

Gender ICT: Issues, Implications & Opportunities

Summary of Discussions

From September 13th to December 12th

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Three Monthly Report on ‘Gender ICT’ Channel

<http://www.dgroups.org/groups/GenderICT>

Introduction:

The discussion channel on “Gender & ICT: Issues, Implications & Opportunities” is a joint venture by Digital Opportunity Channel (www.digitalopportunity.org) of OneWorld South Asia is launching with i4donline.net (www.i4donline.net), an initiative of the Centre for Spatial Database Management & Solutions based in India.

The discussion forum is hosted at ‘D-Groups’ server (<http://www.dgroups.org>) with an attempt to attempt to increase awareness, raise concerns and make our commitments to give a gender perspective to policies and design of development tools.

Here follows the details of the channel and the summary of discussions held in this forum in the last three months. This will also highlight the

Following information on the channel would give a clearer picture as to what the discussion channel is for and what is its achievement in the last three months.

URL location of Gender&ICT discussion channel:

<http://www.dgroups.org/groups/GenderICT>

To subscribe: join-GenderICT@dgroups.org

Starting date of discussion: 15th September, 2003

Total number of subscribed members: 183 members

Total number of messages so far: 103 messages

Objectives: We aim to:

- Help stakeholders in the fields of gender and ICT issues exchange ideas and debate issues about the gender issues and implications of ICT applications in development and the opportunities that they offer.
- Provide them with a platform to take their voices to policymakers in order to influence national, regional and global strategies.

Main Features: It is a time-bound, topic-based, objective-oriented discussion channel

Each month we select a topic and that topic is critically analyzed, featured with examples and best practices, discussed with challenges and opportunities and is highlighted with policy implications, preconditions, successes and failures

Subscription Reports:

Grand total members by type for 'genderict'

- Normal Members: 181
- Unsubscribed members: 9
- Held Members: 2
- Unconfirmed members: 5
- Confirmation rate: 97%

From November 1st to November 30th, 2003

- New normal members: 8
- New unsubscribed members: 5
- New unconfirmed members: 5
- Confirmation rate: 61%

From December 1st to December 31st, 2003

- New normal members: 2
- New unconfirmed members: 4
- Confirmation rate: 33%

Geographic representation of contributors

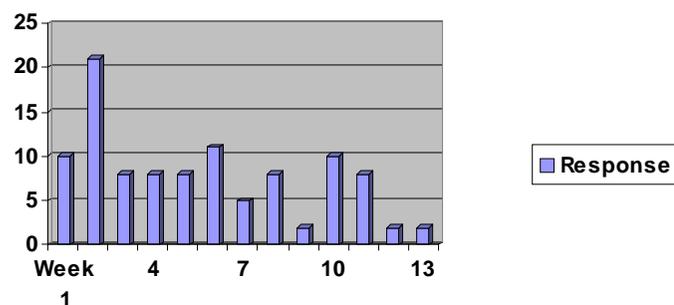
I have tried to give a geographic representation of the total number of contributors we got over the three months. Though most of them I could locate the area where they are presently placed but a few of them couldn't be traced. The biggest problem is that the contributors don't introduce themselves when they post something to the forum. So except their email address, it was difficult to find the details like the organization they belong to etc. Almost all the contributors have participated more than once. Maximum contributions were found from South Asia (more than 5 times). From the CIS countries there was one contribution from the country of Kazakhstan. Further since this being a gender forum, I have attempted to show the male and female representation within the contributions.

| Region | Number of Contributors | Percentage of Contributions | Female | Male |
|---------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------|-------------|
| South Asia | 17 | 61.1% | 8 | 9 |
| Middle East | 1 | 1.94% | 1 | - |
| Africa | 6 | 13.59% | 6 | - |
| Australia | Nil | - | - | - |
| North America | 2 | 5.82% | 1 | 1 |
| Europe | 4 | 6.79% | 3 | 1 |
| South America | Nil | - | - | - |
| CIS countries | 1 | 5.82% | 1 | - |
| Unknown | 2 | 3.88% | | |

Quantitative Analysis of Responses

1. Weekly Response

| No. of Week | No. of Responses |
|----------------------------|------------------|
| Week 1 (Sept 13 – Sept 19) | 10 |
| Week 2 (Sept 20 – Sept 26) | 21 |
| Week 3 (Sept 27- Oct 2) | 8 |
| Week 4 (Oct 3 – Oct 9) | 8 |
| Week 5 (Oct 10 – Oct 16) | 8 |
| Week 6 (Oct 17 – Oct 23) | 11 |
| Week 7 (Oct 24 – Oct 30) | 5 |
| Week 8 (Oct 31 – Nov 6) | 8 |
| Week 9 (Nov 7 –Nov13) | 2 |
| Week 10 (Nov 14 – Nov20) | 10 |
| Week 11 (Nov 21 – Nov28) | 8 |
| Week 12 (Nov 29 – Dec 5) | 2 |
| Week 13 (Dec 6 – Dec 12) | 2 |



2. Ratio of members who posted to total members (Average total members taken 180 for all three months)

| Months | No. of contributors | % Contributors of total members |
|--|---------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1 st month (13 th Sept – 12 th Oct) | 19 | 11% |
| 2 nd month (13 th Oct – 12 th Nov) | 16 | 9% |
| 3 rd month (13 th Nov – 12 th Dec) | 11 | 6% |

3. Frequency of contribution

Usha Reddi made maximum number of contributions in the first month i.e. 5 times.

Brenda Zulu made maximum number of contributions in the second month i.e. 3 times

Digbijoy Bhowmik made maximum number of contributions in the third month i.e. 3 times and also in the overall discussion spanning three months i.e. 7 times

4. Details of these contributors

Usha Reddi is Director of the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia, New Delhi, India.

Brenda Zulu is a freelance journalist from Zambia active with Gender issues.

Digbijoy Bhowmik is the assistant editor of i4d, a bimonthly magazine on information for development, India.

Qualitative analysis of responses

In the first month, around 50 responses came. Topics like “Technology with social fabrication” and “Gender implications of ICT” generated a lot of good responses. An active discussion took place on the WSIS process. Many new members joined in during this phase and many new contributors participated in the discussion on this topic. It was observed that many of them actively discussed on Gender and WSIS process and never contributed again on the other following topics.

Contributors can be classified as follows:

- Some participated throughout the discussion irrespective of the sub-topic.
- Few came into the discussion only under some very specific sub-topics and disappeared once that topic got over or lost momentum.
- Few never participated in the discussions but occasionally made announcements.

Very quality suggestions came throughout the discussions. It was found that all the contributors raised very valid and genuine concerns in this arena. Mostly participants placed their viewpoints or observations gained through their experiences. Lack of case studies was apparent.

In the second month, mostly discussions hovered around indigenous women and indigenous knowledge. In these discussions the contributors were mainly from developing nations of Africa and India. The topic sparked off a very good discussion with excellent responses though the contributors were limited. This sub topic stretched far beyond its scheduled time and the next topic about the need for innovation in technology was carried to the next month too.

