

# GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2013

Women's rights, gender and ICTs



ASSOCIATION FOR PROGRESSIVE COMMUNICATIONS (APC)  
AND HUMANIST INSTITUTE FOR COOPERATION WITH DEVELOPING COUNTRIES (Hivos)

# Global Information Society Watch

## 2013

# Global Information Society Watch 2013

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# Preface

*At the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, ICTs were recognised as critical for achieving women's empowerment and gender equality. In 2003, the World Summit on the Information Society reinforced that the development of ICTs will provide opportunities for women's full and equal participation in all spheres of life. Since then the internet has become a critical global resource that enables women to exercise their right to speak, impart opinions, share ideas, build knowledge and access information. Access to the internet enables women to participate in the information economy, exercise citizenship rights, get access to health information and other services, form communities, engage in formal and informal processes to determine their social, cultural and political life and more. By the end of 2013, 1.3 billion women are expected to be online. We believe this increase in the number of connected women must be, and can be, accompanied by greater empowerment of women and more widespread gender equality.*

*However, human rights online are connected with human rights offline, and to achieve these goals we need to combat discrimination and gender-based violence. Online harassment, cyber stalking and other ICT-enabled violations are on the increase, as are shutdowns of networks by governments, and censorship of sexual rights and reproductive health websites and other content that is particularly relevant to women. The very spaces that allowed women to increase their participation in the public sphere and amplify their demands for justice are under threat.*

*This edition of GISWatch examines how the internet and other ICTs have extended the public sphere and created new opportunities and freedoms for women. It highlights the threats to these freedoms and explores the role of technology in resistance to these threats.*

*No struggle for social justice is a better measure of success than that for women's rights and gender equality. This can also be applied to the internet. A truly free internet that fulfils its potential as a tool for social justice is an internet that is not just used by women, but also shaped by them through their involvement in its governance and development. It is an internet on which women have the freedom and capacity to actively tell their stories, participate in social, political and economic life, and claim their rights to be empowered, equal citizens of the world who can live free from discrimination and the fear of violence. ■*

**Edwin Huizing**

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, HIVOS

**Anriette Esterhuysen**

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, APC

# Introduction

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**Joanne Sandler**  
Gender at Work  
[www.genderatwork.org](http://www.genderatwork.org)

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## The online terrain for women's rights

I remember vividly the day, in 2003, that the name of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) was stolen online by a pornographer. I was the deputy director of UNIFEM and the head of our communications division came running into my office, frantic, and told me to search online for "www.unifem.com". Pornographic images filled my screen and it created a loop that took many tense moments to close.

I remember the feelings of violation and horror. And, as we tried, largely with futility, to find out if we had any rights to reclaim our identity, I recall our frustration and helplessness. It didn't matter that this had also happened to UNICEF. It didn't matter that [unifem.com](http://unifem.com) was not our main website, but a URL that we bought precisely to avoid it being used by others, nor that our frustrated web manager was unable to get a bureaucratic administration to pay the USD 65 needed to renew it on time, resulting in an alleged Russian pornographic enterprise scooping it up within several hours of our URL elapsing. I shuddered at the thought that innocent internet users would put "UNIFEM" in the subject line on their search engine, and might very likely get trapped in the same loop of degrading images of women that I did. The deliberate efforts of a pornographer to capture a URL of a women's rights organisation made it more insidious.

After nearly four months of consulting with UN lawyers, US and Russian officials, and internet legal specialists – and following disturbing phone calls and emails from the entity or individual that had "captured" our URL and was now offering to sell it to us for USD 1,500 – we had no resolution. This was uncharted territory and, as many experts told us, legal regimes and remedies did not keep pace with the types of violations that were occurring. There was no agency that had clear jurisdiction to intervene in this situation; it was a perpetrator-free crime.

Our dilemma ended because of serendipity. An anonymous donor bought the URL and donated it to us, paying USD 400 into an account in Russia. We learned, of course, to never let bureaucracy interfere with expeditious renewals of our URLs. But something changed forever: we braced ourselves for the next attack. Given the pace of technological innovation and the profitability and impunity for perpetrators, there was a feeling of inevitability about it.

Many individuals and organisations working at the intersection of feminism, social justice, human rights, and information technology echo the observations in a recent report: "If we agree that the online world is socially constructed, then gender norms, stereotypes and inequality that exist offline... can be replicated online."<sup>1</sup> This is not necessarily at the forefront of thinking when one's business is expanding because of online sales, when telemedicine brings powerful diagnostic tools to rural areas to save lives, or when online activism helps to unite the opposition and bring down a dictator, as we saw in the Egyptian and Tunisian uprisings in 2011. But as we laud the power of the internet to inform, break through isolation, and unite, we must also recognise its power to misinform, divide and put individual and collective rights in direct conflict with one another.

That is why this issue of GISWatch is so important and why I was so pleased to be asked to contribute. During nearly 40 years of work as a women's rights advocate and nearly 15 years of working in the UN – with a strong belief in the power of linking normative global policy to local-level organising and change – I have been privileged to witness, time and time again, how the collective voice and strategies of women's rights advocates change opportunities and agendas on issues of major importance to human security and survival. The premise of this article is that the local and global

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<sup>1</sup> Fascendini, F. and Fialová, K. (2011) *Voices from Digital Spaces: Technology-related violence against women*, Women's Networking Support Programme of the Association for Progressive Communications. [www.apc.org/en/pubs/voices-digital-spaces-technology-related-violence-o](http://www.apc.org/en/pubs/voices-digital-spaces-technology-related-violence-o)



discussions and renegotiation of policy priorities that are taking place – as part of the World Summit on the Information Society review (WSIS+10), the 20-year review of the UN Fourth World Conference on Women and its Beijing Platform for Action, and the post-2015 development agenda<sup>2</sup> – represent an opportunity for women’s rights constituencies to reframe and reposition the ways that the internet and other information and communications technologies (ICTs) can be deployed to advance, rather than reverse, progress on women’s rights. This is a unique opportunity to generate innovative and aspirational ideas for legal and policy changes that more effectively harness the power of the internet to expand gender equality. This introduction proposes a “lens” for better understanding and reframing gender regimes on the internet, and calls for expanding constituencies for human rights and women’s rights in discussions on ICTs as an urgent priority.

### Mapping gender regimes in the online world

ICTs, alone, cannot change inequitable systems and values. But we already have evidence that the radical potential of the internet to be a positive force for change in women’s and girls’ access to their human rights and for social justice is undeniable. One of many examples is the Women’s Learning Partnership, which has a programme that supports women’s rights advocates to harness the power of information technologies. It describes the internet’s huge potential:

Women’s rights activists [in Iran] have used every communication technology tool at their disposal to create a grassroots campaign demanding an end to discriminatory laws. Their website is attacked. They move to another domain. Activists are imprisoned. They release urgent alerts bringing it to the world’s attention almost instantaneously. And, with all of these tools, they are successful. The Iranian government recently withdrew a draconian family protection bill that would have further circumscribed women’s freedoms. Iranian women face

many mighty foes in their centuries-old struggle for gender equality. Given what technology now makes possible, they now have a mightier friend. And therein lies a lesson and an inspiration for all of us who wish to foster democracy and social change.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, the ways that this “mightier friend” can reinforce existing inequalities and create new ones emerge almost daily. Unlike legal remedies, which are slow to keep pace, the fast-growing lexicon – from “cyber stalking”<sup>4</sup> to “sexting”<sup>5</sup> – is evidence of a rapidly expanding array of new threats to women’s rights. Research by the Association for Progressive Communications (APC)<sup>6</sup> revealed many examples: in Cambodia, for instance, it is very common for men to violate their female partners’ privacy rights through tracking and controlling, using GPS and spyware devices.

While the online world often replicates and potentially exacerbates the offline world’s existing opportunities and inequalities – including those related to gender, class, race, disability and other lines of identity – it also requires us to adjust the lens of gender and human rights that we apply offline to enable us to map and claim our rights in this new terrain. Many strategies from “offline” power struggles are applicable, but the online terrain is far from a mirror image. Mapping the gender regimes that exist in this terrain is essential to the task of envisioning what the internet would look like with greater gender equality and women’s rights.

This article applies the Gender at Work framework to generate a broader view of some of the options, opportunities and challenges for advancing and protecting women’s human rights online. This is an incipient analysis. Bringing more experiences, more contexts and more perspective into this analysis could generate a much more complex and relevant change strategy and help us to articulate concrete policy demands that, at once, take into account the interlinked changes needed at the national, regional and global level.

2 These are all United Nations processes, most of which involve consultations at local, regional and global levels and will culminate in 2015. Ultimately, these processes will lead to some type of outcome document or resolution that the 193 member states of the United Nations will agree to and then will be accountable for implementing. For more information on each, see: [www.itu.int/wsis/index.html](http://www.itu.int/wsis/index.html) (for the WSIS+10 review, which is led by the International Telecommunication Union), [www.un.org/womenwatch](http://www.un.org/womenwatch) (for the Beijing+20 review, which will be led by UN Women) and [www.un.org/en/development/desa/development-beyond-2015.html](http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/development-beyond-2015.html) (for the process that will determine the post-2015 development agenda, the successor to the Millennium Development Goals).

3 Interview with Ms. Usha Venkatachallam, director of Innovation and Technology at WLP on the World Movement for Democracy. See: [www.wmd.org/resources/whats-being-done/information-and-communication-technologies/interview-women's-learning-par](http://www.wmd.org/resources/whats-being-done/information-and-communication-technologies/interview-women's-learning-par)

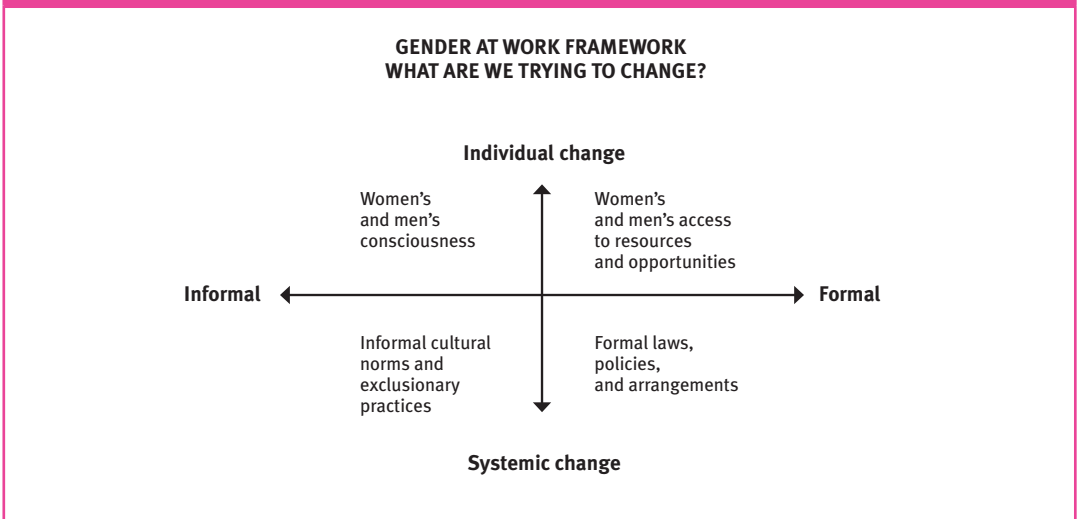
4 Cyber stalking includes (repeatedly) sending threats or false accusations via email or mobile phone, making threatening or false posts on websites, stealing a person’s identity or data, and spying on and monitoring a person’s computer and internet use.

5 Sexting is a form of “texting” that involves the creating, sharing and forwarding of sexually suggestive images or messages, primarily between mobile phones

6 Fascendi and Fialová (2011) Op. cit.



FIGURE 1.



### The Gender at Work framework

The four-quadrant framework, based on Ken Wilber’s Integral Model, enables a quick assessment of where change that affects gender equality is happening or needs to happen in institutions and organisations.<sup>7</sup> It distinguishes two polarities: (1) individual and systemic change, and (2) formal (visible) and informal (hidden) experience. Many proposed solutions to gender inequality focus on only one quadrant, or perhaps two. Gender at Work’s hypothesis is that change will be more comprehensive and sustainable when efforts focus on all four quadrants.

#### *Starting in the upper right-hand side of the framework: What resources are needed to promote and protect women’s rights on the internet?*

The two quadrants on the right-hand side of the matrix relate to what is visible and therefore “trackable” in terms of change. Starting on the upper right-hand side of the quadrant brings us to the question of how formal and visible resource distribution generated by the internet impacts on gender equality.

Much of the discussion about the internet has focused on its potential to generate resources related to income, time, anonymity, global solidarity and other benefits to both women and men. This could have particular application, for instance, to women who have restricted mobility, whether because of

their rural location, disability, or religious/cultural practices.

