

Report on the launch of
***African Women and ICTs: Investigating
Technology, Gender and Empowerment***
Kampala, Uganda



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**Venue: Department of Food Science and Technology, Makerere
University**

List of Abbreviations

GRACE	: Gender Research in Africa into ICTs for Empowerment
ICTs	: Information Communication Technologies
IDRC	: International Development Research Center
WOUGNET	: Women of Uganda Network
DWGS	: Department of Women and Gender Studies
MENA	: Middle East and North Africa
NGOs	: Non-government Organizations
CEEWA-U	: Council for the Economic Empowerment of Women of Africa - Uganda Chapter
IWTC	: International Women's Tribunal Centre
ATMs	: Automated teller machines
UWONET	: Uganda Women's Network
UMWA	: Uganda Media Women's Association

Cover: L-R Prof. Grace Bantebya-Kyomuhendo of Makerere University, Hon. Alintuma Nsambu (Minister of State for ICT) and Susan Bakesha, Head of GRACE Africa Secretariat proudly display the GRACE book *African Women and ICTs: Investigating Technology, Gender and Empowerment* at its launch at Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda, on 11 February 2010.

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1.0. Background to the book launch

The Gender Research in Africa into ICTs for Empowerment (GRACE)¹ project was initiated in 2005 with an aim to prove context-specific data on how women in Africa are using information communication technologies (ICTs) to improve their lives, and to identify barriers that prevent them from doing so and how they surmount these barriers. With support from the International Development Research Center (IDRC), GRACE evolved into an African network of gender and ICT researchers involving 14 research teams in 12 different African countries including Uganda.

Researchers from Africa conducted studies aimed at interrogating the external, structural barriers to ICTs. The teams also sought to document women's experiences, as well as the internal factors which enable them to adopt ICTs and the strategies they employ to overcome gender-related impediments.

Uganda was represented by two research teams which included Prof. Grace Bantebya Kyomuhendo from the Department of Women and Gender Studies (DWGS), Makerere University of Kampala and Susan Bakesha, Angela Nakafeero and Dr Dorothy Okello from the Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET).

The findings of the GRACE projects were captured and published in a book titled *African Women and ICTs: Investigating Technology, Gender and Empowerment*, published by Zed Books, and co-published with IDRC and UNISA Press. The book was released in 2009 and launched in Dar es Salaam in April 2009.

Launch of the GRACE Book in Uganda

The launch of the book in Uganda was part of the ongoing process on sharing and dissemination of the research findings with different stakeholders on women and ICTs.

¹ Details about GRACE can be found on www.GRACE-Network.net

It was also intended to contribute towards the ongoing debate and policy processes on gender and ICTs.

The launch took place on 11 February 2010 at the Faculty of Food Science and Technology Conference Hall, Makerere University, and was attended by over 50 participants representing different stakeholders including academicians, press, private organizations and governmental and non-governmental organizations, activists' groups, students and individuals interested in women and ICTs.

The launch was organized in the form of a public dialogue which was graced by Hon. Alintuma Nsambu, Minister of State for ICTs, as guest of honour. The Deputy Vice Chancellor of Makerere University, Prof. Lillian Ekirikubinza-Tibatema, also attended the function.

The dialogue was informed by brief presentations by the GRACE Uganda researchers² on their respective chapters. This was followed by presentations by two reviewers of the book, Ms Beatrice Lamwaka from FEMWRITE³ and Mr Aramanzan Madanda from the Department of Women and Gender Studies, Makerere University

After the individual presentations participants were engaged in a plenary discussion focusing on the role of ICTs in promoting women's empowerment. This dialogue was concluded by remarks by Prof. Lillian Ekirikubinza-Tibatema and the Hon. Alintuma Nsambu, who officially launched the book. Details of the schedule appear in Appendix 1.

