharma is of the view that ICTs potentially offer many opportunities for poverty alleviation and employment generation for, among others, marginalised women. The main hindrance to the achievement of these benefits for the poor, he notes, lies in the problems of access, high costs and minimal human resources (*ibid*).

ICTs have also been described as catalysts for political and social empowerment of women as they promote gender equality (Chat Garcia 2006). Social and cultural constructed gender roles and relationships, it is noted, play a cross-cutting role in shaping the capacity of women and men to participate on equal terms in the information society (*ibid*). The author argues strongly that growth of ICTs in the past decade and its impact on universal communication and flow of information is a powerful force in advancing equitable economic and social development, including gender equality.

Other authors similarly observe that where women have used ICTs for their own purposes, they report increased knowledge and self-esteem. This seems to be almost universally true in different social cultural contexts – from China to Ethiopia, from Peru

to India. This empowering process, however, has the potential to destabilise existing gender relations (Hafkin 2002c, Gurumurthy 2004).

Hafkin (2002) offers an overview of the emergence of the 'gender and ICTs' theme. She provides a historical perspective of how the concept of ICTs and development and of gender and development converged and gained more recognition. According to the author, the first operational activities associating gender and ICTs appeared in Kenya, Senegal and South Africa in 1995, but to date the area that has received the least attention in Africa is the role of women in the information economy, especially in the context of jobs and economic opportunities created by ICTs.

Hafkin concludes with a brief overview of the future of ICTs for women in Africa. She envisions that women in Africa will take advantage of this medium and fit it into their economic, social and cultural context to empower themselves. She notes, however, that the new technologies are not gender neutral and if women do not grasp the opportunities, then societal forces will prevail and they will be left further behind.

Rathgeber (2000) points out that men and women's attitudes, needs and perspectives on ICTs are likely to differ, rendering it important to address the specific needs of women. In this context she stresses the need for a reconceptualisation of the use of ICTs as tools for African development, but adds that this must be done in parallel with the reorganisation of existing information.

Rathgeber emphasises that if African countries are to benefit from the use of new ICTs, there is a need for national information technology policies focused on improving the telephony sector, but developed with the involvement of industry, management and local research and development institutes. She argues that the telecommunication policies adopted by many African governments do not make distinctions between the attitudes and needs of male and female users.

In addition, she points out that these 'gender-neutral policies' tend to favour men, as they are likely to have the income to purchase the ICTs and have a slightly higher level of education, which predisposes them to trying new technologies.

In essence, Rathgeber's thesis is that although new ICTs can marginalise both men and women in Africa, women are likely to be slower in adopting the new technologies unless strategies are developed to deliberately include them. To prepare the ground there should be more emphasis on ensuring that girls get involved in science and technology at an early age, and that the information they access should be relevant to them, comprehensible and easily available.

Huyer (1997) discusses issues of access, the benefit to African women of using ICTs, and their role in the production and dissemination of information. The author discusses how to empower African women through ICTs and the barriers to full use of these technologies, the most prominent being the high rates of illiteracy. In the five case studies (four from South Africa and one from Uganda), the importance of developing 'women- friendly ICT systems' is highlighted. One of the major findings was that the type of information accessed by women is an important consideration. Huyer recommends that ICTs be located in local institutions to which women have open and equal access, such as health centres, NGO facilities and churches.

2.3 ICTs and Empowerment

In the recent past there has been growing concern that more focus should be on how ICTs can be used to empower women. There are only a few studies on how women can be empowered to use ICTs to enhance their status. The best case studies are drawn from the constantly cited TETELMAN, M., (2006) example. However, other upcoming ones

such as UNDP's (2002) project to empower women farmers using ICTs in 30 mandals of Audhara Pradesh in India, are mentioned although their impact has not been assessed.

Assessing the impact of such projects would require a broad consensus on the understanding of the construction of the sense of empowerment, which varies in different contexts. As Kvinnoforum (2001) states, there is no set definition of empowerment, but focus should be on two basic principles; (i) dissemination as a starting point for the empowerment process; and (ii) empowerment not given by someone else, but starting from within.

Nevertheless, a number of voices have welcomed ICTs, arguing that it is difficult for women to shift the balance of power (experience empowerment) if they are to use only indigenous social and knowledge systems in opposition to modernisation and modern technologies.

Mitter argues: "women usually have insignificant power over decision-making when they are confined by traditions and constrained by the norms of behaviour in their communities." The liberating aspects of the information revolution and advanced technologies are praised as "giving women economic power, autonomy and the chance to escape the tyrannies of traditional societies" (Mitter and Rowbothan 1995).

The liberating aspects of the information revolution notwithstanding, it has been noted that women are under-represented in all decision-making structures in the ICT sector, which undermines equitable access and autonomy to receive and produce information relevant to their needs and concerns which are central to women's empowerment (Primo Natasha 2003). Other authors also underscore the need for information to be made directly relevant to the needs of women, whether these needs are in the areas of agriculture, health, micro-enterprise or education. Rathgeber *et al.* (2000) argue that it is not enough for women simply to be passive participants in the development of ICTs in

Africa; that they must also be decision-makers and actors in the process of using the new ICTs to accelerate African economic, social and political development.

Some studies, however, suggest that increased access to technology, especially ICTs may not have significant impact on domestic gender power relations. As traditional family farms in Australia are increasingly turning to ICTs to enhance their effectiveness and efficiency in management, a study of the use of ICTs on 20 family cotton farms sought to discover whether tools such as cellular phones, citizen band radios, computers, fax machines and the telephone had gendered patterns of usage. The analysis, which focused on gender-based division of labour and on power relations embodied in the usage of the technologies, did not result in appreciable changes in women's power nor in changes to the prevailing gender division of labour. It was concluded that it is highly unlikely that ICTs will deliver on their promise of women's empowerment, particularly in family contexts (Stewart 2004).

