# Qualitative Report

### for the

# Young women
# Govern South Africa Project

### within the

# Women-Gov Project



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# 1. Policy Brief

## Executive Summary

Marginalized young South African women are extremely disadvantaged because of their social locations. At the same time they are potentially powerful in terms of their numbers and capacity for public engagement and leadership. The Young Women-Govern South Africa Project sought to strengthen young women's public participation in the Western Cape through using ICTs including social media, IT skills, the making and circulation of documentaries and photographs and public events and campaigns. In realizing its mandate to empower citizens who have been disempowered on the basis of age, race, gender and class, post-apartheid local, provincial and national government planning should support, assist and strengthen the core trajectories of this project at the regional, communal and national levels.



*YWGSA National Workshop debate on ICT policy related matters*

## Introduction: The South African Intervention: Challenges of Action Research

Within the parameters of a three-country project addressing women and public participation titled "Women Govern", the South African action research intervention has focused on young women in the 18-29 year-old age range. Socially marginalized young

women form a group that is possibly more alienated from and ignorant of public information than other groups defined as major constituencies[1]. Having grown up as the inheritors of post-apartheid change, few have been involved in NGOs, CBOs or trade unions in the ways that a previous generation was. At the same time, their youth, sense of restlessness, and the fact that they are far more familiar with modern ICTs than a previous generation all mean that they form keen and strategically located participants in a civic action project that enlists the adventurous use of new media.

The action research between 2012 and 2014 has addressed women's active citizenship. Information produced by NGOs, CBOs and local, provincial or national government, can alienate and further marginalize young women as critically informed citizens. The Project has concentrated on young women establishing control over the production and dissemination of information, rather than on their access to existing circuits of information.

In an attempt to target marginalized women in urban and peri-urban Cape Town, the first phase of the Project involved working with the young women's chapter of a community-based organization, the New Women's Movement. Following lessons learned from this partnership, the second phase of the Project, which commenced from the start of 2013, involved working with women students in partnership with young women from NGOs and in marginalized areas in the Western Cape.

## Approaches and Results

The Project has focused on five related priorities and goals. These are:
 -to enhance young women's associational activity;
 -to institute and strengthen information-sharing;
 -to facilitate the use of ICT access and competencies in developing associational activity and   information production and sharing;
to develop young women's understanding of domestic, community and national politics, especially around gender and sexuality;

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[1] These would be "youth", black men, black people, women, black women, rural women, rural people.

to encourage young women to use new media for their active engagement around domestic, community and national affairs.

Work done during the first and second phases of the Project revealed the importance of young women developing their autonomous creative, intellectual and political voices. Action research on Young women Govern-South Africa has also uncovered the significance of women's creative and dialogic expression in facilitating their grounded understanding of local and national politics and their critical information sharing and knowledge production. Genres such as dance, film-making, poetry, photography, artwork and installations have therefore been central to the campaigns and public events conducted in 2013 and the start of 2014.



*Alternative feminist knowledge production by participants through artwork*

The interaction between students and young women in communities presented both positive and challenging results. Because of the structural and long-term effects of apartheid, many young women who are not students were practically unable to maintain their commitment to project activities, workshops and skills acquisition. Students have therefore been the most consistent participants, and the goal of deepening communication has not always been achieved. In this regard, the location of the Project in the Women's and Gender Studies Department alongside its collaboration with the Gender Equity Unit, is contributing to the University's long history of social engagement. At the same time, the difficulties of this engagement in post-apartheid neo-liberal South Africa cannot be denied. However, the principle of working towards each-one-teach one was consistently followed in the project, even though it was realized that working with organizations, as opposed to

individuals who may or may not be connected to NGOs or CBOs presented many organizational and administrative challenges that undermined rather than strengthened the project's goals.

One major objective of this Project was to strengthen networks with local government structures and systems. The 16 months of the second phase of the Project did not allow for consolidated exchanges, even though young women were able to enhance their public participation and communal visibility. Research on the reasons for this has ascertained that a major factor is the length and depth of the Project. Unemployed young women and young women who do not have the resources to pursue higher Education are under pressure in households to perform domestic activities and to be income generators. Incentives for participation in public participation can only be developed over time. A second factor is the exclusionary nature of participatory structures and discourses from the points of view of young women. The language, protocols and conventions of public participation through local government structures and processes do little to engage socially marginalized women as embodied persons, rather than as abstract social subjects with entitlements to rights.

## Conclusion

The feminist action research project aimed at enhancing young women's public participation encourages reflection on the role and significance of popular education at South African universities in the present day. With the closure of projects and sites at several South African universities, universities appear to have declared the demise of popular education with the aim of concentrating on "academic excellence". At the same time, marginalized subjects continue to be primary subjects in university-based research. This action-research project has sought to incorporate young women as active producers of knowledge, and to ensure that their voices are heard. Most importantly, it has demonstrated the significance of opening up debate, especially in the wake of the 2008 Ministerial Committee Report on the transformation of higher education, on the role of Higher Education and public participation in neo-liberal South Africa.

Sectoral approaches to change create little space for much-needed dialogue between government; policy-makers and planners; the HE sector and feminist and other social justice initiatives. There is an urgent need to create dialogues across sectoral boundaries to set in place sustainable and pro-active support systems and policy research for enhancing the public participation of youth in South Africa.

Think tanks and workshops for taking these ventures forward are important. Equally important are efforts by local and national government to ensure that citizens are not only able to access information, but are equipped to play contributory roles as critically informed and respected citizens. In recent years, the strikes and protests against poor service delivery in South African communities speaks volumes about the discontent among South Africans, and young people in particular, with the trend towards top-down systems of governance. It is also a gauge of the frustrations experienced by citizens who have lost confidence in existing platforms of debate around democratic governance. The information revolution has set in place valuable platforms and technologies for facilitating these exchanges. And young South Africans, despite the digital divide, are well-placed to drive these exchanges.

## Implications and Recommendations

- Inter-sectoral conversations involving local government, donors and the HE sector, are important in setting in place strategies and priorities for guiding projects and sites for ICT-driven public participation programmes. The fragmented approach to sectoral reform that was ushered in from 1994 has proved ineffective, especially regarding the need to integrate the ICT sector and telecommunications reform.
- A national ICT policy framework which is open to input from several stakeholders and which is widely circulated and publicized would strengthen the independent communicative power and scope for public participation of young women.
- The implementation of e-services such as e-government, e-health and e-education must be revised in accordance with the varying resources and different voices of women in poor communities.

- Efforts must be made to develop and strengthen communal participation alongside telecommunications reform. The silos that sectors have operated in to date have proved detrimental to participatory governance and public access to and usage of ICTs.

- Universities must critically assess their role as producers of knowledge deemed to be in the service of the empowerment of socially marginalized groups. As several inquiries into the protracted transformation of the HE sector vis-à-vis public education have revealed, universities and University centres, units and Departments should be galvanizing conversations about much-needed changes.

- In the early years of South African democracy, the emphasis within local government on Integrated Development Planning sought to reverse the divisions and uneven-ness of apartheid planning. The purposes, mechanics and timing of IDP planning should be clearly spelt out for communities on radio, in the print media and digitally to ensure that all interested parties can contribute in holistic and accountable planning for all members of communities.

- Inattention to the revolutionary impact of new media, especially among youth, should be fully integrated into Integrated Development Planning. Planning for communities has tended to assume that members lack all skills, interest or resources to exploit the revolutionary potential of modern ICTs. However, the energies of South African youth, including those from the most marginalized communities, defy the stereotype of *a* socially marginalized South African who is wholly cut off from the world of ICTs.

- Using ICTs in fragmented communities in South Africa presents enormous possibilities for deepening young South Africans' engagement with participatory processes. Resources, funding and programmes for ICT-driven ventures are therefore critical. At the same time, these resources should ensure that programmes are geared towards the substantive empowerment of citizens, rather than equipping them to take up compliant roles within the existing class, racial and gendered status quo. While this "empowerment" leads to small sections of communities enjoying short-term privileges within the parameters of developmentalism, it does not allow

for strategic and long-term changes that guarantee a flourishing and robust democracy.

- The dourness and austerity of existing information about governance and public or civic participation currently available to South Africans can alienate young people whose needs for engaging in lively and compelling cultural and political affairs is steadily intensifying because of the energy of the contemporary globalized world of mass culture. Much of this mass culture is reactionary, misogynistic and sedating. However, the forms of visual culture and the entertainment industry, which often morph into new media today, are valuable and necessary components of information production and dissemination among young people.

- The accountability of government (including local and national government) to marginalized communities tends to involve communities' being required to use strategies, structures and agendas defined by politicians, bureaucrats and administrators. The principle of ensuring that public participation entails what Devaki Jain has terms "bubbling up", rather than "trickling down", is rapidly being eroded in South Africa, and must be re-activated.

## 2. Context Analysis

### 2.1 Women, Citizenship and Public Participation

In creating a framework for gender equality, the South African constitution has obviously made provision for the active role of women in governance, law-making and public participation. Since the Constitution also institutes measures for redressing apartheid inequalities in order to promote equality, the advancement of black women - who were effectively disenfranchised under apartheid - has been actively promoted through institutions including National Gender Machinery, the Commission on Gender Equality and the Human Rights Commission, as well as the National Gender Policy Framework and several laws and policies within education, politics and the workplace. South Africa has also ratified international conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of

Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform of Action, and has endorsed regional instruments for ensuring gender equality, such as SADC's protocol on gender and development. Several measures for ensuring non-discrimination against and affirmative action for black women have led to the country's being ranked among those with the highest numbers of women in government at the parliamentary and provincial levels. Although women's leadership at the local government level has been far less impressive, safeguards for ensuring women's decision-making and leadership have been instituted through the South African Local Government Act and the legislative emphasis on the role of local government in the Integrated Development Process (IDP).



*South Africa's women's movements have played a role in shaping the political landscape*

While the country has an impressive standing in indices that measure women's participation at the upper levels of government as well as policies and laws for women's empowerment, large numbers of poor, unemployed and working-class women do not contribute to decision-making about the country's laws, policies and development plans at the national or local levels. Moreover, many women in South Africa's rural areas, as well as its mushrooming urban and peri-urban areas continue to bear the brunt of poverty, lack of services, limited access to education and other resources and insecurity in public spaces and their homes. Today, therefore, the position of most South African women in politics is strikingly similar to that of the majority of women in Brazil and India: in each of these postcolonial and multi-cultural countries, the majority of women face enormous challenges in contributing to governance not only at the national level, but also at the communal levels. This is the case despite the facts that each of these countries has undergone major democratic restructuring. In India, Brazil and South Africa, the struggles of groups that have been marginalized on the basis of race, class, caste, ethnicity and gender have

culminated in innovative policies, laws and planning for redistributive and decision-making justice. As revealed in the IBSA Dialogue Forum established in 2003, Brazil, India and South Africa also share a standing in the international community as influential "middle powers" in the third world. Women-Gov, as a South-South co-operative project for strengthening the participation of politically subordinated women has therefore held out the promise of fruitful comparison and exchange.

The growing numbers of young people in urban and peri-urban areas throughout Africa tends to be sidelined in transformative and developmental work that fixates on the rural-urban divide. Yet the stead migration to urban and peri-urban areas has led to a massive increase in young people, especially women, who are poor, unemployed, discouraged and politically disempowered. The over-arching aim of the South African chapter of the three-country project has therefore been to enhance *young* women's public participation in an urban/peri-urbn context.

As the project evolved, the meanings of "public participation" and active citizenship became increasingly complex. It became clear that understanding the context of young women's experiences of citizenship through an action research project seeking to strengthen this necessitates a careful engagement with some of the key theoretical and political challenges that feminists have raised about gender, women's political agencies and citizenship. South Africa's rapidly changing information and communication landscape makes this contextualization even more complex. The expansion of Universal Access and Services (UAS) has overlapped with post-apartheid efforts to democratize national resources and public services for all citizens since the dismantling of formal apartheid in 1994. Official attention to public access and universal services was already implicit in the post-apartheid government's Telecommunications Act of 1996, although the particular emphasis on ICTs was built into the Electronic Communications Act of 2005.

To a greater extent than many other African countries, however, South Africa starkly reveals a first-world-third-world divide, with factors such as technology costs, extremely limited competition among service providers resulting in high bandwidth prices, the vastly

uneven distribution of telecommunications resources, limited education and skills for most of the country's inhabitants, and the costs and accessibility of electricity (Molawa, 2009) posing tremendous challenges for the majority of South Africans, including those living in urban and peri-urban areas and often very close to populations whose ICT use mirrors patterns in the first world. Despite the proliferation of formal measures for public information access and services, then, marginalized women continue to struggle for visibility and authority both in creating publically influential information networks and in public participation.

In fact, just over two decades after the first democratic election in South Africa, the notion of "women's citizenship" - both in official and in popularized public discourse - has become a cliché with very similar meanings to the vacuous notion of "*Batho pele*" or "people first"[2]. During the run-up to the first democratic election, women's roles in governance and public participation were the subject of animated struggles and debates. Significantly, South Africa – in contrast to many other countries - began to grapple with women's public participation during, and not after, decolonization. From its inception, the African National Congress had created a space for women's agency in anti-apartheid mobilization and struggle. While this led to national action including women's mass protest against apartheid pass laws[3], women's political agency tended to be tied to male-centred organizations and agendas. By the 1980s, however, women's groups aligned with the United Democratic Front[4] acted concertedly to position gender struggles in the broader movement against apartheid. Three years before the dismantling of apartheid, the Women's National Coalition, an amalgam of women's organizations and party wings, organized seminars, lobby groups, advocacy and debates about the centrality of gender justice to democratic post-apartheid transformation. The build-up to independence and the work towards a new Constitution therefore

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[2] Introduced shortly after South Africa's first democratic election, the *batho pele* or "people first" initiative aimed at transforming public service delivery, especially at local government level. More recently, as evidenced by the waves of unrest and demonstrations throughout South Africa, and as a result of GEAR economic policies, batho pele is often an empty slogan.

[3] In 1956, in the largest protest against one of apartheid's most dehumanizing laws, approximately 20 000 women marched to the Apartheid Government's buildings in Pretoria to protest against black women's carrying passes to permit them into "white' areas of the country.

[4] The United Democratic Front (UDF) was formed in 1983 and became the main anti-apartheid organization operating within South Africa.

centralized gender justice and women's inclusion in governance. And from 1994, successive pieces of legislation addressed women's inclusion through formal rights.

Twenty years of democratic rule, and the gradual implementation of "gender equitous" legislation and policies at levels including workplaces, the primary and HE sectors, the corporate world, the political sector and domestic and interpersonal relationships (through the Domestic Violence Act and Sexual Offences Acts, for example) alleviated some of the glaring formal social, economic and political inequalities of the apartheid period. Yet because formal changes have not been accompanied by major socio-economic transformation, large numbers of historically disadvantaged women remain unaffected by them, and in many cases, ignorant of what their implications are. In her case study of how a group of unemployed black women in a peri-urban area of the Western Cape responded to workshops on realizing women's rights in 2005, Mary Hames concludes that "for the majority of black women even the notion of liberal citizenship is still a pipe dream…'paper rights' have not been transformed into 'substantive rights'…especially for those who have been subject to the historical disadvantage that is the legacy of apartheid" (2006:1325)

As indicated above, one major critique of South Africa's implementation of rights for women at the domestic, community and national levels revolves around the fact that many women – both in urban and in rural areas - have limited and uneven access to these rights; there are therefore considerable limits to the "empowerment" they facilitate for the majority. "Having rights", means accessing advantages within a classist system in which there are entrenched and radical differences among women's access to educational and economic resources. "Women's inclusion" therefore allows a small group minority of economically advantaged white and black women to compete in and take up positions of authority in extremely masculinist and classist contexts. As the literature review later will show, recent South African feminist appraisals of certain women's formal inclusion - alongside the *de facto* exclusion of many more - dominate recent progressive policy-related and scholarly work on gender and public participation.

 A related obstacle to women's public participation has been explored by Linzi Manicom (2005). Manicom confronts ways in which women are constructed as gendered subjects,

and how gendered public participation - for both women and men - is naturalized within entrenched racial, class and heteronormative structural relations. For commentators like Manicom, therefore, the problem is not that the rights framework does not "go far enough" or "do enough for all women", but that it is socially constructed to normalize a range of domestic, communal, national and global power relations. Drawing attention to how nations, even those that seem to set in place major democratizing processes, legitimize themselves in the eyes of the country's inhabitants and an international community, Sylvia Walbie rhetorically asks whether women's public action in communal or national processes has the same form or intent as that of men. Interventions into citizenship studies such as Walbie's and Manicom's convey that the apparent universality of a single national interest is belied by the way that different social subjects define national and local interests as well as democratic governance. As revealed in the Indian women's narratives in *Playing with Fire: Feminist Thought and Activism through Seven Lives in India* (2006), women marginalized through caste, class, domestic relations, nationalism and global capitalism negotiate intricate entanglements of power in their struggles for national participation and belonging. As is the case with many young South African women and participants in the YWGSA Project, these Indian women's struggles reveal the importance of radical interrogations of citizenship and public participation for many women in the global South, as well as the contexts in which women subjects are enjoined to take up positions as "active citizens".

The theoretical framework agreed on for both the South African and three-country Projects was a feminist one. As it developed, the YWGSA Project action research demonstrated the absolute centrality of a feminist lens in understanding concrete struggles for political participation and processes that progressive legislation and extensive telecommunications reform can obscure. Measures of citizenship and ICT reform have often been juridical ones, programmatic rights and entitlements that easily reduce persons to atomized and universalized subjects. Realizing citizenship and communications rights within a legal and juridical framework requires homogenized subjects to speak a common language, to use particular routes and tools of communication, and to accept monolithic models of empowerment. The hegemony of these models can lead to the effective alienation of

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citizens from the participatory processes. Throughout the two phases of the South African project's attention to "empowering young women", researchers were made sharply aware of the distinctiveness of these women's social locations and perceptions. In particular, our action research grappled with the extent to which young South African citizens can remain profoundly estranged from dominant conceptualizations of and routes for attaining citizenship.

At the same time, we were made conscious of how neo-liberalism significantly shapes the subjectivities and struggles of those (including the subjects of the present study) who, politically and economically, stand to benefit little from it. In South Africa, neo-liberalism's hegemony and its assimilation by subordinate groups can be traced to the evolution of the government's economic policies. Post-apartheid economic policies and development during the last two decades rapidly shifted away from the nationalistic and socialist aspects set in place by the Freedom Charter and the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) towards the aggressively neo-liberal framework established by the Growth Employment and Redistribution plans from 1996. Unlike the RDP, which placed some emphasis on the democratic redistribution under state regulation, the GEAR strategy blatantly privileged economic productivity and insisted that social goals could be achieved through "competitive platform for a powerful expansion... within a "stable environment for confidence" and a "profitable surge in private investment" (GEAR, 1996: 2). In contrast to the externally-imposed structural adjustment in many other African countries, therefore, South Africa has manifested a "homegrown structural adjustment" (Bond, 2001).

Equally importantly, neo-liberalism in South Africa has discursively shaped public and popular culture and citizens' subjectivities in ways that naturalize constructs of, for example, "empowerment", "freedom" "self-determination" and "individual success". In tandem with the state, South Africa's educational system, its globalized mass media industry and its ethos of consumer culture have increasingly prioritized personal achievement and growth under capitalism, and strategies for investing in young socially mobile South Africans as the future galvanizers of an aggressively neo-liberal capitalist development. Young working-class, unemployed or poor South African women - especially since they have limited experience or knowledge of radical collectivist struggles - have

been highly susceptible to the neo-liberal messages that pervade the current South African cultural and mass communications landscape. Consequently, the struggles, subjectivities and consciousness of socially marginalized young women are often uneven and inconsistent, at times registering deep alienation from and frustration with the status quo, and at times reflecting a profound desire for assimilation into it. These paradoxical impulses were often reflected in the use of and responses to ICTs among the Young Women Govern South Africa participants.

## 2.2. Women, Local government and Public Participation



Of the three spheres of government in South Africa, national, provincial and local, the local or municipality level is potentially the most effective platform for the voices and service delivery needs of poor women. As outlined in Section 52 of the Constitution, local government has the strongest potential to encourage community participation and decision-making. In the early years of South Africa's democracy, many NGOs, activists, radical researchers and women's community organizations, were confident about the unique potential that local government provided for building South Africa's participatory democracy, especially through including the most marginalized women in rural areas, peri-urban slums, informal settlements and townships. It was believed that even if national

government and the inevitable centralization of power would not work to effect democratic participation, then local government - guided by successive pieces of legislation - would ensure that marginalized voices would be heard. This convICTion was evidenced in the work of the NPO, the Gender Advocacy Programme. In addition to its work on securing women's representation in governance structures and its 50/50 campaign, GAP turned increasingly to women and local government, commissioning several action research projects, including the work on a Gender Policy for Groot Drakenstein, a farming area inhabited by women farm workers as the most vulnerable and exploited group of women workers in South Africa (GAP, 2005).

As commentators like Yvette Abrahams (2005), Jo Beall (2004) and Van Donk (2000) show, gender transformation in local governments is central to formerly rightless groups' participatory and newly dynamic roles in the years immediately after the transition. Because citizens have far more direct access to their local government councilors than they do to provincial and national MPs, local government, as the "tier closest to the people" brings public participation closest to communities. And when communities have a history of being deprived of the right to democratic governance, local government can encourage confidence in institutions and processes with deeply oppressive apartheid legacies.

This trust is especially important in the case of the majority of women in South Africa. Discriminated against on the basis of race, class and gender, many marginalized women in urban, peri-urban and rural areas experience profound "estrangement" (see Mbembe, 2001) from provincial and national institutions and processes of governance. Local government offers them opportunities within their communities to speak in their own idioms to and about the people and worlds they know best. In turn, this facilitates their contribution to promoting significant national changes in women's living conditions and access to power, resources and services.

Local governments in the years immediately after apartheid was eradicated drew on the communal networks, relationships and organisations that were pivotal to apartheid-era struggles for democratic participation in South Africa. This history makes the participatory potential of local government extremely significant. Since women played a central part in

civic organisations in the seventies and eighties, it is obvious that local government structures and processes can offer them the space to continue to build a sustainable democracy.

To a large extent, however, the institutional arrangements for involving women in local government applied in South Africa, like other third-world contexts, have grown out of a developmentalist paradigm, rather than out of communal structures and methods. From the start of the United Nations' Decade of Women (1975-1985), a deluge of research, information and publications began to focus on gender in the context of economic development in third world contexts. The tradition of highlighting women's developmental needs and agendas was driven by the assumption that women needed to be incorporated into existing paradigms of development by increasing their involvement in prevailing relations of production. This reinforced existing patriarchal and class relations, since women were simply incorporated into relations of production in which both men and domestic as well as international capital remained dominant. By defining women mainly as adjuncts in the production and nation-building processes, transnational capital and the imperial global world order could continue to maximise profits, while women would be plunged into growing cycles of poverty and disempowerment.

Although arguments discrediting the usefulness of neo-liberal WID approaches have increased alongside growing evidence that these models have failed to alleviate women's poverty, the dominant pattern of defining women and focusing solely on their utilitarian role in mainstream economic processes has persisted. Currently, therefore, many models used today are framed, albeit often surreptitiously, by the WID paradigm that assumes the status of third-world women as passive objects. The assumption is that third-world women's economic and political empowerment depends on the resources of first-world women, and western[5] expertise. This paradigm therefore excludes women's voices both in defining what their needs are, and in the formulation of strategies for transformation.

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[5] It is crucial to acknowledge that Western here, as in the rest of this report, refers to the politics embedded in particular practical or intellectual projects. As Chandra Mohanty observes, it is important to define western feminism in terms of the confluence of effects, and not the regional or "racial" identification of those who produce it.

Top-down assumptions of developmentalism and utilitarian approaches to women's public participation undergird models for gender planning at the local and community levels. The need to put "equality provisions" into place in South Africa, as in other contexts where planners and policy-makers are driven solely by urgent timelines and mandates for prompt delivery, has led to proliferating technologies of development with very little attention to their long-terms effectiveness in encouraging public participation. What is neglected is the heuristic value of time-consuming research into and analysis of marginalized groups' lived experiences of and struggles for public participation, subjects to which we turn in what follows.

The notion of "public participation" in South Africa has become progressively more hazy. In particular, the increasingly *symbolic* definition of public participation and the growing uncertainty about what constitutes sufficient public participation stems from government's failure to acknowledge the voices of the people at whom policies are aimed. The South African Constitution's vision of human rights and dignity is based on a long history of struggle for a society that respects all citizens irrespective of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and disability.

The gendered implications of the failure to acknowledge popular voices need to be spelt out. Since women are rarely as organised as men, infrequently have the same political, educational and financial resources that give access to public participation processes, the failure to implement measures that actively redress their marginalisation can be regarded as a form of political exclusion and injustice.

In the equitable process of becoming accountable and making redress, local government has a particular role to play. As Tumelo Kgosimmele (GAP, 2005) argues:

> Gender becomes increasingly relevant to governance when there is unequal representation, restrICTions and barriers to women's citizenship, and when there are no significant changes in women's living conditions and access to basic facilities…The paradigm of democracy has made it possible for governments to commit themselves to the ensuring of human rights of the people they serve. This has been seen by

government taking responsibility to ensure that the day-to-day lives of its constituents are of quality, as opposed to that of apartheid. (GAP, 2005:18)

## 2.3 Women's Public Participation in a Global Context

The current impasse in many women's experiences of justice and freedom becomes even more pronounced when we consider the political context in which many women experience ongoing injustices and deprivation. In a recent discussion of the disjuncture between struggles for democratic citizenship under apartheid and the ongoing struggles for substantive citizenship in the present, it has been argued that:

Contemporary South Africa reveals far less evidence of the sustained and widespread debate, networking and activism that raised public awareness about feminisms in previous decades. ... Feminist activism and discourses during the 1990s also incorporated animated controversy about race, class and knowledge production... The visibility and impact of discourses about gender transformation in the present day are significantly different... As Shireen Hassim argues, "The idea of gender equality is thus increasingly reduced to a vague set of 'good intentions', which are rarely translated into meaningful policy and ideological demands" (2006: 368). Sectoral forms of gender activism and inclusionary politics fail to "impact laterally on the political agendas of other social movements and in civil society more generally" (Lewis, Hussen and van Vuuren, Africa, 18: 44).