² Prof. Grace Bantebya Kyomuhendo and Susan Bakesha

³ FEMWRITE is an association of Uganda women writers

2.0. Introduction

2.1. Opening remarks by Prof. Grace Bantebya Kyomuhendo, Department of Women and Gender Studies, Makerere University-Kampala

In her opening remarks, Prof. Bantebya thanked the participants for responding to the invitation to attend the book launch. She noted that their presence was testimony to their interest in the subject addressed by the book - women and ICTs - as well as an inherent interest in contributing to research processes and development.

After sharing the programme, she led participants through the self-introduction session, which revealed varied participation including academicians, policy makers and government and non-government practitioners.

Prof. Bantebya informed participants that the book launch was an outcome of the first phase of the GRACE project, and encouraged them to look forward to attending the second launch that will result from the already ongoing second phase.

2.2. Overview of the GRACE Project by Ms Susan Bakesha, Head, GRACE Africa Secretariat

Giving an historical background to the GRACE project, Ms Bakesha noted that GRACE was initiated in 2004 by group of academics and activists who wanted to provide answers relating to the different challenges women face as they engage with ICTs to improve their lives. It was envisioned that a research network would emerge from this group of individuals, that would operate as a virtual research team. This led to the formation of the Gender Research in Africa into ICTs for Empowerment (GRACE). While the research teams were all encouraged to follow their individual research passions,

design their own methodology and formulate their own research questions, there was a common ground and alignment to a shared purpose. The process was funded by the IDRC.

The GRACE researchers are aligned with the purpose of women's empowerment through ICTs by addressing women's agency. The focus on the women's agency necessitated that the researchers would be able to recognize the capacity of their respondents and make them visible in their reflections and writings. The research process emphasized the application of feminist research methods of data collection, with a commitment to respect and appreciate the role of the research subjects in formulating knowledge. For the researchers the process involved self-development sessions and mentoring that aimed at improving their skills and capacity in qualitative research methods.

Ms Bakesha provided an overview of the book, highlighting the major themes covered by the different researchers. She noted that the book was an outcome of a 3-year project running from 2005 to 2008, and attempts to bring out the women's perspective and experiences as they relate with the different ICT tools in a bid to improve their lives. She said that the book provides an important resource for those interested in bringing about effective change and equitable development.

Ms Bakesha informed participants that the second phase of GRACE started in 2008. In the second phase, the GRACE project expanded to include 7 countries from the Middle East and Northern Africa (GRACE MENA).

2.3. Presentation on Uganda Chapters by Prof. Bantebya and Ms Susan Bakesha

The first presentation was by Prof. Bantebya on the topic "The mobile pay phone business: A vehicle for rural women's empowerment in Uganda". This research was inspired by Prof. Bantebya's earlier observations about women in Hoima and other rural areas. She wondered why the pay phone business was predominantly done by women.

One response to her reflections was that, "That is women's work, how would a whole man sit at the roadside to collect 100 shillings?" Thus she sought to find out to what extent the pay phone business was empowering to women. She mainly documented women's perception of empowerment and also conducted in-depth interviews with the women in order to understand what empowerment meant to them and how it affected their relationships with their husbands.

It was discovered that the pay phone business provided women with employment opportunities from which they earned an income. With this income they were able to look after their families and make some savings to buy property. These phones have also increased their mobility because they move out of the home; they dressed nicely and became considered as 'working' women.

However, there were challenges along the way. For example, the gender relations remained intact, and this affected the women's progress. Internally they felt empowered, but the structures still remained the intact. In other instances the women were not able to make ends meet, and some ran out of business.

Some husbands became uncomfortable with the changing roles, others were comfortable that ICT is a possible vehicle for empowerment; therefore, some women decided to work with their partners to maintain the status quo.

As promoters of ICTs and policy makers, it is important to note that whereas ICTs offer various opportunities to bring about change in people's lives, this has to be considered within the existing prevailing social structures. In case of African women where most of these structures promote their subordination, ICTs might aggravate the situation.