Other observers are also of the opinion that empowerment does not necessarily take place when incomes are generated or when livelihoods are enhanced. It is noted that although social capital undoubtedly empowers people, the scope of empowerment is limited because hierarchies and structures do not alter within families, households and societies. In this context, the author suggests the use of ICTs as non-confrontationist interactions, that is without changing existing gender relations (Deshmukh 2003). This would, however, depend on how the sense of empowerment is constructed, as it would mean the women gaining greater control in some areas, yet remaining within the confines of traditional gender hierarchies. This is a definite move in the direction of equality or empowerment, but represents a mere shift in power, actually facilitating perpetuation of the prevailing patriarchal system².

² Emphasis mine.

2.4 The Context of ICTs in Uganda

2.4.1 ICT Policy Framework and Interventions

Uganda's move towards an ICT policy is traceable to political commitment and privatisation efforts. Statutes related to this process include the Press and Journalist Statute of 1995, the Electronic Media Statute of 1996; the Communications Act of 1997 and the Rural Communications Policy of 2001. To enhance and streamline developments in the ICT sector, the Government through the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNSCT) formulated a national ICT policy framework. The aim of the latter was to meet the challenges and harness the potentials and opportunities offered by ICTs.

Other efforts by Government include the establishment of the Rural Communications Development Fund (RCDF) administered by the Uganda Communication Commission (UCC, 2001). This fund provides subsidies to facilitate access to basic communication services such as telephones, computers and Internet within reachable distances for all in Uganda. The implementation focus areas for the RCDF are those considered commercially unviable by commercial telecommunication operators. The Government has also removed taxes on all imported ICT equipment. This is gradually reducing the costs of providing ICT services. When UCC instituted zero licence fees for provision of public communication services, a new and vibrant industry erupted in telephone kiosks and Internet café services (UCC, 2005).

Implementation of these policy activities was evident in increased investments in communications infrastructure, notably in mobile telephony, frequency-modulated (FM) radios, television and Internet services. The phenomenal growth of ICT infrastructure from 1996 to 2004 can be seen, among others, in growth in the number of fixed telephone lines, which rose from 46 000 to 71 272. More impressively, the mobile

phone subscribers increased from 35 000 to an incredible 987 456 in the same period. To date (2006), MTN (the largest mobile network provider) alone has over 1 000 000 subscribers (UCC 2004).

2.4.2 The Mobile 'Village' Phones

Under the Village Phone Uganda project, the Grameen Foundation USA teamed up with MTN Uganda to extend cell phone coverage throughout rural Uganda. Using micro-finance loans MTN Village Phone sells cellular phones to female entrepreneurs in rural areas, who then sell airtime on the phones to others in their communities.

The MTN Village Phone was formally launched in November 2003 with a ceremonial call placed from a village phone operator to the Vice-President of Uganda. As of March 2004, MTN had over 400 village phones in the field and was deploying phones at a rate of 60 per month, well ahead of original projections. Usage of the phones was also about 25% higher than originally projected. To date other network providers (UTL, CELTEL) have launched village phones, and several people are self-employed as mobile village phone operators (*DOT-COMments Newsletter 2004*).

The venture generates income for the operators (mostly women) and offers affordable telecommunications access to rural communities. Village phone clients have used the phone for a variety of purposes, including conducting business transactions, communicating with family members, participating in call-in radio talk shows and checking the price of agricultural goods (*ibid*).

2.4.3 Women's Utilisation of ICTs for Empowerment

The lack of access to ICTs has a direct impact on ICT utilisation levels. However, in some areas where ICTs are accessible, women have demonstrated their capabilities in

exploring ICT opportunities in business and economic processes that affect their well-being (Amuriat and Okello). Women's capacities notwithstanding, concerns of access, utilisation and the application of ICTs remain largely gendered to the disfavour of women (poor women) and unaddressed (CEEWA – Uganda, 2001).

In 2000, CEEWA – Uganda (whose mission is to promote the economic empowerment of African women) implemented an ICT project to promote economic empowerment at the community level. It integrated gender aspects into the multipurpose community telecentres in Buwama, Nabweru and Nakaseke, all rural areas at varying distances from Kampala. A number of strategies were applied, including the establishment of business linkages between women producers and buyers. Markets were found for women, especially those who were involved in the making of crafts. Information on where they could find markets and business opportunities was provided. Services which could not be provided under the project were given through a linkage programme. Rural women were linked to microfinance institutions and were able to receive credit to support their enterprises.

Although the project registered a number of achievements, especially in building capacity of women in ICT use and application and others, a number of things did not work. For instance, telecentre design at the three project sites assumed that rural women would be able to pay for ICT services such as telephone, training and access to information on the Internet. However, due to low incomes, high illiteracy and lack of appreciation or relevance, this did not work. The other assumption was that ICTs are a priority need among women, which turned out to be a total misconception. Women expressed the need for credit - yet this was left out in the project design. These factors per se or in concert with others may have contributed to the limited use and hence empowerment potential of the ICT facilities for the rural women (*ibid*).

