



# Citizens' Advocacy for Public Accountability & Democratic Engagement through ICT Convergence in Eastern Africa

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**Abstract:** This paper aims at contributing to the concept of [electronic] e-participation by exploring empirical relevance of the ICT Convergence approach to promoting citizens' democratic advocacy in the developing world context. It presents an analysis conducted on ToroDev's ICT convergence approach for democratic engagement in western Uganda. It describes how simple, affordable, and cost effective ICT tools are used to mobilize, activate the intuitiveness, assertiveness and facilitate local citizens' participation in good governance processes. ICT tools have strengthened offline citizens' gatherings to deliberate on good governance issues through advocacy forum platforms. As a result, essential service delivery is improved at the grassroot level. The paper also relates ToroDev's approach to other initiatives in the Eastern Africa and discusses challenges and potentiality of the approach in empowering local citizens to democratically air out their views, monitor and participate in planning, budgeting for improved service delivery together with leaders on a larger scale.

**Keywords:** Governance, Good Governance, ICT Convergence, Democratic Engagement, Advocacy Forums

**Acknowledgement:** This paper presents preliminary results of the project, 'Converging ICT Tools to Promote Public Accountability and Democratic Engagement for Improved Service Delivery in Rwenzori Region, Western Uganda', implemented by Toro Development Network (ToroDev) with financial support from SPIDER at Stockholm University and National Endowment for Democracy (NED). ToroDev also partners on the project with FrontLine SMS, UK to mainstream the potential of mobile phone technologies for local citizens' empowerment and the ICT4Democracy Network in East Africa for evaluation, learning experiences and dissemination of results to regional and global platforms.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) offer concrete opportunities for local and national governments to improve their performance in terms of transparency, participation and decentralization (Guchteneire & Mlikota, 2008, p.2). Many other scholars and development practitioners globally, have echoed related statements in recent years. However, many are anecdotal and coming across empirical case studies to support such conclusions has been difficult. The United Nations (2010) reported a social media boom supported by mobile technologies in Africa. It is also argued that countries that have harnessed the potential of ICTs have attained significant social and economic development. This transformation also has influence on how political leaders govern citizens in these knowledge-based economies or nations. For example, the boom of online social and broadcast media and mobile technology use in the North African states of Egypt, Tunisia and Libya is believed to have contributed to change in governments that were perceived undemocratic by citizens since the year 2011. Strand (2010) stressed that in a given state, citizens must have access to public information in order for democracy to function. For lack of it, results in a non-participatory society in which political decision making is not democratic.

Therefore, access to information and transparency are prerequisites for democracy as well as key tools in the fight against corruption.

This analysis paper consequently, examines innovative and practical ways in which local citizens are empowered to use ICT to democratically engage their leaders for improved essential service delivery in western Uganda. It also briefly explores other practical e-participation processes in Kenya and Tanzania where the ICT for Democracy Network for East Africa currently operates. The major goal of the paper is to contribute to a body of empirical knowledge about the ability and challenges of ICTs in promoting bottom-up (citizen participation) good governance practices in the developing world. It presents the preliminary results of a project kick-started in July 2012 titled, *“Converging ICT Tools to Promote Public Accountability & Democratic Engagement for Improved Service Delivery in western Uganda”*. The project is implemented by ToroDev in partnership with SPIDER at Stockholm University, the National Endowment for Democracy, USA and ICT4Democracy Network for East Africa. The novelty of this project is that, it conceptually employs an *“ICT convergence approach”* that emphasizes broadcast media as a hub, where all other information and knowledge sharing initiatives – including internet enabled online platforms – can be accessed and used by the bulk of local citizens in a rural or countryside context of the developing world. The paper also analyses the effects of the ICT convergence approach and ICT for development in general; creating a sense of responsibility, spurring individual and group intuitiveness to tackle complex socio-economic and political development challenges in the community and forge unity among the rural populations. Outcomes from ToroDev’s interventions show that this kind of citizen empowerment continues to be possible in western Uganda. For example, through the emergence of ICT-enabled citizens’ *advocacy forums* as physical and offline platforms, rural citizens objectively engage leadership for essential service delivery accountability and government leaders are finding it challenging to match civically empowered citizens’ information needs.