The second presentation was made by Ms Bakesha based on the chapter entitled "ICTs as agents of change: A case of grassroots women entrepreneurs in Uganda." The chapter discussed the findings of a study of ICTs as a CD-ROM which was locally designed to provide business-related information to local women entrepreneurs through the use of telecentres in Nabweru, Buwama and Nakaseke. It was anticipated that the

women would use the information to improve and expand their businesses, thereby improving their economic situation.

There was noted improvement in learning computer skills like typing, and composing and sending email messages. There was also noted improvement and expansion of the women's businesses using the information provided on the CD-ROM.

In terms of their home life, there were changes in gender power relations and roles. As women earned more income, their responsibilities in the home increased. They spent most of their income on meeting family-related needs like food, school fees and medical bills. Their husbands would abdicate their responsibilities. At the end of the day, even if women expanded their business they would not save, their businesses would stagnate or they ran out of business.

However, there were "deviant" cases. These were single or widowed women who, because of the freedom of mobility and ability to make personal decisions, were able to make some significant changes in their lives as a result of information acquired and improvement in their businesses.

Other outcomes were that women would congregate and socialize; they would get an opportunity to catch up with each other. This contributed to building networks, like Tweekembe Women's Group, it reinforced *Nigiina* groups in Nakaseke and Nabweru – women were able to appreciate each other. Through the networks, women could exchange information on improving their lives.

Some women took it upon themselves to mentor and teach others how operate a computer. There was a 78-year-old woman who through her enthusiasm learned how to operate a computer and conducted sessions for women that were not able to come to the telecentre. The actions of this lady also challenged the general perception that computers are for the educated and the young.

3.0 Book Reviews

Before the launch, two people were identified to review the book and share their findings with the audience. This was intended to provide the audience with a deeper understanding of the book from an objective point of view, since the reviewers were not GRACE researchers.

The reviewers were asked to read the book and help the audience understand what the book was all about, highlighting the issues covered and how they relate to women's empowerment. The book reviewers were Ms Beatrice Lamwaka of FEMWRITE and Mr Aramanzan Madanda from the Department of Women and Gender Studies, Makerere University

3.1. Review by Ms Beatrice Lamwaka



Ms Beatrice Lamwaka presenting her review of the book

Introduction

African Women and ICTs explores the ways in which women in Africa exploit ICTs to facilitate their empowerment through the mobile phone business, through Internet use, and career and ICT employment opportunities. This is an outcome of a 3-year extensive research project by 14 research teams who investigated situations within their own communities and countries. Issues raised include ICTs for empowerment and as agents of change, ICTs in the fight against gender-based violence, and how ICTs could be used to reconceptualize public and private spaces.

The book is subdivided into four parts. "ICT tools: Access and use" deals with how women's lives have been changed by the various technologies and how they are limited in accessing and using these tools. These women's lack of access and use is related to lack of infrastructure, poverty and illiteracy. "Female-only ICT spaces: Perceptions and practices" – women are benefiting from or would benefit from 'female-only' spaces they create themselves or which could be created for them through and with ICTs. In these spaces women express themselves, learn, network and trade. "Using ICTs: Making life better?" describes how women use ICTs to increase control over their time and space in their personal and professional lives, while "Creating new realities" describes how women use ICTs to enhance their lives according to their own designs. The book analyses the relationships between ICTs, women's empowerment, gender discrimination, access, entrepreneurship and advocacy among others.

Issues emerging from *African women and ICTs*

The roles of different NGOs in empowering women in rural communities are highlighted in this book. As readers we get to know factors that facilitated the utilization of the CD-ROM titled "Rural women of Africa: ideas of earning money". The project was proposed by the International Women's Tribunal Centre (IWTC) implemented by the Uganda National Council of Science and Technology in partnership with NGOs including

Economic Empowerment of Women of Africa (CEEWA), Media One and Uganda Development Services that in 2001 pioneered telecentres in Nakaseke, Buwama and Nabweru. It was noted that donors and development agencies are supporting income-generating activities that have been focusing on micro and small enterprises as a tool for poverty alleviation in Egypt for years. As we read the book, we realize that the global crafts - in this case women artisan - market is a highly competitive sphere, both in price and quality. Therefore the women need to support the market in order to benefit from their products. This kind of information can direct donors' support for women empowerment in the right way.

