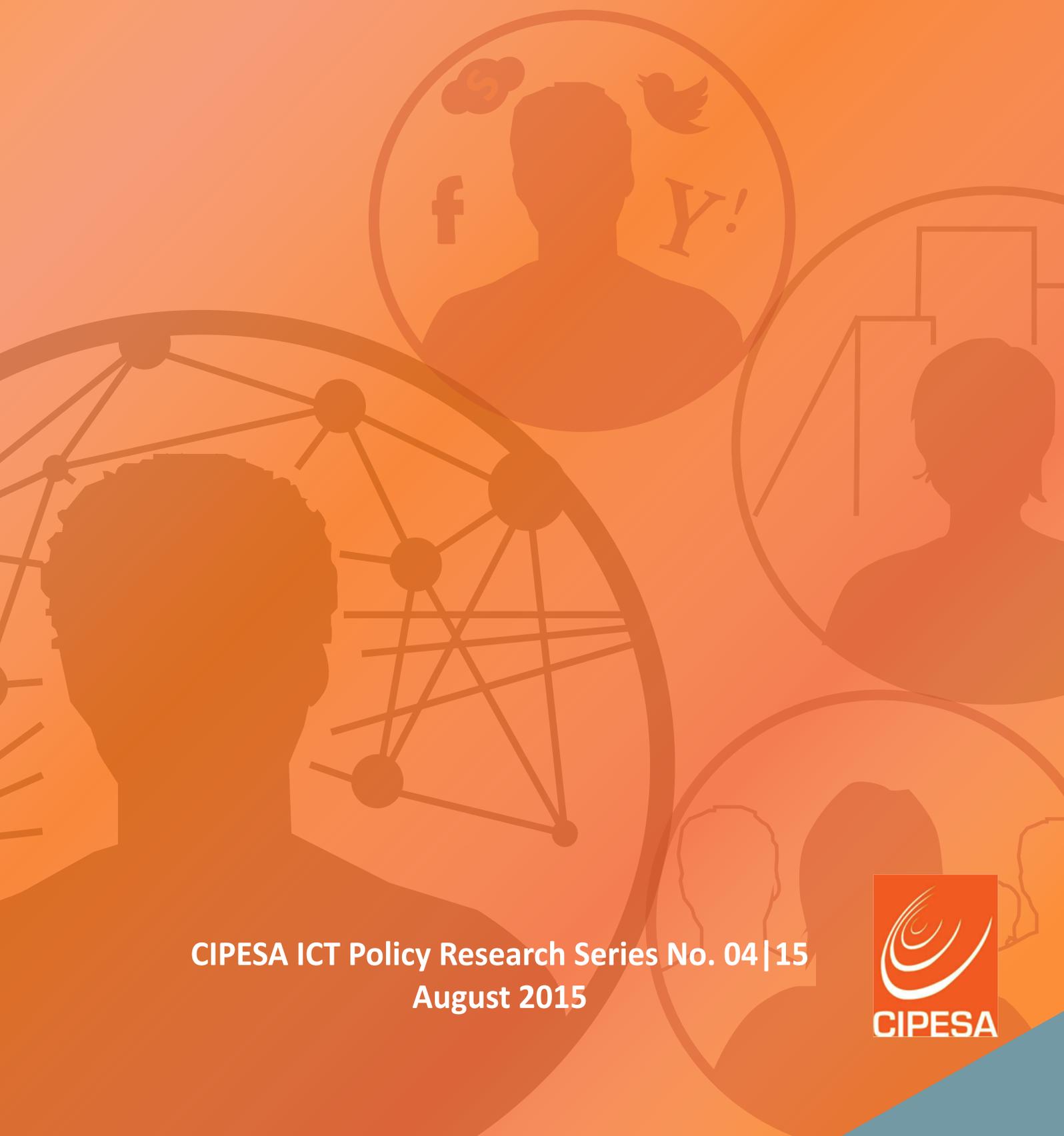


ICT in Civic Participation and Democracy in Uganda

Citizens' Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices



CIPESA ICT Policy Research Series No. 04 | 15
August 2015



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INTRODUCTION

There is growing recognition of the role Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) can play in various spheres of social, political and economic transformation. The internet, mobile phones and other ICT tools and services are increasingly being used in political processes, to empower citizens, to promote human rights, to enhance citizens' access to information, and in promoting transparency and accountability in government operations (UNDESA, 2013; Sida, 2009).

The anonymity which ICT can offer, as well as the possibility for citizens to participate at a time and location of their convenience, makes ICT tools attractive platforms for promoting democratic processes, including increased participation by citizens. The digital technologies are facilitating, among others, networking, advocacy, mobilisation, service delivery, critical debate, voting, electoral monitoring, and freedom of expression. All these make them a tool that can enhance democracy. The spread of mobile phones, crowdsourcing technologies, and social networks have particularly enabled messages to be amplified, information flows to be accelerated, and new spaces to be opened up for the involvement of individuals and communities (Coyle and Meier, 2009).

However, it has also been argued (Selian, 2002) that while many look at modern technology as a panacea for old problems, "it appears that their power for enhancing transparency, imposing international accountability and fostering cooperation stretches only as far as the will of respective nation states bends to embrace and adopt them." Low literacy rates, high costs of accessing and owning ICT, acute shortages of electricity, the gender divide, unfavourable policy and legislative frameworks and a shortage of skilled human resource, mean the use of ICT in many developing countries is limited to a few citizens. In Uganda, only 23% of the population uses the internet while teledensity stands at 53 phones per 100 inhabitants.¹

There are other challenges that are not related to access or affordability. According to CIPESA (2012), the needs of citizens and citizens' groups are rarely addressed in the development and deployment of ICT in citizen participation and democracy monitoring. In an analysis of citizens' motivations for utilising ICT in citizen participation and democracy, CIPESA also found that despite widespread awareness of ICT-based tools for participation, a significant proportion of Ugandan citizens preferred non-ICT spheres for engaging in democratic processes.

As in many other parts of the world, in Uganda ICT can be more effectively used for increased access to information, monitoring of government, reporting violations of human rights, and tracking corruption. With lower costs of and broader accessibility, mobile phones are increasing flows of information and facilitating communication, thus enhancing people's capacity to act and participate in democratic processes. Indeed, at the citizen-to-citizen level, a lot of conversations and actions are taking place via ICT. Many of these ICT-enabled interactions and discussions are empowering citizens, helping to enhance civic agency and promoting participation in various ways that should be nurtured.

However, there is insufficient understanding of how ICT are being used and the reasons why many citizens who have ample access to ICT hardly use them in democratic processes.

The Collaboration on International ICT Policy for East and Southern Africa (CIPESA) undertook this research to assess the informational and ICT use, skills and needs of Ugandan internet users and their effect on citizen participation. The study, conducted between July and August 2014, sought to among other things; investigate the extent of knowledge that citizens have on ICT. It also explores citizens' attitudes towards the use of ICT and their practice in utilising these tools for democratic processes, including civic and political participation in Uganda.

The research attempts to fill the knowledge gap in the use of ICT in democratic processes and what needs to be done for more citizens, the media, civil society and government departments to embrace the use of ICT for democracy.

The research results can be used by civil society organisations and government departments interested in implementing ICT-for-development and ICT-for-democracy programmes, including in promoting awareness and capacity building. The results are also useful for researchers interested in evidence on the state of ICT and democracy in Uganda.

1. Uganda Communications Commission, Telecom Subscribers and Penetration Data 2014, <http://ucc.co.ug/data/qmenu/3/Facts-and-Figures.html>.

METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE

The research used a variety of data collection methodologies and techniques. Print questionnaires were administered amongst 322 internet users, and seven focus group discussions were conducted with individuals from academia, students, local government, civil society, media and the private sector in nine districts.

Respondents were chosen from each of Uganda's four regions – in Lira and Gulu districts in the Northern Region, Iganga, Mayuge and Mbale in the Eastern Region, Mpigi and Masaka in the Central Region, Kabarole and Kasese in the Western Region.

The questionnaire consisted of 20 questions that captured demographic information (sex, age, educational attainment, and incomes of respondents) and informational and ICT skills and needs of survey participants. Respondents were also asked about the frequency of use of different ICT tools and services. These included Google and other search engines; Email (including sharing photos and documents as attachments); contributing to online discussion groups/ chats; use of social media such as Twitter, Whatsapp, Facebook, and MySpace; SMS on mobile phone; blogging; downloading files (documents and media); and video conferencing (such as Skype and Google Hangouts).

