



GRACE 2: Gender Research in Africa into ICTs for Empowerment

Includes preliminary workshops in Asia and MENA

**Proposal presented to the IDRC by Research for the Future
January 2008**

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1. Executive Summary

This proposal emerges from the accomplishments of the first phase (May 2005 – February 2008) of the Gender Research in Africa into ICTs for Empowerment (GRACE) project, and from a recognition that the emergence of a sustainable research network can be achieved through an additional implementation and capacity development phase. Based on the effectiveness of the first phase in relation to the objectives of research capacity development and analysis of the relationships between gender, ICTs and empowerment,¹ we propose extending this initiative, enriching its initial methodological basis and expanding its reach. In terms of the network's initial methodological grounding in qualitative research for transformation, we aim to evolve this focus into action directed approaches, participatory policy research, quantitative approaches that are coherent with the transformative objectives of the project, mastering the transformative qualitative techniques and methodologies that were initiated and explored in GRACE 1, and integrating outcome mapping methodology in the research designs. GRACE 2 will also expand the reach of the initiative to introduce certain elements from the overall process and specific training from the above mentioned transformative research techniques to partners in Asia and MENA (the Middle East and North Africa). It is envisaged that GRACE 2 will run from March 1, 2008 until February 29, 2011.²

The vision behind the way GRACE has been developed and managed is grounded in the understanding that women's agency is the crucial factor in women's sustainable development and empowerment. The mastery of transformative research techniques and methodologies, to the degree that international networks of researchers (in Africa, MENA and Asia) are producing sound, valid, gender conscious research for change, that can influence policy and contribute to improving women's lives, is a central objective of the proposed second phase.

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 is 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.

Building on the current research capacities of the researchers, and expanding the scope of GRACE directly contributes to the long-terms goals of the initiative:

- The formation of a research network that can do ongoing gender and ICT research in Africa and potentially Asia and the MENA countries.
- The formation of research expertise in various institutions throughout Africa, and in the future in MENA countries and Asia, that can contribute to the debates around gender and ICT issues.
- The generation of knowledge that will influence policy at local, national and regional/global levels.

The proposed networks in Asia and MENA will likely draw a great deal from the expertise and experiences from GRACE 1 in Africa, however each network will chart its respective course, while retaining bi-directional links to the other networks for sharing and learning purposes.

The project process is outlined in the project work plan (section 13). It will commence with a planning workshop in Asia and a similar planning workshop in MENA. This will be followed by Network Initiating Workshops with MENA regional representatives, and a second with Asia

¹ For an assessment of GRACE 1, refer to the Final Narrative Report, submitted February 2008.

² Activities related to MENA and Asia will take place mostly during the first year of the project.

representatives. At these workshops the researchers will get in touch with their research passions and translate these into a research question; they will develop a sense of the type of research approach they would like to engage and the way they would like to collaborate with each other in a regional research network. After they have written their draft research proposals, intensive Research Design and Methodology workshops will be held in these two regions. At these workshops, the researchers will consolidate their methodological approaches, finalize their research designs, receive qualitative and quantitative research training (including using the qualitative analysis ICT tool Nvivo), learn (or review) how to use digital cameras and recorders and learn how to edit sounds and images using their computers.

A Research Proposal Development workshop will also be held with the continuing and new members of GRACE Africa. This workshop will take 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 – 27 September. The GRACE researchers will present their GRACE 1 work at these events. At the subsequent Research Proposal Development workshop, they will share how they want to evolve their research project with a new research question and possibly additional research approaches: in-depth qualitative research, action research and action learning, appreciative inquiry, participatory action research and quantitative research including surveys and experimental designs. In consultation with the GRACE Africa research coordination team and an external senior quantitative methodologist, the researchers will write their new research designs.

After they have piloted their new design in the field, a Methodology Training and Research Design workshop will be scheduled for the Africa region. At this second Africa region workshop the researchers will consolidate their research design in consultation with the GRACE Africa research coordination team and the external senior quantitative methodologist, receive appropriate research training in qualitative, quantitative and participatory action techniques, refresh how to use the qualitative analysis software (Nvivo), review how to use digital cameras and recorders and how to edit sound and images using their computers. A Research Sharing and Writing Workshop will be held once the researchers have reached the point where they are able to write up their findings. Based on the experience with GRACE 1 where an additional writing workshop needed to be organised to support the researchers with writing their findings into book chapters, a final workshop focusing on Writing and Dissemination will be held.

Mentoring and capacity building will take place throughout the project, with the capacity building starting with the initial workshops in each region early in the first year. These workshops will also be the starting point of the potential emergence of a GRACE Asia network and a GRACE MENA network, and the actualization of the GRACE Africa network. Site visits will be made by the Research Director and Research Coordinator in Africa. The Research Director, Research Coordinator and quantitative consultant will work closely with each research team in the design and implementation of the teams' varied research strategies. User friendly online collaboration platforms will be continued and new ones developed as needed. Results will be documented through updates to the GRACE web site, in a professionally edited online and printed publication, and in video documentation of the GRACE process.

From the planning phase of the project the network's broader policy transformation goals will be considered and dissemination activities that recognize the GRACE process and results will be engaged.

This 3-year project will be implemented by Research For the Future (RFF). The Project's Leader and overall Research Director will be Ineke Buskens, a cultural anthropologist with expertise in qualitative research methodology, research with women and transformational research education and training. The Research Coordinator will be Anne Webb, who has research coordination, project management, qualitative research and research education expertise. She will work primarily with GRACE Africa. A Project Administrator and part-time Research

Assistant for Africa will complete the research coordination team. External expertise will be sought in the form of a senior quantitative methodologist for all three regions and an advisory group for each region with specific topical and regional expertise and experience.

2. Background

This proposal emerges from the accomplishments of the first phase (May 2005 – February 2008) of the Gender Research in Africa into ICTs for Empowerment (GRACE) project, and from a recognition that the emergence of a sustainable transformative research network can be achieved through an additional capacity development and implementation phase. Based on the effectiveness of the first phase in relation to the objectives of research capacity development and analysis of the relationships between gender, ICTs and empowerment, we propose extending this initiative, enriching its initial methodological basis and expanding its reach. In terms of the network's initial methodological grounding in qualitative research for transformation, we aim to evolve this focus into action directed approaches, participatory policy research, quantitative approaches that are coherent with the transformative objectives of the project, mastering the transformative qualitative techniques and methodologies that were initiated and explored in GRACE 1, and integrating outcome mapping methodology in the research designs. GRACE 2 will also expand the reach of the initiative to introduce the training in the above mentioned transformative research techniques to partners in Asia and MENA.

The vision behind the way GRACE has been developed and managed is grounded in the understanding that women's agency is the crucial factor in women's sustainable development and empowerment. The mastery of transformative research techniques and methodologies, to the degree that international networks of researchers (in Africa, MENA and Asia) are producing sound, valid, gender conscious research for change, is a central objective of the proposed second phase.

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 is 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.

Building on the current research capacities of the researchers, and expanding the scope of GRACE directly contributes to the long-terms goals of the initiative:

- The formation of a research networks that can do ongoing gender and ICT research in Africa, and potentially in MENA and Asia.
- The formation of research expertise in various institutions throughout Africa, and in MENA and Asia in the future, that can contribute to the debates around gender and ICT issues.
- The generation of knowledge that will influence policy at local, national and regional/global levels.

The initial phase aimed to explore the ways in which women in Africa use ICTs to empower themselves, the external, structural barriers as well as the internal factors which prevent or enable them to use ICTs to their advantage, and the strategies they employ to overcome impediments. The project comprised 14 empirical research studies located in 12 countries. While coherent with the general aim of the overall research initiative, the sub-projects differed from each other greatly in terms of target group and research focus. Furthermore, the

concepts of gender and empowerment which frame the project's general direction and commitment, did not have unequivocal meaning within the sub-projects.

The project therefore contributed to the debates focusing on women's empowerment and ICTs through finding its own understandings of what "empowerment" and "gender" meant in multiple African ICT contexts. The lessons learnt are shared through the GRACE web site (<http://grace-network.net>), through conference presentations, through conveying research results to boundary partners and research participants, through published articles, and through the forthcoming publication of our book, *Creating New Realities? Investigations into African Women using ICTs for Empowerment* (Fall 2008, Zed Books and IDRC).

The project's impact reaches beyond its direct research outcomes. The network has become a supportive and nurturing environment for the GRACE researchers, enabling them to stretch themselves, realize their highest potential and create their dreams. To use the words of one of the researchers, GRACE has become a "Utopia for Africa", where women and men relate with each other in ways that are grounded in appreciation for Africa's uniqueness, yet critical of its disempowerment of women. Another researcher commented: "GRACE is also a vision of the world, a process of transformation or change, and for that, it has a mission. GRACE means for me the search for coherence, efficiency, better intelligibility of the social in order to be more conscious of gender. With GRACE I am undergoing a process of deep change. I changed, and I am using this know-how in my classes, and in my personal research."