Gender inequalities still exist in most African communities; the research showed that women enjoy fewer benefits from ICTs than men, and that existing gender inequalities are often unaffected - or even perpetuated by - ICT use. It also found that gender-based obligations, societal biases, and even physical strength can restrict women's ability to learn about or use new technologies. For example, women are less mobile and have less free time than men, and therefore cannot easily take advantage of training and other resources; male university students discourage their female peers from accessing computers in labs by pushing them out of line; women often feel uneasy or unwelcomed when visiting Internet cafés on their own; and ICT use can shift family dynamics and the balance of power, causing strife in the home which can lead to arguments, violence, divorce, and even death.

In order to understand women's dreams and desires beyond their female-accepted roles, it's often necessary to create a mental space for women where they can experience that part of themselves and give it that voice. As Virginia Woolf argued in her book, *A Room of One's Own*, a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction. As we read the book we realize that every woman needs her money to be empowered with ICT.

Changes need to be made in society where women are fighting for survival, otherwise the digital gap will grow. There is a need to improve socio-economic conditions which could help women see technologies in other ways, and become empowered. At this stage of development the women's absolute priority is tools that will increase their capabilities and their assets in the short term, by enabling them to work more efficiently, save time and costs, and achieve economic self-sufficiency for themselves and their households. For instance, in Mozambique, where 66% of the women are illiterate, they don't speak Portuguese, the official language, they are poverty-stricken and marginalized; in order to empower such a group there is need for the conditions to change. This means that telecentres and other institutions involved in women's development and empowerment have to make great efforts to provide content formats usable by rural women, by placing more emphasis on capabilities and socio-economic issues that rural women value.

The Review

The book is simple and easy to read, mainly because the methodology of the research was qualitative and exploratory. This develops an understanding of the situation for women entrepreneurs as the researchers used individual interviews, group discussions and life stories. Investigations are done using focus, consideration, and non-judgmental observation that includes examination of the subjects' as well as the researchers' values and dreams.

The relationship between women, their empowerment and the use of ICTs in Africa is complex. Women's struggles to overcome the limitations of their positions and identities through the use of ICTs have to be understood from within this context, and likewise their victories in overcoming such. *African Women and ICTs* highlights the context of each country covered in the book so that the readers can understand.

Questions guide the readers for instance, do women in Manhica and Sussundenga in rural Mozambique use ICTs available in the districts? If so, what for? If not, why not? These guide the reader to see the direction that the research is leading and as readers we can also evaluate if the research was successful. The authors indicate ICTs in the lives of women in Africa who are getting on with the daily struggle for greater autonomy and equality with the perceptions of the women themselves, and a context that predominantly focuses attention on the promises of ICTs for development rather than the ongoing divisive inequalities.

African Women and ICTs gives the readers a peek into different African countries. For instance, in Morocco ICTs are helping raise awareness about domestic violence; women's use of cell phones to meet their communication needs: a study of rural women from northern Nigeria; mobile phones in a time of modernity: the quest for increased self-sufficiency among women fishmongers and fish processors in Dakar. Reflections on the mentoring experiences of ICT career women in Nairobi, Kenya: looking in the mirror, etc. Enhancing women's access to and use of ICTs therefore requires a transformation of people's mindsets and knowledge of the world that have been shaped by gender inequality and by male domination. The male perspective that has shaped African societies and the role of women in the labour market and in the domestic sphere is a key variable of empowerment and disempowerment in the ICT sector.