2.5 Research Gaps

It is evident from the literature reviewed that many questions in the context of Uganda remain unanswered. The contextual experiences of rural women with ICTs, especially mobile telephony, although beginning to be researched remain largely unarticulated. Most of the available literature is generic and not specific to Uganda and its various socio-cultural, economic and gender configurations. For instance, would it be rational to generalise for Uganda what is known elsewhere about ICT dividends and divides, or is it context-specific - and to what extent, if any? How has adoption of ICTs (voice telephony)-based enterprises like the village phone business affected rural men and women's livelihoods? How are gender relations and/or ideologies – the value systems, marital interactions, being affected? What are the implications for women's empowerment, social emancipation and advancement? These questions are key and were part of the core concerns of this study.

CHAPTER THREE: THE STUDY FINDINGS

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter the study findings are presented and analysed with a focus on the outcomes of qualitative in-depth interviews with the eight women commercial teleworkers. The individual profiles of the eight women are not presented per se, but rather are drawn upon to unravel the impact of factors such as gender domestic roles/responsibilities, gender-based restrictions, gender power relations and societal attitudes on the individual women's working experiences. This was done by building up a thematic narrative of the interview results so as to identify key elements, citing instances and relevant quotes to back up the findings. Reference to the quantitative findings was made where there was a need to substantiate, quantify or clarify issues that did not emerge explicitly by applying the qualitative approach.

Among others the analysis dwelt on women's phone businesses as an option for economic survival, enjoyment of the benefits, the arising gender tensions and the women's coping responses in this increasingly competitive business. Overall the analysis sought to portray the potential of commercial mobile telephony as a tool for enhancing women's social and economic empowerment through promotion of gender equality in access and utilisation.

3.2 The Mobile Village Phone Business – an Option for Economic Survival

In the qualitative survey, all the eight women teleworkers cited various reasons for starting and operating their respective phone business. Case I, Zaitun, was experiencing severe cash shortfalls and could not meet basic family needs, including upkeep of her young child. Her previous business as a fresh farm produce vendor in the public market was ailing, and she had to abandon it for the apparently more lucrative pay phone business. Case II, Monica, a barely literate impoverished woman, was a subsistence

cultivator who could hardly cater for the basic needs of her large family, until she started the phone business. Case III, Olivia, then a struggling single mother, could no longer survive on her meagre wages as a hired phone attendant and quit to start her own phone business. Case IV, Sylvia, a young girl who had escaped from crushing poverty in a remote lakeside village, found herself in a situation of 'urban' misery when she prematurely dropped out of school and started living alone. Desperate, she had to find work and did so as a hired pay phone operator.

Case V, Florence, despite being respectably married to a university graduate and operating a modest retail shop, was not content with her financial situation. She had to diversify by purchasing a village phone set and operating a pay phone business. Case VI, Phionah, got tired of being a low-paid casual employee in a Celtel shop and, inspired by the experience gained from working in the shop, decided to strike out on her own as a mobile village phone owner and operator. When Case VII, Eva, escaped from the drudgery of married life in a remote village, she tried one option of selling vegetables near her new home in town. When this failed to generate sufficient income even to cater for family basics including child upkeep, she had to try another option – the mobile phone business. Case VIII, Mellanie, had had her fair share of abject poverty, after working for two gruelling years in a shanty eatery/shebeen. When an opportunity for self-employment as a freelance phone operator presented itself, she could not miss it.

Although the social and demographic characteristics of the women phone business operators differ markedly, as indicated in the quantitative survey, the emerging pattern from both data sets is that it is mostly the poor, cash-strapped women who are drawn into this business. Further, it emerges that many of the women teleworkers were not new to the business world prior to engaging in the mobile phone business. Many had previously worked as market vendors, shop attendants, tailors or bar attendants or been engaged in other similar petty enterprises. Indeed, some of the respondents were

concurrently operating their phone businesses with these other business activities at the time of the survey.

It is thus apparent that the women did not engage in the mobile phone business out of deliberate choice, but rather out of desperation for an option for economic survival. None of the respondents possessed prior training in ICT, and they therefore lacked knowledge or experience in that area. The women thus could not have engaged in commercial mobile telephony in pursuance of an ICT or related ambition. Economic 'getting by' appears to have been the primary motive for every woman who engaged in the mobile pay phone business.

Worthwhile noting is the more or less equally vulnerable situation of the women teleworkers' husbands/partners. None of the men in question was gainfully employed. Some worked as *boda-boda* (bicycle or motorbike taxi) riders, petty traders, drivers, peasant cultivators, carpentry hands, cart pushers or market vendors. Others were completely redundant, or struggling students. As a result of such economic status, it would be rational to assume that these men could barely fulfill their respective cultural obligation of adequately providing for their wives, children or extended kith and kin. In the face of such a situation, with the characteristic economic hardships, the hapless women desperately needed an income-seeking activity to ensure family and own survival – to get by at least, and the mobile village phone business presented a ready and unique option.

3.3 Ownership of the Phone Sets and Businesses

In the quantitative survey it was found that 78% of the respondents personally owned the phone sets they were using, 18% were renting and 4% were working as employees of the *bona fide* phone owners. In the qualitative survey most of the women did not

refer to the phone sets as family property, but rather as personally owned: “*esimu enu yange*” – the phone set is mine (Cases I, III, V,VI, VII, VIII).

Of the personally owned phone sets, 80% had been purchased brand new at prices ranging from Ushs 220,000 (US \$120) to Ushs 240,000 (US \$132), prices varying according to the make of the phone, time and place of purchase. Eighteen per cent of the women had bought the phones second-hand and 5% had apparently acquired the phone sets as gifts or free from undisclosed sources.