In the third month, topic of data unavailability generated a very few responses and the discussion diverted to another very sensitive topic of “Is technology perse gender neutral or not”. Many strong feminist responses came along and a new topic could not be introduced at that point. Till the end the same topic about technology and gender was hotly debated.

It is observed that introduction of a suitable or not so valid topic is the reason behind the rise or fall of responses. Though pre-decided themelines were followed to some extent but a few could not be discussed either because of the time constraint or the other sensitive topics sparked off which generated long debates.

Topics and Sub-topics of discussion forum:

Gender & ICT: Issues, Implications and Opportunities

13th September – 12th October

Main Topic – Access to ICTs and their use

Some of the theme lines discussed under this are as follows:

- Access issues: Is it a gender issue or a poverty issue?
- The barriers – social, cultural, education, technology, language, and geographical location of facilities
- Technology Limitations
- How much the ICT medium is adapted to local contexts and existing women skills
- Do pre-existing gender inequalities get reflected in differential abilities of men and women to appropriate technologies?
- Gender Implications of ICT
- Participation of Women in decision making in the information society. How to assess – Gender and WSIS

13th October – 12th November

Main Topic – Information, technology and women empowerment

Some of the theme lines discussed under this are as follows:

- Indigenous knowledge: Are indigenous modes of information dissemination to women of help?
- Improving women's access to ICT education and training. Need for innovation & adaptation?
- Impact of ICT on broader gender issues
- Case studies and conceptual tools other than internet available on the impact of ICT on achieving gender equality

13th November – 12th December

Main Topic - Women's campaigns, networks, resources and repositories on ICT

Some of the theme lines discussed under this are as follows:

- Lack of quantitative data and documentation
- Is technology perse gender neutral?

13th September to 12th October

Summary Report

Main Topic - Access to ICTs and Use

This topic was taken up foremost because the issue “the lack of access to ICT is one of the major impediments towards achieving an information society and the women fall under the disadvantaged group of this society. We still need to ascertain whether access is a gender issue or poverty issue. We know, women fall into the deepest part of the divide in all the developing countries even far behind the men whose poverty they share, and access to the ICT resources to women is a bigger concern. A sentence from the final report from the Bucharest Conference reads “Governments and others stakeholders should provide the necessary conditions to ensure women’s equal access to information and knowledge as well as ensuring their equal role as producers and decision makers in all aspects related to the shaping of IT policies and frameworks”

Sub Topic 1 - Access issues: Is it a gender issue or a poverty issue? The barriers?

Talking about barriers, Usha Reddi, Director of the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia, New Delhi pointed out that solely technology cannot be considered a barrier to the gender, it is associated with other factors persistent in the society. “Technology is not neutral--it carries with it values, ideologies, assumptions and preconditions; use and management practices; benefits and disadvantages (knowingly or unwittingly) of its source of origin. But technology per se is gender neutral--how it is exploited in a society begins to include that society's ideologies, assumptions, and preconditions. In other words, if in a given society, women are denied education--they will also most likely be denied access to technology. Thus, one has to go beyond mere technology to determine what causes gender and digital divides.” She also stressed that though lack of education is a barrier it “does not mean lack of wisdom, lack of survival skills or resilience. What is denied is the lack of the power to be able to make a considered choice--because choices themselves become limited. And so, we do have to go beyond ICT to understand the linkages between the gender issues--which incidently exist, irrespective of wealth or poverty; educated or uneducated--and technology.”

Agreeing to Ms. Reddi’s observations Digbijoy Bhowmik of i4d said “that ICT makes certain presumptions. However, being illiterate need not necessarily mean uneducated - and being educated means having the ability to use information and communication effectively.” He raised that “‘being able to use’ the technology effectively, which the social, economic and the cultural fabric has consistently disallowed.” He also has the view that technology should not be taken as a limitation to access to information, “It must be kept in mind that the need for information and communication precede the need or substantiation of technology. For any individual, man, woman or otherwise, making better use of whatever little information that is made available would obviously hold more benefits that being ‘wired up’ to the internet - with too much of information and little to do. When we talk of ICT access, this distinction between access to technology and access to information must be kept intact.” He said that “however, there have been ample examples where women have been given/ have made by their own free will and ability - the choice of making informed decisions - there are numerous cases of self-help groups which have been able to create effective networks with both micro as well as macro finance.”

Usha Reddi said similarly that more important than technology is information, “the need for information and knowledge and the means by which these are provided are to be separated. In other words, needs existed even before ICTs; whether they were agricultural, health, or of human rights and empowerment. ICTs remain and must be seen as tools enabling access to and to provide a means for voicing, articulating, and aggregating such needs. Ultimately what comes first, technology or people and their needs. To me it is the latter.”

Geeta Sharma, Editor Learning Channel said, “we need to see what kind of empowerment we are looking at through ICTs as the means? Are we looking at ICTs as a tool to help women cope better with the

requirement of life or as a means to significantly change the conditions of life and assert alternative gender roles to achieve greater equality?

On the question of access, it cannot only be a gender or only a poverty issue. It is both and much more and is influenced to a large extent by both gender and technology infrastructure and the socio-economic and cultural context in which ICTs are used.”

Started with another sub-topic 2 in parallel – Technology Limitations

Subbiah Arunachalam, M.S. Swaminathan Institute said “every advance in technology, left to itself, benefits the well off and exacerbates the divide between the rich and the poor. Therefore we need to pay special attention to see that we use the new ICTs intelligently and innovatively so the poor and the marginalized are not left behind. Easier said than done.”

He also pointed that existing ICT medium is not adapted to local contexts and aggravates the gender and information gap. “To be able to do that we must appreciate their context and their needs, and then equip ourselves to be able to work with them in finding appropriate information (knowledge) that can satisfy their needs. Much of what is called 'local content' IS NOT FOUND in the INTERNET and the millions of WEBSITES. The local content is 'local' and the best way to create it is to work with the local communities.”

He further discussed the case study of Information Village Research Project at the M S Swaminathan Research Foundation, Chennai, southern India. Prof. Swaminathan calls it the 'Antyodaya' approach, which aims at reaching first the poorest of the poor ('Unto the last' as John Ruskin called it). “Often while talking about ICTs people tend to view them as great technologies for improving 'access to information'. I would like to emphasise another important aspect: we can also use these technologies to facilitate the poor and the marginalised to communicate with the experts, who in turn can refocus their research and action to solve the specific problems posed by the people. I was alerted to this possibility by Prof. Bruce Alberts, President of the US National Academy of Sciences, who visited our project villages a few years ago. Indeed, based on this simple notion we have now launched a Virtual Academy for Rural Prosperity, where we will use a whole range of traditional and modern technologies to facilitate two-way communication that will lead to the rural poor, farmers, etc. getting timely help with weather forecasts, availability of seeds and other farm inputs, advice on crops to be cultivated (depending on the soil, weather and market conditions), healthcare, education, employment, capacity building, government entitlements, and so on. In essence, the Academy is a kind of a university (with no formal classroom lectures or examinations) where anyone can learn what is relevant to his/her life.”