Most people say that they don't like reading African books because they are dark, usually about war, genocide and sexual violation, but *African Women and ICTs* has success stories showing the strength and resilience of women, for instance Suzanne, an online crafts entrepreneur whose IT skills are sophisticated as she uses the Internet as a marketing resource. In Uganda the liberating effects of the phone business give the women economic power, autonomy and the chance to break free of the constraints imposed on them by the prevailing behaviour norms in the community.

I end with quotes from women who I admire, and I can't agree with them more on what they say about the book, *African Women and ICTs*:

"A detailed and absorbing account of how African women are using new technology to transform their lives – a major contribution to African Women's studies. This important book celebrates their remarkable achievements, and explores how technology both enriches and complicates African society."

Margaret Walters

"This book brings to light the strength and the resilience of the women who spoke with the authors, yet also the slim margin there is for true empowerment within the context in which they live. I commend this valuable initiative."

Machel

3.2. Review by Mr Aramanzan Madanda



Mr Aramanzan Madanda making his presentation

On commencing a comprehensive review of this book, many questions were posed: What is in it that is new, theoretically, methodologically, conceptually and factually?

What are the important findings about African Women and ICTs in relation to women's empowerment? From its title, the book is women-focused and therefore, what has a man got to do with it?

On reading, it is easy to discover that *African women and ICTs* is not just an edited collection of articles from various "scholars" coalescing to author a book. It is a reflection of a serious joint effort from research teams spread in 12 African countries working on a project, Gender Research in Africa into ICTs for Empowerment (GRACE). To allay my anxiety about regarding a man's intrusiveness, at least four of the 29 authors are male, even the "problem" of men researching women is identified and articulated in the book as well. While the book is written by many teams from various African countries, the common methodological and theoretical thread that runs through it is its grounding in an anthropological approach informed by rigorous feminist thought.

The authors state that they set out to explore external or structural barriers as well as the internal or conceptual factors which prevent or enable women to use ICTs in a context that predominantly focuses attention on the promises of ICTs for development. This set me thinking that this book is about the familiar business of engaging with barriers to women's access to ICTs that has been articulated variously since the beginning of 2000 by a range of authors, including N. Hafkin, S. Jorge, N. Taggart, S. Bakesha, S. Huyer and A. Madanda, to mention but a few. I also thought the book might be a profiling of "success stories" which has also been a key preoccupation of many international, regional, national and local "development agencies." My thinking was also that the engagement with the usual might be spiced with sophisticated lengthy and winding arguments drawn from development theory around issues of technological determinism versus social determinism, whereby the former touts technology over society while the later elevates society as over technology. This would have reopened an endemic debate whose long history and foreseeable future do not show any signs of convergence.

That kind of debate would have been the old known stuff. Moreover, having recently gone through the 2008, 3rd edition of Gilbert Rist's book; *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith*, published by Zed Books, I had become a keen believer in his "novelty is rare" notion. This approach would have entrenched my faith in Gilbert Rist's assertion.

The authors of *African Women and ICTs*, however, skillfully circumvent this explosive debate on developmentalism, seeking to immerse themselves in the diverse unique experiences of women and ICTs in Africa, returning to it only in the epilogue (conclusion). This is where both Ineke Buskens and Anne Webb, the editors, state on page 208: "The potential of ICTs to enhance our lives in an equitable society is tremendous. Yet for this to occur, the rapid spread and pervasiveness of these technologies need to be regulated in the interests of pursuing the development of a non-discriminatory society, and to be accompanied by efforts to reduce...disparities."

Despite the apparent real and potential benefits of ICTs, particularly for women's empowerment, this statement is a powerful indication of the inadequacies of the current ICT policies within which ICT is being propagated at institutional and national levels in Africa. It is clear that the current policies are deficient and need attention so that the huge potential of ICTs can be enhanced for various purposes: women's empowerment, poverty reduction, reduction or elimination of inequalities of all sorts, and so on. This is an important conclusion that resonates with many other scholarly and experiential pieces of research in the arena of studies exploring the link between gender, ICTs and development.

