

Case Studies : Exploring the transformatory potential of ICTs for enhancing women's political participation

1. The potential of ICTs in supporting women's resistance to mainstream politics through campaigns and subversive organising

1.1. The Pink *Chaddi* Campaign

Country: India

More information:

- Pink *Chaddi* Wikipedia page: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pink_Chaddi_Campaign
- Movements.org case study: <http://www.movements.org/case-study/entry/the-pink-chaddi-campaign/>

Overview:

In January 2009, a group of people belonging to the Indian right wing Hindu group, *Sri Ram Sena*, launched an attack on some women and men who were spending time in a pub, in the city of Mangalore (Karnataka, India). The attack was motivated by the conviction that the women who were present were behaving in an immoral way and disrespecting Indian values and traditions. Following the attack, the political group announced plans to also target couples celebrating Valentine's Day, threatening to force unmarried young men and women who were hanging out together on that day, into marriage.

As a response to the violence unleashed by the *Sri Ram Sena*, a group of young women formed a group called 'The Consortium of Pub-going, Loose and Forward Women', which led to the creation of the '*Pink Chaddi*' (literally Pink Underwear)-campaign, referring to pink underwear. The campaign got its name because of a move on the part of the organisers, who urged supporters to participate in the cause by sending a pair of pink *chaddis* or pink underwear, to Pramod Muthalik, *Sri Ram Sena's* founder, who had publicly defended the attacks, saying that they were necessary and acceptable. The campaign utilised online spaces, mainly Facebook, to reach out to women in India and around the world, to build

momentum and gain support for the cause.

The *Pink Chaddi* campaign demonstrates the potential of online social networking in enabling women's political mobilisation and subversive organising. At the same time, the *Pink Chaddi* campaign's experience also serves as a cautionary tale on the limits of online social media platforms to support radical groups.

ICTs and women's subversive organising: Opportunities

The campaign's Facebook group attracted a lot of attention, and gained over 40,000 members within just one week, from all over the world. Online technology, in the case of *Pink Chaddi* mainly Facebook, enabled the Indian women activists to quickly connect with thousands of other women around the world and gain support and strength for their movement and cause. While a lot of action was initiated offline by the group, the role of online social networking (in this case, facilitated by the Facebook platform) cannot be ignored as that enabled the movement to grow exponentially and gain momentum, which it would not have been able to do otherwise. The social media platform also functioned as the medium for passing vital information to supporters on meetings, activities, and even the logistics for the campaign on sending pink underwear to the offices of the *Sri Ram Sena*. The use of social media enabled the organisers of the campaign to bridge national and socio-cultural divides, and create a community of support around the issues of countering violence against women, and protecting women's fundamental freedoms.

ICTs and women's subversive organising: Challenges

Though the use of social media was initially successful in enabling the organisers of *Pink Chaddi*, to build momentum around their campaign, they did face some challenges using Facebook. For example, the organisers learned that Facebook does not allow users to send a joint message to all group members, once a group crosses a certain threshold of members – this is Facebook's way of curbing spamming. This feature hindered information sharing between group founders and members, as members do not always check the group's home page to access information, and rely more on personal messages.

A more grave concern emerging from the *Pink Chaddi* campaign's experience was

Facebook's unresponsiveness to requests from group members for support, when the group page was repeatedly hacked, and racist messages and violent slurs posted. Not only was Facebook unresponsive to repeated requests for support, it actually disabled the account of the group administrator.

This experience makes one reflect on how open online spaces for social networking and political mobilisation are. Though corporates owning social media platforms such as Facebook do make claims for being defenders of online freedoms, they tend to be guided by business considerations, and so adapt their policies often to suit country contexts and their long term interests.