The stagnation of political debate and the relative silence of civil society in the present has much to do with the distinctive trajectory of South African political struggles and the mainstreaming of gender activism into democratic governance. "Mainstreaming", in the sense of integrating struggles for gender justice into class and anti-colonial transformation, has been a priority in postcolonial contexts as diverse as South Africa, Brazil and India. Each country has therefore implemented fundamentally top-down models for women's public participation. But comparing these three countries also reveals that the South African state's shift towards neo-liberalism and an open-door policy for capital has been far more pronounced in South Africa than in, for example, India or Brazil, where the state has

been made to remain more accountable to countries' inhabitants (see Roy, 2013). On one hand, this is a result of the overtly accommodative nature of the South African transition, with neo-liberal GEAR maco-economic policies replacing the inroads into national redistribution in the early years of post-apartheid transition.

At another level, it has to do with the unique nature of feminism within the postcolonial state. Anupama Roy (2013) provides a suggestive discussion of this by comparing India, Brazil and South Africa. Focusing on the extent to which each country has - both in the colonial past and the neo-imperial present - rendered citizenship "strange" for many marginalised subjects, she shows that feminist and civil society activism in Brazil and India have involved far more of a substantive emphasis on "making citizenship familiar". Her conclusions are borne out in the critical work on citizenship among South African feminists including Shireen Hassim (2006) and Amanda Gouws (2005). As both show, the evolution of femocracy, in which elite women were successively incorporated into the class structure of the state, alongside state control over gendered legislation and change profoundly eroded a bottom-up process in which formerly disenfranchised communities, including marginalized women, could concertedly make citizenship familiar.

As the arguments above suggest, the South African state in many ways plays a covertly authoritarian role in containing popular resistance and guarding the interests of elites and foreign capital. Soon, for example, the replacement of the South African retailing industry by the American retailer, Walmart, will increase unemployment among large numbers of women in Cape Town, with this move explicitly indicating the state's capitulation to the interests of foreign capital. More recently, the passing of the Secrecy Bill is a startling example of the government's effort to control participation through monopolising public information; although the bill was passed following several amendments to clauses reminiscent of apartheid era censorship, pubic protest, including protest currently driven by the Right 2 Know Campaign, indicates how much the South African government has reneged on its earlier commitment to democratizing information and other resources (see http://www.r2k.org.za/secrecy-bill/).

The South African government's current restrictions on democracy become especially alarming when we bear in mind its economic and political influence within Africa at large. Describing trends at the end of the twentieth century, Manuel Castells lumped all sub-Saharan countries together to argue that these had jointly deteriorated in their "relative position in trade, investment, production and consumption vis-à-vis all other areas of the world" (1998; 2005rpt: 82-82). Yet within Africa, the South African government has played a singularly vanguardist role in orchestrating neo-liberal capitalism on the continent. Managing a robust economy, the South African state currently performs the role of a regional centre throughout Africa, extending its economic, cultural and political influence throughout the region via trade, information dissemination, the mass media, popular culture, commodity exports and the control of many Africans' mobility and labour. Those most adversely affected by this control are of course the African region's women, whose roles in reproduction (for example, through their coerced purchase of commodity items from South Africa,) or roles in the formal and informal economy are dICTated by economic systems created and managed from and through South Africa. The neo-liberal and neo-imperial strategies of the current South African government therefore have implications not only for marginalised women in South Africa, but also for large numbers of women throughout the African region.

Within this landscape, the management of information, how information is linked to and conceals power, how information constructs official myths and recasts the character and role of the post-apartheid state are processes of vital importance to efforts to empower women. And how marginalised groups, especially poor women, are prevented from accessing or creating critical knowledge information networks to participate actively in governance are crucial sites of intervention for ICT strategies aimed at democratising the participatory sphere. Thus the argument in the main proposal for the "Making Local Governance Work for Women" Project encapsulates the assumptions and challenges for this South African research:

> The theory and practice of development and social change must therefore adapt and evolve, carefully re-examining and reinterpreting the local, bringing the lens of power analysis to emergent patterns. For feminist scholars, especially from the South, the

everyday lives of marginalised women, as they may be entangled with local histories and cultures, comprise the touchstone for theory and action. It is indeed the local, as it recasts itself in relation to social change that constitutes the immediate and tangible site of power for marginalised women.

## 2.4 Young women and marginalization/social marginality.

In South Africa we chose from the start to focus on young women between 18 and 29 years of age, with our project being titled Young Women Govern South Africa. Socially marginalized young women constitute a group that is possibly more alienated from and ignorant of public information than other groups defined as targetable major constituencies. Having grown up as the inheritors of post-apartheid change, few have been involved in NGOs, CBOs or trade unions in the ways that a previous generation was. As the quantitative[6] study reveals, the dislocation of young women (compared with previous generations) from labour, student and social movement activism can compound the political frustration, alongside a despair stemming from unemployment and poverty, that characterizes large number of youth in Africa's mushrooming urban and peri-urban areas. At the same time, their youth, sense of restlessness, and the fact that they are far more familiar with modern ICTs than a previous generation all mean that they form keen and enthusiastic participants in an ICT feminist activist project (see Lewis, Hussen and Van Vuuren, 2013*).*

With the shift of the project to the University of the Western Cape from the end of 2012, the Project was able to rely on a group of university students[7] who were eager to enhance their political skills and knowledge through involvement in this project. Our goal at this time was to draw on two distinct groups of socially marginalized young women: UWC students with fairly solid research and ICT skills, and young women from NGOs and "working-class" areas surround the university, who have strong leadership, mobilizing and other political skills, and demonstrated their commitment to activism around gender justice and sexual rights.

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[6] See *summary* of quantitative study in the appendix section
[7] As discussed in the section on context and elsewhere

"Working class" is a misnomer in the context of the widespread unemployment and anomie among numerous poor black people living in the Western Cape. Currently, many South women in rural, urban and peri-urban areas are unskilled, poorly educated, unemployed or find only casual work – often in the informal sector. Previously, many poor women of colour in Cape Town could find employment in this city's large manufacturing, food processing and other industries. With the growth of multinational companies and increasing labour specialization in the post-apartheid period, previous employment patterns have changed, and today, unemployment has increased, and has had a particularly destructive impact on *young* women and men. A conservative report by the Centre for Development and Enterprise indicates that in 2008, 65 percent of the four million South African youths between 15 and 24 were unemployed. Unemployment in the city of Cape Town has intersected with spiraling drug and alcohol abuse, violent crime and gangsterism in historically impoverished townships, and the social and health impact of HIV/AIDS. Moreover, many young women in impoverished central and outlying areas lack information and resources to further their education, are alienated from formal spheres of public influence and participation.

As many radical black women scholars and activists have acknowledged, it is vital to challenge the stereotyping of marginalized black women as perpetual vICTims.[8] At the same time, the realities confronting marginalized women in South Africa's urban and peri-urban areas are enormous: Often, poor women are particularly vulnerable to situations of profound emotional, bodily, psychological and material insecurity – often both inside and beyond the home.

The different class backgrounds of participants, (ranging from poor to lower-middle-class),[9] raises the complexities of identifying "class location" among young South Africans

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[8] See, for example, Mary Hames (2006).

[9] Class membership is of course notoriously difficult to define, particularly in the context of the present fluidity of South African society. For the purposes of this study, however, class membership refers to the class origins of participants. The study yields insights into how and where class membership is complicated by other circumstances.

today: class mobility and social status in contemporary South Africa is extremely fluid and volatile. For example, many young women students, who are first-generation university students, come from the same backgrounds which many poor and unemployed young women come from. Often, their nascent "middle-class" status rests on their hopes of securing jobs in an extremely competitive environment where unemployment – including unemployment among graduates – is high. Their class status is therefore fairly precarious, and circumstances could easily lead to their moving back into the working class or "lumpenproletariat".



*Project Participants outside the GEU at the University of the Western Cape and at the Artscape Theatre*

Similarly, young women with few social advantages and little formal education can sometimes achieve breaks through their exceptional abilities or perseverance as, for example, artists, activists or employees in working environments where they are supported to improve their education and skills. The contextual and biographical experiences of our respondents is revealing about the class mobility and fluidity among young people in South Africa's contemporary urban and peri-urban areas. Currently, socially marginalized young people face numerous structural challenges that inhibit their growth and access to education; at the same time, the absence of Apartheid's draconian restrICTions created – for *a mino*rity that has been able to seize opportunities – offer scope for rapid although erratic career advancement. Possibly even more importantly, however, post-apartheid has generated the neo-liberal illusion – especially among the youth – that

individual achievement and material advancement are central and desirable goals in the new South Africa. While this illusion has been set in place with the post-apartheid government's increasingly neo-liberal policies, it has also been fed by a ferociously globalized commodity culture, by the mass media and by formal education.

Youth subjectivities - as shaped by *hopes of seizing opportunities* have been popularized especially by the media and advertising. Here it is significant that the data obtained in the quantitative study of young women's class experiences in lower middle-class and poor areas often reflects young women's expectations and hopes (for example, for living in small nuclear families), and is often *not* an accurate reflection of their lived realities. The hegemonic impact of an ideology that celebrates material advancement and middle-class aspirations in shaping their on their hopes and subjectivities is sharply evident here. And it is significant to note here that socially mobile young black women are identified as especially important and malleable subjects for economic investment. Such investment ranges between policies targeting black women for training, skills development and business enterprises to commodity marketing and advertising. Whether the message of self-improvement is to encourage young women to alter their bodies or to invest in their education to "succeed", developmental discourses have become increasingly aggressive and seductive in moulding the embodied subjectivities of young women. A quick look at the range of magazines, commodity products including clothing, haircare, skincare and "hygiene" products explicitly reveals the extent to which they cater to the minds and bodies of young women: teenage girls and young women have been persuaded that they can and should improve themselves in terms of their body image, their social aspirations and their economic status.  And it is this notion of possibility, of an envisaged self that is currently core to their ascribed subjectivities.

*South African media Ad Campaigns focus on body image and success*

Neoliberalism has meshed with discourses of class and race in shaping this notion of self-improvement and possibility. Consequently, ideals of improvement – both bodily and political, have been attached to messages about race and class, messages that draw on those that were set in place under settler colonialism and Apartheid. It is noteworthy that many of the messages about self-improvement in contemporary South African magazines targeting black consumers mirror those from the magazine *Drum* in the fifties. A publication that in many ways served to induct black South Africans into neo-liberal urban modernity, this magazine focused on the domestication and feminization of black women in terms of their aspirations to whiteness and middle-class-ness. The lightening of skin was in many ways a metaphor for this rebirth into a white world of urban modernity. In remarkably similar ways, advertising in post-apartheid and neo-liberal South Africa targets young black women as potential consumers of products that prefigure their renaissance into urban "sophistication". And the over-riding message, as was the case decades before, is that young women have the innate capacity to launch themselves into a world of freedom of choice and aspiration.

Yet the subjectivities of young black women are not only repressively shaped by external pressures, As work on subjectivity by postcolonial scholars such as Stuart Hall shows, subjectivities are shaped by dynamic processes of *identification* in which "identity" remains an illusion to which social subjects aspire. Many postcolonial feminist scholars have gone further in demonstrating that feminized subjects are always contradICTory subjects, subjects whose biographical experiences, political histories and unique locations within an assemblage of race, sexuality, class and global culture can paradoxically subvert, defy and unsettle dominant scripts of identity.

*Fashion as a platform for unsettling dominant scripts of identity*

To a large extent, the methodology and theory driving this project grew out of this philosophical view of the subject: namely, that the subject is both shaped by and actively shapes her cultural, material and political universe. Avoiding a voluntarist notion of the subject's agencies, the study seeks to consider the detailed and often highly nuanced ways in which young women are affected by a cultural assemblage, yet simultaneously become agents with this assemblage. Our key objective, how to energize young women's political agencies through supporting the communicative, associational and civic power, is predicated on this view.

Patricia Hill Collins (2006), Pumla Gqola (2013) and Elaine Salo (2003) have been central black feminist proponents of the theoretical view that young black women can exercise agency within the parameters of their repressive material and cultural worlds. Developing this notion with particular reference to public knowledge and cultural resources, Patricia Hill Collins shows how young black women in the US have utilized elements of the music industry to fashion their own repertoire of "hip hop feminism". Illustration a similar argument in the South African Western Cape context, Elaine Salo analyses ways in which working class women in the gang and drug infested township of Manenberg have exercised agency in defining their femininities in particular ways. Sarah Nuttall's (2009) notion of self-styling, based on Foucault's, takes this analysis further in showing how young black South Africans in Johannesburg eclectically use the resources of commodity culture to fashion themselves in ways that interrupt or unsettle entrenched legacies of race, class and

identity. Nuttall describes the intricate modes of young people's making of the "self" in Johannesburg as follows:

> The city itself becomes the engine for this self-styling. The emergence of new stylisations of the self, embedded in cultures of the body, represents one of the most decisive shifts of the post-apartheid era. (2009: 131)

Many activities for the YWGSA demonstrated the extent to which appropriations of commodity items among participants functions as bricolage and allows many young women to draw on artifacts of commodity culture in developing a unique political discourse and language of self-expression. Generally, the analytical sections of this study show that the South African social imaginary provides fertile symbolic resources for young women to refashion themselves in ways that complicate their embodied subjectivities and, in the processes, hone their critical engagement and capacity to become active citizens. As also indicated, creativity and an eclectic and inventive engagement with various forms of expression have been key to this active citizenship, with young women turning adventurously to the symbolic resources that populate their cognitive and cultural landscapes.

## 2.5. The Information Revolution and Young Women in South Africa

In responding to the particularities of context, the ICT intervention driven from the Western Cape has, from the start, concentrated on women's *active* citizenship to ensure that young women *establish control* over information. This control would include what information could be created in terms of its content and its form, how it can be used, and mobilizing it in ways that directly enhance women's subjective and social needs and those of their communities. This latter objective meant that they inventively adapted information to take collective action against various forms of injustice. It is therefore important that the South African intervention has focused on enhancing women's skills at, and their control over, the production and management of information, rather than merely facilitating their *access to* existing information. Whether such information is produced by existing NGOs, CBOs, local, provincial or national government, it has the potential to alienate, effectively

disenfranchise and further marginalize young women as critically informed citizens. In this sense it has actually worked to make citizenship strange, rather than familiar. Yvette Abrahams' (2005) work on the Groot Drakenstein Municipality has persuasively shown how, in the first decade after democracy, many women in the farmland areas of the Western Cape remain profoundly estranged from the discourse, procedures and meanings of local governance. And this estrangement is often caused, rather than alleviated by the work of many "gender experts" and municipal officials' languages and methods for promoting community participation.



*First phase of the project with the Young women's Chapter of the New Women's Movement*

The repressive and authoritarian effects of information conveyed by government structures are often not obvious. As the quantitative study shows, young women may not necessarily experience this deluge of knowledge as overtly repressive. Many, however, experience it as sterile, cold, abstract and disconnected from their embodied experiences as young, classed, gendered and sexualized subjects with particular experiences of estrangement, marginalization, disempowerment and empowerment. Offering extremely revealing insights into marginalized young women's sense of estrangement in contemporary South Africa, Malaika wa Azania, a "born free" South African, debunks the myth of the post-apartheid rainbow nation, arguing that her ostensible "liberation" is in fact a different experience of oppression. Dealing with situations such as ongoing racism

and the corruption of politicians in post-apartheid South Africa, her memoir takes the form of a letter to the ruling ANC.  The author writes:

> The struggle of the generations before us, because of the period in which it happened, was a struggle for political freedom... But our people remain in chains. So, what about this generation, which has the mission of freeing the people from those chains, is 'free'? What about us is reflective of a 'born-free' generation when our generation is born during a time of the struggle for economic freedom and the quest for the realization of the objectives of the African Renaissance agenda? ...I may not have been born during times of constituionalised apartheid but I still remain a product of an epoch of systematic, individualized and institutionalised apartheid. (2014:7)
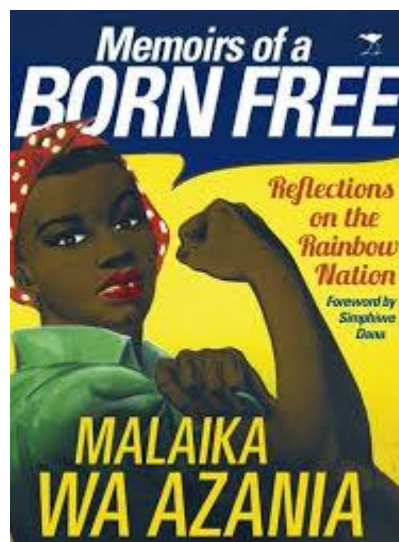


Like this author, many participants in this project experience a political cynicism that has made them reluctant to engage in available spaces for public participation. As the quantitative study suggests, this reluctance also extends to their attitudes towards many NGOs and CBOs. And it is noteworthy that many young women may experience the

apparently empowering forms of social media and ICT networking in certain forms of activism and progressive organizations as restrICTive.

In responding to the myriad challenges of the information revolution, South Africa has pioneered a number of innovative open-source initiatives. These range from the implementation of *MXIT* to the establishment of open source software -that allows individuals with minimal skills and resources to set up blogs and websites. According to Sarrazin, MXIT, because it works on a range of mobile phones, has considerable potential for activist networking among young women. Applications such as MXIT have enabled a small organization Free Gender, (from which many of the Young women-govern South Africa participants come), to communicate instantly with black lesbians in the townships and organize members to events or marches. In an interview, the organization's director, Funeka Soldaat stated that "Internet is still expensive and our members do not have money for this, but they do have mobile phones and *MXIT* is free so we can constantly communicate with people." She focuses especially on the need for mobilizing in the face of the rape of lesbians, saying that: "It is amazing how quick we are able to mobilize people and spread the message of Free Gender; we do not have resources, but we know how to organize locally".

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Similar encouraging views have been espoused by the former deputy director of the Network on Violence Against Women in the Western Cape, Claire Mathonsi: According to Mathonsi, communication is key in the advocacy lobbying and support mechanisms of the network and they employed a variety of ICTs in message to partners and members: "We have a diversity of members in urban and rural settings, they speak different languages, with different needs and they come from varied of socio-economic backgrounds". (Interview with Crystal Orderson)

At universities, the driving of open-source initiatives and efforts to ensure democratic e-governance have meant the introduction of policies around democratizing knowledge in universities as key sites of knowledge creation and sharing. Initiatives at universities are especially important in signaling their renewed accountability to popular education.

Efforts to make ICT resources accessible and to link it to activism in present-day South Africa are impressive. However, the context of ICT initiatives today are state-regulated information and communications interventions which have often seemed very positive, but which have, since the 1990s, become extremely inconsistent and erratic. At the start of the democratizing process, South Africa seemed to take up the challenge of integrating government's commitment to public participation with comprehensive telecommunications reform. For instance, a policy paper presented at the Information Society and the Developing World (ISAD) forum 1996[10] shows the importance – at a formal level - attached by the government to Information Technology (IT) application for human and economic development. The following letter from the then Deputy State President Thabo Mbeki articulates the expectations of the South African government for information technology:

> This information revolution presents great opportunities for the developing world. In particular, it raises the question as to whether IT can assist developing countries in leapfrogging stages of development or in going in entirely new directions towards achieving a good standard of living and quality of life. Indeed, the ability to use information effectively is now the single most important factor in deciding the competitiveness of countries.

In this forum South Africa presented four issues that are considered central for ICT policies. The first relates to the Information Community (IC) (renamed as "information society") perspective as it signals the importance of extending ICT use among social groups as well as individuals, and holds that the information revolution should benefit society as a whole. Second is the emphasis on the role of the IC in promoting development, with a focus on development needs of the country. A third is the need to measure equity to access for information technologies, articulating the need for IC to be an instrument of emancipation and empowerment, appropriate to the environment and needs of each country. Fourthly, the state is expected to play a key role in the Information community, and the extent to

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[10] See the *executive summary* in the appendix section

which it ensures universal access and supports establishment of the economic environment for the IC.

In contrast to these principles however, there has been a drastic policy shift away from an emphasis on human development through ICTs to a free enterprise capitalist framework which prioritizes ICT infrastructure for global market consumption and competition especially in Africa. The shift to accommodate markets and competition has exacerbated social and economic divides within the country. Walter Brown and Irwin Brown argue that:

> Despite its ICT infrastructure being one of the most sophisticated in Africa, ICT diffusion and utilization in South Africa is limited to a small segment of the population whose HDIs [Human Development Index] are equivalent to many high income economies. A large proportion of the population remains disadvantaged, with very low ICT service levels (2008: 109).

The ICT infrastructure shows that the upper class society, which is predominantly white, enjoys the benefits of this sophisticated ICT access; whereas low income communities continue to be disenfranchised, deprived of basic access. Mobile telephone services "have partially bridged the information divide, but their knowledge delivery capacity cannot be compared with high speed fixed broadband infrastructure" (Brown and Brown, 2008: 113). This digital and knowledge divide shows that South Africa has a sub-optimal ICT policy and regulatory system. The reasons for this include:

- Lack of policy implementation and follow-up.
- The fact that the Department of Communications as well as the Ministers holding portfolios in these departments have often fluctuated in recent years.
- The fact that high prices for bandwidth, technology and hardware is not being alleviated by competition, and the government has not regulated an environment conducive to competitors likely to lower prices for cellphones, bandwidth, computers and software or applications.

While these factors suggest a bleak scenario for ICT reform, South Africa at present does

have a policy-rich envorniment for democratizing telecommunications, and this can be made to work in the interests of groups who are made sufficiently aware of their potential. Moreover, sites of innovation and competition such as the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), which launched an Open Source Centre to help stimulate the adoption of open source software technologies in Africa and Canonical Ltd, producers of Ubuntu software encourage a future South Africa where ICT sources, usage, software development and modification are geared towards broader societal needs.

In addition, the 2014 "National Integrated ICT Policy Green Paper (No 44)" policy reform re-conceptualizes ICT policies towards a more human development – based. The panel completely rejected the capitalist market oriented policy framework and prioritized "Human Right – based" approach. Fourteen objectives and principles that are derived from basic rights in the Constitution were amended[11]. As the report indicates, these rights and other policy principles were presented to the public and there was an overwhelming support for the policy review initiative as well as the principles presented. The following five objectives put forward to summarize these principles:

1. South Africans have a right to an inclusive, transparent, accessible and technology-neutral policy making and regulatory process that promotes stability and fosters a knowledge based society;
2. South Africans are entitled to a communications sector that prioritizes and promotes public interest, independent regulation, fair and equitable treatment of all role players, and net neutrality;
3. All South Africans are entitled to a secure cyber environment in which all infrastructure, network and service providers work together to maintain the highest standards of security;
4. South Africans have a right to a three-tier system of broadcasting providing for public, community and private ownership; and

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[11] See enclosed *executive* summary of National Integrated ICT Policy Green Paper (No 44)

5. South Africans have a right to access public information through the communications services in order for them to be active participants in political and social life, as well as in the construction of knowledge-based society.

Importantly, the National Integrated ICT Policy Green Paper covers diverse ICT- related issues and policy reforms in terms of citizens' rights. However, the question of how effective rights – based policy reform is in responding to the present digital and knowledge divide remains. The limits of ensuring justice through rights, including justice in the access and use of ICTs among marginalized groups, is well-explained by Mary Hames' criticism of formal rights for poor women. Indicating that the multi-layered realities of many women's lives often make rights meaningless, Hames's argument can be applied to many South Africans' ongoing alienation from the rights apparently guaranteed by ICT policies. Although the information revolution is and continues to be enormously instrumental for development, without concerted contribution from government, the private and public sector, NGOs and the Higher Education etc., information technology will continue to be a "paper right" for those marginalized and poor communities in the country (Hames, 2006). Moreover, even the efforts of progressive and activist organizations can muffle the distinctive voices of young women who often wish to speak independently. Although many organizations set up for young women's interests provide compelling evidence of the positive effects of using ICTs for advocacy and mobilization, they tend to see ICTs as neutral media for transmitting information and knowledge that is assumed to be beneficial and liberating. It may be far more important to define ICTs as politically and discursively loaded technologies that are intricately connected to struggles for and about power and knowledge.

# 3. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

## 3.1. Theoretical Mapping

The phenomenal explosion of feminist work on citizenship in the last decade or so has shed considerable light on broad issues related to belonging, the state, globalization, nationalism, women's agencies, redistribution and social justice. As such, this interdisciplinary work addresses questions such as:

- "What constitutes political agencies for subaltern subjects?"
- "What are the hidden sites and forms of "political expression for subaltern groups?"
- "How do various layers of authoritarian and oppressive institutions, relations and discourses constrain subaltern voices?"

It therefore constitutes a rich source for analyzing young women's agencies in the context of our ICT activist research for the YWGSA Project.

The literature on citizenship, women and gender is extremely diverse in terms of its political orientation and agendas. Our preliminary observations and insights into the challenges that young women face within local governance structures and processes has led us to make sense of their locations with reference to theorizing and literature that questions narrowly rights-based approaches to citizenship. Framing this work is a significant body of postcolonial feminist theorizing and scholarship: studies of gendered subjects whose voices, agencies become extremely difficult for researchers to access because of their imbrication in multiple networks of dominant ideology, institutions and power. Gayatri Spivak's widely influential notion in postcolonial studies, of the "gendered subaltern that cannot speak" aptly conveys the situation of the young women of this study: invariably spoken for and about, but rarely "heard".

In complementing our attention to how young women are situated in multiple networks of power, we draw on theorizing that seeks to "listen" to the silences, uneven-ness and also deep yearnings of persons who are frequently misrepresented or silenced. We use the leads offered by feminist and postcolonial cultural studies and media and communication studies which seek to make sense of gendered subjectivities in the context of globalized

popular culture. We also draw on the methodological insights of postcolonial feminists who have sought to question their own preconceptions through seeing others' worlds from *their* points of view. Consequently, in the same way that the Tanzanian feminist, Marjorie Mblinyi has described her struggle to relinquish her own beliefs by understanding how her research subject, a Tanzania peasant challenges them, we have sought to "learn by doing", jettisoning objectives which we initially found important in "making local government work for young women", and allowing ourselves to learn from their political energies.