Yet the above is a conclusion based on a wealth of experiences and analyses in the case studies elaborated in the 222 pages spanning 17 chapters of the book. For instance, it is based on the finding in a Zimbabwean University that the fair "first come, first served" computer access policy for students is after all not fair, and excludes most of the female students. It is based on the finding from Uganda that the benefits derived from ICT and mobile phones by women may not automatically enhance women's

empowerment when issues of power and gender in the families are not addressed, for these may make the situation explosive to women as well.

It is also based on the elaboration from the South African case study which shows that if household energy needs in general and women's energy needs in particular are not addressed, the benefits from ICT may be compromised. The conclusion also arises from the example from Morocco which shows that women could use simple computer applications and mobile phones to address gender-based violence, while in other examples it is shown that the use of ICT does not necessarily challenge gender inequality and may perpetuate gender-based violence.

One weakness of this engaging collection is that the book is entirely qualitative, to the extent that if a reader is interested in the positivist tradition of, frequencies, numbers, tables, cross-tabulations, levels of significance and degrees of freedom, that cannot be found in here. Yet the rigorous employment of qualitative methodology and case studies by the authors is phenomenal and constitutes the core methodological strength of the book.

The book does not only let the reader traverse the different writing styles, expertise and rich diversity drawn from the interviews, but also covers a wide geographical and cultural ground, with case studies drawn from countries in North Africa (Egypt, Morocco), Southern Africa (South Africa, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe), West Africa (Nigeria, Senegal), Central Africa (Cameroon), East Africa (Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda). While the authors do not lay a claim to representativeness, the rich material speaks for itself. Of course, some countries, such as the turbulent Somalia, and the small ones such as Eritrea, Cape Verde and Mauritius, miss out. Even then, the range of countries covered gives a broader part of the story of African women. The topics covered address various themes, ranging from accessibility and passive use of ICTs, to perceptions of and practices in women-only ICT spaces, and women's use of ICTS in their empowerment as well as creating new realities in ICT with respect to professional women and mentoring.

Topics covered include entrepreneurship, use of mobile phones, Internet and other computer applications. The book also covers topics that have not been significantly addressed before, such as the intersection of ICT and violence against women. An interesting addition is a chapter by Salome Awour Omamo, which is not just about the role of mentoring in ICT but also the benefits of mentoring, elucidating on the question of what *mentors* learn and benefit from mentoring. But it is the chapter by Ruth Meena and Mary Rusimbi that takes the notion of reflexivity in qualitative research beyond the obvious. These two authors not only reflect on the research subjects and their own experiences but actually turn themselves into research subjects, including their own stories into the chapter and rigorously analysing them. The research approach adopted sets the writing of the book apart, and endows it with rich experiences of not only the researched but also the researchers.

I entirely agree with the opinion of Nancy Hafkin carried on the back cover that *“those interested in women’s empowerment and its relationship to technology will find this book a highly innovative approach to the subject, combining a unique perspective with case studies from a wide variety of African countries and settings.”* I would add that even when the book has independent chapters, readers would maximize its utility by treating it as a complete whole. The book is a rich and accessible account of the subject of women’s empowerment and ICT in Africa using a rigorous qualitative approach that appropriates and innovatively puts feminist thought and the notion of reflexivity to invaluable use.

4.0. Plenary Discussion

During this session participants interacted with the researchers and the book reviewers as well as among themselves to discuss the issues raised in the book, seeking to get a better understanding the relationship between ICTs and women empowerment.

Q: How did the CD ROM that was designed locally help the women?

A: It helped them access information and ideas to improve their businesses based on local needs, opportunities and challenges. The project had been informed by an earlier assessment made to identify the needs of local women entrepreneurs in terms of production and marketing.

