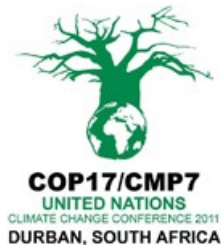


Africa: Using ICT to communicate climate change to women

By [Ticha Tsedu](#)

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[[16 Days of Activism](#)] As decision-makers continue to deliberate on the future of the planet, the people most vulnerable to global warming remain largely voiceless in the public domain. While mainstream media may sometimes be missing the boat when it comes to giving these voices the spotlight, new media is proving to be an important avenue to promote awareness and give women a voice on climate change issues.



It goes without saying that social media has reshaped society. Facebook, Twitter, blogging, YouTube, and many other forms of new media are powerful tools for individuals to participate in and access public spaces like never before. Recent events in the Arab world show the value and strength of public participation through new media that gives voice and power to the citizens.

Been side-lined

Caroline Tagny, an ICT trainer from Canada attending [COP17](#), noted that regarding climate change, mainstream media focuses predominantly on debates around the negotiation processes between nations and their respective governments. The impact of climate change, told by those most affected is equally important, but has unfortunately been side-lined.

The Internet and new media can serve as platforms for women to produce content that is missing in the mainstream media. "If the mainstream media is not covering those kinds of stories, you have to find some ways to produce alternative media like blogging," said Tagny.

If people have access, the Internet is one of the cheapest ways to create and distribute media content. According to O'Neill and Boykoff (2010) in the book *Engaging the public with climate change: Communication and Behaviour Change*, only 6.7% of Africans are Internet users - a figure of 65.9 million people on a continent populated by nearly one billion people. This represents 3.9% of the world total, according to the 2009 statistics.

Essential to educate, demystify use of the Internet

Despite this low Internet penetration, Tagny believes that it remains essential to educate people and demystify use of the Internet. She pointed out that inequitable access should not be an excuse not to know or gain knowledge. She added that, although there are concerns about the digital divide, it is important to move away from that debate and move towards a discussion around access and knowledge production.

From 2000 to 2009, the growth of African Internet users rose 1360%, a progressive and impressive rate of access and use on the continent. In this part of the world, however, many Internet users don't own, and have never even used, a computer - mobile phones are the preferred gateway.

Of course, not all of Africa is connected, but innovative convergence strategies bringing mainstream and new media together are also breaking new ground. It has become increasingly important to connect and report outside of radio and television stations through use of the Internet.

Training female journalists to work better

On the sidelines of COP17 at the nearby University of KwaZulu-Natal, the South African-based Women's Net is currently training female journalists to work better by using web 2.0 tools and social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter when reporting climate change. Journalists play an important role in reporting information to communities.

Community media is particularly important because one of their mandates is to produce diverse media content. They therefore give a voice to many women whose stories on climate change are unknown.

Lee Tsomo from Eldoz FM in Johannesburg, SA, believes that women have the right to have a voice in climate change discussions and to access information on adaptation. In addition to this, she mentions that the impact of using social media as a platform for communication is huge.

"Government can do more"

"It could be even greater if Government can do more to teach people about climate change through technology," adds Tsomo.

In addition to journalists, civil society organisations also form an important component of empowering women and girls to access information and use ICT.

"Women have something to say that is valuable, specific and different," points out Lerato Legoabe, co-director of Women's Net Women. "They constitute 52% of the population and also deserve to be in the public domain and to be heard."

Through ICT, it has become possible to move women's stories and experiences toward greater integration within the broader public space. In the context of climate change discourse, the powerful act of giving women a voice to express themselves through online media services such as blogs and Facebook is indeed a necessary one.

Whereas mainstream media is often highly controlled by ownership patterns and private interests that determine what is deemed important for public consumption, new media puts the power in the hands of the people. As noted by Legoabe, "the freedom that comes with the Internet allows you to decide what you want to publish because you are the editor, the photographer, the reporter."

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