The lessons learned, findings and evaluation of GRACE 1 in relation to research capacity building, network development and policy influence activities and potential will be integrated into GRACE 2 processes at an early stage, informing workshop development, sub-projects and the meta-research projects.

The GRACE 1 research teams will be invited to continue with GRACE 2. Their locations are: Cameroon, Egypt, Kenya (2 teams), Mozambique, Morocco, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda (2 teams), Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

New teams located in Asia and MENA will be identified through discussion with IDRC regional offices and the preliminary workshop processes.

Furthermore, 2 meta-research sub projects will be undertaken by the Project/Research Director and the Research Coordinator. These two projects will reflect on their position / praxis in the GRACE process, and on the implications of qualitative research capacity enhancement for development and change.

It is anticipated that the current Africa researchers, and in the future the researchers from MENA countries and Asia, will use their increased research capacity to support the development of "novice" researchers in their organizations and academic environments. GRACE's emphasis on women's agency sensitizes researchers to the gendered nature of women's realities from women's perspectives and enhances their capacity to develop an understanding of the possibilities and limitations for change. At the same time, this emphasis on women's agency which necessitates awareness of agency in oneself, also primes GRACE researchers to become change agents themselves, in their own personal contexts and beyond.

3. Research Problem and Justification

GRACE 2 will continue and build on the work of GRACE 1, on several levels. An important focus of GRACE 1 was research capacity building. Researchers were provided with opportunities to develop research capacity as well as capacity to use several (research related) ICTs effectively. The project made provisions for intensive training and ongoing mentoring and support in critical emancipatory qualitative research. It endeavoured to integrate the research and the ICT aspects into a holistic capacity building experience for the participants.

A significant element of the GRACE 1 project was that ICTs were approached from a user-perspective. Taking this approach means that the findings of the research endeavour speak to the gendered nature of women's engagement with ICTs in concrete, specific and in-depth ways. For the researchers to effectively investigate the user perspective, they have had to recognize the respondents' agency, their contexts, systemic gender discrimination, and the influences on their minds, while at the same time questioning the influences on their (the researchers') own minds and their own way of seeing things. They have developed this ability through the training and mentoring offered, and through their own practice of a 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.

It is this capacity achieved by the GRACE 1 researchers that will enable them to create knowledge bridges between the world of African women research respondents and their lived realities, and the world of policymakers. This research capacity development is the crux of the three longer-term objectives of the initiative listed above (Background): the formation of a research network, the establishment of a research base, and public policy influence.

Based on the effectiveness of the training and capacity development process to date, we are proposing a continuation of the GRACE process that extends the capacities of the continuing researchers in Africa, and starts the GRACE process in Asia and MENA countries. The project will work with the continuing Africa teams through action research processes which have the explicit intent of achieving change, and will introduce quantitative methodologies that are coherent with research for transformation. This second phase will focus on the continuing researchers mastering the transformative techniques and methodologies that were initiated and explored in GRACE 1.

This methodological shift from interpretive approaches toward approaches that are transformative and induce change, also and particularly in the researchers themselves, is lodged in the perspective that the greatest agent for change, even policy change, is the researcher herself/himself. Furthermore, as women's agency is key to sustainable development and empowerment efforts, the capacity to make this agency visible and engage it appropriately, it is important that researchers learn to recognize their own agency first and foremost. In all research, but especially in qualitative and action research and research for change in general, the researchers are the main research instruments and transformative agents. As such, management of the self and reflection on one's personal change process are methodological prerequisites. The respondents who engage in the qualitative and action research processes will be invited to reflect on and assess their experiences with the research, to contribute to a multi-dimensional evaluation of GRACE 2.

The findings of GRACE 1 confirm the very real need to change the elements in our societies and ourselves that create and perpetuate gender inequalities if women are to benefit from the use, development and design of ICTs (and all aspects of society) and enhance their own development and empowerment. The research process discussions also revealed how the complex relationships between external and internal factors shape women's perceptions and experiences of empowerment. This is captured in many of the chapters of the forthcoming GRACE book, *Creating New Realities? Investigations into African Women using ICTs for Empowerment*" (Zed, 2008). 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 will be a rich resource for change efforts aimed at achieving a more equitable and empowering world.

It is the achievement of this depth of understanding that we aim to master with the continuing GRACE Africa researchers and evoke with new members of GRACE in MENA countries and Asia, complemented by quantitative methods that fully tool the researchers in their endeavour to contribute to sustainable development and transformation.

Information and Communication Technologies - ICTs

The concept "ICTs" 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). Adeya states that the term ICTs, which actually refers to three separate entities, namely information, communication and technologies could theoretically be separated into its three components but that this is difficult to do practically, judging from the literature (Adeya: 69). Certain publications discuss the three in an overlapping manner or refer to ICTs when the focus is on only one area "as would be the case in referring to the telephone in relation to communication" (idem). While this is problematic because the three parts should be appreciated as three separate entities, Adeya deems the synergy between them and the relevance of the whole ICTs concept more critical (idem).

The term ICT does not only refer to the three parts of information, communication and technologies, it is also used to refer to a whole range of different "technologies". 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". From a communication theoretical point of view, categorizing "ICTs" such as for instance the internet and the telephone together, makes sense. Both these ICTs address the communication aspect.

They are also to a certain degree interdependent: the internet depends on the existence of a telephone line for its functioning. At the same time, however, the differences between these ICTs should not be glossed over. Many of the problems linked to the "new" ICTs such as internet use, like illiteracy and costly infrastructure for instance, do not apply to the older ones such as radio and telephone in 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.

ICT-User-perspective

In reference to this study, the term ICT and the ICTs themselves 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.

The 14 sub-project investigations in Africa, as well as the sub-projects in Asia and MENA countries will focus on a wide spread of ICTs and involve a wide variety of different women users who face 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 develops and evolves, enables us to speak to the problem of the interaction between gender and ICTs in concrete, specific and in-depth ways.

ICTs for Development

While there seems not to be much clear gender disaggregated statistical data available from Africa, Asia or MENA countries there is enough evidence to state that African, Asian and MENA women are not benefiting from the Information Revolution in the same way as men are (UNESCO: 13, Hafkin and Taggart: 1, 2001). There is furthermore anecdotal evidence from all over Africa that disadvantaged women use ICTs in innovative ways to empower themselves

(Hafkin: 13 and Netgains³). 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: 2, 2001). This would counter voices that dispute the fact that ICTs can contribute effectively to development in general and women's development in particular. It is therefore pertinent and crucial to try and understand at this stage of the ICT development efforts on the African Continent and in Asian and MENA countries how gender and ICTs impact on each other.

Need for an African ICT-gender perspective: focus on women's agency

While it has been argued that, especially in this time of increasing poverty and the challenge of HIV/AIDS, Africa faces more serious development problems than women's lack of ICT use and participation in the information society, Africa's history of development interventions would caution us to take such a stance (Adeya, C. N.).

Earlier development efforts in Africa, especially in the agricultural sector, which did not entertain a gender perspective, have actively contributed to the deterioration of women's position and hence of the economic situation of households, leading to malnutrition of children and other vulnerable members of society. Warnings in this regard, which were already flagged in the seventies and eighties, were not heeded and the general ramifications of this phenomenon were only acknowledged after they had become clearly visible on a grand scale. By that time, most of these developments had also unfortunately become irreversible.

Currently, policymakers and researchers in the ICT field find themselves in a similar situation of having to enter an arena of development which has generated already complex unintended effects and may even generate more and different ones. According to anecdotal evidence and to a more limited extent, statistical evidence, the gender digital divide is growing in the developing world in general and especially in Africa. Policymakers and development agencies may now, just as then, have similar blind (gender) spots. By becoming alert to a gender dimension in ICT developments at a relatively early stage of the information revolution, we may be able to prevent greater scaled undesirable effects in the future.

ICT policy is currently being made and implemented all over the continent. Unfortunately this is happening mostly in the absence of clear knowledge about the ways gender, inequality and ICTs are impacting each other. Men's and women's attitudes, needs, lived realities and perspectives on ICTs are likely to differ (Rathgeber: 18). Gender "neutral" policies tend to favour men because of their implicit and unexamined male-centric focus (Hafkin N. 2000; Hafkin N. & Taggart, N. 2001). At the same time, because ICTs enable governments and development agencies to deliver their services more effectively and efficiently, ICTs have the potential to contribute significantly to general development and poverty eradication efforts. They therefore deserve serious attention to prevent them from unintentionally becoming instruments of women's disempowerment and from broadening and deepening the gender digital divide (UNESCO 2003).