There were also questions on the perceived usefulness of ICT for monitoring of government programmes and public services delivery, and whether respondents used ICT to monitor or report on government/ public services delivery. Other questions related to the ways and frequency with which respondents used ICT to engage with other citizens and with duty bearers (government officials, public services organisations) on issues of community or national concern (social, political and economic).

Besides the survey, seven focus group discussions (FGDs) were held, involving 72 participants of whom 43 were male and 29 female. The FGD in Mpigi was only for students at Uganda Martyrs University, while in Mbale and Iganga, the FGD participants were only journalists. In Lira, one of the discussions involved only members of the Voluntary Accountability Committees (VACs) who work with Transparency International Uganda in monitoring services delivery, particularly in the health sector, in Lira and Oyam districts. The rest of the FGDs had a mix of government officials, students, journalists, and civil society actors.

DATA ANALYSIS

The responses to the survey questions were coded and entered in a spreadsheet in order to give statistical descriptions such as mean, percentages, joint distributions and graphs/charts. All figures included are rounded off to the nearest whole number. Responses to the open-ended questions are drawn on for statistical trend explanations and in making conclusions. This process involved reading through each completed questionnaires to establish subjective descriptions.

RESULTS

Demographics

The quantitative research received 322 responses with 59% male and 41% female respondents. The 18-24 years age bracket had the biggest proportion of respondents (41%), followed by the 25-34 age group (38%). Those aged 35 and above were 21%.

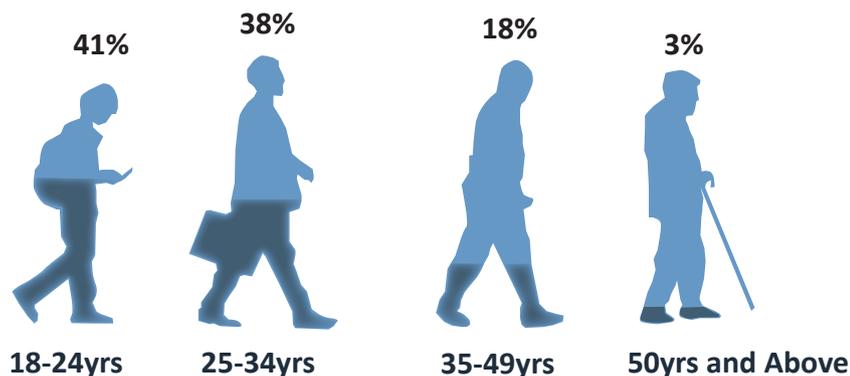


Figure 1: Respondents' age groups

Majority of respondents (66%) were educated up to university level, holding either diplomas or degrees, while 11% were educated up to vocational institute level and 12% had attained secondary school education. Those with postgraduate education such as Masters degrees or PhDs were 9%. Only 2% had not gone beyond the primary level of education.

Current Occupation

Majority of the respondents (39%) were students, followed by those working in Non-Government Organisations at 17%.

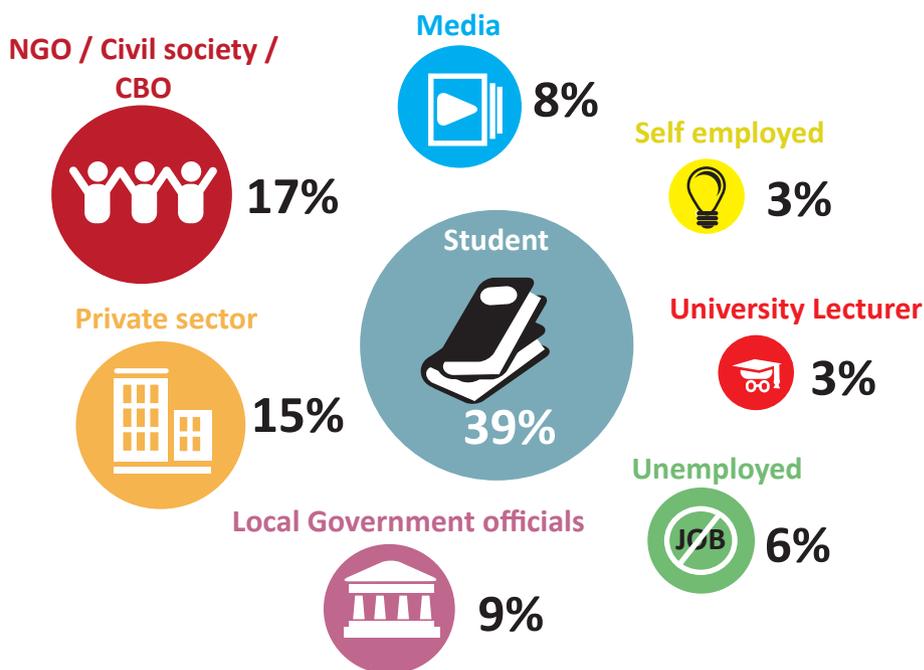


Figure 2: Respondents' current position

Levels of Income

Majority of the respondents (91%) were low to middle income earners, with only 9% earning at least UGX 1 million (US\$ 377) and above per month. The World Bank indicates that the country's current Gross National Income (GNI) per capita is 510 USD.²

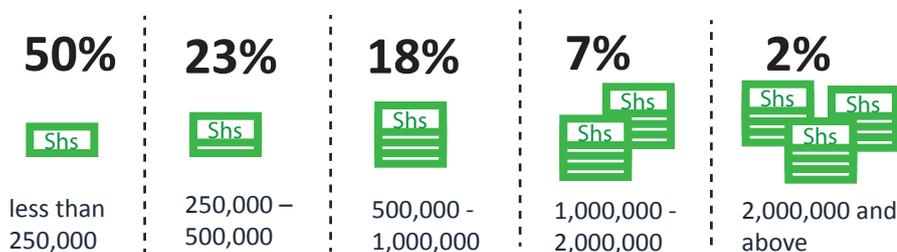


Figure 3: Average monthly income of respondents (Uganda Shillings³)

Access to the Internet

The mobile phone was the main tool for access to the internet, with 45% of those surveyed citing it as their main access device. Desktop and laptop computers at home or work came second, followed by internet cafes.

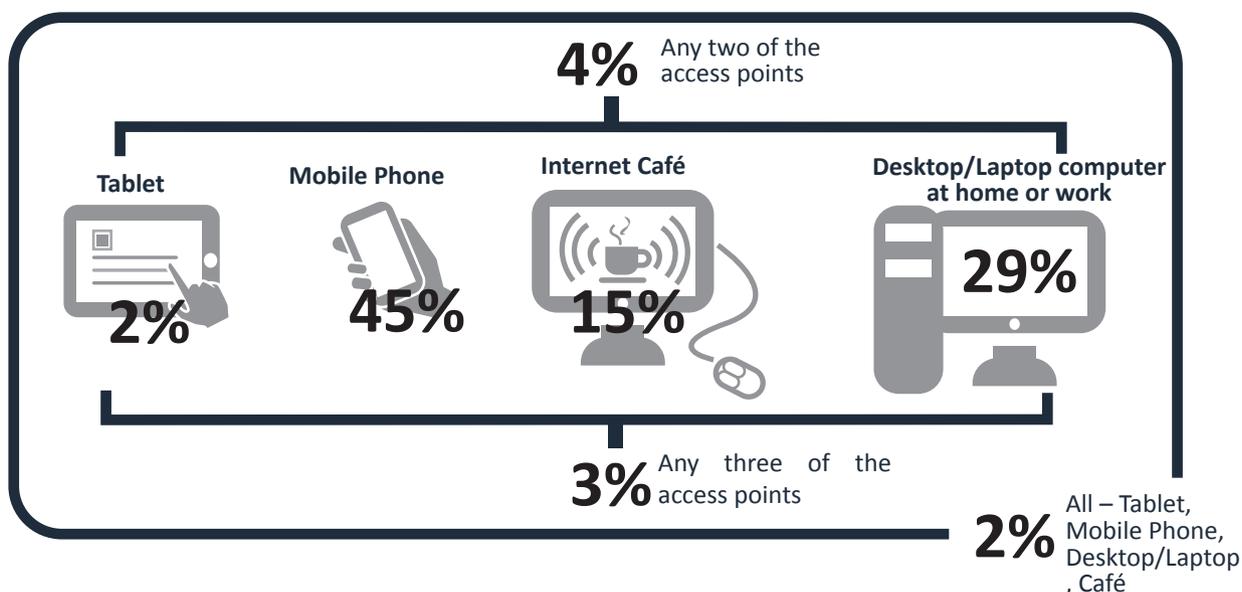


Figure 4: Where do you mostly access the internet from?

