The Use of Online Collaboration & Communication Tools by Civil Society Organizations in West Africa

March 2011

Survey by WiserEarth.org & Kabissa

Analysis written by Camilla Burg (WiserEarth), with assistance by Doudou Sy (WiserEarth) and Tobias Eigen (Kabissa)

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EARTH
The Social Network for Sustainability

www.WiserEarth.org

kabissa
space for
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ABOUT THE ORGANIZATIONS BEHIND THIS RESEARCH PAPER

WiserEarth (WE) is a collaborative social network for those involved in sustainability. WE's mission is to connect the global movement of people and organizations working toward a more just and sustainable world and to improve the sharing of knowledge and best practices.

Kabissa is an online platform where people and organizations working in Africa can showcase themselves and connect with each other for peer learning and information sharing.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to the organizations and people that helped to share this survey with their community: WiserEarth community members, Kabissa community members, Réseau Climat & Développement, LEAD Africa, the African Democracy Forum, TIC-EDU, Internet Sans Frontières and any others who have helped.

SURVEY CONTEXT

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) recognized that ICTs play a key role as "enablers" for sustainable development and for the reduction of poverty as set out in the Millennium Development Goals.

It is within this context of ICTs acting as 'enablers' that this research investigates how and why the internet is being used by civil society organizations in West Africa.

Specifically this report provides a broad picture of some of the trends and limitations relating to the use of internet-based collaboration and communication tools by organizations in the region.

INTRODUCTION

From early October to end November 2010, representatives of Kabissa and WiserEarth.org carried out research among civil society organizations in West Africa.

Their hope is that this research will help these two organizations, as well as others supporting civil society in the realm of ICT, to understand the needs on the ground and help set priorities.

In addition, they hope that this analysis will be combined with similar research by others to help build a broader picture that will enable civil society organizations to a) improve their strategies and b) benchmark their initiatives relating to how they use online tools for communication and collaboration.

The aggregate data from this survey is available as a free download at http://kb2.org/2010SurveyData for use by other researchers. If you decide to use the data and find it useful, we would like to hear about it. Thank you!

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2011**

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information about this survey, a copy of the questions or to give feedback, please contact Camilla Burg, WiserEarth's Communications & Outreach Director (camilla@wiserearth.org) or Tobias Eigen, Kabissa's Executive Director, (tobias@kabissa.org)

To join WiserWestAfrica Group on WiserEarth visit: http://fr.wiserearth.org/group/WiserWestAfrica
To join Kabissa visit: http://www.kabissa.org

SUMMARY

Lack of funding and infrastructure problems are the most critical issues that are limiting the use of internet-based online collaboration and communication tools among civil society organizations in West Africa (74% and 69% respectively). The lack of local internet connection points is also an important issue (53%).

For a large number of respondents, the **workplace is the main place which is being used for accessing the internet for work purposes** (45%). However, **Cybercafes also play an important role** in helping members of civil society organizations 'get online'; they are used as the main place for accessing the internet for work purposes by 34% of those answering the survey.

One third of respondents indicated that **inadequate training and skills are limiting their usage of these tools.**

- *These results point to a need to improve access to ICT funding as it provides a key way for civil society organizations to create, access and share information. Considerable investment in the development of the local telecommunications infrastructure and access points as well as increased training opportunities in West Africa are also central to helping civil society organizations build their capacity and drive greater efficiencies in meeting their missions.*

Organizational representatives within this survey spend quite a lot of time online; 76% of them are online every day. Since this research survey was conducted online, this result may not be surprising; however, it indicates that **internet access is essential for the day to day work of civil society organizations in West Africa.**

It should be noted that **much of the time spent online is for email usage**; 87% use email either every day or several times a week.

- *For online networks the still prevalent use of email means going back to basics and focusing on "going to people where they are" i.e. helping them to access information through email newsletters and listservs.*

SMS seems to be a preferred technology for respondents who work with civil society organizations (used frequently by 61%). Blogging is much less popular; it is used by 21% of respondents. 57% of those answering the survey indicated they rarely or never use blogs.

- *For online networks this means that organizations are likely to prefer receiving SMS notifications to help them abreast of the latest information and news.*

- *Better information and training around the benefits of blogging to raise awareness and visibility for the work of civil society organizations may be needed*

Facebook is the **most popular social network** among respondents. Nearly half the people surveyed use Facebook. This further **confirms** the **global market dominance of this commercial platform.**

- *For online networks and organizations, this may mean needing to reach out to ones community via Facebook.*

- *Creating opportunities to share best practices, benefits and concerns relating to relying on Facebook both privately and for organizational purposes is an important priority.*

With regards to the disadvantages of using social networks for work, there was general **concern about security and privacy issues**. Many believe that information shared online can be easily misused. Another concern of respondents was the potential misuse of the tools resulting in **social networks being a waste of time.**

This may indicate the need for those involved supporting ICT initiatives to address the following areas:

1) privacy and security concerns
2) avoiding spammers/scammers
3) information overload and time management
4) cost effective use of technology

On the other hand, a large number of positive benefits were cited relating to the use of social networks. For example, the ability to **communicate, maintain and create contacts** (such as partners, funders, volunteers, co-workers as well as friends).

Respondents mentioned that social networks **facilitate the dissemination of a wide variety of information to a large audience and improve one's visibility among supporters and donors**.

A number of respondents believe that social networks help to **support collaboration, speed up projects and enable the sharing of best practices**. They also have the **potential to empower people within civil society organizations if used correctly.**

Results show that a **high number of respondents have learnt about technology and the Internet through being self-taught** (39%). Others learn about how to use technology through work colleagues or friends (41%). **Few have been involved in professional training programs** (16%). The spread of access to professional technology/ICT training programs remains more or less the same regardless of whether the respondent works for a large or small organization.

- *Civil society organizations need access to ways to help them improve their ability to use the internet in their work. (for example, self-learning materials or programs).*
- *User-friendly interfaces and high standards of usability are essential given the high level of self-training.*

Raising awareness (21%), improving learning/education (21%), and saving resources (time, energy, paper) (21%) were all mentioned equally as being the most important benefits brought by the use of the Internet. Saving money and helping to connect with new funding sources was mentioned by 14% of respondents. Helping to find employees or volunteers was least mentioned (9% of all responses).

- *Capacity-building is needed to leverage the benefits that can be achieved by using the internet to further and improve the efficiencies and capacity of civil society organizations.*

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RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

The following limitations should be noted:

This research focuses more on establishing trends that are taking place in the region rather than making direct comparisons between country-to-country practices for which the sample sizes would have needed to be higher. This report attempts to provide a summary of key findings with a focus on the use of online communication and collaboration tools in West Africa.

