

ICTs for Rural Women in Africa

**Presentation for Dimitra II Launch
Brussels
20-24 October 2002**

**Natasha Primo
Women'sNet**

Outline of Presentation

- What do we mean by ICTs?
- Why gender and ICTs?
- The African context
- Perspectives on gender and ICTs in Africa
 - Agriculture and ICTs – Economic Empowerment for Rural Women?
 - Democratisation, Good Governance and ICTs
- Engendering ICT policies

What are ICTs?

- ICTs are a multi-level phenomenon:
 - IT equipment and services
 - telecommunications equipment and services
 - media and broadcast
 - Internet service provision
 - libraries
 - commercial information service provision
 - network based information services
- ... a diverse set of technological tools and resources to create, disseminate, store, bring value addition to, and manage information.

Conceptually...

- ICT have the potential to digitally link each and every woman in the world in a network that opens endless possibilities for information exchange;
- ICTs could be used creatively to communicate with other people who are online, and disseminate info to others who are not online through convergence/hybrid technologies like Internet radio, community radio, mobile phones, newsletters, etc.

Why gender and ICTs?

- The Information Age is a reality
- Issues around gender and technology, especially ICTs:
 - **governments and development agencies treat technologies as neutral, value free tools and assume the adoption of these technologies will naturally lead to development**
 - **government and development agencies tend to ignore women's relationship to technology;**
 - **women have unequal access to development resources (of which information has become a primary resource, like land and capital)**
- Telecommunications policies make no distinctions between the attitudes and needs of male and female users
- New ICTs can marginalize men and women
 - Women likely to be slower in adopting the new technologies

Why gender and ICTs? (II)

- **Equity issue**
 - Women are the majority of the rural population in ACP countries, and significant in food production
- **Human rights issue**

Gender equality is a central to a human rights based approach to development
- **Efficiency issue**
 - Development projects that take account of gender are more likely to meet their objectives
- **Poverty alleviation**
 - Addressing gender issues means addressing poverty
 - Women's empowerment is central to poverty eradication

Strategies must be developed to deliberately involve women

Gender and IT/ICTs: Pros and Cons...

- **Not all good:**
 - sexual exploitation
 - putting women in low wage, low end jobs
 - threats to women's jobs
- **Not all bad**
 - new jobs and opportunities
 - end to isolation
 - broadened range of vision

Women's IT usage in Africa and other developing regions

- it's low by comparison
- compare to 51% of users in U.S. women, 60% of population with Internet access
- but % of women increasing everywhere
- no correlation between female usage and expected indicators
- women users in developing countries part of small, educated urban elite

Women as % of Internet users, Africa

Country	Women as % of users	Internet users as % of population
Zambia	37.5	0.0
Uganda	31.5	0.1
South Africa	19.0	3.0
Ethiopia	13.9	0.01
Senegal	12.0	0.1

Increases in % women's use last year

Country	% 1999	% 2000
Philippines	43	51
Brazil	25	43
Mexico	33	42
Western Asia	4	6
China	21	30.4

Deepest of the digital divide . . .

Country	Internet users as % of population
D.R. Congo	0.00
Somalia	0.00
Bangladesh	0.00
Papua New Guinea	0.00
Burundi	0.00
Liberia	0.00

Women on the Net: What do they use ICTs for?

- networking for political advocacy
- networking for business
- women medium-scale formal sector entrepreneurs using business applications almost as much as men
- e-mail and discussion lists more than Web
- corporate sector trying to entice women in dc's into global shopping mall

Economic empowerment: what IT opportunities can rural women seize?

- Women farmers need information on markets, agricultural inputs, food preservation and storage
- access problems can be overcome: farm radio, listening clubs, WorldSpace, community centers with intermediaries
- train schoolgirls as community information assistants, to overcome literacy barriers, for example.

GENDER AND ICTs IN AFRICA: AGRICULTURE AND ICTs (ii)

- **Background:**
 - Focus on urban areas, yet agriculture is mainstay of Africa
 - Rural population: 70 - 80% of Africa
 - Women's role in agriculture:
 - Women constitute 70% of agricultural workforce
 - Women produce 80% of Africa's food
 - Generally responsible for household food security...thus need information on increasing productivity, improving farming methods
 - Role reduced by customary and religious practices
 - Weak extension services in Africa
 - 7% extension time; 7% female extension officers
 - Current initiatives to increase number of female extension workers
 - Land tenure and ownership
 - some reforms, but a long way to go
 - need information on land rights

