



## **LEARNING TO LINK**

### **An Evaluation of the Women Connect! Project Of the Pacific Institute for Women's Health**

**By Colleen Lowe Morna  
Gender Links  
October 2001**

|                 |
|-----------------|
| <b>ACRONYMS</b> |
|-----------------|

#### **ZIMBABWE**

|        |                                                    |
|--------|----------------------------------------------------|
| ACPD-  | African Community Publishing and Development Trust |
| FAMWZ- | Federation of African Media Women Zimbabwe         |
| JPV-   | Jekesa Pfungwa Vulinqondo                          |
| Musasa |                                                    |
| WAG-   | Women's Action Group                               |
| WASN-  | Women and Aids Support Network (WASN)              |
| YWCA-  | Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA)         |
| ZWB-   | Zimbabwe Women's Bureau                            |
| ZWRCN- | Zimbabwe Women's Resource Center                   |

#### **UGANDA**

|            |                                                 |
|------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| AmwA       | Akina Mama wa Afrika                            |
| AUWMD      | Association of Uganda Women Medical Doctors     |
| FAWEU      | Forum for African Women Educationalists, Uganda |
| HAR        | Hope After Rape                                 |
| ISIS-WICCE |                                                 |

|        |                                                         |
|--------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| NAWOU  | National Association of Women's Organisations in Uganda |
| SMI    | Safe Motherhood Initiatives                             |
| SWAAU  | Society of Women and Aids in Africa Uganda (SWAUU)      |
| UMWA   | Uganda Media Women's Association                        |
| UPMA   | Uganda Private Midwives Association                     |
| UWONET | Uganda Women's Network                                  |

## **ZAMBIA**

|        |                                                 |
|--------|-------------------------------------------------|
| KARA   |                                                 |
| NGOCC  | NGO Coordinating Committee                      |
| NWLG   | National Women's Lobby Group                    |
| YWCA   | Young Women's Christian Association             |
| ZARD   | Zambia Association for Research and Development |
| ZNADWO | Zambia National Association of Disabled Women   |
| PIWH   | Pacific Institute of Women's Health             |
| VAW    | Violence Against Women                          |

### **BOX ONE: THE POWER OF INFORMATION- STORIES FROM WOMEN CONNECT!**

*"Growing up as a young girl in the village, my hopes were never raised high to think that one day I would drive my own car or be the manageress at some work place. Why? You may ask, because my thoughts were never allowed to venture into such fantasies. Grandmother's stories, tete (auntie's advice) never told me about working in an office as I read in borrowed books, whilst I was attending school. Their stories always told me that a woman's place is in the home. The greatest achievement a woman could attain was to become a mother. How, then could I think of becoming a teacher one day? Traditional cultural values have influenced violence against women, especially psychologically. Women grew up with the impression that being a mother is the only thing for a woman and not anything beyond that."* – **Gwendoline Mandula, Dzivarasekwa, Zimbabwe, in an essay competition on "Have Traditional Cultural Values influenced Violence Against Women" run by the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) as part of its Week of No Violence Campaign, November 2000.**

*"After we established three open spaces for women, they asked to have access to the tape recorders that we used to collect their stories. Now, when they have discussions, they tape these and share the stories with us. In one dramatic incident, a nine-year-old girl was raped in the village. She collapsed and was rushed to her mother, full of blood. Members of the community rushed her to the police station, hoping to lodge a case. But the police demanded 3000 shillings (about \$1.50) to open a case. Not having the money, the community members took the child to hospital where she was cleaned, destroying the evidence required for a police case. When she heard this, one of the women from the center rushed to the hospital with a tape recorder, and taped the girl's story. She brought the tape here to ISIS, and we took it to the police head office, and to the gender ministry. The man was apprehended, tried and jailed using the heart wrenching evidence on the tape. The local council in the area has resolved that no woman who has been raped should ever have to pay 3000 shillings to have a case opened. This is the power of information, and of information technology."* – **Ruth Ochieng, director of ISIS, Uganda.**