## 3.2 Citizenship, Feminist Activism and the Challenge of "Making Citizenship Familiar"

Dominant conceptualizations of citizenship are based on ideas about the equal membership of citizens "across social structures implying equal/uniform application of the law, and the promise that no person or group is privileged before or by the law" (Roy, 2013: 240). This equality involves access to constitutional rights and obligations (Hassim, 1999; Hermes, 2013; Roy, 2013). According to McEwan, however, this conception of citizenship is "an abstract, universal and western-centric notion of the individual and is consequently unable to recognize either the political relevance of gender or of non- western perspectives and experiences" (2005: 971). Many radical scholars argue, however, that discourses of citizenship offer insights into the difficult relationships between individuals in socially subordinate groups, and the state. Thus, "to enjoy the full potential of social, cultural, political and economic privileges offered, the citizen must negotiate a range of institutions, from the educational to the authoritarian" (Arvanitakis, 2013:16). Roy echoes this when she writes that "citizenship cannot be a universal concept (as in applicability) because of its development out of a particular conjuncture of structural and cultural conditions peculiar to the West and its experiences with modernity" (2013: 251).



*South African Public – dominant perception of the Rainbow Nation*

The problems of translating universal rights into what actually benefits embodied women is raised by McEwan:

> As with other post-independent states, the struggle for women lies in the (im)possibilities of translating de jure equality into de facto equality, and of translating state level commitment to gender equality into tangible outcomes at local and individual levels. (2005: 972)

Postcolonial feminists focusing on contexts such as Brazil, India and Africa as well as radical feminists such as Nancy Fraser, foregrounding global redistributive justice and transnational feminism, reject the neoliberal conceptualisation of citizenship and "demonstrate[e] how the constitutive exclusion of women in [liberal] theories and practices has been key to feminists' expanded notion of politics. Asserting that citizenship is dependent on a set of arrangements and practices that are gendered" (Miraftab, 2004: 2). In other words, the simple formal inclusion of women might change the structure of citizenship but not the power dynamics created by social and economic inequalities. Writing about South Africa, Shireen Hassim points out that "the demand for a gender-differentiated citizenship, on the other hand, while distinguishing between men and women, tends to treat women as a homogeneous grouping with similar experiences and values" (Hassim, 1999:9). Mary Hames demonstrates how this is played out when women from poor communities (similar to those from which the subjects of our action research come) and with very little formal schooling are "educated" about their rights in a workshop. She concludes that trying to explain the rights to which they are entitled to them - in the absence of addressing their distinct educational, social and political locations - amounts to giving them "paper rights" (Hames, 2006). Moreover, it obscures and de-politicises communities' everyday political experiences – associated, for example, with poor service delivery and day-to-day socio-economic and domestic struggles.

Theorizing about such experiences in third-world contexts, the influential postcolonial feminist, Nira Yuval-Davis argues "citizenship should consider the issue of women's citizenship not only in contrast to that of men, but also in relation to women's affiliation to dominant or subordinate groups" (Yuval-Davis, 1997: 4). This means "acknowledging that

universal inclusion does not exist because in reality citizenship is based on power exercised through social, economic and political structures that perpetuate the exclusion of certain social groups" (McEwan, 2005: 972). Among others, Nira Yuval-Davis offers the notion of "intersectionality" as a lens through which to think through women's entanglement in multiple power relations. Developing Yuval-Davis's (1997) "multilayered" conception of citizenship, Roy endorses 'intersecting' and 'mulitlayered' struggles and subject positions rather than essentialised assumptions of citizenship:

> The notion that citizenship is multi-layered and dialogical, not only recognizes multiple political subjectivities and simultaneous membership in several political communities, it also identifies the sites of 'exclusions'. The insertion of the variable – exclusionary citizenship – concentrates on the way the different positionings of women affect their citizenship in policy areas such as education, planning, welfare, etc., and how these various positionings contribute to the construction of boundaries – between national collectivities and between private and public. The inclusion of a broad canvas and intersecting –dialogical layers of membership also allow them to examine how these intersections and their different/discrepant positionings give rise to 'ambivalences' or 'ambivalent citizens' on the 'borders' of citizenship viz. (Roy, 2013: 257).

Work that analyzes intersectionality acknowledges what should be central to understanding subordinate women's social and political experiences:  the "difference" among citizens based on their particular identities and how these affect their rights as citizens. Roy states that "the negotiation of these differences and the specificities of contexts may generate at different times and places diverse sets of practices, institutional arrangements, modes of social interaction and future orientations" (Roy, 2013: 256).

*Former Gender commissioner, Dr Yvette Abrahams speaking at a workshop with participants*

As the work on intersectionality and difference reveals, many postcolonial and transnational feminists have insisted on a shift in thinking about citizenship beyond instrumental political participation and legal frameworks. In order to do this, McEwan argues, "feminist conceptualisation must think beyond notions of 'impasse' or 'hollowness', to rethink the public/private distinction that still frames many debates about citizenship and to consider the emancipatory potential of gendered subjectivity as it relates to both men and women" (2005: 971). Echoing these ideas in the context of South Africa, Hassim argues that "the central contribution of feminism to the debate on citizenship is to focus on the issue of human agency" (1999:10). She argues "if citizenship is to be the basis for dealing with inequalities in access to power and resources, feminists need to treat social policy critically" (Hassim, 1999:16). These include "the relationships between individuals and the state, the scope of the state's authority over society, and the nature of political participation of individuals, particularly women, in a democracy" (Hassim, 1999:6).

Thus, while formal citizenship may be meaningless for certain young women, their agency and civic engagement demand nuanced attention. Describing the apparent paradox of young people's apathy alongside their determination to exercise agency, Veloso writes:

> For some, citizenship and the forms of access to it are still determined by their marginalized, stratified, and racialized subject position. For others, responsible, active, participating, and 'radical democratic' citizenship can take place… (2008: 56).

Crucial to the identification of agency for critics such as Hassim (1999) and Veloso (2008) are "political spaces" that determine how subjects from particular groups can demonstrate their distinctive agency as active citizens. McEwan theorizes the spatial contours of agencies as follows:

> Despite exclusions in officialized spaces of citizenship, possibilities exist for a more substantive citizenship to emerge. Foucault's (1986) notion of the 'strategic reversibility' of power relations suggests that these are always already sites of resistance and contain the productive possibilities for subversion, appropriation and reconstitution; spaces of invitation produced by the South African state are also inhabited by people with alternative ideas, with potential for expanding the agency of those invited to participate and a different kind of participation than that envisaged (2005:977).
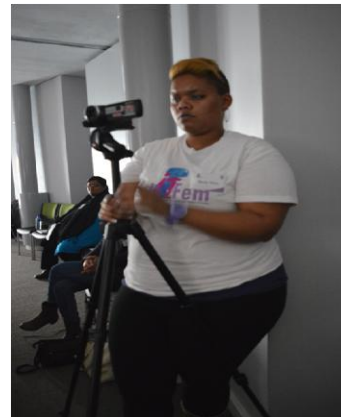


*Young women participants, 'T-shirt culture' and political Statements*

## 3.3 Marginalized Agencies and the Limits of Formal Citizenship

Developing the feminist critique of formal understandings of citizenship and participation Miraftab (2004) and McEwan (2005) invoke the metaphoric meanings of political space. Miraftab (2004) explores the distinction between "invited" and "invented" spaces of citizenship, arguing that spaces of invitation are not only exclusionary, but permit limited opportunity and access to those who are invited. "Invited" spaces often exhibit a

hierarchical political power structure and have fixed views of participatory citizenship. She urges for the recognition of "informal" and "invented" spaces of citizenship, and for recognizing how they transcend "formal" discourses as weapons through which to challenge and to resist. Echoing the views of feminists attentive to many women's nuanced agencies, Miraftab affirms: "the fluidity of grassroots collective action across both the invited and the invented spaces of citizenship and knowledge, as well as the significance of the invented spaces of insurgency and resistance" (2004: 1).

The use of ICTs in resistance is often defined in narrowly instrumentalist terms as though ICTs were neutral instruments responding to the "invitation" to take up dominant definitions of citizenship, rather than as malleable instruments for inventing citizenship. A small but growing body of research that focuses on the nexus of subject's complex agencies, popular culture and the use of modern communication technologies provides concepts and analytical leads for exploring "invented" spaces for subjects' self-defined expressions of citizenship. Nancy Fraser's powerful response to Habbermas' notion of "the public" in the form "subaltern counter public" has proved very influential in analyzing socially marginalized group's imaginative and determined efforts to "speak back" to and through the repressive communicative networks that define "the public sphere". In exploring young women's political and imaginative energies, we are indebted to Fraser's formulation.

One of the dangers of celebrating the agencies of subordinate groups is the tendency to instrumentalise these responses as clear-cut "political acts". Hermann Wasserman, avoiding a "naïve celebration of resistance" (2013:10), draws attention to a "nuanced assessment" of how cultural expression can become a "platform for the articulation of controversial or popular political views" (Wasserman, 2013:10). Like Hasserman, writers such as Pumla Gqola, Adam Haupt, Sarah Nuttall and, in the United States, Patricia Hill Collins have researched and theorized about a new generation of young socially subordinate groups who use the resources of popular and commodity culture to define agendas for change on their own terms. Although not all this work acknowledges the far-reaching transformations to communicative systems in recent years, it offers a valuable framework for thinking through the invented spaces of citizenship, which the young women in this study have struggled to craft.

Similar to the above argument Malika Wa Azania, young South African woman student and social media activist, in her book *Memoirs of a Born Free* describe the procedural vagueness of civic movements:

> We had not determined whether the movement was going to operate within the civic space or whether it was going to become a political party…It was a decision we wanted to leave to other stakeholders….We hit the ground running…the mobilization drive began on social networks. We create Twitter and Facebook accounts and encouraged people to volunteer…The response was overwhelming. In just a few days, thousands of emails and messages poured in. I was glued to my laptop and cellphone, fielding calls and emails from young people all over the country who wanted to be part… (Wa Azania, 2014)

For marginalized young South African women, who navigate especially complex routes of oppression and exploitation at the local, national and global levels, "alternative spaces of participation are being shaped by groups [invented], organisations and activists that have particular consequences for the nature of empowerment and practice of citizenship"(2005: 979).

These newly invented spaces, regardless of their popularity and durability, are strongly related to particularized, as opposed to "national" identities. As McEwan puts it, "alternative spaces of citizenship lend visibility to identities and interests that are given shape by collective political action; they are, therefore, important spaces for the exercise of citizenship and realisation of rights" (2005: 981).  At the same time, the public expression of national belonging and contribution of these groups can become inward-looking. McEwan explains: "Paradoxically, alternative citizenship spaces are rarely inclusive and often rely on oppositional processes of identity formation for the creation of a common purpose" (2005: 980). Therefore, "simply creating these new spaces might not be enough to empower citizens or bring about greater participation in decision-making and resource distribution" (2005: 975).  Our work on the YWGSA project highlights the paradoxical action-research challenge of supporting *and* re-shaping the agencies of young women - in ways that both respect their distinct locations and needs for "invented" spaces of

citizenship and that avoid the pitfalls of sectarian and inward-turning identity politics.

## 3.4. Young Women's Subjectivities

Sonia Livingstone, Nick Couldry and Tim Markham argue that "young people are often positioned by even the most well-meaning public sector sites not as citizens but as citizens-in-waiting" (2007:5). At a global level, many have bewailed the widespread sense of apathy to politics among the youth in urban and peri-urban areas affected by neo-liberal globalization and commodity capitalism. Commentators in South Africa have pointed to the lack of involvement of young South African men and women at various national, provincial, or municipal levels - over issues ranging from service delivery to violence against children and women.

In explaining this, it has been argued that "young people are often conceived as a 'dangerous' alienated group threatening to adult society; or, mid-way between these two, as 'incomplete' adults/citizens and therefore in need of guidance" (Steenveld, 2013: 23). As a result, the youth find themselves in a "confusing and contradictory patterns of protection and pressure, with conflicting perceptions of their abilities and inadequacies, rendering their social presence inconsequential and their social power invisible" (Kurth-Schai 1988: 116; cited in Steenveld, 2013: 23). Some state that South African politics positions young people in terms of the dictum that "young people should always respect their elders" and that the domain of political participation and decision-making space should remain that of the "old", those who fought for liberation and ensured freedom for the young generation (see, Lewis, Tigist and Van Vuuren, 2013).

Complementing this view of youth inadequacy, are more analytical perspectives which explain the political realities of young South Africans in a post-apartheid context. Malila (2013) argues that their lives should be compared with their parents' life struggles, with the youth in contemporary South Africa often being seen as those who inherit the fruits of their parents' struggle and a country with democratic governance system. She writes:

> The parents of the Born Frees had a 'cause' against which to protest politically

and with which to engage at the political level. This new generation, however, is imagined to have been given all the things they need to succeed by the new democratic government – education, employment opportunities, a racially inclusive society, and much more. (Malila, 2013: 5)

Since the youth of today are seen as the "new" and "born free" generation, with access to all rights, the expectation is often that they should use these rights to engage in everyday citizenship practice. In relation to this Malila writes:

The term the 'Born Frees', itself epitomises the expectations placed on these young people. They are expected to be free of the burdens of the past, to be free of racial, political and economic prejudice and to flourish in a country which offers them so much. (Malila, 2013: 5)

Young people are often also seen as having a sense of entitlement, one which public intellectual Jonathan Jansen describes as the syndrome of "Our turn to eat". Jansen argues that South African politics is increasingly expressed through "we demand" this and that. He argues that such culture of political struggle originates from the "old" generation:

Of course we know where this demandist culture comes from. Those of us who lived on both sides of apartheid know about protracted struggles marked by demands: demand the end of unjust laws, of racist government, of separate schooling, of forced removals, and scores of bad things we fought against. Then and now, there is nothing wrong with demanding things from government, whether that authority is legitimate or not. But when this demandist culture transfigures our humanity, renders active citizens impotent, negates reflection, and leaves us beholden to the state for good things, then something has gone horribly wrong in the public arena. (Jansen, 2013: 9)

Contrary to Jansen's argument, Wasserman and Garman stress that political struggles in post-apartheid South Africa should be taken as indicators of how much, "the ANC has turned local government structures into a site for the (often inadequate) delivery of desperately-needed and essential services (shelter, water, electricity, schools, clinics)

thereby making South Africa's poorest people into clients dependent on patronage"(2013:2). Thus, responses ranging from apathy to "demandism" invite us to reflect carefully on "how and when audiences turn into publics … to find out where and how they form opinions. Public opinion formation, in terms of a shared analysis or agenda for a common future, is ultimately the key ingredient of the type of bonding that we call citizenship" (Hermes, 2006: 300).



*Student and non-student participants participating in "Bring back our girls" campaign*

In many cases, when South Africans express their discontent about poor service delivery or call for better lives, it is usually frowned upon and dismissed as a call for anarchy or abuse of democratic right, in other words, seen as a form of anarchic disobedience that is antithetical to responsible democratic practice. In recounting her involvement with civil society organizations as well as party politics, the young "born free" South African and author of *Memoirs of a Born Free* (2014) repeatedly describes how she is chastized by veterans of ant-apartheid struggle for daring to express her critical views. Her account of the angry response to her letter to a well-known politician, Julius Malema, exemplifies this, and in her response to Malema's angry condemnation of her criticism, she seems to speak for many young South Africans who desperately want to be heard and treated respectfully as independent citizens*:*

Of course, being only 21 years old, I am younger than you…But that is not the basis or grounds for you to believe that you are justified in wanting to intimidate me into silence by saying that when I disagree with something and raise the argument critically, I am being disrespectful…I agree that we must respect one another. Let that

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be a principle that is applied between all of us and not one that must apply unequally. (2014:164)

In some cases, the estrangement of South African youth from existing political struggles is perceived as a matter of young people abdicating all sense of political responsibility - either because of their inexperience of "formal" political engagement or of being simply uninformed about democratic structures and practices. The limited political spaces for the young, the haste with which they are called to order, and the impatient dismissal of their alienation as evidence of ignorance or apathy is a cause for concern among activists, politicians, policy-makers and educators committed to building the consciousness, sense of hope and information networks for building democracy among young South Africans. The limited attention to or dismissal of young people' desire for autonomous political and knowledge creating spaces may contribute to a further decline in the numbers of potentially politically powerful young people who join unions, political parties or even vote in elections.

At another level, youth's political cynicism, often directed especially at the ruling party and former champion of democracy, the ANC could give rise to amorphously rebellious citizens and political groups, with the youth finding a political home in movements that appear to be radical, but that may in fact undermine democratic struggles and meaningful development for all South Africans. This has been the case with the mass support among young South Africans for Julius Malema's Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), a political party whose stance around land ownership, economic justice and ongoing racism has resonated powerfully for young South Africans. The EFF claims to be "a radical and militant economic emancipation movement", with its political stand being based on the assumption that "political power without economic emancipation is meaningless".

*EFF enjoys mass support from youth, at the "Big Debate" talk show at SABC 2*

Even though many South Africans - particularly radicals from an older generation - are sceptical about the party's political agenda and the reputation of its leaders, the party obtained surprisingly significant votes in the May 2014 general election. In *Memoirs of a Born Free* (2014*)*, the author, Malaika wa Azania, describes how her disillusionment with the post-apartheid status quo and ANC led her to embrace the EFF, despite her misgivings about the party leader's conspicuous consumption and theatrical displays of rebelliousness. Her insights vividly indicate how demoralized young South Africans can be drawn to the limited available options for political opposition. In fact, wa Azania's views are interestingly echoed in the responses of many participants in the YWGSA Project. During the YWGSA photo campaign at the time of the May 2014 General election ("Is voting right or duty?"), participants used emails, facebook, twitter and meetings to discuss the corruptness of the ANC government, and the possible benefits of supporting the only opposition party that seemed to focus on economic and structural justice. As the photograph below shows, many were very critical of the party's leader Julius Malema[12], but many, like Maliaka wa Azania, remained inspired by the party's radically transformative agenda. The young participants agreed that - unlike the liberal oppositional DA (Democratic Alliance) party - the EFF seems to have far-reaching solutions to current poor service delivery under the ANC government. These two participants decided to have their pro-EFF pictures taken with hidden faces to avoid being identified by others as supporters. The interest in the EFF, coupled with the anxiety about identifying openly with it indicates

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[12] It is a public knowledge that Mr. Malema, since he was the president of the youth league in ANC, has been one of the most corrupted and erratic political leaders in South Africa

the political dilemmas of many South African youth, caught up in a web of desires, limited options and expectations: anxiety about how others see them, concern about what existing oppositional spaces *might* offer them and a burning desire for different powerfully oppositional political platforms.
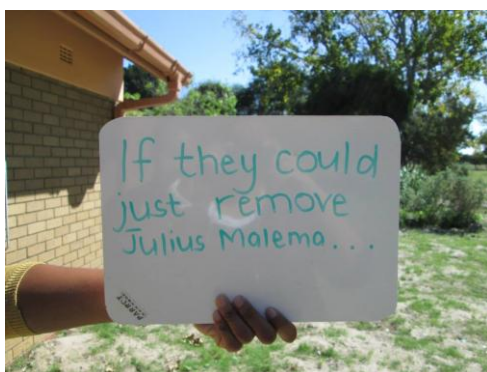


Following the general election in May 2014, the unexpected success of EFF has shaken South African political culture to the core. And it has dramatically brought to the fore the new preoccupations with citizenship and public participation among the youth. ANC politicians attempt to dismiss EFF as a political movement led by "uninformed" youngsters who are "disrespectful" of the history of South Africa's struggle against apartheid. However, many young people continue to be attracted to it and make up the majority of its members. The fact that this politically complex and ambiguous political movement is gaining popularity and acceptance among the youth should be regarded as an indication of the extreme anger and frustration among many socially marginalized young South Africans today.

 A further concern in thinking through young women's subjectivities in South Africa concerns their location within a neo-liberal global context. As noted in Section 2.4, young women are often identified as those in whom business, donors, and government should invest. The advertisement below shows how the corporate sector has targeted young black women for ICT expansion in a market economy.

## Helping young black women fill ICT skills gaps in SA



IT skills service provider, Rigatech, is taking on the challenge of developing and executing integrated training and internship programmes to address specific ICT skills shortages in South Africa.

Concern has been expressed that the shortage of ICT skills in South Africa will constrain government's goal to achieve a sustainable annual six per cent growth rate in GDP and to halve unemployment and poverty by 2014.

The ICT skills shortage is often attributed to the mismatch between the supply of skills and the skills demanded in the labour market, further aggravated by a loss of skills to other countries that offer higher salaries and better conditions of employment. Additionally, many organisations are reluctant to pay for the creation of skills, seeking rather to
outsource their requirements.

The 2011 ITWeb-JCSE Skills Survey found that many software developers, high- end integrators and other ICT service providers continue to complain that their growth is constrained by a shortage of relevant skills. According to the survey, current demand amounts to 20 000 to 30 000 job opportunities, or 10% to 15% of the total ICT workforce.

Two thirds of companies responding to the ITWeb survey reported that they were severely impacted by a shortage of ICT skills. According to recruiters and employers, application development, mobility, high-end infrastructure and analytics are just a few of the areas where the industry has a dearth of skills.

Rigatech aims to address these skills shortages and to provide realistic and sustainable solutions to developing ITC skill sets within South Africa, particularly amongst young black women whose potential has been sorely overlooked in the past.

"We have resolved to take an innovative approach to addressing sustainable job creation by combining

profitability with a real contribution to social development," says Rigatech Chief Executive Evelyn Naidoo. "To realise this objective our aim is to provide previously disadvantaged women with skills and experience in the ICT industry." Naidoo possesses more than 35 years' experience in the banking sector and is driven to lead and inspire young women who are aspiring to acquire new skills.

Rigatech is presently piloting a training syllabus which aims to develop and execute optimal integrated training and internship programmes to address specific ICT and business needs and skills shortages. This two-year process includes faculty training at Rigatech, alignment with university syllabi through student mentoring followed by internship placement.

Collaborations with a number of corporate IT organisations will see these companies providing specialist skills and mentorship incubators within their organisations. After a screening process of eligible candidates, qualifying black women will be selected for the programme and placed with these companies for in- house training.

"We are laying the foundations for our projects success by creating a pipeline of potential trainees, building awareness of the programme, developing assessment processes, and packaging our training and evaluation processes for certification," Naidoo explains. "The final steps will be to establish placements for our graduates into identified roles within chosen IT organisations or to facilitate the shadowing of existing roles for eventual placement within the company."

Backing the new concern is parent company Logikal Consulting, a leading BEE multinational that provides integrated telecommunications, financial services and public sector solutions. The company is lending both capital and other resources, such as skills transfers and job placements through its team of experienced technicians and thought leaders.

Through messages about self-empowerment, individual determination, and, most importantly, the liberal myth of "freedom of choice", young women are encouraged to define themselves as free-wheeling and atomized agents. And although many might remain theoretically aware of the impact of authoritarian, racist, patriarchal and ageist institutions and practices in shaping and constraining these choices, they might still subconsciously internalize the view of their autonomy to act independently of social forces, and mirror the seductive neo-liberal myth-making of their surrounding world.

*Poster from the Democratic Alliance's Student's Organization*

As discussed in the analytical section, this sense of freedom has ambiguous effects. On one level, it can lead to a self-assurance that borders on solipsism and contempt for what is perceived as "weakness", "inadequacy" and "failure" in material terms. At the same time, it seems to equip many young women who confront daunting challenges of violence, homelessness and impoverishment, with a deep resilience and confidence in "the Self". As demonstrated, such confidence is a powerful resource for defying circumstances of othering in workplaces, communities and homes.

## 3.5. Social and Digital Inclusion/Citizenship



*Websites targeting youth focus on narrow notions of skills development, education and "invited" citizenship*

Roy draws attention to the potential of the "cyber world as a space of citizenship formation and performance, where a diversity of movements come together to protest against the state and demand an end of corruption, nepotism and autocratic rule" (Roy, 2013: 264). Our action research with young women has exposed the extent to which young people can voice their political concerns against the backdrop of inhibiting political discourses through cyberspace (Hartley, 2010). Hartley calls these ever growing "invented" spaces of popular media usage "media citizenship" (2010: 239). He argues that citizens, who are excluded from the "formal" citizenship practice, are most likely to use different media to engage in civil matters within their group and/or communities to construct identities, associations and communities (Hartley, 2010).

In deepening these insights, Wasserman and Garman point out that "media citizenship" should not only be understood within the context of "serious" political engagement and deliberation, but also popular media texts "that are ostensibly focused on leisure and entertainment; soap operas, hip hop music, radio talk shows" (2013:2). These should be taken seriously as they represent platforms for public discourse about everyday "citizenship" realities. Furthermore, as Arvanitakis stresses, "media and media interactions are fundamental to understanding the way young people engage with civic processes that can develop or undermine their sense of agency – or both, as circumstances and personalities provide" (2013: 16).


Hermes argues that Internet-based communication and different ICT technologies "do not necessarily produce new citizens but that they do provide for new and important citizenship practices" (Hermes, 2006: 295). Hermes writes:

> The Internet is but one modality built with new technology but it encapsulates various tendencies that define the cultural usage of new ICTs: it bridges public and private spaces; it is used for entertainment, for consultation and information and for communication. It offers new means to connect information and experience (2006: 304).

As such, it is important to explore how the uses of different forms of engagement with various kinds of media are fundamental to young women's efforts to express opinions about personhood, as well as civil and political matters. In many cases, the divide between the personal, the civic and the political is in fact often very blurred. It is also clear that invitations to civic political engagement on various ICT platforms are affected by normalized patterns of exclusion on the basis of age, gender and class. They recreate and reinforce the same kind of political dynamics that have traditionally undermined women's agencies in public domains including politics. Vromen (2007) and Livingstone et al. (2007) argue that often websites are used to politically reinforce an already-existing political and civil status quo. They can therefore "focus on government-directed information delivery and consultation with individuals rather than active processes of citizen ownership and collective forms of participation" (Vromen 2007: 61).

Alongside ageist, gendered and authoritarian power relations, class position and access to resources continue to be a huge barrier to marginalized young women's empowerment as citizens through their engagement with ICTs. Vromen argues that "the Internet is not providing a radical change for young people in general by facilitating new participation" (2007: 61). As indicated previously, South Africa, despite the great strides that it has made in pioneering software such as ubuntu, or applications such as MXIT, has lagged behind many other countries in generating substantively popular access to mobile phones, mobile networks, landlines and bandwidth quality and costs, not to mention resources such as computers, laptops and tablets.