GENDER AND ICTs IN AFRICA: AGRICULTURE AND ICTs (iii)

- **Background:**
 - Limited access to credit
 - no land, therefore no collateral
 - Limited access to training and education
 - social/cultural pressures
 - transportation problems
 - Low levels of literacy
 - career guidance on women's role in agricultural development
 - Workloads -
 - reproductive, productive, community development
 - Little access to information or technology
 - radios - who owns the batteries?
 - Agricultural research does not take women's needs into consideration... focus on cash crop/commercial rather than subsistence farming

GENDER AND ICTs IN AFRICA: AGRICULTURE AND ICTs (iv)

- **Appropriate content for Female Farmers**
 - Radio
 - rural radio available in many countries
 - Farm Radio Network in Harare / Developing countries, FRN Canada
 - Union of National Radio and Television Broadcasting of Africa
 - TV
 - generally not very successful due to problems with language /scheduling
 - Audiovisual
 - includes videos, films, slides, pictures
 - CD-ROM
 - Commonwealth Agriculture Bureaux International (CABI) databases
 - Agris from FAO
 - SA Dept of Agriculture feasibility study
 - Telecentres
 - Access to Internet information sources

IT for political empowerment...

- to end women's isolation and give them a voice
- to network women for social and political advocacy
- to strengthen women's participation in the political process
- to improve performance of elected women officials
- to improve women's access to government and its services
- through education
- through the dissemination of indigenous knowledge

Barriers: time, cost, location, technical skills, etc

- **women don't have time ...**
 - productive, reproductive, and community management roles
- **connectivity costs more in developing countries, more so in rural areas**
- **no computers at home**
- **do women feel at ease in the existing spaces?**
- **need literacy, language, computers and information use skills**
- **perceived fear of technology .. “ICTs not for women”**

Gender Issues in ICT and rural development

Lack of infrastructure is a gender issue...

- Poorer infrastructure in rural and remote areas;
- More women live in rural areas than men
- Urban bias in connectivity deprive more women than men from the universal right to communicate

Other gender issues...

- Financial resources
- Limitations of the media on gender issues
- ICTs as limited and desirable resource

Gender lessons from projects ...

- Technology empowers women, but also alters gender relations within which they are located;
- Every project is gendered in some way ... none are gender neutral
- Women emerge from project participation with greater knowledge and self-esteem;
- Need to be pro-active to ensure women's participation;
- If you don't ask for it, you don't get a gender perspective/analysis

How to ensure women's inclusion?

- **Technology will take care of some access problems**
- **Training for women in non-traditional fields**
- **Develop role models**
- **Inclusion of ICT training in training and education projects for girls and women**
- **Train young women from communities at community centers**
- **Improve girl's and women's education in Africa**

Engendering ICT policy

- must be done to ensure women included, women-friendly access alternatives exist
- also, gender and development policy needs to include possibilities offered by ICT

Strategies for including gender in ICT policy (I)

- Including gender analysis in technology policy, and ensure that resulting policies include the needs, requirements and aspirations of women
- Target financial and technical resources specifically to reduce gender inequality in electronic communications technology (e.g. MPCCs a vehicle) and develop gender-disaggregated statistics to measure impact
- Make network and equipment choices so equipment and services are cost effective and appropriate solutions for women's needs e.g. by linking access to profitable urban markets to universal service obligations in regulatory frameworks
- Build technological capacity through employment policies and women-friendly work practice that by encouraging women's active participation in ICT related fields

Strategies for including gender in ICT policy (II)

- **Facilitate involvement of African women in technological innovation, product design and technology**
 - private sector companies, academic institutions, public sector research, and not for profit organisations
- **Facilitate the production of culturally resonant content**
 - language issue, volume of African produced information
- **Design and deliver appropriate training programmes**
 - facilitate hands-on training, motivational training materials, user friendly materials, involving local user support
- **Increase effective demand for these goods and services**
 - e.g. telecentres for providing community level access

Making a gender strategy operational

- Gender redistributive policies have characteristics that tend to create opposition and resistance as they challenge existing cultural norms, values and resource allocation. To make a gender strategy operational it is important to acknowledge these tensions
- There is no universal definition of what is a desirable outcome from a gender strategy in ICTs. Strategies for Africa must define goals and objectives in dialogue with all key actors and potential beneficiaries
- Key actors themselves operate in gendered social and political contexts that where the social value ascribed to, and interest of women and men are continuously negotiated. This makes the project in bringing gender justice ICTs more complicated as there are no unifying definitions of the project, desired outcomes, and the consequences of achieving these outcomes