The preferred use of mobile phones to access the internet was also echoed during the group discussions in Kasese, Fort Portal, Iganga, Mbale and Mayuge. Participants in these discussions, who had access to laptop or desktop computers, indicated using mobile phones interchangeably with the computers for internet access.

2. The World Bank, Uganda Overview, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/uganda/overview>

3. US\$ 1 = UGX 2,650 (Average for June 2015)

Knowledge and proficiency in use of select ICT tools and services

Respondents were asked about their knowledge of ICT tools and services and proficiency in using them. Short Messaging Services (SMS) emerged as the top tool most survey participants (41%) had excellent knowledge of and proficiency in using, followed by social media (39%) and search engines (32%). Blogging and video conferencing were the least known and used, with 38% and 20% of respondents reporting having no knowledge or proficiency in using them respectively.

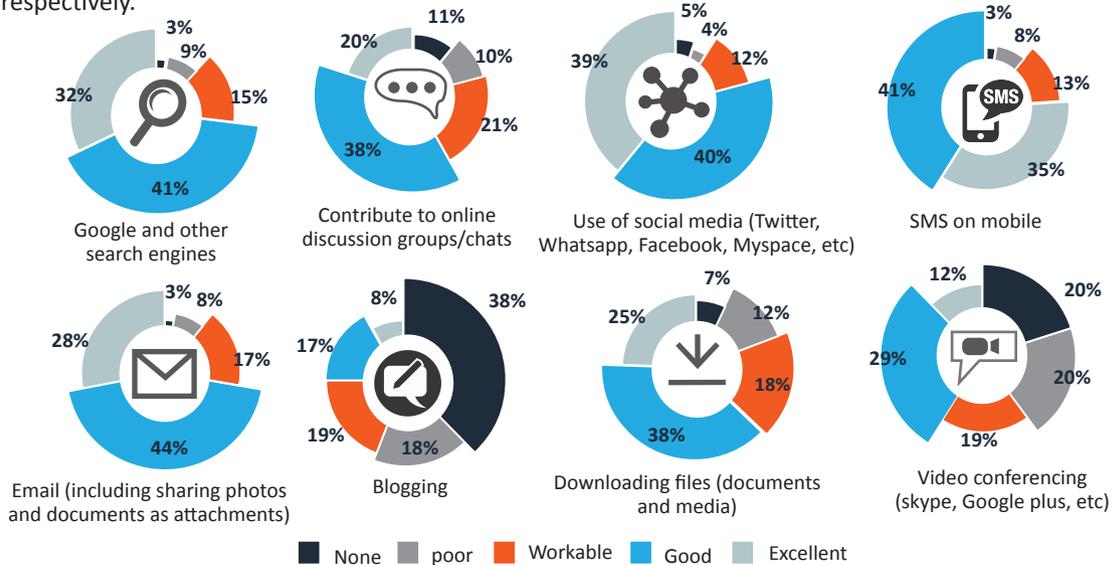


Figure 5: Rate the level of your knowledge and proficiency in using the following technology tools and services

Frequency of use of ICT tools and services

Facebook was used daily by 60% of respondents, followed by SMS (58%), search engines (46%) and email (42%). Just over a quarter of respondents did not use Whatsapp and Twitter.

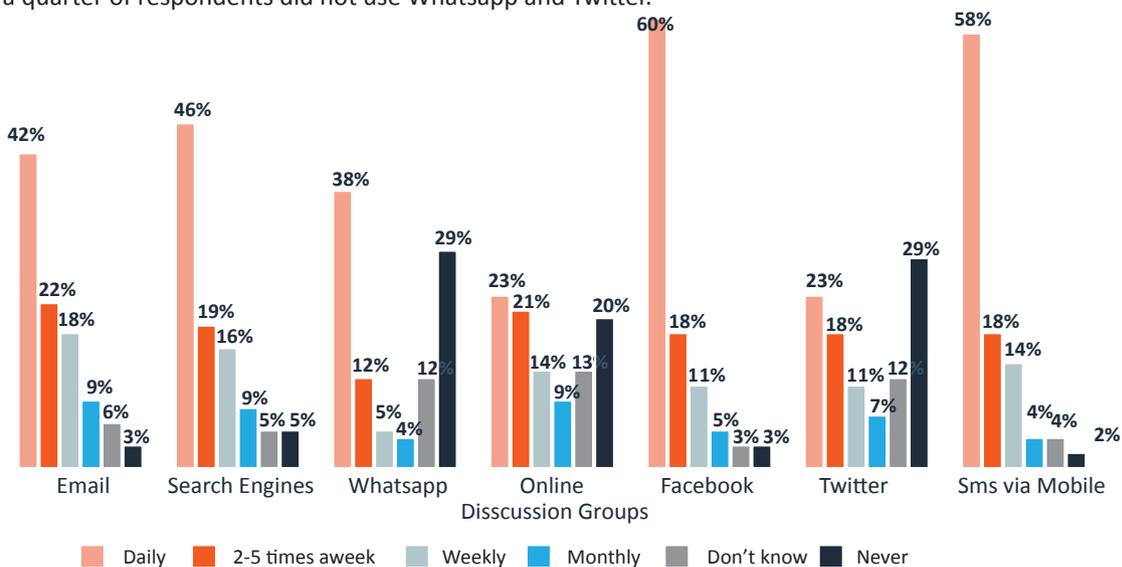


Figure 6: How often do you use these ICT tools and services?

Social media platforms (Facebook in particular) were the main tools that participants in the focus group discussions used. When asked how they used social media for civic participation and democracy monitoring, participants' responses were varied, primarily based on their job functions and peer interactions. It was evident, however, that their engagements were mainly with individuals they knew, rather than with groups or leaders they were not acquainted with. Although not all focus group discussants were daily users of social media, they mostly used Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and online discussion groups.

Sources of Governance Information

Mainstream media, specifically newspapers, radio and television, were cited as the most important sources of information on governance matters with 55% of respondents citing both newspapers and radio as most important. Television was ranked next by 51% of respondents. Interestingly, 35% mentioned word of mouth from individuals including family, friends, and colleagues, while direct interactions with government officials were among the least popular sources of governance information.

