Electronic Infrastructure

By Albert Ngosa, Senior Information Communications Technology Officer

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The Gender Links Information Technology (IT) Department is responsible for the establishment of information technology (IT) policy and planning, for IT procurement and contracts, and for providing the computing and telecommunications infrastructure for all information systems technologies within the organisation. This report reflects the continuing evolution of Information Technology mission and the activities conducted by this organisation for the year 2015.

Importance of IT to GL work

IT is an important tool to optimise GL operations and conduct information exchange. IT has proven beneficial in knowledge and experience sharing both internally and externally. It enhances the effectiveness of organisational processes and systems. IT reduces distance and has the potential to multiply the number of beneficiaries reached. Over the last year GL has invested heavily in its IT infrastructure.

GL strategic objective - 2014	IT stragetic priority	Milestone - 2015
Design, procure, install and maintain a superior information and instructional technology infrastructure that supports all GL organisational functions.	Maintain and Improve the Core Infrastructure.	Migration of all HR and Financial systems to a cloud based solution.
Develop and implement administrative policies that directly support staff initiatives and programming.	Support and Enable Administrative Information Systems and Business Intelligence.	Adoption of a range of digital tools and services like Sharepoint, to improve ways of working.
Capacity building and staff development	Support and train internal technology Users.	Users have been trained and are utilising remote service solutions.
Information management	Maintain and Enhance Information Security.	Enhanced password protocol to safeguard the enterprise data and systems from unauthorized access.

Gender Links launched its IT Strategy in 2014 with a commitment to implement new ICT solutions and consequently enhancing efficiency in the organisation. This is the second year of the strategy and we can report that a number of significant commitments and targets have been achieved with good progress towards achieving the others. Since the strategy was published there have been major changes in Gender Links approach to technology and digital services. These are entirely consistent with driving improved sustainability for the institution and its partner's technology.

The move to cloud based-solutions provides opportunities for greener and more efficient solutions. There is a strong central commitment through the GL Ways of Working (WOWs) initiative to ensure that Gender Links staff have the modern tools they need to enable them to work effectively together and with partners. New greener digital technologies and working practices will help do just that, as well as improve the quality of deliverables by providing more timely and inclusive change.

GL departments are adopting a range of digital tools and services to improve the way they work. The access, processing and storage of their data and information, and taking initiatives to reduce sustainability impacts across the ICT lifecycle of the assets deployed is being appreciated. GL Staff are being provided with access to a wide range of collaborative working tools from shared working spaces to video and audio conferencing facilities and social media, allowing them to work together and with partners, at a wider range of locations. This has facilitated not only more efficient working practices and more timely outcomes, but also helped to reduce travel costs by allowing staff not to have to travel to meetings.

The implementation of the remote service system and provision of Electronic-HR and Finance systems is driving sustainable savings and efficiencies by removing physical infrastructure downtimes. This service also allows GL employees to work in more flexible and collaborative ways by enabling access to their ICT services from anywhere in the world.