Summaries of the research problem context will be provided for Asia and MENA in their separate proposals, as these are developed following initial sub-project research proposal development workshops.

³ For a survey of African women's organisations 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>

4. Project Objectives

4.1 Research Question and Research Objectives

While the overall research area that binds all the projects together is how women in Africa, MENA countries and Asia use ICTs for empowerment, the generic research questions and focuses in each region will be defined after the initial Network initiating and proposal development workshops.

Within that broad scope, each of the sub-projects will articulate a research question that speaks to the gendered nature of women's engagement with ICTs and the implications for women's empowerment, in the interest of achieving change. The overarching rationale informing the research is that gender discrimination does not have a place in an enlightened world. Furthermore, women are crucial to the transformation of societies. [The Millennium Development Goals](#) fortunately acknowledge both the importance of the contributions women, as people and as women, are making to the well-being of humanity, while at the same time acknowledging the fact that women are facing very specific, human made challenges, because they are women.

4.2 Network Focus and Network Objectives

Through the GRACE Network, and as functions of being a network, capacity building of multi-disciplinary research teams will continue to take place, there is a forum for knowledge sharing, and researchers will be personally empowered in quantitative, qualitative and action research methodologies. This will mean specifically that

- research networks will be continued in Africa and proposed in Asia and MENA countries that can do ongoing gender and ICT research.
- A research base will be formed in various institutions throughout Africa and potentially Asia and MENA countries that can contribute to the debates around gender and ICT issues.
- The knowledge which will be generated will influence policy at local, national and regional/global levels through:
 - o Broadening researchers' capacities to influence policy
 - o Expanding policymakers' knowledge of ICT and gender issues
 - o Influencing formal policy regimes (i.e., documents and processes)

Furthermore, it is envisaged that the networks, which will be grounded in, and existing for the purpose of research, will generate opportunities to:

- Contribute to the knowledge of how researchers functioning in networks use ICTs in their knowledge construction processes.
- Contribute to the methodological debates on the quality of qualitative and action research processes and research education processes in international ICT-based networks.
- Reflect on what are the factors which keep this research network alive, interactive and sustainable, how the network itself has been an empowering experience for women and men researchers in Africa, and how the network developed in GRACE 1 will contribute to the future evolution of the network

5. Theoretical and Methodological Framework

5.1 Women's Devaluation and Oppression

We as humans walk the earth in the form of women and men. This difference in sex has not only been associated with appreciation, wonderment, complementarities and offspring but also with devaluation, discrimination and exploitation. Personally, socially, culturally, politically and in matters of religion, women have experienced being devalued in comparison to men. The grand narratives have failed us in our attempts to understand why the human race has needed and still needs to devalue its women so.

The dynamics that underlie and maintain the processes of this devaluation of women are intertwined with mechanisms of oppression. Women have experienced devaluation and oppression because they are women through the hands of men and women.

Women's devaluation and oppression are located in the thought patterns that define global, national and local structures, agreements and alliances, which are created, maintained and re-created by women and by men. Women's devaluation and oppression are also located in relationships, the relationships between women and men, the relationships between men and the relationships between women.

Women and men have internalized the (often culturally specific) images and myths of male superiority and female inferiority. Many have accepted these myths unquestioningly and many still do. Influencing and defining the way women and men construct their perceptions, emotions and thought patterns, these images not only lay the foundation for sexist attitudes, they also serve to justify those. While male sexism has received a fair share of attention in women and gender studies, female sexism (women being sexist towards other women) has entered mainstream feminist discourse only recently (Chesler, P., 2001). In a study of 5 continents and 19 countries, the four nations with the highest mean sexism rate included three African countries (Nigeria, Botswana, South Africa). Female sexism seems to be related to a country's mean sexism rate. Women, relative to men endorsed "benevolent sexism" in these three countries significantly more than men did. Benevolent sexism would "elicit women's cooperation in their own subordination" by idealizing traditional female stereotyped images (Glick and Fiske as quoted in Chesler, P. 2001: 138).⁴

Women's devaluation and oppression are furthermore located in the relationship women have with themselves. Steve Biko, the famous South African liberation fighter and proponent of the Black Consciousness Movement stated that the greatest weapon in the hands of the oppressor would be the mind of the oppressed. This analysis would transfer to the field of women's devaluation and oppression as the insight that the struggle for liberation and empowerment would start in and with a woman's mind.

5.2 Empowerment, women and ICTs

The perspective on empowerment, which every GRACE sub-project will have to develop individually, will be a function of that sub-project's focus on a specific aspect of women's oppression. In the same way, the meaning ICTs can have for a sub-project's target group in terms of empowerment, will be a function of this focus. ICTs are technical devices that facilitate human information and communication processes. While ICTs may not in and of themselves be either tools of oppression or of empowerment, studying their use can throw new light on both women's oppression and women's attempts for empowerment. Studying the ways ICTs are used reveals which interests are served, who is in the position to have their interests served and how these interests are served. This may bring certain aspects of

⁴ Glick, P. et al. (2000). Beyond prejudice as simple antipathy: *Hostile and benevolent sexism across cultures*. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 70 (5).

women's oppression and desire for empowerment to the foreground which while not new in themselves, could appear new to the eyes which could have noticed them before had they not become blind because of familiarity. The research approach used will unpack how empowerment is understood and given meaning by the research respondents and the researchers.

The overall research consideration of what, when, and under what conditions, does the use of an ICT become empowering or disempowering, or contribute to empowerment or disempowerment, and what is the interpretation used to make this discernment, provides the parameters for the sub-projects' research processes and establishes a shared space for the overall GRACE research effort. Asking the question what empowerment could mean for GRACE research respondents in the light of the variety of the subprojects' proposals, three main answer categories come to the fore:

- 1) Women could be so oppressed that they could not even imagine what they could wish for in terms of empowerment. They would be so accepting of the cultural gendered myths that they could for instance not wish to have or be what men have and are. They would not be able to question the status quo, let alone challenge it, because they would be completely identified with it.
- 2) There would be women who would express their perspectives on empowerment in the form of what men have and are because that would be their main frame of reference. Going against the trends of unquestioned acceptance of the status quo, these women would challenge mainstream thinking and could suffer the consequences for the way they would aspire for change.
- 3) There would be women who would want to define their ideal of empowerment not in terms of what men have and are but according to their own emerging design. These women would challenge the status quo, not because they would fight existing images and conventions, but through becoming who they really want to be.

5.3 *Theoretical and methodological convergence*

Steve Biko's analysis (realizing that the greatest weapon in the hands of the oppressor would be the mind of the oppressed) would transfer to the field of women's devaluation and oppression as the insight that the struggle for liberation and empowerment would start in and with a woman's mind. In acknowledging women's structural oppression while asserting that the struggle for liberation would have to start in them and with them, would lay the convergence between the GRACE project's theoretical position and its methodological position.

Research based in and inspired by the Critical Emancipatory Paradigm considers and treats research respondents as actors and emancipators and not as research subjects or objects. The distinction between the three paradigms: the empirical analytical, the hermeneutic interpretive and the critical emancipatory paradigm is based in Habermas' conceptualization of the knowledge interests served in and through social research (Habermas, J. 1972). While generally paradigms are under-determined by methods and methods under-determined by paradigms, there is a convergence of sorts between paradigm and main method with the critical emancipatory paradigm displaying the greatest paradigmatic freedom (Smaling, A., 1994).

The way the research respondents are framed in the critical emancipatory paradigm seems paradoxical in the light of the fact that the social analysis, which motivated the creation of the research question and the action agenda, acknowledges the fact that the research respondents experience structural inequality, disempowerment and lack of social justice. How can one treat victims as if they have the power to change the situation they are victimized by? The commitment however to produce practical, functional knowledge, the type of knowledge that can lead to change necessitates this stance. Only the ones who would have to do the actual changing would be able to lead others (and themselves) to the understandings of what that "changing" would entail (Buskens, I.: 2002). Approaching research respondents in their sovereignty and not in their victimization will lead to the type of reflective awareness in

respondents that will enable the researchers to construct the type of knowledge needed to understand the specific and localized context and dynamics of the change process. This will also be the type of knowledge that could be transferred to benefit other situations than the actual research context in the form of reflections, interventions or policy recommendations.

5.4 Virtual Action Research

GRACE involves a 2-stage research training process: starting with in-depth qualitative training and practice in the first phase, it moves to action research in the second stage. The second stage training, engaged with the continuing Africa GRACE teams, will enable researchers to master the transformative methodologies that are introduced in the first stage.