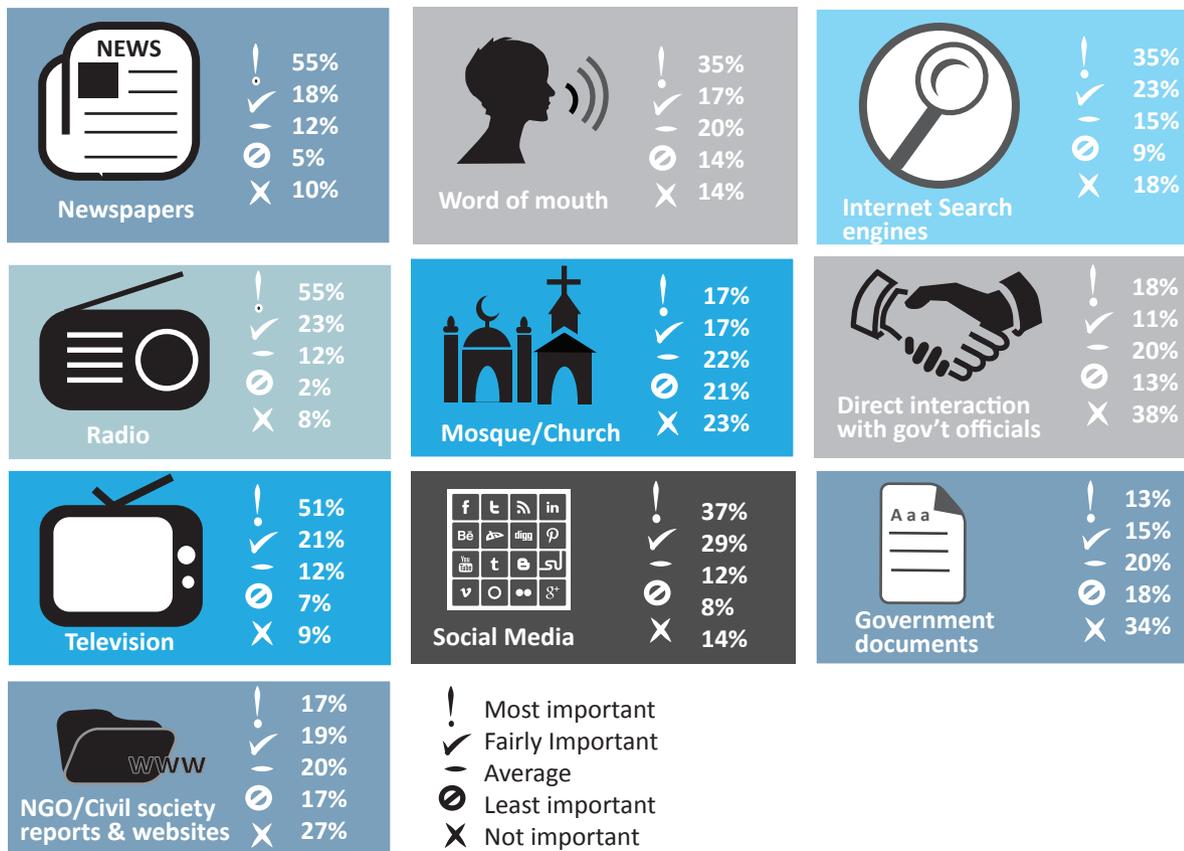


Figure 7: What are your main sources of information on governance/political matters (rank in order of importance from most important to least important)?

The popularity of print media as a source of governance related information was reiterated in all the group discussions. At the same time, FGD participants acknowledged that some public figures have an active online presence which they use to engage with their audiences and are a source of information on governance related issues. Discussants revealed that governance issues were also raised on blogs, and online discussion groups such as the Rwenzori Journalists Forum, the Rwenzori Anti-Corruption Coalition (RAC) Facebook page both in western Uganda, and the Busoga Association online discussion group in eastern Uganda, among others.

Information Sharing Behaviour

Majority of respondents (85%) indicated that they shared information on governance. However, 15% stated that they did not. Friends, workmates and spouses were the primary social groupings with whom information was always shared – 54%, 47% and 33% respectively. On the other hand, groups with whom information was least shared were religious leaders (43%), children (38%) and civil society (31%).

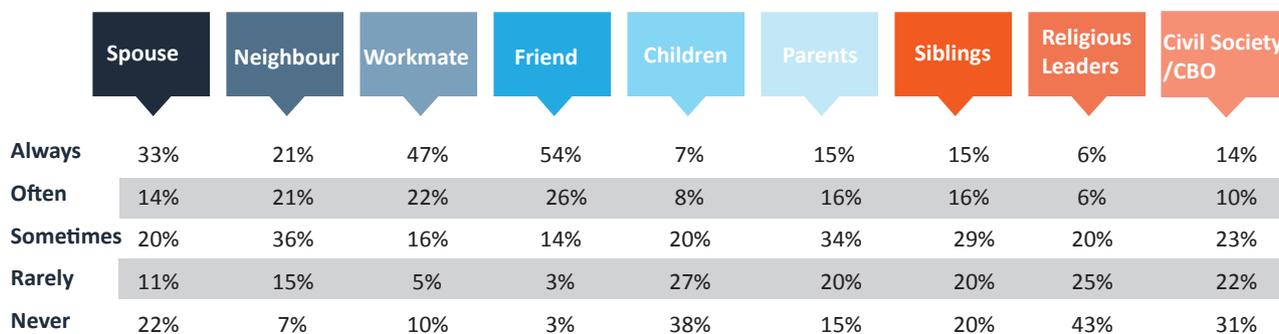


Figure 8: Which people do you share information with and how often?

Reasons for not sharing information

In the Fort Portal and Kasese discussion groups, it emerged that the nature of information was a key determinant of whether it was shared or not. In cases where content appeared neutral but had political connotations, this would be reason enough for some not to share it for fear of being affiliated with particular people or political interests.

Explaining the groups with whom information was not often shared, one survey respondent said, “Religious leaders have limited time to talk about government programs and children are less concerned.” Other reasons for not sharing information included uncertainty about the accuracy of the information or the reliability of the sources. “I avoid sharing biased information because everyone interprets it in their own way,” said one survey respondent. “At times there is no evidence [to back up the information],” stated another. Some respondents, mindful of their safety and security, stated that they did not share information publicly in order not to disclose their identity to people they did not trust. “People may report me to government officials,” explained one person. Others explained that if the information was confidential, personal or on “sensitive security” issues, they did not share it with others.

Why I may not share information...

- “I don’t share information until I authenticate its source.”*
- “My information sometimes is misrepresented and so misquoted.”*
- “It depends on the nature of information and the interest of the people around me in the nature of information I want to share.”*
- “Fear of political differences and you end up fighting therefore I decide to stay quiet.”*
- “To avoid unnecessary confrontation and arguments.”*
- “Fear of repercussions. There is no freedom of speech in Uganda.”*
- “It is risky sometimes because it may result in arrest.”*

*Extracted from questionnaire responses

Busy schedules were also a reason for not sharing information as some respondents “didn't have time”. One respondent from Mbale stated that she did not share information because “nothing is going to be done about the shared information”. The apathy sentiment was echoed by another respondent who stated, “However much you are concerned, nothing will be done because the information is only shared amongst the youth with no politicians involved and so [the problem] remains with no solution.”

In Lira, a focus group participant mentioned that there was “no absolute freedom online” and that some information could “compromise national security”. This reveals the perception of communications surveillance and interception held by some individuals, which hampers information sharing.

Participants from media houses noted, however, that there were some active duty bearers on social media who responded promptly to media queries. They indicated nonetheless that there remained bureaucratic challenges for some duty bearers when it came to responding to queries or posts. They also stated that often, citizens posted queries directed to a duty bearer on their personal social media accounts instead of on the social media page of a District, Ministry, Department or Agency (MDA). This indicates a conflict between personal and official presences online.

Despite these shortcomings, there was a general agreement on the role that social media has played in increasing accessibility to persons in positions of leadership both at district level and national level.

Unmet information needs

More than half of the respondents (56%) cited health service as the sector on which they lacked most information. The health information highlighted as being hard to access included drugs availability, staffing in hospitals, public health education on maternity, immunisation, family planning and sexual health.

The second priority information need was on education services where 41% of respondents stated that information on school drop outs, teacher recruitment, enrolment levels, scholarship opportunities, higher education and illiteracy levels were some of the key information needs in their communities that were not being met.

Information relating to public, donor and community development funds management, budget allocations, disbursements, expenditure, tendering processes and accountability, was mentioned by 27% of respondents as key information needed in the community that was not being met. The fourth priority information need in the communities was on road and transport infrastructure (21% of respondents).

