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

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Empowering Grassroots With ICTs for Development

Summary of Presentation

- Introduction
- ICTs' role in promoting good governance processes through citizens' participation.
- Methodology for analysis
- ICT Infrastructure & Policy framework in Eastern Africa
- ToroDev's ICT Convergence Approach
- Other e-Participation initiatives in Eastern Africa using ICT convergence approach
- Achievements & challenges of approach
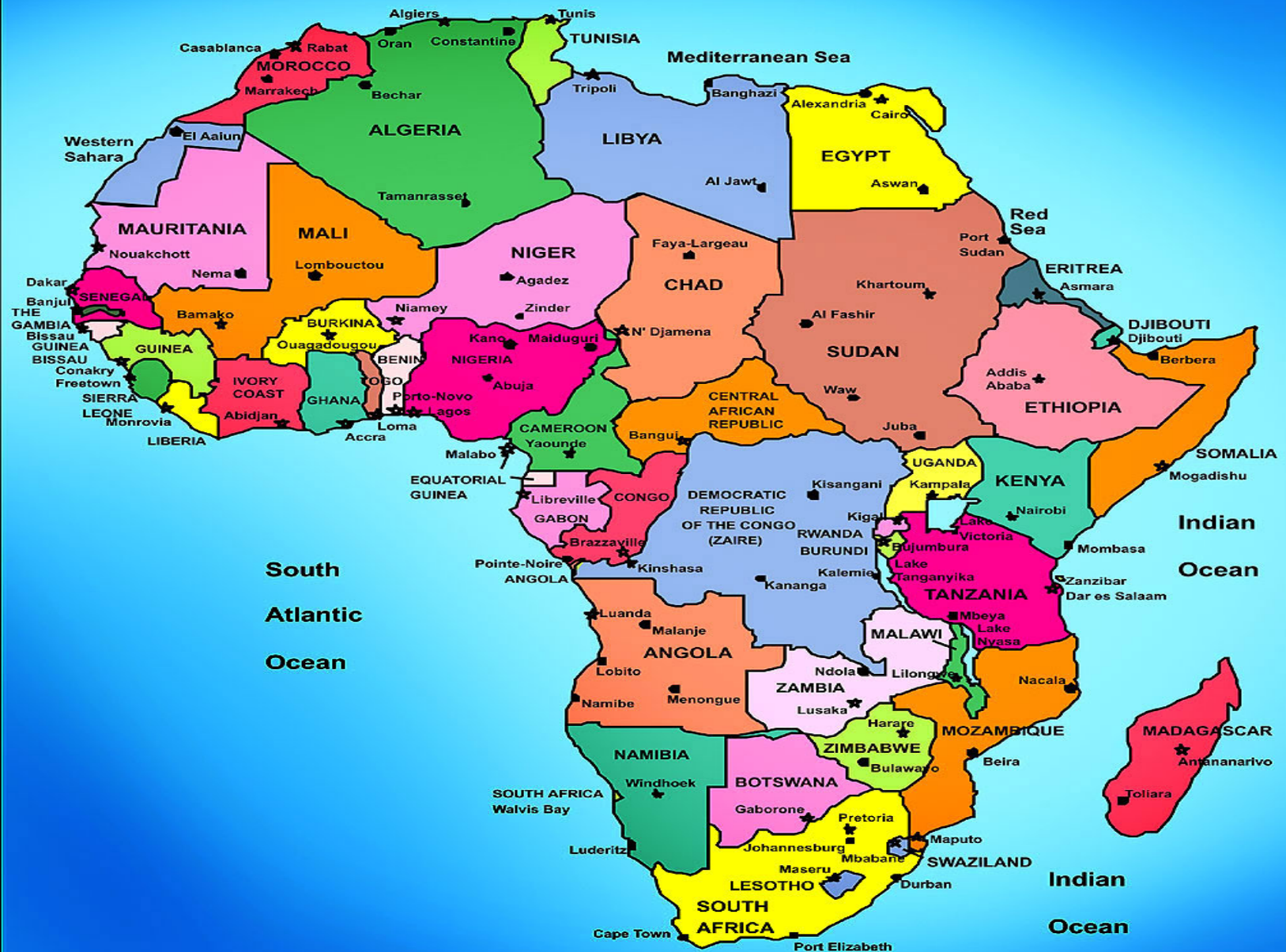- Conclusion

Introduction

- This paper presents preliminary results of ToroDev-SPIDER (Stockholm University) project on ICT Convergence for public accountability and democratic engagement in western Uganda. ToroDev is also supported by the ICT4Democracy Network for East Africa on this project.