GRACE 1 was not an action research project. The majority of research undertaken by the various site teams was qualitative and exploratory in nature. While the researchers intend to eventually facilitate adoption of the research recommendations by policy makers, actions and interventions as such were not part of the research process and were not subjected to the reflective cycle characteristic of typical action research (Mash, R.J. & Meulenbergh-Buskens, I.: 2001).

The researchers' commitment to women's empowerment however, which was foregrounded in GRACE from the beginning, forced GRACE to position itself within the Critical Emancipatory paradigm. As such GRACE Phase 1 positioned itself as a "virtual" action research project. This means in the daily research reality that women are treated as actors and emancipators and not as powerless victims. It also means that the researchers have to realize that empowerment means different things for different women, that empowerment even means different things for their respondents than what it does to them. This does not mean that researchers are not able to entertain their own analysis of what empowerment in the context of their research project means. On the contrary, having one's own conceptualizations conscious and clearly formulated facilitates the dialogues which are necessary to discern what approach would contribute most to the construction of practical and functional knowledge.

While GRACE 2 will provide in-depth qualitative training, and introduce quantitative approaches that are coherent, to the researchers new to the project to lay a foundation of thorough questioning and analysis, the main thrust in Africa will be to build on the training that the continuing researchers have received by shifting on the one hand from interpretive approaches to approaches that are transformative and induce change in themselves and on the other hand, to approaches that facilitate sustainable and systematic policy influence.

5.5 Conceptual and theoretical framework

This project aims to explore and affect the ways in which women in Africa (and Asia and MENA countries) use ICTs to empower themselves, the external, structural barriers as well as the internal factors which prevent or enable them to use ICTs to their advantage and the strategies they employ to overcome impediments. The name GRACE has been inspired by this focus: "Gender Research in Africa/Asia into ICTs for Empowerment".

As in GRACE 1, initial research proposal writing workshops will be held with each group of new researchers, and with the continuing Africa GRACE researchers. The participants will be given the freedom to formulate their research question and develop their research proposals in response to their personal research interest. This theoretical and methodological freedom will result in a collection of very specific proposals, from which the Research Director and Research Coordinator will then develop over-arching research proposals for each region that embrace the individual projects. This overarching proposal will include an articulation of the explicit and implicit theoretical and methodological understandings revealed in the sub-project proposals as the starting point for future methodological and theoretical discussions and selection of relevant literature.

While the emphasis on gender and empowerment will continue to inform the overall GRACE focus, every project will have to engage these debates in its own way. The main paradigm in which the sub projects will design and execute their research will be Emancipatory Action Research.

5.6 Emancipatory Action Research (Buskens, I & Earl, S. 2008)

The term "action research" was coined in 1946 by psychologist Kurt Lewin. He saw this category of inquiry not in the conventional way – as a dispassionate undertaking that seeks so-called objective knowledge – but instead as a form of social action. Over the years, many types of action research have been developed. Nowadays, the term emancipatory action research is applied to a variety of approaches that focus on participative inquiry and practice for social development. This paper sets out the authors' particular interpretation and application of the method.

If we consider Habermas' classification of research on the basis of three "knowledge interests" – empirical-analytical, hermeneutic-interpretive, and critical-emancipatory – action research would respond logically to the third category (Habermas 1981; Smaling 1994). In other words, action researchers are concerned that their work contributes to a better world – in Goran Carstadt's phrase, "a world worthy of human aspiration" (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p. 12). The method is oriented towards a future that could be realized, or even that should be realized (Ludema, Cooperrider, & Barrett, 2001). The vision of the future that is articulated within any action research project is often "bigger" than the project's immediate goal, thus allowing the project to align itself more broadly, within a wider collaboration of community and academic interests (Senge & Scharmer, 2001).

Emancipatory action research seeks to use knowledge processes to inform action. In an international development context, action researchers seek to improve the lives of marginalized people both through the process of enquiry as well as through the practical application of the research findings. They operate within a context of change, advancing toward social justice and ecological well-being. As such they are concerned about issues of power, gender, and ethnicity, not only in society at large but also within the research milieu itself (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, Introduction).

While action researchers do consider questions of research quality and rigor, the concepts of validity, reliability, and methodological objectivity as traditionally used in the empirical analytical paradigm are not considered helpful, as they are perceived to be discordant with the fundamental nature of action research. Sometimes these concepts can be applied in such a way that justice can be done to the practice of action research, as for instance Smaling does (1995, 1998). In general, however, criteria for good action research would focus instead on such qualities as participation, practical outcome, the plurality of knowing, the significance of the effort, and whether the effort leads to a new and enduring structure (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, Conclusion).

Emancipatory action research is often evolutionary in nature; that is, the characteristics of a particular intervention will be developed as it goes along, in collaboration with all participants. To put it another way, practical knowledge is constructed by way of dialogue and action. Action research is focused on learning, and therefore may lead to changes in the very process itself. Thus there is an affinity toward "research capacity development" since at the outset the participants often may not have the necessary knowledge and skills (Meulenberg-Buskens 1996, 1998; Ludema et al., 2001; Senge & Scharmer, 2001).

Emancipatory action researchers know that their calling demands they be deeply involved in the process, and furthermore that they themselves will likely change as a result. Thus they should be able and willing to acknowledge and process their own thoughts and emotions (Buskens, 2002; Wadsworth, 2001). Self-awareness is a crucial quality in this type of inquiry. Whether one engages in a first-person exploration of the self, in a second-person analysis of

colleagues or partners, or in a third-person investigation into issues such as race, gender, or class, all action research has an inward-looking dimension (Senge & Scharmer, 2001).

GRACE 1 was not set up as an action research project; it was based on the premise of exploratory qualitative research. That does not mean that our commitment to the purpose of empowerment was less pertinent. Whilst this focus was not operationalized in every research decision, it informed every research decision and was considered at all relevant research moments.

GRACE aims to contribute to the transformation of Africa, and with phase 2 to introduce this process in Asia and MENA countries, through raising the issues of gender and empowerment and ICTs in the context of development and the growing digital gender divide. Whilst GRACE 2 will continue to engage exploratory qualitative research with the new members of GRACE, with the GRACE 1 researchers continuing their GRACE journey, a shift will be made to action research approaches. Practically this may mean that some GRACE teams may want to engage Appreciative Inquiry approaches with vulnerable groups, focusing on the most disempowered women, whilst other teams may choose to work with policy makers and social leaders to contribute to positive changes in women's lives.

While our focus on gender and empowerment makes a completely inductive approach impossible (inductive meaning that all the categories that cluster meaning would be generated from the data), this does not imply that as a project we have chosen an analytic framework already. We envisage that the concepts to give meaning to women's experiences may be constructed during the research process itself. Some researchers may find inspiration in the various traditions of women's studies / gender studies and / or within the ethnographic and ethnomethodological research traditions.

5.7 Methods

While our general gender perspective has informed our choice of mainly in-depth qualitative and action research methods because we want to understand women and their lived realities on their own terms and affect sustainable and systematic change, this does not mean that we are adverse to using surveys or statistical evidence when this enhances our understanding. Sometimes, quantitative data is needed to understand the specific gendered nature of the realities women find themselves in. Recognizing this, quantitative approaches will also be introduced through the proposal development and methodology workshops.

5.7.1 Main data sources

The main target group for the empirical aspect of the research are the women and where relevant the men who are using (or not using) ICTs in relation to the specific sub-projects' main research questions. Other people who can offer a perspective or who are in the position to influence the lived realities and perspectives of the main target groups will also be studied. To understand the various contexts which impact on the main target groups and the various research sites, theoretical and research literature reviews will be done, the relevant demographics of each research site will be gathered and the political and policy factors impacting on the target groups and the research sites will be monitored continuously through documents, newspapers, media reports etc.

5.7.2 Main methods

Main methods will be grounded in the exploratory and iterative cycles of qualitative research and the transformative nature of action research. This means that participant observation;

observation; informal interviewing and depth interviews will be employed, next to dialogue, workshopping and building partnerships through participation and consultation.

At the same time however, by involving a senior quantitative methodologist / statistician, the researchers may choose to evolve or enrich their research focus by employing quantitative research designs, methods and techniques which could include survey research and experimental designs. All researchers will do their own literature review, specific to their project, while the coordinating team will distribute relevant literature and references, and will engage a literature review that considers the space the GRACE Network holds as an overall project.