1.2. *Feministas en Resistencia* (Feminists in Resistance)

Country: Honduras

More information:

- Margarita Salas' Think Piece: Gender and Information Society in Central America: Between the immediate and strategic scenarios: <http://www.gender-is-citizenship.net/citigen/think-pieces>
- *Feministas en Resistencia* blog: <http://feministascreenresistenciaalgolpe.blogspot.in/>

Overview:

In 2009, a military coup overthrew the democratically elected president in Honduras. The official version of the facts claims that he was guilty of constitutional disruption for attempting to conduct a popular referendum that would enable him to be re-elected. The Government of Honduras deployed heavy military repression against all demonstrations against the coup. For the first six months after the coup, when state repression was at its peak, the government forcefully influenced all media channels and persecuted the ISP providers. However, in spite of state repression, there were dissenting voices – and most of them had to resort to online spaces for registering their protest against the coup. This was

not easy, in a country with low levels of internet penetration and in a context where the threat of state reprisal was very high. However, activists resisting the coup managed to successfully use the Internet as a space for challenging the official accounts of the coup. As the presence of the voices of resistance on the Internet demonstrate, there were many who were willing to stick their necks out to tell the world what was happening in their country. For example, the local feminist movement organised a group called *Feministas en Resistencia* (Feminists in Resistance), and documented the abuses conducted by the armed forces and broadcast them through a channel on Youtube. In other Latin American countries, women's groups organised demonstrations at the Hondurian embassies on solidarity with the *Feministas en Resistencia* movement.

The online spaces the movement created in 2009 are still active and available, and the videos, photos and other documentation by the *Feministas en Resistencia* are accessible on their blog sites. In fact, the group continues to address pertinent issues related to women's rights, such as sexual and reproductive health, and share information about these topics on their site.

ICTs and women's subversive organising : Opportunities

The experience of Honduras clearly demonstrates that in contexts of state authoritarianism where debates and expressions of dissent in the national public sphere are stifled, the extra-territoriality of Internet spaces can enable the emergence of a strong counter-public, and build strong ties with global networks of human rights defenders.

More crucially, these global ties that the activists in Honduras forged online, actually saved many lives. In instances where participants in the resistance movement were arrested, their peers tapped into the online communication networks, to initiate global protests against the arrest and co-ordinate global action such as requesting groups from across the world to send in letters and faxes demanding the person's release.

ICTs and women's subversive organising: Challenges

Though the online activism by the activists of Honduras was successful in enabling them to speak out against their repressive government, the threat of a state clampdown on the

Internet loomed large. The state government did persecute ISP providers in the first few months after the coup, in its attempts to control the media and public sphere. In fact, one of the social organisations that hosted the .hn domains had to look for asylum in Costa Rica and re-route their services in order to guarantee the movement against the coup - *Honduras en Resistencia* (Honduras in Resistance) the only channel they were able to use, to tell the world what was really happening in the country.

1.3. Uprising of Women in the Arab World Campaign

Country: Countries in the Arab region

More information:

- Uprising of Women in the Arab World campaign site:
<http://uprisingofwomenintheArabWorld.org/en/?p=1481>
- Uprising of Women in the Arab World Facebook page:
<https://www.facebook.com/intifadat.almar2a>
- Open Democracy interview with the founders of the campaign:
<http://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/sara-abbas/revolution-is-female-uprising-of-women-in-arab-world>
- AWID article on Dana Bakdounis: <http://storify.com/AWID/dana-bakdounis-and-uprising-of-women-in-the-arab-w>

Overview:

In October 2011, Yalda Younes, a 34-year old Lebanese woman living in Paris, launched the 'Uprising of Women in the Arab World' campaign on Facebook. The goal of the Facebook page was to raise awareness about issues relating to women's rights in the Arab world as well as to create a platform for solidarity with women activists. One year later, in October 2012, Yalda and her collaborators, Farah, Diala and Sally, launched a campaign to commemorate the page's one year anniversary, and to draw attention to the issues at its heart. The premise was simple. Supporters of the campaign had to post a picture of themselves along with a message starting with the phrase, "I am with the uprising of women in the Arab world because...", and fill in the blanks. Hundreds of people from around the world, both men and women, participated by posting their pictures on the campaign's Facebook page or website,

to show their solidarity with the movement and their support for the feminist activists in the region.