Gautam Navin of i4d said was of opinion that “illiteracy is mother of all problems but if we talk about the access of something then I think that there is some difference between access of ICT and education on ICT or education as a whole. It is important that people get the knowledge of the ways to use the tool and get benefits rather keeping complete focus on education or core education (especially to the adult). He made the statement, “ to become a good driver only demands a total control over the machine, and not a total control over the mechanics.”

Leslie Wright, First Vice President, Conference of NGOs talked about the rapid change in technology. “Whether literate or not, and even if you have been trained in the use of ICT, the situation in developed countries is that the technology is changing so rapidly that if you do not work in the field, you have no idea what things are. Just purchasing a new television requires developing a whole new vocabulary and connecting new items to your computer requires hiring someone to connect them. Busy people often do not have the time to research what things are and how they connect. The pace of change means that we reduce our expectation of technology because we cannot absorb it all.”

Gautam Navin said “access of ICT is more co-ordinated with the need and requirement of the people. So, it is important to assess the need of the people meticulously before providing them the tools of ICT. If they won't find the tool useful for them then they are not going to accept it whole-heartedly. Technology should not be imposed to the masses but it should be blended with basic fabrication essential for the society, so that they feel its need and hence demand for the same.”

Janet Feldman, Director KAIPPG/International ActALIVE Arts Coalition gave the example of rural Kenya to discuss the issue of information accessibility and gender. They studied the local needs and thereby use various forms of communication to impart information.

“In rural W. Kenya, there is a severe lack of infrastructure, making for few roads and scarce and expensive electricity. We do have a couple office computers, but are not able to access the Internet on a regular basis (due to the \$200 a MONTH charge for continuous connection, so I do the honors on that, as I am running the international branch in the USA, with daily Internet access...speaking of digital-divide issues!), so computers—while desirable in and of themselves--are not as useful at the moment, unless of course we can get solar rechargers or develop some kind of alternative energy source, which we are considering. For the GenARDIS grant, we realized we had to work within the limits of this local context in terms of what types of ICTs would be useful, not only in terms of communication devices themselves (so we have focused on introducing mobile phones, cassette recorders powered by batteries, and radios, hand-cranked and solar-recharged), but also in terms of languages used, the lack of literacy (90% of the grant beneficiaries are women who have little to no literacy), and local needs, which involve poverty alleviation, nutrition enhancement, general education, and HIV/AIDS information. We also use the arts in various forms (song and theater to convey info), pictorial communication in terms of charts and the like, and local languages are a must in terms of materials (something we are working on now, as many forms of communication are not yet translated into local dialects). We do hope to add laptops and even desktops at some point, and are investigating satellite, solar, wireless, and other devices, but again with an eye towards applicability (at least in the immediate future) and also for sustainability (we can get the high-tech items, but they aren't useful because too expensive to maintain for the time being). Oral communication, listening and sharing face-to-face, and traditional forms of cultural expression (arts) will continue to be crucial and invaluable, and in fact we hope this will always be so, even as we begin to blend the old with the new in terms of ICT use.”

He further appreciated, “The resources at web-based orgs. like the Development Gateway are vast and extremely helpful as per examples of translating general concepts into the local context, and addressing the issue of Gender and ICTs, and also others like Digital Dividends, I-connect, OneWorld's The Learning Channel and Digital Opportunity Channel, Eldis, and organizations like WOUGNET (“Women of Uganda Network”, at <http://www.wougnet.org>), which have websites crammed full of amazing and invaluable materials. The Communications Project/Drumbeat, UNIFEM, the FAO, INSTRAW, the IWRC, and others are also excellent, and the forums I have mentioned above.”

Shashikal Shetty of MIC Manipal said that “technology should respond to needs of people and also that the need should be assessed. What is the concrete way of doing it? Given the nexus of technology with dominance, how to break the ice? Further, technology has its own logic, different from ordinariness and alien to the simplicity of the life of masses. Further, the idea would not have much following unless it is concretely shown to transform the reality in a positive way. Do we evolve it (technology) from the people or do we (somewhat patronising!) evolve people to have it? One middle path could be, to create knowledge banks of the people, managed by the people where technology plays second fiddle to preserve the knowledge and to accrue the benefit to people (as in case of indigenous knowledge). Such complementarity could be explored in every instance of interface of technology and masses.”

Usha Reddi remarked, “for any successful deployment of any kind of technology, need assessment is critical. We, in India had learnt and had done it well during the days of the Radio Rural Forums and the SITE experiment, and it seems we have forgotten those lessons fascinated as we are with a new kind of delivery technology. Need assessment is done generally through PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal) techniques and is carried out to determine every aspect of technology use, from location, to technology, to content.”

Elaborating more on PRA, Digbijoy said “PRA has been around for quite a while now, and has been extensively used in almost every sector of rural development, including issues like housing and access to land, physical and social infrastructure. Its own techniques have been most simple - including using lumps

of cowdung or leftover 'rotis' to highlight the scale and intensity of identified problems on a matrix. For some reason, prospective beneficiaries still identify a lot better with these odd media than the oft-repeated information kiosk. It may also be seen that with the exception of the MCSTCS project in Andhra Pradesh, now appended to the e-Sewa, not many of these ICT measures have served as local level DMT's (Decision Making Tools). PRA, on the other hand has been considerably more effective. With greater emphasis being laid by the day on the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments so as to enable people to take decisions locally, the question is whether the ICT regime, whether technologically 'cutting-edge' or not, is actually helping the people - men, women or otherwise take decisions for the betterment community or not. Interestingly, whenever good ICT practices are mentioned, we hear mostly about RRF's (Namma Dhvani and the like), e-Sewa, Gyandoot and other rural information kiosks. However, we almost *NEVER* mention success stories like the people's plan in Kerala or Lok Jumbish in Rajasthan/ Madhya Pradesh, which have also had their share of information needs - maybe not so technologically substantiated, but success stories nevertheless."

Usha Reddi again stressed the fact "about little known but very good efforts not often found in public domain literature." She too felt there is a need to document these also.

Sudha Chauhan too agreed with the points raised by Mr S. Arunachalam.

Sub-topic 3 - Gender Implications of ICT, The WSIS Process

Kanti Kumar, Editor Digital Opportunity Channel brought into light "there are interests that do not want to allow women's equitable access to ICTs to be part of national and international strategies. Just when we launched this discussion last week, our colleagues from the NGO Gender Strategies Working Group were protesting in Uruguay against the exclusion of the reference to the gender implications of ICTs from the draft declaration of WSIS. All of us believing in gender equity must protest this lack of provisions on gender concerns in the current draft of the WSIS Declaration and Action Plan."