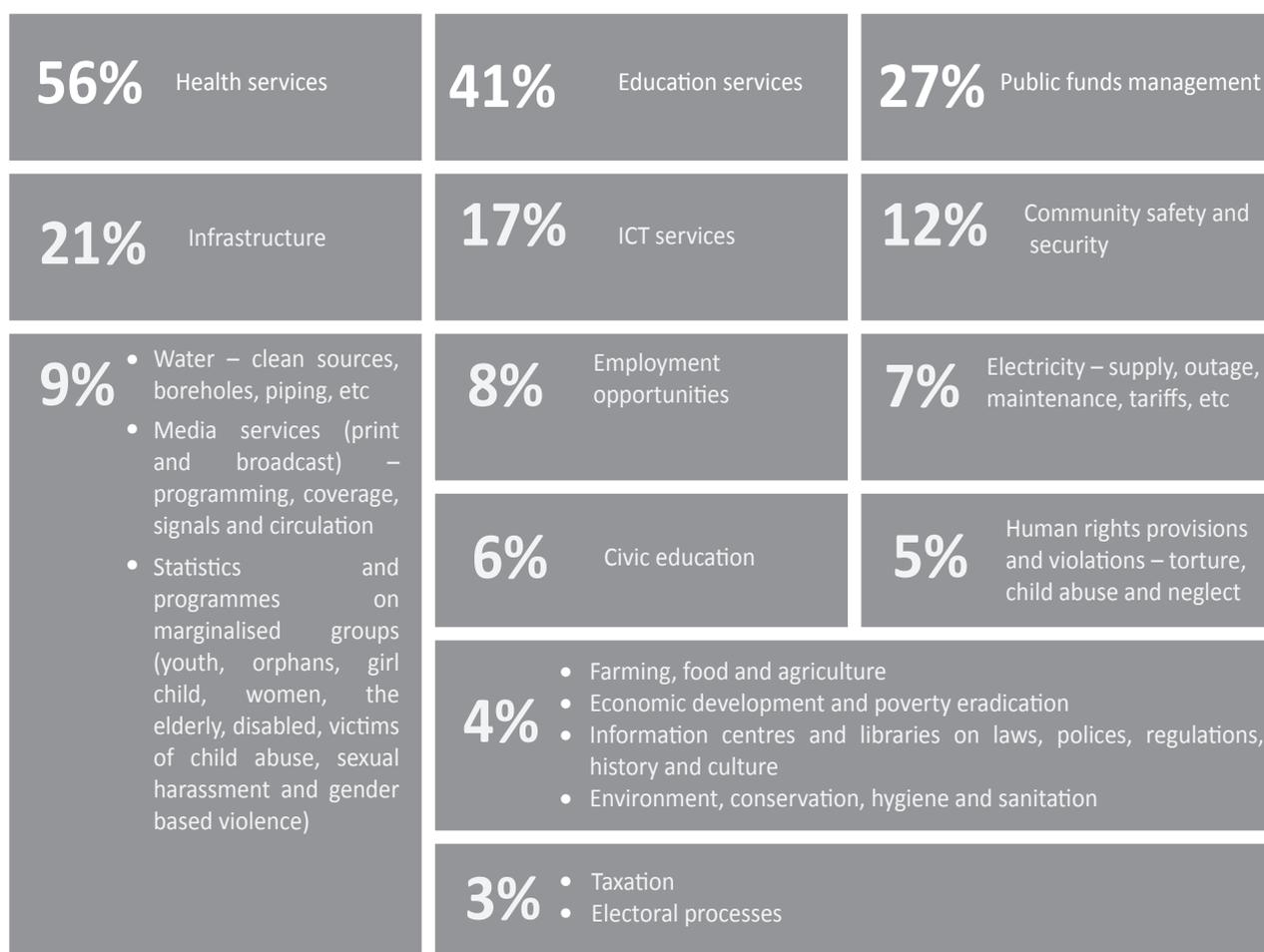


Figure 9: List the main information needs in your community that are currently not met

Usefulness of ICT for monitoring government programmes and services

Nearly half of respondents (48%) strongly agreed that use of ICT made it faster, effective and more productive in monitoring government programmes and public services. With 45% agreeing that they would monitor public services better if ICT were used as compared to other means, 44% concurred that using ICT would make monitoring of public services easier and simpler. However, 17% of respondents strongly disagreed, arguing that since not everyone used ICT, this limited the tools' usefulness for monitoring government programmes and public services.

Although 40% of respondents agreed that ICT tools would make it easier to communicate with public officials, 15% disagreed and 5% strongly disagreed that ICT were a secure tool to use in monitoring government programmes and public services.

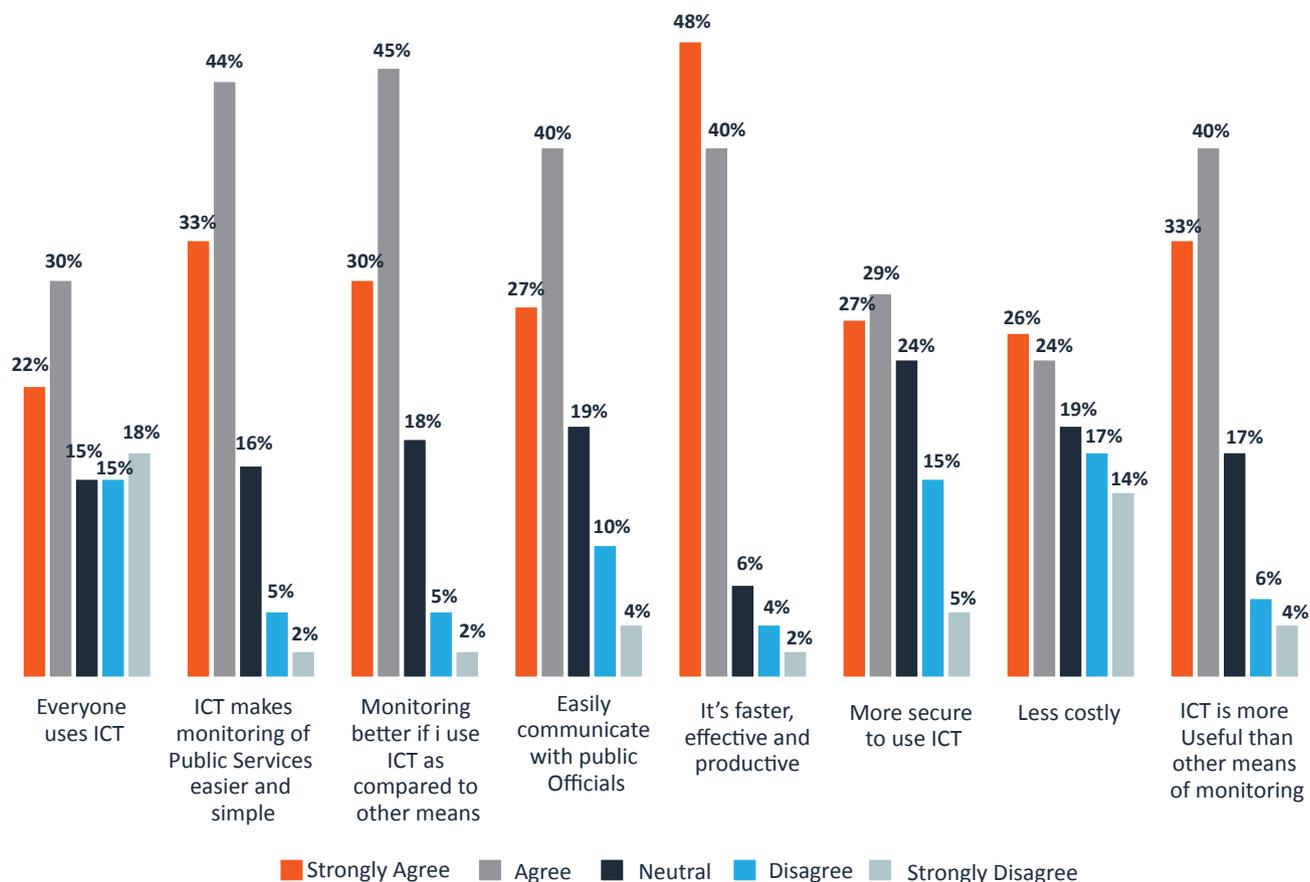


Figure 10: What is your perceived usefulness of ICT for monitoring of government programmes and public services delivery?

Involvement in monitoring and reporting of public services delivery

Only a third of respondents were involved in monitoring and reporting on government/public services delivery in their communities. It was mainly male respondents (62%) and the 25-34 year age group (37%) who actively participated.



Figure 11: Are you involved in monitoring and reporting on government/public services delivery?

Use of ICT to monitor and report on government/public services delivery

Majority (66%) did not use ICT tools to monitor or report on government/public services delivery. Of the 34% of respondents who used ICT to monitor, the majority were male (63%) and aged 25-34 (39%). Meanwhile, camera phones were noted as an excellent but poorly used tool to monitor or report on service delivery issues.



Figure 12: Do you use ICT to monitor or report on government/public services delivery?

Those who used ICT to monitor or report on government/ public service delivery credited them for being easy to use, convenient, fast, effective, cheap and reliable. Social media including Facebook, Twitter and blogs were the most common tools used for social accountability through sharing posts, images and videos. One respondent stated, “I use Facebook to monitor public service delivery since I have friends and a civil society organisation that keeps me informed about the service delivery situation in different areas.”

