



WORLD WIDE WEB
FOUNDATION

ICTs for Empowerment of Women and Girls:

A research and policy advocacy initiative on empowering women
on and through the web in 10 countries

Project Background Report

World Wide Web Foundation with IT for Change

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction to the World Wide Web Foundation.....	3
2. Project goals, expected outputs and desired outcomes.....	3
3. Project components.....	4
4. Focus on women’s rights on and through the web.....	5
5. Theoretical framework.....	6
6. Research framework.....	7
7. Policy framework.....	15
8. Countries and country selection criteria.....	18

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1. Introduction to the World Wide Web Foundation

“To advance the open Web as a public good and a basic right.”

The World Wide Web Foundation was established by web inventor Sir Tim Berners-Lee to advance the open Web as a public good and a basic right. We champion the rights of all people everywhere to affordable Internet access; to privacy, freedom of expression and freedom of association online; and to participate fully in decisions affecting them using the power of the web and open data. The World Wide Web Foundation operates at the confluence of technology and human rights, targeting three key areas: access, voice and participation.

2. Project goals, expected outputs and desired outcomes

Although great expectations have been placed on information technology as a tool for transforming women’s lives and as an alleged enabler for empowerment, relatively little is known about how, when, and why such transformations occur (Wheeler 2008). The possibilities for greater women’s empowerment via web-powered ICT demonstrate the need for evidence-based research based on how women currently access and use web-powered ICTs and the nature of the gender digital divide that persists despite growing global statistics on mobile phone and web-enabled ICT use.

This project seeks to deliver evidence-based research on women and the web to facilitate policy dialogue on women’s empowerment and ICT issues in 10 countries. Project outcomes aim to promote the commitment and incorporation of action plans on women’s rights in ICT decision and policy-making spheres. Global, regional and national ICT governance and policy frameworks can either enable full participation in the information society or inhibit access to technology, information and knowledge. Representation of women’s rights issues in policymaking spheres is, therefore, vital to creating conditions and regulations that will enable women to maximize possibilities of benefiting from the digital society. Policy dialogue on gender issues aims to encourage the commitment of institutions to gender and ICT policy action plans.

Despite the opportunities that exist for supporting women’s rights on and through the web, there is very little statistically relevant data on women

and ICTs, and none of the major gender equality indices incorporate ICTs. When ICT data excludes data on women specifically, women's social realities become ignored in data and in policy (Hafkin 2002, Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development 2014). As web-enabled ICTs become increasingly central to all aspects of everyday life, integrating women's perspectives in all aspects of policy and outreach becomes a major cause for attention. A gap exists for multi-country household data on web-enabled ICT access and use by women, as well as specific gender-based challenges that might be addressed by mainstreaming ICTs into women's rights policy and program frameworks.

The project addresses the call to action of the ITU Broadband Commission Working Group on Broadband and Gender to integrate gender and national ICT broadband policies, and to initiate action plans to achieve gender equality in access to broadband (2013). As noted in the final report of the 2013 World Telecommunication ICT Indicators Symposium (WTIS 2013), the collection and analysis of ICT gender data is a necessary prerequisite to the achievement of a more equitable global information society. The project also addresses the call to action of the UN Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development that: "Particular efforts should be made to promote the collection of data on the use of mobile cellular phones by individuals, especially in developing countries, because in many of these countries they are the most-used form of ICT, especially by girls and women."

This project rests on the premise that there is a need to look beyond descriptive statistics on individual and household ICT access and use, and to dive into analytical findings on the daily lived experiences of women accessing and using the web around the world. Research ICT Africa suggests that "Without analysis, descriptive data is not only incomplete but can also mislead policymakers on the correct points of policy intervention aimed at encouraging greater gender equity in ICTs" (RIA 2012). Thus, web/ICT related data for men and women is not only about differential access and use, but about the personal, social and institutional consequences of such differential access and use. We have identified the need to research and to develop strong evidence about what constitutes a "web for women's empowerment" in diverse contexts, taking into consideration different forms of access and use, and personal perceptions of the impact of the web on women's informational, communicative and associational lives. We also see the need for data about the legal, demographic and socio-cultural conditions upon which women's access and

use of the web for informational, communicative and associational needs and wants are contingent.

