

# Ghana Information Network for Knowledge Sharing (GINKS)

## The National ICT4D Network in Ghana

Ibrahim Inusah, Martine Koopman, Denise Senmartin  
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The ICT for Development (ICT4D) national networks focus on the role of Information and Communication Technology in accelerating development in various sectors (education, health, rural livelihood and governance) in a country. This thematic brief describes the lessons learned from the IICD-supported National ICT4D Network in Ghana. It is intended for practitioners in the field who would like to learn from the experience of this network as well as organisations that would like to implement something similar to this.

The brief takes much of its learning from the Evaluation exercises that have been performed by the network, with the help of IICD and the local Evaluation partner Development Alternative Services Foundation (DASF) over the years. This Evaluation system consists on the one hand of questionnaires filled in



*GINKS Focus Group meeting 2009*

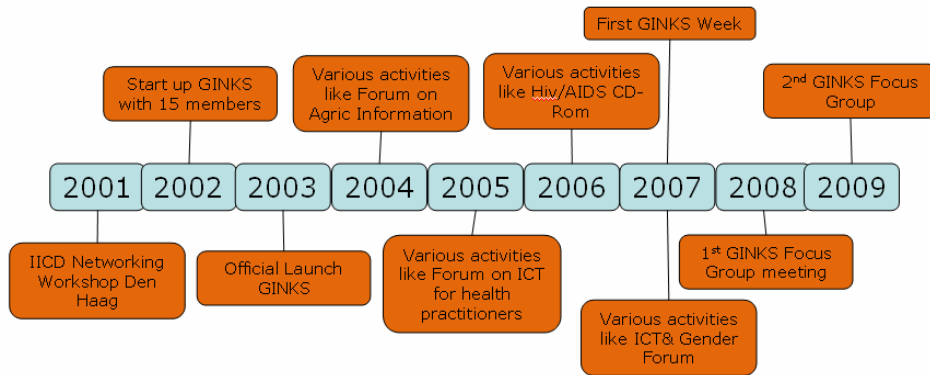


anonymously by the members of the network on a yearly basis (a representative sample) and analyses of the data from these questionnaires: user profiles, use and satisfaction of services, and impact of the network. On the other hand, it consists of Focus Group meetings attended by members, Secretariat and Executive Council to reflect on the data and discuss successes, challenges and solutions. The brief has been elaborated in close collaboration with the network partner, the Ghana Information Network for Knowledge Sharing (GINKS). For more information on IICD in general, please refer to the last page.

### Context

In June 2001, the International Institute of Communication and Development (IICD) organised a workshop in The Hague with the theme "Strengthening Information Exchange and Networks on





ICTs in IICD's Focal Countries". IICD already supported several individual ICT and Development (ICT4D) projects and these expressed the need to create a platform to share their knowledge and experiences. In December 2002 GINKS was established by a group of 15 individuals to create this platform in Ghana. GINKS was officially launched a year later with the aim to create a platform for institutions and individuals to dialogue and share experiences in ICT4D and to support the potential of ICT tools for socio-economic development. Until its inception, ICT professionals, decision makers and advocates in Ghana had very few options for linking up with other colleagues. Since then, GINKS has brought together individuals and groups interested in ICT4D and has helped fill the vacuum for knowledge sharing and networking by creating both online and offline spaces for holding discussions, sharing lessons and best practices to promote ICT for development in Ghana.

According to Mr. Kwami Ahabenu II, one of the founders of GINKS. "Knowledge sharing did not exist in Ghana. GINKS planted the seed to create this open culture." In the first year of its existence GINKS was still small with around 20 individual members. An ICT4D newsletter was created by GINKS, named iConnect, to share ICT experiences with other practitioners. Face-to-face meetings were combined with an electronic mailing list on D-groups (an online platform created by international NGOs)<sup>1</sup>, positioning GINKS

<sup>1</sup> The NGO's that participate in D-groups are: [IICD](#), [HIVOS](#), [CTA](#), [IDRC](#), [ICCO](#)

as a space for networking and dialogue between practitioners and policy makers from the government, NGOs and private companies. GINKS participates in various ICT4D forums, locally and internationally.