Recognizing how entrenched inequalities create the digital divide has shaped the cyber-sceptics' position. Bonder (2002), writing about Latin American and the Caribbean, challenges the exaggeratedly optimistic argument that cyberspace can be constitute a knowledge commons and be appropriated for all inhabitants' dynamic engagement with civic matters. She writes:

> The scandalous growth of poverty and of the levels of social inequity, together with the weakness of the national states and the lack of public investment in strategic sectors for human development, such as education or health; together with other

alarming signs such as the lack of transparency of the state administration of budgets for social programs and purchase of technological infrastructure, the concentration of multimedia in the hands of transnational corporations, and the absence of regulations regarding the rates of telecommunication services, do not allow us to be very optimistic, at least in the short term (2002: 4).

Echoing Bonder's sense of outrage in relation to South African youth, Livingstone et al. (2007: 10) suggest that:

Youth participation might be better redressed through offline initiatives, strengthening the opportunities structures of young people's lives … rather than building websites which, though they will engage a few, will struggle to reach the majority or, more important, to connect that majority to those with power over their lives in a manner that young people themselves judge effective and consequential.

Our analysis will demonstrate that the cautions of the cyberpessimists such as Bonder or Livingstone are important in encouraging an interrogation of the current social obstacles that affect many young women's use of ICTs in urban and peri-urban South Africa. But we also avoid the cynical dismissal of the value of ICTs. Consequently, rather than seeing them as "indulgences" leading to a distraction from civic purpose, we follow Vromen in considering the steady but uneven appropriation of new media tools and technology by young people, irrespective of their class positions, and how these have become "indispensable for a variety of reasons such as information distribution, sharing news and information, event organization, keeping in contact, and for facilitating debate within both offline and Internet-based communities" (2007: 61). Moreover, we register that the appropriation of ICTs in relation to a "sensitivity to space is central to understanding concepts of citizenship and the abilities of different people to exercise their rights as citizens" (2000: 628).

As many cyberoptimists show, cyberspace is providing important political space for young people to "have a right to express themselves, for their voices to become visible …to 'be heard' [through] a common feature of the design characteristics and interface of youth civic

websites (Livingstone *et al.*, 2007: 4). Moreover "young people are more likely to participate online than take part in more traditional forms of politics" (Livingstone *et al.*, 2007: 9). One reason is that the Internet provides a new way of participating in politics, "youth websites are built on the supposed parallels between young people's preferred style of interaction (dialogic, diverse, alternative, dynamic) and the infrastructure of the internet for "community-oriented" young people.



*Young women participants, digital inclusion and "invented" citizenship spaces*

As the invocation of the building of youth websites indicates, however, the assumption about "youth" here is the universalized assumption that young people have the skills, resources and time to use the Internet and computers. Our work with the participants has made us profoundly wary about the Western-centric and classist cyberoptimist view that "unlimited information available through the Internet will foster an increase in political knowledge, that people will express their views freely on email, lists and in chat rooms, and will subsequently become more active in community politics" (Vromen 2007: 49). In other words, we continue to explore difficult questions around whether the "new media" can, as argued by the cyberoptimists, resolve enormous social challenges and create progressive emancipatory possibilities for young women to use their own (as opposed to others'). We are therefore conscious of the ways that "the structures of the offline world" lead the "new media [to] offer both reactionary as well as transformative possibilities" (Livingstone *et al.* 2007: 9).

In reconciling our understanding of "offline realities" with our confidence in the liberating potential of ICTs for marginalized women, we draw on the notion of "digital inclusion". According to Notley, "the concept of digital inclusion differs from that of the digital divide" (2009: 8) in that digital inclusion makes a distinction between access and usage, and shifts emphasis towards the imaginative and determined usage of technology (2009: 8), irrespective of what form this usage takes. Digital inclusion is specifically concerned with ICT use and its outcome in societal civic matters - irrespective of the "levels" of ICT resources or skills used by particular individuals and groups. Notley emphases that social inclusion and digital inclusion should be understood as "connecting young people's ICT access and use with their ability to participate in society in ways that they value"(2009: 8). Some use the Internet to obtain information about public issues that affect them and also to forge alliances and dialogues with their peers or certain organizations. Perhaps the really significant question, then, is to what extent are individuals allowed to independently communicate their experiences without being excluded socially and/or in the digital world.

# 4. Methodology

## 4.1. Practices of Feminist Participatory Action Research

For a number of influential researchers, action research is primarily defined by its research design. This involves the use of established research techniques selected on the basis of 'best-fit' for the identified research problem. They argue that action research becomes Participatory Action Research (PAR) "depending on who is involved in each of those stages, and to what extent" (Mackenzie, et al. 2012: 12). Participatory action research methodological framework is developed through a process that is inclusive of research participants as collaborators and knowledge creators. This section reflects on the conceptual and (related) participatory action methodological framework used in the practical and research aspects of the Young Women Govern South Africa (YWGSA) project.

Many researchers agree that "the main purpose of using a PAR is to create an opportunity for researchers and research participants to learn from each other by operating within principles of democratic participation "(Mackenzie, et al. 2012: 12). It is also argued that PAR addresses power imbalances and empowers participants, enhances the social relevance of research and connects research to larger social change efforts (Langan and Morton, 2009: 167). Most importantly PAR starts with "the understanding that people especially, those who have experienced historic oppression hold deep knowledge about their lives and experiences, and should help shape the questions, [and] frame the interpretations' of research" (Torre and Fine, 2006, 458, cited in (Cahill, 2007: 329 &330)).

In short, the participatory action research methodological framework is developed through a process that is inclusive of research participants as collaborators and knowledge creators "who can inform project design, propose methods, facilitate some of the project activities, and importantly review and evaluate the process as a whole" (Mackenzie, Tan, Hoverman, and Baldwin, 2012: 12). This echoes the standpoint of postcolonial feminists such as Marjorie Mblinyi and Richa Nagar, who insist that feminist

researchers should engage in a conversation with their participants rather than bluntly seek to translate or represent voices that have been marginalised, silenced, or ignored (Winter and Munn-Giddings, 2001). According to Gatenby and Humphries, "both participatory action research (PAR) and feminist research have been developed by researchers aiming for involvement, activism and social critique for the purpose of liberatory change" (2000, 89). Thus, feminist participatory action research is a "conceptual and methodological framework that enables a critical understanding of women's multiple perspectives and works towards inclusion, participation, and action, while confronting the underlying assumptions researchers bring into the research process" (Langan and Morton, 2009: 167).

The YWGSA project has been a feminist project, and we believe that the feminist participatory action research (FPAR) methodological approach best describes the ethics, politics and philosophy informing its methods. At the same time, we have found it very important to flag disjunctures between the formal definition of "feminist participatory research" and its actual results. Hence, this section critically reflects on the conceptual and (related) participatory action methodological framework used in the practical and research aspects of the project.

## 4.2. Action research, Power and Empowerment

The concept of empowerment has become a contested concept in participatory active research projects. According to Lennie, Hatcher and Morgan, the contradictory effects of feminist discourses of empowerment "underpinned by poststructuralist theories of power, knowledge and subjectivity" (2003: 58). Too often, scholarship defined as feminist proceeds with the complacent assumption that merely identifying power imbalances, seeming to "empower participants" and producing what is at face value "socially engaged research" is a straightforward and coherent enterprise. Peters and Marshall stress that discourses of empowerment need to be interrogated with 'a sense both of its problematical nature and of the political rhetoric it might serve' (1991:127). Similarly, Lennie, Hatcher and Morgan write:

Analysis of the complex power relations enacted in participatory action research projects requires a framework that enables researchers to focus on both the micro and macro context, and the multiple subjectivities of those involved. It also requires the use of methods that can enable the critical, reflexive analysis of taken-for-granted assumptions about important feminist and action research concepts such as 'empowerment' (2003: 63).



*Actitfem Event at District Six – "Hear me Roar"*

By analyzing and critically reflecting on the research process and activities, one can transcend a fixation only with technicalities and methodological tools, which often masks vulnerability, uncertainties and the irresolvable "messiness of the research process.

Our research and the project are open-ended, exploratory and in many ways "incomplete". While scholarship, even feminist "post-positivist" scholarship, often assumes that open-endedness, exploratoriness and fragmentation indicate "flawed' research, we believe that it is precisely through flaws, gaps and inconsistencies that participatory action research can be enriched and further its aims of social accountability and engagement with socially marginalized participants. We were ever-mindful that an absence of reflexivity results in an omission of contradictions, and that it is tempting to tidy the 'messiness' of data in order to make research reports 'hygienic and clean', 'thus limiting any analysis of power between researched and researcher' (Humphries, 1994, p. 201). Lennie, Hatcher and Morgan (2003: 63).

From the beginning, we were aware of the blurring of empowerment and disempowerment. In other words, we accepted that the concept of "empowerment" is ideologically laden, and depended for its meaning on who defines and who experiences it. At the same time, it became increasingly clear that the magnitude of challenges, dangers and contradictions associated with the gap could lead to endless self-scrutiny and paralyze the project.

Stringer argues that "a fundamental premise of community-based action research is that it begins with an interest in the problems of a group, a community or an organization. Its purpose is to assist people in extending their understanding of their situation and thus resolve problems that confront them" (1996: 9). Primarily, the need to identify "an issue" was considered an important task for all project participants involved in this YWGSA activist and research initiatives. We did not want to "dump down" (Cahill, 2007: 333) the concept of "civil and political participation in contemporary South Africa" on the young women participants. Nor did we wish to prescribe by prioritizing specific issues, except through providing information about methods to be used and the use of digital technologies for the research project.



*Exploring digital resources in the course of the project*

In particular, our information focused on encouraging the participants to understand the project as one that enlisted ICTs for feminist ends, rather than as an ICT project focused on skills acquisition and preparation for the job market. In this regard, we relate to Mackenzie, Tan, Hoverman, and Baldwin's critical reflection on the difficult of standardizing participatory active research:

The types of activity conducted as part of an action research activity are difficult to standardize, for three reasons. First, PAR is context-specific and fluid. As issues arise and relationships develop, the methods and activities conducted are necessarily dynamic, requiring adaptation and revision. It is better described than defined. Second, PAR is context-centred; it aims to solve real-life problems. In this way, it is particularly useful for ensuring that research continues to form action in the longer term and for the integration of research into practice and improvement. Third, PAR needs to be widely inclusive of the diversity of experience and capacities amongst participants in the research to capture potential outlier input and ensure acceptance and ownership of both the process and the findings. (Mackenzie, Tan, Hoverman, and Baldwin, 2012: 13)

In order to create interconnections between individuals and groups, it was very important to facilitate weekly workshops to take stock of and continually redefine the project – with constant reflections on feminist forms of collective action, consciousness raising and communicational power (Lennie, Hatcher and Morgan, 2003). We regularly encouraged the young women participants to volunteer and come up with different techniques of team-building activities. The image below shows team-building activities and exercises that were used to break the ice and create communication networks based on trust and reciprocity. Significantly, the photograph also captures the awkwardness of the location of the principal researcher, the researcher and the coordinator at the edges of the process: on one hand, seeming to participate fully, yet at the same time, never fully participating because of their distinctive relation to the process. As researchers, we have learned that this power imbalance should constantly be surfaced, rather than be denied or suppressed. Within the academic space, we were often confronted by the hierarchical and bureaucratic management system. Hence, although "the epistemological framework of a PAR project privileges a 'bottom-up analysis', placing emphasis upon the critical insights of the community collaborators" (Cahill, 2007: 327), we were constantly reminded to review our positionality in relation to the project participants, the institution within which we were located as well as our accountability to the funder and project partners. To borrow from Langan and Morton, we often found that "our experience [spoke] to how trying to do

politically informed academic work is difficult in ways method and methodology books rarely prepare us for" (2009: 181).



The next step was to identify the "issues" that significantly affecting young women from marginalized communities, and to seek to ensure that these "issues" were not imposed by us as "experts". The young women participants were constantly encouraged to identify social problems and methods to collectively address that problem. However, the focus areas identified by young women in the Project were concretely articulated only several months after the project began. The problems that young women face in the Cape Town region were often expressed indirectly, through random comments that filtered into the discussions or through articulating experiences that affected their involvement in the project. For example, the repeated lateness and erratic attendance of many of the non-student participants made it abundantly clear that transport was a major social problem for them. Yet "transport issues" were also crucially linked to financial resources, service delivery, infrastructure problems to endemic violence, including the omnipresence of crime. There are, in other words, a host of issues that impact on "transport problems", and identifying transport issues as a salient and over-arching problem was often difficult.

Ultimately, then, the definition of safe transport and the other issues identified for the action-research involved a form of compromise between action and conceptualization.

Attempts were made to avoid taking up the position of "expert" by the "working team". However, because of the diversity of the group's "different needs, agendas, and ideologies, and different levels of knowledge and expertise" (Lennie, Hatcher and Morgan, 2003: 58), compromises were needed to reduce the messiness and complexity of "problems". Hence, identified issues needed to be "tamed" into concepts that could be used for action and research. Ultimately, these became Violence against women (Bodily Integrity), Unemployment, and Transportation.

Groups were formed to create ongoing activism around these identified social problems. Considerable effort was made to articulate the group dynamics as "non-hierarchical" and supportive. Three students, who were also part of the "working group" for the project, were given the task to facilitate formalize meetings and regulate communication with the rest of the group members. Since the project was located at the university, this was important as students could easily and regularly communicate with the principal research and/or the research assistant. Often, the original understanding of activism and activist projects as defined in "working group" meetings was redefined and reconceptualized as young women increasingly took ownership of what mattered to them, and in identifying what civic action should and could involve. Most importantly, their articulation of their concerns involved constantly threading through an emphasis on expressive and dialogic communication.

The use of ICTs for feminist activism in South Africa is, of course, far from a new phenomenon. However, the opportunity to allow both the forms and meanings of "activism" to evolve as participants transformed, challenged and contested "received" ideas – often from the Principal Researcher, the research assistant and the co-ordinator, does raise new challenges. These challenges derive from the fact that simply "allowing" young women to pursue their own interests does not solve the problem of "power" or the complexity of developing feminist consciousness among participants. At the same time, by involving young women from marginalized communities to actively exercise their contradictory creative, intellectual and political agencies, the project included the "excluded", "silenced" and "ignored" expressions of a largely silenced generation in contemporary South African politics (Cahill, 2007).

Most young women participants in each group wanted to produce a documentary or a film on the three identified social problems in their community. While this seemed to the researcher to point to a fixation with the glamour of film-making, it also speaks volumes about young women's desires for visibility in a world where the documentary film offers a powerful route for visibility.



*Project participants exploring different media institution platforms*

In pursuing the young women's needs for public visibility, we focused on gatherings for exhibiting artwork and performance, the use of "digital activist messages", the production of documentaries about YWGSA, photo campaigns, website, facebook page, google+, Youtube, etc. It was from the creative energies of these activities that members of the group developed three political campaign events namely in 2013 – the "I Am" campaign, the YWGSA website launch, and the "Hear Me Roar" campaign. And photo campaign in 2014 – "I am UWC" and "Is Voting a Right or Duty?"

*Posters circulated digitally via various social media platforms and also in print*

This political activity, while not taking the more orthodox forms of, for example, petitioning councillors or engaging with representatives of municipalities, created all-important affirming spaces for the young women's political expression.

## 4.3. PAR and Invented Citizenship

One of the milestones of the project was the production of our website ActITFem. From the beginning both researchers and participants were critical of websites created by others for a specific purpose, without extensive engagement with the end users. In order to reverse the usual situation in which "experts" speak down to "citizens in waiting", we used bottom-up techniques of soliciting ideas, desires and information to develop the website design. In so doing, we believe that we demonstrated Cahill's claim that "Self-representation is one of the most significant contributions of the PAR process" (2007: 335). We asked what young women participants would want to see on the website. We had several workshops characterized by heated discussions as to what should represent our website: for example, "If we are claiming to develop a feminist website, what should and should not be included?" The young women also discussed sites that they frequently surfed or knew about, and shared their knowledge of different sites. Ultimately, the process of designing a website was an extremely slow one. The time taken with this process was important however. It is this time-consuming process –often both laborious

but also extremely enriching – that is often neglected in NGO, CBO, donor-driven and policy research with marginalized groups.



*Group discussion and participation in ActITFem website development*

In most discussions, the content was not as much of a debatable issue as was visual representation, images and design. Many wanted the logo to feature the African continent, and for the feminist fist to appear within the map of South Africa. In other words, there was a spirit of pan-Africanism in these debates and pride in being African. We particularly remember the heated debate on a sample logo suggested by the website developer, who used archeological drawings of African people, her intention being to show some ancestral connection. Some young women critically rejected the drawings, claiming that they perpetuated ethnographic perceptions of "primitive Africa". Many of these participants were much more in favour of a gritty and robust urban image, which conveyed youthful energy and what seemed to them to be the spirit of feminist ICT activism for young South Africans.

The discussion of the logo therefore raised rich debates around how young women express their identities and wish to see themselves as active citizens in post-apartheid South Africa. Computer chips and computer wires were tried on the feminist fist, and out of the feminist fist energy lines reached out to the rest of Africa. The young women were not convinced by these prototypes. Interestingly, it was often depictions of the geographical nation and continent (which for many seemed tied to authoritarianism) that most participants seemed uncomfortable about.

Finally, it was decided to give inputs to an artist who would have the intuition to fill-in the gaps and come up with creative and engaging designs. We gave this task to Zulfa Abrahams, a PhD student in the Women's and Gender Studies department and a feminist activist who has a strong connection to many of the participants. She came up with brilliant ideas and five options of drawings. The one that was chosen features a computer chip inscribed on a woman's body, coloured blue. The text in pink sends a strong political message that young South African women are in charge of defining their identity and belonging through digital technologies. Both participants and researchers felt that a spirit of youthful feminism, a lively irony around the symbolic meanings of pink and blue, and a strong sense of confidence, defiance and innovation were well-represented in the logo.
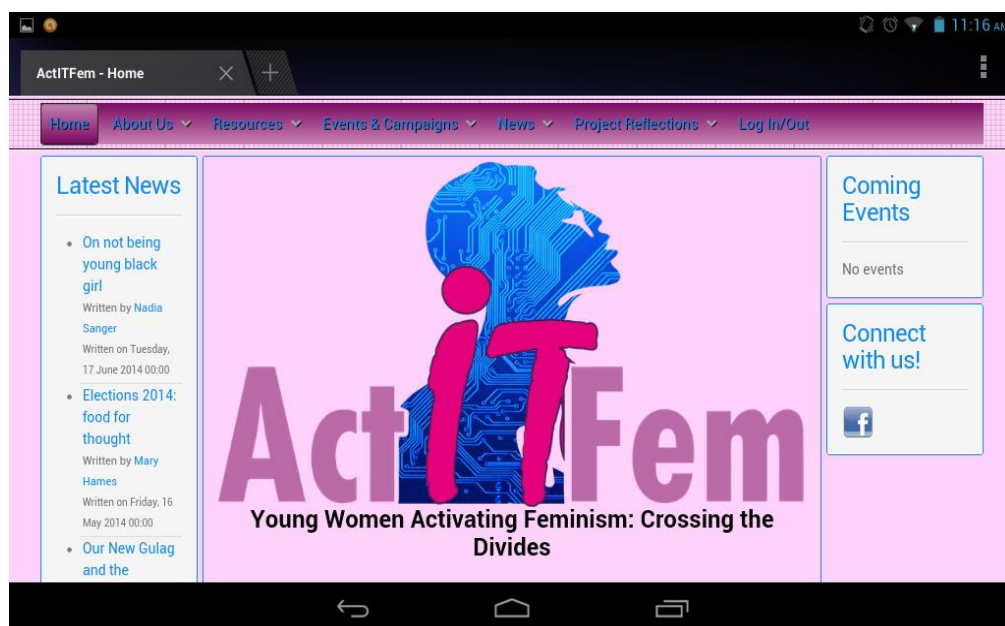


Our work with participants often showed us how young women often express their subjectivity through visual texts and images. It is often these images that convey a profounder sense of "who they are" in existential and political terms. The website, www.actitfem.co.za, was intended both as an archive for participant's knowledge creation, a platform for interacting in a global arena of the internet and a platform for communication. However, although "the website was designed to be interactive, always changing and growing, and reflective of the producers and the audiences who visit it" (Cahill, 2007: 335), this objective was not realized. We are convinced, however, that the

collective design of the website, and its status as a public platform in cyberspace were enormously important to participants' sense of their visibility and potential power as creators of knowledge about community, national and global matters.

## 4.3. Partnerships and Methodological Challenges

> The mix of academic interests and commitments with political interests and commitments in a partnership arrangement potentially presents a distressing dilemma, and this contrasts starkly with the widespread enthusiasm about academic/community/state (Langan and Morton, 2009: 181).

Since the Women – Gov ICT project is between three countries India, Brazil and South Africa, even though both projects shared a common feminist objective of seeking to empower marginalized women, the development of research instruments was often debated and needed to be carefully managed. For instance, the South African research team was deeply uncomfortable with quantitative research methods, often finding that these needed to be analysed as texts, and could not be regarded as insights into "facts". While our unease was partly because of weaker expertise in this area, it also stemmed from the realization that for young women especially this tool obscured more than it revealed. For instance, our quantitative tool reveals a number of "contradICTions", with young women often answering questions with responses that they seemed to believe the interviewer wished to hear. It became increasingly evident that quantitative data often require a discourse analysis and reflections on why respondents give the answers that they do under certain conditions. For example, responses to questions such as "How many members are there in your household" (eliciting responses that gave an average of three) reveal many young women's projections and desires as shaped by hegemonic images of family life, material affluence and strong desires to be "successful". Secondly, quantitative inquiry limits opportunities to explore, through, for example, participant observation, interviews or focus group discussion, how young women overcome power inequities and exclusions that affect their citizenship rights. Consequently, their responses to questions about their knowledge of rights or local government structures might indicate political apathy and civic disengagement, while other imaginative, dialogic and expressive abilities

and desires, often demonstrated differently depending on context would reveal something quite different.

Another complex partnership involved the Project's initial interaction with a community-based organization which, in the early years of democratic transformation played a central role in securing Western Cape women's access to municipality services and social grants. Like many other CBOs and NGOs in postcolonial contexts, however, it has become extremely vulnerable, relying on voluntary or unpaid work by its director and administrator, and often depending on erratic sources of project funding to sustain its demanding work with women in communities. The breakdown of the partnership was therefore symptomatic of a broader economic and socio-political climate. This is characterized by, firstly, declining donor, state and municipal resources for local communities, NGOs and CBOs, and, secondly, neo-liberalism and decreasing state for social development, (leading to decreasing resources and services for poor communities from national and local government). While these factors were anticipated by the Principal Researcher and Research Coordinator at the start of the project, it was not fully understood how significantly this situation would affect the Project.

# 5. Analysis of Findings

## 5.1 Conditions for Subaltern Knowledge Creation: Physical Spaces, Virtual spaces and Knowledge Commons

### 5.1.1 Spatial Challenges



*South Africa under apartheid*

The current spatial manifestations of power and inequality in South Africa reach back to colonial and apartheid segregation. Groups were rigidly divided geographically to ensure class and racial divisions of labor, as well as differential physical mobility and resource access. Post-apartheid reconstruction has not eradicated this legacy and the location of the University of the Western Cape in a semi-industrial area and of many young women participants in poor peri-urban townships clearly reflect this. Moreover, spatial segregation within homes and communities, as is the case in many other societies, also reinforces gender and age hierarchies.



*Area surrounding the University of Western Cape*

Pervasive spatial segregation has also affected knowledge flows, since just as classes, races and gendered bodies are physically separated, so is knowledge distributed, hierarchized and regulated in ways that ensure the authority and hegemony of certain groups' values, beliefs and perspectives.

Hypothetically, ICTs promise to destabilize this, seeming to create a virtual knowledge commons independent of individuals' access to physical space and resources. But even as ICTs promise to collapse the silencing and hierarchization of certain knowledges on the basis of monopolized spaces and resources, they often perpetuate entrenched offline imbalances.

This is because knowledge is never created solely in relation to online space. The offline world that positions young women in political organizations, homes, communities, societies and the nation at large inevitably affects their engagement in the world of ICTs, creating conditions for knowledge that many experience as profoundly unreceptive to their own voices. As discussed in previous sections, young women often experience formal political platforms of opposition - in terms of both party-political and civil society activism – in the Foucauldian sense of governmentality, forms of control where politicians, older activists or community leaders work to harness the youth's bodies and energies to their own political agendas. Consequently, the YWGSA 2014 election protest via photo campaign "Is voting right or duty?" was born out of the sense of frustration and disappointment experienced by the young women participants with their political leaders. The pictures below are on YWGSA Facebook page. The pictures were circulated and some made them their Facebook profile pictures to publicize their political views.

*"Is Voting a right or a duty?" Campaign*

Similar to this photo campaign, YWGSA was invited to be part of the "The Big Debate" current-affair talk show on SABC2, "Big Debate on Youth" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TE6FTdnFppo), the focus of the debate was why a young generation of South Africans is considered inactive, lost and uninterested in political affairs of the country, with Participants speaking out about their reasons for losing confidence in politicians. These two activities, relying on mixed and multiple media platforms, demonstrated how participants could use a wide range of new media resources to make their voices of political cynicism heard.



*YWGSA participating in lively interactions and political debate at the "Big Debate" talk show on SABC2*

The cynicism of the young women participants resonates for many young South Africans today. Powerfully expressed by the young woman writer of *Memoirs of a Born Free* (Wa Azania: 2014), the spaces of education, civil society activism, dominant party politics and oppositional part politics bequeathed by post-apartheid restructuring do not offer secure and nurturing spaces for the energies of many of today's youth. She writes: "The solutions of then sit uncomfortably within today's challenges. The game has changed and it

necessitates that we change too if we are to…find our place in the sun." (2014: xi)

Central to the metaphorically charged change invoked by a "place in the sun" here is the desire for spaces where 'the new game' can be publicly defined, explored and pursued, rather than re-presented, controlled or yoked to the old game of "then". In other words, the real spaces in which women participants in the Project use new technologies needed to be experienced as untainted by others' agendas. It was striking how the word "safe" recurred in young women's perceptions of the conditions for their effective knowledge creation. When asked how the use of space in the Women's and Gender Studies Department (WGS) and the Gender Equity Unit (GEU) at UWC helped them, most young women participants in the in-depth interviews conducted at the end of the Project explained that they felt "safe". In explaining what this meant, one participant said:

> I generally feel that GEU and WGS safe space for me, I feel like I can say certain things and be open about what I believe … about certain things without having the kind of push back you having like in other spaces, so that really helped me, just knowing that it is a safe space and knowing that I am generally around people who feel that same and who hold the same beliefs as me so I felt like it was a comfortable space to do this project … definitely both of them, both spaces.