3. Project components

The project is situated on the premise that the maturity of the information society is determined in part by its defense or neglect of women's rights[1]. The project is comprised of interlinked research and policy advocacy components.

□ **Research**

- Household surveys in 10 countries, focus group discussions
- Web Index expert assessment survey on women's rights and web-enabled ICTs in 86 countries

Primary data collection (household surveys and focus group discussions) will take place in Kenya, Uganda, Mozambique, Nigeria, Cameroon, Egypt, Colombia, India, the Philippines and Indonesia. The research findings will be available for civil society and will include toolkits for relevant stakeholders including policy makers.

In addition to household surveys, the World Wide Web Foundation's annual Web Index measures the effectiveness of the web and its utility as related to access, affordability, freedom, openness and gender. It includes a ranking of 86 countries to determine local significances of Internet worldwide. The Web Index findings on women's rights address the following questions:

- a. To what extent have web-powered ICTs made a noticeable impact on the ability of women and girls to claim and demand their rights?
- b. To what extent can women and girls find user-friendly information via web-powered ICTs about reproductive and sexual health rights and services?
- c. To what extent are web-powered ICTs being used by government or non-government organizations (NGOs or private sector) to support victims of gender-based violence?
- d. To what extent are law enforcement agencies and the courts taking action in cases where ICT tools are used to commit acts of gender-based violence?

- e. To what extent has the government implemented concrete targets for gender equity in ICT access and use?

□ **Policy Advocacy**

- Building a network of women's rights/digital rights advocates to address gender and ICT policy national, regionally, globally
- Sensitizing policy makers to gender and information technology issues

Capacity building and policy dialogue events will take place with government officials, parliamentarians, telecommunications and technology companies and civil society groups towards advocacy on integrating gender in relevant policy areas. Country research and advocacy partners working in gender and ICT policy are vital in-country partners to lead discussions with national Ministries in the 10 countries. Through this project an international coalition will advocate regionally and nationally for policy attention to the gender gap in ICTs in order to affirm women's full participation in society both online and offline. Research outputs will provide valuable evidence-based findings to support policy advocacy campaigns.

4. Focus on women's rights on and through the web

Studies which seek to establish instances and patterns of ICT inclusion and exclusion only highlight if women are included or excluded from ICTs – they do not necessarily indicate the social dynamics of gender (in)equity in society more generally (Sorenson, 2002). Widespread (physical) access to and use of web-enabled ICTs does not necessarily enhance women's positions to become equal to that of men (Sorenson, 2002, see also Huyer & Hafkin, 2007). According to Amartya Sen (2000), "Individuals have varying needs for resources according to their social and physical circumstances, and the special obstacles they face, among other factors. Therefore, even when people may have the same basic resources, they may end up being unequal in their ability to perform." A challenge therefore remains in converting web-enabled ICT access and use into sustained participation of women and girls in society, and more widespread empowerment – where socially marginalised women can renegotiate their personal well-being and autonomy towards social mobility. This project seeks to promote an active commitment to and inclusion of women's rights frameworks in ICT policies

to enhance women's voice and participation on and through the web. It seeks to bring together a rights-based approach to women's empowerment with a public good orientation to the web.

5. Theoretical framework

The widespread uptake of web-enabled ICTs infers that society and technology have become "interdependent and are evolving in a dialectic process of cultural and social appropriation" (de Bruijn, Nyamnjoh, Brinkman 2009:12). As social and communicative tools, web-enabled ICTs are used as techniques to overcome status quos and experiences of distance posed by immobility and marginality. The particularities of web-enabled ICT use and processes of engagement enable individuals to enhance their social status via access to information. They, therefore, provide a means of negotiating social positioning. People are able to extend their social worlds via web-enabled ICTs as social tools, thus challenging the foundations of space, place and territory. Web-enabled ICTs pose as a unique gateway, offering the potential for reconfiguring the architecture of human communication and social life.