Data was collected using 2 web-based questionnaires which were created in French and English on a website called SurveyMonkey. (http://www.surveymonkey.com). We recognize that this may create some bias in the results since this methodology precluded representatives of civil society organizations who are not yet using the Internet for their work. Moreover, many of the respondents who were invited to take the survey are members of WiserEarth.org or Kabissa online networks. This may mean that respondents are likely to be more familiar with the use of social networks.

With a total of 149 completed surveys, the sample size is limited. The data provided here, therefore, should be regarded as purely illustrative. Moreover, the use of information technology is constantly evolving in Africa. This means that there is a host of new developments taking place every day. This report provides a 'snapshot' of what is happening at a specific time, therefore this data will become outdated very quickly.

METHODOLOGY

There were 15 different countries involved in the research study: Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone, The Gambia, Cape Verde, Mali, Togo, Benin, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Guinea Bissau, Niger, Guinea and Senegal.

Respondents from other African regions also took part in the study as they often cited that they were involved in pan-African initiatives which included work in West Africa. We have included these responses in the overall analysis.
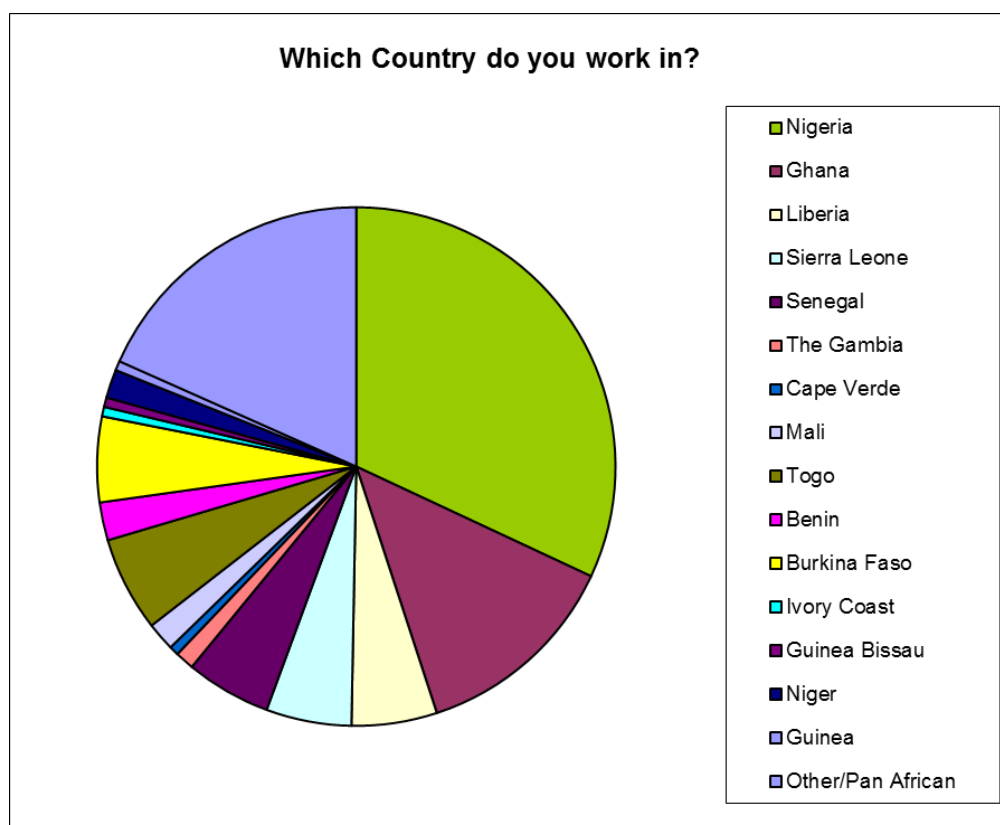
The population sampled included members of the Kabissa and WiserEarth networks based in West Africa, as well as members from similar networks such as Réseau Climat & Développement, LEAD Africa, the African Democracy Forum, TIC-EDU among others.
Links to the survey were sent to members of these networks via email, online newsletters, group messages and through FaceBook and Twitter. Respondents were invited to take the survey in either French or English.

About half of the respondents heard about the survey from Kabissa and half through WiserEarth. A handful of respondents heard about the survey directly through the other participating networks.

139 people answered the English version of the survey with a total of 109 people completing every question of the survey. 48 people answered the French version of the survey with a total of 40 people completing every question of the survey. This gave us a total of 187 responses with 149 fully completed surveys in English or French. The French and English results have been combined to provide an overall picture of what is happening in West Africa.

## SECTION 1 : ORGANIZATIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS

We looked at where organizations are located both at a country level and whether they work in a rural or non-rural area. We looked at the number of employees, languages used and the type of organization as well as the job title of respondents.

Which Country do you work in?

Legend: Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Senegal, The Gambia, Cape Verde, Mali, Togo, Benin, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Guinea Bissau, Niger, Guinea, Other/Pan African

### Question 1: Which country do you work in?

Respondents come from Nigeria (32%), Ghana (13%), Togo (6%), Liberia, Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso and Senegal (each respectively 5%). Other countries which were represented by a few people include; The Gambia, Cape Verde, Mali, Benin, Ivory Coast, Guinea Bissau, Guinea, Niger.

18% of responses came from people who are working in the region but not necessarily within one of these countries; a common responses was 'Pan-African'. We have decided to include these answers in the survey as we are looking for general trends in the region rather than specific country-level comparisons.
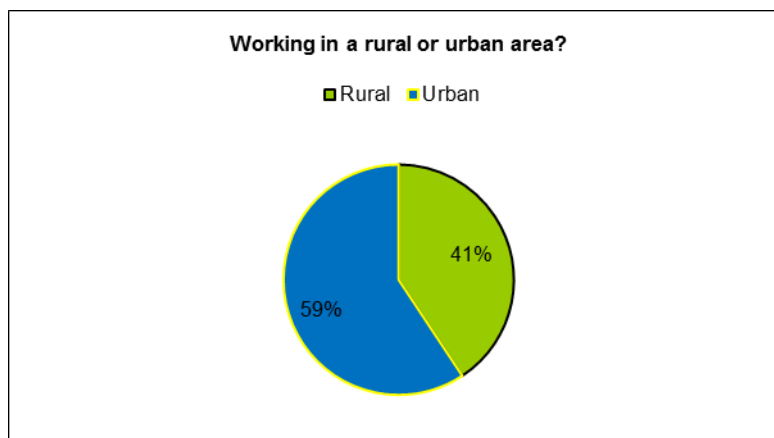
Question 2. Are you working in a rural (e.g. village) or an urban area?