Gender Links current Virtualised Infrastructure
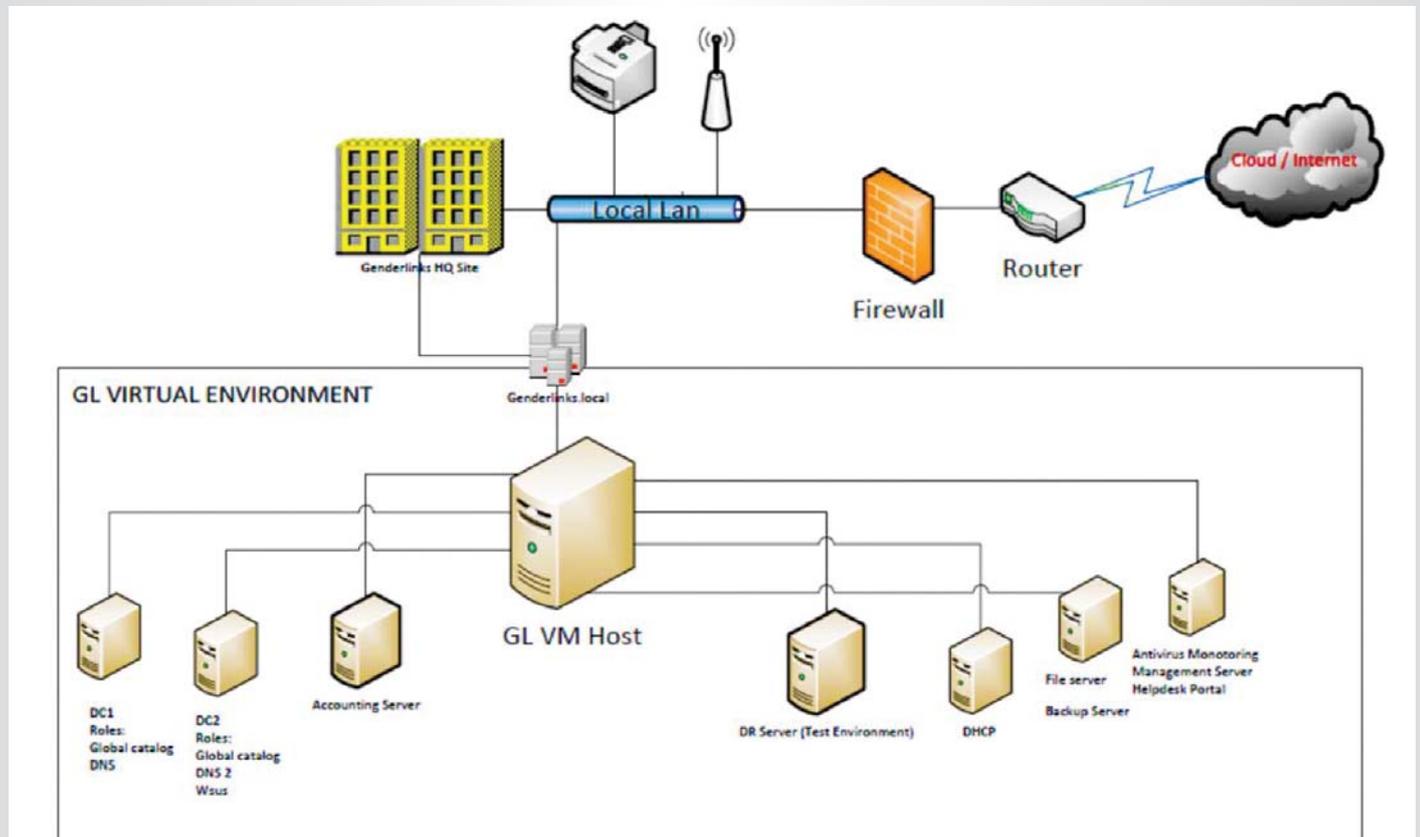
The Share Point and cloud environment is being utilised to promote green computing, saving 4000 sheets of paper (per month) with online reports while increasing accessibility and convenience. This also helped in minimising data centre power, network and space demands by virtualizing computing Infrastructure.

Gender Links spends a substantial amount of money each year on printing, including the support and maintenance of printers across five central departments. The ICT department adopted the Sharepoint solution to reduce the amount of printing.

Security
Gender Links is in the process of developing a comprehensive information security program that includes security awareness training for all staff. Currently, the IT department works to safeguard the enterprise data and systems from unauthorized access, modification, or dissemination to ensure its availability, confidentiality and integrity.

The current GL security protocol covers the following defined Gender Links assets:

- *Information:* Databases and data files, configuration setups, contracts and agreements, documentation and manuals, operational procedures and plans, audit trails, logs, archives.
- *Software assets:* Network and information systems software, application software, software for subscribers, development tools, operational tools, operational software.
- *Physical assets:* Facilities, switches, cables, terminal equipment, network and information systems hardware, network equipment, removable media.
- *Services:* Computing services, network services, general utilities such as power supply, temperature and humidity control.
- *People:* Gender Links staff, IT staff and service providers.