Web-enabled ICTs contribute broadly to a readjusting of social rules for interaction, offering new channels for accessing and avoiding relationships, as well as for forming new connections. As Ling and Horst (2011) note, "Seen through the lens of power, the mobile phone changes the rules regarding who can interact with whom" (2011:370). This has significant implications to the possibilities for gender relations in society as well as empowering women through networking and information exchange. As Buskens and Webb (2009:206) note, "We have to realize ICTs in and of themselves do not empower, that it is the use of them which can be empowering or not." They suggest furthermore, "For there to be sustainable change and 'real empowerment', women have to be the agents of their own processes, in charge and in control of their process of change and empowerment." Women's agency is therefore significant to the role web-enabled ICTs play in resisting gender inequalities and cultivating new social realities based on values of individualism, networking and information exchange and empowerment. However, enabling conditions, be they political, legal, or social norms, are primary structural factors which dictate the extent to which women might access and use the web, to become agents of change. For example, if a woman in a peri-urban area cannot

afford a 3G plan, she may end up using the apps that come free with her service provider. Alternately, if a peri-urban area is not still 3G enabled, she may not be able to contemplate extensive use. Even if she has access to a public access point, she may not be able to use the service if she does not have relevant content or if the place is intimidating or unwelcoming. The presumption that women's access and use of web-enabled ICTs contributes to women's agency and empowerment (women as agents of change), is reliant upon structural enablers - degrees and conditions of access and use - that are socially, politically and historically constituted.

This project is premised upon two dimensions or pathways to the way we study and analyse women's empowerment and web-powered ICTs. The first involves addressing the call of Castells et al (2007:138) and Horst & Miller (2006), which suggests the need to understand the ways in which web-enabled ICTs, and the mobile phone in particular, are being used by individuals. Castells et al (2007:156) suggest that the ways in which people use ICTs is closely linked to the construction of culture, thus illuminating the role of web-enabled ICTs as catalysts for resistance and social change. The second dimension involves understanding social meanings that become attached to the social changes enabled by web-enabled ICTs. This perspective goes beyond dialectical assumptions of technological determinism, which suggests that the mere uptake of web-enabled ICTs leads to change by virtue of the technological capacities of the device. We argue that people are at the forefront of developing social uses of digital technology, a perspective that stands opposed to the silver bullet assumption that merely "transplanting" digital technologies provides positive affordances. We aim to go beyond utilitarian questions about access and use of the web and seek to dive into the ontological through analysis of the meaning attached the patterns and dynamics of web access and use in particular context defined by structural elements, be they policy, market-driven, socially derived etc.

6. Research framework

The research framework addresses: To what extent do web-enabled ICTs contribute to empowerment of women on and through the web?

Borrowing Wheeler's (2008) definition of 'empowerment', we suggest that empowerment can be understood as any process that enables "autonomy,

self-direction, self-confidence, [and] self worth” (Narayan, 2005). Empowerment might be considered to be “a *process* by which oppressed persons gain some control over their lives by taking part with others in development of activities and structures that allow people increased involvement in matters which affect them directly” (Bystydzienski, 1992). Furthermore, empowerment is interpreted circumstantially because it can be “fluid, often unpredictable, and requires attention to the specificities of time and place” (Parpart, Rai, & Staudt, 2002). The research and analysis of this project will provide insight on how web-enabled ICTs can, in the words of the World Summit on Information Society Declaration of Principles, “improve the quality of life for all” (WSIS, 2003, p. 1).

In order to understand empowerment through web-enabled ICT access and use, we aim to examine the nature/ quality of, and conditions (cultural, economic, policy etc) framing access and use of the web. In this, we see empowerment as a process/ end goal being measured as the concept under study. We are interested in teasing out how and why variegated access and use of the web produces empowering and disempowering outcomes for gender equity. We utilize a 'web for women's empowerment' framework to understand empowerment as a category of inquiry, problematising the findings through an exposition of whether and how wider structures frame patterns of empowerment and marginality. We take two points of inquiry in this study, including:

- A. Structural:** The wider context of policy, state intervention, laws/ rights and social norms vis-a-vis ICT and non-ICT domains and how they codetermine - how, why, where and when women access and use web-enabled ICTs. (focus on certain laws, policies and regulatory mechanisms for comparison)
- B. Individual:** Implications of particular conditions (as in point A) and patterns of access and use, examining if and whether differences arise on account of demographics – (age, location, level of education, etc.)