- The project started in July 2012 and will end in June 2014.

- Aim of the project is to realize a close engagement environment, supported by different, converged ICT tools, between local citizens and their leaders on priority planning, budgeting for improved essential service delivery at community level.

Role of ICTs in promoting government responsiveness to service delivery

- There are many theories about ICT and its impact on good governance;

- That ICTs can promote government openness for resource allocation *(Guchteneire & Mlikota, 2008)*

- That ICT can promote citizens' bottom-up movements and somehow 'compel' leaders to pay attention to their service delivery needs **(SIDA, 2009)**

- However, empirical data to support such theories is inadequate!

Methodology for analysis: Looking for Empirical Evidence

- Survey conducted in western Uganda (7 districts)
- Analyzed use of ToroDev's ICT Platforms
- Both Quantitative & Qualitative data collected.
- 214 local citizens interviewed

- 40 information (ICT) intermediaries interviewed
- 60 political leaders at local & central government levels interviewed.
- Analysis in Focus groups
- Explored other ICT convergence initiatives in Eastern Africa
- Literature analysis of context & ICT uptake in Eastern Africa region.

ICT Infrastructure & Policy Framework in Eastern Africa

- ICTs work well with clear, supporting infrastructure and favorable institutional frameworks and/or policies **(Kriz & Qureshi, 2009).**
- ICTs are not an end on themselves. Other factors like access, skills, culture affect its impact.
- Policies that encourage transparency in government & citizen involvement
- Investment in infrastructure development steadily improving with broadband, mobile & broadcast technologies.

- Specific ICT policies are in place specific countries
- Broadband infrastructure in EASSYs, TEAMs, SEACOM, and SEAS **(African Undersea Cables, 2012)**
- However, government annual budgeting still low (less than 2% in most Eastern African countries
- Some specific country legislations are counter productive to ICT penetration like the POMA , RICA, CMA in Uganda, Journalists' regulation in Kenya, etc..

Why ICT Convergence? A case of ToroDev in Uganda

- Huang *et al*(2012) & Jussawalla (1999)
- Contextual challenges of infrastructure, access, skills & affordability require ICT convergence.
- However, the role of grassroot (even rural) movements in the democratic processes to bring about real social & political changes is enormous **(SIDA ,2009)**
- The need to generate grassroot/local content in a local context and how to communicate it for citizens' engagement.

- Use of mobile & broadcast technologies for citizens' mobilization for civic/development actions.
- ToroDev, therefore, uses the broadcast media as a point of convergence/hub.

Effects of ICT Convergence Approach in Western Uganda as case study

- Emerging ICT-Enabled, Citizens' Advocacy Forums (grassroot movements, 15 in seven districts)
- Emerging strong journalists' forum (RJF) to counter state manupilation & suppression.
- Change is perspective: Citizen journalism/ community development broadcasting improved.

- Online reporting/ monitoring essential service delivery through mapping & visualization by local citizens.
- ICT convergence has improve the intuitiveness of local citizens to deliberate within themselves and engage leaders as strong community groups
- Use of mobile polling through trac.fm tool improves evidence-based advocacy/engagements