## Methodology

The methodology used for data collection and analysis, combined both qualitative and quantitative approaches within the framework of evidence-based theory and practice (Drisko, 2012). It focused on tracking outcomes of ToroDev’s use of different ICT tools to promote accountability and democratic engagement- where broadcast radio has been used as a *convergence hub* - in western Uganda since 2011. The analysis gathered data on perspectives and noticeable changes as result of using ICT convergence for democratic engagement, active citizens’ participation in good governance processes for realization of improved service delivery. A total of 214 local citizens organised in the fourteen citizens’ advocacy forums spread in six out of seven districts where ToroDev operates were interviewed. The other data was collected from 40 broadcast media practitioners organised under the Rwenzori Journalist Forum, 60 local and central government political leaders and civil servants in the seven districts of Rwenzori region, western Uganda also provided vital information for this analysis. The literature on other ICT-enabled citizens’ participation initiatives in Eastern African countries (Kenya and Tanzania) were also analysed in relation to ToroDev’s ICT convergence approach.

## 1.0: Context, ICT Infrastructure & Policy Framework in Eastern Africa

ITU (2010) estimated that ICTs could be accessible to everyone by 2015 and bring internationally agreed development targets ever closer to achievement (UNDP, 2012). The realism of this estimation remains an unanswered question in Eastern Africa due to contextual challenges. These could be social, economic, political and technical, including infrastructural issues, which slightly differ from country to country in the region. The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency urged that in government, ICT may increase accountability and transparency and counter corruption through more efficient administration and increased flows of

information. This may also strengthen good governance and improve interaction between government and citizens (Primo & Esterhuysen, 2009). However, one of the challenging questions faced with development practitioners has been how to practically localize access and use of ICT to benefit rural citizens in their quest for active participation in governance processes that target to improve their livelihoods in the developing world.

The concept of *governance* has been around in both political and academic discourse for a long time. However, the cornerstone of *good governance* involves high quality service delivery, quick and efficient response mechanisms, easy access to necessary resources, and high civic engagement (Moraa, 2011 & Olugbenga, 2001). Oloo & Kamungi (2012) defined governance as a process by which public institutions conduct public affairs, manage public resources and guarantee the realization of rights and services. On the other hand, they described good governance as public service delivery in a manner that is free of abuse and corruption, respects the rule of law and commitment to democratic values. It is participatory, transparent and accountable, based on broad consensus and includes the voices of the poor and vulnerable in decision-making processes (Oloo & Kamungi, 2012).

More so, as Chaligha (2008) stressed:

*"...good governance refers to existence of democratic norms accepted and nurtured by citizens and their government. The involvement of citizens in development of rules and procedures (norms) is crucial. Hence, the government has to be close to its people by involving citizens in development and implementation of policies, programs that affect them in their localities. A government that ensures citizens' participation also ensures continuous accountability, transparency, legitimacy and trust. When citizens take a role in determining and implementing projects, their quality of life improves. Under such conditions, citizens' participation can be perceived as a prerequisite for poverty reduction. Consequently, the lack of citizen participation in determining their own destiny can impact upon citizens negatively. Citizens may feel ignored if they are not involved in formulating and implementing projects in their own communities. When they feel that their local authority does not involve them, they may feel alienated. Good governance suffers under such circumstances, and democracy is also undermined." (Chaligha, 2008, p. ix).*

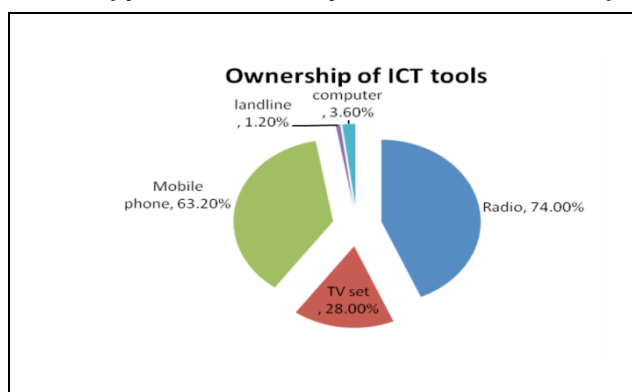
While much has been reported on the benefits of ICTs for promoting development – including governance processes, recent studies indicate that the technologies themselves cannot bring about positive changes in people's lives; it is ways in which these technologies are used, the infrastructures available to access these technologies and institutional frameworks that protect those that do use these technologies. Often it is these other factors that enable positive transformation (Kriz and Qureshi, 2009, p.2). A brief exploration of the ICT sector and government openness frameworks in some East African countries reveals the following;