ICTs and women's subversive organising : Opportunities

After the campaign was launched, the membership of the 'Uprising of women in the Arab world' page grew exponentially. From approximately 20,000 at the beginning of the campaign, there are over 80,000 at present (December 2012). Women and men, young and old, from Morocco to Syria and everywhere in between, posted photos of themselves holding banners. Some used the banners to cover their faces. Others showed them proudly. Others revealed only their eyes.

The campaign's success can be attributed to organisers' persistence in raising many issues around women's rights that challenge prevailing socio-religious doctrines, and not evading those questions about women's status, that are considered taboo in the region. It is also important to recognise that the online spaces claimed by the campaign for raising women's rights concerns has proved to be a vital space for women's free expression, in a region where prevailing cultural norms exclude women from the public sphere.

ICTs and women's subversive organising : Challenges

The 'Uprising of women in the Arab world' campaign has had to deal with challenges similar to the Pink *Chaddi* campaign in India: online threats and censorship from Facebook. The campaign ran into controversy when 21-year old Dana Bakdounis who had cast off her veil, posted a photo of herself on the Facebook page which read: "I'm with the uprising of women in the Arab world because for 20 years I was not allowed to feel wind in my hair and body." On October 26, 2012, Facebook removed Dana's photo, and blocked the administrator of the Facebook page who posted the photo from posting anything for 24 hours. The picture was taken down by Facebook because the social network had received complaints. The photo was allegedly reported as being 'insulting'.

The organisers fought against Facebook's decision to remove Dana's picture and temporarily block the group's administrators from using Facebook. According to some statements made by Facebook representatives, the decision was made mistakenly, and the picture was restored to the Facebook page. The issue gained notable attention in the media, and Dana's

cause gained support in online communities and platforms such as in Twitter, where many declared their support for Dana and condemned Facebook's actions. Unlike in the case of the Pink *Chaddi* campaign, the organisers managed to successfully win their battle against Facebook.

However, the 'Uprising of Women in the Arab World' campaign raises questions similar to the one emerging from the Pink *Chaddi* campaign: In the corporate owned social media platforms, how can women's groups and feminists be assured that these spaces will be free from arbitrary censorship measures? More importantly, can corporates such as Facebook be given the power of discretionary regulation of online content generated by the users of these social media platforms?

2. ICT-enabled initiatives for networking and capacity-building of women in public office and enabling women to emerge as a strong political constituency

2.1. Empowering Women Leaders at the Local Level through the *Gramamukhya* digital platform: Translating Descriptive Representation to Substantive Representation through ICTs

Country: India

More information:

- Gender is Citizenship (CITIGEN) project website: <http://www.gender-is-citizenship.net/citigen/India>
- CITIGEN India project final report : [http://www.gender-is-citizenship.net/citigen/Research Reports](http://www.gender-is-citizenship.net/citigen/Research_Reports)

Overview:

The *Gramamukhya* digital platform (www.gramamukhya.in) was created in 2010 through an action-research project undertaken as part of the IDRC funded, Asia-wide research

programme on Gender and Citizenship in the Information Society (CITIGEN). The project mainly aimed at networking elected women representatives of *gram panchayats* in Kerala, through a digital platform, in order to enable solidarity-building among local women leaders and also help them connect with the wider feminist movement in Kerala. The main rationale guiding the establishment of *Gramamukhya* was that on-going dialogue and critical reflection among elected women representatives would enable political consciousness building and enhance their participation in the political arena: enabling them to make the journey from nominal participation to substantive civic and political engagement at the local level.

Therefore, the design of *Gramamukhya* has focussed on ensuring that the portal can serve as a collaborative portal for the free articulation of experiences, and at the same time open up possibilities for members to critically engage with not just local governance issues, but also to public life in general. All content on the portal is in the local language Malayalam. The portal has three sections: 'Knowledge Creation and Information Sharing' which has information about governance issues; a 'Discussion Forum'; and a 'Writers' Blog.