Slightly more than half of all respondents work in an urban setting (59%). This compares to 41% of respondents who said that they work in a rural setting.
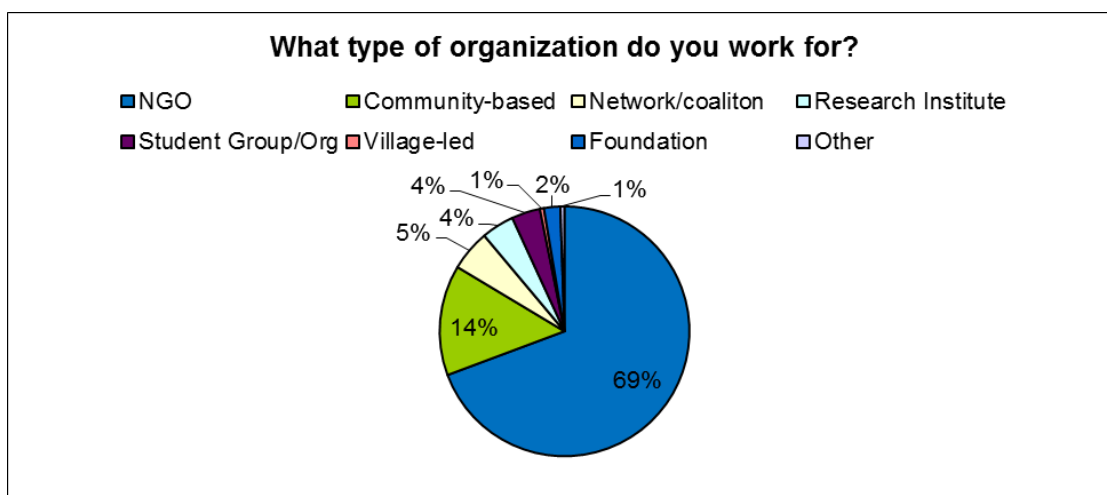
## Question 3: What type of organization do you work for?

The majority of respondents work for an NGO (69%). 'Other types' of organizations and community-based organizations were represented by 16% and 14% of respondents respectively. Organizations cited in the 'other' category included universities, youth led, peace corps, orphanages and institutes.

How large is your organization?
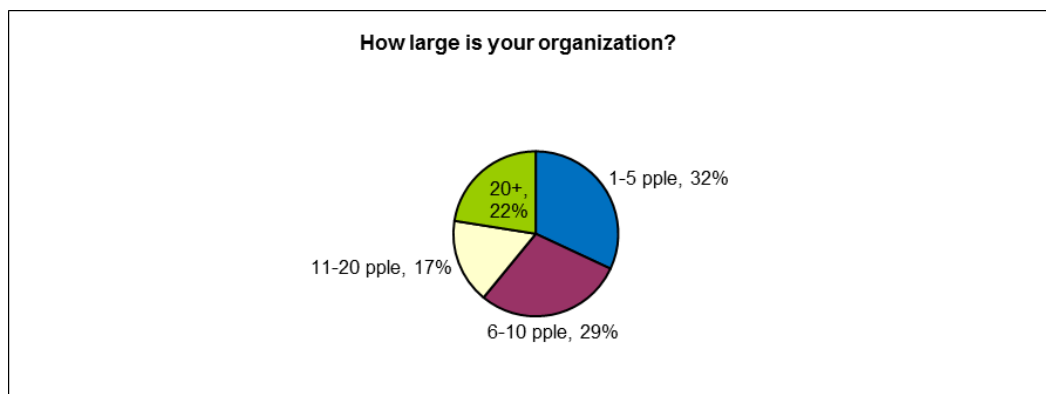
Question 4: How large is your organization?

The majority of respondents work for organizations with less than 10 employees (61%). Organizations with 11-20 staff were represented by 17% of respondents, and with more than 20 full-time staff by 22% of the respondents.

When asked about the number of volunteers within their organizations, many respondents indicated that they depend heavily on volunteers. This indicates the critical role of volunteers within civil society organizations in West Africa.

What is your role in your organization?
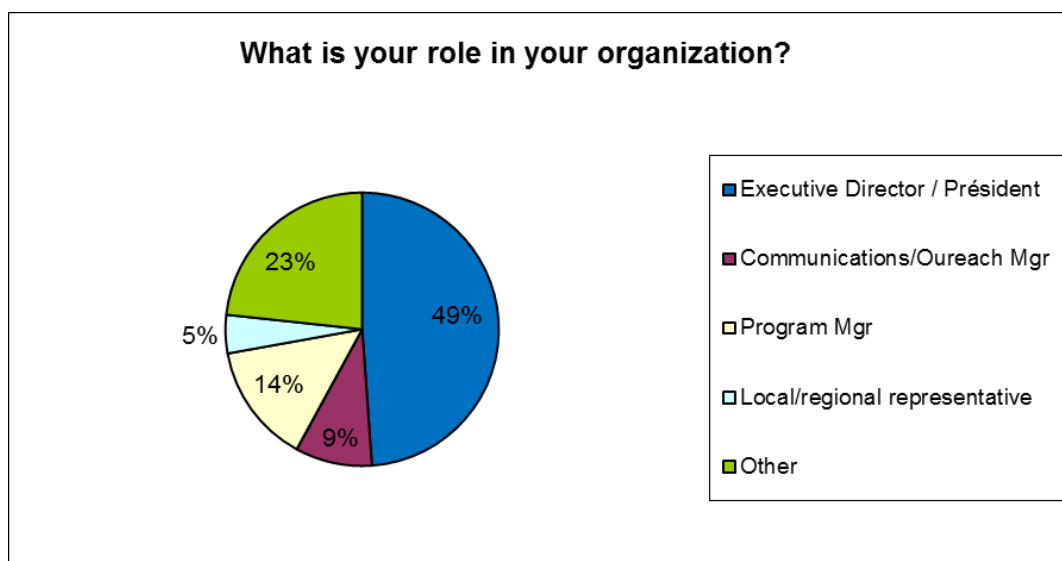
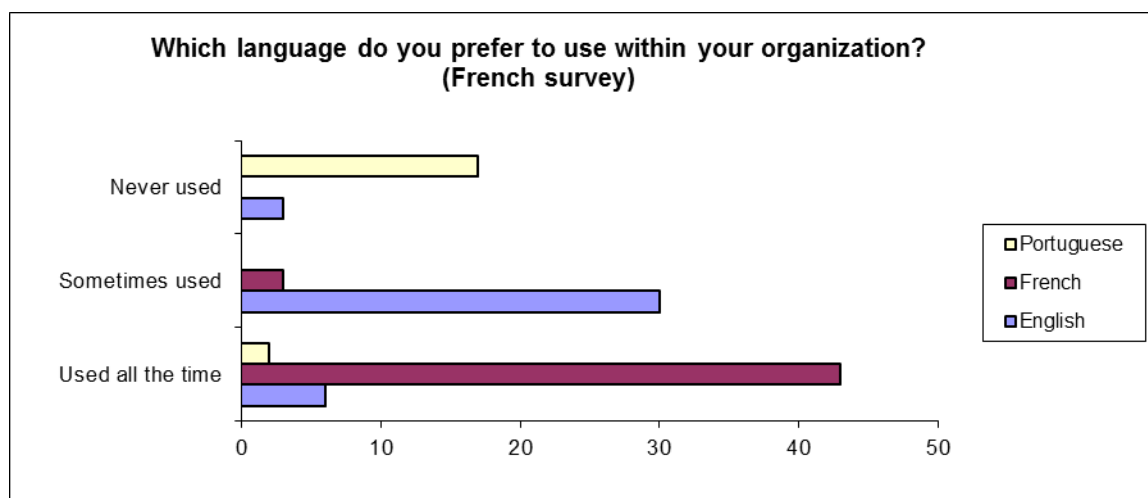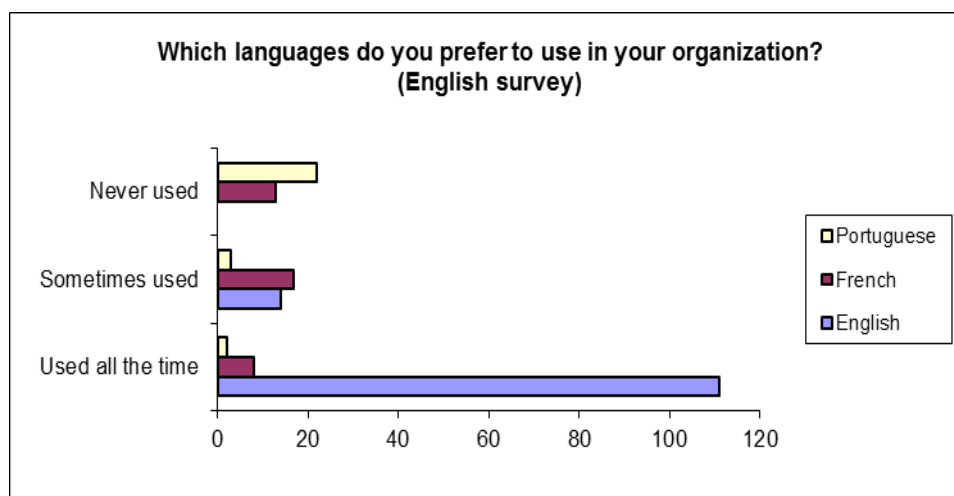## Question 5: What is your role within your organization?