The current Draft Declaration of Principles here (in six languages) could be read at http://www.itu.int/wsisis/documents/doc_single.asp?lang=en&id=990

and the Draft Action Plan here

http://www.itu.int/wsisis/documents/doc_single.asp?lang=en&id=991

More links to find about women's role in the WSIS process

http://www.genderit.org/wsisis/wsisis_process.shtml.

He called for "a group debate this and reach a consensual statement that can be put across to the governments and international agencies at the Geneva summit? Would someone on this list like to take the lead on bringing together material related to this development for everyone's knowledge and for discussion so we can take this forward? OneWorld and our partners will be present at the Geneva summit and would like to take your concerns on gender implications of ICTs to the various platforms available there."

Eva Charkiewicz raised the concern that "the problem is not only with gender inequalities in access and use of IT. My concern is the WSIS process does not address the relationship between gender, development as sustainable livelihoods, and ICTs. What about social and gender costs of the IT society? Women's work manufacturing of computers and in the computerized work environment, (a lot of it in the EPZs) entails low paid insecure jobs, gender wage gaps, occupational health hazards (carcinogenic, neurological and reproductive health effects). Computer industry is one of the dirties in the world. About 16 ton of soil is moved to manufacture one computer. The production of chips and mobile phones, etc. requires rare metals. What media labels as ethnic conflicts are resource wars, which destroy the basis of livelihoods, and generate economic, social and sexual violence in communities. These social and ecological costs of IT society should be put on the agenda. (See www.svtc.org, or www.ourstolenfuture.org) The other kind of costs: increase of surveillance, centralised control, asymmetrical hierarchical observation result with the loss of citizenship by women and man. I do not think it is sufficient to lobby for access if these issues are not addressed. Otherwise we mobilize women for getting a fair share of a poisoned cake."

Florence Etta brought into notice that the WSIS Gender caucus is also looking at the two documents and revising the text to make the language more equality-sensitive etc and asking for the revisions to be endorsed.

These can be seen at the Gender Caucus website on: <http://genderwsis.org/papers.0.html>

The endorsement form is on the link below: <http://genderwsis.org/prepcom3position.0.html>

Janet Feldman found this to be a very vital topic. "I have been in the WSIS Gender Caucus forum and also in NGOwomen and ICTfor Rural Women forums, where these issues are being debated, and news from the latest WSIS meeting is being posted. We have had postings from a number of people and organizations including gender and ICTs as a focus. I am wondering if somehow we could combine forces and discussions here, perhaps bringing the discussions to date in from other forums (where many issues have been covered as a lead-up to negotiations about the final WSIS docs), and then carrying on together in some fashion, at least with cross-postings? That might make the gathering of materials easier, and also present an already-developed foundation upon which to build debate and hopefully consensus (as this process has occurred already in the Gender Caucus forum, so perhaps rather than starting from scratch we can continue and expand upon the work which has already been done)."

Glory Mushingie, MIND Zambia also believed that there should be a protest against drafting this kind of declaration. 'I wonder whether this is a deliberate move (Which I hope is not) and if it is just something that did not cross the minds of the people responsible for the drafting of the declaration to include that particular text, then that's a serious oversight which should not be left to go like that.'

Subbiah Arunachalam gave the example of the ways rural women in the villages of Pondicherry are using technology. They operate a project called the Information Village Research Project in ten villages in Pondicherry in southern India, with funding from IDRC and CIDA. They have set up knowledge centres in these villages and each centre is managed by local volunteers selected by the local community. More than half the volunteers are women. They all use computers, input information in Tamil (the local language which has 247 alphabets) using the standard QWERTY English language keyboards, send and receive email messages, prepare reports, code html, transmit data and voice messages, and so on. Some of them surf the net as well. Incidentally none of them had ever seen a computer, nor have used a telephone, before the knowledge centres were set up six years ago. The women in the Pondicherry villages have acquired some status and standing in the community. Men - farmers, landless labourers, traders - come and ask them for information and they provide the answers. They have set up self-help groups and micro-enterprises. They have taken part in discussions held at our Foundation and answered questions posed by many overseas delegates. Only a few years ago they would not have ventured out of their village unaccompanied by their husbands or in-laws. They are better off in every respect today than they were a few years ago.

Nidhi Tandon of Networked Intelligence for Development said that a support campaign should be started to ensure a gender perspective in the WSIS proceedings and to make sure the gender issues which are included also go beyond just the declaration. She said "In 1997 when the World Bank and CIDA initiated the first global knowledge for development conference, they too quite deliberately did not consider that women might have something critical to contribute to knowledge. At that time, the strategy we took was to raise money here in Canada to run a counter conference just with women from around the world, we created a database of women scientists, entrepreneurs, activists and academics and set up our own declaration of principles. As soon as the money was secured however, our core group was brought into the mainstream conference program and listed as co-sponsors. I think this was an ineffective strategy however, because co-sponsor or not, women's issues specifically were still very much sidelined. This is evidenced today by the distinct lack of financial support for women's training and capacity building."

Leslie Wright emphasized that "mainstreaming in this specific way, bringing up gender issues in all the caucuses, could be the most effective if we can stay focused on bringing in that one idea. It is difficult to maintain the focus."

Chat Garcia Ramilo of Association for Progressive Communications Women's Networking Support Programme, (APC WNSP). "APCWNSP is one of the members of the NGO Gender Strategies Working

Group, which Kanti has quoted to start off this discussion. (Just one correction though, we were not protesting in Uruguay but in Geneva. The report was written by someone in Uruguay). Other members are Isis International Manila, FEMNET, ALAI, and IWTC. In addition, many other organizations and individuals joined the advocacy effort during Prep Com 3, including the Gender Caucus. APCWNSP has been involved in the WSIS process in most regions in all of the Prep Com Meeting to advocate for women's empowerment, gender equality, human rights, universal access issues and many other concerns. The advocacy work for gender as well as for other equally critical issues in WSIS will continue and all efforts in support of this is needed. The NGO Gender Strategies Working Group has been facilitating a list in support of this advocacy work for a while now and I would also like to invite everyone interested to join the list. The list is NGOWomen@genderit.org.

Florence Etta reported that there are a number of different caucuses currently active to make their own positions and voices heard and attempting to inject their issues into the two main WSIS documents. She thinks "one way to go is to try to have a person with gender responsibility within each of the various caucuses and liaising or touching base with the Gender caucus. For instance I do know that there is a WSIS Gender caucus, in addition to a WSIS Gender working group, a civil society caucus, youth caucus etc and the fragmentation goes on. This might actually be one strategy for ineffectiveness I do not know but some strategic coming together just for Dec and after individual group consolidation might make a more powerful impact. It seems to me a good place to start as suggested by both Leslie and Nidhi by finding out who will be in Geneva and within which group. As it turns out the civil society groups/members had some initial difficulty sitting through discussions during prepcom3 but since I was not there and all I have is what was relayed I am not sure what plans are under way to deal with similar situations in December.

Nidhi Tandon said that "the Millennium Development Goals acknowledge the particular needs of women if poverty issues are to be effectively addressed, we can build on their process, their language and the fact that they are universally embraced by the UN agencies to give us the ground base for WSIS."