### The Organisation

GINKS is a legal entity with a constitution that governs its activities. It is comprised of the Executive Council, the Secretariat, the GINKS 20, sub-committees, partners/regional representatives and the

#### Ghana Profile

Surface Area (sq. km) 228 thousand  
 Population total: 22.1 million  
 Life expectancy: 57.7  
 Adult literacy %: 65  
 Gross primary enrolment %: 53  
 School enrolment, primary (% net): 97.8%  
 Human development index (UNDP): 135 (out of 177)  
 Source: World Development Indicators database, 2007

#### Access to communication technologies per 100 people

Telephone line: 1.6  
 Mobile subscribers: 32.4  
 Internet Users: 42.2  
 Personal computers: 0.6  
 Households with a tv: 25  
 Internet users: 3.8  
 Source: UN eGovernment survey 2008

#### Data on the project

Sector: Livelihood, Education, Health and Governance  
 Number of members: 492  
 Target group(s): ICT practitioners, Government staff, NGO staff, Private sector practitioners, teachers, health staff, farmer organisations



*GINKS Northern ICT4D meeting 2009*

general network members.

The Executive Council is responsible for administering the GINKS network and its members are nominated and elected every two years from the general membership of GINKS. It is made up of the previous Chairperson and up to eight elected members. The chairperson is elected by the council members. The Secretariat is appointed by the Executive Council. The functions of the network are undertaken by sub-committees whose members are volunteers drawn from the general GINKS membership. Each sub-committee is headed by a member of the Executive Council.

The network coordinator is a paid position that serves as the executive secretary of the network and is in charge of the day-to-day activities including the coordination and facilitation of the work of the various subcommittees and Executive Council assignments and any other activities of GINKS. The network coordinator is supported by an assistant coordinator.

The GINKS 20 is composed of highly distinguished community leaders who are involved in ICTs for Development in Ghana. This group is a consultative forum to advise and guide GINKS. They are nominated from all sectors of the Ghanaian society including Academia, Media, Information Technology Professionals, Business Community, Non Governmental Organisations, Religious bodies and Government. Members of the GINKS 20 are nominated by the Executive Council in consultation with the General membership. A member of GINKS 20 can be an individual member or a representative of an institutional member.

The current focus of the activities is on Awareness raising for the potential of ICT in development, Knowledge Sharing and Learning, including seminars on "ICT training in school: prospects and challenges," a seminar on "ICT and Women in Politics," and a forum on "Use of ICT in effective election reporting." Other subjects were "The role of ICT in Agricultural Information Dissemination" and "The role of ICTs in reducing discrimination against women." GINKS has a strong link with IICD project partners and organises "project node meetings" where project partners share knowledge and practical experiences with each other.

While the network continues to grow and strengthen, GINKS has identified, based on their experience of the last few years, the following challenges as very critical to the survival of the network: Establishing a financially sustainable network, creating relevant local content to support knowledge sharing, building membership capacity for effective lobbying and advocacy, expanding network presence throughout the country, establishment of a vibrant platform for knowledge sharing, ensuring an increase in the number of female members and participation in the network and promoting the participation of the youth and students in activities of the network.

#### **The membership**

The GINKS membership has doubled from approximately 200 during the official launch in October 2003 to 492 members



*Training workshop on election coverage using ICT 2008*





*Lobby and Advocacy workshop 2009*

in September 2009. Its membership base is currently very broad, ranging from stakeholders in the ICT industry, rural development, environmental protection, agriculture, health, women and youth. Even though GINKS is an open forum for all those interested in ICT4D, it encourages targeted discussion to meet the needs of particular groups. For example, through regional and thematic nodes such as the GINKS-Tech forum and the GINKS-Women & ICT4D, the network has created specialised spaces for members with common interests to share experiences across the country. The GINKS-Tech forum and GINKS-Women & ICT4D were set up to focus on technology and women in ICT4D discussions.