The Institute for the Future identifies six drivers most likely to shape the future workforce: longer life spans; a rise in smart devices and systems; advances in computational systems such as sensors and processing power; new multimedia technology; the continuing evolution of social media; and a globally connected world. The ICT sector clearly underpins an important segment of the future of work and livelihoods. Women are not well-positioned in this future. An International Telecommunication Union (ITU) report cited that in February 2009, for example, women accounted for only 25% of all IT occupations, the exact same proportion of IT occupations held by women in March 2000. Without a better understanding of the gendered digital divide, a number of trends suggest that those who are most excluded will be further marginalised in this environment.<sup>8</sup>

At the same time, recent expert group meetings in preparation for WSIS+10 have affirmed that there is inadequate data to assess the different facets of the gender digital divide, especially in developing countries. Evidence to date shows inequalities in many dimensions, with the gender divide varying by region, country and within countries, and dependent on education and incomes. The first divide – that 77% of people in developed countries are online against only 31% of people in developing ones – has a riveting effect on reaching the most

7 For more information on the Gender at Work analysis and support to organisational change initiatives, please visit [www.genderatwork.org](http://www.genderatwork.org)

8 Tandon, N. (2012) *A Bright Future in ICTs Opportunities for New Generation of Women*, ITU, Geneva.

excluded.<sup>9</sup> And while recent data notes that 46% of the global web population is female, this masks other disparities. In wealthier regions such as in North America, the web population is evenly split. A UN Women/US State Department/Intel report cites that, on average across the developing world, nearly 25% fewer women than men have access to the internet, and the gender gap soars to nearly 45% in regions such as sub-Saharan Africa. This is despite anticipated benefits nationally and globally. The same report estimates that facilitating an additional 600 million women to get online would mean that 40% of women and girls in developing countries, nearly double the share today, would have access to the transformative power of the internet and potentially contribute an estimated USD 13 billion to USD 18 billion to annual GDP across 144 developing countries.<sup>10</sup>

Even without comprehensive gender-disaggregated data,<sup>11</sup> there are many emerging initiatives that have shown the ways in which the internet and connectivity in general can create new types of illiteracies which emanate directly from divides of gender, race, location and class. As studies on gender and ICTs in Africa highlighted, women's access to connectivity and use of the internet are mediated by education, financial means, time, safety and security of location, technophobia and the fact that there is often inadequate content for women and girls. One Moroccan woman interviewed for an International Development Research Centre (IDRC) study commented, "[The internet] has become a necessity and the one who does not know how to use it is illiterate. I consider myself illiterate. I started learning for some time, then I gave up. One needs many hours per day."<sup>12</sup>

And while the priority needs to be on ensuring that women and girls who are most disadvantaged have equal access to the resources and opportunities that the internet generates, complex dynamics resulting from gendered resource constraints in the larger society influence use and access to the internet even in the richest countries. While addressing a group of large companies in Spain that had signed on to the Women's Empowerment Prin-

ciples as part of their corporate social responsibility programmes,<sup>13</sup> a number of younger women from a large, national supermarket chain explained to me how an internal personnel survey had revealed that women's stress levels and career opportunities were adversely impacted by use of email and electronic communities of practice by employees over the weekend. The survey had assessed that men found it easier to participate because they had fewer domestic responsibilities at home: their careers benefitted from their ability to continue to work online over the weekend, to respond to emails quickly and from the absence of the added stress that women experienced. The company responded by prohibiting email traffic during the weekends, a policy that generated an immediate effect on levelling the playing field. This company is an exception in recognising inequalities that emerge due to domestic time pressures. The gendered division of labour that continues worldwide will continue to have unique manifestations on the internet in all contexts.

*Moving to the lower right-hand side of the framework: What policies are needed to promote and protect women's rights on the internet?*

The question of policy formulation at all levels – global, regional, national and local – to promote and protect women's rights on the internet is particularly relevant at this moment, given the local and global convenings related to WSIS+10, the post-2015 development agenda, and the 20-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action. As others have noted, some international organisations and civil society groups are already engaging with issues that concern the democratisation of the ICT arena, from the digital divide and the right to communicate, to cultural diversity and intellectual property rights. Gender equality advocates have also been in alliance with broader networks in pushing to address the gender dimensions of the information society: integrating gender perspectives in national ICT policies and strategies, providing content relevant to women, promoting women's economic participation in the information economy, and addressing violence against women and children on the internet.<sup>14</sup> A key example of this is the Women, ICT and Development (WICTAD) Coalition, made up of a range of stakeholders that seek to share learning, identify

9 [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global\\_Internet\\_usage](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global_Internet_usage)

10 [newsroom.intel.com/community/intel\\_newsroom/blog/2013/01/10/intel-announces-groundbreaking-women-and-the-web-report-with-un-women-and-state-department](http://newsroom.intel.com/community/intel_newsroom/blog/2013/01/10/intel-announces-groundbreaking-women-and-the-web-report-with-un-women-and-state-department)

11 Initiatives like the Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development ([www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/intcoop/partnership/default.aspx](http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/intcoop/partnership/default.aspx)) can help build the capacity of developing countries to collect and disseminate official sex-disaggregated and gender-related ICT statistics.

12 Buskens, I. and Webb, A. (2009) *African Women and ICTs: Investigating Technology, Gender and Empowerment*, Zed/IDRC.

13 [www.unglobalcompact.org/Issues/human\\_rights/equality\\_means\\_business.html#cite](http://www.unglobalcompact.org/Issues/human_rights/equality_means_business.html#cite)

14 Gurumurthy, A. (2004) *Gender and ICTs: Overview Report*, Bridge, Brighton.

opportunities for collaboration and alignment, highlight and make efforts to fill gaps in understanding and investment, produce recommended actions for the post-2015 UN development agenda, as well as generate a new consensus on the importance of leveraging ICTs for women in development agendas. The coalition, comprising a number of workstreams led by different organisations, covers access to ICTs, digital literacy, health, education, political participation, entrepreneurship, content producers, ICT careers, ICT policies, and data and research.

These alliances have already generated precedents to build on. At the first WSIS (2003), member states agreed that the “development of ICTs provides enormous opportunities for women, who should be an integral part of, and key actors in, the Information Society. We are committed to ensuring that the Information Society enables women’s empowerment and... full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society and in all decision-making processes. ... [W]e should mainstream a gender equality perspective and use ICTs as a tool to that end.”<sup>15</sup>

Amplifying the collective voice of women’s movements from different countries and contexts in relation to WSIS+10 and its relevance to overall ICT policy is a strategy that requires support. We should learn from the experience in 2003 – where there were two coalitions advocating for women’s rights, sometimes at cross purposes and, in general, insufficient engagement by feminists with WSIS overall – to enable us to secure a policy agenda that can be carried through the Beijing and post-2015 debates. There are a wide range of policy options to advocate for, from securing national commitments to disaggregate data by gender on ICT use and access, to introducing quotas or positive action for participation of women and girls as participants and decision makers in ICT education and governance, or introducing subsidies that make ICTs affordable for rural communities and, particularly, for women and girls who have restricted access. But we have to continue to press and build a case for concrete and targeted commitments, rather than the kinds of vague statements that are so easily eluded in practice.

The terrain that remains in dire need of feminist framing and activism is the policy void and resistance to address the multiple ways that the internet has become a prime site of sexual exploitation and abuse. As Fascendini and Fialová note:

The complex relationship between violence against women (VAW) and information and communications technologies (ICTs) is a critical area of engagement for women’s rights activists. ICTs can be used as a tool to stop VAW, while on the other hand VAW can be facilitated through the use of ICTs. However, few women’s rights activists are working actively on this issue. Consequently, a political and legal framing of the issue is not established in most countries.<sup>16</sup>

Globally agreed norms and standards can help to inspire countries to incorporate these in their domestic frameworks. In 2013 the UN Commission on the Status of Women committed member states to:

Support the development and use of ICT and social media as a resource for the empowerment of women and girls, including access to information on the prevention of and response to violence against women and girls; and develop mechanisms to combat the use of ICT and social media to perpetrate violence against women and girls, including the criminal misuse of ICT for sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, child pornography and trafficking.<sup>17</sup>

This resolution, and several others, are important policy steps that activists can use at national level to press for changes in national ICT and security policies and anti-violence legislation. But we have to go further.

Firstly, laws and policies to protect women and girls from violence need to be reframed to recognise, prevent and redress new forms of technology-related VAW. This means taking such steps as expanding definitions of violence and harm beyond physical harms<sup>18</sup> and introducing laws that deal with new phenomena like cyber stalking, “sextortion” and other online violations. We need laws, policies and standards that are aimed at prevention and that are accompanied by education programmes for women and girls on how to negotiate online spaces and sexual interactions safely.

Secondly, radically new approaches to privacy laws will be critical. This is complex terrain that requires deep feminist thought and advocacy. The experience from Malaysia (see Box 1) is an example

<sup>15</sup> [www.itu.int/wsis/docs/geneva/official/dop.html](http://www.itu.int/wsis/docs/geneva/official/dop.html)

<sup>16</sup> Fascendini and Fialová (2011) Op. cit.

<sup>17</sup> [www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw57/CSW57\\_agreed\\_conclusions\\_advance\\_unedited\\_version\\_18\\_March\\_2013.pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw57/CSW57_agreed_conclusions_advance_unedited_version_18_March_2013.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Fascendini and Fialová (2011) Op. cit.

## BOX 1

In February 2009, intimate pictures of a Malaysian female politician were sent, allegedly by her partner, to local daily newspapers and subsequently posted online and circulated via mobile phones. While newspapers did not publish the pictures, they questioned and reportedly bullied the politician over the images. Her political opponents used the leaked photos and videos to question her morality and demand her resignation. Despite her public statement that she did not feel embarrassed or compromised, she resigned from her political post. Due to overwhelming public support, her resignation was eventually rejected by the government. Although the Constitution of Malaysia enshrines a conclusive list of fundamental rights, including freedom of assembly, speech and movement, it does not specifically recognise the right to privacy.<sup>23</sup>

of how violations of women's privacy rights have reverberating effects on individuals and societies.

Thirdly, the need to balance one person's right to privacy with another person's right to know – two basic human rights – makes this a particularly complex policy terrain. Often the way that these rights are defined depends on power relations within a society. This debate has traditionally generated significant friction within feminist and social justice movements, unmasking divisions of race, class and other perspectives between those who advocate for limits to freedom of expression that are needed to strike a balance with other human rights and those who believe that freedom of expression must be absolute.

The complexity of this terrain was uniquely visible in May 2013, when a coalition led a week-long campaign to hold Facebook accountable for its policy on dealing with hate speech and the representations of gender-based violence shared by its users. Within one week, the Everyday Sexism Project, Women Action & the Media (WAM!) and activist and writer Soraya Chemaly succeeded in generating enough pressure on Facebook to get the USD 1.4-billion company to admit that content on the site has been “evaluated using outdated criteria” and to promise to review and update their Community Standards around hate speech. In response, freedom of expression advocates have voiced concern and criticism over the precedent set by demands for Facebook to remove hateful content from its site.

Despite this ongoing debate, there is clear space for agreement on the need for accountability in how internet intermediaries deal with abusive content, a point made by advocates from a variety of backgrounds, including the UN Special Rap-

porteur on freedom of opinion and expression.<sup>19</sup> If human rights are indivisible, inalienable and interdependent, then freedom of expression cannot trump the right to live a life free of violence. Collective advocacy to move this agenda over the next three years of global policy debates could be an important contribution of women's and social justice movements to creating an online environment that respects freedom of expression and individual rights to safety.

*Moving to the left-hand side of the framework: What changes in individual consciousness and invisible norms and cultures are needed?*

Securing resources and policies that create opportunities for more women and girls to access and use the internet – or for more women's rights advocates to have an equal voice in decision making about internet governance – will fall short unless ample attention is paid to the left-hand side of the Gender at Work framework: that is, the largely invisible and expensive-to-track areas of individual attitudes and collective norms and values that ultimately influence our choices, our attitudes and our actions.

There are two dimensions to monitoring and changing individual attitudes that perpetuate gender discrimination on the internet (the upper left-hand quadrant). Firstly, there is the power of the internet to track and change the attitudes of those who actively promote or enable gender discrimination, both online and offline; secondly, there are the attitudes of women themselves, who can encounter both empowerment and disempowerment within the power of the internet.

<sup>19</sup> [www.takebackthetech.net/blog-feeds/44](http://www.takebackthetech.net/blog-feeds/44)

The ways that the internet increases reach, with the ability to build robust and rapidly expanded social networks across vast geographic divides and to reach millions in cyberspace with the click of a button – from emails to Twitter and Facebook – mean that empowerment or abuse can happen every moment of every day, all year long. The power of campaigns like the Bell Bajao and One Million Men/One Million Promises run by Breakthrough<sup>20</sup> – using a combination of new and traditional ICTs, including the internet, television and community-based training in order to amplify positive messages and build communities around men’s responsibility to stand up to end violence against women – is a positive example of using existing online and offline capacity and inspiring others to do so.