Karen Banks suggested an effective way to build a good platform for gender issues in WSIS is by trying "to have a person with gender responsibility within each of the various caucuses and liaising or touching base with the Gender caucus." She further discussed the role being played by NGO Gender Strategies Working group. "Much of our earlier work involved lobbying amongst our own networks within civil society, lobbying for them to see gender equality as a central issues and foundation principle in all of our work and adopt it in their own advocacies. We are gradually seeing the fruits of that labour, certainly amongst the regional caucuses, the community media caucus, the patents, copyrights and trademarks working group (dealing with the IPR agenda), the privacy and security working group, the human rights caucus and the youth caucus. i'm sure there have been other impacts, but i am certainly aware of those specifically." She also informed that women NGO activists are active in playing leadership roles in the main organizing elements of Civil Society.

Sanjay Jaju of eSeva again focused that information technology because of its all pervasive nature gives opportunity to innovate. He talked about the project eSeva which has empowered the women by making them self-sufficient. "The project e Seva (e services) began in the district West Godavari, which falls in the province of Andhra Pradesh in India. The project is a tool to bridge the digital divide in the rural areas and has used Information Technology for providing access to various C2C (citizen-to-citizen) and C2G (citizen-to-government) services to the people living in rural areas. Under this project web enabled rural kiosks termed e Seva centres have been established at the mandal (a sub district unit of administration) level. The unique thing about these centres is that they are run and managed by the women self help groups and have been able to position the rural women as information leaders to help bridge the gender divide. The project thus provides Information leadership to these groups and helps them act as change agents and makes it possible for them to grow in strength and stature with the project. As a result, the women self help groups are drawing strength from the project and on the other hand buttressing the project with their existing strengths, a win-win situation for the twosome. Information and communications technology have acted as an agent in enabling this change and is an attempt to replace the traditional form of governance and its accompanying deficiencies with a modern, more open, transparent and responsive service delivery system."

Michèle Morier-Genoud Hello from Switzerland!

From an organization in Switzerland PPP/BFA also agreed to the discussion-taking place.

Jai also agreed with Etta and emphasized that the gender perspective should be pushed more in the declaration. There is a need to analyze and highlight the successful projects where women have been benefited. He pointed out the drawbacks of the Kula Lumpur meet, “which focused on gender aspects of ICTs overall did not take into account women's special needs, and diluted the role of traditional media which women have access to in Asia and Africa. From all accounts there were few examples of successful sustainable projects.”

Kanti Kumar said “Overcoming the Gender Digital Divide: Understanding ICTs and their Potential for the Empowerment of Women” This research paper offers research findings on the potential of ICTs and how they can empower and transform women's lives. This burgeoning potential will not be realized, the authors assert, until women of all nations compound efforts to better inform policy-makers of the needs of women in relation to the access and use of ICTs, and the need to shape policy formation accordingly.

Centre for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA) has come up with a Gender Guide to encourage gender-based responsibilities in the implementation of health communication programs. Whilst it does not directly address broad-based issues of gender equity, it does provide questions to help program managers determine how gender roles, for both women and men, may impede access to health information, restrict use of health services, or limit beneficial health outcomes.

By identifying this information, this Guide attempts to assist health communication programs to encourage individuals and communities to pay attention to resolving gender inequities. It aims to make program planners aware that health behaviours, practices, or actions promoted by health communication programs may precipitate direct or indirect changes in gender roles. It demonstrates that if program planners anticipate changes in gender attitudes or roles, they should define those changes clearly and include them in outcome indicators to measure changes.

This Guide follows the five steps for developing a health communication program:

- a..analysis
- b..strategicdesign
- c..message/materialsdevelopment
- d..pretestingandproduction
- e..management,implementationandmonitoring
- f..evaluation

The guide provides questions to identify and address gender issues to ensure that gender awareness is part of a program's design, implementation, and evaluation.

13th October – 13th November

Main Topic

Information, technology and women empowerment

Sub-Topic 1- Indigenous knowledge: Are indigenous modes of information dissemination to women of help?

Brenda Zulu a freelance journalist from Zambia raised the concern about the negative effects of the production of technology on indigenous women especially in Africa. “I believe indigenous women have their own ways of communicating and sharing knowledge, which preserve indigenous identity, culture, heritage and language. Communication at local level is horizontal and is conscious of transmitting traditional or indigenous values.”

Gautam Navin felt that adding indigenous elements to a technology like local language interface could enhance the acceptability level. “Each and every region or location has their own way of communication, which encompass its culture, heritage and henceforth its identity. So it is very important to incorporate the indigenous flavor into the technology to make the technology palatable for the masses. Technology can become a boon or bane ...depends on how we take and use it. If we look at the needs of indigenous people first and then coming up with a technology suited to their purpose then it will definitely benefit them. Instead of going the other way round.”

Brenda argued that most of these indigenous groups don't even have basic infrastructure facilities for communication. “Indigenous women and other women working in the micro-electronic industry suffer from bad working conditions, are paid low wages, face health hazards. For example some indigenous people living in a mine area here in Zambia have pointed out that their lands are appropriated to establish electronics and microelectronics industries but mining companies, which extract and process minerals and metals used in information technology, displace them from their ancestral territories and pollute their land and waters. They also pointed out that there is lack of written and audio-visual information about indigenous women and from the available ones, it is unknown. There is lack of contact and/or communication among indigenous women.” She stressed that there is a need to develop stronger and effective ways of communication. “It is in this context that indigenous people should have access and control over information technology without losing their own indigenous knowledge, identity, culture, cosmo-vision and control their territory and resources and without surrendering their right to self determination. Therefore the question is not whether to use information technology but to ensure that they have control over the access and use of this technology.”

Digbijoy agreed to the issue raised by Brenda of the degrading work practices resulting in hazardous health environment for the workers in Zambia. He further remarked that this sort of situation lies in other developing nations of Asia as well. He said, “This issue was raised in the Doha declaration in 2001. However, if I remember correctly, the Zambian government does still retain considerable control over entry into such sectors as consumer electronics or ICT hardware. If the Zambian government would be conformant to the EPA standards and strictly regulate ISO: 14002 parameters, it would NOT be in violation of standards set by the WTO. In fact, the WTO ruling on liberalisation and privatisation CANNOT circumvent standards of human health and habitation, and this has been made clear time and again in several conferences and summits - Doha being the latest of the series.”

Claude Almansi said “what you say about Zambian women's horizontal communication also applies to Swiss women and women all over the world. i.e., maybe due to gender ideology factors, women tend to be better communicators. Where I don't follow you is when you oppose this traditional communication to tech, online, communication, which is horizontal too. Accessing information would be another matter: that's not horizontal, though maybe it is slightly more horizontal (un-hoerarchic) online than in the real world. But

take e-mail or discussion groups: aren't they closer to traditional, spoken communication than, says, TV or even radio debates (let alone "forums" in paper publications)?"