The majority of people answering the survey were Executive Directors of civil society organizations (49%). Remaining categories included 'Other' mentioned by 3% of respondents. Respondents who answered 'other' mentioned: Board member, PA, field officer, team leader, consultant, special advisor and director.

Communications/Outreach Managers (9%), Program Managers (14%), and Local/Regional Representatives (5%) round out the remaining occupations among respondents.

Question 6: Which languages do you prefer to use for communication within your organisation?

Unsurprisingly, English is the main language of work for those answering the English version of the survey and was cited by the majority of English-speaking respondents living in English speaking areas of West Africa (for example, Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone, The Gambia). French was mentioned by some respondents as being sometimes used. Portuguese is rarely used by civil society organizations in the region.

French is the language used at work for those answering the French version of the survey with the majority 'using French all the time'. English is described as 'sometimes used' by quite a few of the of respondents. Portuguese is used by a very small group of respondents.

Which languages do you prefer to use in your organization? (English survey)

Which language do you prefer to use within your organization? (French survey)
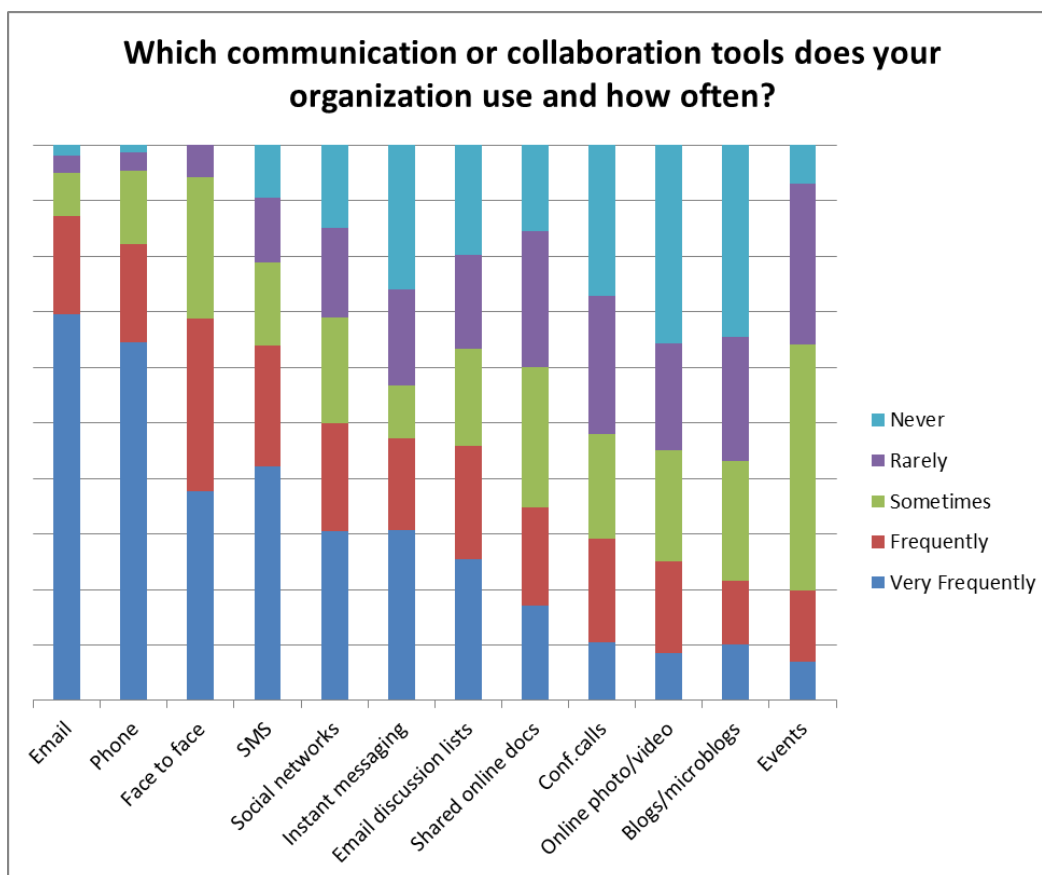
Other languages used (English survey): Hausa (most popular), Yoruba (mentioned a number of times), as well as Krio, Wolof, German, Spanish, Lamnso, Ewe, Swedish, Hungarian, Mwaghavul, Mende
Other languages used (French survey): German, Spanish, Arabic, Poulaas, Wolof, Moore (most mentioned), Gul Macema, Hausa, Swahili

SECTION 2: THE USE OF COMMUNICATION & COLLABORATION TOOLS

An exploration into how organizations are using communication and collaboration tools was carried out in the survey.