At the same time, this is the terrain where online and offline strategies are mutually reinforcing. The use of patriarchal power to restrict or intimidate women’s and girls’ use of and influence on new technologies emanates from cultures and attitudes about masculinity. A study in West Africa affirmed what has been proven in other regions: many men felt threatened when women used mobile phones and accessed the internet, seeing it as destabilising to relationships and inappropriate. Many cases were reported of men monitoring the mobile phone and internet use of their partners. A woman from Cameroon commented, “My husband won’t let me have a cellphone; I have asked him several times to get me one. He answers that if I want a divorce, I just have to say so.”<sup>21</sup>

Or, as a Moroccan woman observed, “In internet cafés, men are not supervised. They sometimes use pornographic websites... and nobody cares about that. But the women feel embarrassed because we are watched by others who keep an eye on what we are writing or watching, even by the internet café’s owner. There is no privacy.”<sup>22</sup>

Despite intimidation, women are persevering and showing great courage to use the internet to break cycles of silence, draw attention to women’s human rights abuses, form new kinds of social networks, and infiltrate male-dominated spheres, whether as hackers or bloggers. Women’s rights advocates are using the internet to draw attention to rape, abductions and many other human rights abuses, often at great risk to themselves. As one

woman blogger from Mexico noted, “When women bloggers... manage to get their voices heard, that is when they start receiving the most pressure, threats and smear campaigns. ...This happens to all of us, whether we are in Tunisia, Ciudad Juárez [Mexico] or Saudi Arabia... because when power feels it is under attack, it reacts against the voices that provoke debate.”<sup>24</sup>

Reversing individual and collective attitudes that restrict women’s full participation in the benefits of the internet and that perpetuate patriarchal control and abuse is the ongoing work of women’s and social change movements. This work must be focused on democratising cyberspace as well. As in other spheres, from politics to the larger terrain of science and technology, one aspect of changing patriarchal norms and standards is to strive for greater gender balance amongst experts and decision makers in particular fields. This remains an important strategy in relation to the internet. Positive images of women who are leaders and technological wizards in the tech field are the exception, but exist nevertheless. A media report from Zambia<sup>25</sup> illustrates the ways in which some women in the tech field understand their importance as role models and “norms breakers”. At a Women’s Rights Brainstorm and Hackathon in Zambia in March 2013, Clara Malupande, an ICT specialist who spoke about her experience in the ICT field, noted, “I love being able to challenge social norms and do things that people least expect me to be capable of.” An often-asked question she receives is: “Can you cook?” The Zambian article noted that this question highlights the perception that women in male-dominated sectors are unable to perform what are deemed to be “traditional” duties, a belief exhibited in countries worldwide.

### *What changes in informal cultural norms and practices are needed?*

Finally, the lower left-hand quadrant of the Gender at Work framework focuses on informal cultural norms and exclusionary practices. It is here that we see how existing power relations in society determine the enjoyment of benefits from ICTs. It is here where collective and well-entrenched cultural, gender, class and race biases determine who benefits and who controls cyberspace, regardless of which formal policies are in place. As Gurumurthy observes, at its highest levels, the ICT arena is characterised by strategic control exercised by powerful corporations and nations, reliant on monopolies built upon the intellectual property

20 [breakthrough.tv/explore/campaign/ring-the-bell](http://breakthrough.tv/explore/campaign/ring-the-bell)

21 Hafkin, N. and Huyer, S. (2006) *Cinderella or Cyberella: Empowering Women in the Knowledge Society*, Kumarian Press.

22 Buskens and Webb (2009) Op. cit.

23 Ibid.

24 [www.ipsnews.net/2012/10/women-using-icts-to-change-the-world](http://www.ipsnews.net/2012/10/women-using-icts-to-change-the-world)

25 [www.zedtechnologynews.com/?p=372#sthash.a6eolOHF.dpuf](http://www.zedtechnologynews.com/?p=372#sthash.a6eolOHF.dpuf)

regime, increasing surveillance of the internet, and exploitation by capitalist imperialism, sexism and racism.<sup>26</sup> Building a policy-to-action cycle that embraces all of the quadrants and is mindful of the cultural and traditional norms that mediate the internet is an important new terrain for challenging patriarchy and privilege by asserting claims for women's rights and the rights of all groups that are excluded from the benefits of development.

## Conclusion

Strengthening capacity to use and govern the internet for advancing human rights and weakening its potential to exacerbate inequality and abuse will require what women's movements have long brought to other complex phenomena: the power of feminist analysis and reframing concepts so that

they can be transformed into policies; the power of information dissemination and awareness raising to build constituencies; the power of collective voice and organising to face down injustice and exploitation and to model new types of interactions and relationships.

In a 2011 article for the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID),<sup>27</sup> Jenny Radloff rightly urged that "we need to take control of [information] technologies, deploy them creatively and infuse our technology practice with feminist principles in order to enhance and deepen our movement building." At the same time, we need to inspire women's movements to challenge gender-discriminatory policies and practices that characterise the internet and ensure that the radical potential of this terrain to promote and protect women's rights can be enjoyed by all. ■

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<sup>26</sup> Gurumurthy (2004) Op. cit.

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<sup>27</sup> [www.awid.org/News-Analysis/Friday-Files/ICTs-A-double-edged-sword-for-Women-Human-Rights-Defenders](http://www.awid.org/News-Analysis/Friday-Files/ICTs-A-double-edged-sword-for-Women-Human-Rights-Defenders)



## Thematic reports





# Accessing infrastructure

**Mariama Deen-Swarrray and Mpho Moyo**

Research ICT Africa  
www.researchictafrica.net

## Accessing telecommunications infrastructure in Africa: A gender perspective<sup>1</sup>

Despite the rhetorical undertaking of governments and multilateral agencies, there has been little systematic collection of sex-disaggregated data on information and communications technology (ICT) access and use.<sup>2</sup>

A newly released study by Research ICT Africa (RIA) provides a sex-disaggregated overview of ICT access and use across 11 African countries which highlights the unevenness of access to ICTs. The study unmaskes the gender dimensions of the limited sex-disaggregated ICT indicators available. Using the RIA 2012 survey data<sup>3</sup> and building on the 2010 RIA gender and ICT report,<sup>4</sup> it assesses the gap in ICT access and use from a gender perspective and examines whether the gap between men and women exists. RIA also surveyed how women entrepreneurs in the informal sector make use of ICTs – mainly mobile phones and the internet – to conduct daily business activities.

Though in general, access to and use of mobile phones and the internet among women have increased, the RIA study confirms the findings of the few systematic national and multinational studies in this area that women and men are not equally able to access and use ICTs. It goes further to demonstrate that this increases as the technologies and services become more sophisticated and expensive, requiring greater levels of income and education to access and to operate. Modelling of the nationally representative survey data, however, demonstrates that

this inequality is not a result of anything inherent in ICTs, but rather a result of women being more concentrated in lower income groups, in lower education levels and in rural areas, or more generally what has become referred to as the “base of the pyramid”.

## Women and technology

### Mobile ownership

The uptake of mobile technology in Africa in general has increased significantly in the last three years. The breakdown by gender of mobile phone ownership shows that since the 2008 RIA survey, it has increased significantly for both sexes, as shown in Figure 1. However, the 2012 data shows that a gender gap still persists. Mobile ownership among females increased in all countries over the two periods observed, in particular in Botswana (23.8%), Uganda (22.3%) and Kenya (21%). In fact, the adoption of mobile phones among women exceeds that of men in Botswana in particular, and also in Namibia and Cameroon, though by a lesser extent. However, in all the other countries surveyed, the share of men that own a mobile phone continues to be higher in comparison to women.

Mobile phones have become the new tool for accessing the internet<sup>5</sup> and the share of individuals with internet-enabled mobile phones is growing. But in most of the countries, except in Tanzania and Rwanda, women still lag behind in terms of owning internet-enabled mobile phones (see Figure 2).

### Internet access

Though it is said that access to and use of the internet can boost women’s income and increase their sense of empowerment and equity, there are still some women who are not aware of the internet and its benefits, and others who simply do not have the know-how or technical skills. Despite the increase in internet use in recent years, there are still over four billion of the world’s population that do not have access, the majority of whom are women.<sup>6</sup>

1 This article is drawn from two papers: Deen-Swarrray, M., Gillwald, A. and Morrell, A. (2013) *Lifting the gender veil on ICT indicators in Africa* and Moyo, M. and Deen-Swarrray, M. (2013) *Gender and Entrepreneurship in the Informal Sector: An African Perspective*. See www.researchictafrica.net

2 As the final component of the WSIS Measuring the Information Society project undertaken by UNCTAD and ITU, standardised universal indicators for ICT access and use are being formulated.

3 The methodology of the survey and the data can be found on RIA’s website: www.researchictafrica.net

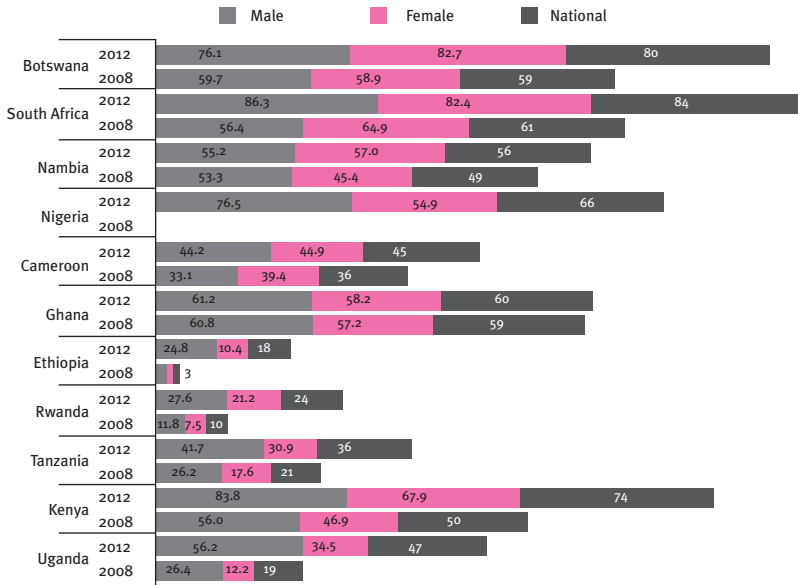
4 For the full report by Gillwald, Milek and Stork (2010) see www.researchictafrica.net

5 Stork, C., Calandro, E. and Gillwald, A. (2013) *Internet going mobile: Internet access and use in 11 African countries*, Info, 15(5).

6 Intel and Dalberg (2013) *Women and the Web: Bridging the internet gap and creating new global opportunities in low and middle-income countries*.

**FIGURE 1.**

**Mobile ownership compared by gender across countries (%)**



Source: RIA Data 2012

In general, the adoption of internet use in Africa has been rather slow, mainly as a result of limited connectivity across many countries and the very high cost of services where they are available. Internet use in all countries in general and by gender increased between 2008 and 2012 (see Figure 3). However, in almost all the countries, except in Cameroon and Tanzania, there are more men using the internet than women. The increase in the share of female internet users between the two periods was more pronounced in Botswana, where the figure increased by 22.5%. The increase was, however, comparatively low in Rwanda (3.1%), Uganda (2.0%), Cameroon (1.9%), Tanzania (1.2%) and Ethiopia (0.7%).

Though access from an internet café still remains predominant, this figure has dropped, with access shifting more towards use from home, work, place of education and another person's home. The share of women accessing the internet from an internet café dropped by about 21%. Women accessing the internet from home increased by 24%, while those accessing it from another person's home increased by 17.2%. The share of women also making use of the internet from an academic institution went up from 13.0% to 27.5% in 2012 (see Figure 4). Also

notable, though not included in the figure below, is the share of individuals that accessed the internet through their mobile phones. About 74% of men and 71% of women used the internet on their mobile phones during the last 12 months (RIA 2012). This, as well as the availability of internet modems, could be a contributing factor to the shift from accessing the internet via a public place (internet café).

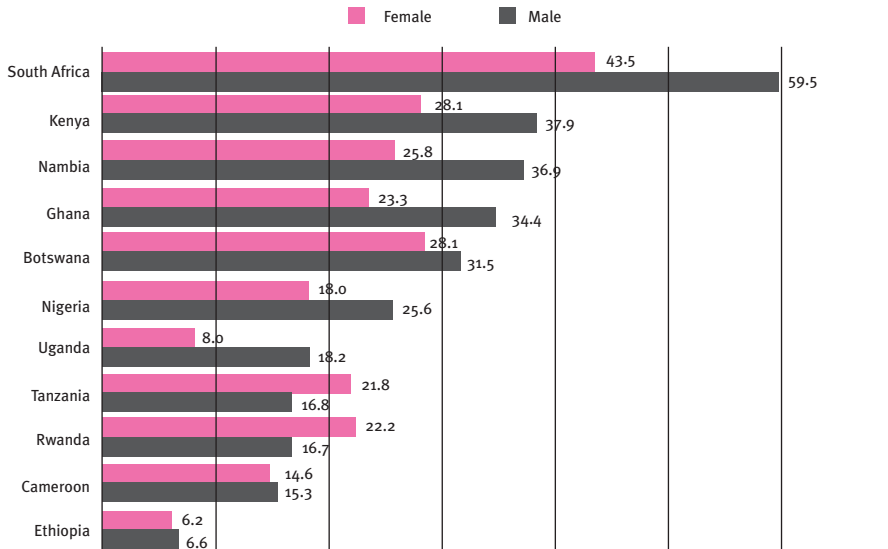
The use of social networks has been one of the contributing factors to the recent increase in internet use, and more individuals are increasingly accessing social network sites through their mobile phones. The share of women accessing social networks from mobile phones (31.6%) is higher than men (27.2%) and this could possibly be due to their low levels of e-skills, which limit their use of computers. However, the share of males signed up for social networks is still higher (see Figure 5).