A bilingual journal on gender studies, *Zan-e Farzaneh* journal, is published with January 2004 special issue on "Gender and ICT Woman in the Information Society".

Glory Mushinge took a different approach in defining the effects of technology on indigenous women. She said that Brain Drain is prevalent among indigenous people especially women who are exploited under the aegis of ICTs a term conceptualized by the developed nations. "For example, the main focus of the Information Society is how issues affecting certain groups in developing countries are going to be addressed using ICT's and how are these ICT's going to be used to help them. But then, the first thing the 'concerned people' want is information from you. In short you go out researching on the issues and hand them the information, hoping things will change, but at the end of the day, somebody somewhere gets money from that research and the situation with you and the indigenous group you belong to, remains the same. Usually you don't get to know what the information you provided was used for or get feedback as to what action will be taken from the information So to me there is too much cheap consultancy from indigenous people in the name of improving technology."

Brenda Zulu discussed about the information needs of the indigenous women by saying, "information should be made available to them in their own languages and must consider the context and cosmovision of the indigenous peoples. That information should not be used to undermine the cultures, identity and rights of indigenous peoples. Information and information technology should not be used to commercialize their knowledge and image of the indigenous peoples, in general. The method of communication should integrate different ways of communication, which are oral, informal and collectively done. Information should be made available for indigenous women so that they will have access to decisions made, which have direct impacts on their lives. Spaces, which allow indigenous women to empower themselves, should be facilitated by information and technology. They therefore recommend that: all documentation which deal with indigenous peoples should be elaborated and disseminated through appropriate means of communications (TV, radio, paintings, stories) in the language of our people according to the realities and with a gender perspective.

Talking about capacity building she said that dissemination of existing important information among indigenous women could be done by establishing networks, centers of communication and information. "As advocates we therefore should make concerted efforts to influence policies of communication to safeguard the rights of indigenous peoples. They are under threat and may lose their identity, culture and access to resources.

We should use the means of communication to: denounce abuses and violations of indigenous peoples rights and to promote international solidarity in the defense of their rights." She called for an integration of indigenous women's struggle in the global women's struggle and thus a representation in the decision-making.

The article by Reshmi Sarkar of IT for Change, Bangalore comments on the nature of barriers hampering women's access of IT as she said, "So what prevents women from having a share in the pie? While poverty is a gender neutral attribute affecting the access of men and women equally to the gains from technology, several gender-specific antecedents impede women's access of IT: apart from literacy and education, social and cultural norms that constrain women's mobility and access to resources as well as women's are huge obstacles."

Complete article at:

<http://www.sdnf.undp.org/perl/news/articles.pl?id=5705&do=gpage>

Under resources two articles were referenced

Indigenous Women's Empowerment and Internet by Ellen Cole

The paper summarizes the results of a questionnaire distributed by Women Action and APC-Africa-Women to 74 African women's organizations and programmes. The results were used to lobby for improvements to the Internet situation among African women. The 27 respondents were found to prefer Internet information presented in text format and they least like to receive graphical information. E-mail

and electronic mailing lists were their preferred media for receiving information, as well as for disseminating it. The respondents suffered a multitude of problems in accessing the Internet, namely financial difficulties in repackaging/redistributing information; lack of connectivity; and poor skills, both technical and non-technical. There was a big demand for training on how to use the Internet for Beijing +5, how to organize with other NGOs on the Internet, and information management skills, as well as technical skills.

<http://www.antenna.nl/viio/paper-ellen-2001.html>

Jennifer Radloff suggested another article on "Net GAINs African Women take Stock of Information and Communication Technologies" - a joint research project by APC-Africa-Women and FEMNET. <http://www.apcafricawomen.org/netgains.htm>

A paper by Rita Mijumbi - "ICTs as a tool for economic empowerment of women: experiences from the use of a CDROM by rural women in Uganda" could also be good to read. It is on the UNDAW website <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/index.html>

Gautam commented it is indeed true that developed countries had always used developing countries for their own benefits. "To reduce the production cost MNCs are putting up their units in these countries in the name of WTO REGULATIONS and COMMITMENTS that too without giving thought to its effects (environmental, social and many more). Many of these countries have no basic facilities and economical strength to get access of these technologies of which they are the part."

Brenda came up with certain suggestions of the ways in which internet technology should be used for globalising solidarity.

- Nations should make positive efforts and provide the necessary support to document the history of women.
- NGOs and feminist organisations should make effort to complement these efforts. The need for information and technical training should be a concern for national and local governments in their nations. Strategies should be devised to change the absence of women issues in the media.
- Feminists networks must come up with alternative usage of the internet technology which contribute to solidarity of the women's movements. More concerted efforts should be made by the women's networks to make the hidden forms of violence, poverty and state repression appear on the information networks.
- As everyone has observed, for information to be made accessible and widely available, human and financial infrastructure is needed. Finances must be made available to support the work of women's centers, archives and documentation centers. Funds must be raised to enable organisations to pay for connectivity to Internet.

She further elaborated the situation in Zambia "In most women organisations in Zambia very little attention is paid to icts and where people would like to introduce a specific desk to be dealing in it, in most cases there is no money. Most of the organisations are not even connected to the internet and if they are only the Managing Director has access to the internet. The most popular ICT tool used among the elite women is the cell phone. Many women do not even have an e mail address such that even a quick survey in the internet cafes and libraries shows that very few women use the internet. It is a pity even among Journalists the internet is still a new phenomenon. This is especially common among rural based Journalists."

Janet Feldman remarked discussion on "digital-divide" is taking place everywhere. "Some fantastic exchanges and activities taking place in these various forums - African Youth Assembly, Peace summit 2004, WSIS Youth Kenya, WSIS Gender Caucus, ICT for Rural Women, Gender ICT, NGO women, one Village Foundation (with African locations in Ghana and Kenya), the AY Initiative, ARYI, reps from Taking IT Global and Mandate the Future, Netaid, hoping that everyone will network together, as "united we stand"!

Sub-Topic 2 - Improving women's access to ICT education and training. Need for innovation & adaptation?

I started a new thread of the need to innovate to empower more and more women with information. "Though internet no doubt is a very potent tool to inform and educate but we also know that infrastructure and expertise needed to use internet will 'still' take some time to reach the masses. So, why don't we explore the benefits of other tools like radio? CD-based resources are another such contribution. I would specially like to take your attention, here, towards the power of community radio. Since its content and technology is very participatory and people-oriented, it caters to the information needs of a local community. In India there are several initiatives taken in this direction. One such model is by Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan (KMVS), Rajasthan. It uses local Kutchi language generated locally to answer the social and cultural information needs of the marginalized and remote communities. Radio provides support to poor women to raise issues, reclaim their rights and thus provides a platform for communication. The women who have been a part of this KMVS community radio experiment feels more informed on development issues like watershed management. While tool like internet mostly serves a society well-versed in English, dearth of local content is a big issue. Here I feel tools like community radio plays a major part. We still have to find out how much the ICT medium is adapted to local contexts and existing women skills. Are there more experiences and experiments like community radio, which is both affordable and region-specific, helping marginalized poor women? Though technology perse is gender neutral as earlier stated in this forum, but certain innovations are definitely going to advantage women. What we need is Innovation in technology!!"