The Uganda government drafted the National ICT Policy in 2003 and established a fully-fledged ICT Ministry in 2006. Later on, the enactment of Right to Access to Information Act (2005) signified government's commitment to empowering local citizens to actively participate in governance issues. The Uganda government recognizes the potential of ICT tools to improve delivery of development services, transparency and governance through availability of public domain (ICT Policy 2003, pg.9). The Uganda Vision 2040 and the National Development Plan 2010-2015 also acknowledge that there is serious lack of ICT skills and knowledge in the population that would propel local citizens to engage government for social economic development, especially in the rural areas (NDP, 2010; pg. 126). However, Uganda's promising ICT policy framework implementation could also be let down by recent hostile legislations like the Regulation of Interception of Communications Act (2010) and the Public Order Management Act (2013). These in turn could limit the enthusiasm and assertiveness of several local Ugandans to use ICT tools to demand accountability from political leaders. Their boldness to act as whistleblowers on any impropriety or misappropriation of public resources meant to improve essential service delivery

could also be curtailed by the same laws. Amnesty International (2010) enchoed similar concerns about the uncertainties caused by communications interception law in Uganda towards citizens' freedom of expression, participation in good governance processes and privacy during the course of its operationalization. Specific articles four and five of this act need review, since the persons and circumstances under which the interceptions of the communications are authorized seem controversial in Uganda's current context of pursuit for democratic and open governance. More so, the Public Order Management Act (2013), particularly article nineteen, reveals the government's double standards on commitment to citizens' freedom of assembly as embedded in the country's constitution and, endagers civil active participation in good governance processes (Free Word Centre, 2013). In Kenya, the national ICT policy was launched in January 2006, whereas in Tanzania, the same policy was approved in 2005. ICT stands out to be one of the main pillars in achieving Tanzania's Vision 2025.

Conversely, the ICT infrastructure has steadily improved in Uganda due to considerable government's enabling environment in the last decade. The Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) estimated that there were 14 million mobile phone subscribers in the country as of June 2012. National internet backbone fiber optic laid is about 2,500 kilometers countrywide by both private and government investment, with major regional towns and border posts connected. However, much of it is not yet operationalized and therefore fewer citizens are accessing it. But also, there is increasingly a shift in the means of access to internet services, with the strong emergence of mobile and wireless as opposed to traditional fixed access. There are WiMAX and WiFi, 3G access in some towns, cities as well as GPRS connections on the GSM networks (Mulira, 2010). In Kenya, there were 24 million cell phone subscribers in July 2011, out of a population of 41 million. Throughout the East African region, the cost of mobile telephony service is also reducing tremendously. For example, costs in Kenya for voice and SMS have dropped over 90 percent in the past five years (DANIDA, 2012), whereas 67 percent of the total population were mobile phone subscribers. In Uganda, call cost per second has reduced from an average of 8 to 4 shillings for local calls in the last three years and over 48 percent of all Ugandans subscribed to mobile telephony by 2012. In Tanzania, mobile phone subscription had gone up to 25.6 million by 2012, representing 55.5 percent of total population (World Bank, 2011). In Rwanda mobile telephony subscription is at 57 percent (over 6 million of total population) by April 2013.