In Eastern Uganda, a discussant in Mbale district, said that they are able to monitor health services in the area by actively engaging with the Principal Administrator Mbale Regional Referral hospital on social media. Through his Facebook account, the administrator once responded to queries on the deaths of expectant mothers and on staff conduct at the hospital. Calls and SMS through mobile phones were also cited as common ICT tools used to monitor and report on service delivery. Tuning in to radio and TV programmes and combining it with SMS straplines and calls-in was another means of monitoring. “I always contact the relevant bodies directly using phone calls and even on radio programs,” said one respondent.

Others used email: “I always use email to communicate directly with the officials in various capacities.” Respondents also used discussion groups, search engines, Skype, Whatsapp and comment sections on websites (including those of political parties and local governments) and newspaper articles. A journalist from Iganga remarked: “As a media person I gather data using both the internet and other ICT tools to report my finding to the listeners.” Specific ICT monitoring and reporting tools mentioned were USpeak⁴ and Ureport.⁵

For those who did not use ICT to monitor or report, explanations given included high access costs and skills shortage: “There is a lack of knowledge about ICT”, “ICTs are expensive”, “ICT services are not available in my community”. One respondent noted that the tools did not “guarantee responses,” hence his opting not to use them. Others said that they had “little interest in monitoring” or were “too busy at work.” Further, limited availability of information related to public services delivery also constrained the capacity to monitor and report.

Respondents also noted lack of trust in the message reaching the right duty bearers and no follow up action being taken as negatively influencing the use of ICT in reporting and monitoring.

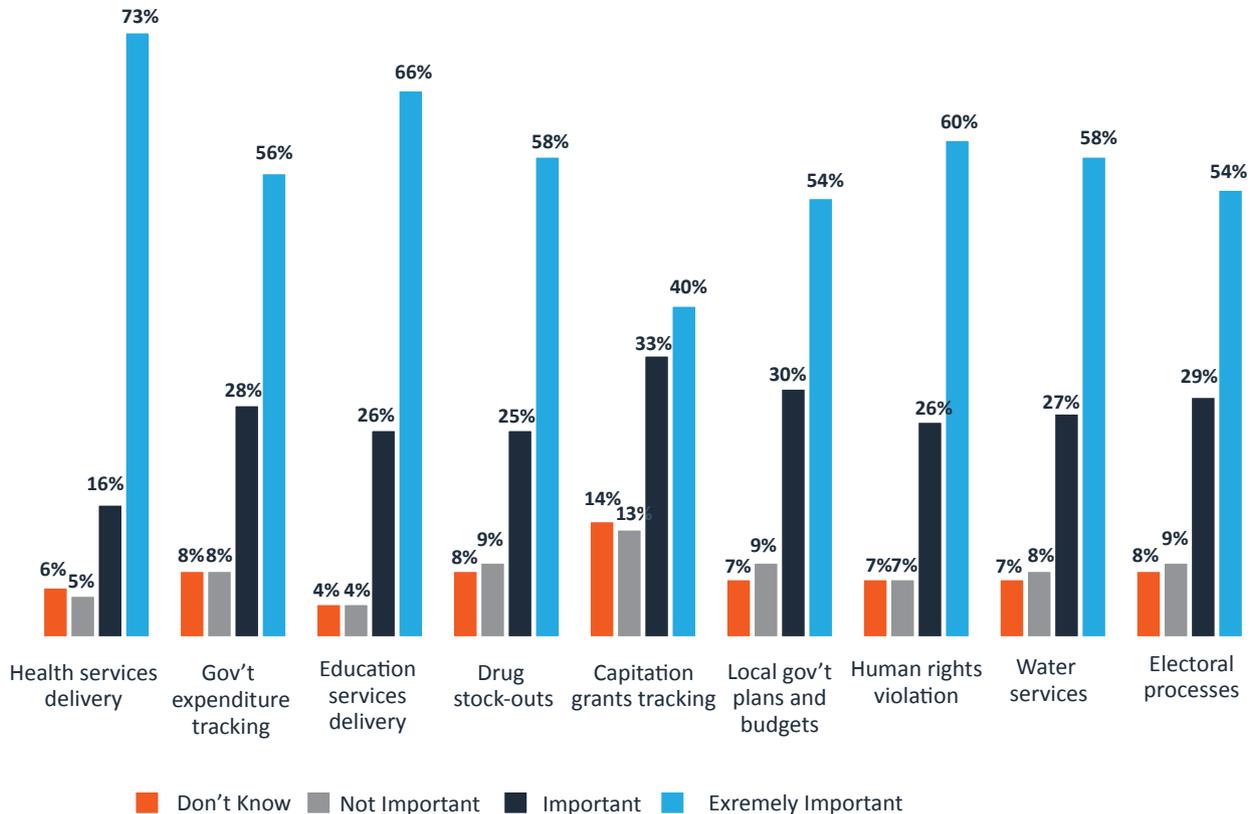
4. Launched August 13, 2012, U-Speak allows citizens in Uganda to communicate with their representatives in Parliament and helps lawmakers respond to citizens’ needs. This is done via SMS or by leaving a voicemail. The messages are automatically re-routed on a platform which scans, analyses and categorises each message according to its policy category, and aggregates it on a map, accessible through the personal dashboard of each representative. - https://www.ndi.org/uganda_uspeak_launch

5. Ureport is a free SMS-based system that allows Ugandans to speak out on what’s happening in communities across the country, and work together with other community leaders for positive change. - http://ureport.ug/about_ureport/

The important public services to monitor

Health service delivery was indicated as extremely important to monitor by 73% of those surveyed. The second most important service to monitor was education services (66%), followed by human rights violations (60%), drug stock outs (58%), water services (58%) and capitation grants at 40%.

Regarding the specific monitoring of services, one respondent noted that all public services were “fundamental to human sustainability” thus monitoring them all was a priority. Other services mentioned by respondents as important to monitor include roads construction and communications service provisions.



Figures 13: How important do you think it is to monitor the following services?

Only 40% of respondents indicated that they used ICT to engage with officials in the above services; 60% did not.



Figure 14: Have you used ICT to engage with officials in the important services mentioned above?

Testimonies of some of the means used to engage with the officials included social media, online discussion groups, radio talk shows, direct emails, SMS and phone calls.

"I have interacted with my MP on Facebook."
"I use twitter to contact the National Water and Sewerage Corporation on the water crisis in Masaka."
"Used Facebook to communicate with trade minister Amelia Kyambadde about the high taxes."
"I have always texted Councillors and other district leaders for comment on and engaging on certain topics."
"I interviewed the District Health Officer and Local Council V of Kitgum on phone and at times Skype."
"Used Facebook to comment and chat with our Local Council V. There I can post questions and replies."
"Facebook messages to the chairperson Local Council III about the nurse who was mistreating a woman giving birth."
"In most cases I involve them in debates on radio and also put questions to them to respond."
"Giving comments on political websites and Facebook pages."
"I have contacted the Resident District Commissioner both through phone calls and email about human rights violation in the district."

Infomediaries such as Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) and regulators such as for human rights and communications were also mentioned as having been engaged for onward relaying of issues to the duty bearers.

How ICT was used to engage with other citizens on issues of community or national concern

Of the surveyed respondents, 43% engaged with other citizens on issues of community and national concern through posting social media updates on Facebook and Twitter. This was followed by 39% who shared concerns through text messages and seeking information and news. Some 46% of respondents did not write in local press or community newsletters as a means of engaging with fellow citizens. Another 34% did not engage with fellow citizens through live call-ins and SMS strips on radio and television shows.