Artee Agrawal concurred that community radios and television should be utilized more for providing information in local language. "They are indeed a powerful sources of information. Internet although, is limited to a specifically educated persons but it is also getting popular with coming generation."

Atanu Garai elaborated more on the benefits of radio as a tool for information dissemination. "The power of radio as a affordable, low cost yet highly effective ICT tool has been long proved. Since 60s many development efforts have been undertaken that have implemented radio as a very successful information and knowledge dissemination technology. Still in this age of internet, this efficacy of radio has remained as powerful as ever. This is because of two reasons: one, its simple cost effective technology both from the view point of the provider of the service as well as that of its receiver and second, the gradual upgradation of traditional analogue radio transmission technology into a modern digital one that has made it attractive to even technology savvy receivers. Keeping this in mind, radio could be used widely in developing countries by the NGOs as a knowledge dissemination medium as part of their development effort, but in actuality this has not happened in the scale as one might expect. In Africa, radio as a developmental ICT tool has become reality under the auspices of UN agencies mainly FAO, but in Asia, this phenomenon is relatively negligible."

Talking about the status of community radio in India, he said, "State regulation has remained a contributing factor for spreading of community radio in nations like India. India's FM regulations do not permit an NGO to establish their own community radio station, rather that this is supportive towards the niche national level higher education institutions for establishing radio station for their student and faculty community. Yet, as expected, such institutions, like the IITs or IIMs have not approached the government regulatory body for this purpose since these institutions do not require radio as an ICT tool, as there have been large scale implementation of high end ICT tools like VSAT linked high speed internet connectivity. If favorable regulatory environment could be built up, radio could certainly become a very effective ICT tool for knowledge dissemination."

Maja talked about simputer as another cheap alternative to personal computers being developed by Indian researchers with the aim of expanding IT access for poor communities. "The Simputer runs for eight hours on three penlight batteries, has text-to-speech capabilities in five languages, smart card capabilities and a touch screen accessible to those who cannot read and write. On the software side, a team from Hyderabad is now achieving close to 95-percent accuracy in the machine translation of northern Indian languages, and expects similar success with southern Indian languages. These developments could soon empower millions

of people with affordable, multilingual computing, and give grass-roots governance the potential to make a significant dent on poverty in Asia.”

Digbijoy reported more about simputer from an article on net. Here are a few excerpts

"Only three years ago, the Simputer was the biggest story to come out of the Indian IT industry. It was to be the first time that a computing product would be completely indigenously developed and marketed. What made the whole idea sweeter was that it would be a product that would take computing to the very interiors of India. It would be a 'personal computer' costing less than half the price of the conventional desktop available in the market. The promises were many. But how far has the Simputer come since then? Is one currently available in the market and how much does it cost? Nearly five years after a resolution on the Simputer was passed, the product is yet to be freely available.

Two companies, PicoPeta Simputers and Encore Technologies, have been given the licenses to produce the Simputer. They compete with each other and have products that look different. Its not a cheap computer. And that computing for everyone is likely to carry a price tag of anything between Rs 12,000 and Rs 20,000. But clearly, somewhere along the line from conception to development, talk of the Rs 9,000 Simputer that would become the computer for the poor man, has been lost. Currently, the Simputer powers two projects. The Gulbarga Electricity and Supply Company's spot electricity billing system, and Bhoomi, the land records computerisation effort.

Some of the key articles in the i4d with the theme: Can ICT Cross the Gender Barrier?

1. African women and civil society ICT networks: Digital divide or information innovation? More than identifying ICT disparities, many Digital Divide scholars warn that ICT exclusion results in increased social exclusion, with African women 'getting further behind' as compared to men and the North.
Ellen Kole

<http://www.i4donline.net/issue/sept-oct03/digital.htm>

2. ICT and Gender: Why women lag and why they may lead

If asymmetric power or perceptions of inequity are deeply ingrained, then even with new technology, an improvement in women's position will take time, and require support. These distortions lead to a deep ambivalence in women's relation with technology.

Ashima Goyal

<http://www.i4donline.net/issue/sept-oct03/women.htm>

3. A Gender Perspective: Career development of IT professionals

The equal opportunity recommendations, moreover, ask women to exchange major aspects of their gender identity for a masculine version without prescribing a similar de-gender process for men.

M.Suriya

<http://www.i4donline.net/issue/sept-oct03/career.htm>

4. Empowering women self-groups

Over 5.4 million women have organised themselves in 380 thousand groups and they have accumulated savings of the order of 900 USD.... they are now demanding more and more access to Information.

V. P. Sharma, B. Renuka Rani and M. Srinivasa Rao

<http://www.i4donline.net/issue/sept-oct03/empowering.htm>

13th November – 12th December

Main Topic

Women's campaigns, networks, resources and repositories on ICT

Sub Topic – Lack of quantitative data and documentation

Florence Etta disagreed with the statement made in this forum that "Though technology perse is gender neutral as earlier stated in this forum". She says, "Each product bears (is imbued with) the cultural marks of the makers!!! Lets not be so naive or blind!"

I remarked, "I do understand we should have some grounding before we can make statements like "Technology perse is gender neutral". Well, we all know there are social features of the technology, which differ from place to place. I have never come across any study or analysis being done on gender implications of technology choices given of different cost structures, different models to region-specific contexts. Are there examples to who uses these different technologies for what purposes? How do cost, design and deployment of technology choices impact the women and advantage women, if at all?

Another facet, I found missing is adequate facts and figures available related to gender and ICT making true sense. The kind of data,, which will support statements and questions like this made above. There are some studies done giving region wise and incomplete quantitative information. And I know all those who are researching this field must have felt it at one point of time or another."

I would like to add here one paragraph mentioned in Nancy Hafkin's paper Gender Issues in ICT Policy in Developing Countries: An Overview

Statistics and indicators

Our knowledge of gender issues in ICTs is hampered by the lack of reliable statistics. The major collector and disseminator of statistics on ICTs is the International Telecommunication Union (ITU 2000, 2001). However, the ITU does not disaggregate any of its ICT indicators by sex. As a result there are few, if any, reliable statistics on women's use of ICTs in developing countries. In the absence of reliable statistics, those looking for data have to fall back on sources of dubious reliability. Many of the country studies that propose to show large numbers of women Internet users are marketing studies, conducted by or for firms that want to market products to women consumers. It would not be remarkable to find that they identified and projected large numbers of women users for their clients. In other cases, the studies are limited country surveys, generally based on the subscriber lists of a few, small ISPs or email services. In countries where public access is the dominant mode, subscriber lists may identify only a third (or less) of users. Few studies have kept gender statistics on the users of public access facilities by sex.

Another argument sparked off: Is technology perse gender neutral?

