Women, participation and design in ICT4D: Addressing barriers using a co-creation approach

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Abstract:
Rural middle-aged women are the backbone of their communities despite their being the most disadvantaged population group in South Africa and in other developing countries. Uplifting and empowering these women can positively influence a whole community. However, there is no consensus on how this can be accomplished with ICTs. This paper describes a section of work from a larger ongoing research project that is aimed at facilitating the adoption of an ICT platform to empower middle-aged women involved in agriculture in Mafarafara, a remote rural community in South Africa. The majority of the inhabitants of this community are middle-aged women who have had no exposure to ICTs other than mobile phones. A pluralistic approach is used, and design theory, feminist theory and critical theory form the theoretical basis of the research. The overarching motivation of the research is to make ICTs accessible and useful to rural women. This paper describes how the researchers addressed the barriers that can prevent access to and use of ICT facilities by rural women. Also addressed are the barriers that women face when involved with participatory ICT4D projects, and how the research team enabled the women to become true co-creators of an ICT artefact designed for their use.