Which communication or collaboration tools does your organization use and how often?

Legend:
- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Frequently
- Very Frequently

Categories: Email, Phone, Face to face, SMS, Social networks, Instant messaging, Email discussion lists, Shared online docs, Conf.calls, Online photo/video, Blogs/microblogs, Events

Question 7: Which communication or collaboration tools does your organization use and how often?

When asked what type of communication and collaboration tools people are using within their organization and how often, there was general consensus that email is still the most important communication/collaboration tool among civil society representatives. 87% either use it very frequently (every day) or frequently (several times a week). Only 5% use it rarely or never.

While phone and face to face meetings are still important (80% and 70% using these forms of communication frequently), it appears that they are being replaced by new technologies such as SMS. The research indicates that 61% of all respondents use SMS (text messaging) every day or several times a week. 20% of respondents never or rarely use SMS.

Social networks are generally highly rated in this survey with 50% using social networks either every day or several times a week (this may not be surprisingly as many respondents were

invited through the WiserEarth and Kabissa networks). 31% said that they rarely or never use social networks.

Online photos/video sharing services and blogs appear to be the least used online tools with only 24% using photo/video services and 21% using blogs. Many respondents have either never used these tools or are using them very rarely. (53% & 56% respectively).
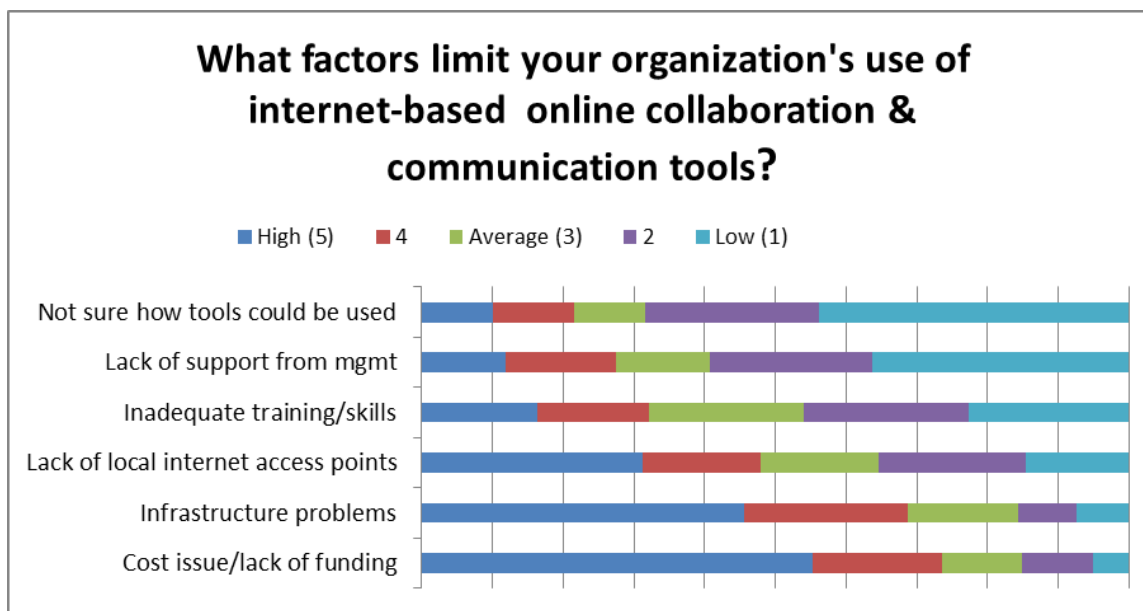
Online conference calls are sometimes used by civil society organizations with 31% saying they use these tools every day or a few times a week. However, the majority of respondents (56%) said that they rarely or never use them. Wikis and shared online documents are used slightly more often (37%). 43% of respondents have never or rarely use online document sharing such as wikis.

Email is the most popular form of communication, more than phone, face to face or text messaging.

However, online tools such as social networks, email discussions and SMS are also being used within West African civil society organizations.

The chart below shows the usage of the communication or collaboration tools which are either used at work very frequently (once a day) or frequently (once a week).

1. Email	Very frequently/frequently: 87% Rarely/never used: 5%
2. Phone	Very frequently/frequently: 80% Rarely/never used:4%
3. Face to Face	Very frequently/frequently: 70% Rarely/never used: 6%
4. SMS	Very frequently/frequently: 61% Rarely/never used: 20%
5. Social networks	Very frequently/frequently: 50% Rarely/never used: 31%
6. Instant messaging	Very frequently/frequently: 44% Rarely/never used: 35%
7. Email discussion lists	Very frequently/frequently: 42% Rarely/never used: 39%
8. Shared documents	Very frequently/frequently: 37% Rarely/never used: 43%
9.Conference/video calls	Very frequently/frequently: 31% Rarely/never used: 56%
10. Online photos/videos	Very frequently/frequently: 24% Rarely/never used: 53%
11.Blogs/microblogs	Very frequently/frequently: 21% Rarely/never used: 56%
12.Events (live)	Very frequently/frequently: 20% Rarely/never used: 37%

What factors limit your organization's use of internet-based online collaboration & communication tools?

Legend: High (5), 4, Average (3), 2, Low (1)

Categories (top to bottom):
- Not sure how tools could be used
- Lack of support from mgmt
- Inadequate training/skills
- Lack of local internet access points
- Infrastructure problems
- Cost issue/lack of funding