As discussed in the literature review, the provision of ICTs in developmentalist work is often driven by utilitarian models assuming that the mere provision of resources and skills enables marginalized groups' creation of knowledge. What is paramount, however, is how subjects experience autonomy in their use of new resources. This is in line with a 'bottom-up' approach where participants have the freedom to decide and act on their beliefs and sense of purpose.

## 5.1. 2 Evaluating the Telecentre Model

One of the key development solutions to digital poverty in third-world contexts is the telecentre model, community access points and resource-equipped spaces that centralize equipment and platforms for groups' use of modern telecommunications. As Savita Bailur (2008) notes, these differ from cybercafés in having a developmental orientation and being

implemented mainly among marginalized groups in the global South. The Women-gov South Africa Project initially sought to work with this model. And during the first phase, when the Project worked with young women in the New Women's Movement, efforts were made to establish a telecentre at the offices of this CBO. During the second phase, once the Project had relocated to UWC, the aim was to establish a larger hub at the University of the Western Cape, and to use both newly acquired resources alongside the University's resources (for example, the computer training laboratories) both as access points and for training participants, especially young women who were not students.
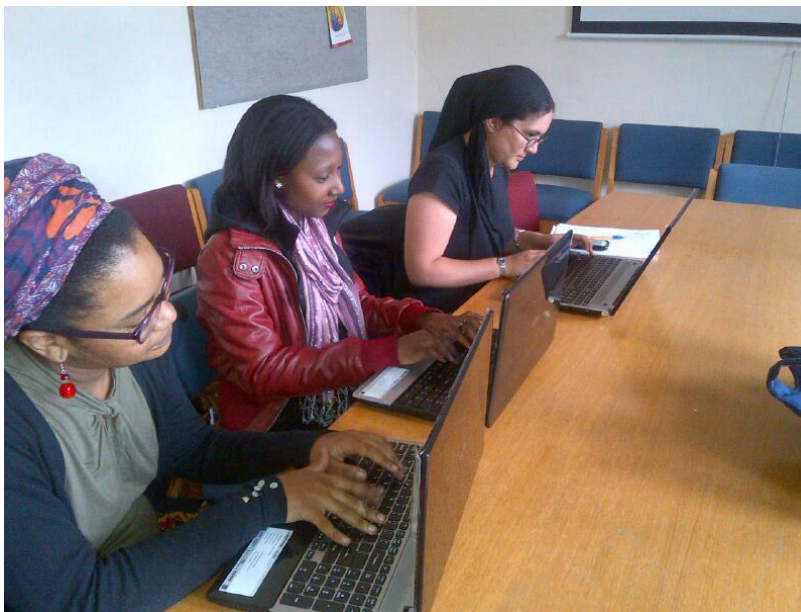


*Trialing the mobile telecentre at the Women's and Gender studies Dep. At UWC*

Initially, the telecentre model at the University seemed ideal, since it promised to offer a wide range of resources and skills for training. Problems with the telecentre model arose very early, however. Some of these have been identified by critics pinpointing the ineffectuality of the telecentre model.[13]  These include the following:

- the fact that the young women participants, like other marginalized women, are restricted in accessing telecentres because of domestic obligations, vulnerability in public spaces, and the practical difficulties (including transport) of accessing telecentres.

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[13] For a summary of criticisms, see Atwood, Diga and May (2013)

- the fact that telecentres often effectively function in terms of confused or conflicting agendas, so that, for example, the business or entertainment priorities of certain individuals or groups can interfere with the civic or political priorities of others, or the particular civic purposes of some can greatly conflict with others.
- the fact that even with the presence of a designated telecentre operator, conflict and confusion rises around access to building and resources.

In addition to this, it became progressively clear that ICTs are becoming increasingly mobile, portable and compact. Following the initial purchase of large computers and printers, it was realized that participants' greatest needs were for tablets, small video cameras and editing and other software portable products that did not need to be used in large working spaces.

The practical and functional drawbacks of telecentres therefore surfaced early in the Project, and we ultimately defined and streamlined our "telecentre arrangements" as a mobile information hub. As a non-student, one participant conveyed the problems with using a one-stop access point in a focus group discussion with student participants in the following way. (Significantly, her comments were made when determined efforts had been made to ensure participants' access to the telecentre operator -both in terms of arranged times and through sending her messages - and available computers:

> I am not like you, sometimes a whole week goes by without me checking my Facebook page or posting anything so anything that would be run on Facebook I would miss it.

> I occasionally have access to Internet; so being in these media spaces was a problem. But ... me personally I couldn't have access and also I am not a social medial person much

The poignancy of this participant's "I am not like you" reveals the extent to which particular persons remain marginalized in arrangements that seem to promote homogenized "community" access.

Alongside the factors above, however, may lie a deeper and more profound ideological dilemma, namely that the telecentre model puts in place precisely the centralized ordering that many marginalized groups – at a global level – are structurally disempowered and silenced by. This power structure has been revealed in the organization of the Project which, even though conceptualized as a participatory one, has been located within layers of unequal resource control and authority. Thus, the trivial tensions and seemingly petty complaints of many of the participants often registered discontent with how those with greater authority (the telecentre operator, the research assistant, the Project coordinator and the Principal researcher) exercised their power in matters such as allowing access to resources for participants' use. For example, in the middle of 2014, when many participants felt they had acquired the skills for creating dynamic videos, the Principal Researcher made a decision that resources could not be taken off campus because they might be lost or stolen. In turn, members of the Project working team, especially the Principal Researcher, Co-ordinator and Research Assistant – experienced constraints in matters such as developing certain activities, adjusting plans in the face of emerging contingencies or reallocating the budget outside of agreed budget lines - in the face of their obligations to the Project's funder and the main project partner.

These tensions and organizational challenges can be analyzed in terms of the postcolonial critique of telecentres offered by Savita Bailur (2008). Bailur argues that the history and use of telecentres reveals their entanglement in government's and donors' mandates. These top-down agendas for social transformation among marginal groups in the South often undermine knowledge networks driven and conceptualized by communities. Bailur raises the significance of patterns that include binaries between rationality and primordinialism, progress versus atavism and urban versus rural, development versus stasis in analyzing the ideological and institutional scaffolding on which telecentres rest.

It seemed to us that one of the key challenges in using the prevailing one-stop access point model was that we frequently ignored or fudged the power dynamics that it embedded. We saw the telecentre idealistically, and not as a model whose effectiveness and sustainability would be deeply affected by factors including the participants' practical needs and constraints, the top-down notion of "giving access" that it implied, and its location within

systems that centralized ownership and decision-making - even when the donor and main Project partner strove to encourage democratic and flexible decision-making. Working on this Project has led us to realize that participatory action research requires a constant critical reflection on long-established systems and models of development practice. If progressive researchers intend to pursue a strategy that takes the long-term agendas of marginalized groups seriously, they need the resilience and humility to constantly adapt and, where, necessary abandon strategies and models that simply do not work for the intended beneficiaries.

### 5.1.3 Discovering a New Knowledge Commons

The notion of a knowledge commons, defining information and data that is jointly owned and managed in the interests of collective desires and goals has become increasingly central both to cyberoptimists who neglect social inequalities and to those committed to globally uniform access to and control over digital resources. As defined from the 1990s, knowledge commons encapsulates both shared resources and property rights, conveying ways in which diverse individuals can manage information resources to produce their knowledge in their interests. When defined in this way, experiencing a "knowledge commons" becomes an ideal that is extremely difficult to reach for groups such as our Project participants. Not only are they situated within the organizational structure described in the preceding subsection; they also lack the power, skills or networks to intervene into broader global struggles around the corporatized and commercial control of software, computer or cellphone prices, bandwidth costs and so on.

In his review of telecentres, Rajindra Ariyabandu (2009) suggests that "knowledge hubs", which foreground resources alongside context-specific knowledge relevant to particular groups (for example, farming in communities where agriculture is paramount) are important in transforming telecentres to serve the interests of particular marginalized groups. This was clearly articulated by the young women, who often expressed a need for the Project to be tied to a thematic and political focus. It was also expressed in both explicit and implicit disinterest in formal political participation, and local government structures

and spaces.

As the thematic focus on three distinct areas affecting young women indicated, it was paramount to define Participants' effective ICT use alongside their articulation of specific issues and agendas emanating from their intersecting identities. Gradually articulated as focus areas for knowledge creation and action (bodily integrity, transport and employment), these were concerns that they were especially close to and that preoccupied them.

The vividness of how knowledge was experienced almost viscerally - based on participants' shared standpoint - was well-captured in an interview with one participant:

> … Being in the bodily integrity group made me realize the depth of bodily integrity and bodily violence, the different kind of violence that can be done to black women and how it affects us … I got to learn how deep violence actually is and it also helped me with regards to how I view my body and the bodies of other people … yeah I think it was very personal it helped me personally a lot, I definitely take bodily integrity to heart, it was obviously very relatable so yeah …

Another, explicitly referring to her social status and how the Project impacts in helping her "come to voice" said:

> I got to realize that I can participate in civil matters more than I thought I could because of my age and gender. But it empowered me to start participating where I previously not. So, it helped me sort of to understand how to go about it, how to represent myself instead of always having other people represent my views and sometimes misinterpret them

Our growing misgivings with the conventional telecentre model grew not only out of asking the hard questions: "What political purposes (that resonate powerfully for participants) will ICT use and access serve? And how will the use of these ICTs strengthen democratic, dialogic and reciprocal ways of encouraging skills acquisition and guard against models of one-way instruction?

Thus, rather than providing formal training sessions, in which skilled persons taught those who "lacked" them, we sought to work with the principle that we all learn from one another. We gravitated increasingly towards one-on-one sessions for activities such as basic ICT skills' acquisition, with the research assistant, intern and telecentre operator making arrangements to engage with participants individually. These one-on-one sessions, meant that "teaching" was as two-way and mutually beneficial as possible, assumed that each person has valuable knowledge or perspectives to share and that teaching and learning should take the form of dialogue. What therefore worked well in many cases was a time-consuming form of peer tutoring, which often allowed the young women to interact regularly with each other on the basis of trust, sharing knowledge, equality and reciprocity.



*Examples of engaging skills transference with regard to feminism and ict's*

Secondly the discussion-oriented sessions worked far better than the formal training sessions. In sessions with the web designer and with film-makers, for example, it was realized that sitting in a circle and creating discussion-oriented sessions led to far richer ideas how to use skills than any top-down information sessions that focused on skills in isolation.

The idealistic notion of digitization providing a knowledge commons has frequently been challenged by those that acknowledge how ICT resources are differentially accessed and how certain information and knowledge becomes hegemonic. Attention to a Project's

dynamics and models used in the light of postcolonial and intersectional perspectives can surface hidden and naturalized form of power and inequality, even when these are expressed only as vague disquiet, withdrawal or impatience. These forms of inequality are rarely discussed in the literature on ICT for development, and apparently neutral notions of "community access points", "development", and skills transfer", "empowerment" and "training" often conceal the inevitably messy and fraught processes through which individuals must struggle to produce knowledge that makes sense to them. The young women gov project has not come up with definitive solutions provided did not provide comprehensive solutions to these difficulties. In fact, it could be argued that any claim to having provided a solution would itself indicate that many problems were ignored or neglected. It did, however, uncover the extent to which even the most well-meaning participatory projects can perpetuate what B calls the "othering" of the intended beneficiaries, the "information-poor" (10), and the vital importance of and difficulties with crafting flexible resource access arrangements for marginalized groups' knowledge creation.

Supportive arrangements, however, are effective when the self-organised commons created by the participants builds strong collective-action and self- appraising and regulating strategies. This requires will, determination and voluntarism. All this cannot be created in a short space of time, and it has been realized that ICT activist projects that take the building of marginalised groups' knowledge fully into account require enormous amounts of social capital that can be built only over extended periods of time.

## 5.2 Leadership and Organizations in ICT Activism

Debates about what constitutes feminist leadership have abounded, with many feminists arguing that authoritarian, centralized and top-down methods perpetuate masculinist ones. How have these feminist ideas intersected with the functioning of ICTs for feminist mobilizing and organization, where platforms and resources – as long as individuals can access them – seem less dependent on particular individuals' social power or privilege? Scope for controlling and regulating information via Facebook messaging or cell phone communication was very limited, and many participants expressed their sense of freedom in using these platforms.  One stated, for example:

what I like about ICTs and about social media is that … we can talk about our own stories the way we want to without having to report back to people outside, like we can control the narrative so twitter, blogs, facebook those kind of things we are able to create news, to create narrative and discourses that involve us on our terms and I really like that and I think the more women we empower to be able to do that the more stories we will here and that is empowering in itself being able to say your stories on your terms under your control.

The above response conveys the value of social media for the participants, who felt able to spontaneously share news, information on social events, and even music with one another. Based on our observation, we found that the YWGSA facebook page has been extremely instrumental in creating solidarity among young women, developing effective communicational strategies, advertising YWGSA public events, sharing feminist activist messages and photo campaigns. As the responses above show, this social media space has given young women participants the autonomy to freely express themselves and/or their political views as well as to have control over their stories. Since the YWGSA facebook page is open not only to those who are participants of the project but also to invited members, young women benefitted from a range of viewpoints and perspectives. For instance, Zanele Muholi, a globally renowned South Africa feminist photographer regularly posts news about violence against young black lesbian women, and uses her recognizable "latest" to share relevant news links. Despite South Africa's progressive laws on gay and lesbian rights, violence against lesbians is rife, with traditional media under-reporting incidents of this growing scourge.

Zanele Muholi
August 22

Latest:

"...if previous cases had been properly investigated and successfully prosecuted we would not have been standing at another Memorial of a raped and murdered young lesbian in Women's Month.

- by Odidi Mfenyana... See More

2014 Aug. 21: "We want ACTION. Why must we still fight for OUR RIGHTS!?"

At the forefront of our struggle, at this time of sadness... Activists from Gay Umbrella leading the way to the sport grounds before the Memorial service of...
INKANYISO.ORG

Unlike · Comment · Share

Zanele Muholi
August 26

Latest:

"Family and friends who gathered in Tshing township to bid their goodbyes to Gift could not contain their emotions.
While some wailed uncontrollably, others shed their tears in silence, with pain, sorrow and sadness written on their faces."

2014 Aug. 23: Relatives and friends shed the tears at Gift's funeral and some fainted

Text by Lerato DumsePhotos by Lindeka QampiWhen the casket carrying the body of Disebo Gift Makau (23), was lowered six feet underground at a Ventersdorp...

As seen above, through news and information-sharing by feminists like Muholi, young women Participants have had the opportunity to access and comment on stories concerning South African lesbians, South Africa's judicial system and the injustices that continue despite formal measures of non-discrimination. This simple but powerful act of sharing news has disturbed what Roy calls "hierarchized citizenship". She argues that "the vocabulary of citizenship 'stops' when it comes to homosexuality and the 'queer citizen' as the 'invisible' subject of civil law" (Roy, 2010: 36). Once the news is posted on the facebook page, the young women share it on their facebook walls to amplify, popularized and make this and similar issues part of the everyday political struggle of black women in South Africa.

In contrast to twitter, facebook and cell phone messages, communication via the Project's website was experienced as remote, even though the website does allow for Participants' interaction. One of the dilemmas experienced here was that the website is the public face of the Project, with its political regulation guaranteeing the Project's integrity. Even though the website design and much of its content was produced by Participants, it has not functioned as a communicative tool.

The contrast between highly interactive social media and the more archival website indicates how control and regulation of certain platforms is inevitable in the case of any activist project that seeks to adhere to political principles. While this could be defined as gatekeeping, Participants seem to have valued the website as an archive:

I have used the website, I have read some articles but I am not uploading anything but I like the website ...

I only use the website for referencing, even online I use it as referencing ... I post the articles on my twitter or something like that ... I mainly use it to share what is on there

I have been on the website ummmm as usual it is cool to see yourself on a website and see your pICTure and what you said and a little bit about you but I haven't use it that often actually ... but I know that it is a good space for archiving and collecting what we did so I pop on there every now and then to see if there is anything new if anybody written anything ...I think website is good for archiving we back looking at photos and things we did together.

I go and check our website ... I check if there is something new and I would read the articles or the video posted there so I watch those, I think it is a good space for actually putting out the aim of the project and the material posted on was very much related to actually the project so I felt that it was very good.
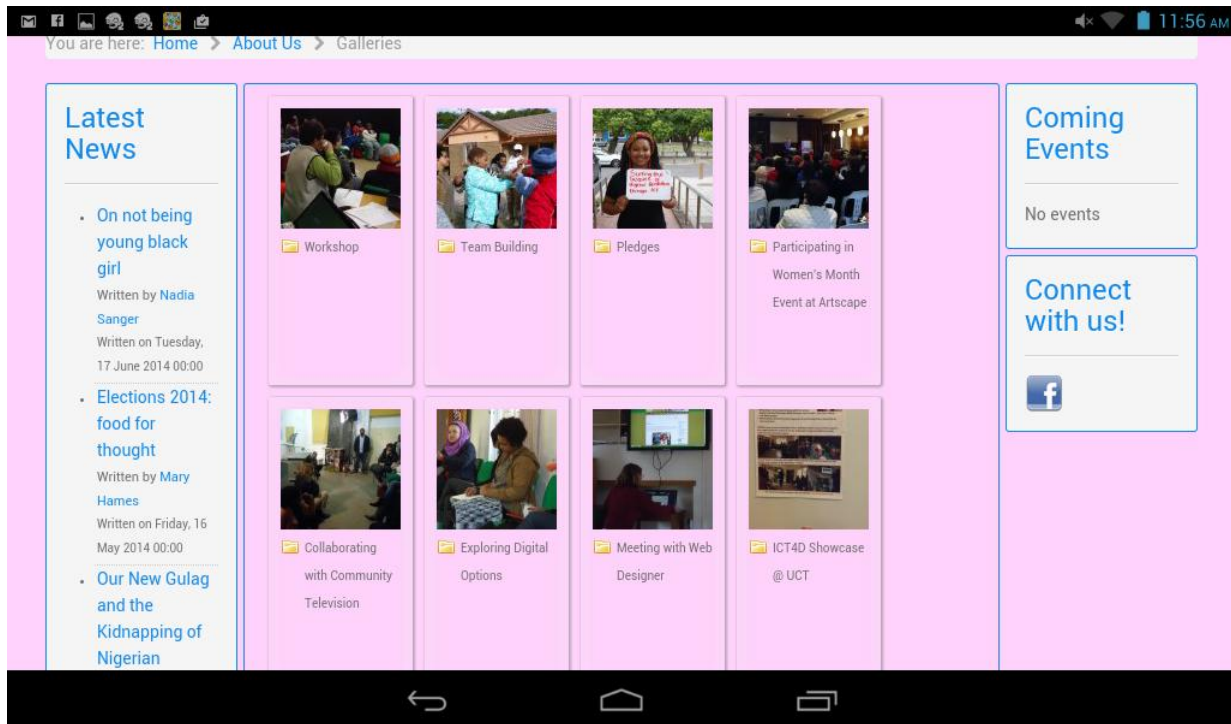
*Screenshot of events gallery on Project's website*

## 5.3 The South African University and Social Engagement

The need for leadership in the form of a guiding and advisory political focus became clear in the misgivings expressed by a number of participants about the direction and purpose of the Project. While they appreciated the freedom to explore and work inventively with one another, many expressed the need for guidance.

One said:

> I know that the project was trying very hard to be students and young women driven but I think most of the time we were a bit lost, I think we needed, may be not control but we needed a bit more guidance from the people whoever was, like about where the project was supposed to go, a lot of time I was not sure what's going on at the moment … I think when it is completely top-down you feel like you just there and you just got to do what they want you to do and then when you are done there is no impact on you but a completely  bottom – up approach we often get lost and some of us we are students and very young

and I think it will be very helpful for the older people who are much more involved and experienced in NGO work and activism to kind of wave in every now and then and let us know if this is working, if we are doing the right thing, what is expected of us and that sort of thing, I think we need a combination of both ...

We started the Project with the goal of each-one teach one, in which students with primarily theoretical knowledge would pair up with non-students who had mainly activist knowledge and experience. While the reciprocal sharing of activist and intellectual experience was never achieved, it was noteworthy that both students and non-students generally found the hosting of the Project at a university with a strong activist history beneficial.

One in-depth interview made it clear that the space was very convenient for both student participants and young women from the communities who have to travel to get to campus to attend seminars and trainings. A young women participant from the community commented:

> I think ... people feel that things that are predominantly in the university are only for students ... it is how people have looked at it and people get very reluctant to join things that are part of the university because they are not ... so it has a negative effect ... but the way we did it, where we invited people and make them realize that ... it is not about you go to school or not, it is not about you are from this university or not, but your participation matters.

A student participant gave similar comment:

> ... I think the university is a good space ... the spaces we were in [WGS &GEU] were safe spaces and I think that is very important to build a foundation of any sort of project before you go move out into other space, I am not saying other spaces can't be safe ummm ... I think this was a very good project in trying to do some work, bring our university work outside into the communities surrounding the university so I think it was good for ... to get the university more involved

outside in the communities around the university where a lot of our students are from.



*A short skit written and performed by participants at the website launch and "I Am" event at University of the Western Cape*

By the time we held our national workshop, aimed at taking stock and evaluation the Project with stakeholders in different sectors, Participants and the working team had become convinced of the value of an ICT activist Project hosted by a South African university. In a climate where many CBOs and NGOs are under growing pressure to provide resources, spaces and skills acquisition for members, it seems to us that deepening connections between universities and marginalized groups' desires for knowledge creation and sharing is intellectually and politically valuable.



*Prof. Pumla Gqola - feminist public intellectual and Social media activist deliver keynote address*

*Photographs taken at the Project's two day National workshop*

One important thread at this two-day workshop concerned the weakening of South African universities' progressive engagement with communities. Even the most elitist universities under apartheid maintained strong ties with communities' needs for progressive knowledge – encompassing issues such as trade union struggles, domestic workers' stories and organization and women's neglected struggles against violence. Currently, many researchers, academics and departments pursue research on marginalized subjects and communities, although such research rarely finds its way back into communities.

We believe that a participatory Project such as women gov South Africa, which required students' and researchers' active engagement with and accountability to community issues successfully avoided the pitfalls of merely producing knowledge about others, but also entailed determined involvement in community struggles and mobilization.

Our action research on the YWGSA Project has also shown us that university students, through using social media, have considerable opportunities and potential to drive civil society action on behalf of their communities. Events beyond South Africa indicate that in African and other post-colonial contexts, the centrality of university students in socially transformative networking and action cannot be over-estimated. As illustrated by the uprisings against the Mubarak regime, Egyptian university students were able to use their ICT skills, networks and knowledge to orchestrate far-reaching democratizing action in their society. And as Fatima Mernissi (1987) has argued, students, often drawn from working-class and poor backgrounds) in postcolonial countries such as Egypt are likely to gravitate towards activism when confronting governments' failure to deliver on democratic resource allocation and public participation. Mernissi discusses the high rates of enrolment

among the urban poor and peasants at the Asyut University in Egypt, describing unrest in the area in the seventies to the deep disillusionment among the youth with a corrupt government and the state's complicity with US imperialism.

Echoing the disillusionment that Mernissi describes among Egyptian students, Malaika wa Azania, a South African student whose activism in contemporary South Africa involves extensive use of social media, writes:

> I realized that student organisations, as factories where future leaders are manufactured, should lead the revolution of the annihilation of ill-discipline. It begins with fighting against SRC corruption and misappropriation of resources. It begins with ceasing the culture of electing leaders on the basis of popularity as opposed to electing them on the basis of capacity to deliver. (2-14: 147)

## 5.4 The pitfalls of translation in action research

Our work on this Project has alerted us to the complexities of managing accountability to both donors and to participants. The huge amounts of funding that currently drives ICT for development in the global South often entails researchers, NGO workers translating the messiness of subjects lives into manageable scripts that allow these groups to become the them to become the beneficiaries of developmentalism, rights discourses and governmentality in the form of state and global system.

It seems crucial to air critical reflection about these dynamics. One way of doing so is with reference to Partha Chaterjee's claim that civil society activism has become an elite enclave. This does not necessarily need to lead to a wholesale condemnation of the motivations of researchers or NGO workers working with marginalized groups. However it does draw attention to the power dynamics in which many currently operate. Many academics, NGO workers, policy researchers negotiate complex patron client relations in terms of processes such as protecting or enhancing their organizations, research units, or universities by creating access routes to resources and opportunities from government departments or funders.

As progressive researchers who believe that we are allies in civil society activism, we have battled with the often conflicting challenges of being led by the voices of marginalized groups, and becoming conduits for manageably textualised lives. What does it mean when we act as translators, often by using powerful and influential ICTS to convey the lives and voices of marginalized groups? And how can we surface these dilemmas and be more self-reflexive about them without feeling paralyzed.

One aim of the national workshop held by the Project towards the middle of its final year was to establish a conversation with representatives from funding organizations with the aim of generating dialogue about how donor funding arrangements could be better aligned with participatory research Projects' substantively developmental aims[14]. Representatives from the Ford foundation, the Heinrich Boll Stiftung, Oxfam, IDRC and the National Research Foundation were able to attend, with all demonstrating that funding organizations are far from monoliths. Thus, the straw target in many radical critiques of donor funding (the Northern donor seen as blind to the needs of marginalized groups and determined only to promote global capitalism) denied the agencies of progressive action researchers or leaders of NGOs. Both individuals working for donor organizations and certain funders often *do* value critical conversations that lead to better practice and action research. To assume that researchers and NGOs in the global South will inevitably be dictated to by funders is to perpetuate the belief of postcolonial powerlessness.


