

Equitable access to information and communication technologies can be an important tool for empowering women

ICT & Gender Equality

GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT BRIEFING NOTES



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Why are gender equality issues important in the ICT sector?

Women and men have different needs and constraints when accessing and using Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). In many societies, women's and men's access to and use of technology are rooted in behavioral, cultural, and religious traditions:

- Cultural and social attitudes are often unfavorable to women's participation in the fields of science and technology, which limits their opportunities in the area of ICT.
- Women are often financially dependent on men or do not have control over economic resources, which makes accessing ICT services more difficult.
- Allocation of resources for education and training often favors boys and men.
- In some societies, women's seclusion from the public arena makes access to community telecenters difficult.

Unless explicit measures are taken to address the constraints women face, advances in ICT may increase gender disparities and their potential impact will be reduced.

Gender-responsive ICT can make technologies, from telephones to computers, available to more people and offer ways for both women and men to access information and markets, and participate in new income generating activities. When ICT policies and programs recognize the different constraints women and men face, ICT will contribute to reducing women's burden of labor in time consuming tasks, provide income generating activities, and provide an important source of employment in both ICT and other fields.

Issues to consider

- Are there gender differences in access to ICT?
- How does the use of ICT affect men and women differently? How can ICT be used to reduce gender inequalities?

Gender-responsive intervention examples:

- **Telecommuting:** *Flexibility in use of time and locations has opened new opportunities for women.* Spryance, India, provides web-based medical transcription services for doctors and hospitals in the U.S. It has pioneered the home-based franchisee strategy in India, involving many women working from home. High salary and flexibility of telecommuting attract many female workers.

- In rural villages in Uganda, women use **cell phones** to operate businesses that provide communication services to their communities. The Grameen Foundation along with MTN Uganda began MTN Village Phone Uganda in 2003 and there are now over 1,000 rural Village Phone Operators throughout Uganda, each earning enough money to repay their microfinance loan and put money aside for the welfare of their families; including purchasing food, education, and health services.

- **A CD-Rom** developed by the International Women's Tribune Center for rural women in Uganda teaches them about new ways of earning income, using local languages and many visual aides.

- Are both men and women included in ICT decision making? Are gender issues considered when setting national ICT priorities?

What is the World Bank doing?

Through the Global ICT Department, **Gender and ICTs Clinics Training**, the World Bank collaborates with various stakeholders. For example, in 2004-2005, the World Bank held multiple videoconference seminars with New Delhi, Chennai, Seoul, Tokyo, Rome, Geneva, Kabul, Beijing, and Amman to discuss how ICT has helped increase women's economic opportunities. The World Bank also commissioned a paper, titled "The 'Hole in the Wall' experiments - Self-organizing systems for

gender parity in primary education", by Dr. Sugata Mitra, to illustrate the importance of computer training for young girls. As girls more readily receive computer training before the age of 13, they could be inspired to later pursue a career in ICT/Sciences. In 2004, the World Bank conducted a global **e-Discussion on ICTs and Gender Equality** and produced a summary of the dialogue which includes findings and recommendations.

The World Bank is stepping up its gender mainstreaming efforts in ICTs and Infrastructure

Infrastructure plays a critical role in making markets work for both women and men, and in empowering women to compete in markets. Under the leadership of the Sustainable Development Network Vice-Presidency, the Global ICT Department is looking into devising strategies to scale-up successful projects, mainstreaming gender into ICT sector operations, and monitoring results. In 2005, the World Bank launched an "Engendering ICT Toolkit". As it helps World Bank staff and others responsible for ICT policies and programs around the world incorporate gender issues into their work, this toolkit has proven very useful.

The World Bank currently lends an estimated USD 1 billion per year to various e-government projects. Services such as on-line access to land, voter registration, rural microfinance, disaster prevention and recovery, and license applications, can benefit women, especially when such services would otherwise be available only in the capital. One successful example is the e-Sri Lanka project, which uses e-government applications in education services that are tailored to promote women's skills training. A voucher scheme initially grants women free access to rural telecenters; they then pay a few cents per hour to make the centers financially sustainable.

Gender and ICTs Clinics Training:

<http://www.worldbank.org/gender/digitaldivide>
Engendering ICT Toolkit
<http://www.worldbank.org/ict>