ICTs and capacity building of Elected Women Representatives (EWRs): Opportunities

At the horizontal level, the *Gramamukhya* platform brought together both serving and former women presidents of *gram panchayats* from three districts in Kerala: Thiruvananthapuram, Malappuram and Kannur. Over 126 serving women leaders have been networked, and a support group of nine former panchayat presidents created. At the vertical level, *Gramamukhya* has enabled elected women representatives to interact with feminist activists, scholars and collectives, women centric quasi-government meso-level institutions, women writers, and diasporic women workers from Kerala. These interactions that the portal has facilitated has enabled the elected women representatives to take initial steps towards building solidarities based on their shared experiences of negotiating the spaces of local governance, as women; and helped them in bridging differences such as political party divides.

ICTs and capacity building of Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) : Challenges

Initially, workshops were conducted with the women leaders participating in the project, to

orient them to the need for formation of a collective, and making them cognisant of the politics of technology use along with enabling computer and Internet usage, and enabling them to effectively access the *Gramamukhya* portal.

Scheduling workshops proved to be an operational challenge, due to conflicting schedules of the participants. At times, workshops had to be cancelled at the last minute because the women themselves had to attend other official duties at very short notice. More substantively, changing the participants' view of themselves as passive recipients of training turned out to be difficult. In fact, for all initiatives that aim at using ICT strategies with communities who are unfamiliar with technology, enabling them to overcome their fear and hesitation, and make the journey towards effective use of technologies, is an arduous process.

2.2. Empowering Female Indigenous Leaders Through ICT – The Swedish Program for ICT in Developing Regions (SPIDER)

Country: Bolivia

More information:

- SPIDER ICT4D Series No. 4/2012: Empowering Women through ICT
<http://www.spidercenter.org/newsroom/news/new-spider-ict4d-publication-empowering-women-through-ict>

Overview:

TiCBolivia is a locally established multi-stakeholder network of national actors working with ICT for development (ICT4D) in the areas of governance, agriculture and education. The Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Eastern Bolivia (CIDOB) is part of this network, and one of CIDOB's national chapters focuses on solidifying leadership and public policy advocacy for indigenous women. SPIDER partnered with IICD from January 2009 to December 2009 to assist in developing ICT competences of indigenous female leaders. Integrating computers into the lives of the members of CIDOB was a gradual process that began in 2002 with support from IICD. The establishment of 11 regional centres

strengthened the development of ICT competence among the CIDOB members. On the wave of this success, IICD and SPIDER narrowed the focus of their intervention to enhancing women indigenous leaders' participation in political processes.

In order to enhance their participation in lobbying activities and decision-making practices, a core group of 100 women participated in ICT trainings that were tailored towards building the women's self-worth and political leadership capacities. The trainings covered the following areas: computer skills development that qualified the women in computer and Internet skills such as email, Skype, blogging and writing wikis ; the use of applications such as Word, Excel and Power Point ; and Web development and maintenance .

ICTs for empowering women indigenous leaders: Opportunities

Through the use of interactive platforms such as blogs and wikis, the women's appreciation for information exchange grew. The Internet was not the only medium through which the female indigenous leaders found and articulated their voice. Some of the traditional media such as television and radio were used to increase outreach opportunities. As a result of the programme, learning to use tools such as Skype allowed the female indigenous leaders to connect with each other in an easier and cheaper way than before, and online platforms such as blogs and wikis, as well as radio and television, provided them with the possibility to communicate their messages to a wider audience. According to a project report, a number of the women's demands were addressed when a local leader in CIDOB assumed a national leadership role. The report also notes that learning ICT skills has been empowering to the participating women, and ability to access Internet resources has created a greater awareness of governance issues and technical ways of communication.

ICTs for empowering women indigenous leaders : Challenges

The project report notes that many challenges were encountered during the project, the most prominent ones being limited infrastructure and the limited education of the women. The latter was addressed with the use of images and alternative forms of information and communication. Infrastructural challenges demand alternative and technologically innovative solutions.