Q: Were women in Hoima aware that they are now more empowered by ICTs, and able to express it?

A: Yes, for example, during informal discussion with the researcher, one lady revealed that she had opened up a personal bank account which no one else has access to, and she had bought a plot of land by concealing her money in a welded tin which could only be opened by the welder. These were revelations of how different dynamics surrounded the pay phones versus other means of income generation.

Q: Were you able to know the extent to which men find challenging women's access to pay phones?

A: The access to pay phones improved women's networking with family and friends. Women were now accessible to other people, and this could cause violence when their husbands checked their phones and found out that they had received calls from male callers that were not known to them. When talked to, men felt that their wives were more accessible to other men which was considered unacceptable. However, on the side women's improved access to communication enabled them to combine pay phone work with other business and family commitments.

Q: Another participant said that this book was exciting and she looked forward to reading it. In reference to the CD ROM she wanted to know apart from pay phones what other businesses women were engaged in?

A: the CD has business-related information training women on different businesses, like kiosks, food joints, fashion designs and bridal parlours. They are also trained on how to start, expand, succeed in and run a business. After this training on this CD ROM the women demanded more information on other issues like HIV/AIDS, adolescents, water and sanitation and more.

Q: What do you have to say about sexual harassment in the mobile phone business?

A: We thought about this but never explored it – some women operated next to bars, therefore sexual harassment could not be ruled out. However, this is still a gap for future research. It was observed that usually in the evenings male relatives gathered around the place where the women were doing business. The other context of violence was that women received text messages and calls at night which was said to have made their husbands uncomfortable.

Q: How are you solving the gender divide, especially women not using the Internet?

A: It is true that women accessing the Internet are fewer than men. The Zimbabwean case shows how access of female students to computer labs was restricted due to the existing “first come, first served” policy. So, reviewing of access policy is one step in the right direction as we seek out ways to increase women’s access to the Internet.

Q: It was mentioned that there are changes in power relations and that women were earning an income as they engaged in ICT-related businesses; were men getting poorer as women got richer?

A: Men were not getting poorer; if anything the men are making more money because they are no longer spending. In some cases, they ended up marrying second wives. The change in power relations was both positive and negative to women. Although they could earn more, get out of the domestic arena and become economically independent,

they had to shoulder all the responsibilities in the home. This was another form of subordination.



Participant contributing to the plenary discussion

Observations from participants

On violence against women because of ICT, one participant observed that the same technology could be used by the women to seek help to combat the violence. As such, there is a need to understand and take advantage of the opportunities provided by ICTs to fight violence against women.

The GRACE research team was appreciated for availing Africa-based literature and interpretation of empowerment by the subjects and not imposing the researchers' perceptions on them.

5.0. Remarks by invited guests

5.1. Remarks by Prof. Lillian Ekirikubinza Tibatemwa – Deputy Vice Chancellor, Makerere University, Kampala

I want to thank the GRACE Secretariat for organizing this launch and for inviting me to speak at this event. I believe that all of us gathered here have great respect for knowledge creation and development through research. We also know the power of knowledge in shaping our beliefs and behaviour. Knowledge is a concept itself and often influences the creation of the world we live in. It is important to note that knowledge is power and therefore that those in charge of its creation are likely to have power over others. In patriarchal societies like Uganda, women's world is shaped by the knowledge they acquire. However, this knowledge represents various images that promote their subordination through traditional values, norms and beliefs. In the end, women end up living in the shadow of men's realities.



Deputy Vice Chancellor Prof. Lillian Ekirikubinza giving her remarks

As you may all be aware, ICTs have become part and parcel of our daily living. They have contributed significantly to the attainment of globalization. Through the Internet for instance, information about different aspects of life is shared around the world in seconds. The Internet has proved to be a major place of networking and social interaction through the various social networking tools like Facebook and blogs to

mention but a few. In Uganda the mobile phone has become a central tool which determines our social, political and economic well-being. But the question remains - what is the role of ICTs in promoting women's empowerment? Do women use ICTs to improve their well-being or otherwise? The GRACE network is indeed a welcome initiative since it aimed at producing knowledge that provides answers to the above questions. Through this book, *African Women and ICTs: Investigating Technology, Gender and Empowerment*, women share their perspectives, insights and experiences with regard to their engagement with various ICTs.

