
Employment of ICT towards effective realisation of MDGs

Commission on Social, Ethical and Legal Issues –
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The Information Society Lens – Not just about the digital!!!



- ICTs - Not just tools but constitutive logic
 - ICTs not about an eworld; indicate structural / institutional transformation
 - New rules to be written
 - The flux of the info society – non-linear change
 - For realigning meso level structures – institutional leapfrogging
 - For gender equality – democratic transition, a moment in time to renegotiate the social contract where women's political and economic rights are recognised

The Information Society Opportunity



- Development and gender equality – seizing the moment!
 - *The network society even as it underlies a capitalist (and even a statist) consolidation, also privileges values such as collaboration and institutional forms and modes that promote greater openness and inclusion. And therefore what is at one level a capitalist transformation may also be characterised as a democratic transition.*



What is in it for women?

- A new opportunity structure
 - Individual freedoms
 - A rapidly changing public sphere
 - New social and economic infrastructure/ institutional revamp
 - Architecture of a New Knowledge Paradigm
 - The enjoyment of human rights now seen in conjunction with access to the Internet



The Dominant Discourse

- Connectivity – a red herring?
 - gender gaps in access not necessarily confined to developing countries
 - across countries, gender gaps become progressively larger with the sophistication of ICTs

- What is the notion of women's membership and participation in the information society? - is it IT jobs or much more?



The Dominant Discourse

- Shrill rhetoric around mobile phones
 - the closed nature of mobile platforms not examined
 - 'locked-in' nature of content and services in the network architecture of mobiles.
 - No debate around the merits of community owned telecom networks for strengthening local economies
 - No debate around the the economic and social benefits of open platforms

What is not working for women?



- Market / BOP approaches – social subsumed in the economic; positioning of social inclusion as a residual policy.
- Walmartisation of connectivity models - democratising access but subsidising corporate globalisation
- Corporatisation of health, education agriculture through ehealth, elearning and e-agriculture
 - Entrepreneurial models squelch and hollow out local communities – echoupal as a case in point
- A demand based, non-visionary approach – a consumer-user discourse

Conceptualising access and connectivity



- Digital divide – not about access or connectivity to the 'network'
 - Debate no longer about 'how to'
- The question here is not about connecting but connecting on what terms
- The 'network' privileges profit and enterprise at the cost of capabilities and collaboration.

Conceptualising access and connectivity



- What is the opportunity cost of a particular technology diffusion model from the vantage of equity?
- What are we missing in the dominant discourse? (for eg. Lately there is a talk around the convergence between wireless and Internet? Is access to the Internet through mobiles our vision of an inclusive IS? Who will this benefit? What are the limits of the market? Who is to build the local systems / the local informatics design? What should public policy and public authorities do for equitable access to the information society?)

- *E-commerce initiatives can only be successful where women have the necessary e-business skills and marketing and distribution capacities; without these, women's small and medium enterprises may very well not be able to survive the overwhelming competition that these very same channels, where they become available, tend to unleash.*
 - *ICTs as Hobson's choice*



Core Questions for Public Policy

- Nature of **technology architecture** – closed vs open (open technologies favour inclusion)
 - Does the network empower the peripheries?
 - Openness in the technology paradigm to women's empowerment is one continuum
- Nature of new **institutional design** for connectivity - efficiency based vs participatory
- Not connectivity models but an entire **digital ecology - an institutional framework** that is gender sensitive, addressing publicly funded hardware, software, content and connectivity



Core Questions for Public Policy

- In development terms – a communitization of ICTs
 - Creating surpluses for local communities
 - Institutional accountabilities and effectiveness
 - Public monitoring
 - Community solidarity

- Institutional architecture for a citizenship approach – IS Commission; policies and arrangements for a convergent design for livelihoods, education and training, health, entitlements etc.