The qualitative survey findings indicate that the phone sets were actually mostly acquired by substantial monetary contributions of the women’s husbands, and only in a few cases through long-term, painstaking saving efforts of the women themselves. However, the nature of acquisition of the phone sets notwithstanding, what was most striking was the emphatic and in some cases aggressive manner in which the women, even those cohabiting with their partners, described themselves as the sole owners of the phone sets and subsequent proprietors of the pay phone businesses. Perhaps in response to this (women’s) attitude, a number of husbands/partners - despite the initial financial, material and other support they had rendered to start and operate the businesses - had gradually divested themselves or lost interest in what were hitherto meant to be family businesses. Further, as it emerged in the in-depth interviews, this (women’s) personalisation did not end at the phone sets and businesses, but went on to include the financial proceeds (profits) accruing out of the businesses.

In reference to the women’s rather odd behaviour, it can be argued that in situations such as those that they live and operate in - where empowerment is influenced, among others, by asset endowments which enable one to make purposive choices - the women, by laying personal claim on the phones and businesses, are actually striving to derive a form of empowerment by exercising full control over an important domestic resource. In the quantitative survey, although the respondents acknowledged that

decision-making *vis-à-vis* key family assets/resources remains men's prerogative, with the phone businesses 64% of the wives reported being autonomous controllers of the income, while 31% had joint control with their husbands, and only 5% totally lacked control, remitting whatever money was earned to the husband. These findings undoubtedly lend credence to the above argument.

3.4 Women's Phone Business Operations – a Rocky Start; the Benefits

Both quantitative and qualitative findings indicate that most of the women teleworkers experienced a multitude of challenges in starting and operating their respective businesses. Costly airtime, unreliable electric power supply (for battery charging), stiff competition with business colleagues, time constraints and unsuitable working premises were some of the pressing setbacks experienced by most phone business women. In the in-depth interviews, all eight women, in spite of a difficult start, mentioned a number of benefits for themselves, their family members, and in some cases extended kith and kin, as a result of their teleworking activities.

Case I, Zaitun, was not only able to raise money for her child's upkeep, including school fees, but would even occasionally provide cash to her husband. She was also able to cater for her personal needs and even secretly save some money. Case II, Monica, talked of making substantial financial contributions to meeting basic expenditures in the home. She was proud of being able to support her 'special needs' child and sending him to an appropriate school. With the proceeds of her phone business Monica was also able to purchase some personal effects (second-hand clothes and shoes) for herself, on top of saving some money.

Case III, Olivia, who started as a hired hand, could as a result of her teleworking activities comfortably cater for all her baby's needs as well as her own, on top of contributing substantially to meeting domestic expenditures Despite being just a hired

phone attendant, . Case IV, Sylvia, had been able to save Ushs 79,200 (US \$44), and with subsequent savings was hoping to buy herself a village phone set. She also talked of being able to cater for most of her personal needs and even occasionally remitting money to her impoverished parents back home in the village. Case V, Florence, was able to boost her retail shop with financial proceeds from the phone business. With the extra income she purchased a second-hand refrigerator and started selling chilled softdrinks and juices.

Case VI, Phionah, who started as a low paid casual employee in a retail phone shop, mentioned the most impressive benefits. Within only one year of freelance teleworking, she had purchased two brand new phone sets and accessories, and become an employer; all this on top of catering for her basic needs and occasionally providing cash to her needy university undergraduate husband. Case VII, Eva, talked of making more money than she had ever dreamt of (US \$4.4) per day, and contributing generously to meeting domestic expenses. Case VIII, Mellanie, described her net weekly income of Ushs 34,920 (US \$19.4) as “Unbelievable!” Her lifestyle changed positively and she was able to rent and relocate to a better home, on top of catering for all her personal needs and those of her child.

Apart from the direct monetary benefits, which inevitably led to improvement of the women’s livelihoods, other less direct but crucial benefits were mentioned as well. Many of the women talked of acquiring both physical and social addresses, which reduced their hitherto physical and social isolation. Some of the benefits mentioned by the women are not only amazing but also very personal. For instance, case VIII, Mellanie, as a result of her improved financial status was able to influence her hitherto reluctant boyfriend to formalise their relationship into marriage.

The phone business benefits are better articulated in the quantitative survey: 15% of the women said that they no longer pester their husbands for money to purchase

clothing, visiting hair salons and cosmetics; 11% said that unlike in the pre-teleworking period, good foodstuffs like sugar, rice, *matooke* (*plantain*) and occasionally bread are always available in the home; 5% said that the family can at least afford a kilogram of meat a week.; and 11% mentioned increased respect from their husbands as a result of their respective contributions to family welfare.

Other benefits pointed out included ability to afford any desired foodstuff (8%), ability to pay for and attend weekend entertainment concerts without begging (money) from the husbands (7%), affording to buy milk for the baby (4%), affording to take children to private clinics when ill (10%), paying school fees for relatives (6%), enrolling children into private schools (instead of the low-quality UPE schools (4%), paying off personal debts (3%), giving or lending money to husbands (95%), secretly buying land and preparing to build (2%), accessing family planning without involving husband (2%), affording medical bills for sick relatives (4%), enrolling children (not husband's) into school (1%), repairing grandparents' houses (1%), and ventures into other businesses, especially *boda-boda* transport (1%).

At a glance, several themes become discernible from these identified benefits. What is most striking, however, is the financial empowerment, which translated into the women's autonomy to partake in activities, roles, responsibilities or decisions traditionally relegated to the men (husbands). The ability of the women to set up and profitably operate the pay phone businesses, generating and controlling their money and among others contributing substantially to improvement of their own and family welfare, is an indicator or evidence of their enhanced potential to overcome the inhibitions imposed on them by prevailing patriarchy to keep them socio-economically subjugated, both in the domestic and community domains.