*"The greatest influence that the calendar created was on a couple living in Nakonde, more than 1,000 kilometers from Lusaka. The couple had withdrawn their 14 year-old daughters from school so that she could get married. A social worker visited the family to try and persuade them to allow the girl to continue with her education. The parents refused. However, the social worker had heard of the role models calendar produced by ZARD. He traveled all the way from Nakonde to Lusaka to collect one calendar that he took to the family. Upon seeing the photographs, especially those of the female pilot, the mechanic and camera woman, the couple were impressed and decided their daughter could go back to school and continue with her education, so that, one day, she could be like one of those women in the pictures. This was a happy ending to a situation that could have destroyed the young girl's life!"* – **Patrick M. Sapallo, Zambian Association for Research and Development (ZARD)**

## **FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This evaluation of twenty- six media and information technology projects focusing of women's health and well being in Uganda, Zimbabwe and Zambia has been a fascinating journey through new and exciting terrain.

Since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, gender activists around the globe have become acutely aware of the need to become more effective at communicating their concerns, using every conceivable medium, from song and dance to the information superhighway that has given a dramatic new meaning to the term "a global village".

Communication, in whatever form, is about reducing distance. There were many distances to be overcome in this project: between a Northern NGO and several Southern NGOs, between groups, interest parties and constituencies within countries and across borders as well as between individuals within organisations. That is a tall order, all in the space of three years. Credit for the remarkable achievements goes to the Women Connect project team in California, the local consultants who oversaw the projects in country, and most of all the project partners who made it all happen. I had the privilege of meeting all of these categories of people involved in Women Connect! and thank them for their time and inspiration.

To the extent that outcomes fell short of the original objectives, this is part of the continuous learning that engaging in such a complex programme brings. I have called this evaluation "Learning to Link" because learning continues- even in the final evaluation. What began as a checklist often turned into animated discussion about what worked, what did not, and most important, how to move forward.

The advantage of parachuting in from the outside is that you have all the knowledge of hindsight, and none of the responsibility on the ground. Any criticisms in this report are offered against that background. But they are also offered in the spirit that as women's rights activists we do not have the luxury of making too many mistakes. Learning to link effectively is critical to achieving a world in which all women and men are free to achieve their human potential. And we can only learn if we pause, listen, reflect, and then resolve to do things better.

*Colleen Lowe Morna  
Director, Gender Links  
26 October, 2001*

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Background**

This report presents the findings of an evaluation of Women Connect, a project of the Pacific Institute for Women's Health (PIWH) undertaken between August and November 2001. The project aimed to bring greater empowerment of women through the effective use of communication strategies in media and technology to improve women's health and well-being. Working with 26 NGOs in Zimbabwe, Zambia and Uganda, a project management team in Los Angeles, together with African technical resource persons in each country, sought to achieve its objectives through skills building workshops, site visits, a small grant project, referrals of sources of communication hardware and software, referrals to donor organisations, professional and development opportunities. The University of Southern California's Annenberg Centre matched a small grant from the Wallace Fund to provide seed money for the project, while the William H. Gates Foundation provided the bulk of the funding over three years. The Scope of Work of the Evaluation is attached at **Annex A**.