In order to address the 'on' and 'through' aspects of 'women's empowerment on and through the web,' we will study seven key factors of web ICT access and use, listed below and expanded on thereafter:

1. Individual agency, self-esteem, self expression (safety)
2. Social interaction (peer interaction, networking)
3. Public institutional participation
4. Access to and use of informational resources

5. Access to communicative platforms
6. Access to associational / collective action spaces
7. Access to economic opportunity

Individual agency, self-esteem, self expression (safety)

- To what extent are 'real' social constraints overcome via individual agency/digital engagements when power is implicit in defining the margins?

Paradoxes of human agency and social structure emerge in the context of web-enabled ICTs. On the one hand, the web is a realm of socialisation that enables flexibility in mobility, identity, citizenship and belonging. Being on the web, one has inherent power to actively contribute to social, political and economic relationships, interconnections and interdependencies, whether intentional or not and despite persistent hierarchies at local and global levels. Technology is creatively appropriated based on subjective needs and desires and, therefore, becomes embodied as a product of human imagination and creativity. Information seeking, messaging and virtual exchanges are inter-subjective socio-cultural and communicative practices through which people constantly negotiate with other users and in doing so define themselves as active agents. The web is a realm of self-selected socialisation, and interactions have the potential to be empowering experiences whereby individuals can choose where and with whom to associate with, and on what terms. Individuals become liberated (to a certain degree) from culturally-specific social norms when online, and new forms and adaptations of identity, culture and social life are negotiated with and via the virtual world.

On the other hand it is important to consider how patriarchies and other forms of social hegemony that perpetuate socio-economic and political exclusion are reproduced via web-enabled ICTs and online mediums. This includes consideration of the parallels running between the information revolution and corporate globalisation, between online public space and the boundaries that protect privacy and freedom of expression. For example, even though the Internet enables women to exercise freedoms of expression and association, the 2013 Global Information Society Watch report on women's rights highlights that censorship, surveillance of women's sexuality and violence and harassment against women perpetuate online. Growing incidences of violence and harassment targeted towards women online are evidence that misogyny continues to be a threat to women's rights and freedoms. Research has consistently found that women are

subjected to more bullying, abuse, hateful language and threats than men when online and that cyber-bullying has a hugely disproportionate impact on women and girls (Demos 2014, CBS News 2014; Pew 2014). A recent Pew (2014) study suggests that young women aged 18-24 experience certain severe types of harassment at disproportionately high levels. 26% of young women surveyed have been stalked online and 25% were the target of online sexual harassment. Cyber-misogyny differs from other forms of bullying in that it “uses online and digital communication tools to harass women and girls solely because of their gender” (CBC News). As a result, women’s agency is threatened, and women often retreat from expression and association online through self-censorship.

Henry and Powell (2014) suggest that international research has increasingly demonstrated the ways in which online spaces and communities are being used to promote sexist, racist and homophobic discrimination and violence. Despite this, existing laws often contain loopholes that allow web-enabled ICT-based violence to escape criminal prosecution. Meanwhile, the offline public sphere may not be characterised by a greater plurality of voices at all as a result of web-enabled ICT access and use.

We acknowledge that marginality is often guarded by structural regimes through which hegemony and domination perpetuate. Despite this, we firmly believe that the perpetuation of marginality does not stop people “from finding ways of inserting themselves as ‘international actors’, or from reinventing the terms through which they understand and act on their everyday lives” (Simone 1998). Marginality certainly may not always be revolutionarily overcome via web-enabled ICTs, but is instead, negotiated and mitigated through the web, which provide means for the empowerment of the imagination via access to information, communication and the extension and perpetuation of social networks.

Social interaction

- Are women able to interact on the internet freely and use it on a personal level? (free flow of interaction, entertainment, peer interaction, networking)

Digital spaces (though often anonymous) create opportunity for social interaction, peer networking and opinion-making. Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai suggests that the domain of information flows has led us into “an altogether new condition of neighbourliness, even with those most distant

from ourselves” (Appadurai 2008: 48). The role that peer interaction online (through social media, for example), plays in everyday lives is often trivialised – designated to the realm of the virtual and framed as somehow less 'real' than offline interactions. However, the sustained (and growing) use of social media platforms by multiple users in pursuit of multiple interests suggests that such an imagined distinction fails to recognise the complex negotiations that constitute social life.