Gender wise, membership is predominantly male, with 75%. This has varied slightly in the three years since Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) data is available: 67% in 2006, 84% in 2007 and 73% in 2008. Most members are between 21 and 30, have tertiary education (in 2007 this was 100%, but in 2008 17% of members had only primary or secondary education) and live in the capital city of Accra although the latter is decreasing. In 2006, 75% came from Accra, in 2007 this decreased to 69% and in 2008 to 45%. This is mainly the result of increased activities in the north of Ghana, especially the Northern ICT4D series and the Northern Project node. Also this year hard copies of the questionnaire were distributed in the North.

For most members, including the new ones, the objectives of the network are clear (73%). On participation, 40% of the members participates at least weekly in

activities of GINKS and but 29% participates less than once a month<sup>2</sup>.

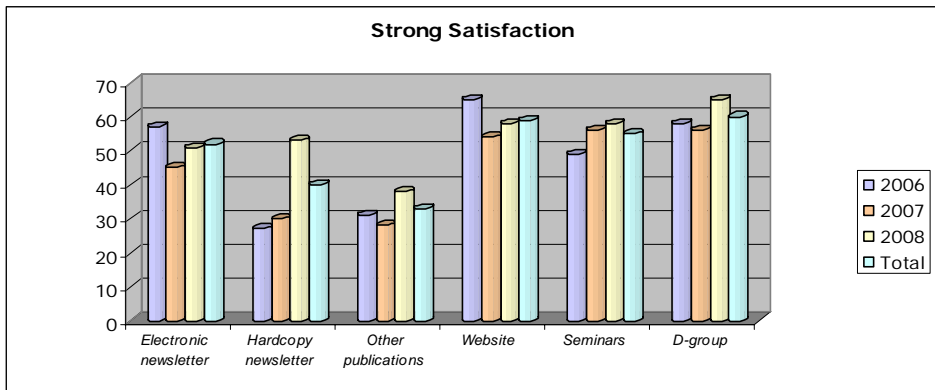
Since the inception of the project, the users have been asked about their motivation to participate in the network. The main reasons were related to sharing ideas, knowledge and skills: *"To share knowledge and ideas with other ICT professionals across the country and outside Ghana"* and *"I want to help the Northern Region to get more involved in ICT"*. Other reasons were related to acquiring knowledge, information and skills: *"To enhance and widen my scope of understanding of the field of ICTs for development in which I operate"*. Another member: *"My main reason mostly is to gain knowledge from others, and share that knowledge I acquire with others as well"*. In general, perception of reaching goals has been steady, with 59% of the members mentioning that their goals were currently met (2008). In 2006 and 2007 this was 55% and in 2008 62%. In the words of one member: *"I have come to appreciate the knowledge I have gained from the interactions online and through physical meetings. The knowledge gained has made my work enjoyable and fulfilling."* From a less satisfied member: *"I am not satisfied, because I lack facilities like a PC or laptop which can help in further research."*

The percentage of members that feel responsible for the success of the network increased from 26% in 2006 and 2007, to 46% in 2008. Also, 40% of the members felt very involved in the network, and 59%



*Northern ICT4D meeting 2008: the role of ICT against Women discrimination*





of them want to be more involved in discussions and decision making, while 39% find this just right at the moment.

The satisfaction rate was measured by three major factors: (1) achievement of goals, (2) opinions towards activities, services and products and (3) frequency of use of knowledge as well as its application. The results indicated that 77% of the respondents were positive. Among the activities, services and products provided, least satisfying was the "Electronic Newsletter" at 58%. The most satisfying were 'Seminars' and "Relevance of Information" with nearly 88% of the respondents being positive.

**Impact**



Review of the use of ICT during the election 2009

<sup>2</sup> Most members who participate daily contribute to the electronic D-group of GINKS

The impact of GINKS has been measured for three years, giving a good overview of the project's development over time. In 2008, the project collected questionnaires from 115 members, showing the growth of the network from only 57 questionnaires in 2006 and 64 in 2007.

The impact is measured by asking users to respond to a 7-point scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree) and then combining these statements into five impact indicators: ICT, Awareness, Knowledge Sharing, Lobby & Advocacy and Gender. In general the impact study showed members with a positive attitude towards all the indicators.