They were many in the forum those who felt that technology perse is not gender neutral. Sumi Krishna too disagreed with this kind of statement and reported that vast literature and well-substantiated data is available to anyone apart from what can be learnt from one's own experiences.

Dighijoy argued that technology does not include the interfaces for access to such technology. He kept the view "Several experts in semantics/ semiotics argue that media and/or content of the same always has a perspective, that 'gives away' whether the content had a woman or man at the core of its creation. There are, according to these theorists, 'male' media and 'female' media for manifestation(s) of such technology. I cannot say why - as for me, I've never seen a medium that is used any differently by equally qualified men/women. Maybe there are....Technology, however is what DRIVES the medium - it is ubiquitous, yet invisible and all prevailing. And it still does not ask its beneficiary if its a man or woman."

Hoofd Ingrid Maria also agreed to the view that technology is not gender neutral. "Although this issue begs the question exactly whose histories are connected to the creation of each technology, let us not forget that

in the case of the Internet, its main creator was the US military. Although this is not to say that feminist appropriations and marginalized histories of these technologies are not possible, but it makes the case for these more urgent and complex.”

Anuradha said saying that innovations in technology is the requirement of the day to bring in gender equality on the ICT front.

Digbijoy replied that internet what has evolved “perse had no leanings towards promoting its use amongst any particular gender. If, at this point of time, the internet is deluged with content that is 'suited' or 'conductive' to a particular gender, then I am sure its got little to do with the technology. What is there on the internet is simply a reflection of the priorities of our society that constantly change with times. And the next change in priorities of self-expression may well makethe internet a 'particular gender's medium'!

As for the contention that technology could possibly be gender biased on accounts of cost/ deployment structures et al, there is a more fundamental question to be asked. While, albeit arguably, certain irreconcilable social, cultural DIFFERENCES exist between the genders (note the fact that I use the word DIFFERENCES, not INEQUALITIES), would not the incorporation of cost models/ deployment structures be admission of INEQUALITIES itself, which in itself undermines the basic tenet of gender equality or equivalency?

The argument is simple. If you have a pencil and blank sheet of paper, its just lying there - inconsequentially, waiting to be put into use. It is only when something is written onto it, that it can takes sides, or make a point. Technology is just that paper and pencil - its suitability or lack thereof to a gender can only be determined when someting is written on it. And there are lots of pieces of papers out there - each with a different story to tell - each to be judged on a case-to-case, instance-to-instance basis. Last, but not the least - WHY, when we are aiming for a socitey that achieves gender equivalency, start branding partly-tangible items such as information and communication technology with gender? Does assertion of masculinity or feminism REALLY REQUIRE such branding?

Sumi Krishna put forth a very feminist approach and detailed out the theories pertaining to the gender technology.

Feminist studies of technology are based on the both the empirical research on particular technologies and theoretical work on the cross-cutting issues arising from a range of technologies.

There are three strands to this approach:

1. The liberal approach is that technology is inherently neutral, and that the problem is of improving women’s access to technology (and their capacities to do so) in a society, which is gendered by stereotypical sex roles. Technology itself is not critiqued. This approach has been critiqued as naive.
2. The ecofeminist/ radical approach is that technology is inherently masculine and has been used by men to subjugate women and nature. The forces that shape society and technology are not distinguished separately, and particular technologies are not studied. Ecofeminist arguments have been tellingly used against military and reproductive technologies, and have valorised ‘feminine’ technological knowledge and skills arising from women’s biology and presumed closeness to nature. This approach has been critiqued as essentialist and ahistorical.
3. What I would like to call the gendered approach (which I share) has gained ground since the early 1980s. It rejects both the liberal and ecofeminist approaches (of technology being inherently neutral or inherently masculine) and views women’s exclusion and alienation from technology as the result of a process of historical and cultural construction of technology as masculine, and of masculinity as involving technical capabilities. This inter-weaving of masculinity and technology is seen as both a product of men’s power in society and as reinforcing it. In the gendered view, the core issue is the relation between gender and technology. Gender divisions of labour shape the process of technology-development and technological products carry a gendered (male or female) imprint. One of the best-known examples is the initial development of dedicated word processors in the 1970s, which were designed to mimic and automate the office typewriter (typing in the West being almost entirely female work). However, as with the typewriter the needs of the users, women typists, were not considered and thus the persistence with the inappropriate QWERTY keyboard (which overloads the fingers of the left hand).

Some of the questions she thought should be raised were like what are the assumptions about gender being made in the process of technology development, the design, manufacture, marketing and use of products; whether women are involved in the decision-making process of technological development; and whether and how such development is transforming gender relations and women's work.

She further stated that it is difficult for people who have not been exposed to either feminist or social-construction perspectives to grasp the idea that the process of technology creation (and not just its application) are shaped by class, gender and other divisions of society and that the artifacts carry this imprint, in ICT as with industrial technologies. She mentioned about the vast literature available and listed a few names like Evelyn Fox Keller, Sandra Harding and Londa Schiebinger are among the most interesting and insightful on gender and science; Cynthia Cockburn, J. Wajcman, Rosalind Gill and Keith Grint on gender and technology. Specifically on gender and IT, a useful introductory text (written for undergraduates) is Juliet Webster's *Shaping Women's Work*, which has a strong focus on labour relations and a bibliography of over 300 studies.

Glory Mushingie agreed that there is too much emphasis on internet when people talk about ICTs and many other aspects are ignored. She fears "internet does not eclipse other information dissemination means, such radio and render it irrelevant. There has to be innovation."

Information about e-bulletin "Online women" of Asia Pacific Online Network of Women in Politics, Governance, Decision-making and Transformative Leadership, www.onlinewomeninpolitics.org was send.

Glory Mushingie said that continuous updates on women issues and their involvement in leadership positions should be there. This helps to know how women in other parts of the world are handling some of the critical issues.

Digbijoy found that the Qwerty keyboard did not have the alleged problem with the layout of the characters - it was and is suited to the US English language. He said "there is a whole lot of design literature as to why the two most repeated vowels 'a' and 'e' are so located as to enable the left hand to access them easier. Yes - one might try to accuse them of being insensitive to left-handed individuals - but then, no study has ever substantiated that there are more instances of women being left handed than men. The problem that has really been dogging it is the layout of the keys - and this again has not targeted any particular gender - the phenomenon of repetitive stress injury is well documented in either case."

Sheila French agreed with Sumi and added a few more references. *Women in Computers* edited by Landers and Adam, which focuses on IT and Computing (very useful for undergraduates and gives an overall picture) there is also an organisation in the UK called WIC, which some may be interested in <http://www.wic.org.uk/>. There is also a journal called *Gender and Education*, which has issued a special feature on gender and technology as well as covered related issues regarding women in science and maths. She felt that one need to educate self outside the field of computing and IT. She said, "My personal background is in computing and Information Technology whilst I have found it challenging to grasp the depths of feminist theory and other theories of sociology doing so has opened a whole new perspective and way of looking at the many issues regarding gender and technology, which I would have missed otherwise."