## 5.5 The Individual, Collectivism and Connectivity

### "This is not an ICT project; this is a feminist project"

Many contemporary social theorists criticize the extent to which our modern consumerist world valorizes the idea of the free-floating individual whose success, achieved through concerted individual effort, is measured by the image, status and material achievements of particular persons. This glorifying of the atomized individual can be elevated even more by digitization, where platforms such as Facebook encourage the self-expression or self-

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[14] The summary report is included as an appendix.

invention of personalities, wealth, success and image. Significantly, Facebook personae often celebrate the apparently unique body and personality, and also often laud the will and drive that a globally dominant ideology defines as the route to "success".

The pervasive impact of the drive towards personalized achievement was often manifested among the young women participants, many of whom believed that the Project would offer tools for immediate personal advancement and achievement. Despite our repeated insistence that the YWGSA Project was not an ICT one, but a feminist one that used ICTs, deep-seated beliefs about its connection to personalized ambitions remained. These included:

- the interest in immediate skills acquisition with a view to employment
- the impulse to "take personal credit" for project results and products that were jointly created by Participants
- the motivation to participate energetically and regularly mainly on the basis of material incentives, rather than be motivated by voluntarism.

It would be naïve to imply that a "properly" political response is always either altruistic rather than individualistic. However, as indicated in the contextual study, neo-liberalism has had a profound impact on the behavior ad values of youth globally. Wherever young South African women live, they are touched by the reach of a globalized ideology (and its multifaceted media manifestations) that urge personal and material accomplishment as definitive measures of human worth. Paradoxically, it was often the sheer drive to excel as individuals that made many of the young women so determined in this collectivist project. At the same time, this self-absorption was often counterproductive, undermining the sustained progress of collective action and the deepening of solidarity.

An important lesson for both participants and researchers was the extent to which physical experiences of sharing and deliberation gave each participant an embodied sense of the value of communal belonging and participation. Interestingly, then, collective energies were most often experienced when participants literally came together, choosing and sharing meals and teasing and laughing with one another, or holding conversation about their everyday lives in between their planning and deliberations about public activities and

their thematic working groups.



*Spaces for socializing and workshops at the New Women's Movement*

In contrast to this, interaction via Facebook or cellphones meant that the inevitable offline experiences of participants ("I lost my cell phone and couldn't receive smses"; "I had to miss yesterday's meeting because of the bus strike" or "I had a job interview today and didn't have time to check Facebook for our working group's plans") were occluded. This meant that online communication could be experienced in terms of frustration, impatience, intolerance and conflict. Equally importantly, the opportunities to connect as human beings with deep, even though elusive needs for being nurtured and understood by others, for sharing laughter and even for spontaneously arguing could not be provided by, for example, facebook or cellphone communication.

Having closely observed group dynamics among participants, then, we have realized that no amount of online connectivity is able to replace the holistic experience of shared human contact, including eating together, interaction about the mundanely personal and trivial, and planning towards obviously serious public activities.

One participant's comments on the weekly workshop session, captures this well:

> The weekly seminar was so great and helped me and gave me more understanding ...
> it opened my eyes to a lot of stuff, and views from other people, which shaped me to
> grow in my opinion and views going forward. As much as you communicate with
> people a lot around you [in online spaces] but you don't really hit the core as we did
> [weekly seminars] in terms of getting to deep to understand certain things.

It seems to us that the literature on ICT use among marginalized groups focuses exclusively on the serious, ignoring the extent to which different groups achieve a sense of enduring solidarity when they connect emotionally and psychologically, and not only on the basis of shared intellectual and political goals. The emphasis on connectivity as a primary pre-requisite for collectivity – both in ICT for development research as well as in work on the social value of ICTs – ignores the immeasurable value of human connections in anchoring and sustaining collective action. In fact, the ICT for development literature implies that broadly human experiences based on physical intimacy, eating communal meals, hugging or laughing together are in some ways vestiges of pre-modern communication. ICT competencies are seen to be in line with a new form of productive subjectivity, where human potential is reduced to the cerebral, the virtual and the disembodied.



*Examples of spontaneous group pictures taken at different events*

While the Project's working team initially treated emotional and bonding experiences as though they were incidental, it was realized more and more how pivotal these often unplanned, spontaneously sought and discovered experiences were to collective action and mobilizing.

## 5.6 Politics of Collective Dreaming: Fun, Pleasure and Creativity

At the same time that the project participants used a range of ICT and social media platforms to create and share critical knowledge about social issues affecting themselves, their communities and their national and global contexts, they also pursued imaginative, eclectic and hybrid ways of creating information and knowledge, and communicating it to others. One of the disturbing legacies of social transformation and developmental work in the global South has been its definition as somber and gloomy, as though marginalized subjects could not possibly have the time or energy to link their economic, social and political struggles to humour, play, performance or music. Yet Participants were often most energized when given the freedom to envisage a political message in imaginative ways. Thus, the Digital Activist Messages relied on short videos incorporating provocative images, sound and text. Not only do these allow the creators to create texts in creative ways; they also encourage audiences to play an active role in interpreting messages, rather than to passively consume these. Such an active role for the receivers of politically charged art has long been a central goal in progressive artistic projects.



*Artwork exhibited at the Project event titled: "I AM"*



*Artwork exhibited at the Project event titled: "Hear Me Roar"*

Associated with the "alienation techniques" of the Marxist playwright, Bertolt Brecht, past and present community theatre or visual art display in contexts including the Soviet Union, China, Latin America and Africa have striven to generate active audience participation and a deepening of subjects' radical consciousness and understanding.

Our observation and the in-depth interviews showed us that the public events involving creative expression led to significant shifts in young women's political consciousness. As one participant said:

> … It was an honour to be able to perform actually. I mean the fact that my body, my talent, my ability, my performance served as a catalyst for people to realize or think about certain things in different way that is very humbling.

Another participant stated:

> It was interesting I didn't know it could be done through art and things like that through dance and yeah so it was eye opening for me, learning the different ways we can convey social injustice … it was completely new for me and refreshing

Yet another said:

> The media we used to portray violence, transportation and unemployment were effective and impactful because it is not like they are reading something they were watching us perform and usually people are drawn more to that so I think we had impactful events …
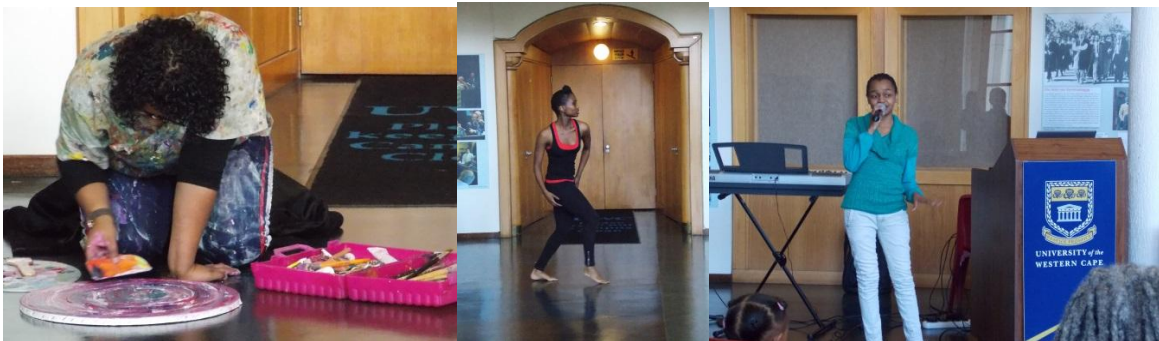


*Painting, Dance and Poetry performances at Projects event: "I AM"*

As is the case with embodied experiences of collectivism, therefore, imaginative, active and creative responses to social challenges often animate and drive activist energies more powerfully than any purely cerebral or literal identification of social challenges and pursuit for solutions. As the variety of communicative media used by participants reveals, processes of producing critical knowledge were restless, hybrid and eclectic. Print media were often preferred (for example, the use of large posters to attract audiences and encourage involvement in the project's activities). This was not because women lacked the skills or resources to use them, but because direct visual encounters with large poster can remain – even in a highly digitized age – an extremely powerful method of communication. Similarly, the consciousness-raising and mobilizing effects of collectively watching a dance representing women's rights to bodily freedom can resonate, as participants and many audience members indicated, far more powerfully than digitally circulated and received information which clearly conveys a message about gender violence. It is disheartening that the attention to imaginative, sensory and embodied facets of actual persons' development within development work is sometimes dismissed as maverick and indulgent. It is equally disheartening that development work can reduce marginalized groups' needs to facets of their experience, rather than recognize how marginalized groups holistically seek to fulfill their human needs through integrated struggles. We believe that participants were able to use ICTs and new media alongside other traditional media and communicative or expressive forms to push back the boundaries around conventional development ad activist work.

# 6. Concluding Remarks

For the purposes of generating comparative research between India, South Africa and Brazil, it has been deemed important to analyse findings in terms of the categories of informational power, communicative power and associative power and collective action. These categories obviously overlap and intersect. Moreover, findings from the YWGSA Project in relation to these categories do not yield definitive conclusions to the research question that drove the three-country project: "What are the conditions under which digital technologies can enable marginalised women to gain active citizenship at the local level?" What follows therefore summarizes key trends.

## 6.1 Parameter 1: Informational power

On the basis of participant observation, interviews and focus group discussion, it has been clear that the main form of information power acquired by young women students and non-students has involved their growing confidence in becoming interlocutors in local, national and regional affairs. The production of their knowledge here has involved visual material, articles, short blog essays, artwork, and oral input for community TV and national TV stations. We believe that young women have acquired the confidence to produce their own interpretations of current affairs including the reasons for poverty and unemployment, the scourge of violence against women in South Africa and the limitations of how this scourge has often been written and spoken about in the public domain, and the connection between public transport facilities and the needs and vulnerabilities of women, especially young women. At the same time, because of the unique opportunities that digital communication makes possible, they have also learned about situations - beyond their own communities and the country in which they live – relevant to their efforts to make sense of their particular experiences. For example, the internet, facebook communication, twitters and cellphone text messages allowed them to acquire insight into and to form critical opinions about the abduction of Nigerian schoolgirls in April 2014.

Weekly training sessions assisted young women with developing the technical, analytical and political skills to produce knowledge. It should be stressed that approximately a year after participants gravitated towards the use of film, including short bits of film, sound and text, (which the coordinator dubbed the digital activism message), this form has acquired

renewed interest among NGOs.  Replacing the former genre of digital storytelling, which stressed autobiographical and testimonial information, these forms focus on consciousness-raising and encourage viewers to critically reflect and take action. In other words, these forms produce condensed analysis and critical information. Dubbed digital activist messages, these short films can work both to conscientize other young women and can be used as tools for critical political literacy among other NGOs and CBOS.

Regarding women's access to information, and their participation in our local information network, the establishment of a website has been a key means of ensuring young women's sense of their "presence" in a local, national and globalized knowledge flows. Irrespective of the injustices and inequalities within these global flows, and whether or not participants voices are listened to, the creation of the actifem website – as interviews and focus group discussions revealed – gave participants a sense of the global visibility of their knowledge and perspectives, and their potential as critically literate political actors at the communal, national and global level. As indicated throughout this study, digital inclusion, reflecting the determined efforts of groups to use the resources available to them, including traditional media and hybridized communication and knowledge creation, is a primary objective in making icts work for marginalized groups; focusing mechanically on step to overcome the digital divide neither respects the determination of social subjects, nor acknowledges that the digital divide is a product of broader social and political relationships.

## 6.2 Parameter2: Associational power and collective action

One effect of the associational power generated by the project was that it attracted and involved politically restless young women in Cape Town who often experience frustration with top-down and authoritarian ventures that reduce their experiences to victimization, or narrowly defined economic and political needs. As word spread about the Project through facebook, public events and the website, a number of Cape Town-based young women including students, dancers, artists, poets and activists found that the Project gave them freedom to express liberating artistic, political and personal ideas – especially in the face of national and international discourses and structures that reduce emancipating struggles to economic and political concerns. The association power offered by digitization also encouraged certain global solidarities and networking. The freedom to air debates

about racism in a country often believed to have transcended racial injustices, about globalized racism in media representations of black women, or about sexual rights and homophobic violence, attracted others to facebook, and participants have been able to share views across national boundaries, and to acquire a sense of the connections between their immediate struggles and those of certain culturally and politically disempowered groups.

Project participants and the working team were often very encouraged by the spirit of solidarity, determination and enthusiasm experienced among the young women. At the same time, this spirit was often erratic and fragile. The associational power of the young women has concentrated on building associations among an immediate community – clearly an important starting point in any feminist venture, but a process that is also limited and needs to be taken further. It may be that the focus on using icts – in the absence of an even more significant emphasis on traditional methods of association (for example, meetings and public events) can lead to intense knowledge creation alongside very few efforts to translate that knowledge into action, such as petitioning municipality councillors for adequate and safe transport or staging demonstrations for the provision of shelters for abused women. Even though some of this action can occur through using social media and similar communicative platforms, much of it cannot.

Maria van Driel, an activist who works with marginalized youth in Johannesburg, has noted that the lively use of social media among young South Africans to protest against Israel's military operations in Gaza in July 2014 did not translate into effective action when it was appropriate.[15] It is noteworthy that the ict activism that drove the Egyptian revolutions since 2011 involved the massive mobilization of physical bodies within actual and not virtual spaces.   It may be the case that the notion of ict activism or icts for development over-emphasizes the use of icts as ends in themselves, tending to neglect the contexts in which they are used, the bodies of those that use them, and the agencies of those bodies within physical spaces.

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[15] Interviewed by Desiree Lewis, Cape Town, 6 November 2014.

## 6.3 Parameter 3: Communicative power

Project activities and methods have been informed by a wide range of media, genres and critical theories of power in order to ensure that young women are able to communicate their political ideas as critically, spontaneously and originally as possible. The most focused communicative activity revolved around our three themes, themes that are directly relevant to the provision of services to communities at local government level, namely Access to public transport; Bodily integrity/Violence against women and Unemployment.

Activities and workshops on these three themes have sought to deal with social issues holistically, so that rather than these being seen as stand-alone issues that can be solved in isolation, they are conceptualised as symptoms of underlying social problems. As indicated, one facet of communication has involved the circulation of political and artistic ideas among young people about issues that tend to be silenced, considered taboo or irrelevant in the "new" South Africa. A less successful goal has been to create an audience among role-players who are responsible for planning and implementing change at the local, provincial and national levels. Although efforts have been made to do this in the past (for example, participants' involvement in debates on community and national television) the widening of this audience would be an important priority in any efforts to take the Project further.

While it is important to recognize the Project's limited impact on a wider audience of influential decision-makers and political actors, the creation of a self-created knowledge commons among marginalized young women has been extremely significant for reasons described above. It is noteworthy that while certain participants' involvement in the IC4D conference in November 2013 was not strictly speaking a "political" activity, it gave them confidence in their ability to convey the value of their communicative strategies and ideas among global "experts" on icts and development in the global south.

This report has stressed that young women have been especially frustrated by the silencing or appropriation of their voices. The freedom, resources, confidence and platforms for speaking out have been some of the central achievements of the YWGSA Project. Any efforts to deepen the aims of the Project would involve foregrounding young women's creative activities, such as their use of skits, poetry, photography, installations and talks, in forums

where government officials and decision-makers can hear them. This would ensure the integrity of their own invented spaces of public engagement. Equally important is the fact that young women have derived considerable power from having the authority and space to tell their own stories and represent themselves in their own ways. As indicated by Esley Philander[16], a community TV film-maker who trained certain participants in film-making, no amount of authoritative knowledge can replace the power of stories that groups tell about themselves to themselves.

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[16] Esley made this comment during a training session while showing participants that technically "weak" community-made films were often far more compelling for viewers than technically proficient films made by experts.

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**Appendix One:**

# Summary:

# YWGSA

# Project Quantitative

# Report.

## A. Individual Characteristics and Household Resources

Data gleaned from the quantitative study among young women in the Western Cape reveals that, many (aged mainly between 21-26) are single and childless. This does not does not necessarily mean that they are free from the roles and obligations expected from daughters or young women in communities relying on unpaid reproductive labour; in fact, the number of family members in most respondents' households indicates that respondents play a crucial supportive roles in families – financially in contributing to the family's income or supporting younger siblings with their education, as care-givers of younger children or older parents or grandparents, as breadwinners, child-cares etc. Moreover, their subordination in households where fathers are generally the main decision-makers indicates their subordinate status on the basis of age and gender within patriarchal family units. At the same time, their status as single and childless does indicate that they have relative degrees of mobility and choice, and that many members of this group is well-placed to benefit from the Women- Gov ICT activist research project for enhancing public participation.
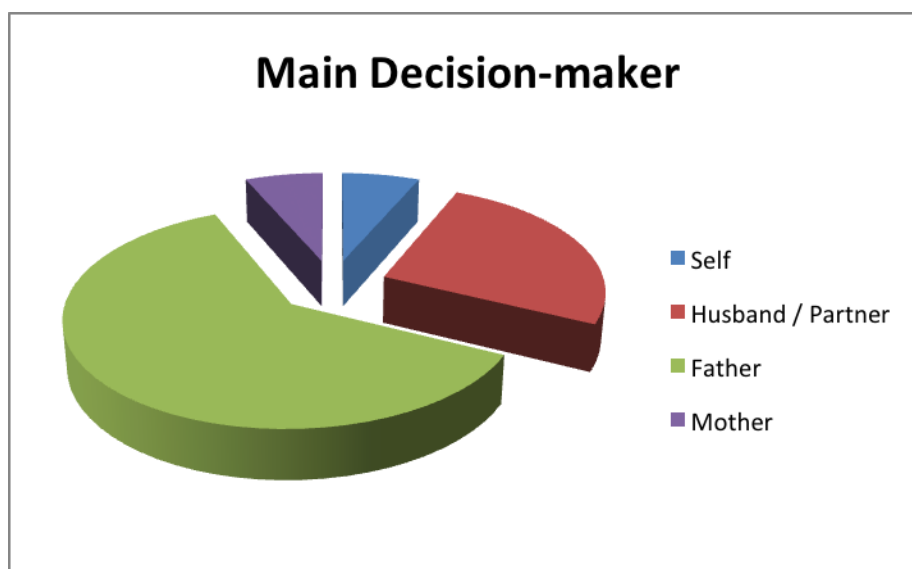


Although the respondents all fall into the category of "coloured" or African" - historically socially marginalized groups, it should be noted that the majority are employed either full-time or part time. Although a significant proportion 18 out of 50 are not employed, the data suggests that socially marginalized women often do have formal education and employment. (The majority of participants have either competed high school or are studying at tertiary –level institutions). Most indicated that they are employed on a professional basis, most live in homes that are owned, and the main source of income within their household is a salary based on professional work.

Formal Education



Employment

**Types of Employment**

- Student
- Domestic work in your home
- Professional work, such as Nurse, Teacher, Tutoring, etc.
- Informal sector work
- Other
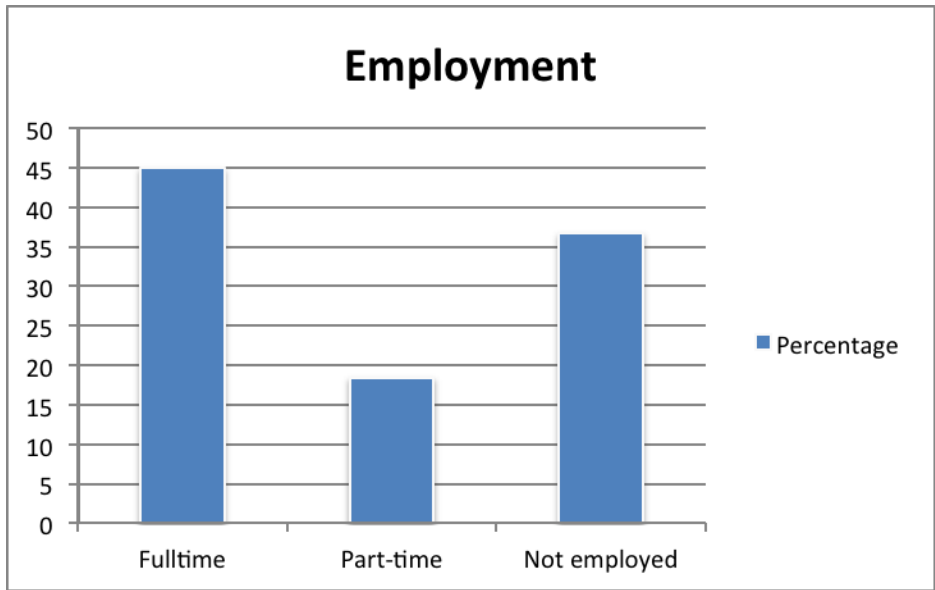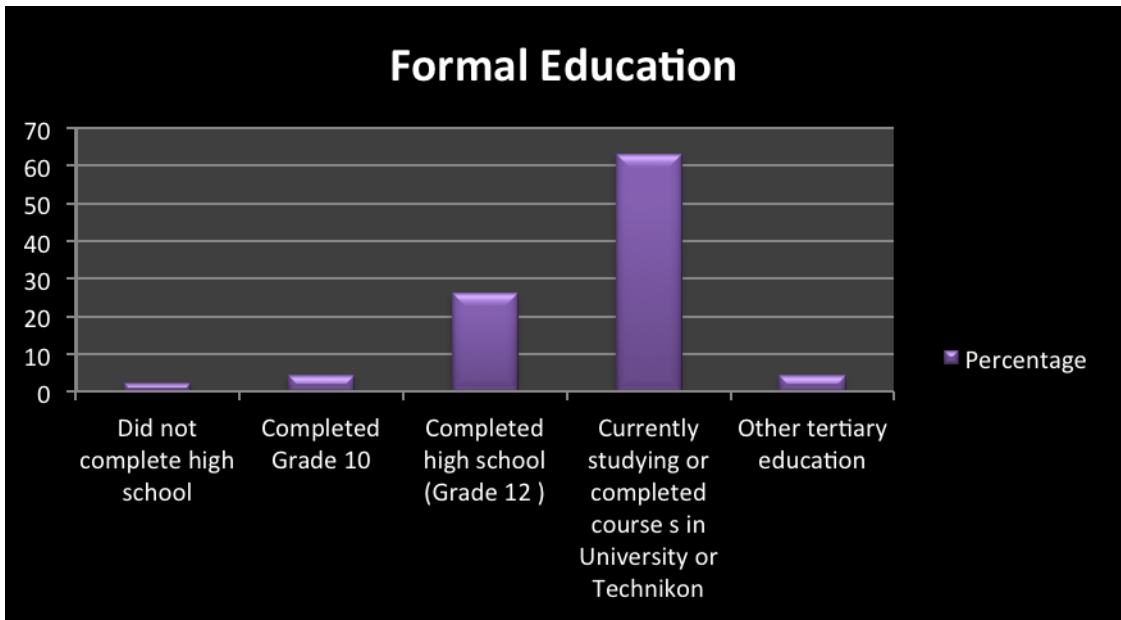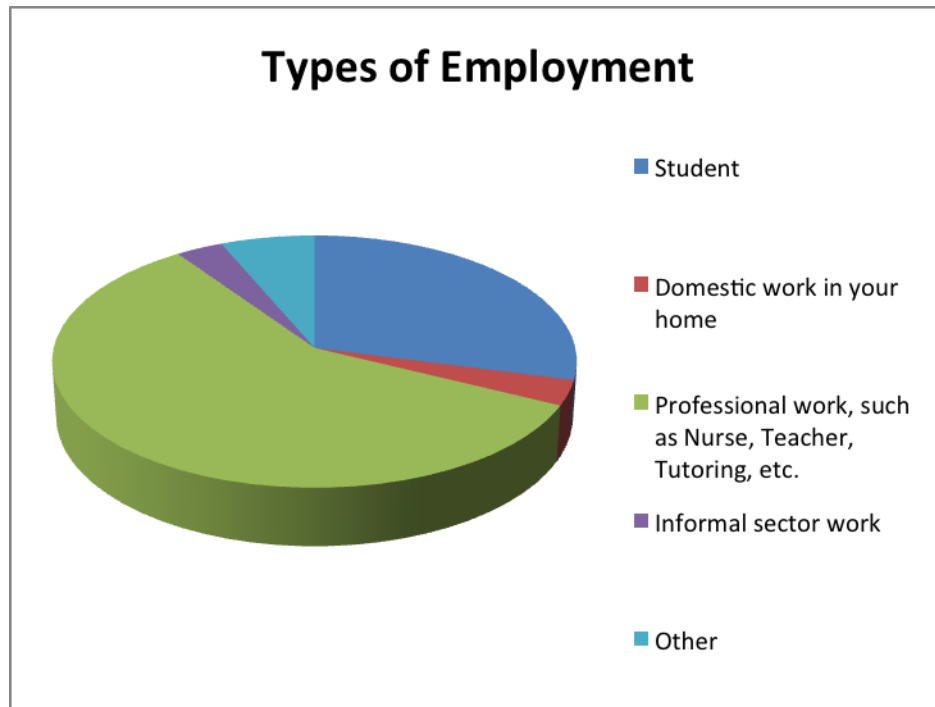
Assets in the household also indicate fairly high levels of security. This clearly has implications for the project in that activities can assume certain research, writing, reading, communication and ICT skills. Most importantly, our research into socially marginalized women in the Western Cape indicates the dangers of leveling this group out as a homogenous group uniformly affected by poverty, under-education and lack of resources.

Consequently, the statistics lead us to re-evaluate our understanding of working class, poverty and social mobility in South Africa's current neo-liberal context. (This will be expanded upon in the qualitative study.)

## B - Familial and Communal Status

"Socially marginalized young women in South Africa" can be seen as being marginalized in several ways – on the basis of age, race, class and gender.  Yet the percentage of young women who do have decision-making power over assets in the household, over other members of the family is higher than those who do not. This may be the result of the earning power or even potential for earning power of most of the young women in the study. The situation of class mobility noted previously has meant that certain women in socially marginalized contexts may have socially powerful roles, yet lack the status commensurate with these roles (as breadwinners, decision-makers, etc). This information would therefore need to be gleaned mainly from a qualitative study. The information that is revealing in the quantitative study, however, concerns the

*respondents perceptions' of what they have sufficient access to*. It is extremely significant that, while many respondents indicate that they have sufficient access to housing, education and job opportunities, the majority indicate profound a feeling of profound insecurity around economic and physical security. This situation of insecurity is revealing about the power relations in which young women citizens are enmeshed in post-apartheid South Africa. This context guarantees their formal citizenship, but does not ensure their substantive rights and entitlements in terms of, for example, bodily integrity and security within their homes. This hypothesis has been central to the project's focus on bodily integrity as a core theme, and is expanded on in the qualitative study.