From a development perspective, access to the web is generally promoted to enhance use of resources and apps that allow users to find economic, health, or educational information, write a report, create a CV, or simulate financial scenarios for a business - rather than to engage users in 'non serious' activities such as playing computer games, chatting with friends and family, or updating social pages. However, we question if these 'non-serious' uses of information technology are more valuable than given due reward. A 2013 IDRC report suggests that these activities may have instrumental value for users in two respects. “First, users who are first attracted to using computers to play games or update their social network may go beyond that initial use to explore other ICT activities. Second, even the less serious uses of ICTs also generate familiarity with a range of aspects of information technology, promoting computer skills and possibly resulting in important impacts” (IDRC 2013:72). Social networks are paramount to transferring technical knowledge and knowledge in general, and we predict that friends sharing expertise on a whole range of themes might be the most prevalent means of organizing around rights based issues and learning about rights. We therefore aim to explore if, and through what means, women are able to interact on the internet freely and use it on a personal level for entertainment, peer interaction, networking etc.

Public institutional participation

- What are the gender and power dynamics of women using technology to access local government services and participate in local governance?

Local governance systems have historically excluded women and are, therefore, a site for negotiation of power relations. We are in a unique historical position to leverage changes set in motion by digital technologies and the internet that can open up the possibility for more vibrant and viable democracies where women (particularly marginalized women) can find voice, visibility and centrality in local governance. Web-enabled ICTs contribute to a reconfiguring of the political landscape and citizenship

practice, as they allow for greater opportunity for public voice from the margins. The web has the potential to support citizens to avoid top-heavy and corrupt bureaucracies and to access important information and services. We might consider how the democratisation of local communicative spaces and the public sphere enable marginalised women to articulate their interests and shape local governance agendas.

We need to support the conditions under which digital technologies enable marginalised women to gain active citizenship. This requires understanding the conditions that support access and use of the web, and reflecting on replicating those conditions in different social contexts.

We furthermore seek to understand if and how the web plays a role creating or enhancing access to information on government and non-governmental services that allow women to claim rights, such as information on health services for women and services for victims of gender-based violence. We believe that web-enabled ICTs are essential tools to fight against the social perpetuation of violence and harassment against women and girls. The 2010 GSMA gender gap study suggests that 93% of women reported feeling safer because of their mobile phone. LirneAsia (2012) suggests that in Bangladesh, Pakistan and India, the mobile phone is essential to a women's security when she is away from home. An example provided is of a young woman who was allowed by her parents to go to study because she would be reachable by her mobile phone when away. In many cases, the benefits of security provide the motivation for women for getting connected in the first place. As such, we seek to achieve a better understanding of the ways in which web-enabled ICTs contribute to advancing women's access to information to enhance their rights, participation and leadership in society.

Access to and use of informational resources

- What are the global variances in how, when, where and why women access and use web-enabled ICTs for informational needs (re health, safety, education, entrepreneurship etc)?

Access to web-enabled ICTs is fast becoming a critical determinant of earning power, social capital and social mobility. It is the right of everyone, everywhere to access the transformative power of the web. Yet over 60% of people around the world, most of them women and girls, continue to be excluded (A4AI 2013). Women globally seek to benefit from the information society, though according Research ICT Africa's 2012 study, it is estimated

that women's chances of benefiting from the advantages of ICTs are one-third less than men's. According to Intel's 2013 study on Women and the Web, the gender gap amounts to 200 million women who aren't online, equivalent to the population of Brazil, the 5th most populous country in the world. Despite the fact that the United Nations declared access to the Internet a basic human right (Kravets, 2011), allegedly 21 percent of women and girls in developing countries have access to the Internet, while 27 percent of men have access (Intel 2013). The spread of Internet adoption and use in Africa, for example, has been relatively slow as a result of the burdens of limited connectivity across many countries and the high cost of services where they are available (Research ICT Africa 2013).

The wider structural context of policy, state intervention, laws/ rights and social norms vis-a-vis ICT and non-ICT domains codetermine how, why, where and when women access and use web-enabled ICTs and how women perceive the utility of the web. Cultural taboos and cultures of use (within the local context, influenced by the market, state programs, peers) and variations in cultures of use owing to differences in gadget ownership are also structural co-determinants of the socialisation of technology. We elaborate below on the structural conditions around access and use of informational resources in the context of a) affordability of the internet, b) public access points, c) market conditions and accessibility of relevant content.