**Figure 1: Typical Ownership of ICT tools in Kenya in 2009**



*Source: Table 15, Kenya National Housing and Population Census (2009) Report, p. 423*

Noteworthy, the World Development Indicators reveal that there were fewer East Africans using internet services in 2012. Tanzania at 13 percent of over 40 million people, Kenya was at 32 percent, Uganda at 15 percent with over 31 million people and Rwanda at 8 percent of the total population (World Bank, 2012). With these findings, mobile phones and broadcast media technologies become the most widely accessed ICT tools in Eastern Africa. Despite the region's connection to huge fiber

optic cable projects like EASSYs, TEAMs, SEACOM, and SEAS (African Undersea Cables, 2012), access to broadband is still in third position below radio and mobile telephony. This therefore, calls for strategies and approaches that combine the power of online, broadcast and physical information and knowledge sharing initiatives for citizens' democratic empowerment. This is where and when the ToroDev's ICT convergence approach becomes conveniently deployed.

## **2.0: Why the ICT Convergence Approach for Citizens' Democratic Participation Processes in Eastern Africa**

The cost of internet connectivity and infrastructure still pose challenges to realizing benefits of the digital revolution in Uganda and rest of Eastern Africa. Not everyone in the developing world has the opportunity to access internet connectivity as it could be the case in the western developed world, yet this revolution has forged new ways to create knowledge, educate people and disseminate information. It has restructured the way the world conducts economic and business practices, runs governments and engages politically (ITU, 2013). The fundamental question now, is how the majority citizens in the developing world can leapfrog to benefit from this digital revolution, meanwhile as the infrastructural issues are addressed.

ICT convergence is not a new terminology; it has been around in practice and academic discourse for many years. Jussawalla (1999) defined ICT convergence as merging of content and carriage via multimedia channels. Moreover, Huang *et al* (2012) described ICT as a convergence in itself, combining Information Technology (IT) – which refers to both hardware and software used to store, retrieve and process data- on one hand, and Communication Technologies (CT) – which includes electronic systems used to communicate data to individuals or groups and communities. ToroDev's ICT convergence approach does not fundamentally differ from the above descriptions. It focuses on combining the power of internet and computerized applications, mobile technologies and electronic broadcast media – which includes both means to store, retrieve, process and facilitate communication of relevant data or information to appropriately build a democratic community of local citizens in western Uganda. However, the approach deployed by ToroDev is rather improved to suit the social-cultural and economic situation of the rural citizens. It recognizes the power of electronic broadcast media in a rural developing world context and deploys a frequency modulation (FM) radio as a central point or “hub” where information from all other ICT tools converges. It puts into consideration the notion of both basic and ICT skills illiteracy of majority local citizens in rural Uganda and arguably in the Eastern African region, yet they determine who governs them through one of the key democratic governance practices – participating in periodic general elections - that place individuals in positions of leadership and development resources management.

Lessons learnt from democratization processes in different parts of the world underscore the importance of grassroots' movements for democracy in bringing about social change (SIDA, 2009). These movements need constant access to relevant information for their activism. This is because real functioning democracy and equitable access to information are inseparable. A collaborative research program between Denmark, Kenya and Tanzania (2009) also reported that although democratic engagement in Africa had developed tremendously in the past decade, one of the major challenges in the process, however, was to secure inclusive development processes, where all groups of society are participants, feel included, have a say in decisions influencing them and see a way forward in their individual and collective development. The ICT convergence approach that recognizes electronic broadcast media as a major information communication channel for local citizens in a rural context becomes appropriate.

Although e-participation in democratic governance processes by local citizens is showing positive trends in Kenya – at its highest peak immediately before and after the 2013 general elections - much is desired in neighboring Eastern African countries. The analysis of the region

proves the need for a hybrid approach of converging traditional and modern ICT tools to facilitate both online and offline democratic engagements between local citizens and leaders to improve essential service delivery. It is always important to note, however, that there are other socio-cultural and economic contexts that affect citizens' motivation to participation, not technology alone. These may not be similar in all Eastern African countries and, therefore, this could also account for noticeable differences in ICT uptake and enthusiasm of citizen participation, country per country. However, the fact that broadcast media and mobile telephony top the list of ICT tools accessed and used by local citizens in the entire Eastern Africa region, their potential needs to be harnessed optimally, with consideration to specific country socio-cultural, economic and political context. Internet information and other online applications can be accessed on a radio and smart mobile phones, with abundant satellite telecom network countrywide. Whereas online social media and crowdsourcing is important for global connection, information dissemination and knowledge sharing beyond local audiences, radio becomes the most convenient older ICT tool to raise the voices the voiceless in a rural context compared to newer ICT (internet-enabled) tools with limited broadband connectivity, costs and poor usage skills coupled with inappropriate packaging in foreign languages instead of indigenous ones.