The above have been classified as assets which, when breached and or failing, can have a negative impact on the security or continuity of electronic communications in the organisation. In the past two years, Gender Links in partnership with Hambisana Technologies have implemented a new statistical records system on the Linux server using Symantec EndPoint Protection (SEP). The IT department can now gather and track metrics of infiltrations on server and network computers. On top of that, Gender links has deployed an effective network and computer antivirus, which helps track, clean and block any suspicious infiltrations on the network. As a way of safeguarding institutional data, a Guest access point was established to allow Gender Links visitors on the network but without access to any institutional drives.
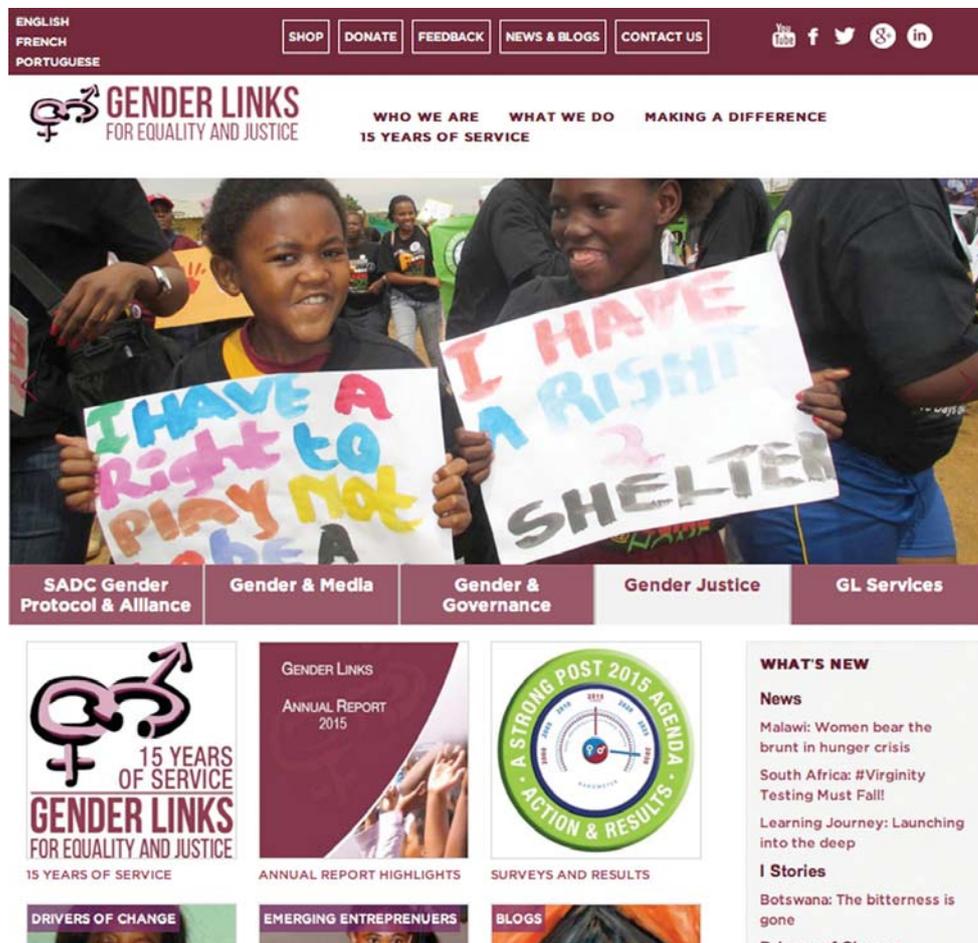
Website upgrade

In 2014 Gender links embarked on a website upgrade as the Content management system (CMS) had become obsolete. GL used this opportunity to update the site to a modern design. The new site has an easy-to-manage interphase, with good social and multimedia integration, as well as the capacity to display dynamic data. The project has been implemented by Cape Town-based Creative Spark using Word Press.

Key considerations in the move to a new website
- The website should not be static, it should be engaging and interactive.
- The website should be driven by one database that has a common set of parameters and that can be easily searched across functions and across the three websites.
- The content management system must be geared towards ensuring maximum and automatic cross linkages between a vast array of information sources.
- The content management system must be able to handle large volumes of files, including sound and video, and to be geared towards multi-media functions.
- The ability to make E sales for example of publications and photos.
- Easy to use tools for gathering regular data for monitoring and evaluation.
- Easy to maintain. Programme staff should be able to maintain their sections of the website with minimal assistance.
- Training in use of the system should form part of the tender and should be available on an ongoing basis.
- Back up support should be readily and easily available once the system is functioning.
- The system should be compatible with all major softwares; easy to upgrade and sustainable for several years to come.