WEHUBIT

Country
Mali

Implemented by

grdr
Migration - Citoyenneté - Développement

TUWINDI

Budget
349.915 €

Duration
12/2018-05/2021

Contribution to SDGs

| 4 QUALITY EDUCATION | 5 GENDER EQUALITY | 8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH | 10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES |

Implemented by

Enabel

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partner in development

Learning from
Inclusion of women and youth in planning and local governance through ICT

Can digital social innovation increase women's and youth rights, inclusion and empowerment, how and in which context ?

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Reason

In Mali - and more particularly in the border region of Kayes - the social status of **women** and **young people is lower than the status of older men**. Yet, women and youth play a key role in the development of the country while at the same time many young people leave the region for economic reasons. While some progress is being made, **cultural customs** and **social resistance** limit progress towards **empowerment** and **access to full citizenship**. The political forums where strategic choices and local planning are decided are still **poorly accessible to women** and **young people**.

Digital Social Innovation

Against this background, digital social innovation helped **build the capacity of elected women** and **young people** or **members of Civil Society Organisations** (CSOs). It provided **digital platforms for political dialogue** in order to facilitate and foster citizen participation of this little heard group, even in remote rural areas.

The first action of the project was to produce and make data on local gender and youth issues available to CSOs and local elected officials. This data was then **popularised** and **disseminated**, notably through digital platforms and information & training sessions in internet cafés, allowing young people and women to **better know their rights** and **their role in local development**.

Upon this foundation the project pursued further initiatives:

Capacity sharing with women and **youth members of CSOs** and **local elected officials** on women, youth and citizen participation issues through face-to-face **training/consultation sessions** and two digital platforms:

- **Gafé**: application of 20 **standard literacy** modules and 6 **functional literacy** modules (e.g. equity, gender and governance, ICT and local development...).
- **5 Massive Open Online Course** (MOOCs) made available through the **Sahelink Platform** (a platform launched by a range of local development actors in the Senegal River basin). The 5 MOOCS are gender and youth public policies in Mali, communal management, associative governance, advocacy, leadership and citizen participation.

The provision of two **online applications for citizen participation**

- "**Mon Elu**" application: an interactive platform for elected officials and the public to **get in touch** and **interact via a smartphone**. The functionality is limited for **easy use**. Elected officials can publish public messages and share council decisions; citizens can express themselves/voice an opinion, propose an action/project.

- **Xensa**: an application that allows citizens to question their elected representatives and react.

The creation of three hosting and training centres called **connected spaces**. 3 locations providing internet access, computers and video projectors. They are run by a facilitator who makes sure the **applications** and **equipment** and **information** are available.

From the perspective of the human rights-based approach (HRBA)

The HRBA approach aims, on the one hand, to empower **rights holders** – **women and youth in the Kayes region** – to claim their rights and participate in their own development process, and on the other hand, to share the capacities with the **duty bearers** – **local leaders, public authorities** – to respect, protect and fulfil these rights.

The key assumption of the project is that once mobilised, informed and trained on their role, on civil society organisation and on digital technology, **women** and **young people** will be able to **take ownership of their political participation** and **active citizenship**, notably via digital participation platforms. The project also sought to influence male representatives of society through **information, education, consultation** and **advocacy**.
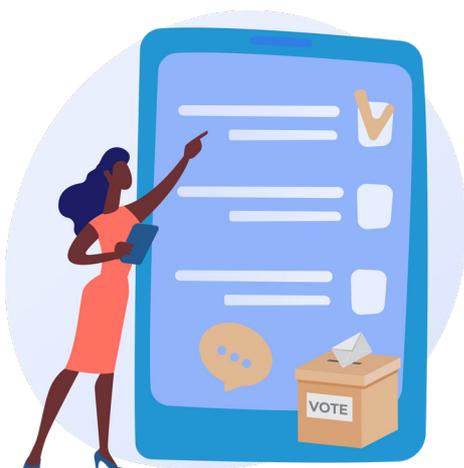
The connected spaces allowed **3476** people to use the facilities and to receive training while initially planned for 2283

From these 3476 people, **32%** were women and **68%** were younger than 35. All were assisted in using the tools

KEY MESSAGES

▶ The connected spaces are **meeting** and **training** spaces. They have primarily been used by youths (women and men younger than 35) who used them to **learn to use digital** (office) **tools** and get informed on **important topics for their professional career** via online resources.