Wamala (2013) echoed similar concerns about usage inappropriateness of newer ICT tools by the rural population in a development world context. While analyzing results of a related ICT for development project implemented by the Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET), focusing on promoting local citizens' participation in good governance processes in communities of the Northern Uganda, she stressed;

*"...a pertinent question is to what extent the communities in question succeeded in amplifying local voices through these ICTs. Mapping social issues on crowd sourcing platforms for example, has come under scrutiny with an underlying question "what's in it for the crowd"? Similarly the Facebook updates, the blogs and the Twitter feeds have not been placed there by the affected individuals. The medium of discussion on all these platforms has been English, which is itself exclusionary to the "crowd" that is contributing the content. This brings the discussion towards what is meant by ICT for development? Whose development does ICT4D consider?" (Wamala, 2013, p.6)*

In above analysis, Wamala (2013) observed that broadcast media or radio was a relevant, additional ICT tool used by WOUGNET to complete the information access, use and dissemination loop amongst rural citizens in northern Uganda. Radio even became a main medium of engagement between citizens and their local leaders. This would have been very difficult, if only crowdsourcing and other newer online platforms were used throughout the project, hence giving relevance to the ICT convergence approach that ToroDev is piloting in western Uganda.

### **3.0: Other Citizens' e-Participation through ICT Convergence Experiences in Eastern Africa**

In Kenya, the use of ICT by local citizens to participate in good governance processes has taken great strides in the last five years. Since the occurrence of the post-election violence in 2007/2008, the significance of ICT in consensus and peace building has been evident. A number of private and public ICT initiatives have been adopted. For example, the design and deployment of online application tools like 'Ushahidi' (<http://www.ushahidi.com>), 'Huduma' (<http://www.huduma.or.ke>) and 'Uchaguzi' (<http://www.uchaguzi.co.ke>) that are used by citizens and civil society to engage community to participate in good governance processes like service delivery, election and human rights monitoring, deserve mention. These applications can also be accessed via mobile technology with specific application versions for android powered smart phone, iPhones, iPads or use of the common Short Message Service (SMS), whose presence is wide in the Eastern African region. The use of ICT played a key role in keeping the citizens

engaged during the constitutional amendments, referendum and 2013 general election processes in Kenya.

As Oloo and Kamungi (2012) observed:

*“Over the years, ICT tools have played a critical role in the constitutional reform process. The use of diverse technological tools and resources to communicate, create, disseminate, store and manage information about the reform process increased public awareness about the process itself as well as opportunities for active participation. ICTs also emerged as the main mobilizing tool during the referendum on the constitution. Campaign messages were broadcast in mainstream media while ‘soft’ mobilization took place in the social media, where those ‘connected’ to the internet initiated and debated vigorously reform issues on blogs and social networking sites. Old and new ICT tools were the main avenues through which information about the reform process was communicated to citizens.*

*ICTs also provided a platform for debate and feedback by facilitating posting of alerts, reactions and public debate about the reform process. ICTs were used to educate voters and to mobilize for a peaceful referendum. Since the promulgation of the new constitution, citizens have used ICTs to draw public attention to incidents of corruption or abuse of office, increasing accountability of public office holders and promoting adherence to provisions of the constitution. During the establishment of constitutional implementation commissions, citizens used ICTs to provide information for purposes of vetting and recruitment (Aloo & Kamungi, 2012, p. 42-44)*

A typical empirical case to support the role of ICT - enabled citizens' participation in governance processes (e-participation) is recorded during the appointment of the nine-member team of the Judicial Service Commission (JSC) in Kenya in December 2010. The process was very competitive and transparent with the interviewing process relayed through live broadcast on several televisions and radio stations in the country. Before then, advertisements for the positions were done through online, broadcast and print media. Aloo and Kamungi (2012) also argued that the high level openness and participation demonstrated in this democratic exercise, increased confidence among all Kenyans in the new constitution implementation and actual feeling of ownership of the judicial sector in the country. In Tanzania, citizens self-initiated practical cases of e-participation are not well documented. This raises concerns of the extent to which ICTs are actually empowering the population to actively engage government for improvement of essential service delivery in the country. Nevertheless, the boom of mobile technologies in Tanzania cannot be underestimated.