Affordability

High costs of connectivity limit access for women in the developing world, resulting in increasing exclusion of women from the emerging global economy of information and knowledge, the digital economy. The average cost of broadband Internet in developing countries ranges from 11% to 30% of average monthly incomes (A4AI 2013). The Alliance for Affordable Internet's annual Affordability Report (2013) highlights that for those living on less than US \$2 a day, mobile broadband costs exceed 20 per cent of monthly incomes in many countries, and skyrocket to as much as 48 per cent of income in Colombia, 35 per cent in Zambia, and almost 90 percent in Zimbabwe. Given the context that in several countries in Africa, women earn on average 30-50 percent less than men (Research ICT Africa 2012) and that women in the Asia Pacific region will earn 41.2 percent less than men by 2030 (Euromonitor 2014), Internet costs drastically affect the scope and possibilities for use.

*Public Access*¹

For many users, public access venues, such as an internet cafe, library or telecentre, are the only option they have to access ICTs, and particularly the internet. A study by the Washington University Technology and Social Change Group/IDRC (2013) on “Why Public Access ICTs Matter” suggests that for more than half of the user survey respondents, a public access venue provided them with their first ever contact with computers (50%) and the internet (62%). However, many use public access venues for reasons beyond basic access needs, such as to use better equipment, to get technical or content support from venue staff or others, and, to a large extent, to work with or be with friends or other people. There may also be other reasons to use public access points, such as competition with family members and limited freedom at home. People see public access venues as places where a broad range of information needs can be met (p 96).

However, the distribution of public access such as cybercafes is skewed in favor of big urban centers. Since urban users tend to have greater social assets (education, income, etc.), it is likely that they would make greater use of - and possibly derive greater benefits from - public ICT venues. Conversely, rural users may have more to gain from public access ICTs and may therefore place higher value on their gains from public access use.

Female users are also still a minority in public access centres. Evidence indicates that most public access users are of middle socioeconomic status, urban, male, and young (IDRC 2013:30). Cybercafes might not be an available option for women due to social unacceptability of women using technology, or because of they are oftentimes male dominant spaces where women may not feel safe or comfortable. The costs of cybercafes, which are private businesses as opposed to public facilities such as libraries, may also exclude women from using facilities.

Market Conditions and Accessibility of Content

We argue that access to digital spaces does not inherently guarantee autonomous use. Though the web transforms the capacity for people to participate socially, politically and economically, it also enhances the propensity for institutionalisation and capitalisation of society - threats to net neutrality for example and the perpetuating of certain “kinds of

1 “The term “public” in “public access” refers to the characteristic of venues that are open to the public and do not have restrictions on who can use them. “Public” does not necessarily refer to a venue being government funded.

knowledge” threaten free access and the freedoms associated with rights to information and communication; some content might be free or promoted by market forces.

Drawing on Gurumurthy and Chami’s (2014) argument, we point out that: “As far as wireless broadband is concerned, opportunities for public information outreach through mobiles to rural, marginalised communities have largely been left to the hand of the market, to initiatives such as Facebook’s recent Internet.org app for creating a women’s information network at the local level, in Zambia. While such initiatives do bring the internet to women who were previously unconnected, the nature of access they facilitate is questionable: they create information oligopolies – a collusion of businesses that provide preferential access to certain telcos, certain platforms and content provided by certain companies. The resultant stunting of a truly open and public information ecology and discrediting of alternative discourses arguing public investment is bound to end up privileging info-cultures that will subsume women into the information society as passive consumers, rather than as fully participating citizens - active agents who can co-create the Internet ecosystem.”

Access to communicative platforms

- To what extent do women participate in public (online and offline) communicative platforms?

Women’s access and use of public and communicative spaces is often mediated by not only gender inequalities in society, but also poverty, traditional divisions of labor, and social norms which exclude women from equal participation. These norms are socially constructed based on historical inequalities built on relationships of domination and subordination which translate into both the public and private realms. For example, priority of use of the household computer by fathers, husbands and brothers or censorship of content may prevent access to communicative networks and platforms by women at home. In general, an authoritarian state can squelch free expression/ blogging or shut down use of communicative platforms by women’s rights defenders.