*Affordability and use*

On average, women are shown to spend less than men on mobile phone use, except in Ethiopia, Rwanda and Tanzania. This could be due to their lower earning capacity, which constrains how much they can allocate to mobile use and in turn limits the way they make use of their mobile phones (see Figure 6).

**FIGURE 2.**

**Share of individuals with mobile phones capable of browsing the internet (%)**



Source: RIA Data 2012

Though there are differences in which activities more women use their mobile phones for than men, these differences are only slight (see Figure 7). The results show that some of the more advanced and sophisticated activities, such as downloading applications, browsing, games and email, are more common among men, while the more basic (missed call/please call me, text messaging, sending/receiving money) are used more by women. This could be due to underlying factors such as skills or education and income, which in turn affect affordability, as the relatively more advanced uses of mobile phones usually require more data and better skills.

Women mostly claim that they do not own a mobile phone because they “cannot afford one” or they “have no one to call” or their “phone is broken”. About 7.8% more women stated that they do not use the internet because they “do not know what it is” and about 4% more stated they “do not know how to use it”. Slightly more women also mentioned that they do not use the internet because it is too expensive (see Figure 8). These reasons are indicative of the exclusion factors, namely education (knowledge/skills) and income (affordability).

**Empirical findings**

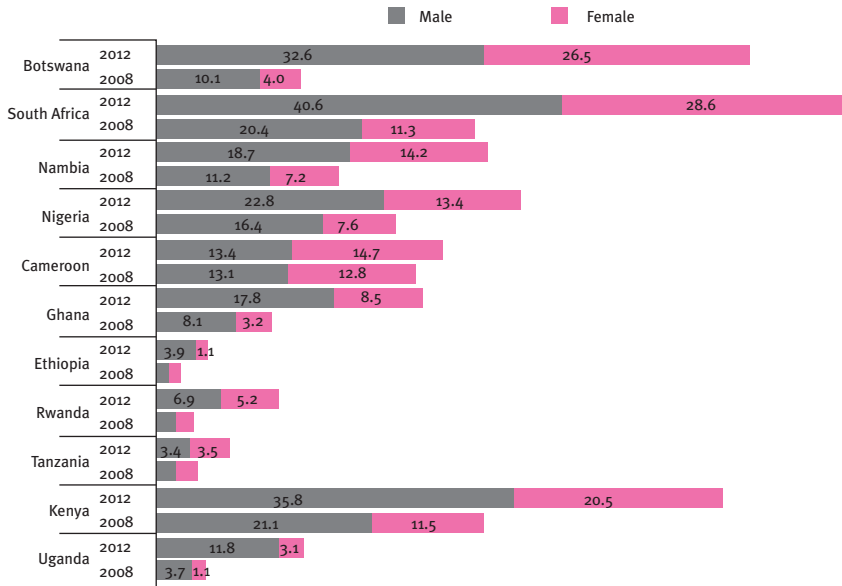
Using logistic regression models to further analyse the gender divide in mobile ownership and internet use indicates that in general, when income and education are controlled for, there is a negative relationship between the gender variable and both mobile ownership and internet use. The relationship is not statistically significant in the case of mobile ownership, indicating only a negative correlation between mobile adoption and being female. However, the relationship is statistically significant in the case of internet use, showing a negative causal relationship between being female and using the internet.

Income and education show a positive relationship to mobile adoption and internet use, an indication that with more income and higher levels of education, the probability of an individual owning a mobile phone or using the internet is increased. This relationship is also maintained across all countries and supports the findings by Gillwald et al. in a 2010 study.<sup>7</sup>

7 Gillwald, A., Milek, A. and Stork, C. (2010) *Gender Assessment of ICT Access and Usage in Africa*, Volume 1, Policy Paper 5, RIA. [www.researchictafrica.net/publications.php](http://www.researchictafrica.net/publications.php)

**FIGURE 3.**

**Share of individuals 15 years or older using the internet by gender (16+ for 2008) (%)**



Source: RIA Data 2012

### Women in the informal sector

The structural constraints faced by women in terms of education, income, assets and limited access to financial resources have pushed most of them into the informal sector, a sector which is said to have become a domain for the marginalised, unemployed and poor.<sup>8</sup> The theory developed by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor stated that people in developing countries were driven by poverty, survival and a lack of choice to start business ventures, concluding that the greater the poverty, the higher the level of necessity entrepreneurship in a country.

Sex-disaggregated data of the motivating factors for starting a business shows that the majority of female respondents had been “pushed” into entrepreneurship across all countries except Kenya, where slightly more women were “pulled” into entrepreneurship. This indicates that those who go into business in the informal sector as a way of making a living and finding some form of employment are mostly women.<sup>9</sup>

### Gender and the use of ICTs for business

Mobile phones are found to be the only widely used ICT amongst informal businesses.<sup>10</sup> However, a lower share of female entrepreneurs use mobile phones for business purposes. The gender inequalities are more pronounced in Ethiopia, where 46.4% of male-owned businesses used mobile phones for business purposes in comparison to 3.2% of female-owned businesses. The mobile phone is the tool most widely used to communicate with suppliers and customers, yet with the exception of Uganda, female-owned businesses still lag behind their male counterparts in the use of mobile phones to communicate with suppliers, with a significant difference between male entrepreneurs (36.4%) and female entrepreneurs (2.4%) in Ethiopia. Similar trends were found with fewer female entrepreneurs using this medium to communicate with customers in all countries except Kenya (see Table 1).

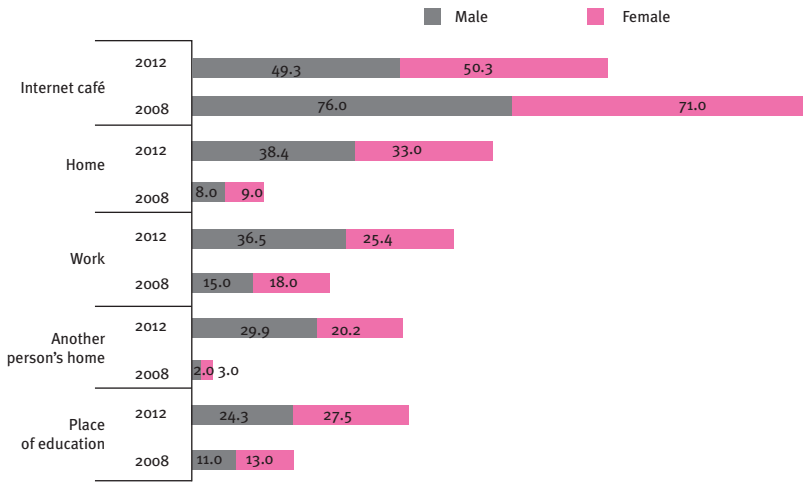
Internet use amongst informal businesses in all countries surveyed was negligible, though in South Africa and Uganda, there were slightly more

8 Flodman Becker, K. (2004) *The Informal Economy: Fact finding study*, Sida. [rru.worldbank.org/Documents/PapersLinks/Sida.pdf](http://rru.worldbank.org/Documents/PapersLinks/Sida.pdf)  
9 RIA Data 2012.

10 Deen-Swarray, M., Moyo, M. and Stork, C. (2013) ICT access and usage among informal businesses in Africa, *Info*, 15(5).

**FIGURE 4.**

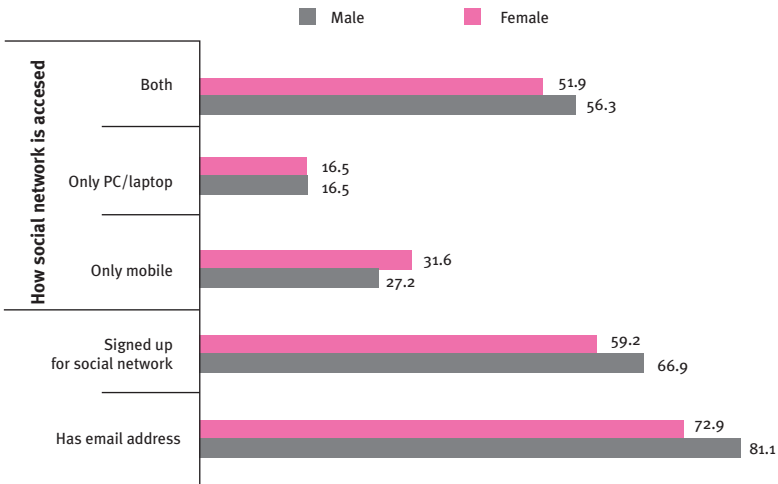
**Share of where internet was used in the last 12 months (%)**



Source: RIA Data 2012

**FIGURE 5.**

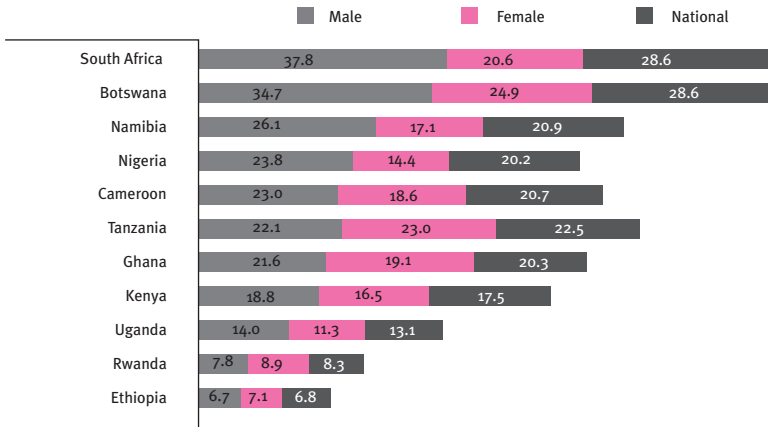
**Share of individuals using email and accessing social networks (%)**



Source: RIA Data 2012

**FIGURE 6.**

**Monthly expenditure on mobile phone in USD PPP**



Source: RIA Data 2012

female-owned businesses with a working internet connection.

Female entrepreneurs mainly claimed that they did not make use of mobile phones for business purposes as they were not relevant and they found no need for them. Significant gender differences were found in Ethiopia, where 47.8% of female business owners compared to 28.7% of male owners stated that they had no need for mobile phones, and in South Africa, where 55.1% of women entrepreneurs compared to 35.6% of men made the same claim. High costs, lack of need and unavailability of internet services are the main reasons why businesses do not make use of internet facilities to conduct their activities. The nature of businesses also plays a role in the communication devices that entrepreneurs opt for, and generally they opt for ICTs from which they will derive the highest benefit at the lowest cost.

**Conclusions and recommendations**

The sex-disaggregated overview in this study indicates that women and men do not access and use ICTs equally. Women generally have less access to ICTs and use them sub-optimally, and this increases as the technologies and services become more sophisticated and expensive.

The analysis shows that on average, women earn comparatively less than men. In general, fewer women than men have tertiary education, and even

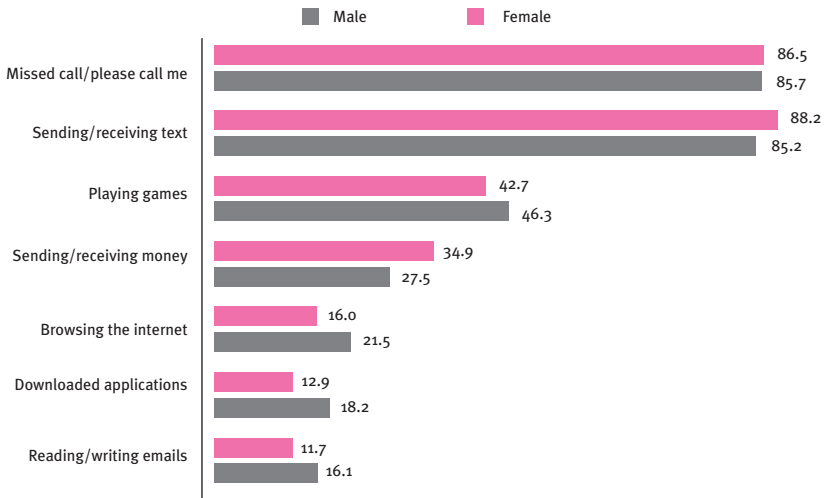
in the secondary and primary levels, the majority of the countries have fewer women completing these levels, emphasising the continued gender gap in education. These findings indicate that it is mainly this underlying gender gap in income and education that contributes to the exclusion of women in the ICT domain. This gap is reflected in the higher share of female entrepreneurs who were pushed into the informal sector to make a living and has further influenced the differences between male and female entrepreneurs in terms of access and use of ICTs for business purposes.