It can be argued that the women are, courtesy of their teleworking business activities, in a better position to control their own destinies, even when their interests are opposed

by others (especially husbands) with whom they routinely interact. Several of the phone business women, when talking about the future of their businesses, exuded internal strength and a strong sense of resilience and self-determination which can be interpreted to mean that they are gradually, at least psychologically, trying to reverse the sense of alienation and disbelief in change, as a result of increased access to resources and control over the conditions and decisions that affect their individual lives. The question, however, is – how does this economic and social empowerment that many of the women business teleworkers are experiencing fit into both their domestic and community lives, where the restraining structures of patriarchy (characterised by a predominance of masculinity norms) remain strongly in place and intact?

3.5 Women’s Phone Business Operations – Gender Tension

Both qualitative and quantitative findings indicate that despite its benefits (especially empowering the women entrepreneurs financially), the influx of women into the mobile phone business has had its opportunity costs *vis-à-vis* social or more specifically domestic gender relations. In the quantitative survey 4% of the respondents talked about suspicious husbands who interfere with smooth operation of the businesses by intimidating male clients; 8% complained about competing time demands between performance of domestic chores and business operations; 6% mentioned sexual harassment by males posing as clients; and 4% talked about negative social attitudes towards commercial teleworkers in the community.

Although the quantitative survey did not adequately focus on gender issues in relation to the phone business women’s work, in the in-depth qualitative interviews it emerged that the women’s commercial teleworking activities were causing serious conflicts between the women and their husbands, both outside the home and within the domestic context. Apart from Sylvia, Phionah and Mellanie (Cases IV, VI and VIII respectively), the rest of the women initially consulted or sought some form of approval

from their husbands to start their phone businesses. Although some of the husbands had reservations and only gave tacit approval, others directly encouraged their wives to start the businesses. In the latter category, approval was given on the understanding that the wives would reciprocally significantly contribute to meeting domestic expenditures such child care and home basics or the wives' own personal needs, and maintain their domestic work.

Nevertheless, irrespective of the nature of approval sooner or later tension developed between the wives and husbands *vis-à-vis* the former's teleworking activities. For each individual woman, the nature and magnitude of tension assumed a different dimension. For Case I, Zaitun, her husband - who had encouraged her to start the business and even contributed to the purchase of the phone set and accessories - soon started resenting her work. What irked him most was Zaitun's time schedule, which left her with hardly any time to spare to be at home, and her physical exposure, especially in the high-risk street and pub environment where she worked. Zaitun feels that her improved smartness in dressing since she started the phone business also contributed to her domestic woes, as it made her husband jealous and insecure. Another source of discontent between the duo was Zaitun's deliberate refusal to declare and hand over all the profits of her business to her husband.

Tension between Zaitun and her husband attained fever pitch when he started verbally abusing and subsequently battering her - sometimes in public at her phone kiosk. Some form of compromise and relative peace was only attained when Zaitun grudgingly hired a girl to operate the business, which enabled her to spend more time at home.

Monica, Case II - perhaps out of experience acquired after a long marriage - did not take her husband's approval for granted. She chose to sacrifice much of her teleworking time for performance of what she viewed as her gendered obligatory chores at home. Although this was at the expense of the viability of her phone business, she was not

much bothered. Nevertheless, these efforts notwithstanding, her husband did not feel at ease even with the limited time Monica allotted to her phone business. At the earliest opportunity he insisted that Monica trains her two teenage daughters to take over.

Although Case III, Olivia, considers herself still married to the father of her child (*Taata w'omwana*), in reality she had separated from her husband for over a year as a result of conflicts arising out of her teleworking activities. Despite giving approval to start the business, her husband did not like Olivia's success. He also resented the public exposure that her work subjected her to. He falsely accused her of being a prostitute and started battering her. When Olivia stubbornly refused to abandon her phone business, he deserted her for another woman.

Case IV, Sylvia, complained that her relationship with her husband, a *boda-boda* rider, had adversely disrupted her phone business. Her husband openly loathed her job, especially the long working hours and public exposure. He resorted to hanging around her kiosk during evening peak hours, in the process intimidating her male clients, who left.

Florence (Case V) says that although her phone business has never been a source of marital conflict with her husband since it is sited within domestic premises, he is still suspicious and monitors the call log on a daily basis. He also denied her permission to purchase a cell phone for personal use, although she could comfortably afford it. He also resented male clients, especially those who come to make calls after 20h00, and he had sternly warned her against them.

Case VI, Phionah, also has a husband who openly resents her commercial teleworking activities. Despite being away most of the time studying at university, he cannot come to terms with her 'ungodly' working hours, which he contends are a prelude to

indecent and immoral. She has continued to work, but feels that her relationship with her husband is seriously dented and that she may soon lose him to other women.

Case VII, Eva, experienced a domestic catastrophe as a result of her phone business. Her husband, who had initially given her the green light to start the business, later developed a negative attitude. The financial benefits notwithstanding, he complained that a proper woman does not abandon her husband in bed at dawn, take their child to grow up on the streets, and return home after dusk too tired to do anything, including sex. Eva suspected her husband of being envious of her business success as she was making much more money than him. She continued operating her business against all odds, but the relationship became increasingly strained and her husband eventually deserted her.