Furthermore, the majority of internet users in developing countries only have access to low bandwidth infrastructure, which significantly restricts the type and quality of communication platforms, applications and services they can access. For many women in developing country contexts the costs

of ICTs and broadband connections, poor quality of connections, and the limited availability of ICT services outside of major urban areas are major obstacles to access and effective use online communicative platforms. As Gurumurthy and Chami (2014) argue, even if a rural textually non-literate woman in a developing country context has some degree of access, she will likely be unable to access relevant content requiring high bandwidth, video and audio services and applications.

Given this growing communication capacity gap, the possibility that ICT development could further rather than diminish hierarchies, be they gender relations or geopolitical, whether at a global, regional, national or local level, between populations as a whole and specific population groups (women and men, non-literate and literate populations, etc.) is cause for concern.

Towards this end we question whether women across the world in various political and social environments and from different demographic backgrounds are able to speak, voice opinion, and self express online (or offline) in their communities. Do communication platforms include women by virtue of their structure, content and values? Whether or not this sort of a communicative space exists, we also question the freedoms, comfort or fear women feel towards such as space, the issues of privacy, safety and security that emerge around this space, and whether the space is used in a ways that participants are able to reach out to a wider audience.

Access to associational / collective action spaces

- How, where and in what circumstances do women organize collectively to make political claims and demands?

The web undoubtedly offers the potential for marginalised women to redefine their 'sense of place', and creating fluidity between 'the public' and 'the private', and allowing for greater ownership of the means and strategies for negotiating political power and self and community empowerment. As Gurumurthy, Nandini and Saloranta (2012) argue, "The public in the network age is defined by new interactivity and zones of anonymity that recast social norms, thus re-writing the forms and meanings of the personal political and the intimate-private."

Linkages created between and across spaces, including across geographies, helps develop new associational forms that are rooted in local needs and

interests. Web-enabled ICTs hold the potential for empowerment by opening up spaces for self expression, expanding social networks and creating up opportunities for economic and public-political participation. As such, we seek to understand how associational and collective action spaces relate to current forms of political mobilization and organization.

Access to economic opportunity

- Have web-enabled ICTs created new economic opportunities for women?

We agree with Bratton’s suggestion that web-enabled ICTs have promising economic consequences from which socio-cultural, political and economic changes inevitably follow (Bratton 2013). We therefore seek to understand to what extent the web has allowed women to access new economic opportunities, and to increase incomes.

GSMA’s 2010 gender gap study suggests that mobile phones in particular are helping women save time, and money, improve productivity, increase returns on investment and maximize household resources. The study also suggests that every additional \$100 in monthly income increases the likelihood of mobile phone ownership by 13% (GSMA 2010). In addition, we expect that web-enabled ICTs serve as a means to economic empowerment as information accessed may enhance business success and possibilities for market access and self-generated income, allowing women a degree of control and determination of their labor costs and assisting to close the gender wage gap (UNCTAD 2014).

We predict that web-enabled ICTs have the potential to alleviate some of the barriers faced by women such as illiteracy, poverty, time scarcity, lack of mobility, cultural and religious taboos and constraints on voice (particularly public voice) in societies characterized by male-domination and degrees of social control including surveillance of women’s physical and social mobility - leading to economic impact.

7. Policy framework

Web-enabled ICTs lead to a fluidity of the boundaries of place and culture, reforming socialisation, social networking and means of participation in society. Modern social life increasingly takes place in virtual space, which leads us to increasingly live in a space somewhat “beyond” (Ginsburg et al. 2002:1). In this sense, instead of thinking of ‘the online’ and ‘the offline’ as

separate and distinctive spaces, we are led to acknowledge the interaction between the physical and the virtual as an inseparable realm (Gurumurthy 2012). In this context, ensuring and protecting women's rights online and offline is vital, and needs to be supported by international, regional and national political and legal commitments.