In Uganda, for over a decade, the use of ICTs continues to entrench in local citizen's quest for access to information, knowledge sharing and struggle for active participation in good governance activities. The recent survey conducted by CIPESA, a partner of the ICT4Democracy Network in East Africa revealed that at 54% percent of respondents - local citizens in Uganda use e-participation or ICT tools to demand service delivery from their leaders. Survey results also showed that 56% of citizens communicate with each other and other interest groups about the same using ICT tools (CIPESA, 2012). It should be emphasized, however, that the above survey found out that citizen's use a convergence of both 'old' and 'new' ICT tools for their e-participation activities in Uganda. In particular, the important role of broadcast media and television was specially mentioned in the survey carried out by CIPESA.

#### **4.0: Analysis of Effects of the ICT Convergence Approach on the Citizens' Democratic Engagement Processes in Western Uganda**



#### 4.1: ICT-Enabled, Citizens' Advocacy Forums

Zanello & Maassen (2009) urged that when citizens want to be engaged, they need information to be aware, communication to organize actions, organization to make their action more effective and feedback to have results. This is the rationale for the citizens' advocacy forums model piloted by ToroDev in western Uganda. The disconnection between elected leaders and citizens in Uganda is wide, leading to limited continuous consultation and feedback between the electorate and their democratic representatives. There is limited awareness among local citizens about their power and the extent of this power in the democratic system, limiting their ability to exercise it in promoting and demanding particularly democratic practice and accountability (Kiranda, 2013). Citizens are not fully confident to demand accountability from their leaders and are also not mobilized towards achieving common development goals through engagement with leadership. Advocacy forums are organized citizens' groups that champion deliberations, instill intuitiveness and unity among rural citizens, organize democratic engagement forums between citizens and leaders and monitor of service delivery. They use appropriate ICT tools like social and broadcast media, FM radio, online or internet platforms like the 'Ushahidi', facebook and mobile applications (SMSs) to communicate important service delivery information and also mobilize citizens to take action. So far, there are fourteen citizens' advocacy forums initiated by ToroDev and spread in six districts of western Uganda.

An empirical case of the Mugusu Forum for Development in Kabarole district, in western Uganda informed this analysis about how local citizens engaged the local government through the forum, to extend gravity flow water scheme to their locality. ICT tools that included mobile applications of SMS, facebook and radio were used to mobilize local residents where over three hundred signatures were collected to petition the district chairperson for a seven kilometer water scheme extension. As a result of this mobilization and later meeting with the district officials, at least a four kilometer water extension was agreed on between local citizens and local government leaders in the next financial year. Surveys were done by engineers and citizens are now preparing for the launch of the project (Akugizibwe, 2013). The advocacy forums bring citizens to think and deliberate together on priority service delivery needs in their rural communities.

Moreso, the analysis results also showed that in Kyenjojo district, Bufunjo People's Forum mobilized local citizens through mobile telephony technology, facebook posts and radio broadcasts to repair a local bridge that had broken down due to heavy rains, yet it interrupted business at a major marketplace - a source of income for the community. The education sector in the community was also heavily affected by the breakdown of this bridge. A primary school pupil would be charged at least one US dollar daily to be helped cross over, and this definitely had negative social and economic implications on households in that community. When the local citizens organized in the advocacy forum contacted the district leaders and responded that there were no funds in budget to promptly to repair the bridge, the ICT-enabled mobilization was well organized to ideologically bring citizens together and temporarily repaired the bridge as they waited on the local government's response. This case study goes a step ahead to demonstrate the potential of ICT tools to positively influence rural people's behavior for a common development cause in the developing world.