Apart from Case II (Monica), Mellanie (Case VIII) is the only other business phone operator who had not experienced serious marital problems because of her teleworking activities. This could, however, be due to the nature of the relationship with her partner, where she apparently enjoys the upper hand by virtue of her better financial position. The shortness of the marital relationship could be another explanatory factor. However, she had to get a competent housemaid to take care of her housekeeping chores, which may have eased potential marital tensions arising out of her prolonged absence from home.

The testimonies of the eight women provide considerable evidence that the establishment and operation of pay phone businesses by the women caused enormous tension, especially between the women and their husbands. It is also clear that in the domestic context the inter-spouse tension was not only because of the absence of the women from their homes, but also the ability of the hitherto financially hapless and dependent women to generate and control their own income. This financial autonomy, coupled with public exposure and the overall empowerment which the women were

experiencing, inevitably provoked gender-based tension and subsequent violence against the women. The husbands who meted out the violence can be seen as striving to reinstate their control and dominance in the domestic context, which they felt was at a stake.

Even those husbands who gave the green light to their wives and assisted in establishing the businesses were seen to shift their positions and refuse to allow their wives to continue working. All of a sudden they felt that their wives should give their full attention and labour to the home. It is obvious that the husbands resented and could not come to terms with the autonomy that having and controlling their incomes gave to the women. They were also not comfortable with and subsequently opposed the commercial teleworking activities that put their wives in contact with other men, took them away from home during the evenings or involved unchecked mobility.

Some of the women who were enjoying considerable independence, and above all improving the welfare of their families, resented being disrupted by this seemingly irrational behaviour by their husbands, and quite naturally put up a spirited resistance - which served only to aggravate the gender tension. Of those women whose marriages broke up as a result of the negative consequences arising out of their phone business activities, a number did not have nor express any regrets - a factor that brings into question whether the mobile phone business and marriage can successfully be combined.

Overall, it emerged that the gender tension had negative consequences, which does not augur well for the women's pursuit of change, their resilience, their families and other aspects of their lives.

3.6 Women's Phone Business Operations – Implications for Personal Status

Despite a rocky start characterised by various structural, social and gender-specific constraints, many of the women pay phone business operators registered impressive financial success. For a number of them this financial success translated into a form of empowerment, which gave them autonomy to make key decisions pertaining to management of their businesses and the accrual of financial proceeds. As a consequence of this financial/economic empowerment, the women reported not only making substantial contributions to meeting domestic, personal and other expenditures, but also accumulating savings and reinvesting some of the money into the businesses. Some of the women actually managed to expand their businesses by acquiring more village phone sets and accessories and employing attendants. What we intend to examine are the implications of this economic empowerment for the individual women's personal status in the home and community. In order to do this we shall draw extensively on the findings of the qualitative in-depth interviews.

Case I, Zaitun, said that since she started contributing substantially to family upkeep, her husband stopped beating her and does not quarrel as loudly as before. In fact, she feels that he respects her, although he does not openly show it. In the wider community she feels that her friends, relatives and neighbours see her as a woman of financial substance (*mukazi wa sente*), someone capable of managing her own life and not by any means to be overlooked. However, apart from her own perceptions of other people's attitudes towards her, she did not specifically refer to anybody who has come out boldly to recognise or acknowledge her 'elevated' status in both the home and the community.

Case II, Monica, the oldest and most experienced (in marital affairs) among the phone business women, on the other hand, had a different view. She emphatically asserted that irrespective of a woman's financial or other contribution, her status in the home is not expected to exceed a certain level. She went on to elaborate that a woman's status

actually depends on the extent to which her husband appreciates and acknowledges her work and contribution. Monica feels that she is held in high esteem in the wider community, despite being poor, implying that her improved financial situation at domestic level has nothing to do with this. In other words, Monica's status is derived from the stability of her marriage.

Case III, Olivia, cannot talk about her status in the home since she mostly lives alone, and even in the wider community did not feel that people respected her. She cynically pointed out that society has negative attitudes towards women business teleworkers, whom they regard as failures in life. She observed that married women in particular resent female teleworkers, whom they view as disguised sex workers bent on enticing their husbands.

Case IV, Sylvia, felt uncomfortable when asked about her social status, pointing out that she does not see herself as having any. She remarked that commercial teleworking (more so than being a hired attendant) does not augur well for one's status. Sylvia implied that status is derived mainly from financial/economic well-being and subsequent autonomy, which she currently lacks.

Case V, Florence, said that she had not noticed any change in her status in the home since she started her phone business. She stressed that a wife's financial contribution does not matter and is not commensurate to her status in the home. She was also not certain about her status in the wider community. She pointed out rather cynically that what some people perceive as elevated status resulting from financial success is actually malicious envy. Status, according to her, is derived from marital stability.

Case VI, Phionah, felt that when she opted out of paid employment and started her freelance teleworking activities, her social status could have declined. She attributed this to the fact that nobody can respect a woman working on the streets, regardless of

how much money she makes. She acknowledged that the moral conduct of some phone business workers left much to be desired and undermined their status. In other words, Phionah feels that moral disposition supercedes financial empowerment in issues relating to individual social status.

Case VII, Eva, sadly noted that before starting her phone business, when she was poor but married, people respected her; but when the phone business succeeded, she lost her husband, the marriage, and all the associated respect. Devoid of any self-esteem, Eva does not see herself as having any social status worth talking about. Like many of her business colleagues then, Eva attributes social status to marital stability, not financial empowerment.

Case VIII, Mellanie, affirms that her teleworking activities have elevated her social status, albeit indirectly. She was of the view that her acquisition of a husband -as a result of her better financial circumstances - has elevated her position in society as a respectably married woman. Mellanie thus also attributes social status to marriage.

CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Discussion

4.1.1 Women's Phone Business Work and Domestic Virtue

As elsewhere in the developing world, Ugandan women who work to earn an income operate in a context influenced by two powerful forces. While the reasons for their quest for ways to earn own income are valid and strong, the women who actually do so are confronted with formidable ideological opposition. In striving to resolve the uncertainties surrounding the proper roles and duties of women in Uganda's dynamic social context, and to provide a justification for clamping down on what was seen as their undue autonomy, African and British male leadership during the early decades of the twentieth century formulated a shared definition of a 'good woman' (*omukyala omutufu*). Although this set of expectations was not laid out explicitly, it can be pulled together from a variety of statements and policies. It is labelled a model of domestic virtue, since it stressed women's contributions and responsibilities within the home setting. The domestic virtue paradigm defined how a good woman, one respected by her male and female peers, should behave. Its basic components, closely intertwined in practice, were as follows:

- All women should marry and as wives provide services for their husbands, including sex.
- Women are mothers. They provide for and care for their children, as well as socialising them into their cultural traditions.
- Women have practical duties within the household. They grow food for their family and perform essential chores like cooking, cleaning, water and firewood collection.
- Women's work occurs within the homestead and its fields except when going to collect firewood and water.

- Women are subject to male authority. A woman should be submissive and differential to her husband, his male relatives and other men in the community. This requirement is part of a broader tradition of respect for authority and hierarchy.
- Women are not decision-makers. In the family, a woman may discuss issues with her husband but does not decide on her own, with the exception of minor domestic issues.
- Women may use resources, such as land and domestic assets, but they do not control them.

A corollary was that women who were voluntarily away from the domestic context, especially if not married, were labelled as bad. Hence they were legitimate targets of male sexual interest (Kyomuhendo-Bantebya and McIntosh 2006).

Although the domestic virtue model has proved itself adaptable, able to generate variant forms that permit some women to work under specific conditions, its core features – especially those governing gender relationships, remain in place.

Within the confines of domestic virtue thinking then, it is evident that the social environment in which the phone businesswomen operate is far from conducive. In fact the impediments that characterise the way the women operate all point to a struggle - not only in the practical terms, but also in a personal, emotional sense. It is clear that the women did not engage in commercial mobile telephony out of deliberate personal choice - they were compelled into the business by material factors or individual aspirations. They had to work to feed their families, educate their children, meet personal needs, improve their worth and gain overall self-satisfaction. For many of these hapless women starting a phone business appeared to be the only available meaningful option to escape the dire consequences of extreme poverty and deprivation.

At the same time - and known, but probably not well internalised by the business women - was the fact that they faced phenomenal ideological opposition to engage in any work, commercial or otherwise, outside the home setting. This ideological opposition stemmed from the model of domestic virtue.

Many of the women pay phone operators were not new to the business world, having worked as shop attendants, tailors, market vendors, cooks, waitresses in local eateries or bar attendants prior to engaging in commercial teleworking. Compared to their former businesses, however, the mobile phone business presented them with unique and tempting opportunities. Apart from assurance of daily cash, the business availed the women with both social and physical exposure. Their kiosks, mainly located along busy streets, became their physical addresses and the phone sets provided them with convenient digital contact. Also, the nature of their work required them to be away from home for long periods of time (often from early morning to dusk), offering some of them a rare opportunity to escape the monotony and drudgery of domestic married life. The nature of their work also required them to dress fairly smartly so as to be presentable to potential and real clients.

To compound the above, the mobile phone business enabled the women to generate and control their own money, and to assume roles and responsibilities of their husbands, like providing family basics and making major decisions in the household. Despite the benefits for both the women and their families, this did not augur well with the inner workings of the model of domestic virtue. It directly undermined the ideology and practice of patriarchy and posed a real threat to existing gender relations and the functioning of households.

Gradually the ideological opposition against the women and their work, which at first was subtle, became clearly manifest. The husbands, including those who had given direct or tacit approval, soon experienced the harsh realities of their wives' phone

business activities. Monetary and other benefits notwithstanding, the women were increasingly operating out of the domestic setting. Although married, they could, from the domestic virtue perspective, be labelled as 'bad' - and hence legitimate targets of outside male sexual interest.

When gender tension inevitably developed, the wives found it difficult to argue their case since the patriarchal society within which they operate was not on their side – these 'bad' women who had fallen from domestic virtue.

Whereas one would castigate the husbands as selfish and inconsiderate individuals, within the confines of the domestic virtue model their behaviour can be seen as rational or justifiable. For a husband, allowing and openly supporting his wife to operate especially a phone business outside the home is tantamount to a pathetic admission to society of his failure to cope with his gendered obligatory role of fending for his family. Such a man, even if benefiting from his wife's financial contribution and materially better off than others, would still not be held in high esteem in society. Like his working wife, he will also be seen as someone who has fallen from domestic virtue – a man not in control. This is perhaps why, when some of the women adamantly refused to quit their phone business or to switch to other businesses seen as more acceptable to their husbands and the community, their men - in total disregard of the dire consequences for the family - deserted them.

The financial empowerment of the wives, courtesy of their phone business activities, was another thorny issue which the husbands could not come to terms with. Most of the wives did not fully declare (or declare at all) the financial proceeds accruing from their phone businesses, to their husbands. Many had secret banking arrangements and investment plans. Although many of the husbands were directly benefiting from their wives' commercial teleworking activities, they could not come to terms with their subordinate financial status and overall diminished position in the family hierarchy. To

many, their wives' economic empowerment was not only contentious, but a prelude to rebellion - a valid and real threat to the core of their survival and respect as family heads, breadwinners and makers of key decisions. A solution which maintained their status quo had to be found, even if at the expense of the survival of their families. The wives' enhanced position in their respective households could not fit within the inner workings of domestic virtue: they either had to quit the business or participate less actively if they were to remain married and maintain their families as viable units.