3. Use of ICTs for enhancing women's ability to engage with state institutions, both as rightful claimants of public services and other entitlements and as citizens in local public deliberations and governance processes.

3.1. Empowering local people and communities to monitor districts' services delivery through ICTs – The Swedish Program for ICT in Developing Regions (SPIDER) and Women of Uganda Network

Country: Uganda

More information:

- WOUNET website: <http://www.wougnnet.org/ushahidi/> and <http://wougnnet.org/2012/09/using-mobile-technologies-to-promote-good-governance-and-service-delivery-northern-uganda-2/>
- SPIDER project site: <http://www.spidercenter.org/projects/empowering-local-people-and-communities-monitor-districts-services-delivery-through-icts>
- SPIDER stories 2011 report: <http://www.spidercenter.org/newsroom/news/spider-stories-2011-now-available-online>

Overview:

Women of Uganda Network (WOUNET) aims to improve access to public services as well as increase efficiency, transparency and accountability of government and political processes through strategic use of ICTs. The initiative specifically focusses on women in rural districts of Northern Uganda. The aim is to empower communities by enabling them to participate in government decision making processes. At local levels, pro-poor ICT based governance and public service delivery strategies and applications will be applied so as to contribute to poverty reduction and development within the larger context of achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The project is being implemented in five districts in Northern Uganda, targeting active communities and ready to help in monitoring good Governance and Corruption. Under the project, Voluntary Social Accountability Committees (VSACs) have been constituted at the local level, to carry out community monitoring to identify and expose bad governance and poor service delivery. Through this, the project hopes to strengthen local capacity for collective action, and thus contribute to increased accountability.

ICTs for responsive service delivery : Opportunities and challenges

WOUGNET has carried out awareness-raising workshops with women and men from the communities, on good governance and service delivery as well as ICT capacity-building. ICT capacity-building has aimed to equip the participants to use computers, the Internet, mobile phones, radios, digital cameras and print media to amplify their voices on issues related to poor governance and service delivery, and use social media and other online forums to expose situations of poor governance, in order to influence duty bearers to take responsibility for improving the situation. The participants were in the ratio of 70 women to 30 men.

According to a project report, some of the women participants had at first expressed concerns over the fact that many of them had not gone very far with formal education and felt that this hindered them from becoming well-versed in the use of ICTs. Overcoming this initial inhibition of the women participants in handling ICTs was a challenge. However, this changed as the ICT capacity-building workshop progressed, and many of the women slowly started showing enthusiasm and interest in learning more ICT skills. The project has currently started enabling communities to demand transparency and accountability in good governance, and responsiveness from public officers. The main rationale of the project has been that naming and shaming will force corrupt officials to mend their ways, and act as a deterrent to others in public office.

3.2. Bringing the Local and Intimate to the National and Institutional: Using ICTs for Legislative Advocacy for Reproductive Health

Country: The Philippines

More information:

- Gender is Citizenship project website: <http://www.gender-is-citizenship.net/citigen/Philippines>
- Final research report of the Philippines project: [http://www.gender-is-citizenship.net/citigen/Research Reports](http://www.gender-is-citizenship.net/citigen/Research_Reports)

Overview:

Likhaan (Centre for Women's Health) is a grass-roots organisation based in Philippines that has been actively involved in the decade-long campaign for the passage of a Reproductive Health (RH) bill undertaken by women's groups in the country. In 2010, *Likhaan* took up an action-research project as part of the IDRC funded, Asia-wide research programme on 'Gender and Citizenship in the Information Society' (CITIGEN). At the time of the research, women's groups in the Philippines were in their ninth year of advocacy for the passage of a reproductive health (RH) bill. In a context where the discourse of the Catholic Church on the reproductive rights of women has been pre-dominant in the public sphere, *Likhaan* wanted to explore ICT based strategies for channelising into the public debate on reproductive health, the realities of women and youth in marginalised communities.