Question 8: What factors limit your organization's use of internet-based online collaboration & communication tools?
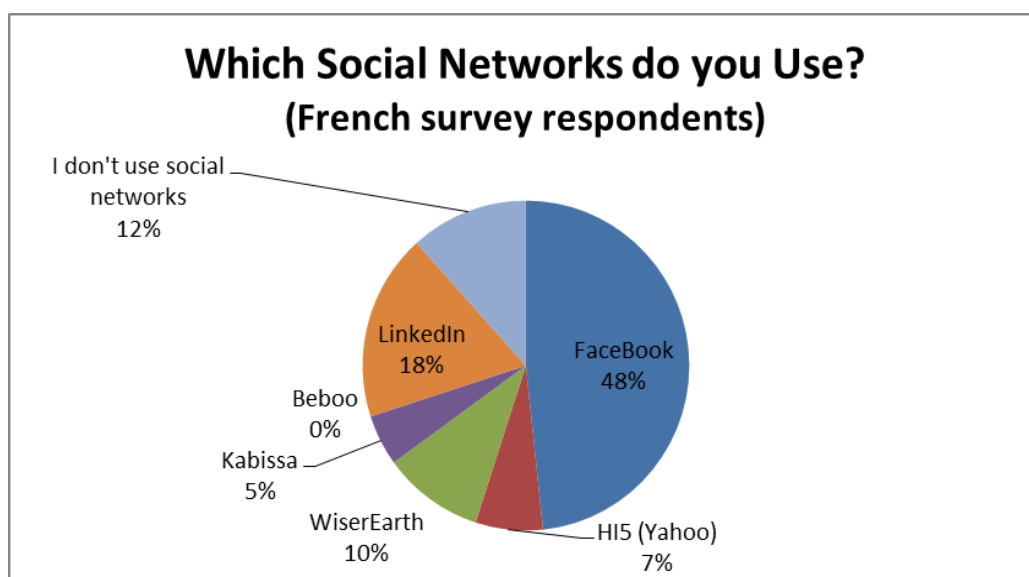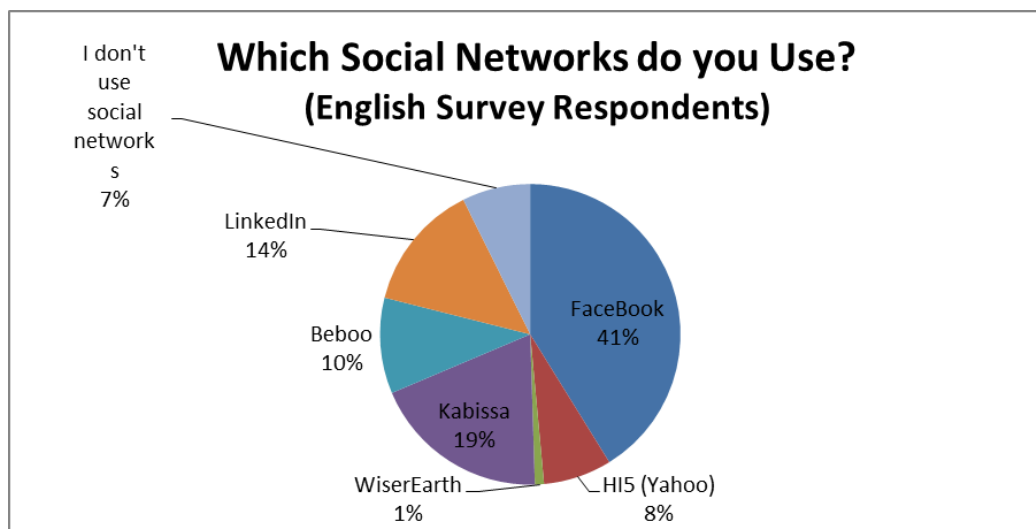
In relation to the factors which limit the use of the internet within organizations in West Africa, lack of funding (or cost-related issues) was cited as being the most critical issue. Cited by 74% of respondents as being high (5) or relatively high (4).

Infrastructure problems were cited as being next in terms of importance (70%) followed by lack of local internet connection points (48%) (cited as either high (5) or relatively high (4)).

Inadequate training and skills were rated as a limiting factor by almost ⅓ of respondents. Lack of support by management was cited by 29% of respondents in terms of its relative importance in terms of limiting internet usage.

28% of respondents answered that 'not knowing how these online tools could be used' was a limiting factor.

*Respondents cited **lack of funding and infrastructure issues** as important factors in limiting their use of the internet for their organization's work.*

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Which Social Networks do you Use?
(English Survey Respondents)

I don't use social networks 7%

LinkedIn 14%

Beboo 10%

Kabissa 19%

WiserEarth 1%

FaceBook 41%

HI5 (Yahoo) 8%

Which Social Networks do you Use?
(French survey respondents)

I don't use social networks 12%

LinkedIn 18%

Beboo 0%

Kabissa 5%

WiserEarth 10%

FaceBook 48%

HI5 (Yahoo) 7%

Question 9: Which social networks do you use (if any)?

In terms of the usage of social networks, FaceBook came out as the clear leader. It is used by 43% of respondents (both French and English surveys combined).

LinkedIn is used by 18% and 14% of survey respondents (French and English respectively). Kabissa is used by 19% of English survey respondents and 5% of French survey respondents.

WiserEarth is used by 10% of French survey respondents and 1% of English speaking respondents.

Beboo is used by 10% of English survey respondents, but none of the French survey respondents. HI5 by 7% and 10% (respectively).

We also asked respondents to name other social networks they are using in addition to this list. These included: Xing, Viadeo, Twitter (mentioned by a number of respondents), Orkut,

Wikimedia, Peace Collaborative Network, GWX, Viadeo, MySpace YahooGroup, Blogspot, Blog4ever, Ning, Ammado, Blackplanet, Nabuur.com, SKYPE among others

The results indicate a significant fragmentation of the social media landscape, with many online networks being used (or perhaps being tested) by organizational representatives. However, FaceBook is a clear leader in this space with more than 500 million active users worldwide and is clearly being used by those working in the civil society arena in West Africa.

Question 10. What do you think are the advantages (if any) of using social networks (such as FaceBook) in terms of collaboration & communication?

For many respondents, the ability to **communicate, maintain and create contacts** (including partners, funders, volunteers, co-workers as well as friends) is a key advantage of social networks. Facilitating the dissemination of a wide variety of information to a large audience and improving one's visibility among supporters and donors was also an important advantage. In addition, some respondents believe that social networks can support collaboration, speed up projects, the sharing of best practices and can empower people within organizations if used correctly.

Other comments mentioned include the ability to help set up projects, share with others working on similar projects, archive data and facilitate group work as well as the fact that the tools are cheap and fast.

Here are a few comments made by respondents:

"Large audience, easy to use, fast and efficient"

"Meeting different people, (making) connections, exposure, discovery of new ideas"

"It gives you the opportunity of knowing what people around the globe are doing and how they are doing them"

"Very useful and timely, particularly a new initiative like our organization OHCI that will be officially launched/registered in Freetown, Sierra Leone"

"Help connect you to funders around the world. Connect you with volunteer that will help you push your work forward. Connect you with friends…"

"Social networks are educative tool for sustainable development in Africa"

"You can reach a wide network of people not only within your organization and NGO circles but also Africans fortunate enough to have Internet access. It has great potential to share ideas across cultural and political boundaries"

"There are a lot of benefits especially to WE in Africa, because it will enable us to get access to the larger developed communities and will greatly enhance speedy growth in developing countries"

And some responses from French-speaking participants:

"permet d'échanger et de rester en contact en permanence »

"gain en visibilité auprès du grand public, des donateurs individuels potentiels, des adhérents, bénévoles, supporters de l'association bien"

"cela permet de faire publier les avis et communiqués et les évènement le plus rapidement possible".

"lier des partenariats avec d'autres groupes intervenant dans le même domaine"

"Mettre les gens en contact autour des projets"

Question 11. What do you think are the disadvantages (if any) of using social networks (such as FaceBook) in terms of collaboration & communication?

