

## Web 2.0



**Ednah Karamagi** is Executive Director at the Busoga Rural Open Source and Development Initiative (BROSDI), an NGO working to improve rural livelihoods through the use of ICTs. With a background in community development, she is firmly convinced of the importance of extending appropriate emerging technologies into rural areas.

# ICT tools in action

**The new generation of Web 2.0 tools can play a major role in helping small-scale producers share knowledge and improve marketing prospects. Ednah Karamagi, one of a team in Uganda committed to pushing out the ICT frontiers, describes some of the creative ways on-line applications can help farmers to boost production and sell their produce for a better price.**

Web 2.0 offers various networking and collaboration tools to address personal, organisational and community needs. At BROSDI ([www.brosdi.org](http://www.brosdi.org)), we have embraced the trend, using many Web 2.0 tools to reach out to our target groups.

Our agriculture, education and health programmes each have a blog. The health blog is a platform where people share information on reproductive health and HIV/AIDS issues. The education blog enables orphaned children to talk about the challenges they face, their views, successes and future dreams. Meanwhile, on the agricultural blog, farmers share their knowledge and post content on agricultural topics. For each of the blogs, two-way communication is possible.

## Sharing information

These blogs are one of the sources of information disseminated through weekly SMSs sent out by our CELAC project (Collecting and Exchange of Local Agricultural Content). This initiative uses ICTs to collect useful agricultural information from farmers and distribute it to others who might find it helpful. CELAC has recently installed a Web-to-Phone tool, which farmers can use to share information freely, with up to 10 people at a time. This service can be accessed from the project website, [www.celac.or.ug](http://www.celac.or.ug). Another knowledge-sharing method we use is podcasts. Farmers who are knowledgeable about a given subject make recordings, currently in local languages, though we plan to add English at a later stage. These are then turned into audio CDs and distributed to other farmers, who have received CD players from BROSDI. Copies of these recordings are also uploaded on the CELAC website.

Our most recent information-sharing tool is [www.filesanywhere.com](http://www.filesanywhere.com). This has been a real eye-opener. We are using it to upload various categories of information from different sources, including digital world space radio. The information will be available on-line to the public as soon as we have completed the process. We use Picasa and Flickr on-line photo albums to share images of our field activities.

## Direct market linkage

We are currently using Google maps to relay agricultural information in the districts where the CELAC project is implemented. This offers information about the district where we work. Now we

are taking it to the next stage where we will place valuable information about farmers' harvests on-line, including contact phone numbers. This link will be advertised directly to potential buyers.

At our BROSDI centre in Mayuge, we give computer lessons. The Internet has a lot of information and one needs to know where to look for it. Joseph Mulopi, a farmer in Mayuge district, grew cabbages, but after each harvest, which was once a year, he sold the cabbages for UG SHS 100 (less than €0.50) irrespective of the size. Mulopi took advantage of our training, searched the Internet and got the telephone number of a buyer in one of the Kampala markets. Today, he produces cabbages all year round, which he sells at UG SHS 300/kg (€1.25) to his contact. He has also managed to convince three of his friends to grow cabbages, which he buys from

*A cocktail of tools is the way forward*

them for resale. By using Google maps, we hope to do even more to cut out the middlemen. With this tool, the buyers will know what the farmers have produced and using the contact phone numbers placed there, they will be able to get in touch with the farmers directly.

In-house, we use a wiki as an internal planning tool for training. We also use Yahoo! and Skype for monthly and ad hoc meetings. In a community programme like ours, it is important that the team is well organised. These tools are important to us because team members are often in the field and yet we need to communicate and discuss frequently. I should also mention that no single tool can work independently. Projects need to be in touch with the emerging technologies and creatively adopt those within their means. A cocktail of tools is the way forward. ■

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See Dossier on *The second generation Web* (Spore 129)

*The opinions expressed in Viewpoint are those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the views of CTA.*

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