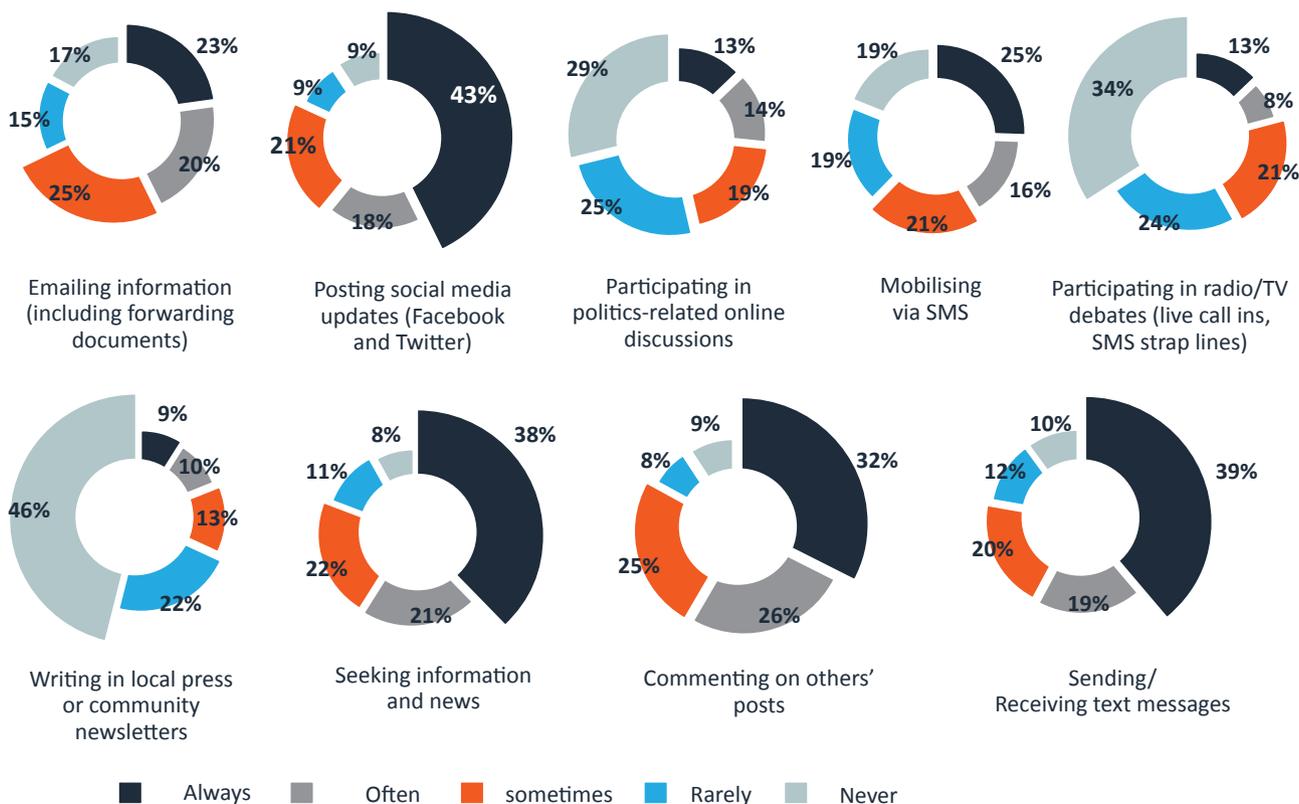


Figure 15: In what ways and how often do you use ICT to engage with other citizens on issues of community or national concern (social, political, economic, etc)?

How ICT was used to engage with duty bearers on issues of community or national concern

Seeking information and news from duty bearers was the most frequently used form of engagement with duty bearers (33%), followed by social media at 26%. Participating in live call-ins and SMS strips on radio and TV debates was not used by 34% of respondents as a means of engaging with duty bearers. Commenting on political websites (32%) and online discussion forums (31%) were also not popular for engagement with duty bearers.

The use of ICT as a tool to engage with duty bearers is one that is increasingly competing with face to face interactions. Some focus group participants had experience seeking information and news from their leaders, primarily for journalistic purposes and in some cases driven by community concerns and work. Media participants in the Iganga FGD pointed out that it was easier to follow what duty bearers with an online presence were doing as opposed to trying to physically follow them up. It was shared that some local members of parliament had an active presence on Facebook and were responsive online on topics including on Busoga region's community and economic development issues.

Participants from Lira noted that social media and its related tools had increased the ease of access to people in positions of leadership locally and nationally. They noted that there is some level of valuable information exchange on various platforms. Further, they noted that attitudes on using ICT tools for monitoring service delivery/governance by citizens and leaders were the main hindrance to these engagements. Besides that, there are not enough duty bearers online for them to engage with in addition to limited local governance information online. "It is easier to get information on random issues than it is to get information on topics pertaining to governance," remarked an FGD participant in Lira.

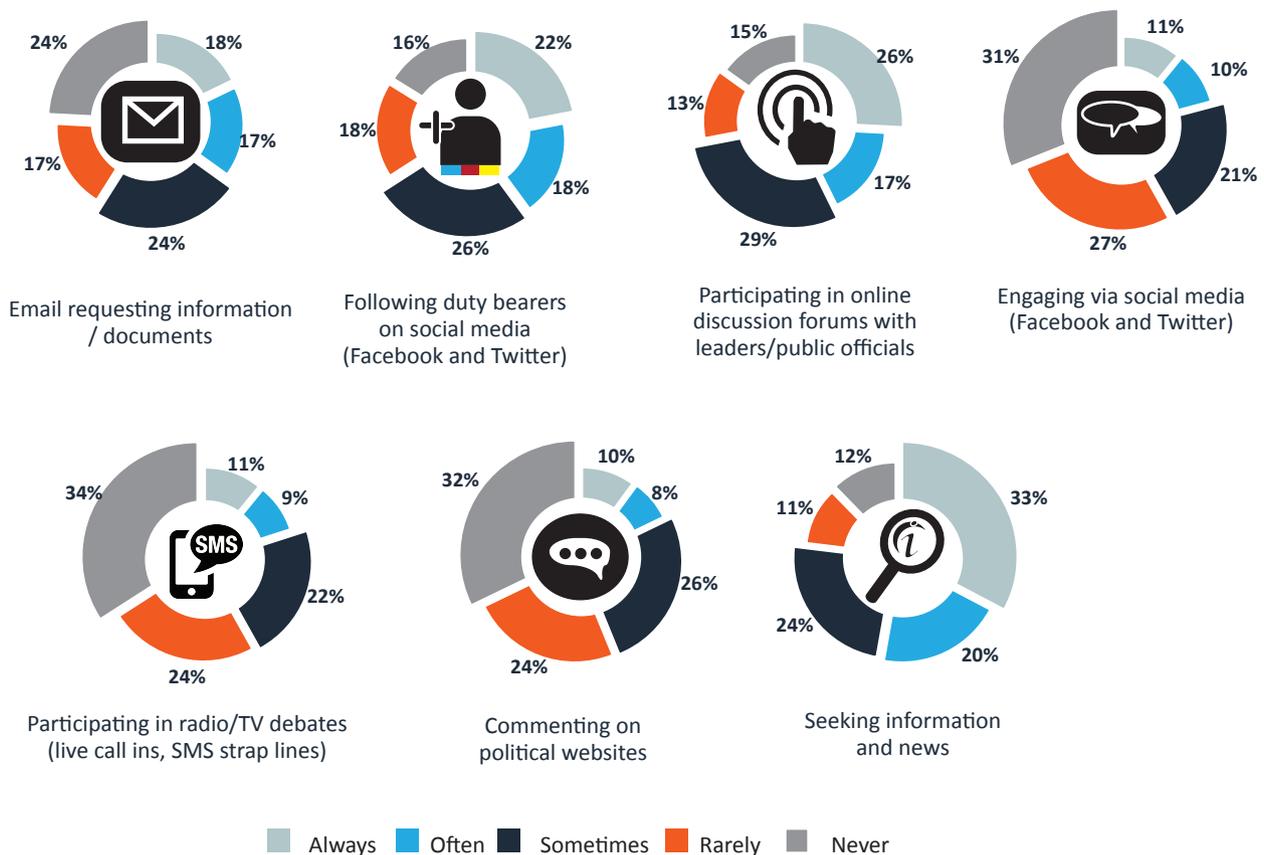
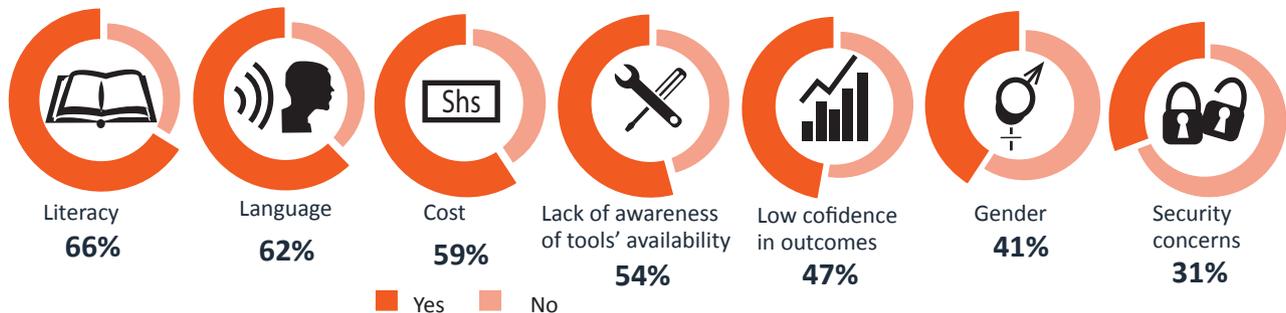


Figure 16: In what ways and how often do you use ICT to engage with duty bearers on issues of community or national concern (social, political, economic)?