▶ The **face-to-face training** and **consultation sessions** remain important and complement the training work on the tools provided by the **facilitators** of the connected spaces. Face-to-face information is useful when **introducing the tools** and **boosts the women's** and **youths'** **confidence in themselves**.

▶ The added value of digital capacity sharing platforms is the ability to **translate content into different local languages**, which is a must when reaching out in the Kayes region.

With digital technology, women are " gradually becoming aware that they have power, that they can initiate and even be part of the change that they want to achieve in their " community.

Djouldé Seck,
39-year-old women from the Kayes region

In addition to being training and meeting " places, connected spaces engage young people in the construction of citizen projects for the future, hence this notion of sharing that is " central to our approach

Mariame Doukouré,
Coordinatrice de GRDR au Mali

More stories about the project ? 📲

Or videos ? ▶

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LESSONS LEARNED

Inclusion and equity

The facilitators of the connected spaces offered **digital literacy training** in order to reduce the digital divide. While most women and young people have a basic phone or even a smartphone, many have never had the opportunity to work on a computer.

The use of applications and online training requires a **smartphone** and, above all, a **good connection**, which is not feasible for all young people and women. The establishment of **connected spaces** solved this problem. However, women, who do most of the domestic work in the regions concerned, made much less use of the connected spaces owing to lack of time.

Some of the target users - mainly women in rural areas - remain **illiterate**. The MonElu tool was adapted to transmit **voice messages** and **questions via the microphone**. However, an application with a voice interface takes up a lot of **storage on a phone** and again raises the issue of **accessibility**.

Stakeholders and users' responsiveness

Digital platforms - citizen participation and capacity sharing - are an **opportunity for interaction** and **visibility** between citizens and elected officials and leaders. Although women and mainly young people called on their elected representatives, there was very **little participation** from the latter - mainly men over 35 - despite the awareness-raising campaigns. This was solved by re-scheduling debates to Saturdays, when elected officials are less occupied.

Most users do not have the necessary **phone credit** to ensure a stable internet connection. Exchange remains possible, but **live interaction on citizen participation platforms is limited**.

Citizen participation applications and capacity sharing platforms had limited success. Two reasons are given: (1) **Familiarisation** and **access to digital tools** did not lead to increased citizen participation because the target group had different expectations. (2) **Developing the tools** in an inclusive way took a lot of time and did not showcase in this time-limited project whether the use of digital tools increases with more information and training.

Use of digital tools beyond project's end

Connected spaces will continue to be used by young people as they respond to their desire and need to **develop digital skills** for private and professional purposes.

The connected spaces need the presence of facilitators to **raise awareness, train** and **accompany users**. It is therefore important to staff the internet cafés in the long term and provide the necessary finances to **ensure attendance**.

PERSPECTIVES

From the start of the project, the connected spaces were entrusted to the inter-municipalities, which are responsible for the **operating costs**, including human resources. However, inter-municipalities are often also dependent on external funding. Ways are being considered to make the connected spaces viable, such as **charging users for internet** or **low-cost paper printing**.

In order to enhance the value of MOOCs for women and young CSO members, the partner organisations are considering **organising introductory sessions to MOOCs** in existing connected spaces.

The findings of this Wehubit project in Mali call for a redefinition of needs and the design of solutions involving women and young people, while paying **attention to the differences between the groups** (women/youths, urban/rural, etc.). The demand tends to be more focused on **acquiring professional skills** and creating an **inclusive social network** for effective citizen participation.