5.7.3 Data Analysis

Because the research projects are as a whole inductive in design while maintaining the focus of gender and empowerment, the Nvivo qualitative data package will be introduced, or re-offered as a tool to assist the researchers in their data analysis.⁵ The Nvivo package allows the researchers to introduce external theoretical concepts as well as stimulate inductive theory construction. The potential use of one analysis package by multiple researchers could enable us to compile sub data sets pertaining to issues which cut across the various projects. Furthermore, when all the data is captured with Nvivo, secondary analyses by other researchers may be done in the future. Given the fact that the data will be of a rich and detailed nature, it can be foreseen that the researchers' first analysis, which will be guided by the specific focus of the greater project, will not exhaust the data. Capturing the data in such a form that other researchers who might have a different purpose and theoretical framework can access it is an effective way to ensure that the researchers' efforts are put to use optimally. At the same time, the researchers who are choosing to take on quantitative designs, will be supported in their choice and use of quantitative data analysis and statistics.

5.7.4 Research Participants

In terms of the target groups, the various sub-projects will span the range of approaches taken when doing research with women (Maynard, M. & Purvis, J., 1994: 15-18).

- 1) Pre-eminent concern with women alone. In this case the research question often reflects women's oppression so clearly that exclusive focus on women is not only warranted but crucial.
- 2) Women in relation and relationship to men, although examined from a women's perspective while trying to understand how women's experiences in a male world are structured.
- 3) Women who experience apart from gender other forms of oppression based on such factors as for instance ethnicity (race), rural descent, class (education), and age.
- 4) The fourth perspective, focusing on women in relation and in relationship to other women, within the dynamics of patriarchy may yet arise due to the focus in some of the projects and the involved and intensive nature of the qualitative research process (Chesler, P. 2003).

The mix of respondent groups will inevitably create a forum for discussion within GRACE. The understandings about research with women which will result from this discussion may provide the project with exciting opportunities to contribute to the research debates in gender studies and feminist research.

⁵ www.qsrinternational.com

6. Striving Towards Quality

In the striving towards quality in qualitative research and action research, certain capacities are key. While these capacities have a skill aspect to them, they are often also qualities of "being". The most prominent of these is the researcher's capacity to be reflexive (Mason, J. 1996; Meulenber-Buskens, I. 1997). Role-taking, and reflective empathising are other important aspects of a successful research attitude. Open-mindedness and open-heartedness when converging in dialogical openness form the foundation of successful communication (Smaling, A., 1998, 1995).

By triangulating data sources and methods, researchers can accomplish a higher level of validity and reliability (Mason, J. 1996; Smaling, A., 1987).

Important in the striving towards research quality, especially in action research, will also be the nature of the communication between the researchers. Dialogical inter-subjectivity is an important methodological norm in qualitative and participatory research (Buskens, I., 2002; Meulenber-Buskens, I., 1997). Grounded in Habermas' concept of communicative symmetry, it presupposes a research dialogue that would be as democratic as possible and where nobody uses a power position to influence the dialogue. In other words, extraneous influences or an ulterior motive or an external agenda would be kept out. It would be the research coordinating team's task to guard this space to hold it as "symmetrical in communication" as possible while keeping themselves accountable for this management towards all network members.

To this end, the Research Director intends to document the research dialogue (between the researchers and between the researchers and the coordinating team) and offer her reflections at regular intervals for discussion to the researchers. When the GRACE members would give their permission, the Research Director plans to write about this in order to contribute to the debates on the striving towards quality in qualitative research and qualitative research education. As a methodologist this area reflects the Research Director's basic scientific research interest.

7. Ethical Considerations

At all times the commitment that no harm should come to respondents in and through the nature of the research process will be adhered to. Consent processes will be designed by each GRACE team individually and will be subjected to their respondents' informed consent. Identities will be kept confidential if that would be the respondents' wish or when the researchers can foresee that harm could arise in the future from divulging these. When research respondents want to be acknowledged this will also be accommodated.

8. Research Capacity Building and Support

Asia and MENA Workshops

8.1 Network Initiating Workshops (5 days)

These workshops will be held with Asia and MENA in August 2008, following the initial planning meetings in these two regions. At these workshops the researchers will get in touch with their research passions and translate these into a research question; they will develop a sense of the type of research approach they would like to engage and the way they would like to collaborate with each other in a regional research network. The workshops will include the regional partners and the IDRC staff responsible for the regions. After this workshop the

researchers will write their own research proposal whilst being able to draw on mentoring and support from the GRACE Research Director, the quantitative consultant and any other Advisory Board member they would want to engage.

8.2 Proposal Finalization Workshops (11 days)

These workshops will be held with Asia and MENA teams and IDRC staff who wish to participate in January 2009. At these workshops, the researchers will consolidate their methodological approaches, finalize their research designs, receive qualitative and quantitative research training (including use of the qualitative analysis software Nvivo), learn (or review) how to use digital cameras and recorders and learn how to edit sounds and images using their computers.

The research training modules will emphasise practice of research skills, building of theoretical and methodological reflective and creative capacity, introduction to quantitative methodologies for change, the integration of outcome mapping methodology into the research design, the practice of outcome mapping process skills and the establishment of a sustainable practice of researcher self-care.

In consultation with the Project/Research Director, the researchers will refine and rework their sub-project proposals into operational research designs. Furthermore, the researchers will, in consultation with the Project /Research Director, design their own researcher-development and self-management plans.

8.2.1 Methodological and Theoretical Reflection

Qualitative and action research approaches challenge researchers to be reflexive. Research with women furthermore requires of researchers not only to be reflexive but to be methodologically innovative as well. In order to get data that is "less culturally edited" and more "true" to women's lived and experienced realities, ideally researchers should be able to design, when necessary, their own research techniques (Anderson, K. & Jack, D.C., 1998; Buskens, I., 2003). This capacity for methodological innovation is grounded in a thorough insight into interpersonal communication and knowledge construction processes. Finally, the majority of GRACE researchers will share not only gender but also ethnic background with their research respondents. Doing research as a "native anthropologist" will demand that researchers make an effort to make the familiar "anthropologically strange" while not falling into the trap of "othering" their research respondents (Rodriguez, C., 2001). As it is very tempting to assume meanings before they have been established, the capacity to prevent premature closure of the processes of perception and data-analysis will be trained throughout the workshop in various ways.

8.2.2 Research Skills

In terms of research skills, the following techniques will be practiced:

- ~ Anthropological fieldwork methods such as participant observation, observation, informal interviewing, writing field notes, constructing time-budgets, keeping diaries, constructing a situational and context specific analysis.
- ~ Sociological depth interviewing techniques with emphasis on clarifying, summarising, probing, interpreting and confronting.
- ~ Action research techniques, such as dialogue (participatory interviewing including self disclosure and external confrontation), workshopping and research education designed specifically for every respondent group.
- ~ Focus group discussions with an emphasis on awareness of group dynamics and non-verbal communication.
- ~ Quantitative methods that support the emphasis on research for change

- ~ Nvivo training: computer-aided qualitative data-analysis whereby researchers will practice with their own data.
- ~ Writing skills, which imply the skills to construct data by writing and the skills to represent data through writing.

8.2.3 Outcome Mapping Methodology and Action Research: Coherence and Cross Pollination

The coherence and potential for “cross pollination” between action research and outcome mapping methodology will be explored with the African GRACE researchers who are continuing their research journey. and with the new researchers in Asia and MENA if they decide to go forward with the GRACE process)

Outcome Mapping is a planning, monitoring, and evaluation methodology that defines a program's outcomes as changes in the behaviour of direct partners. The process has three broad stages: intentional design, outcome and performance monitoring, and evaluation planning. Outcome Mapping promotes participation and is most effective when it includes program staff and partners throughout all three stages.

The method focuses on how programs facilitate change, rather than on how they control or cause change. Outcome Mapping encourages programs to be intentional about those with whom they are working and the changes they are working towards. It looks at the logical links between interventions and outcomes, because the complexity of development processes together with the contexts in which they occur often make it impossible to attribute results to any particular intervention. As such Outcome Mapping is focused on contribution, not on attribution. Furthermore, it locates a program's goals in larger development challenges that are beyond the reach of the program, and so it encourages the risk-taking that is necessary to achieve real social change (Earl, S., Carden, F. & Smutylo, T. 2001).

Outcome Mapping is consistent with action research in terms of (a) paradigmatic thinking, (b) process management, and (c) capacity level.

First, in both Outcome Mapping and Emancipatory Action Research, the knowledge quest proceeds in the service of social change and development. The knowledge sought is practical; it can make a difference in people's lives. The human element is emphasized. Whereas most evaluation focuses on changes in state, Outcome Mapping looks for changes in behavior, and thus it may be termed “people-centred.” Similarly, emancipatory action research is often characterized as research “for the people, by the people, with the people.”