In 2008, ICT awareness was positive for 67% of the members. Members were most positive about the statement "Through the network I have gained more knowledge on ICT4D" (77%). And "Through the network I now see the opportunities of information and communication technology for my own activities" with 75%. The least positive statement was "the network has motivated me to set up my own activity related to ICT" (41%). This is higher than in 2007 (35%), but much lower than in 2006. From the suggestions that members gave for raising awareness for ICT4D it is clear that the network wants to increase its reach beyond the capital city to include more regions and to strengthen the capacity development of members in ICT.

Knowledge Sharing in 2008 was viewed positively by 69% of the members. This







Northern ICT4D series 2008

increased from 55% in 2007. The members were most positive (77%) about "the network provides access to new knowledge and ideas" and with 76% "the network motivates to share knowledge and information." Less chose the option "the network has helped me to partner with other members to set up new activities" with a positive score of only 40%. Even though this is an increase from 2007, when only 30% were positive, it is still much lower than the 56% of 2006.

The impact of GINKS in Lobby and Advocacy was seen less positively in 2008 with 52% while in 2007, 61% of the members were positive about it. More women (60%) than men (49%) felt the engagement of the network in lobbying and advocacy. Also, respondents from district town/city (37%) were less positive compared to rural (53%) and capital city (62%). Members were positive about "the network involves different stakeholders" with 70%, and "the network is an important stakeholder in ICT related policy debates" with 68%. The members were less positive about "the network represents me in their activities and product" with only 40%, a decline from 74% in (year) although only slightly lower than 2007 (43%). They were also less positive about "the network is effectively influencing policies and development processes" with 41%.

#### Achievements

Since its establishment GINKS has conducted many activities. In the

overview below some of the key achievement:

- GINKS has become the ICT4D Knowledge Sharing platform in Ghana
- GINKS is a vibrant Network with around 492<sup>3</sup> members that participate in face-to-face activities, the online main D-group and the four sub D-groups (Women and ICT (45 members), Technology Forum (86 members), Youth group (75 members) and the Project node)
- In 2008: 25 public events attended by 721 participants took place: 65 at national events, 234 at Livelihood events, 50 at health events, 100 at education events, 234 at governance events.
- In 2009 in the first 6 month of the year 11 events were attended by 350 participants. 103 at national events, 31 at education events, 56 at governance events and 52 at health events.
- High scores in M&E research: 61% of members is positive about the lobby & advocacy ability of the network, 55% of members is positive about knowledge sharing capacity, 57% is positive about empowerment and 45% about network participation.
- Video blogging: [www.ginks.blogspot.com](http://www.ginks.blogspot.com)
- A good reputation of GINKS within the country.
- Vibrant Northern Node of GINKS that helps implement programs and activities in Northern Ghana.
- GINKS successfully implemented a project with support from IDRC by providing an ICT Centre which catered for the information needs of women food producers in Atakwa-Ekumfi, Central Region of Ghana.
- GINKS also produced a CD on HIV/AIDS by capturing the dangers of the diseases in animation form.
- In collaboration with other partners, GINKS implemented a pilot project by re-packaging information on the use of pesticides through radio programs in four local dialects in Tano, Upper East Region of Ghana.

<sup>3</sup> September 2009

### Lessons learned

GINKS is a learning organisation that measures its impact on its members. It is also very keen to identify where improvements could be made:

- Improved functioning of the network through the development of a more professional Secretariat, a Strategic Plan and active subcommittees under the Executive Council
- A redesign of the website including video blogging has improved the visibility of the network
- GINKS has an experienced Executive Council whose rich knowledge and expertise are at the disposal of the Secretariat
- Built the capacity of key personnel to manage the GINKS main and sub-d-groups.
- GINKS dedicated members help in the development and shaping the network activities.