While the descriptive analysis shows that mobile phone and internet access have increased among women, modelling of the data indicates that there is a negative correlation between mobile adoption and being female and a negative causal relationship between using the internet and being female.

This evidence shows that to a large extent, gender inequities in access to and use of ICTs cannot be addressed through ICT policies per se, but require policy interventions in other areas that would allow women and girls to enjoy the benefits of ICTs equally. This would include policies and programmes that incentivise the education of girls, which in turn will increase the income that women have to spend on ICT services. Partnerships could be created to provide vocational and ICT skills training for women entrepreneurs to address the educational gap and increase their earning potential. ■

**FIGURE 7.**

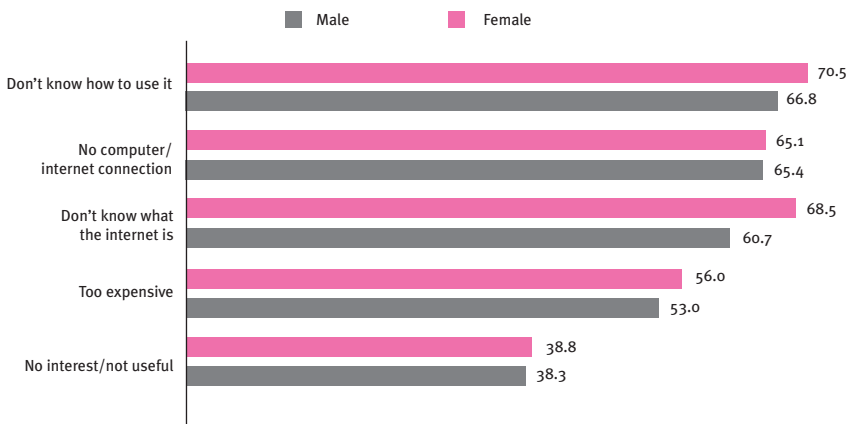
**Main reasons why individuals use mobile phones (%)**



Source: RIA Data 2012

**FIGURE 8.**

**Main reasons why individuals do not use the internet (%)**



Source: RIA Data 2012



**TABLE 1.****Informal businesses with mobile phones and internet access**

|              | Using mobile phones for business purposes |            |              | Working internet connection |            |              |
|--------------|---|------------|--------------|-----------------------------|------------|--------------|
|              | National                                  | Male owner | Female owner | National                    | Male owner | Female owner |
| Botswana     | 42.3%                                     | 45.4%      | 36.8%        | 2.9%                        | 3.6%       | 2.0%         |
| Cameroon     | 56.2%                                     | 68.0%      | 40.9%        | 2.2%                        | 2.0%       | 0.0%         |
| Ethiopia     | 12.3%                                     | 46.4%      | 3.2%         | 0.0%                        | 0.3%       | 0.0%         |
| Ghana        | 44.9%                                     | 57.3%      | 35.7%        | 0.7%                        | 1.2%       | 0.2%         |
| Kenya        | 67.4%                                     | 70.3%      | 62%          | 3.0%                        | 6.2%       | 1.2%         |
| Namibia      | 51.9%                                     | 60.5%      | 45.3%        | 2.2%                        | 3.9%       | 0.9%         |
| Nigeria      | 44.2%                                     | 57.3%      | 37.2%        | 0.1%                        | 0.3%       | 0.0%         |
| Rwanda       | 53.4%                                     | 54.5%      | 44.9%        | 0.7%                        | 0.5%       | 0.3%         |
| South Africa | 49.5%                                     | 55.0%      | 38.3%        | 10.5%                       | 7.5%       | 7.8%         |
| Tanzania     | 44.4%                                     | 46.6%      | 39.8%        | 0.1%                        | 0.0%       | 0.2%         |
| Uganda       | 67.9%                                     | 68.9%      | 63.9%        | 2.0%                        | 1.4%       | 3.2%         |

Source: RIA Data 2012



A digital postcard urging people to follow the 57th session of the Commission on the Status of Women in March 2013. Running for two days, the session was notable for the grouping of states committed to preventing women's access to sexual and reproductive health rights. The postcard urges women to follow events through the Twittersphere via #csw57, and to make their concerns and issues heard. For a colour reproduction of the image, please visit: [www.giswatch.org](http://www.giswatch.org)

# Participatory citizenship

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Anita Gurumurthy  
IT for Change  
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## Tracing the impact of ICTs on the social and political participation of women

The cat is out of the bag. With the Snowden affair, it is unequivocally clear that the network society's emancipatory potential is more or less just that: a promise in the distant horizon that is weighed down by the political-economic surveillance complex. The turn of events is deeply disturbing for global justice. And for the feminist project, it is a sobering moment. Just as we were beginning to creatively bend space with digital tools for building community, forging social movements, organising dissent and publishing perspectives on gender justice, we begin to realise that the "network" may indeed be monolithic, pervasive and unexceptional.

However, feminist activism requires an abiding commitment to constructive, forward-looking analysis and theory that can assist action for change. There is a need to move conceptions of contemporary life from dystopic readings of the network society to productive interpretations that can assist action. What would equal participation in the network society, the experience of "networked citizenship", entail? How can we understand digital space as political terrain? What outcomes for gender equality arise through the discourse and practice(s) of technology? How does political counter-power emerge in and in spite of the hegemonic network? These are some of the questions that need to be explored to articulate the citizenship and public-political participation of women in the network society.

## The connection between digital space and the public sphere: What network politics seems to bring for women

A starting point in the exploration of a framework for action is knowing how political discourse and practice meet the affordances of technology and how

in this interaction, gender relations are realigned.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, politics in the network society imbues the logic of the technological paradigm. From activist distributed denial of service (DDOS) attacks to hackathons-for-a-cause and mass texting or tweeting to galvanise flash mobs, what constitutes political life has changed. This is not just about vocabulary. The social discourse of politics today emerges through networked pathways that are more diffuse, adaptive and decentralised. Politics seems to be everywhere, and as Wendy Harcourt observes:

Today's vibrant, young, "unruly" movements that throng together over one issue and then move on again before analysts can catch them are not negotiating, nor seeking to build institutional stability. They are on the streets, in the piazzas, blogging, tweeting, texting, performing, meeting on Facebook and YouTube. The size, the energy, the multiple images and words in so many languages hardly allow you to catch your breath. This type of civic action provides possibilities for new alternatives....<sup>2</sup>

The performance of politics today does indeed derive from the propensities of a networked society. Borrowing from game theory, network theorists explain how with the use of digital technology a leap of faith occurs, when a "known" becomes a "known known" – a "common knowledge" – which shows you that you are not alone in a particular set of beliefs. What then arises through the dispersed and anarchic performance of politics follows Hannah Arendt's description of transformative revolutionary moments when ordinary people abandon their routines – when common assumptions about the way things go are thrown out – and people come together to invent a new way of doing things. These moments may not last, but they punctuate history

- 
- <sup>1</sup> Of course, it is equally important to look at how feminist practices of technology transform the public-political sphere. This would be another entry point in the analysis. But looking at politics also means taking into account the dynamic interplay between political institutions and political praxis – the framing of gender by political structures and discourse, as well as subversive feminist interruptions in this canvas.
  - <sup>2</sup> Harcourt, W. (2012) The Challenge of Civic Engagement for Development, *Development*, 55(2), p. 151-153. [www.palgrave-journals.com/development/journal/v55/n2/pdf/dev201211a.pdf](http://www.palgrave-journals.com/development/journal/v55/n2/pdf/dev201211a.pdf)

and set the scene for a new point of departure for human society at large.<sup>3</sup>

In this tumult of a scale unprecedented, women activists have embraced online spaces to create a safe harbour; feminist movements deploy social media to inform, organise and mobilise; feminist organisations forge translocal solidarities for concerted “real world” action; individuals across geographies are “interpellated”<sup>4</sup> to political community online in new formations of transnational organisations. Digital technologies create the in-between space in liberal democracies, where marginalised women build collective political articulations as citizens contesting the state.<sup>5</sup> These practices across a wide spectrum, from the self-discovery of political subjecthood and bonding with a “community of fate”<sup>6</sup> to exercising active citizenship, endow the feminist project with immeasurable possibilities for seeking new paths to gender justice.

Understanding these emerging practices as everyday experience of micro-power is not sufficient. The flow of information and creation of community inhere in a changing, even if fluid, order of macro-power. Politics in the network age may just be a new variant of the old craft – but it arises in and through a new technological regime that intertwines with old hierarchies of power. Contemporary society reflects a contradiction, witness as it is to the consolidation of power through new alliances of the powerful, alongside the birth and proliferation of a global public sphere where technology decentres political action, creating a new class of digital citizens. Emerging through these contradictions, the pluralities of network society politics, instead of coalescing into a cogent narrative where power is contested, may degenerate into a “tyranny of structurelessness”<sup>7</sup> making way for default powers that co-opt the powerless into the myth of “power for all”. Those excluded from access to technology – like marginalised women – may be rendered invisible, and their politics insignificant, in the emerg-

ing political discourse. Even with access to digital resources, marginalised individuals and groups would still need to garner other resources that can amplify their informative and communicative power. In the network society therefore, decentralisation of information and action does not necessarily imply a democratisation of power. Politics as process may in fact overtake politics for (democratic) content, displacing radical transformation and rendering resistance an empty signifier.

Historically, the public sphere of nations has been structured by an exclusion of women and by an inhibition to critically discuss patriarchy, particularly as it relates to sexuality, and private property. Even though the internet enables women to exercise freedoms – of expression, association and assembly – the structures of Web 2.0 have commoditised all these initiatives. Also, patriarchal forces have utilised digital media for censorship and surveillance of women’s sexuality. Meanwhile, the broader public sphere may not be characterised by a greater plurality of voices at all.<sup>8</sup>

What we see therefore is that the wide swath of political actions, including those that renegotiate gender through the appropriation of digital space, tend to be “fragments”<sup>9</sup> of micro-power that do not necessarily add up to making a political agora. And as the particular trajectories of the different Arab uprisings show us, how these fragments can challenge and subvert patterns of macro-power, and what a “politics of resolution” would look like, would be highly contextual. It would be contingent upon how situated practices encounter institutional power.

### Participation, citizenship and gendered faultlines in network politics

Feminist opportunism in the network society would demand theories of power that speak to the emerging discourse of power ushered in by the internet and digital spaces. The discussion below focuses on the new forms of subjectivity and community, and the new structures of representation arising in the network society, ruminating on how these developments impact the discourse of participation and citizenship and of women’s empowerment and gender equality.

3 Price, T. C. (2011) Cupid’s Freedom: How the Web Sharpens the Democratic Revolution. [www.opendemocracy.net/openeconomy/tony-curzon-price/cupids-freedom-how-web-sharpens-democratic-revolution](http://www.opendemocracy.net/openeconomy/tony-curzon-price/cupids-freedom-how-web-sharpens-democratic-revolution)

4 Interpellation is a term coined by French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser and refers to the process by which ideology addresses the pre-ideological individual and produces him or her as a subject proper.

5 Claudio, S. E. (2011) Workshop Report of the Review of the “Gender and Citizenship in the Information Society” (CITIGEN) Research Programme. [www.gender-is-citizenship.net/sites/default/files/citigen/CITIGEN\\_Workshop%20Report.pdf](http://www.gender-is-citizenship.net/sites/default/files/citigen/CITIGEN_Workshop%20Report.pdf)

6 Fraser, N. (2005) *Transnationalising the Public Sphere*, p. 4. [www.republicart.net/disc/publicum/fraser01\\_en.pdf](http://www.republicart.net/disc/publicum/fraser01_en.pdf)

7 Freeman, J. (1972) *The Tyranny of Structurelessness*, Berkeley *Journal of Sociology*, 17. [www.jstor.org/stable/41035187](http://www.jstor.org/stable/41035187)

8 Jensen, H. (2011) Workshop Report of the Review of the “Gender and Citizenship in the Information Society” (CITIGEN) Research Programme. [www.gender-is-citizenship.net/sites/default/files/citigen/CITIGEN\\_Workshop%20Report.pdf](http://www.gender-is-citizenship.net/sites/default/files/citigen/CITIGEN_Workshop%20Report.pdf)

9 Habermas, J. (2006) Political Communication in Media Society: Does Democracy Still Enjoy an Epistemic Dimension? The Impact of Normative Theory on Empirical Research, *Communication Theory*, 16(4), p. 411-426.