# C - Information Access
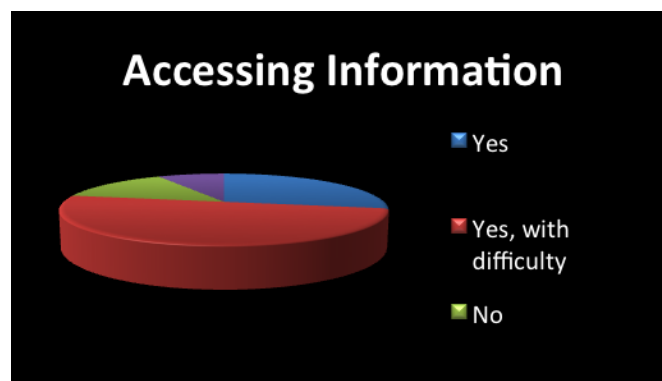


The resources to which respondents have access is highly revealing of their social status as urban, socially mobile subjects. At the same time, the nature of the information to which they have access indicates their relative disempowerment as active citizens: although 50% indicate that they are able to access basic information about government services and grants in their community fairly easily, although 70% and above rely on television, the print media and the internet. Many, as indicated below, also rely on family members:

**Sources of Information**
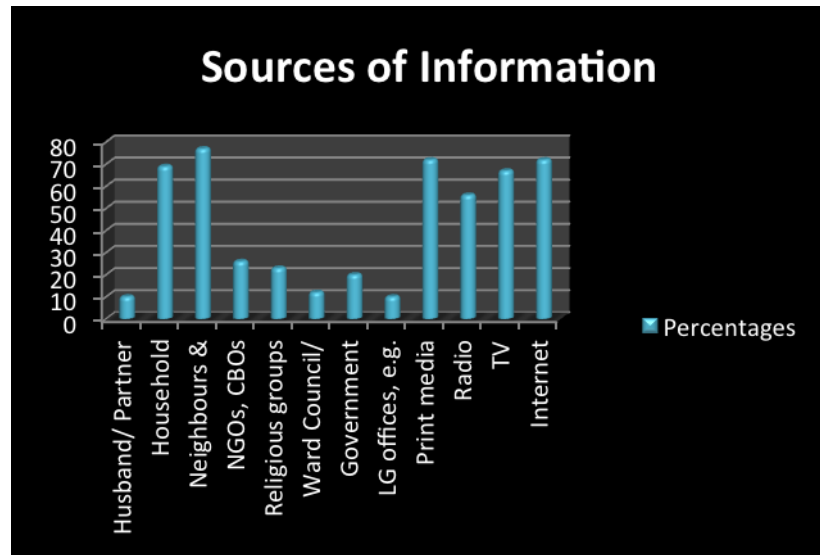
This indicates that local government has a significant role to play in increasing young people's awareness of their rights, particularly through the use of media and communicative channels that appeal to them. The emphasis in the Young Women SA Gov Project on information and communicative networks that are both accessible and engaging is therefore central to efforts to increase young people's active citizenship and their confidence in post-apartheid systems of local, provincial and national governance. In this regard, it is also noteworthy that young women often access particular services (hospitals and clinics), yet do not use community centres which are likely to provide more holistic and comprehensive resources. Overall, the quantitative study indicates that respondents enjoy formal access to services and information, yet often experience helplessness and disempowerment in realizing these rights.
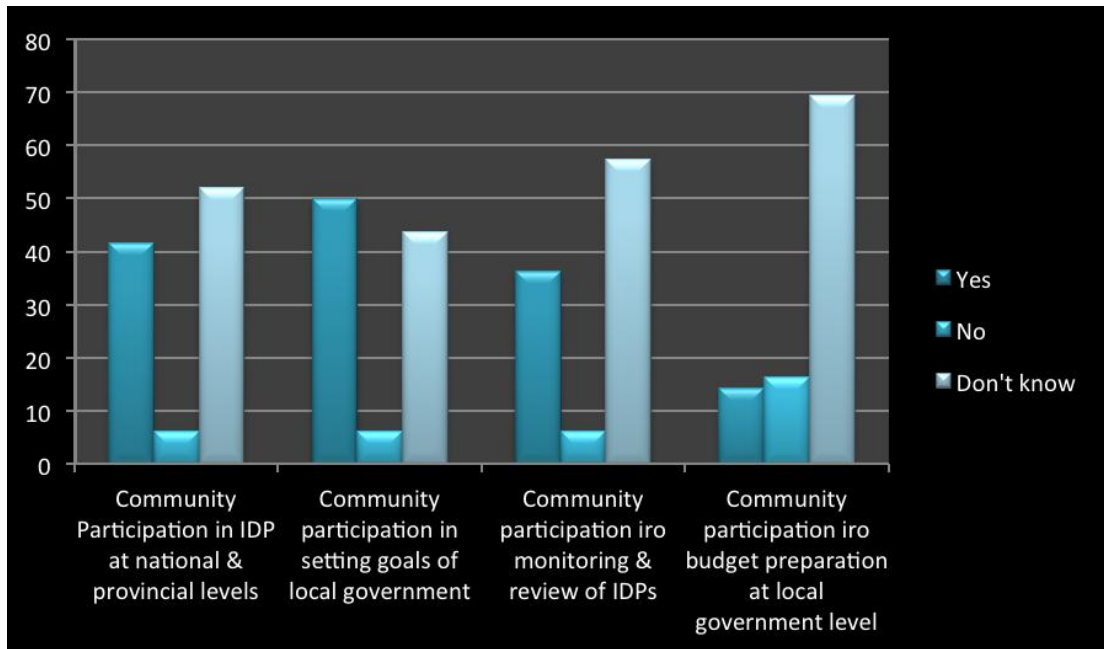
The high percentage of young women who indicate that they do not participate in or find out about heir municipal affairs, (in comparison with the high percentage aware of the various mechanisms for public and youth participation) is one of the most telling indicators of the youth's y alienation from systems of governance in contemporary South Africa.
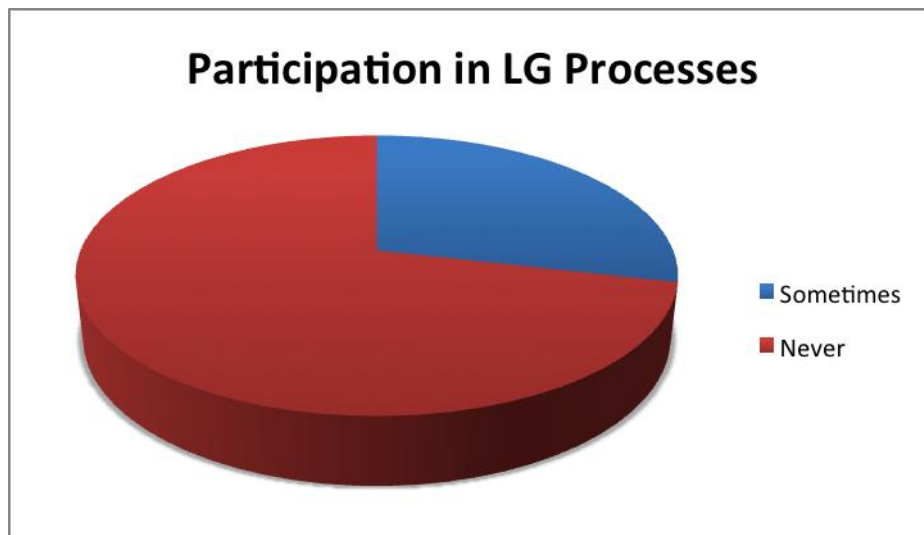
## D - Spaces of Association
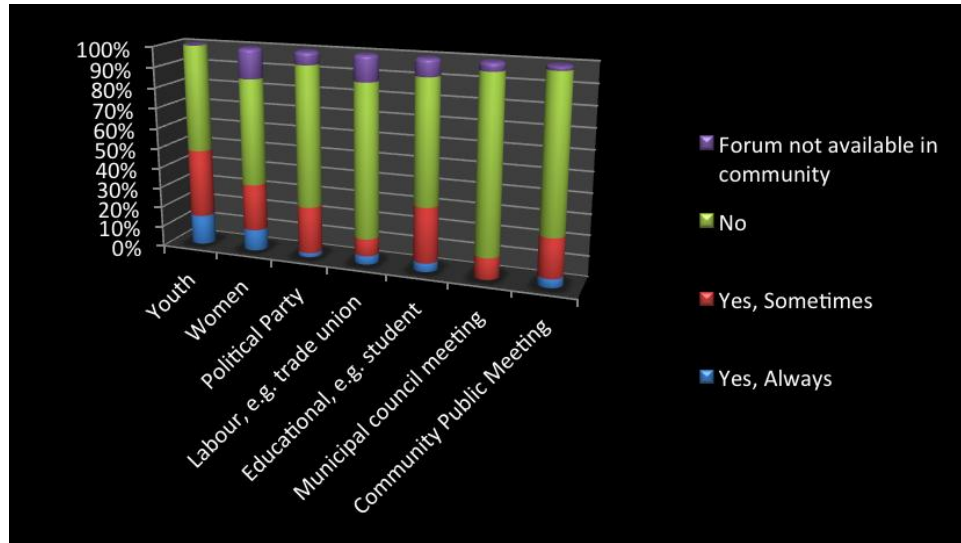


Low rates of affiliation with political parties, youth organizations, religious organizations and especially municipality organizations reinforces findings about young women's alienation. The statistics are revealing because respondents are aware of these, and branches of these exist in communities in the Bellville, Khayelitsha and Mitchell's Plain areas in which the research was undertaken. Almost all participants indicated that they are not interested in existing organizations for communal participation, and 78% indicated that they do not have the time because of work and social pressures. It is interesting that of this 78%, only 38% indicated that they were constrained by specifically gendered obligations. The statistics suggest that young women in contemporary South Africa are under considerable pressure to pursue economic and survivalist pursuits, and that these are frequently not connected to civic an political activity and involvement. The contrast between youth engagements in politics under apartheid is starkly apparent. During this period, the slogan espoused by militant "youth" (including teenage children and mature adults in their forties) conveyed the widespread commitment to socio-political struggles in the interests of social change. This priority took precedence over educational empowerment and the commitment to skills acquisition.

## Participation Barriers
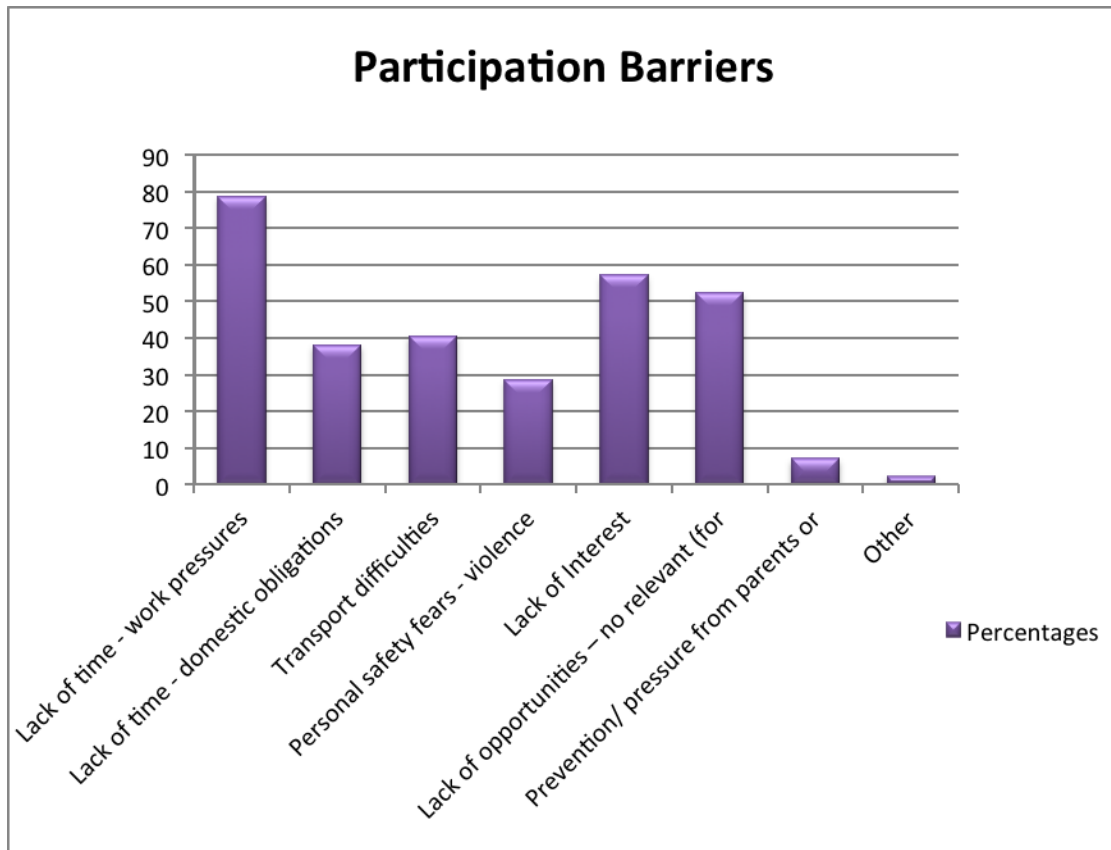


Yet the data also reveals that most young women are aware of the benefits – both personal and collective – of belonging to organizations that cater for women'sinterests:

## Benefits of belonging to a women's organisation
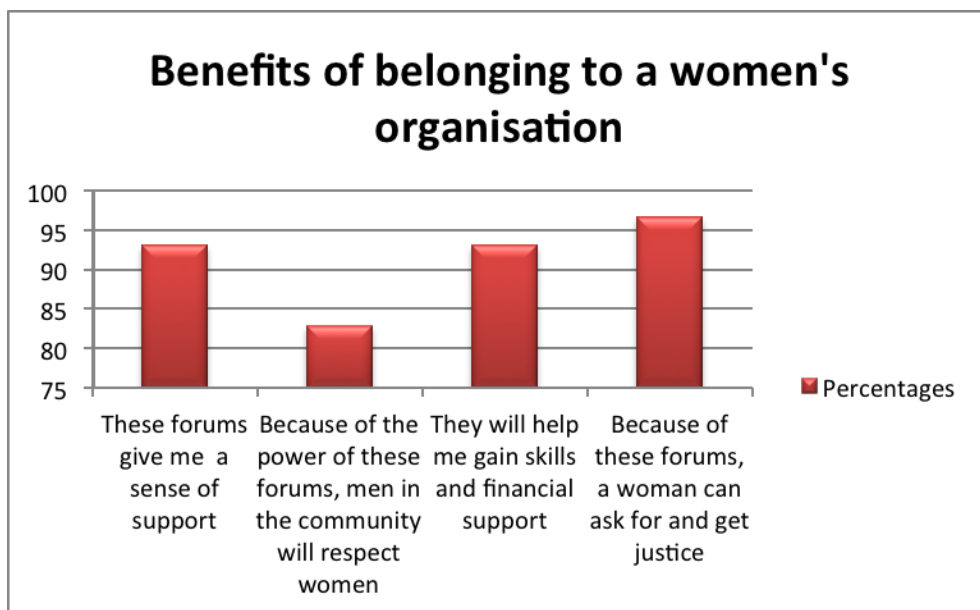
## E - Mobility and socio-economic status

Interestingly, the levels of mobility among the young women is high, with most indicating their need to travel outside o their communities for the purposes of entertainment (83%) and 75% indicating their need to leave the communities for work-related activities. In view of the low numbers indicating full-time or any employment, this latter figure is surprisingly high. It indicates again how young women are often highly mobile in their quest for work or skills acquisition and other opportunity "breaks".

The uneven statistics relating to respondents perceptions of their opportunities to contribute to public participation (through ideas) are highly revealing. Most indicate that they are able to and interested in participating in discussion about national and communal affairs.
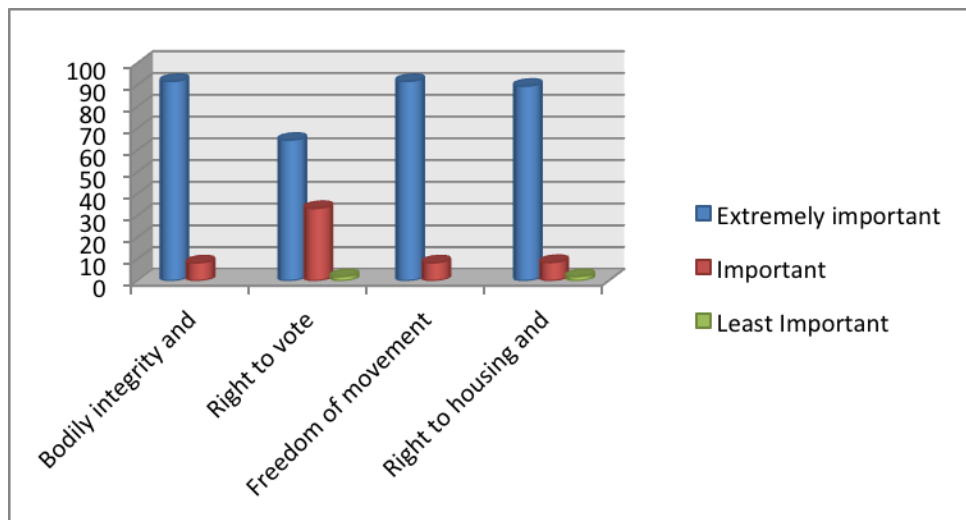


At the same time, most indicate their inability to do so within available forums for collective debate. Thus, 76% indicate that they resort to discussions within the family or among friends, while 66.7% indicate that they do not know where to look for or find spaces for contribution to public sphere debate. There are two implications of this. One is that respondents might not be aware of the extent to which their interactions at the local level do in fact constitute forms of public engagement and civic activity. (The Women Gov Project pursues this in implementing its activities and in its qualitative research findings.) Another is that many young women do in fact experience a powerful desire for and confidence about active deliberation on local-level civic and political affairs, and draw on the networks to which they are exposed and in which they feel comfortable in obtaining information:

**Sources of Information - How government works**
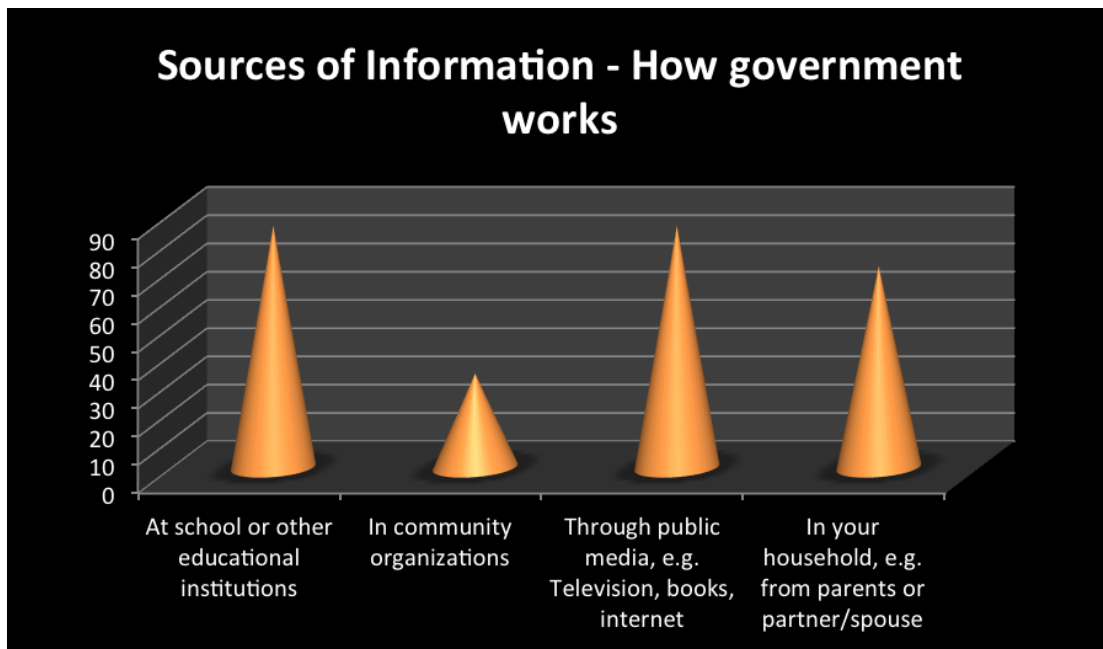
One of our the core findings of our focus group discussions with young women participants in the project has been confirmed by the quantitative research, namely, that young women in urban areas, irrespective of their class membership, are actively engaged in the use of social media, even when they do not have regular internet access or own smart phones. Irrespective of the nature of the technology they have access to, they often seek the most innovative applications to guarantee their connectivity.

## F - Engagement with Social Justice and Rights Issues

The focus of this section is on young women's consciousness of political issues that is mainly related to their public participation. The effort here is to covers diverse human right and social inequalities and opportunities for young women's public participation.

The preliminary data result show that 82.9% of young women responded that they are interested in finding out about opportunities that are designed specifically for young women's public participation. All young women participants confirm that women need to have *same* right as men. When asked, in multiple response questions, why they think women should have equal right, 95.5% responded *Women need more power so that they can protect their children and families*, 30% responded *Women should be protected because they are not as strong as men*. Interestingly, while 95% of young women agreed that women can and are able to contribute in local government, only 35 % of young women participants seem to be aware of the difficulty that South African women are facing to access these rights and opportunities in local and national government at present.

The following figure shows multiple response questions of different but related human right issues. Participants were asked to rate these options from extremely important, important and least important.
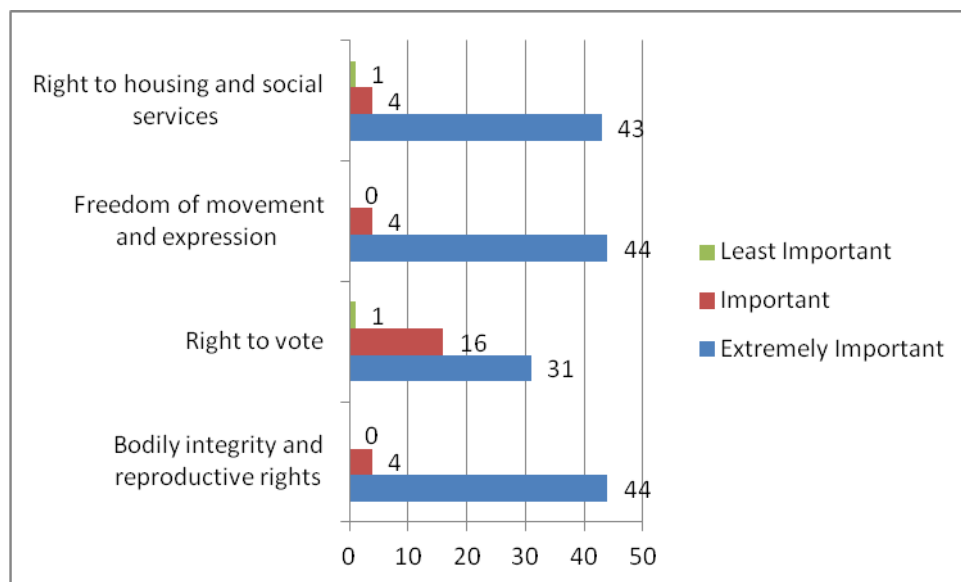


As the above figure shows, the majority of young women find right to housing and social services, freedom of movement and expression, and bodily integrity and reproductive rights extremely important. However, the response for the "Right to vote" is relatively different. While 31 (62%) participants find right to vote to be extremely important, 16 (32%) young women find it just important. Interestingly, in the next section of the questionnaire, the same question was asked in different context (Q93-95). The data result indicates that 83.3% of young women's responses indicate that they vote for local and national elections. Whereas 16.7 % of young women show no interest in the idea of voting; their popular reasoning for not voting is "voting will not make any difference to my needs and goals". The limitation of this particular question (and the quantitative tool more broadly) is that it doesn't facilitate *exploration* of respondents' conclusions. Young women's cynicism and lack of interest in democratic processes such as "voting" as public duty and participation requires detailed qualitative analysis and investigation.

## G - Knowledge of and access to local governance systems and institutions

The focus of this part of the questionnaire is on young women's knowledge about how provincial and national government works, women's participation in municipal councils, and access to different public forum in communities.

With regards to knowledge and information access about governance system, 56.5% of young women participants claim that they have received information about *what* local government is. However, 43.5%

claim that they have never been informed. Similar question was asked about *how* provincial and national government works, 51.1% claim that they have received information and 48.9 do not have the knowledge. As the statistical report indicates, relatively half of young women who participated in this research have no knowledge about *what* governance system is and/or *how* it works. From the report one can conclude that the accessibility and communicative impact of informaiton about local governance is extremely inadequate. However, unless these results are supported with an in-depth research, these statistical measures cannot represent *absolute* evidence of levels of knowledge or the availability of information about local government.