### Challenges

During the development of the Strategic Plan 2010 – 2012 and during the collection of the M&E questionnaires various challenges were mentioned by the members. They will be addressed through various activities in the Strategic Plan 2010— 2012

- The current membership is too much concentrated in Accra: activities will be taken up to extend the network presence throughout the country. Collaboration with the Community Information Centres will be an important part to address this.
- The Secretariat does not have a lot of information of the members of GINKS. Special efforts by the



Strategic Planning workshop 2008

### The GINKS Strategic Plan 2010 - 2012

In this Strategic Plan, the vision, mission and objectives were reformulated.

The vision of GINKS is *"A society where all have equal access and use ICT for national development."*  
Their mission is *"The platform committed to promote, create and provide knowledge for all through the use of ICTs for national development"*

The core values of GINKS are: Commitment, Understanding, Sharing, Flexibility, Respect and Professionalism.

The objectives of the Network are:

- To be a truly national network with presence, membership and programs in every region of Ghana.
- To be a reference point in all ICT4D issues in Ghana.
- To be a financially sustainable network without losing our not-for-profit nature or shirking our responsibility to society.

Secretariat will ask members to register. With more information of the members, GINKS is able to use the various expertise fields of the members much better.

- The Website is not interactive, while currently members expect a social network with more interactivity and integration of blogs, twitter, video and photos
- The female participation is still low. More research should be done to address the needs of female (potential) members
- GINKS is aware of the growing digital divide, especially in illiterate communities and want to address this lack of information by developing audiovisual knowledge products with relevant information for rural communities.
- The members noticed that GINKS lacked Lobby and Advocacy skills to



P.O. Box 11586  
2502 AN The Hague  
The Netherlands

visitors address:  
Raamweg 5  
2596 HL The Hague  
The Netherlands

T. +31 (0)70 - 311 73 11  
F. +31 (0)70 - 311 73 22  
E. [information@iicd.org](mailto:information@iicd.org)  
[www.iicd.org](http://www.iicd.org)



*Ibrahim Inusah, GINKS Coordinator*

- set up campaigns to encourage implementation of ICT policy. Capacity building has started to address this.
- The financial sustainability of the network needs to be addressed, at the moment GINKS is unable to get enough funding to implement all its programs and activities for the period 2010 - 2012

- Unavailability of Internet connectivity makes it difficult to provide information to network members in the rural areas. GINKS should find different ways to communicate with them (through mobile phone or Community Information Centre)

#### 6. Next steps and future plans

In March 2009 GINKS finalized their new Strategic Plan 2010 – 2012. In 2009 the emphasis of the annual plan is on Knowledge sharing events in the Education, Gender and Youth sector, deepening the knowledge about members to use their expertise better, increasing the funding base of the network, producing more local ICT4D stories and videos, encouraging more electronic discussion in the thematic D-groups and building the capacity in Lobby & advocacy skills. It is expected that this focus will bring new experiences and learning that will also impact in addressing the challenges and the future of GINKS.

#### Contact information about GINKS:

[www.ginks.org](http://www.ginks.org)

[www.ginks.blogspot.com](http://www.ginks.blogspot.com)

Ibrahim Inusah, Coordinator GINKS

PO Box 10533

Accra North

Ghana

E-Mail: [ibrahiminiusah@ginks.org](mailto:ibrahiminiusah@ginks.org)



#### Information about IICD:

[www.iicd.org](http://www.iicd.org)

Martine Koopman, Officer Knowledge Sharing

E-mail: [mkoopman@iicd.org](mailto:mkoopman@iicd.org)

Denise Senmartin, Officer Knowledge Sharing Thematic Networks

E-mail: [dseanmartin@iicd.org](mailto:dseanmartin@iicd.org)

*With the right tools, people in developing countries can considerably improve their livelihoods and quality of life. Better access to information and communication technology (ICT) is particularly vital in enabling them to achieve their goals. This is why the International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD) creates practical and sustainable solutions that connect people and enable them to benefit from ICT. As an independent not-for-profit foundation, we put knowledge, innovation and finance to work with partners from the public, private and not-for profit sectors.*

*IICD is active in Africa, Latin-America and the Caribbean where we create and enhance development opportunities in education, good governance, livelihoods, health and the environment. Our approach includes linking local, national and international organisations as well as formulating and implementing ICT-supported development policies and projects. . Together, we can make a world of difference.*