State of Service Delivery in Rwenzori Region

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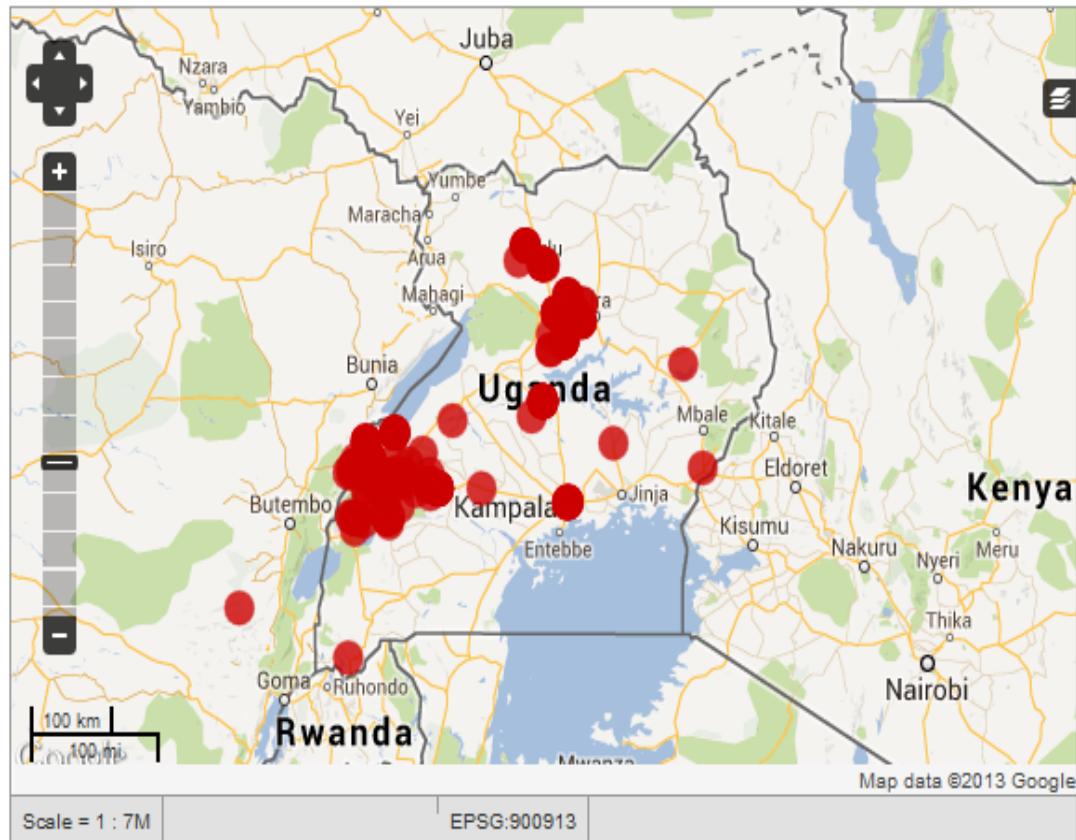Josephine Namaganda and 15 other friends joined
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Other ICT Convergence Initiatives in Eastern Africa

- Development of applications like Huduma, Ushahidi & Uchaguzi
- Increased online& use of mobile technologies for citizen engagement, especially after violent elections in Kenya 2007/2008
- ICTs continue to play a key role in the new constitution implementation in Kenya, even before, ICTs played a key role in the constitutional reform process *(Aloo & Kamungi, 2012)*

- Tanzania's experience in using ICT convergence for human rights **(CHRAGG, 2013)**
- In Uganda, the approach is used to monitor & Report essential service delivery & anti-corruption in the post violence Northern Uganda **(WOUGNET, 2013).**

Challenges of ICT Convergence Approach

- High levels of both basic & ICT skills illiteracy at the grassroot level (40% in the Rwenzori region, western Uganda).

- Low access to newer ICT tools and applications at the grassroot level (only 20% of local citizens can access social media platforms).

- Low access to newer technology applications is as a result of either illiteracy levels or affordability/cost or both.

- Also, newer technologies, especially social media applications are developed in languages not appropriate to grassroot citizens in western Uganda, East Africa.

- Government/political leadership negative interference in grassroot civic engagements, including demand for accountability, anti-corruption advocacy, etc.

Conclusion

- "…mapping social issues on [online] crowd sourcing platforms for example, has come under scrutiny with an underlying question "what's in it for the crowd"? Similarly the Face book 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)*

- Therefore, ICT convergence and/or localization of ICTs to suit access & use of information and communication in different citizen communities becomes imperative in this perspective.