The ICT tools convergence approach has also influenced citizens - leaders democratic engagements for planning, budgeting and ensuring transparency in the local governance processes, particularly in Western Uganda. During the analysis, many district local government political and technical civil servants revealed the positive and negative effects of this approach. As Baguma, et al (2014) revealed in one of the analysis results' article:

*"The mismatch is that there is a lot of demand for information and yet for us as local government leaders, we are limited by resources in giving this information either through media or going for community meetings. Going for community meetings would require moving with technocrats, will require getting a vehicle and you know these technical people will always demand for per diem and fuel. When we go on radio, we speak to people and they also speak to us*



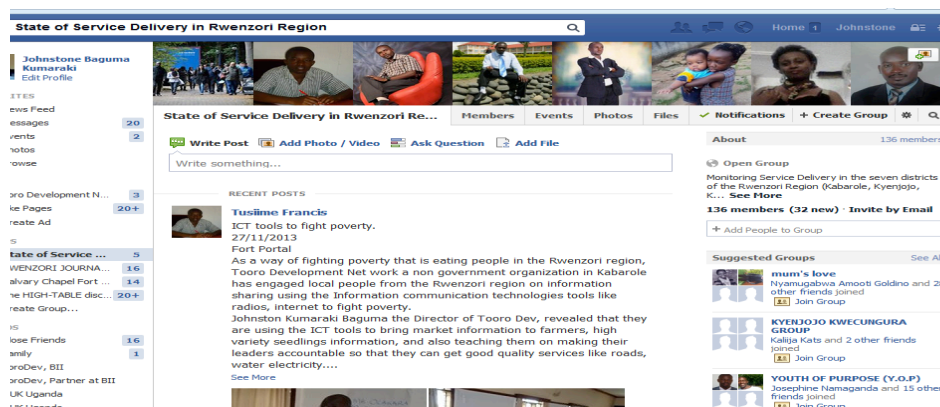
*the calling directly on radio or send messages - through online social media or mobile SMSs - of the comments, questions and concerns which we definitely incorporate in our planning"* (ToroDev,2014)

Nevertheless, the analysis results also revealed a number of challenges associated with the ICT convergence approach. Whereas 80 percent of the citizens who participated in the analysis reported that there was indeed a close relationship between information and knowledge sharing through the ICT convergence approach for local citizens to actively demand for accountability, there was a high level of both basic (40 percent) and ICT illiteracy in the rural communities of western Uganda. This resulted in low access and use of ToroDev information and knowledge platforms for citizens' participation in good governance processes. The other challenge was low access to new ICT tools, including online social media at 20 percent in the Rwenzori region of western Uganda. However, the analysis found out that rapid penetration of mobile technologies presented great potential to address the ICT access problem in the rural community. The analysis also found out that the contribution of ICT-enabled offline citizen gatherings (advocacy forums) for deliberations on how to actively participate in good governance processes was appreciated to counter challenges that illiteracy poised to citizens' participation. ToroDev continues to support the initiation of citizens' forums in seven districts of Rwenzori Region up to end of 2014 when this project comes to a closure. ToroDev expects the advocacy forums to act as a bridge between the rural grass root communities and the leadership using the combination of both older and newer ICT tools for improved service delivery in the region. Most of the advocacy forums were formed by the 120 rural monitors trained by ToroDev since August, 2012. The training focused on online advocacy, monitoring service delivery using online social media and Ushahidi platform for online documentation, visualization and mapping. The Advocacy Forums also use FM Radio Broadcasting as an ICT tool for "convergence or hub" since it is the most accessed media channel in the rural areas of the Rwenzori Region.

#### **4.2: The Rwenzori Journalists' Forum (RFJ) Converging ICTs on Broadcast Media for Improving Citizens' Participation in Governance Issues**

Rwenzori Journalists' Forum is an institutional framework initiated by ToroDev to bring together all broadcast media practioners working with thirteen media stations in the Rwenzori region of western Uganda. In this context, broadcast media practioners is a term applied to describe individuals involved in using radio as a traditional ICT tool to collect, process and communicate relevant content information and provide electronic platforms where local citizens and their leaders meet virtually to democratically engage and deliberate on policy frameworks and implementation of essential service delivery in the region. Due to both basic and ICT illiteracy in the region, especially the majority rural women (Baguma & Komuhendo, 2009), a radio station acts as a hub of other modern ICT tools convergence. The media practioners, through their institutional framework, have agreed to gather information from internet, repackage it into relevant local content and broadcast it on radio for the benefit of local citizens. This information ranges from the best practice articles, reports, the constitution, policy and other legal information documents. Local citizens are, on the other hand, invited to participate on radio live discussions through use of mobile technology applications like voice (call-ins) and Short Message Service (SMS).