As a university, we believe that research is the foundation to effective development since through research we get the information and knowledge relevant to the needs of the people. I would like to appreciate the GRACE network for choosing Makerere University as venue for the launch of this wonderful book. I urge everyone to buy the book and make use of this invaluable knowledge and understanding of women's experiences with ICTs. For policy makers, this book provides relevant information that is important to consider when designing development policies and in particular ICT-related policies. The presence of the honourable Minister of ICT is testimony to government's interest in promoting women's concerns through the use of ICT. I therefore take this opportunity to invite the honourable Minister to address us and officially launch the book.

5.2. Remarks by Hon. Alintuma Nsambu – Minister of State for ICTs



Hon. Alintuma Nsambu giving his remarks about the book

In his remarks, the Minister thanked the GRACE Secretariat for organizing and inviting him to the book launch, noting that it was his first time to launch a book written on women and by women. He said that at first he had a perception that the book was about only women, but on searching the website he found that the authorship was inclusive and very powerful.

He encouraged women's participation in the use of ICTs to improve their communication needs. He applauded the advancement of technology which has made it possible to evolve from bulky appliances like radios to mobile phones which are easy to access and use.

The honorable Minister cited other examples of technologies which can be harnessed to empower women such as automated teller machines (ATMs) used in modern banking. When properly used, sharing of financial information between spouses can prevent loss of family resources in case one of them passes away.

He decried the negative effects of ICTs such as an increase of violence against women. He cited an example where husbands monitored the phones of their spouses by reading

the text messages they received and sometime receiving their telephone calls. This he said has led to destruction of some marriages.

He acknowledged the need for training children and young people in the use of computers in order for them to fit and operate effectively in the global world.

Being the first book he had launched written by women, the Minister said he would dedicate his copy to his daughter. He also said that he would task his sister to read the book to his mother who is unable to read because she did not get formal education.

In order to ensure that students have access to this book, the Minister bought 10 copies to be taken to a telecentre in of one of the rural schools in Masaka district.

In honour of the book, the honourable Minister promised to equip a computer laboratory at the Department of Women and Gender Studies, Makerere University. This, he said, was his contribution towards increasing female students' access to ICTs. He then officially launched the book.

After the launch, participants enjoyed a cocktail party organized by the GRACE Secretariat.

Appendix 1: Schedule for the Launch of the GRACE book on 11 February 2010

Time	Activity	Responsible person
1:30 -2:00 p.m.	Registration	GRACE Secretariat
2:00 – 2:10 p.m.	Opening remarks	Prof. Grace Bantebya Kyomuhendo
2:10 -2:25 p.m.	Overview about the project and the book	Susan Bakesha
2:25 – 2:45 p.m.	Presentation on Uganda Chapters	Prof. Bantebya and Susan Bakesha
2:45 -3: 05 p.m.	Presentation by the 1 st book reviewer	Ms Beatrice Lamwaka, FEMRITE
3:05- 3:25 p.m.	Presentation by the 2 nd book reviewer	Mr Aramanzan Madanda, DWGS
3:25 – 3: 45 p.m.	Plenary discussion	Susan Bakesha and Prof. Bantebya
3:45: 4:00 p.m.	Remarks by the Vice Chancellor, MUK	DVC Prof. Lillian Ekirikubinza
4:00 – 4:30 p.m.	Minister's remarks and official launch of the book	Hon. Alintuma Nsambu, Minister of State for ICT
4:30+	Cocktail and departure	GRACE Secretariat & University Canteen