Significantly, only 45% of the young women participants indicate that they are given the opportunity to be involved in community-based organization forums (See, Q98), yet 60.9% of the participants never discuss their personal problems in these public forums (See Q101). Equally importantly, the pie chart below indicates that the majority of participants consider *family, friends and neighbours* and *police stations* as a safe space where they have a power and resource to act in protecting their rights. This suggests the significance of information methods of communication as opposed to community organizations (29.4 %), municipal councils (11.8 %), which seem to  provide very little resources from the point of view of the young owmen respondents. As the qualitatie study will show, these are perceived as unreceptive spaces for young women to raise their personal and human rights challenges.
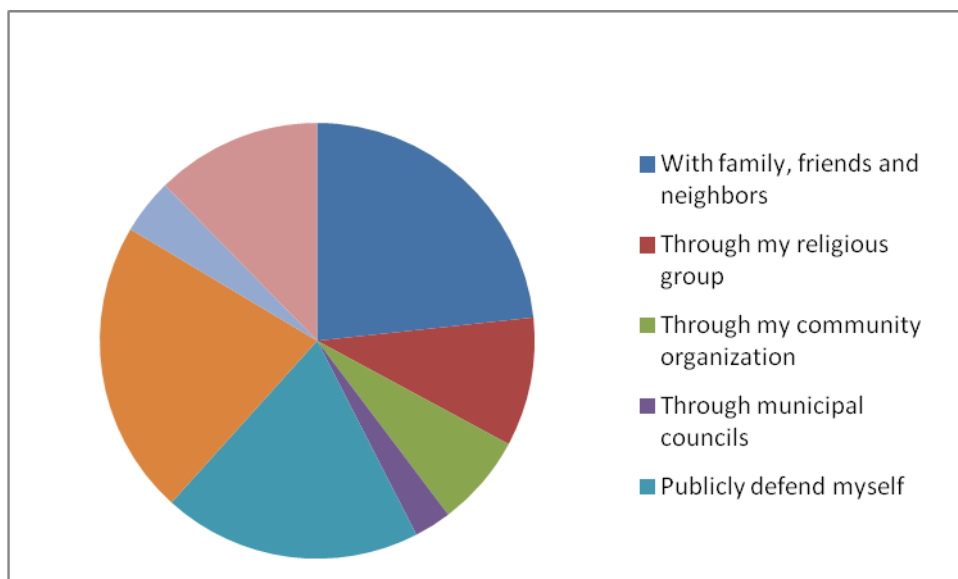


The other important question covered in this section is women's participation in the political arena from community level to municipal and national level of governance system. 26.8% of young women responded that *all* women can take part in municipal council, whereas 65.9% responded *only elected women can*. When asked *what issues can women deal with in Municipal Councils?* 94.9% responded that women can deal with not only women's issues in the municipal council but all political and societal issues.

Moreover, since the research objective is to explore young women's civil and political participation in governance system, participants were asked about the existence of forums exclusively for women in their communities. As the graphical representation below indicates, comparing to Community – based organizations, political party, and women's organisations, religious institutions (80%) seem to have spaces that are exclusively for young women. Although it is difficult to generalise, it is obvious that in religious institution civil and political matters are not discussed as extensively as they are explicitly for civic and political (rather than spiritual) issues.
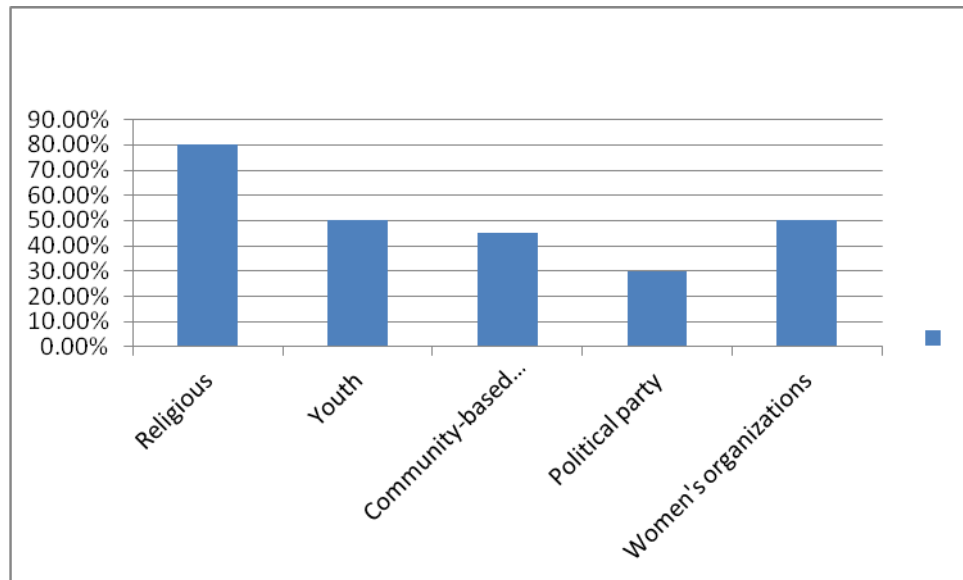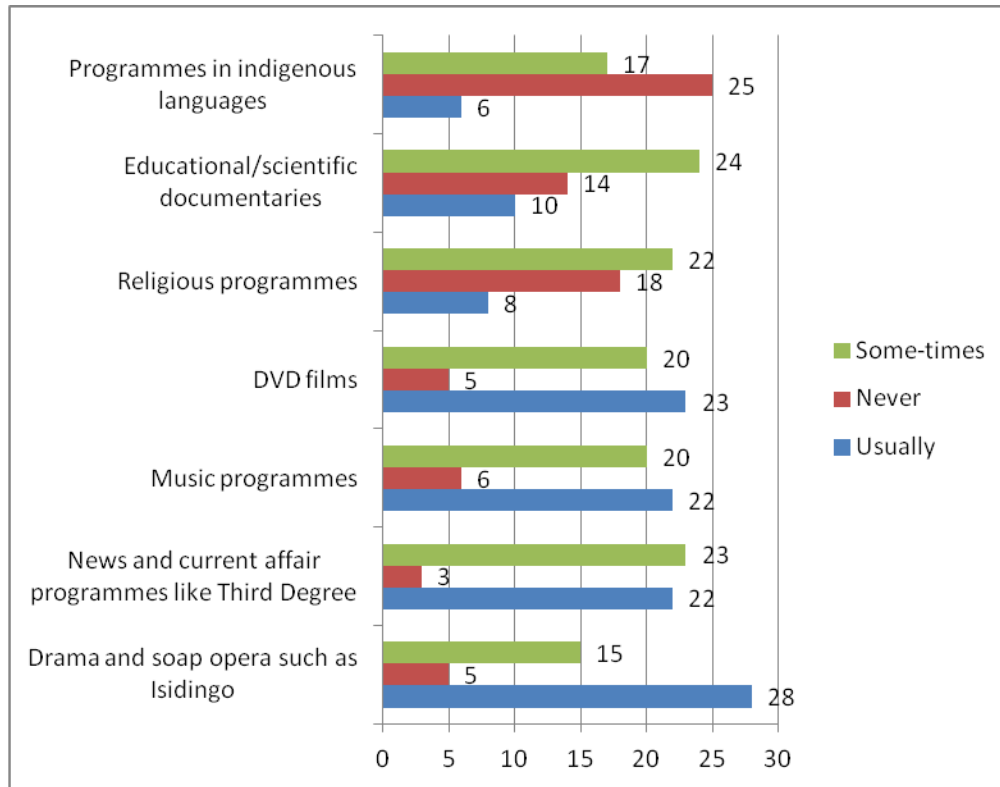


## H - Access, diffusion and use of ICTs

The following graphical representation shows media and information resources that are regularly accessible for young women.
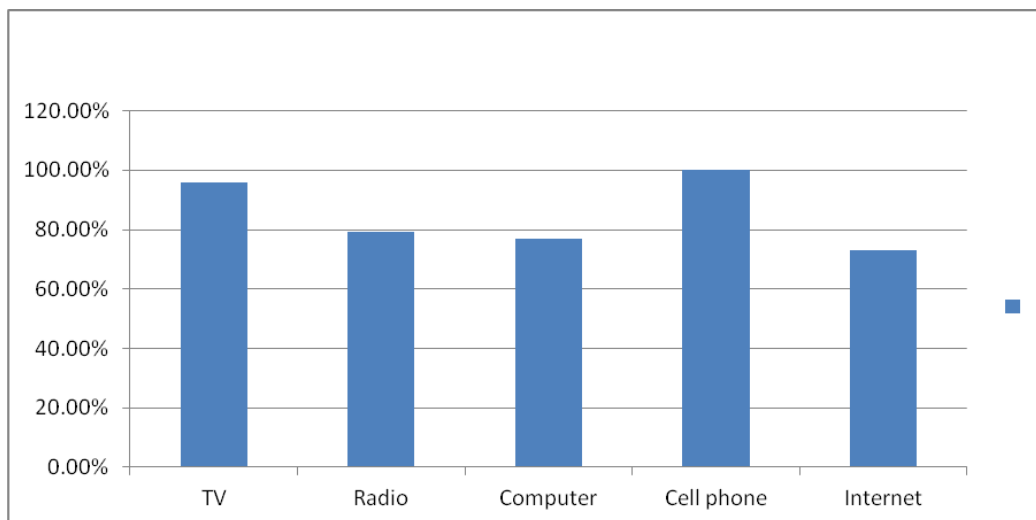
Although the above graph indicates that 95.8% of young women have access to TV, as the following graph illustrates, the majority use it for entertainment purpose.



In contrast to TV, as the graph below indicates, besides music programs many participants responded they use radio to listen to talk shows and phone in programs, and news and current affairs.
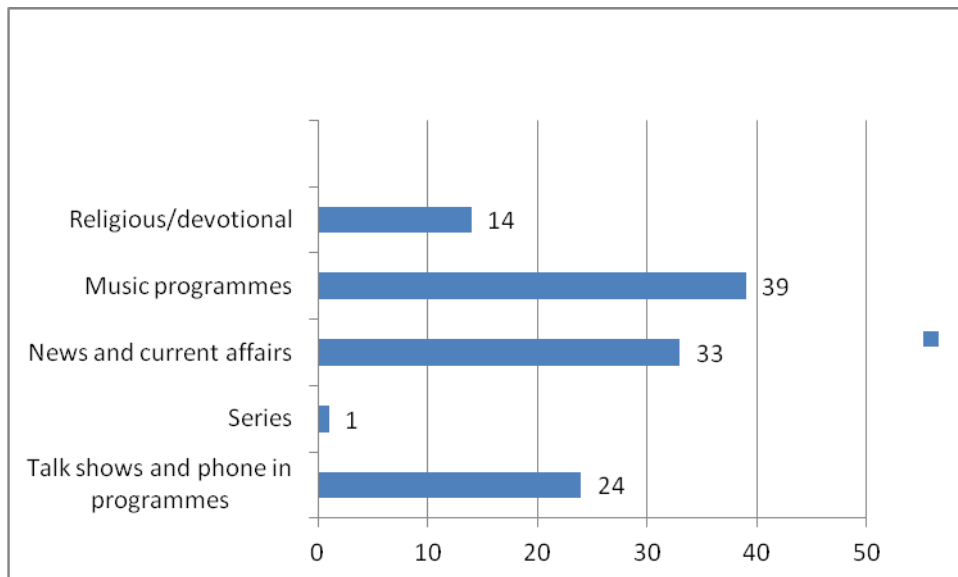


All participants have cell phones. The following graph indicates the main use of their phones.
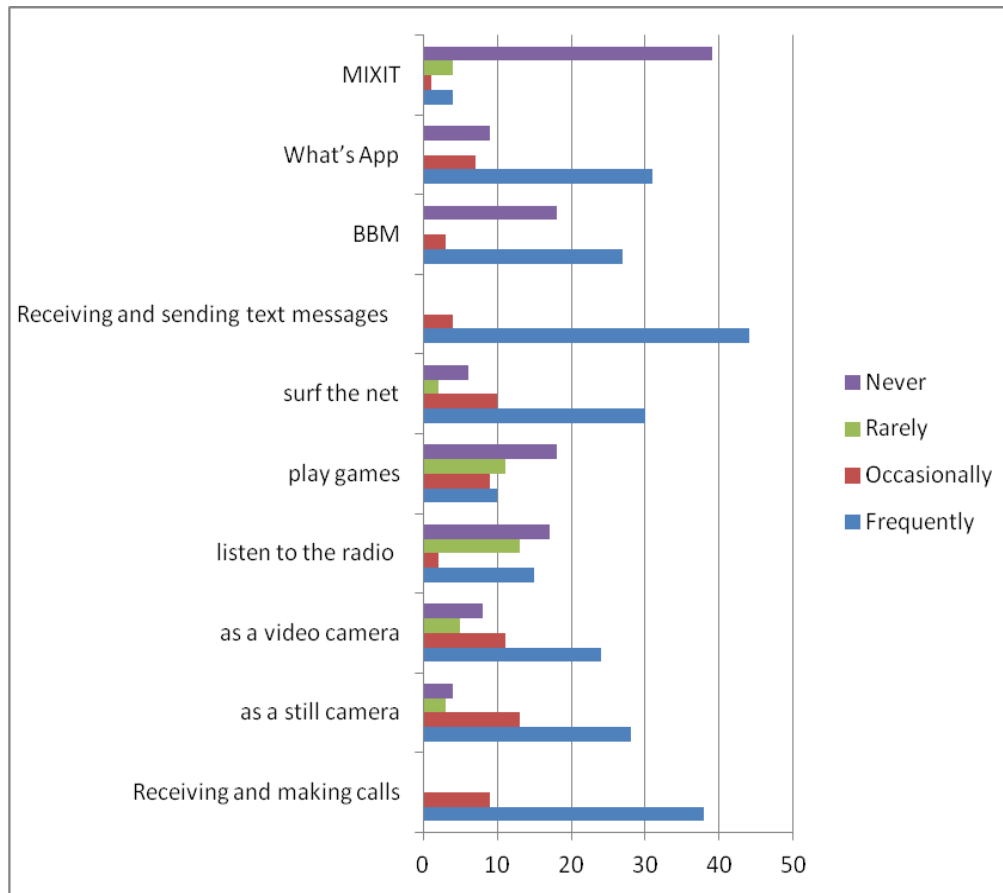
The majority of young women, as the graph below shows, claim that the main use of mobile phone is for socialising. Very few women indicate that they *rarely* send and receive local news and for political campaigns in general.
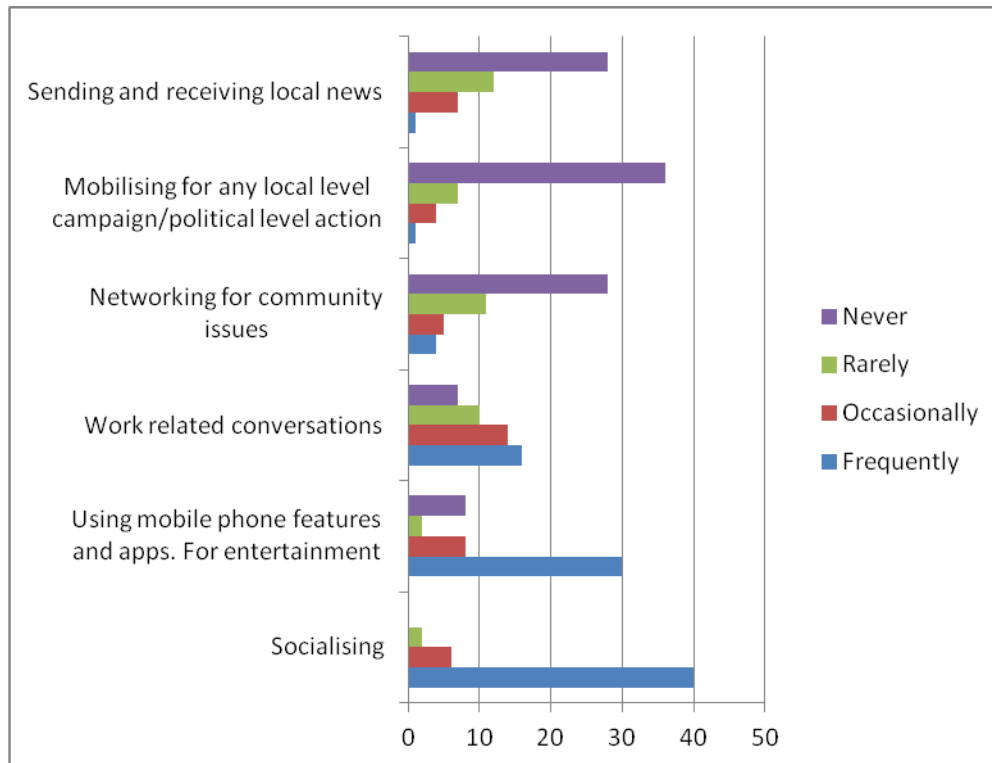
With regards to computer, 95.8% of participants claim that they have access to computer, 95.5% know how to use computer, and 97.8% have an email address. 50% of young women have access to internet at home. However, 78.9% of young women use their phone to access internet. Therefore, "internet access at home" needs further exploration as to what kind of internet service is being referred to. For instance, when we say "internet access at home", do we mean wireless internet access of internet or access via mobile phone? In general, in addition to their phones, many young women use Internet Cafés and services at school. The following graph shows different purposes and uses of computer by young women participants.
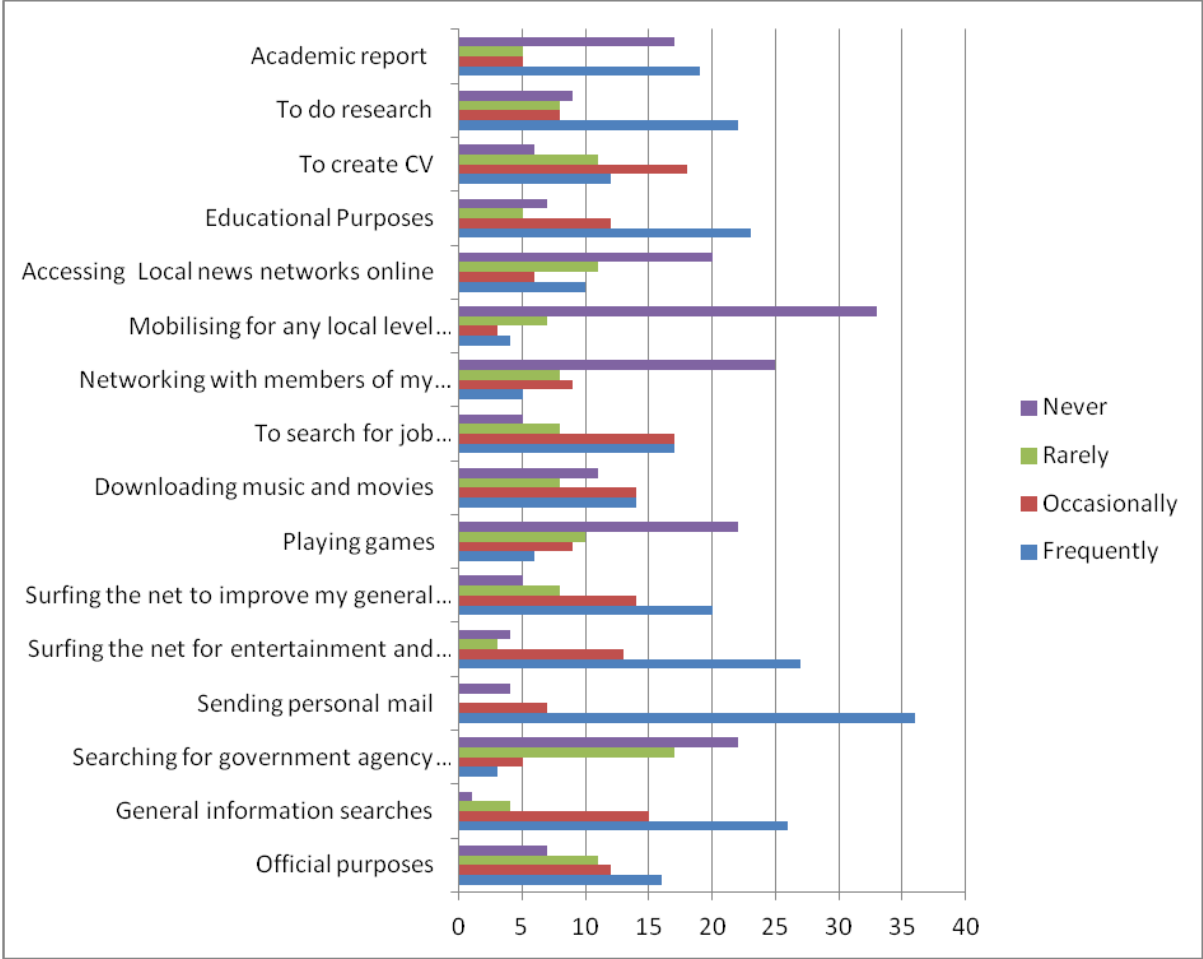
**Appendix Two:**

# National Workshop

# Programme

# Young Women Govern-South Africa Project and ActITFem

# National Workshop Programme

**Date        :        23 June 2014**

**Venue  :        Life Sciences Building UWC**

## OPENING

| 09h00 – 09h15 | Welcome and introduction | Desiree Lewis, Anita Gurumurthy & Ramata Thioune |
|---|---|---|
| 09h15 - 09h20 | Welcoming Remarks | Duncan Brown (Dean of Arts, UWC) |
| 09h20 –09h30 | Poetry Performance by Project participant | Bianca van Rooi |
| 09h30 – 10h30 | Keynote Address | Pumla Gqola (Wits University) - Feminism and Social Media in contemporary South Africa |

## T E A

# Session one

**(Participants Break to Workshop Venue Seminar Room A1)**

| 11h00 – 11h15 | Presentation: Introduction to the Project | Desiree Lewis |
|---|---|---|
| 11h15 – 12h00 | Panel Discussion: Young Women, Feminism & ICTs | Chaired by Nadia Sanger:  Cheryl Roberts, Janine Moolman, Crystal Orderson, Jennifer Thorpe & |

| | | Vanessa Ludwig |
|---|---|---|
| 12h00 – 13h00 | Presentation of preliminary findings | Desiree Lewis and Tigist Hussen to present draft quantitative and qualitative studies together with Project partners, Anita Gurmumurthy (ITfC) and Ramata Thioune (IDRC) |

**L U N C H**

# Session Two

| 14h00 – 15h00 | Government, Feminism and Public participation | Chaired by Dr Yvette Abrahams: Glenise Levendal, Samantha Waterhouse & Vanessa Ludwig |
|---|---|---|

**T E A**

| 15h20 – 16h30 | Higher Education and Popular Education | Chaired by Mary Hames (Director of GEU, UWC): Suren Pillay (CHR) and Neetha Ravjee (Education, UWC) & June Bam-Hutchison (Research Manager, Archive and Public Culture Research Initiative: Social Anthropology, UCT) |
|---|---|---|

**Date** : **24 June 2014**

**Venue** : **Life Sciences Building UWC Seminar Room A1**

# Session one

| 09h00 – 10h00 | Panel Discussion: Young Women, Feminism & ICTs   (Continued) | Chaired by Pumla Gqola: Esley Philander, Samantha Waterhouse, Rebecca Pointer, Chenai Chair & Crystal Orderson |
|---|---|---|
| 10h00 – 10h30 | Project Participants' Presentation | |

**T E A**

# Session Two

| 11h00 – 12h00 | ICT and Popular Education in the face of the Information Revolution | Chaired by Claire Botha: Desiree Lewis, Rebecca Pointer, Mary Hames and Zulfa Abrahams |
|---|---|---|

| 12h00 – 13h00 | On ICT action-research projects | Chaired by Tigist Hussen: Jarita Holbrook, Moenieba Isaacs (PLAAS), Glenise Levendal & Wendell Westley (Oxfam Canada) |
|---|---|---|

**L U N C H**

| 14h00 – 15h00 | Donor-funded projects and research autonomy. | Chaired by Vanessa Ludwig: Ramata Thioune, Nadia Sanger, Benita Moolman, Claire Botha, and Glenise Levendal and Nazeema Mohamed |
|---|---|---|
| 15h00 – 15h30 | Acknowledgments | Desiree Lewis |

# Appendix Three:

# Summary

# Of

# Workshop

# Summary Report on Workshop focusing on Feminist Research and ICTs, hosted at Women's and gender Studies Department at the University of the Western Cape

## Desiree Lewis and Tigist Shewarega Hussen

The Young Women Govern South Africa Project is a three-country project, conceptualized by ITforChange in Banaglore, India, and funded by the IDRC (see www.actitfem.org.za). Having reached the end of its first funding cycle, the South African research team organized a two-day country-specific workshop on 23 and 24 June. We invited 30 participants including feminist researchers who use ICTs, representatives from funding agencies who promote critical research and scholarship, and academics whose work is attuned to social justice and popular education. The project is an action research one that focuses on developing high quality research based on in-depth work with participants, in this case young women students and marginalized women from surrounding areas in Bellville. As such, it lends itself to debates and dialogues outside of our usual academic silos.

In her public lecture, "Feminist Creativities in an age of New Media", the keynote speaker, Professor Pumla Gqola raised the need to think critically (but also optimistically) about opportunities that ICTs provide for innovative cultural and political expression and networking among postcolonial feminists. In responding to a key question about South African women's differential access to ICTs in South Africa, she stressed that the conventional idea about the digital divide - that women either have all ICT resources or are else stuck in rural areas with "nothing but a pencil and piece of paper" - is a fICTion. Pumla argued that women from all classes inventively find ways to access and use compounds of traditional media and ICTs - for immediate struggles for survival, for more strategic struggles around gender injustice and, economic exploitation, and for liberating cultural and creative expression.

The panel discussions in the workshop mainly focused on the value and complexities of ICT-driven feminist knowledge and the role of University departments and units in producing knowledge for social change. Most sessions were characterized by heated debates and discussions. Some of the central issues revolve around the ambivalence of using ICTs as feminist tools, particularly in relation to the risk of the blurred boundaries of social subjects, the challenges of cyberethics, issue of safety and security in online spaces, sexuality and ICTs, digital story telling (whose story is told, for what purpose/s it is used, who is in charge, etc). Many also criticized developmentalist notions of "empowerment" which, in many cases, revolves solely around ICT equipment and digital technology usage rather than the politics of using ICTs.

Another important panel discussion focused on the position of researchers vis-à-vis funding agencies that can influence and constrain critical research priorities in South Africa. It was argued that donor - driven (as opposed to donor-funded) projects (albeit indirectly) sometimes coerce researchers to produce results that are acceptable to policy-makers, governments, the global donor community and individual donors. In contrast to this scenario, researchers and academics who strategically engage with donors and funding agencies can work to ensure the autonomy of their projects. A number of participants argued that researchers and academics, by working collectively and supportively rather than in individualist and ego-driven ways, can negotiate far more empowering relationships with the funding agencies that support research in African contexts. The various representatives from the NRF, Ford, HBS and IDRC who attended the workshop strongly endorsed this.

Generally, the workshop discussions made it clear that critical conversations about the many and multiply-layered contexts in which we do our research, the economic and political circumstances that affect our research, and the revolutionary impact of the digital revolution in altering how we think about research and knowledge production are enormously important.