**Figure 2: Online Social Media Usage to Advocate for Good Governance & Service Delivery in western Uganda**

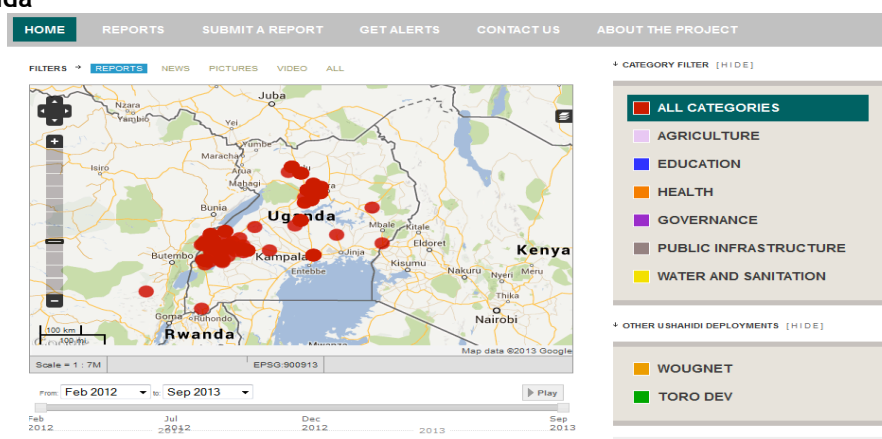


#### 4.3: A case of the Ushahidi Online Platform for Mapping & Visualization of Status of Essential Service Delivery Points in the Rwenzori Region of Western Uganda

This is an online, interactive platform for visualization and mapping of status of essential service delivery points in western and northern Uganda. The Ushahidi platform was developed on free open source software in Kenya to offer a chance to the 2008 post election violence victims to tell their stories online. 'Ushahidi' in Swahili language means 'testimony' and its use has spread over world and used in over 150 countries globally (The Hindu, 2013).

In this project implemented by ToroDev, the Ushahidi platform page to gather, visualize and map status of service delivery points in western Uganda was launched in 2012, in partnership with the Uganda Women Network (WOUGNET). A similar platform page was launched for the same purpose in northern Uganda by WOUGNET. Broadcast media practitioners from twelve stations and rural service delivery monitors trained by ToroDev post constant updates on the online platform. Local community citizens were also oriented by those few initially trained by ToroDev to post updates on their own on the Ushahidi platform. ToroDev volunteers and radio journalist pick the posts from the Ushahidi platform and broadcast them on public accountability programs on the twelve radio stations collaborating with the project. This has helped raise the attention of political leaders to engage with local citizens and address their priority service delivery needs on time.

**Figure 3: A print screen of the Ushahidi Online Platform used by Service Delivery Monitors in Western & Northern Uganda**



## 5. 0: Conclusion

Citizens' participation in good governance processes in the developing world requires free access to information and communication opportunities that are appropriate for a rural context. Whereas ICT have proved to have the potential of facilitating information access and communication, localization of these tools is becoming mandatory, if results have to be well achieved. The ICT convergence approach seems to present this opportunity. In the developing

world context, electronic broadcast media appears to have an edge in converging other online/ internet-based tools that provide platforms for information, communication and knowledge sharing on a global platform. This calls for more research to understand how broadcast media can be improved to complement mobile technologies whose infrastructure and access skills are more available than broadband infrastructure and computer applications use skills in the developing world, especially in the rural communities. ICT for Development practitioners also need to include a convergence approach in their projects and activities to be implemented in Eastern Africa and any other developing world communities with similar contexts. When converged appropriately, ICTs have social, economic and political influence on both citizens and government leaders in Africa and rest of the world. The literature exploration and analysis in this paper shows that state governments in the developing world, especially in Africa, are adding ICT access and use on a list of pre-requisites for successful and inclusive governance processes.

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### **About the Author**

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