Therefore, an online magazine was set up by *Likhaan*, with the aim of bringing in the accounts of women and youth from marginalised communities who were most in need of sexual and reproductive health services and rights (SRHR), with the hope that these accounts would ultimately influence lawmakers both directly and through generating public support, and lead into the passing of the reproductive health law. The magazine was hosted on the website of *Likhaan*.

Activists and leaders were identified from local communities, and trained in citizen

journalism and reporting. The training provided for the participants included ICT-skills, internet use, and reporting basics. The participants were then encouraged to start writing accounts and stories connecting their everyday lived experiences to the larger struggle for sexual and reproductive health and rights. Many of the community reporters did so, often connecting experiences from their life and their interactions with communities to abstract questions such as the right to a better life, and social justice concerns.

ICTs and women's engagement in local public deliberations: Opportunities

A focus group discussion with the participants that was held as part of the research initiative revealed that all the community activists found the project 'empowering'. They expressed pride in themselves because many of them had never written formally and none had ever been published before. Most of the activists felt that their computer and ICT literacy and skills had been enhanced to a large degree. The older women, 3 in the group, recalled how they had never really encountered a computer before they were trained by the project.

While the participating community reporters found it difficult or uninteresting to approach assignments from a traditional, observer-standpoint of a journalist, and instead highlighted more personal aspects, anecdotal stories and personal, individual experiences; *Likhaan* staff have observed that the political point being made by the online publication of these stories is for the validity of individual experiences of intimate matters, and that the personal is indeed political especially for the embodied subject of sexual and reproductive rights.

ICTs and women's engagement in local public deliberations: Challenges

While the participants were issued financial support from the researchers for airtime, and given technical skills training on the use of ICTs and the Internet, the participants identified other challenges that hampered their ability to fully participate in the initiative. These included distance and travel to the nearest Internet café which in some instances was located far from the participants' village, which underscores a bigger problem of access that often plagues particularly poor and rural communities. Despite existing 'coverage', some villages or communities simply lack the hardware and facilities to access the Internet.

Another issue raised by the participants was the number of computers available. Many had

to wait long periods of time in Internet cafés for a computer to become available, which was not feasible for the majority of individuals who might also be losing income and work time while sitting around Internet cafés, waiting for a computer to become available for them. Internet cafés were also described as noisy by participants, which made it harder for them to concentrate in writing their articles.

The researchers from *Likhaan* spearheading the project, noted that while the process was found empowering and useful for the community journalists, the extent of the impact of these stories in strengthening the ongoing struggle for the passage of the RH bill was questionable. There was no direct evidence about instances where the community reporters' stories had been picked up or reported on, by mainstream media.

Thus, it was clear that the goal of reaching decision makers, politicians and bridging the grass-roots movement with the broader policy and legislation discourses in the mainstream public sphere was not easy to realise. Obtaining the attention of those who count / people in power and in decision making positions, and finding ways to gain more visibility and recognition for the standpoints of marginalised people, even when their voices are brought into online publics, is not a simple, linear correlation. Policy change is a complex, political process where interests are traded. Creating visibility for sub-altern voices may be one part of the strategy.

3.3. Women-gov

Country: India, Brazil and South Africa

More information:

- Women-gov project website: <http://www.gender-is-citizenship.net/women-and-governance/>

Overview:

Women-gov is a feminist action-research project initiated in March 2012 that aims at enhancing marginalised women's active citizenship and their engagement with local governance, across three sites in India, Brazil and South Africa. The project focuses on

developing contextual models that harness the potential of digital technologies, for gendering local governance structures and bringing gender politics into local public spheres. Women-gov is an on-going project, still in its early stages of implementation in all three locations. The details of the initiatives taken up in each site, as part of the Women-gov project, are detailed below.