### **Methodology**

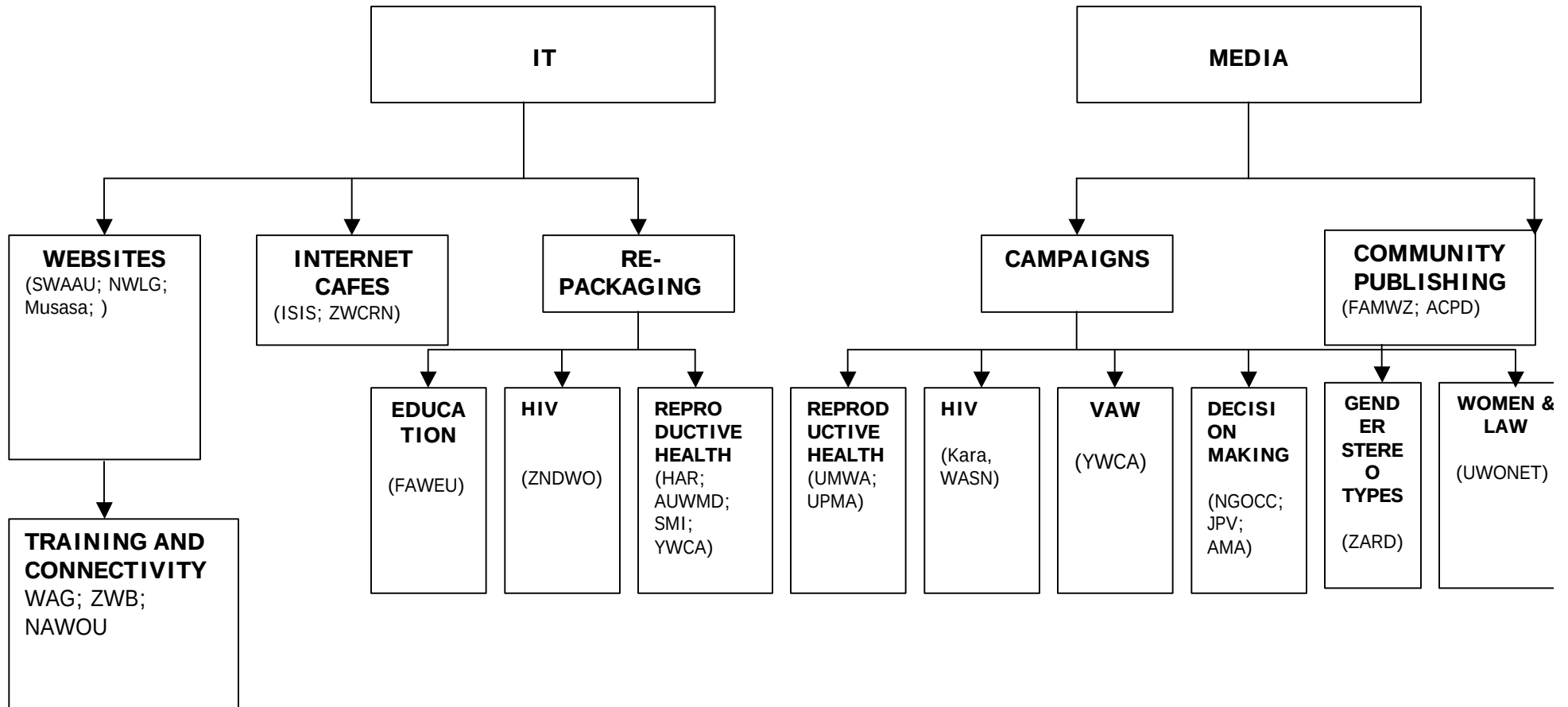
The evaluation consisted of:

- A desk top review of project documentation, including a situation analysis of each country, NGO baseline assessments, workshop evaluations, project proposals, mid term and final reports by project partners and local consultants, reports of field visits and the mid term evaluation by the Women Connect project management team as well as the two Women Connect reports to the William H Gates Foundation.
- A meeting with the project team in Los Angeles in July 2001 where it was agreed that the evaluation would primarily be qualitative in nature.
- Agreement with the Women Connect project team on the checklist attached at **Annex B** to guide the interviews with project partners.
- On-site interviews with all project partners and local consultants from mid September to early October (see schedule of interviews at **Annex C**). In most cases, the interviews included the director, information officer and or other programme managers. In Zambia and Uganda, representatives of project partners also met as a group towards the end of the evaluation mission.
- Written feedback to the Women Connect project team after each visit, to clarify factual issues and share initial findings.
- Work with three groups- the Zimbabwe Women's Bureau (ZWB), Zambia Association for Research and Development (ZARD) and Ugandan Media Women's Association (UMWA), selected by Women Connect to document their experiences as case studies.
- Submission of a final draft in November 2001.

### **Key findings**

The different focus areas of the 26 projects are illustrated in *Figure One* below:

**FIGURE ONE: WOMEN CONNECT PROJECTS**



The key findings may be summarized as follows:

- **Immediate outcomes:** Women Connect yielded a number of immediate, tangible benefits. Contrary to what might be expected, few donors fund IT-related projects. As a result of Women Connect, nine organisations that did not have E Mail or Internet access became connected; two organisations (in Zimbabwe and Zambia) set up Internet cafes; three organisations established web sites; nine organisations repackaged information from the Internet; eight organisations conducted campaigns on reproductive health, domestic violence, HIV AIDS, women in decision- making, gender stereotypes as well as women and the law. Two organisations produced calendars. Other produced stickers, posters, flyers and information sheets.
- **Potential for impact:** Intended as pilots, the projects also opened many possibilities for the future. Project partners are now more keenly aware of the need to formulate communications strategies and to be aware of communications in all their work. They understand better the multiple possible applications of information technology, and the need to be careful in making choices. The campaigns related to health and well- being have demonstrated the complexity of these issues and the need for sustained strategies. Stopping teenage pregnancies, for example, is a multifaceted campaign that can only just be started in one year.
- **Exemplary management:** Closely supervised by a skilled and dedicated management team on site as well as from the PIWH headquarters in Los Angeles, the project delivered most of its intended benefits on time and on budget.
- **Use of funds:** Although the evaluator did not conduct a financial audit of the project, the tangible outcomes, visits and enquiries leave little doubt that all moneys were spent scrupulously on intended outcomes.
- **Continuity:** The link that Women Connect made with the Global Fund for Women (GFW) has provided the opportunity for many of the projects to continue, although ideally this should have been factored in at the start.
- **Capacity building:** The training workshops, on site and on line technical support have helped to build skills among project partners, although staff- turn over of about 33 percent limited the immediate benefits to the organization.
- **Focus:** Women Connect confronted the dilemma in this project of allowing grantees to choose what they wanted to do versus ensuring coherence and focus. The advantage of the former is that it gives grantees greater sense of ownership. The disadvantage is that the portfolio of projects runs the risk of being so diffuse as to lose impact. Although the project management team made an admirable effort to keep projects within manageable limits, the evaluator is of the view that the *project design itself* gave grantees too much leeway by allowing them to: a) choose between complex social campaigns, that are difficult to achieve in one year, and relatively straightforward connectivity projects b) defining health and well being so broadly as to include a vast range of projects, some of which failed to demonstrate a direct link to women's health and well being c) advising, but not insisting on collaborative efforts through funding mechanisms.

- **Impact:** The broad focus, limited time period, and the fact that the projects were intended as pilots, makes it difficult to measure impact so soon after the completion of the projects.

## **Key recommendations**

There are two broad recommendations that arise from the report, the first to consolidate the gains made this far, and the second to reconsider the design of future projects to maximize synergy

### ***Immediate***

Much has been learned both from the successes and shortfalls of the program. This learning needs to be consolidated and smart partnerships forged along the different themes identified in the section on Networking. With the benefit of experience the evaluator believes there is now a good chance of stronger partnerships being formed within countries and across borders, as these will now be based on self-interest. This requires a workshop of all project partners to receive feedback on the evaluation and chart a way forward. Such a workshop could also be used to consult on a training manual for African women's NGOs on how to go about developing a communications strategy, including the use of new information and communication technologies, based on the experiences of project partners and the case material gathered during this consultancy.

### ***Long term***

In designing future projects of this nature, PIWH should adopt the following principles:

- Focus on a limited number of specific issues, bringing in new information and communication technologies as tools for increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of campaigns rather than an end.
- Require that NGOs come up with communications strategies.
- Not define women's health and well being so broadly as to lose focus on some of the critical policy issues in this area.
- Fund NGOs in clusters around specific campaigns or themes that oblige them to work cooperatively. Use IT to enhance networking between project partners within countries and across borders.
- Focus strongly on methodology.
- Build training and capacity building into the entire process, using local experts more as trainers than as monitors.

These principles could be better achieved in the design of future programs of this kind by:

- Having a one-week inception workshop focusing on effective campaigns, and exploring the range of tools for reaching targets, including new information and communication technologies.
- On the last day of this workshop, get NGOs to cluster around specific themes they are interested in pursuing.



- Receive and fund joint proposals around a limited set of highly focused campaigns.
- Bring partners together to map out a strategy for the campaign with detailed timeframes and deliverables.
- Define clear indicators for measuring success.
- Instead of group meetings have group training at regular intervals, e.g. quarterly, at different stages of implementing the campaign (research, developing messages, developing materials, conducting the campaign, monitoring and evaluation). Local experts would take the primary responsibility for these group- training sessions. Visits by the project management team would coincide with the quarterly or half year training to reinforce the initial learning as well as monitor progress.
- The whole process should take place over a longer time horizon, e.g. two years.
- Groups should be electronically networked in country, and across borders, according to the specific themes they are working on. The project management team should facilitate discussions and offer online training, as appropriate, throughout the project cycle.