Both approaches are unashamedly partisan. Practitioners openly embrace their values and belief systems, and formulate their dreams and plan their actions out of these. Both approaches, while allowing for an individual dream-based focus, seek to collaborate, create, and act upon knowledge in company with others. Neither approach seeks linear or causal explanations, but seeks alliance in systems thinking, and respects the contexts in which these processes take place.

Second, both emancipatory action research and Outcome Mapping are open-ended activities. The commitment to learning and the acceptance of what that learning might bring to the process itself require that facilitators have a flexible attitude toward change. In action research, research questions, interventions, methods, and techniques may need to be adjusted as things go along. Likewise, in Outcome Mapping the vision, the mission, outcome challenges, and progress markers* all may change. In both approaches, the dedication to the dream paradoxically provides a clear direction on the one hand, while on the other hand creates not only the possibility but almost the necessity for change.

Both Outcome Mapping and Emancipatory Action Research are grounded in an iterative cycle of planning, design, action, and reflection. Every step in the Outcome Mapping journey is a

* Progress markers are a set of graduated indicators of changed behaviours for a boundary partner that focus on the depth or quality of change.

destination, and every moment in the action research process is a research result. Both methods are built on participation and dialogue. There are however no blueprints or recipes for how to elicit this dialogue; every situation requires its own response and is furthermore in constant flux.

In both methods, the investigation proceeds on three levels. In action research one speaks of first person (self-inquiry), second person (relating to co-researchers and partners), and third person research (relating to issues such as race, gender, and class). Outcome Mapping, on the other hand, monitors the changes in behavior of the program's boundary partners, the strategies that a program employs to encourage change in its partners, and the performance of the program as an organizational unit.

Third, in both approaches reflection and self-awareness are important, and the capacity to engage effectively in interpersonal communication, to listen, and to share is essential. The willingness to bring all of yourself to the process and to allow inner change to occur require self-confidence and trust. The personal qualities one develops as an action researcher are remarkably similar to those needed to engage effectively in Outcome Mapping (Buskens, I & Earl, S. 2008).

Like the facilitation of focus group discussions, outcome mapping methodology processes require that facilitators possess the capacity to listen well, to assess power dynamics and to hold a shared group space where diversity can unfold. The facilitation of outcome mapping processes requires additional capacities: facilitators must be able to create the space and provide the structure for consistent and continuous alignment with the project's purpose; stimulate group consensus and assist a group in translating their dream into practical outcomes. During the workshop, these types of group management skills will be grounded in task and self management exercises.

In terms of knowledge construction skills, outcome mapping involves the construction of propositional knowledge that reflects the participants' practical knowledge acquired in the action process, is informed by the participants' experiential knowledge constructed by being in the world and by engaging the action process and finally requires the participants' skill to present knowledge. This multi-layered knowledge construction capacity will be practiced in the workshop through various reflection and writing exercises.

8.2.4 Researcher Self Development

All qualitative and action researchers are forever engaged in a process of ongoing learning and self-development. To this end, the researchers will design their self-development plans during the workshop in consultation with the Research director and the research coordinator. It can be foreseen that their plans will have to be adapted through the course of the research project once the researchers develop more insight into their particular research process and into their personal capacities.

8.2.5 Researcher Self Care

Maintaining a reflexive attitude, which in itself is change-stimulating, can be very demanding and anxiety provoking for researchers. Commitment to this attitude of reflexivity is however crucial in the striving towards quality in qualitative research and action research. In order to make this attitude feasible and sustainable in daily research reality, researchers have to learn how to embed it in a general practice of self-care (Foucault, M., 1995; Buskens, I., 2002). Because the GRACE project will speak to the researchers in many ways, involving aspects which are integral to their identities, it can be envisaged that the researchers will change through the research process. It can also be assumed that this process of change may evoke stress.

Throughout the workshops, the researchers will be given the tools and the time to practice self care. They will also be given the space to discover what self-care would mean individually for

them in the context of their specific research project. As the researchers are unique individuals and their projects will differ widely from each other, the researchers will have to construct a self care discipline which will suit them and their specific reality. Their self-management plans will be tied into their self-development plans and will be discussed with the Research Coordinator and Research Director during the workshop. It can be foreseen that the self management plans will change through the course of the research project to follow the researchers' progress and challenges.

The Research coordination team will also develop what self-care means to them in the context of their roles in the GRACE project, and these will be integrated with their own self-development plans.

8.2.6 Building the ICT skills and capacity of participants

As one element of the research capacity building, participants will learn how to use new tools to support their research work and the developing GRACE networks. To ensure that the ICT learning process and tools used resonate with each individual participant the ICT needs of everyone involved in the project will be assessed.

The results of this assessment will inform both the ICT capacity building to be undertaken during the methodology workshop and the ways in which we customize and provide ongoing support.

Learning encounters

During the methodology workshop time will be dedicated to ICT training, particularly upgrading how researchers can use digital cameras and digital audio recorders in their research. They will refresh how to edit audio and images on their computers using freely available open source software. Nvivo training -- computer-aided qualitative data-analysis – will also be provided, whereby researchers will practice with their own data.

Preference will be given to free and open source software tools to the degree possible. Additional knowledge sharing platforms will be introduced as the need is identified by the emerging networks.

The use of these tools will enhance the final research product and build a valuable digital photo and voice archive for the GRACE website and future exhibitions.

Africa Workshops

8.3 *Proposal Development Workshop (5 days)*

A 5-day proposal development workshop will be held in September 2008 with the continuing Africa GRACE researchers. The researchers will bring a well thought through draft research proposal to the workshop identifying and articulating their own research passions within the overarching focus on gender, ICTs and empowerment, and capturing their own theories of change, and dreams in terms of research capacity development. Following this workshop, the GRACE researchers will fully develop their research proposals, prior to the first methodology workshop in Africa.

8.4 *Methodology Training and Design Workshop (12 days)*

At this workshop in January 2009, the Africa researchers will consolidate their methodological approaches and finalize their research designs. The teams will come to the workshop having already piloted their proposed design. Starting from the network's initial methodological grounding in qualitative research for transformation, we aim to evolve this focus into action

directed approaches, participatory policy research, quantitative approaches that are coherent with the transformative objectives of the project, mastering the transformative qualitative techniques and methodologies that were initiated and explored in GRACE 1, and integrating outcome mapping methodology in the research designs. These approaches will be explored in the context of a sustainable practice of researcher self-care. The workshop will also include a review of the qualitative analysis software Nvivo, and review use of digital cameras and recorders, including how to edit sounds and images using computers.

The workshops will also function as an opportunity to establish the GRACE Management regimen. In consultation with the Project/Research Director and the Research Coordinator (in the case of Africa), the researchers will refine and rework their sub-project proposals into operational research designs. These research designs will be the basis for the contract between the researchers and the GRACE Project, whereby the Project /Research Director and the Research Coordinator will act as the project's representatives. Furthermore, the researchers will, in consultation with the Project /Research Director and Research Coordinator, design their own researcher-development and self-management plans. These plans will be added as addenda to their personal contract.

8.5 Research Sharing and Writing Workshop (8 days)

In GRACE Africa, after the data collection process is completed, a third research workshop will be held in November 2009. This workshop comprises two parts: the researchers will present their data in the form of a paper and in addition, in any other way they would find suitable such as through visual or audio-visual means. A writer will facilitate an experiential creative writing workshop where the researchers will work with their own material. It is envisaged that the researchers leave this workshop with at least an outline for a chapter and/ or article. Furthermore, it is expected that during this period certain shared interests and research foci will emerge amongst the researchers and that ideas for new research projects will be developed.

Integrated into the workshop will be time and venues for self-care, reflection, and consideration of one's self-development and self-management plans.

8.6 Writing and Dissemination Workshop (9 days)

This fourth workshop in Africa will be held in May 2010 and the focus will be on integration of the thinking and analysis that has emerged from the research and report writing undertaken. A number of resource persons will be invited to give feedback with the intent to stimulate debate and inspiration towards further dissemination of the research results in various ways. The researchers will also advance their research writing skills. A scientific writer will assist the researchers in writing for scientific publications. The second GRACE book will be discussed and the outline and purpose for the book will be defined in dialogue and on the basis of the various possible research inputs.

8.7 Ongoing research capacity building and support

Ongoing capacity building during the research process will take place in several ways:

- Researchers will engage their personal development and self-care plans;
- Researchers will send in field notes every two weeks;
- Researchers will send in a progress report every month;
- Researchers will receive feedback from the Research director and Research Coordinators on their field notes and progress reports;
- Researchers will be given the opportunity to engage the Research Director and the Research Coordinators in a personal, individualised research dialogue;

- Researchers will have the opportunity to engage in an open research dialogue online which will be facilitated by the project coordination team. In this open research dialogue, research decisions, experiences and process learning as well as the content of the data will be shared and discussed.