Factors that hinder greater use of ICT to engage with other citizens

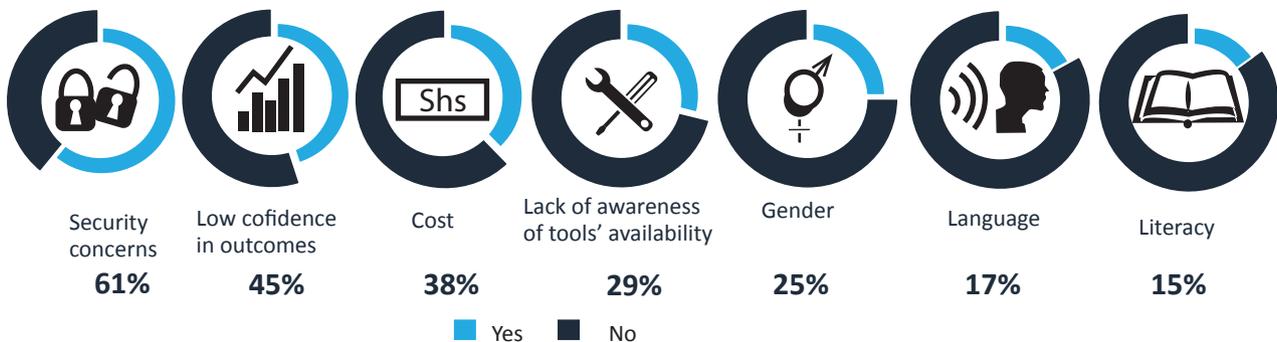
Illiteracy or the lack of knowledge and skills (66%) and language⁶ (62%) were indicated as the two main factors that hindered greater use of ICT to engage with fellow citizens. The third most hindering factor was cost at 59%. Lack of awareness of availability of tools was stated by 54% of respondents as being a hinderance. However, 69% of respondents did not feel that security concerns were hindering the use of ICT tools for engagement with citizens.



Figures 17: What factors hinder your greater use of ICT to engage with other citizens?

Factors that hinder greater use of ICT to engage with duty bearers

Regarding hinderances to greater use of ICT to engage with duty bearers, personal security concerns emerged top at 61%. This was followed by low confidence in getting feedback and responses at 45%. As with engagement with fellow citizens, cost of tools emerged as the third hindering factor.



Figures 18: What factors hinder your greater use of ICT to engage with duty bearers?

Other key factors included cultural and gender restrictions that were mentioned in Fort Portal as hindrances to challenging duty bearers. It was noted that traditionally leaders are not meant to be questioned thus making service delivery monitoring difficult in some communities. Meanwhile, a participant said women were left out of the governance debate as “men do not want to discuss democracy matters with women.”

There appeared to be some degree of ignorance when it came to citizens’ right of access to information. Focus group discussions revealed a level of ignorance on the internet based tools available for accessing information and how to productively utilize them to engage in civic debate, monitoring and governance participation.

The lack of political will to use certain tools such as social media in raising awareness and responding to issues on service delivery was also highlighted. Bureaucracy was highlighted as a limiting factor to the extent to which leaders can effectively interact with citizens. That is, some officials require authorisation before making public statements or comments.

A general lack of interest in using ICT by duty bearers in engaging with citizens was also mentioned. For instance a participant in Iganga shared that “Plan International brought computers to Tororo sub-country. Users weren’t interested in use beyond Facebook.” While in Fort Portal, another participant shared that the local government Facebook pages were mostly used to post information when there was a crisis.

6. Most of the ICT tools are programmed in English, which is not the native language for majority of the Ugandan population

CONCLUSIONS

From the findings and discussions above, a number of conclusions can be drawn.

Access to and utilisation of ICT has grown over the years, especially with the dawn of internet-enabled mobile phones. This has increased the number of platforms through which people can access and use the Internet and other ICT services, not only to communicate, but also to access news and demand information that enhances their participation in social, economic and political processes.

The findings show that some people have proactively utilised ICT to monitor and report on the performance of government projects and services, including demanding for accountability. This, they do in a variety of ways through making phone calls, sending email, interaction on social media platforms with the relevant duty bearers. However, the numbers of those utilising ICT are very few, and responses from duty bearers are often not forthcoming.

The research findings also show that the level of knowledge of, proficiency in, as well as the frequency in the use of ICT particularly SMS, social media and search engines is considerably high, which has contributed to the increased utilisation of ICT. It is, however, important that more people are equipped with the required skills in order to exploit the full potential that ICT bring.

The mainstream media, especially newspapers, radio and television continue to be the most trusted sources of information on governance and political matters. And despite its growth, ICT, specifically social media and internet search engines, are still ranked and treated with some level of scepticism as trusted sources of information and tools for monitoring, and sharing information on governance and political matters.

Among the key causes identified in the research for the limited utilisation of ICT in engaging with community members and duty bearers are the lack of knowledge and skills to navigate the different ICT applications, the high costs of accessing internet bundles, as well as the language (English) in which most of ICT tools and applications are designed. In addition, concerns were raised regarding the limited means of verifying the vast amounts of information shared online, as well as user safety and security online while accessing and sharing information.

The challenges to the effective use of ICT are not completely due to the ignorance of individuals and duty bearers but can also be attributed to the national socio-economic and infrastructure status which has compounded limitations on adequate education, access to electricity and limited training and awareness on the value and effective use of ICT use in remote and rural areas.

The research findings therefore serve to reemphasise the need to promote use of ICT tools for citizen participation in democratic processes and service delivery monitoring, especially in remote and rural areas. However, for this to happen, the survey identifies a couple of challenges that need to be addressed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the key research findings and conclusions, the following recommendations can be adduced.

1. There is need for continuous capacity building for ICT users with the knowledge and skills to innovatively and effectively make use of the available ICT platforms to share news and information as well as monitor the performance and demand for accountability from duty bearers.
2. Leaders and duty bearers should be encouraged and facilitated in building their capacity in ICT to increase their utilisation of the available ICT tools so as to promote openness and proactive disclosure of information on government activities and services, as well as improved engagement with local citizens.
3. Government agencies such as the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) and the National Information Technology Authority of Uganda (NITA-U) should work at reducing other structural barriers to access and utilisation of ICT. This includes but is not limited to subsidising costs for Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to extend coverage to remote areas, tariff plans, data packages and the cost of equipment such as mobile phone handsets and computers.
4. Government should consider the use of toll free numbers as a means to facilitate citizen participation in service delivery monitoring. The anonymity offered by toll free numbers and the fact that citizens can report without spending on airtime would serve to further promote the elevation of issues, especially in remote/rural settings.
5. Government together with other stakeholders should start providing information in multiple languages using multiple media platforms such as newspapers, radio, television alongside social media to enhance peoples' accessibility to relevant news and information.
6. Key steps to ensure online safety and security, including user identity protection and confidentiality of whistleblowers must be taken in order to increase the trust and confidence of those monitoring and reporting on government services and programmes.
7. There is need to start and/or build the capacity of civil society organisations to document and disseminate stories of change on how citizens are using ICT to monitor and report on government service delivery for learning and reference purposes.
8. Lastly, whereas this research has explored a better understanding of citizens' perceptions, attitudes and use of ICT in participation and democratic processes, continued research into this area needs to be conducted to further identify opportunities and gaps that may exist. This would facilitate improved access and the effective use of ICT in a manner that encourages accountability, good governance and civic agency.

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