The Association for Progressive Communication (APC 2011) notes that 80% percent of states have ratified four or more of the core human rights treaties and all states have ratified at least one. However this is not always a sign of governments' commitment to make women's rights a reality. The reality of a gender digital divide globally, and particularly in many developing countries, limits the potential for women to critically engage with web-enabled ICTs. As Gurumurthy and Chami (2014) write, "The ubiquity of the mobile phone is bound to make it 'the' access device of the immediate future, but nurturing the potentialities of the larger digital ecosystem – comprising much more than device-based functionalities - is the priority for a sustainable digital future." This would include access to high speed broadband and mobile Internet, as well as to locally relevant and gender sensitive applications and platforms. Indeed, new institutional innovations in public services and conditions that promote bottom-up collaborative innovations should take priority.

Furthermore ICT policy processes do not include a women's rights approach due to a lack of political will or the presumption that by addressing "citizens" at large, policy processes account for both women and men, an approach that fails to take into consideration specific actions to reverse the gender divide. Governments also say that the fact that they already have a gender equality policy obviates the need to spell out gender issues in every sectoral policy (Hafkin 2002). On the contrary, there is much evidence to show that "policy-making in technological fields often ignores the needs, requirements, and aspirations of women unless gender analysis is included" (Hafkin 2000; Marcelle 2000, 39). Hafkin (2002) suggests that if gender issues are not articulated in ICT policy, it is unlikely that girls and women will reap the benefits of the information age.

Taking the call from Nancy Hafkin (2002), it is important to note that concerns about gender issues in information and communications technology may not be confined to ICT policy alone. Sometimes national governments will incorporate ICT into telecommunications policy. Others will include ICT with media in communications policy. Hafkins explains that

a more recent tendency is the trend towards information policy, incorporating ICTs in the framework of information society goals. Additionally, sectoral policy in health, education, agriculture, labor and industry, among others, frequently include ICT components. In order for web-enabled ICTs to contribute to a greater empowerment of women, ICT policies must also focus on, digital literacy and socialization of technology; relevant content that addresses women's informational needs in relevant ways; and digital safety in order to create an enabling environment to promote greater participation and voice of women online. As such, there is no rigid framework for gender and ICT policy. We believe that policies should be formulated within national contexts, reflecting country concerns and the issues and perspectives that policy makers are committed to. There is, therefore, tremendous variation to the particular gender and ICT issues that may be identified by each country partner within this project in their design of a policy advocacy campaign on women's rights and web-enabled ICTs.

Roadmap to Identifying Problems and Policy Solutions

<p>Problem Definition</p>	<p>What are we trying to solve or change? How can we better understand the problem? (e.g. data and evidence) Why do we need a policy solution for this problem? Is there an appetite for change? How can we demonstrate the urgency of this problem through evidence-based data and advocacy?</p>
<p>Formulation of Policy Options</p>	<p>Share knowledge around the problem, seek many diverse perspectives Policy options should reflect different perspectives and concerns Analysis of advantages/disadvantages of policy options What are the barriers, risks, challenges? Not all policy option will be selected in the end</p>
<p>Selection of Policy Option</p>	<p>Create decision-making criteria for selecting a policy option - this should be linked to what you are trying to achieve Assess the levels of support and resistance from policy makers Assess the capacity of those required to operationalize the policy Set reasonable goals</p>
<p>Advocacy around Preferred Policy Option</p>	<p>The policy should be fully aligned to the problem you are trying to solve Policy advocacy is not just about the goal, but the process of engagement</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Helpful Exercises</i></p> <p>Stakeholder mapping and power mapping are useful exercises to identify: The stakeholders you need to target Who has what degree of power Who to engage with/partner with for policy influence</p>

8. Countries and country selection criteria



Criteria for inclusion of countries:

- SIDA priority countries and previous support via Swedish Program for ICTs in Developing Regions (SPIDER)
- Web Index country
- Inclusion of gender discourse in ICT policy/action plans
- Legal environment that ensures equal rights for women and men
- Strategic multi-stakeholder partnerships (E.g Alliance for Affordable Internet)
- Representation across low and middle income countries (based on World Bank income classification)
- Availability of secondary data from a variety of sources (World Bank, ITU, WEF Gender Gap index)
- National statistical data on ICT/gender

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[1] See also APC (2011) "Voices from digital spaces: Technology related violence against women"