## The individuated female political subject

In countries of the global South, especially in post-colonial contexts, political citizenship for women materialises through a subjectivity rooted in everyday actions and collective histories.<sup>10</sup> This process of individuation is tied to how material life experiences translate into contextual struggles for rights. Cyberspace can be a harbinger of such a process of individuation, enabling women to have a space of their own, reflect upon their location, and become public-political subjects. By learning how to be citizen journalists, marginalised women in Manila, for instance, wrote blogs that captured the everyday marginalities experienced by women like themselves in their slum communities, publicising the personal and arguing what reproductive rights meant for their citizenship.<sup>11</sup>

In tightly controlled cultural and political environments, women activists and journalists have emerged as a proxy “free press”, disseminating news that challenges misinformation and falsehoods. The internet has allowed the space for activists and journalists to support one another (as the case of the #freemona campaign<sup>12</sup> indicates), forcing regimes to be more accountable, taking local events to the international community and risking their lives in the process. Chinese and Iranian bloggers have raised women’s rights issues consistently through the online space.

An interesting facet of political discourse today is the participation online of young techno-savvy women, who embrace subversive semiotic tactics, using technology as sites of contestation. Negotiating and deconstructing the authoritarianism and consumerism encoded in their everyday cultural environment, these “netizens” use humour and satire to challenge network power through counter discourses.

In the network age, political subjectivity encounters the *problematique* of authenticity: what is *real* political activity and who is the *real* political subject. Consider the following:

- The advent of Web 3.0 (personalisation, intelligent searches and behavioural advertising) and digital capitalism’s rising interest in women as a viable consumer market have created a version of online participation that is entrenched in a culture antithetical to radical political action. The segmented spaces of Web 2.0 make debate less probable as

individuals can exercise greater “choice” in what they “like” or who they “follow”. We are witnessing a moment of mass exhibitionism online, with specific forms of self-presentation.

- It is quite possible that online participation can push action towards a depoliticised post-feminist discourse. As research in Hong Kong indicates,<sup>13</sup> the neoliberal economic context, liberal political environment and always-on connectivity have created a “post-feminist” culture. In such contexts, grounded discourses of gender may not get sufficiently politicised for renegotiating gender power.
- The sexualisation and commodification of digital space complicate the process through which subjectivity coheres in digital space. The discourse of “choice” in this context gets into a messy entanglement with feminist concerns around empowerment. The real, authentic self is now transported online with Web 2.0, a phenomenon that the “reality porn” niche, which has expanded significantly over the past few years, makes evident. Recovering agency and problematising empowerment is a sticky challenge for feminism, even if necessary.

The bottom line is also that despite the many positive trends, women remain far behind men as producers of information online.<sup>14</sup> Gender ideologies do not disappear. They reproduce in the virtual environment.

## Community and collectivity for feminist solidarity

Network society architectures of information and communication have given rise to new organisational forms, making it possible to reimagine alliances, collective action, social capital and interest groups. For women, access to the online public sphere is a powerful key to breaching traditional barriers to public participation. The possibility of transcending geographic location and forming new communities of interest allows for new imaginaries of identity and solidarity, and for garnering support on a global scale.

As has been demonstrated in the case of Egypt, online spaces can be schools of democracy. In Egypt, activists collaboratively created the online political space with specific repertoire and forms of

10 Third World feminists like Chandra Mohanty and political theorists like Ranabir Samaddar trace citizenship through the material everyday practices and collective histories of women and subaltern post-colonial subjects.

11 Claudio (2011) Op. cit.

12 [technosociology.org/?p=566](http://technosociology.org/?p=566)

13 Lam, O. (2011) Workshop Report of the Review of the “Gender and Citizenship in the Information Society” (CITIGEN) Research Programme. [www.gender-is-citizenship.net/sites/default/files/citigen/CITIGEN\\_Workshop%20Report.pdf](http://www.gender-is-citizenship.net/sites/default/files/citigen/CITIGEN_Workshop%20Report.pdf)

14 Wajcman, J. (2007) *ICTs and inequality: Net gains for women?*, in Mansell, R., Avgerou, C., Quah, D. and Silverstone, R. (eds.) *Oxford Handbook of Information and Communication Technologies*, Oxford University Press, p. 581-599.

activity, exhorting citizens to exercise their agency. For a few years before the 2011 revolution, a small but influential group of urban, highly educated, middle-class, primarily young Egyptian activists, coordinating and operating through multiple social media platforms, formed an array of loosely affiliated grassroots activist networks throughout the country.<sup>15</sup> New media tools were used to educate citizens, achieve consensus, mobilise citizens to exercise their public will in street protests, achieve non-violence and maintain discipline during protests, and inform the international community about the regime's debasement and suppression of ordinary citizens.<sup>16</sup> In feminist movements across the world, activists have resorted to the internet as the bricks and mortar for learning and building solidarity and for democratising political agendas. In the mid-2000s, in the fight against the Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), the feminist movement in Costa Rica put up an unprecedented display of creativity and coordination, using information and communications technologies (ICTs) for spreading its message and building alliances.<sup>17</sup> In India, Brazil and South Africa, local organisations have evolved radical pedagogies using a range of digital technologies to enable women from marginalised social groups to develop collective identities and assert their claims *vis-à-vis* local public institutions.<sup>18</sup>

It seems like the possibility for community building was never so good for the women's empowerment project. But while it is true that online platforms galvanise community building, the fact that Web 2.0/3.0 is almost completely a "commodified space"<sup>19</sup> presents a political structure for collaboration that is embedded within the market. This compromises the "publics" that emerge within cyberspace, curtailing severely their control over the platforms they build. Their destiny in social media spaces online is precarious, subject as it is to moral policing by state and non-state actors, arbitrary private regulation by corporates (many times in re-

sponse to diktats from the state) and even blatant misogyny.<sup>20</sup>

The pluralism generated by network politics has caused a shift from interest-based politics toward a more fluid, issue-based group politics with less institutional coherence.<sup>21</sup> Whether and how "political" groups and communities will emerge as coherent social movements, while remaining decentralised bottom-up institutions, is an open question. Decentralisation is also not meaningful unless it can promote a shared vision of democracy. A role for feminist leadership in balancing these two considerations becomes critical, but the autonomous nature of communities forged online may defy centralised value-based organising. While it is unclear how feminist movements can combine flexibility for horizontalism with structures for coherence, traditional organisations such as right-wing religious groups have been effectively harnessing the propensities of digital spaces for centralising and consolidating their power.

### *From voice to representation: Can the politics of presence become the power to negotiate?*

Direct representation, enabled through online media, offers many of the same benefits as direct democracy, but fewer of the burdens, allowing "citizens the prospect of representative closeness, mutuality, coherence, and empathy without expecting them to become full-time participating citizens."<sup>22</sup> Online digital media – as we have discussed earlier – may not really revive the public sphere. Nevertheless, they do inject a healthy dose of plurality to a maturing model of representative democracy.<sup>23</sup> For resource-poor groups, like women's rights organisations, online political channels bring spaces hitherto absent, for engagement with traditional policy settings.<sup>24</sup>

15 Ishani, M. (2011) The Hopeful Network, *Foreign Policy*, 7 February. [www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/02/07/the\\_hopeful\\_network](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/02/07/the_hopeful_network)

16 Khamis, S, Paul B. G. and Vaughn, K. (2012) *Beyond Egypt's "Facebook Revolution" and Syria's "YouTube Uprising": Comparing Political Contexts, Actors and Communication Strategies*. [www.arabmediasociety.com/articles/downloads/20120407120519\\_khamis\\_gold\\_vaughn.pdf](http://www.arabmediasociety.com/articles/downloads/20120407120519_khamis_gold_vaughn.pdf)

17 Salas, M. (2010) Internet, Power and Politics: Gender and ICTs in the movement against CAFTA, *The Journal of Community Informatics*, 6(1). [ci-journal.net/index.php/ciej/article/view/530/468](http://ci-journal.net/index.php/ciej/article/view/530/468)

18 [www.gender-is-citizenship.net/women-and-governance/node/3](http://www.gender-is-citizenship.net/women-and-governance/node/3)

19 Fuchs, C. (2012) Some Reflections on Manuel Castells' Book Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age, *Triple C*, 10(2), p. 775-797. [www.triple-c.at/index.php/tripleC/article/view/459/433](http://www.triple-c.at/index.php/tripleC/article/view/459/433)

20 As in the case of the Pink Chaddi campaign ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pink\\_Chaddi\\_Campaign](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pink_Chaddi_Campaign)). Shortly after the campaign took off, the campaign's Facebook group began to be attacked by trolls and was eventually broken into. Attackers renamed the group and included racist slurs and death threats in its description. The attacks continued despite appeals to Facebook's support department for help, and eventually Facebook disabled the account of the group's administrator and access to the group.

21 Bimber, B. (1998) The Internet and Political Transformation: Populism, Community, and Accelerated Pluralism, *Polity*, 31(1), p. 133-160. [www.jstor.org/stable/3235370](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3235370)

22 Coleman, S. (2005) The Lonely Citizen: Indirect Representation in an Age of Networks, *Political Communication*, 22(2), p. 197-214.

23 Papacharissi, Z. (2012) The Virtual Sphere 2.0: The Internet, the Public Sphere and Beyond, in Chadwick, A. and Howard, P. (eds.) *Handbook of Internet Politics*. [www.ciberdemocracia.net/victorsampedro/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Papacharissi-The-Virtual-Sphere-Revisited-Handbook.pdf](http://www.ciberdemocracia.net/victorsampedro/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Papacharissi-The-Virtual-Sphere-Revisited-Handbook.pdf)

24 Breindl, Y. (2012) The Dynamics of Participation and Organisation in European Digital Rights Campaigning, *JeDEM*, 4(1), p. 24-44.

While it is less clear how far online organising can push states toward drastic political change and greater democratisation, especially in states where offline restrictions to civic and political organisation are severe, in an interconnected world, international pressure does seem to count. In an unprecedented case, the appeals court in Vietnam overturned the sentence of a female activist recently. Young dissidents have been using the internet, blogging and fighting for a multi-party democracy in the country, where the Communist state has had complete monopoly over information traditionally.

The rise of the internet has quite clearly enabled powerful organising around international law – making states reckon with global standards for human rights. Organisations mobilising migrant women domestic workers in cities of Asia have used mobile connectivity to reach migrant women domestic workers of different nationalities, bringing them out of their isolation in the “receiving countries”, and enabling them to become political collectivities and exercise their rights to assembly and association. Through the communities they forge, women’s movements pry apart the seam between territory and citizenship, showing how network globality can work in favour of greater democratisation.

But the pathways to representation and democratisation in the digital age are not self-evident. They obtain in very contingent ways where neither the role of traditional power structures nor of the need for leadership can be undermined.

As states become increasingly integrated into the global structures and processes of the network age, and indeed, also use digital technologies to shape socio-cultural discourse within national boundaries, managing public sentiment through digital means has become an essential part of state-craft. Social media tools may be used to encourage “citizen” voice, but such a “right to vent” may just be an escape valve to deflect active resistance against state totalitarianism.

The space for women’s rights organisations to bring gender-based debates into the public sphere may be expanding. But the drift of political change seems to suggest a great malleability of post-welfare state neoliberalism<sup>25</sup> – despite gains for women’s rights, we see little change to the structural aspects of exclusion. The recent anti-corruption campaign in India reflects the rise of a protesting middle class wielding new technologies. While furthering a discourse around new social rights, the movement has evaded completely questions of exclusion. Many

Dalit, feminist, queer and rural groups have pointed out how the movement against corruption has been essentially urban and flattened out older forms of political protests and battles in the country.<sup>26</sup>

In fact, negotiation at the formal political levels and intervention in policy spaces has always entailed technical and political expertise. In digital environments, it also necessitates technological access and skills. As a result, and contrary to claims of inclusiveness and openness, internet-based campaigning is in fact dominated by a small group of highly specialised movement entrepreneurs.<sup>27</sup> Movements online often have no recognised representation. Their diffuse character makes it difficult for them to develop a coherent set of norms or even demands, or achieve significant gains that go beyond an agenda of negation. Saying “no” to a specific event or framing is easier than elaborating and negotiating an agenda of justice. The latter needs organised institutional leadership, often not easy to identify in online movements. In his book, *Revolution 2.0*, Wael Ghonim recounts how Mubarak’s top officials tried to negotiate an end to the demonstrations with him. He could only chuckle as he had no such power.<sup>28</sup>

The hope for a new politics of representation is certainly latent in the power of the internet. With new actors and new constellations, network politics subverts old political equations. The use of social media in the Arab uprising was able to alter the very structuring of the meta-narrative about politics.<sup>29</sup> But to the extent that informational and communicative power is but one resource, albeit potentially game-changing, shifting democracy in favour of gender justice in network age politics will remain a wider social-institutional struggle. It will manifest a complexity not possible to contain within a formula of colinear attributions.