9. ICT Capacity Building and Support

The knowledge sharing and ICT support and capacity building component of GRACE will have 2 main components:

- ~ Supporting the research process and research capacity building
- ~ Building the ICT skills and capacity of participants (see Methodolgy workshop, 8.3.6)

Project management and research process support:

Project management communication and information needs will be assessed based on the systems used and the needs experienced in GRACE 1. We anticipate that tools and platforms that will continue to be of value will include:

- E-mailing lists
- our GRACE web site
- project blogs
- internet telephony

As the complexity of the sharing on the GRACE Network e-lists increases, we will adapt and expand the tools used to facilitate the sharing and communication, such as through added features in the members section of our web site, through project blogs, through additional specialized lists, through pod casting, and other options.

While the new information technologies enable such an international network to work effectively, earlier forms of technology continue to be vital. For example, the Project Leader's availability by telephone (land line) is a valuable aspect of her leadership role. GRACE 2 will budget for a toll-free phone number for reaching the Project Leader

10. Evaluation, Learning and Advocacy

At the proposal finalization and methodology training workshops the research coordination team will present a proposal to the researchers regarding using outcome mapping methodology⁶ as a monitoring and evaluation framework to contribute to drawing out learning across the different sub-projects. As is discussed before (8.2.3), while outcome mapping is designed as a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation method for development programs, it can function within and complement research designs based in the critical emancipatory paradigm very well. Outcome mapping and critical emancipatory research designs share important paradigmatic dimensions and process perspectives. These research designs can accommodate all steps and aspects of outcome mapping methodology coherently and congruently. Outcome mapping will give the GRACE researchers the scope, the concepts and the tools to engage reflection, monitoring and evaluation of the research outcomes in consultation with their stakeholders (boundary partners). Using outcome mapping will thus make the research design more coherent with the critical emancipatory paradigm. Furthermore, the outcome mapping processes will enable the researchers to involve stakeholders from the onset of their research effort. Building these relationships at an early stage will facilitate advocacy of the research recommendations when this will become relevant.

⁶ http://web.idrc.ca/en/ev-9330-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html

Using outcome mapping will also enable the GRACE project to map the convergences and divergences among the researchers' visions of the policy and social transformation they would like to make a contribution to. This monitoring and evaluation framework will also be integrated into the GRACE project as a whole.

11. Project Outputs and Dissemination

Research and policy advocacy

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 will not only produce such research, it will also expand 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 Asia and MENA) 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 is on supporting and guiding the mastery of transformative research techniques and methodologies, to the degree that international networks of GRACE researchers (in Africa and in Asia and MENA) 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 policymaking processes one is trying to influence, and the particular socio-economic and political conjuncture.

Dissemination

The dissemination strategy will be finalized early in the second year for the project. The dissemination will aim at national-level engagement through conference presentations, article publications, and dialogue with policy makers as well as with non-profit organizations and the private sector commercial interests, which may be operating on both national and international levels. Written materials, such as research reports and articles will be posted on the GRACE web site (www.GRACE-Network.net).

The project aims to deliver the following outputs:

- ~ Sub-project research reports (*Africa 14*)
- ~ An overall project report
- ~ Policy briefs (institutional, provincial, national)
- ~ Conference presentations and journal articles
- ~ Mailing lists/d-groups (archived)
- ~ GRACE network
- ~ An edited book (Zed, Sage, IDRC); hard copy and e-book/CD
- ~ Ongoing expansion and updates to our web site
- ~ Training materials
- ~ Video record of the GRACE process and experience

The key players in the process of dissemination, along with the researchers themselves and the research coordination team, will be publishers, distributors, journals, policy makers, community based organizations, non-governmental organizations, universities, national and international donors.

The Potential Barriers to Outputs and Dissemination as foreseen at this moment are:

- ~ The researchers could perform less and less well than foreseen.
- ~ The commitment and discipline of the individual researchers to sustaining the focus and self-awareness required for mastering transformative research techniques and approaches may be challenged by other commitments and wane over time
- ~ The articles and papers could lack the quality to be accepted for publication.
- ~ Sub-project research teams may fracture
- ~ Political opposition could play a role because this research questions the status quo and this could especially limit the policy influence the project intends to have.
- ~ Local to national contexts could be affected by natural or political instabilities that disrupt/delay the researchers' access to their project sites and respondents.

12. Project Management

A main coordination challenge that faced the GRACE 1 pan African project was holding a constructive and creative tension between the forces of convergence and those of divergence. As the overall research design honors the exploratory nature of the projects and given the fact that the various country teams have methodological and theoretical sovereignty in their research, the coordination had to create such a space and provide such a structure that dialogue between the countries retained the potential for mutual recognition and thus fostered learning, sharing and network building. Based on the emergence of interconnecting themes from the research, and shared research process, analysis and writing reflections and interests, it is apparent that the space and structure created in GRACE 1 was appropriate. This challenge will be faced again in GRACE 2 with the exploratory nature of the project in GRACE Africa continuing and with the potential emergence of Asia and MENA GRACE Networks.

A second challenge is the research capacity building. Promoting the striving for research quality amidst a network of activists and academics whose experience with empirical social research in general and iterative exploratory qualitative research in particular varies greatly, requires innovative and creative solutions.

A third challenge is that coordination and research capacity building has to happen mainly through the use of ICTs. Face to face communication is limited. The Project/Research Director or Research coordinator will visit all projects (Africa) only once and there will be three intensive workshops in Africa in the duration of the project. In GRACE 1 various forms of communication with the researchers and research teams were used. In addition to the annual workshops which were crucial learning and network formation venues, the coordination team communicated through our e-lists with the full group of researchers, we wrote to each team, and each researcher, directly, and at times each of us (Research Director and Research Coordinator) communicated with researchers individually, then with each other. These communications were at times supplemented with skype or landline phone calls. These communication approaches will be continued in GRACE 2, and adjusted to the needs of the new teams and new environments of the next phase.

As research coordination and capacity building of this nature has not often been done yet at such a scale in Africa, the learning from our first phase will be beneficial for GRACE 2 in Africa, and for introducing a GRACE approach in Asia and MENA. It will also be informative for other projects that have similar coordination, research capacity building and networking objectives.

The fourth challenge is the language diversity within the network. As the Research Director understands and reads French and Portuguese, while commanding English fully, the individual communication between most of the researchers in Africa and the research coordinating team will not be a problem. The Research Coordinator for GRACE Africa is developing her French capacity. Asia and MENA are also home to numerous languages. It is foreseen that the working language for GRACE start-up work in Asia will be English. Language needs will need to be taken into consideration when developing the staffing for GRACE Asia and MENA, should these projects continue to develop. Translators accompany the full workshop process, and are included as contractors to the project for written translations continuously as needed.

The following measures are meant to ensure the quality of the research and the integrity of the network:

- ~ The contracts with the sub-projects will contain milestones of performance: during the phases of data collection and data analysis the researchers will send a site progress report to the Research Coordinator every month and personal field notes every 2 weeks.
- ~ The researchers will get clear guidelines pertaining to their research attitude and research engagement.
- ~ Clear criteria for continued involvement within the network as well as grounds for termination will be developed.
- ~ The relation between the GRACE network and the GRACE research project is relatively straightforward and simple for the duration of the GRACE project. The ultimate purpose of the GRACE Network will be to maximally and optimally contribute to the coordination of the research process and to the facilitation of research capacity building. Before the completion of GRACE 2, the network must be re-assessed and a different purpose may have to be formulated.
- ~ The network support platforms and process will be led by the needs of the research coordination and research capacity building process.
- ~ The Research Director is responsible for the process of facilitating the researchers on their research journeys and for holding the space in which they can do their research and develop themselves. The Research Director is furthermore responsible for the best possible research capacity building process which is feasible and viable in the context of this project.
- ~ Rules for the type of communication that will be aligned to the project's purpose will be defined in a process, which will be facilitated by the Project /Research Director working closely with others in the research coordination team.

12.1 Staffing

The project team for GRACE 2 has been expanded from that of GRACE 1. A Research Assistant position for Africa has been added, as has a Project Administrator. It is envisaged that the Research Assistant will work closely with the Project Director and Research Coordinator and enhance her skills and capacities such that she would be prepared to move into coordination roles in future initiatives. The Project Administrator will be a pivotal position in the project, relieving the research coordination team of the majority of the project administration, and having a strong understanding of the multiple aspects of the project.