When asked about the disadvantages (if any) of using social networks, in terms of collaboration or communication, there was a more limited variety of responses in comparison to the question about the advantages of such networks.

Concerns mostly related to the lack of privacy and security issues were most frequently cited as key disadvantages in the use of social networks. The greatest worry is around potential abuse by scammers and spammers.

The cost of using these tools as well as the time needed to use them was a concern (i.e. being too time consuming). It is believed that they could adversely affect the productivity of people working in an organization with little value being added. Providing unreliable information was also cited as a disadvantage.

Some of the comments included:

" I hate FaceBook Too much gimmicky stuff. Too much stuff expecting responses from me. The information flows don't comfortably reflect or enable the information flows within (and in and out from) my organisations"

"you …meet lot of unreal people who may pretend to be helpful to your organization as well as providing you with unreliable information"

"I suggest that NGOS and sustainable ICT tools find its way of reaching the rural folks. We can use cellphone as a tool"

"Many people use the social networks mislead others. They post false information that put people into problem."

"The disadvantage is when other visitors send mails all the time and most of these mails are irrelevant to what one is engaged in"

"The disadvantages are: Meet with internet fraud browser. Very expensive to use in Africa mostly Sierra Leone. Required some technical experience by users. Lack of fund to have one (access) at home."

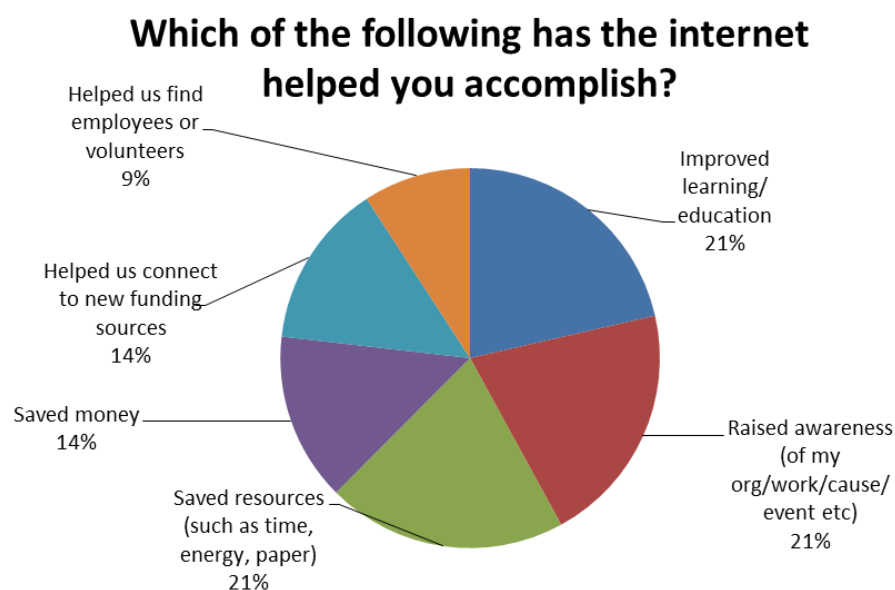*"Workers spent too much time on it, allowing low productivity in the office."*

And in French:

"Votre vie privée est étalée et vous risquez dès fois d'avoir des problèmes d'ordre professionnel si vous émettez des opinions sur vos responsables"

"En général mauvaise réputation des services sociaux en ce qui concerne des échanges sérieux, professionnels"

"Le manque de confidentialité dans le partage des documents assez importants tels les projets et rapports. Il y a aussi et surtout le risque de détournement des idées partagées avec les autres organisations"

"Manque de préservation de la vie privée"

Ensuring that online networks are not abused by spammers and scammers are critical for those working with online communities in order to build trust among members

Which of the following has the internet helped you accomplish?

Helped us find employees or volunteers
9%

Helped us connect to new funding sources
14%

Saved money
14%

Saved resources (such as time, energy, paper)
21%

Improved learning/ education
21%

Raised awareness (of my org/work/cause/ event etc)
21%

Question 12. Which of the following has the internet helped you to accomplish?

We were interested in finding out what the internet specifically has helped civil society organizations to accomplish.
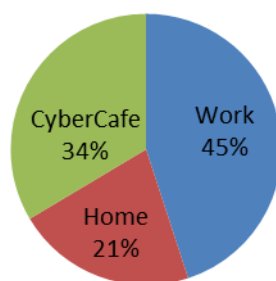
Raising awareness, improving learning/education, and saving resources (time, energy, paper) were all mentioned equally (21% of combined survey answers). Saving money and helping to connect with new funding sources was mentioned by 14% of respondents. Helping to find employees or volunteers was least mentioned of benefits (9% of all responses).

Quote by one survey respondent:

"Une bonne partie du travail se passe sur la toile: soumission de propositions de projets, soumission de conférences,…"

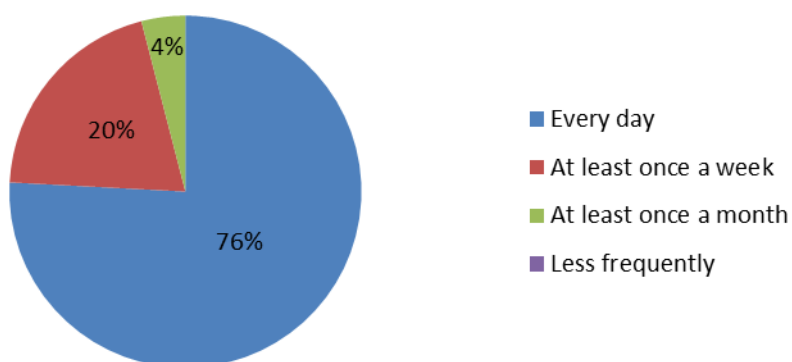*Translation: "a large amount of work is now done on the web; submission of project proposal, conference submissions …"*

Question 13. What is the primary place that you use for accessing the internet for organisational/work purposes?

For a large number of respondents, the workplace is the main place which is used for accessing the internet for work purposes. However, Cybercafes also play an important role in helping members of civil society organizations 'get online' (mentioned by 34% of those answering the surveys). Home was mentioned by 21% of respondents.