Some of the women who had to quit their marriages as a result of gender conflicts arising from their business activities outside the home, gradually came to terms with and adapted to their situation. Free of husband dominance and the characteristic domestic pressures and gender tension, many of these women intimated that they experienced a form of empowerment arising, among others, from better management of their time, increased access to domestic resources and being able to exercise full control over conditions and decisions that affected their personal lives.

It emerged, however, that the empowerment which some of the women experienced remained at individual psychological level. In the wider community this empowerment remained obscure. Many of the women acknowledged that the degree of empowerment they experienced at individual level did not necessarily reflect the same degree of empowerment at other levels. Some of the women were emphatic that instead of enhancing their social status, their financial success and enhanced autonomy in controlling their lives in fact had a counter-effect, especially in the community domain. Whatever their financial success, they were portrayed as bad women and therefore of low status.

The emerging theme is therefore that a woman's status both in the home and the wider community is determined not by material endowments, financial success and the related inner feelings of personal/psychological empowerment, but by her marriage and

the stability of that marriage. For the phone business women this poses a real dilemma. Although the village pay phone business has provided them with a way out of desperate economic situations, enabling them to meet their pressing own and family needs, at the same time this has not changed the existing gender power relations and the women's social status/position within the domestic and community contexts. On the contrary, it has only served to flare up gender tension and conflicts, in the process bringing the hitherto latent gender inequality to the fore.

4.2 Conclusions

The most significant single factor that pushed women into the mobile phone business was the need or desire to generate income. The poor, cash-strapped women needed money for own and family survival, but in general had limited options about what kind of viable work to engage in, since they had no access to capital or credit. Although a number of women took advantage of mobile telephony as a new innovation, exploiting it commercially to set up phone businesses and earn income, they soon encountered serious handicaps, especially within the family context.

Within the domestic setting the ways in which gender factors affected the lives of the phone businesswomen depended largely upon their marital situations. Contrary to what is expected, the married women lacked economic security and adequate financial support from their husbands. Their financial insecurity notwithstanding, the women also faced strong pressure to conform to accepted roles and responsibilities within the family. Most problems arose out of the ongoing expectation, central to domestic virtue thinking, that the women - irrespective of the pressures of their teleworking activities - were to assume full responsibility for caring for their families and children.

Despite the demanding commercial teleworking activities, a new pattern of domestic work shared between wives and husbands did not emerge, and the women had to

shoulder the burden of running their households on top of operating their phone businesses.

Gender tension and sometimes domestic violence ensued when the couples disagreed about the women's phone business operations, or how the income from the phone business should be used. In many instances the husbands were jealous and suspicious when their wives spent time away from home in the presence of other men. In a nutshell, it can be stated that domestic virtue thinking has continued to constrain the ability of several women to succeed in their mobile phone businesses, thereby undermining their contribution towards their households and attempts to improve their self-worth.

On top of contributing to gender tension, the ideology of domestic virtue has also resulted in insecure male identities. Whereas the women enjoyed enhanced opportunities as a result of their commercial teleworking activities, most husbands felt that their accustomed roles and rights were progressively and irreversibly being undermined. This included men's culturally indisputable place in the household as family head and sole decision-maker.

Men's position as authority figures in the public domain was also threatened by the women's aggressive involvement in phone business work and potential elevation of their status in the community domain. Yet domestic virtue thinking did not offer alternative opportunities to men to gain new and more positive identity components in return. Not surprisingly, the men resented their wives' growing empowerment, more often than not expressing that discontent through verbal and physical abuse or desertion.

In conclusion, it can be said that because domestic virtue attitudes hamper women's effectiveness in their businesses, promote gender conflict, and hamper the emergence of more positive identities for both men and women, new gender definitions are needed. Although to some extent change can happen of its own accord, as women become better educated and more successful at work, it is our contention that the development of more constructive gender definitions can be hastened by deliberate interventions. Although deeply held beliefs about core issues like gender identities and domestic relations are difficult to change, this research has shown that gender formulations are flexible, and that they can and do respond to shifts in the material environment around them. In this context the following are recommended:

4.3 Recommendations

A number of goals should shape interventions to weaken the negative features of domestic virtue thinking and promote the development of gender norms that provide greater flexibility in male and female roles. These goals include:

- Initiating a public dialogue that persuades Ugandans that women's ability to earn their own income is universally beneficial (to their families, the community and the nation) and not a threat to the economic position, authority and identities of men.
- Demonstrating how domestic virtue expectations undermine women's effectiveness in their businesses and within the home.
- Highlighting the adverse impact of domestic virtue thinking on the social interactions of working women and men, contributing to destructive gender tension and domestic violence.
- Promoting the development of alternative gender definitions that will:

- Improve women’s ability to initiate and effectively operate businesses while still being socially respected as good women.
 - Enable men (husbands) to gain a new and more positive identity.
 - Improve gender relations in all contexts and strengthen the institution of marriage.
- To achieve these goals, a long-term education campaign must be planned and implemented. This campaign must be led by the Government and simultaneously introduced by:
 - The mass media, targeting a wide audience, including young adults.
 - The Ministry of Education, local education officers, teacher training colleagues and schools, targeting children and teachers through revised curricula and textbooks.
 - NGOs and CBOs targeting men, children and women.

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