### Obtaining participatory citizenship for women in the emerging public sphere: What is the feminist agenda?

For a majority of the world’s women, citizenship would imply the potential to re-politicise development, to examine unequal relations of power, to promote participation, inclusion, democratic process and citizen agency, and to increase accountability of governments

25 Ong, A. (2006) *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty*, Duke University Press.

26 Shah, N. (2012) Resisting Revolutions: Questioning the Radical Potential of Citizen Action, *Development*, 55(2), p. 173-180. [cis-india.org/digital-natives/resisting-revolutions/resisting-revolutions.pdf](http://cis-india.org/digital-natives/resisting-revolutions/resisting-revolutions.pdf)

27 Breindl (2012) Op. cit.

28 Tufekci, Z. (2013) Networked Politics from Tahrir to Taksim: Is there a Social Media-fueled Protest Style? [dmlcentral.net/blog/zeynep-tufekci/networked-politics-tahrir-taksim-there-social-media-fueled-protest-style](http://dmlcentral.net/blog/zeynep-tufekci/networked-politics-tahrir-taksim-there-social-media-fueled-protest-style)

29 Ibid.



to citizens.<sup>30</sup> The situated experiences of women and marginalised genders as they engage with digital technologies in advancing their struggle become valuable sites for envisioning micro-power and strategising for transformative change. In this way, feminist technology practice presents a useful crucible for the study of what participatory citizenship – as an aspiration and a normative project – would look like in contemporary society. The CITIGEN-Asia programme,<sup>31</sup> for instance, throws up interesting insights for theorising citizenship in the network age; to imagine citizenship as practised solidarities, as dislocated from notions of state authority, as civic-republican practice. Online space, the programme found, allows women, and especially those who lead non-normative lives, to imagine the world differently, going beyond the everyday and finding creative ways of self-representation and publicity.

Citizenship also defines relationships between society, government and individuals: classifying who belongs to the “public” and what obligations and rights membership in that “public” confers.<sup>32</sup> The unbounded fluidity of membership in digital space enables us to breach geographic boundaries, connecting to a global public. Yet, this global space does not guarantee equal participation – it is a privatised pseudo public, controlled by powerful countries and corporations.

Through digitally mediated association, women’s collectives have shown us that the enactment of citizenship impels translocal practices of contestation and claims making in which the internet is a critical resource and site. But the publicness of the internet is a precondition for democratising membership in this space. The struggle to shape the norms and ethics of the global internet – influencing the macro conditions for participatory citizenship – is therefore integral to the struggle for gender justice.

Nation states continue to matter. In a neoliberal economic paradigm, they deploy techno-regimes in the name of efficiency and national security, aggrandising power, eroding the rights of the marginalised and reconstructing meanings of citizenship. For a majority of the marginalised, especially women, the actualisation of citizenship is enmeshed in the geographic local, mediated not only by the state but also by family and kinship structures. Access to digital artefacts and to participation in digitally mediated spaces of local governance and democracy are vital preconditions for

activists, women’s NGOs and groups to come together, find a voice, negotiate with community structures and local government, and build the new capabilities required for traversing a more fuzzy public sphere that straddles offline and online space.

The mobile revolution did make access to digital technology more widespread, also bringing to feminist organising new possibilities. Yet, connectivity in the sense of broadband internet access is still a distant reality in most developing countries, especially for a majority of women. The information flows and horizontal ties of the network age require alternatives to informational consumerism – public infrastructural approaches to catalysing and creating civic and cultural capital for women in the form of public access centres, local media processes, community information systems, etc. These capabilities require a positive rights approach to digital technologies, something that the security versus privacy debate in internet circles clouds out.

The autonomous contagion in communication that mobiles can set off cannot be conflated with public sphere participation. Neither can social protest be seen as the universe of political activity. Participatory citizenship in network society is wider and deeper. It derives from a conception of politics as an unceasing practice, through which a new political subject appears in a performative way. It concerns the appropriation of digital space for voicing disenchantments and dreams and seeking discursive equality in very particular everyday contexts of survival and identity struggles – as individuals and collectivities. It proposes network society membership as the capability to belong in democratic process, not as an “isolated public”,<sup>33</sup> but as legitimate participants using and transforming the digital in their own unique ways. As an ethical framework, it calls for a re-politicisation of informational and communicative realms; casting the digital as intrinsic to the future of democracy. Digitally mediated change is not only about those dramatic twists in history; it is equally about women running their own telecentres – collecting their village data to document exclusions from entitlements under government programmes, using this data to dialogue with local public authorities, spreading awareness through video screenings about claims making, and getting together to ideate for and listen with a sense of togetherness and joy to their community radio programmes. ■

30 Cornwall, A. and Nyamu Musembi, C. (2005) Why Rights, Why Now? Reflections on the Rise of Rights in International Discourse, in Pettit, J. and Wheeler, J. (eds.) *Developing Rights?*, IDS Bulletin 36:1.

31 [www.gender-is-citizenship.net/citigen](http://www.gender-is-citizenship.net/citigen)

32 Dahrendorf, R. (1996) Citizenship and Social Class, in Bulmer, M. and Rees, A. M. (eds.) *Citizenship Today: The Contemporary Relevance of TH Marshall*, Routledge, London, p. 25-48.

33 Habermas (2006) Op. cit.



Si yo tuviera la tecnología de los marcianos, la usaría para entrar en la mente de los seres humanos y erradicar la violencia hacia las mujeres.

“If I had the technology of Martians, I'd use it to penetrate into the minds of humans and eliminate violence against women.” – Jerry, Cuernavaca, Mexico. For a colour reproduction of the image, please visit: [www.giswatch.org](http://www.giswatch.org)

# Sexuality and the internet

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## Sexual rights and internet regulation

The internet, as a medium and as a milieu where people, information and modes of consumption connect, has achieved a paramount role for the exercise of sexuality. Online dating, matchmaking and casual encounters, porn, sexual health and education, online commerce for sexual goods, escort services, sex rights activism, and the manifestation of sexual identities and communities, all represent a fruition of interactions, stimuli and exchanges on the internet. That these activities are understood as “sexual” means that they are subject to regulation and disciplining. When it comes to sex and sexuality, the rules about what people can or cannot do, and the norms by which people learn when, where, how and with whom they should do it, respond to the logic of what Michel Foucault called the “sexuality device”.<sup>1</sup> This functions as a medium for the production of truth about the self, under a regime of power and knowledge whereby populations are administered.

The internet and the virtualisation processes that it engenders are mechanisms intrinsically related to capitalist society, liberal modernity, and relations where, in theory, subjects are free to express their “inner truth”. Online interaction has been characterised as a paradigm of free expression – anarchic, resistant to regulation. However, like sexuality, the internet has become yet one more vehicle for social segmentation and discourses about the self.

Offline rules and norms also inform sexual regulation online. The very classification of these experiences, expressions and exchanges as “sexual” inscribes them in a moral hierarchy that privileges certain subjects and experiences, and stigmatises others. According to Gayle Rubin,<sup>2</sup> this hierarchy is

presided by what is considered most “normal”, i.e. the kind of sex that takes place in a monogamous heterosexual relationship within wedlock, geared towards reproduction. Other sexualities rank below, in descending order (unmarried heterosexual couples, sexually active single straights, stable gay couples, promiscuous gays, paid sex, sex without consent), all the way down to criminalised forms such as sexual abuse and paedophilia.

The concerns raised by the prominent role of sexual content in internet communications has generated control initiatives often justified with the imperative of protecting “vulnerable” subjects, such as women, children and youth, or people lacking the autonomy or technical skills to respond to online threats. Control policies are based on the perception of an omnipresent threat represented by perverse individuals prowling around to prey on the weak. To what extent do these devices attempt to regulate dissident sexual behaviour and subjects at large, arguing that it is for their own good and the good of society? What are the effects of internet control mechanisms on sexual freedom?

Certain conditions of safety and security are required for the expression of sexuality online. Users may become, and often feel, vulnerable to online threats of a sexual nature. But protection devices are often designed to restrict, rather than protect, the exercise of sexuality. Online sexual content has become a prime target of censorship, monitoring and restrictions based on moral anxieties. Bans, filtering and data log capturing devices also generate restrictions which directly interfere with user access to content and online activity which could otherwise improve their thriving online experience.

The Association for Progressive Communications (APC) Women’s Rights Programme and a team of researchers from Brazil, India, Lebanon, South Africa and the United States recently completed the first phase of EROTICS, an exploratory research project into sexuality and the internet.<sup>3</sup> Team researchers Melissa Ditmore and Kevicha Echols reported on the use of search filters set up to protect children and youth accessing the internet at US

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1 Foucault, M. (1978) *The History of Sexuality. Volume I: An Introduction*, Vintage, New York.

2 Rubin, G. (1984) Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality, in Vance, C. (ed.), *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, Routledge, New York.

3 [www.apc.org/en/system/files/Erotics\\_Exec\\_Summary.pdf](http://www.apc.org/en/system/files/Erotics_Exec_Summary.pdf)

public libraries, where 77 million people regularly access the internet, 25% of them aged 14 to 24 years old. Blocks are triggered by keyword searches including, for example, “anal”, “abortion”, “homosexuality”, “breast” and “penis”, denying access to adult content, but also, inadvertently, to information on issues such as breast cancer or anal warts, and to websites run by sexual minority groups and organisations.<sup>4</sup> Terms such as “gay” or “sex” are also often intentionally blocked. The researchers reported:

In the United States, minors who use computers in public libraries and school libraries may be restricted from accessing content deemed “harmful to minors”. This harm is not clearly defined or located, but what is typically restricted is information about sexuality. There are a range of concerns about the dangers of sexuality and technology. Moral panics about children and the availability of and exposure to pornography and paedophiles in cyberspace have been behind several efforts to control and/or censor the internet.<sup>5</sup>

## Risks and promises

Interactivity and anonymity online are defining features of many forms of online sociability, promising precious opportunities to elaborate ideas and identities – in particular, for stigmatised and marginalised subjects, including women and sexual minorities. Since physical co-presence is not a requirement for online interaction, alternative self-representations may be chosen in response to multiple contextual possibilities, restrictions and aspirations. One consequence of this is the possibility for anonymous engagement, enabling interactions otherwise unlikely to take place, or only possible under the most strenuous circumstances. Online exchanges often provide a sort of safe haven for sexual experiences banned from the reality of users’ everyday exchanges in the offline world. In other words, the internet is a space propitious to non-normative expressions. Furthermore, online activity is crucial for the articulation and negotiation of public issues that are barred, tabooed, restricted or subject to regulation offline.

Online interaction takes on a particularly meaningful role for sexual expression. Online forums have, for example, provided a “safe” environment for gender dissidents to experiment with their gender identity even before starting to consider engaging in a transition process. But these qualities

expose users to a variety of risks regarding their safety and privacy. A person’s transgender identity can be disclosed as a consequence of an online privacy breach, before they are ready, and without their consent. Although often lived as private, online interaction is part of a public domain – potentially vulnerable to unwanted interference, open to public scrutiny, and subject to regulation and surveillance. Like sexuality, the internet promises pleasure and represents danger; it may be appropriated by actors with different moral engagements.

## Sexuality online

Interactivity has become vital to the consumption of cultural goods. Rather than passive receptors, individuals and collectives are involved as active participants of communication processes. Media segmentation is inherent to a consumerist model and logic, vigorously expressed by internet communications, which are primarily oriented to the satisfaction of social groups’ specific wishes and needs. Such groups are often defined by particular “lifestyles”, associated with collectively shared inclinations and sensibilities involving consumption, aesthetics and habits but, more importantly, engendering collective identities – sexual identities in particular. Virtual interaction opens a number of possibilities for exchanges which can be classified as sexual, meaning both actual sexual behaviour, as well as issues related to sexuality, such as sexual identities, sexual politics or sexual knowledge. In this broad sense, online “sexual” exchanges can be classified among different – often overlapping – interaction dynamics.

One mode of online interaction comprises exchange networks that can be characterised as “sexual markets”. These include, on the one hand, commercial virtual marketplaces, for interactions understood as services with money value, such as both female and male escort services, in a myriad of formats available online. On the other hand, sexual markets also include non-commercial exchanges, not mediated by money, such as those that take place on online services for dating, matchmaking and casual encounters, and social networking platforms. However, from their users’ perspective, the boundaries between commercial and non-commercial exchanges are fluid, regardless of their declared purpose. Some matchmaking websites may facilitate exchanges of paid sexual services, while one might find a lifelong partner at a platform designed for casual encounters. Money, goods and services, on the one hand, and consensual sex or romantic involvement, on the other, are not mutu-

4 [www.apc.org/en/pubs/erotics-research](http://www.apc.org/en/pubs/erotics-research)

5 Ibid.

ally exclusive. Commercial sex is also not restricted to online spaces primarily designed for that purpose, but also occurs on social networks and dating platforms.

Another form of internet use linked to sexuality is the exchange of sexual knowledge, which includes information on sexual rights and sexual health, as well as issues of sexual expression. Note that online information exchange is not limited to pedagogies or political activism, but takes place under various formats, responding to a diversity of interests and logics. Pornographic content, for example, while also classified as a market commodity, is a source of sexual knowledge to many internet users.