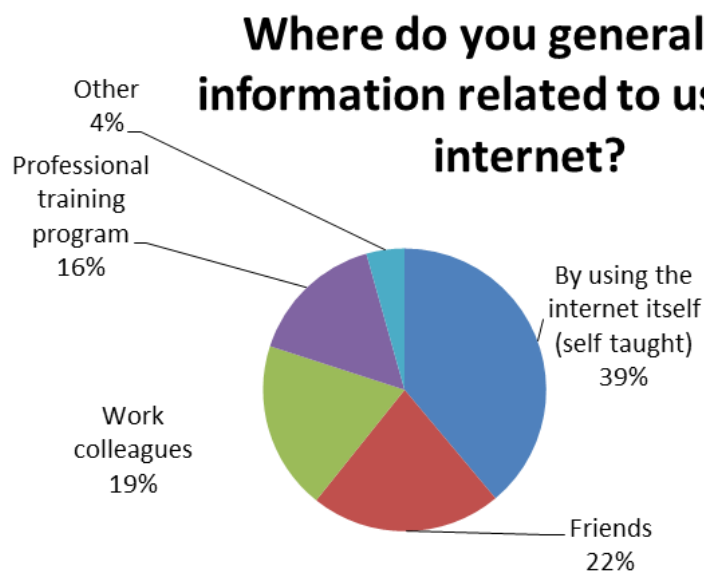## Question 14. How often do you access the internet?

In terms of access to the internet, 76% of respondents mentioned that they go online every day. Since this research survey was conducted online, these responses are not be surprising, however, it indicates that internet access is essential for the day to day work of civil society organizations in West Africa. Only 4% of respondents access the internet only 'once a month'.

What type of internet connection do you have?
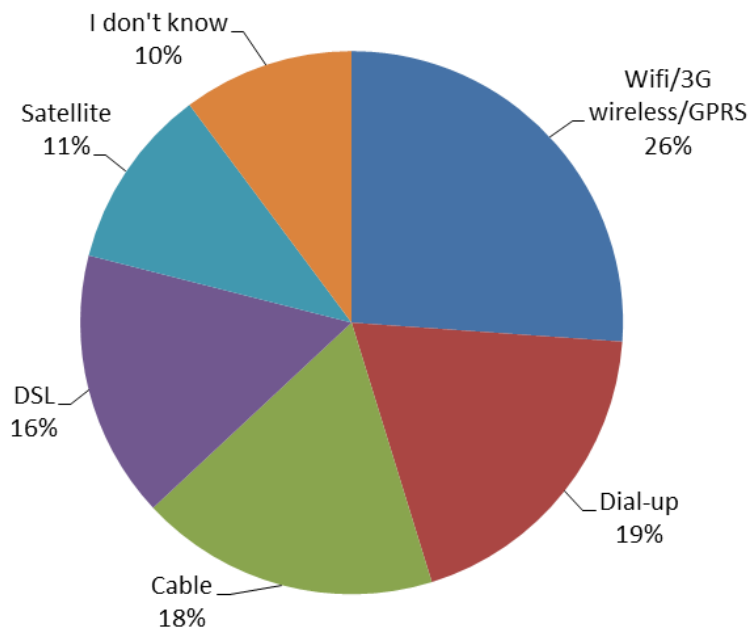
Question 15. What type of internet connection do you have when you are working with your organization?

Most respondents use a wide variety of connections to the internet, with Wifi/3G wireless/GPRS being the most popular (26%), followed by dial-up (19%), cable (18%), DSL (16%) and satellite (11%)

Where do you generally get information related to using the internet?

Other
4%

Professional
training
program
16%

By using the
internet itself
(self taught)
39%

Work
colleagues
19%

Friends
22%

Question 16. Where do you generally get information related to using the internet or new technologies?

When asked about where respondents gather internet and technology related information, most respondents cited that they were self-taught (39%). Friends (22%) and work colleagues (19%) are also an important source of information about the internet and technology uses. Professional training programs were cited by 16% of organizations.

Interestingly, larger organizations (over 20 employees) did not have greater access to professional training than smaller-sized organizations. Other sources of information include family members, online forums, 'people helping me online', technicians, affiliate organizations and Google search.

FURTHER RESEARCH

Further research is needed to ask more in-depth questions which were not answered by this survey. For example;

How to define success in terms of the use of online communication and collaboration tools for civil society organizations in different countries and regions of Africa ?

How can online tools be made more accessible and useful to civil society organizations ?

How are organizational goals and tactics impacted by the adoption of these new online tools and how can this impact be shaped in constructive ways ?

In carrying out these studies, attention should be paid to ensure that a diverse sample of organizations with different budgets, issue focus, regional focus and their stakeholders

In this research, there was no distinction made between the use of social networks for personal use versus private use. We recommend that future research hone in on this question.

Anecdotal research suggests that there is a significant gap in terms of the knowledge and use of ICT by men and women. We recommend further research into the use of technology among women.

Training: face to face and online

The creation of opportunities to help address the needs relating to how to use online tools which advance the mission and grassroots action of civil society organizations is needed.

For example; How can civil society organizations use technology to help leverage efforts taking place at a grassroots level? How can technology be used to create awareness and greater visibility for efforts and how does this change based on the issues or audiences being served by an organization? What are the best practices being used today by civil society organizations relating to the use of ICT?

Training information should be more accessible to all, for example, in the form of online tutorials, e-learning programs & webcasts. Further support could be a list of organizations and people that could provide support for ICT learning and online training to civil society organizations wanting to get the most out of online tools.

Additional research that could support such initiatives could investigate what and where training is needed to help civil society organizations get the most of the opportunities offered by online tools?

Peer-to-peer support and knowledge management infrastructure

Supporting the needs of civil society in between training seems to be an important component in further developing capacity among organizations in Africa.

Web sites such as WiserEarth.org and Kabissa are well equipped to support online collaboration, the sharing of best practices and co-creation of projects among individuals and groups working at both a grassroots and international level. However, further efforts need to be made by both

organizations to ensure that non-tech savvy organizations are able to use the tools that are available. Face-to-face training for civil society organizations is likely to be needed to help organizers to integrate online collaboration tools such as these into the workplace.

Greater focus needs to be made on developing searchable and independent directories of best practices and implementation guidelines for civil society organizations which will help organizers to understand what options are available to them, what works and how to choose the best technology options to suit their objectives.

Overcoming the Digital Divide

This study further underlines the challenges relating to the technology infrastructure in Africa. Significant on the ground work is needed to continue to address the massive digital divide that exists between Africa and developed countries in the West. More knowledge needs to be shared around how and where commercial and nonprofit organizations working in ICT in Africa can collaborate to further reduce the digital divide.

Overcoming the language divide

Unsurprisingly, English is the main language of work for organizations in English speaking West Africa. However, most French organizations, while they use mostly French, have also integrated the use of English into their operations. How can organizations with different cultural backgrounds but who need or have valuable knowledge to share around best practices overcome the language barriers?

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information about this survey, a copy of the questions or to give feedback, please contact Camilla Burg, WiserEarth's Communications & Outreach Director (camilla@wiserearth.org) or Tobias Eigen, Kabissa's Executive Director, (tobias@kabissa.org)

To join WiserWestAfrica Group on WiserEarth visit: http://fr.wiserearth.org/group/WiserWestAfrica
To join Kabissa visit: http://www.kabissa.org