Brazil: *Instituto Nupef*, the partnering organisation, has decided to focus the project intervention on a group of 13 local feminist leaders, each of them supported by two assistants, all of whom are part of an initiative of the NGO *Criola* [www.criola.org]. These 39 women are all leaders and coordinators of Afro-religion centres based in poor communities of the city of Rio de Janeiro, and are a part of *Criola's* programme *Multiversidade*. This programme is dedicated to strengthening capacities of black women on issues related to feminism and the fight against racism, aiming to foster their political expertise and enhance their political action, and also to promote scientific and philosophical reflection amongst this group, by offering a course on theories and political issues of the African diaspora. The project will focus on strengthening women's leadership and their use of ICTs as well as explore the architectures of power and governance and ways to intervene in these by organizing workshops, panels and discussions on various issues, including how to monitor public policies; the architecture of the local governance and spaces of citizen participation; democracy and affirmative policies; online mechanisms for the promotion and defence of rights; Internet and political participation; e-governance; transparency and public accountability; and others.

India: The partnering organisation in India, IT for Change, will work with women who are a part of the collectives formed under the *Mahila Samakhya* programme (locally known as *sanghas*) in Mysore, India. *Mahila Samakhya* is a pan-Indian governmental programme that works with the aim of 'education for empowerment' through a collectivisation strategy that mainly focuses on rural women, especially those belonging to economically and socially disadvantaged sections.

Over the two years of the Women-gov project, IT for Change will be exploring the transformatory potential of community radio, community video, information centres, SMS networks and GIS technologies for :

- Capacity building of *sangha* women to enable them to engage with local governance institutions and influence the discourses in the local public sphere effectively.
- Reductions of community level power blocks that prevent women's political participation in the local community and prevent their access to community resources.
- Increasing the associational power of the *sanghas* at the village level, at the community level, and enabling women to become conscious of the power of the collective.
- Building the linkages of the *sanghas* with local government institutions, other organisations and government departments at the block level; as well as networking with other *sanghas*.
- Strengthening the local information ecology by enhancing the information, learning and knowledge processes at the community level.

By the end of the project period, IT for Change hopes to develop a networked informational system with women's leadership at its core, for enhancing women's participation in local governance, at the end of the project period. To work towards this goal, IT for Change will strengthen its two existing *Namma Mahiti Kendras* (Village Information Centres) in two villages of Hunsur block¹, Mysore district; as well as set up such information centres in three more villages after following community-sensitive entry processes. Through its direct presence in the five villages, and the creation of a networked informational system with the support of the *sanghas* and *Mahila Samakhya* programme staff; IT for Change aims at building a trans-local networks of *sangha* women, reaching out to 25 villages at the secondary level.

South Africa: In South Africa, the project's objective is to establish a telecentre for innovative use of ICTs in activism, with the aim of addressing the immediate and strategic empowerment of rural and peri-urban women across various marginalised communities in Capetown. The South African project will focus on the nexus of governance, public participation, communication and gender justice through using ICTS for ensuring that: marginalised women's voices are not only present, but are amplified and authoritative in local governance processes.; local information systems are driven by and serve the interests

¹ Block refers to a sub-district level of administration in India,

of women vis-a-vis their communities and local government; and that communities of activist women and platforms for feminist activism, especially among young women, are created and strengthened.

The potential of ICTs in enhancing women's ability to engage with state institutions: Opportunities and Challenges

The Women-gov project is in its early stages, but there is clear evidence from all three sites for the need for an intervention focussed on enhancing women's ability to engage with local government. The experiences on the field have re-affirmed the project partners' faith in the transformatory potential of an ICT-based strategy. For example, in Brazil, photography training for the women leaders in communities widened the reach of their local advocacy efforts for community issues – the leaders began to see how if strategically harnesses, the relative anonymity offered by online spaces could be harnessed to support their grassroots level efforts for availing of public services and entitlements. In India, non-textual modes of information and communication have emerged as crucial for effective awareness-building strategies among the largely non-literate constituency of women members of rural women's collectives.

The challenges faced in Women-gov so far, are similar to what has been faced by other interventions that have harnessed ICT strategies in their work with women : women often do not have the time, their schedules often clash making the planning of joint activities difficult; there are technical difficulties such as finding mobile platforms that support non-English text messaging. Lessons learned and challenges will be shared and published once the project has come to an end, and final evaluations of all three interventions can be carried out, in March 2014.