Project/Research Director	Ineke Buskens	.8 FTE
Project and Research Coordinator (Africa)	Anne Webb	.87 FTE (35 hrs/week)
Research Assistant (Africa)	To be contracted	.5 FTE
Project Administrator	To be contracted	1 FTE
Accountant	Richard Grant	Part time
Lawyer	Grant Marinus	On retainer
Translators	Fatima Timjerdine, Gwynneth	Can\$.07/word
Web administrator	Tatjana Vukoja	5 hrs/wk
Nvivo training contractor		On contract
ICT trainer – digital recording		On contract
Quantitative research methodologist	To be contracted	On contract

The **research coordination team** will consist of the Project/Research Director, Research Coordinator and Research Assistant.

External Advisory Group: To assist the Research Coordination Team, a group of people, well-versed in qualitative research, gender and empowerment in Africa, Asia and MENA will be invited to provide external input regarding particular topics and processes.

The constitution of this group, and its terms of reference will be lead by the Project /Research Director and approved by the Research Coordination Team.

Responsibilities of the research coordinating team members:

The **Project/Research Director** will maintain overall responsibility for the project management of GRACE, and for integrating the research aspects to be undertaken by the research coordinators and the researchers.

The Project/**Research Director** and **Research Coordinator** as a team are responsible for ensuring that the project meets all its deliverables and that the research outputs are of high quality and value. Overall project management includes:

- co-facilitating the research dialogue
- following every project's research decisions and communicating with the researchers about those decisions.
- providing the researchers with online /or e-mail assistance in planning and implementing their research projects
- Research Coordinator to work with Project Administrator and Web Administrator to build and facilitate the online workspaces of the research network
- ensuring the online information sharing platforms (public and private) are up to date
- providing researchers with assistance in using online workspaces ensuring that the project is operated according to budget
- authorizing payments
- managing contracts with researchers, and with contracted personnel
- reporting to IDRC
- liaising with related initiatives/research networks
- supporting the researchers in completing their research proposals

Reporting

The project staff and contractors will report to the Project/Research Director, unless otherwise stipulated.

Internal capacity building

It is important to ensure that the Research Coordinator and Research Assistant are able to benefit from the mentoring and skills transfer provided by the Project /Research Director. The hope is that these project staff will continue to be involved in gender research for women's empowerment beyond the life of this research project.

13. Project Work Plan

The following 3-year work plan comprises the activities of the research coordinating team on the basis of a qualitative multi-site study protocol that would be congruent with the overall focus of GRACE. A more detailed work plan will be developed for each region (Africa and Asia and MENA) in the preparation phase of GRACE 2.

YEAR 1 – First 6 months (March –August 2008)

Preparation, sub-project research proposal development workshops

Persons	Timing	Task
Project / Research Director, Research Coordinator	March 15-31 '08	Submit GRACE manuscript to Zed Books
Project / Research Director, Research Coordinator	March/April '08	Develop job descriptions and contracts (with lawyer), advertise, select and hire vacant positions: Research Assistant, Project Administrator
Project /Research Director, Research Coordinator	March/April	Confirm continuing Graciousnesses commitment to GRACE 2
Project/Research Director. Research Coordinator	March-May	Engage GRACE Africa researchers in writing their papers, articles and finalizing their reports for web publication
Project Administrator	April	Organize logistics for planning workshop in Asia, and in MENA for May
Project/Research Director, Research Coordinator	April/May	Review GRACE book manuscript responding to external reviewers' input
Project/Research Director	May	Planning workshop - Asia
Project/Research Director	May	Planning workshop - MENA
Project Administrator	May/June	Set up initial communication platforms for GRACE Asia and GRACE MENA
Project/Research Director, Research Coordinator, research assistant	June - September	Engage GRACE Africa in evolving their research projects, formulating new questions and exploring additional methodologies (on ongoing basis until September 2008 when the Proposal Development workshop takes place)
Project Administrator	June/July	Organize logistics for Network Initiating Workshops in MENA and Asia, August (locations to be determined)
Project/Research Director, Research Coordinator	July/Aug	Design and prepare for proposal development workshop in Africa including readings to be provided
Project Administrator	July/August	Prepare all logistics and compile materials for GRACE Africa Proposal Development Workshop in

		SA, mid-September
Project/Research Director & Research Coordinator	July/August	Assess GRACE members' capacity building needs through studying the proposals and the conducting of subsequent individual dialogues by e-mail or telephone. This assessment will inform the compilation of the GRACE methodology workshop reader and the design of the methodology workshop.
Research Coordinator and Project/Research Director (Asia focus)	June/Aug	Continuous dialogue with GRACE members about their research proposals.
Research teams	July/August	Research teams prepare their sub-project research proposals (Africa)
Project administrator	August	Manage all workshop logistics
Project/Research Director	August	Conduct 5-day Network Initiating workshops with GRACE Asia
Project/Research Director	August	Conduct 5-day Network Initiating workshops with GRACE MENA
Project administrator	August	Compile workshop evaluations; workshop follow-up activities

YEAR 1: Last 6 Months (September 08 – February 09)
Methodology workshop, research designs and field work

Project/Research Director and Research Coordinator	September	The readers will be finalized for GRACE Africa
Research Director and Research Coordinator, Research Assistant	September	Conference and workshop participation for GRACE Africa; includes travel to Pretoria pre-conference workshop and conference (conference travel, fees, accommodation etc. from dissemination budget) Conduct 5-day proposal development workshop with GRACE Africa, continuing Graciousnesses (14 teams)
Project/Research Director, Research Coordinator, RA, All Africa Graciousnesses	September	Presentations and participation in <i>Towards an ICT Research Agenda for African Development</i> and HCC8 <i>Social Dimensions of ICT Policy</i> (Pretoria) Book launch: <i>Creating New Realities?</i>
Research coordination team	Ongoing	On-line references supplied to the research teams, and to the full GRACE-Network lists, to support the proposal development and operational design processes
Research coordinator, Research assistant	November/December	Africa sub-projects operational research designs finalized, with feedback
Research coordinator and Project	December/January	Africa sub-project contracts are issued on the basis of the finalized research proposals and operational research designs, incl. budgets

Administrator		
Accountant	December	Fist Africa sub-project instalments disbursed
Continuing Graciousnesses	December	Book launches/dissemination activities (dissemination budget: Can\$1000/team)
Project/Research Director, Research coordinator, research assistant	January 09	The Methodology and Training workshop for Africa is held.
Research coordinator, research assistant	Jan – May 09	Monthly research team progress reports and bi-weekly individual researcher's field notes are submitted, and returned with feedback

YEAR 2: First 6 Months (March – August 09)
Field work, site visits, research reports

Research coordinator, Research assistant	Jan – May 09	Africa: Monthly research team progress reports and bi-weekly individual researcher's field notes are submitted, and returned with feedback
Research Coordination team	March	Publisher located for second GRACE book
Project/Research Director and Research coordinator	March - May 09	Africa Country field visits are scheduled, organised and undertaken.
Research coordinator and research assistant	June - August	Africa Sub-project research reports are developed by GRACE teams, and submitted for comments

YEAR 2: Last 6 months (September '09 to February 2010)
Research reports

Research coordination team	Sept-Dec 09	The sub-project research reports are re-worked, submitted, returned with feedback. In certain cases, the researchers may have to gather additional data.
Project Administrator	Sept/Oct	The Research Sharing and Writing Workshop for Africa is organized for November 2009
Research coordination team	November	The Research Sharing and Writing Workshop for Africa is held November 2009
Research coordination team	Dec 09 – Feb 2010	Research reports are finalized by the researchers, assisted by the research coordination team
Contract editor and proof readers	Jan – March 2010	Reports are edited and posted on-line on the GRACE web site

YEAR 3: First 6 months (March 2010 to August 2010)
Dissemination, chapter writing, 3rd workshops

GRACE researchers	March/April	Results are presented to policy makers. The proceedings and process during these occasions can, if researchers so choose, be used as data. The coordinating team will assist them in this.
Project Administrator	March/April	Writing and Dissemination workshop is organized for Africa
Research Director and Research Coordinator, RA	March-April	Coordinating team starts to engage the researchers on writing their chapters.
GRACE researchers	March-May	Researchers draft their chapter based on their GRACE research
Project/Research Director, Research coordinator, research assistant	May	The Research Writing and Dissemination Workshop for GRACE Africa is held.
Research coordination team	June/July	Book proposal developed

YEAR 3: Last 6 months (September 2010 to February 2011)
Chapters, manuscript submission, final reports

Research coordination team	September - December	Draft chapters are submitted, reviewed and returned for revising
Research coordination team	September - December	Introductory and other chapters written, drawing together the overall themes of the chapters
Research coordination team	January 2011	Manuscript submitted to publisher
Research coordination team and researchers	ongoing	Dissemination of research results
Research coordination team	February 2011	The overall Grace report is finalized

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