Under a third logic of classification, many forms of online exchange can be understood as a means of empowerment, via blogs, social networks and websites where sexual identities are performed and strengthened. Platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Tumblr, as well as blogs in general, have become a privileged means of communication for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) public, particularly among young people, who make novel, meaningful appropriations of virtual spaces. The internet has allowed people whose sexual orientations, experiences or identities are marginalised to meet online and interact, creating new forms of sociability and organisation, or recreating old ones.

### Sexual empowerment online

The online socialisation of BDSM (sodomasochism) adepts and advocates is an example of the internet as a tool of empowerment for a marginalised sexual category. By disseminating a non-pathological, decriminalised characterisation of their practices, and providing support for individuals, online BDSM networks (forums, mailing lists, blogs and other websites) facilitate the formation of a collective identity, and reinforce a feeling of belonging through the acquisition of information on techniques, concepts and definitions regarded as essential to legitimate BDSM practice.<sup>6</sup>

South African transgender individuals interviewed by EROTICS researchers Jeanne Prinsloo, Relebohile Moletsane and Nicolene McLean found online forums essential to their lives. Torn by the contradictions between their country's progressive constitution, on the one hand, and censorship, everyday violence and policies restricting sexual

expression on the internet, on the other, the South African transgender community has turned to the blogosphere as a space for information exchange, emotional support and community building.<sup>7</sup> Lebanese EROTICS researchers Nadine Moawad and Tamara Qiblawi documented how the internet benefited the growth of their country's queer rights movement, as well as the sophistication of its strategies. Issues of anonymity, pseudonymity, community building and self-expression were recurrent themes in their interviews with members of an internet-based group of queer women focused on personal empowerment and building a network of support.<sup>8</sup>

In EROTICS coordinator Jac sm Kee's words:

[South African] transgendered women and men converge at a popular transgender site to share their struggles in transitioning, including treatment options, celebration of achieved milestones and exchange of experiences in discrimination faced. In Lebanon, the current visibility and dynamism of its queer activism was directly attributed to the emergence and availability of the internet. The registration of [www.gaylebanon.com](http://www.gaylebanon.com) – also the only known website to face legal prosecution in the country – was recognised as marking the beginning of an organised movement.<sup>9</sup>

### Internet control, safety and self-regulation

Countering threats to online safety, such as hacking, spamming, blocking, privacy breaches and identity theft, always require a relatively high level of technical skill. The technical means to threaten an online community or an individual are readily available to the computer-savvy internet user. Governments and service provider companies may also generate sophisticated technical means of interference, spurred by broad security concerns, by moral panics, or by both. These often target internet users based on negative perceptions of their sexual dissidence. Under an adverse political climate, the websites of sexual minority groups can be blocked, as can any online activity deemed "sexual".

One aspect of surveillance technologies, such as data log recording and analysis, is their capacity to track and incriminate those responsible for illegal sexual activity. When perceptions about

6 Zilli, B. (2013) BDSM from A to Z: Consent as a tool against pathologization in internet BDSM "handbooks", in Latin American Center on Sexuality and Human Rights, *Sexuality, Culture and Politics - A South American Reader*, CEPESEC, Rio de Janeiro. Available at: [www.clam.org.br](http://www.clam.org.br)

7 [www.apc.org/en/pubs/erotics-research](http://www.apc.org/en/pubs/erotics-research)

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.



harmful activity are generalised, as in the case of child pornography, official agencies are expected to act in response. As documented by EROTICS researchers Sonia Correa, Marina Maria and Jandira Queiroz, the Brazilian Attorney General's Office, with the support of the civil society Internet Steering Committee (CGI), negotiated a binding agreement with Google to ensure Federal Police access to the data logs of their popular social network, Orkut, in order to aid investigations aimed at prosecuting paedophiles.<sup>10</sup>

Official internet regulation is expected to protect users from one another, although that may not always be the case when attacks come in the form of hate speech, sexual violence or discrimination. Queer users in many parts of the world, and sex workers everywhere, are emblematic examples of the lack of technical or legal support against internet threats that sexual dissidents suffer. Not only are they seldom protected, but they are also often subject to censorship, filtering and blocking.

However, some forms of violence amongst users require minimal technical skill – usually knowing how to access the internet is enough to engage in trolling, hate speech and other forms of harassment. This form of negative interaction poses direct threats to both networks and individuals, sometimes causing users to leave an online network or interactive space, or to remain silent, often traumatised. Whole virtual communities may in turn just dissolve or disappear. But in response to trolling, hate speech and harassment, at times users also take charge and speak out in response, which may in turn lead to the strengthening of their identities.

Communities can and often do overcome the challenge and profit from the experience of being under attack. This makes them stronger and more capable to strategically resist violence and prejudice.<sup>11</sup> EROTICS researchers Bruno Zilli and Horacio Sívori reported on a female-only Brazilian online community for lesbian and bisexual women for whom addressing perceived threats was a concrete form of empowerment. The group developed rules and mechanisms of self-regulation, which included the censorship of explicit sexual content; the exclusion of disruptive members, particularly those suspected of being males posing as females; and the screening of prospective members.<sup>12</sup> The flipside of the coin is that such measures challenge the prized internet ideals of freedom of ex-

pression, deregulation, and resistance to any form of authority.

State-sponsored responses to hate speech, trolling, harassment and other forms of online violence and privacy breaches have mostly been limited to reporting, investigation and prosecution mechanisms. One outcome is the – usually ineffective – banning or taking down of offensive content. This sort of “final solution” has the virtue of eliminating a particular threat altogether. However, social perceptions and opinions on issues of sexual morality are hardly settled. Offences motivated by sexual or other types of prejudice have the capacity to generate debate, which reflects a lack of an offline consensus on their offensive nature. Banning and censorship are a way to avoid that debate, while the internet is often regarded, precisely, as propitious for debate. Moreover, individuals and collectives exercising their sexuality online have come up with their own answers to deal with online attacks.

Zilli and Sívori observed online forum interactions on a social network platform popular in Brazil, where lesbophobic content was regularly posted under the guise of teasing and joking comments. Under Brazilian internet regulation and network policy, hate speech can be reported, often resulting in content removal and banning. Despite that, lesbophobic puns and jokes remained posted and generated long strings of comments, both celebratory and accusatory. Most interestingly, LGBT or pro-LGBT members of that social network often engaged with the bigots, contesting their views and defending the sexual rights of lesbians, at times making fun and calling them on their ignorance and narrow-mindedness. While not necessarily conceived or experienced as “activism”, as defined by established conventions of offline sexual rights politics, this response represents a meaningful form of sexual affirmation and struggle against hate speech and violence based on sexual prejudice.<sup>13</sup>

Meanwhile, other online dangers linger beyond. EROTICS researchers Maya Ganesh and Manjima Bhattacharjya,<sup>14</sup> from India, write that although “the internet undoubtedly allows women to find voice, agency and self-expression through the internet, securing their sexuality rights and communication rights,” they still have to negotiate offline threats.<sup>15</sup> The women they interviewed reported that:

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> [www.apc.org/en/pubs/issue/erotics-exploratory-research-sexuality-and-internet](http://www.apc.org/en/pubs/issue/erotics-exploratory-research-sexuality-and-internet)

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> *The Information Society*

<sup>12</sup> [www.apc.org/en/pubs/erotics-research](http://www.apc.org/en/pubs/erotics-research)



Sometimes, strangers they meet online and have either casual, flirtatious or intimate friendships with threaten to blackmail them if they do not take these relationships further. Other forms of online harm women experience are when their email or social networking profiles are hacked into, phished and manipulated. Women are also extremely concerned about how their personal images on social networking sites can be used and manipulated. Often, male friends and acquaintances are responsible for this; when women post pictures that are “too sexy” online, their friends want to rein them in “for their own good”.<sup>16</sup>

The variety of risks that women, youth and sexual minorities need to negotiate in their everyday in-

ternet use, particularly when it comes to exploring their sexual desires, shows how important it is to reflect, from a feminist point of view, affirmative sexual rights in the context of the regulation of sexuality on the internet. The EROTICS case studies showed that while increasing online activity exposes users to certain risks and threats, individuals and collectives are successful in developing means of self-protection, self-regulation and empowerment. Internet regulation (broadly defined, including state and market, but also community and self-regulation) is a form of discipline, made of social rules and control mechanisms, but also individually or group-generated risk management devices. One might ask to what extent technical skill contributes to a fuller exercise of sexuality or, put differently, whether access to technology is a sexual right. ■

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid

“Cada vez que buscas y reproduces las imágenes  
que explotan el cuerpo de las  
Mujeres en INTERNET”  
Contributes al SEXISMO Y LA VIOLENCIA



<http://www.takebackthetech.net/>  
¡Dominemos la Tecnología!

Make the connection between how women are portrayed, and the violence that disproportionately affects them. Women are portrayed as submissive, in sexualised and available poses, as primarily being a consumer good for men's private, personal enjoyment. A successful man will buy the product, and get the woman. If there is no room for women's agency, there is no room for women to say no. The link between the portrayal of women in the media – whether in adverts, soaps or the news – and violence is real and damages women's physical, emotional and sexual health. For a colour reproduction of the image, please visit: [www.giswatch.org](http://www.giswatch.org)

# Violence against women online

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**Jan Moolman**

Association for Progressive Communications (APC)  
www.apc.org

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## The need to prioritise violence against women online

We live in a violent world. On any day in any country, we will read or hear or see stories about a woman or girl child being raped, beaten or murdered. We might even know one of them. She could be rich or poor. She could be educated or illiterate. She could live in a country ravaged by war or one in which the per capita income is the highest in the world. But as long as she lives in a woman's body, she risks experiencing violence in her lifetime.

In case this is dismissed as alarmist, consider that almost 35% of women have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence (this excludes other types of violence) and as many as 38% of all murders of women are committed by an intimate partner, according to a recent study by the World Health Organization and others.<sup>1</sup>

Technology-related forms of violence against women (VAW), which we define as violence against women that is committed, abetted or aggravated through the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) and in online spaces, are part of this continuum of violence. Technology-related VAW occurs in a context of systemic and structural inequality, which fuels and reproduces misogyny and discrimination. As an emerging form of VAW it is a significant barrier to women's and girls' ability to take advantage of the opportunities that ICTs provide for the full realisation of women's human rights and development.

In this context, in the world of internet rights and governance, where there is very little overt concern with women's specific experiences, the

absence of meaningful engagement about the implications of increasing mass surveillance, intermediary liability, enhanced cooperation and the foregrounding of freedom of expression as a primary rights concern, and other "priority" issues for women and women human rights defenders as stakeholders, will merely perpetuate and exacerbate the conditions in which technology-related forms of VAW thrive.

## What do we know?

The 2006 United Nations Secretary-General's report on VAW noted, "More inquiry is also needed about the use of technology, such as computers and cell phones, in developing and expanding forms of violence. Evolving and emerging forms of violence need to be named so that they can be recognised and better addressed."<sup>2</sup> Today, despite evidence showing an increase in violations involving technology, very little corresponding recognition of technology-related forms of VAW by states,<sup>3</sup> intergovernmental institutions and other actors responsible for ending VAW exists. Consequently, it is not prioritised in prevention and response strategies, budgeting and evidence-based policy making, and women who experience these violations have little or no redress.

Cyber stalking, online harassment, image manipulation and privacy violations have increasingly become part of intimate partner violence and sexual harassment. This compromises women's and girls' safety online and offline and causes psychological and emotional harm, reinforces prejudice, damages reputation, causes economic loss, and poses barriers to participation in public life.<sup>4</sup> Of

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2 UN General Assembly (2006) *In-depth study on all forms of violence against women: Report of the Secretary-General*, 6 July, A/61/122/Add.1. [www.refworld.org/docid/484e58702.html](http://www.refworld.org/docid/484e58702.html)

3 An example of legislation that specifically addresses technology-related forms of violence against women is the Philippines' Anti-Photo and Video Voyeurism Act of 2009, which addresses violence against women that is perpetrated through the making, accessing and/or circulating of images of women, of the genitals or of them involved in sexual acts. While there are limitations to this act, it takes seriously the harm that is done to women through violence perpetrated to their image.

4 Fascendini, F. and Fialová, K. (2011) *Voices from Digital Spaces: Technology-related violence against women*, APC. [www.genderit.org/node/3539](http://www.genderit.org/node/3539)

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1 World Health Organization, Department of Reproductive Health and Research, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, South African Medical Research Council (2013) *Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence*, WHO, Switzerland.

the 470 technology-related violations reported via the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) mapping platform,<sup>5</sup> the majority related to repeated harassment (100) followed by threats of violence and blackmail (58) and abusive comments (43). APC's recent global monitoring survey on sexual rights and the internet bears this out as it showed that while 98% of sexual rights activists see the internet as critical for their work, 51% of them have received violent and threatening messages.

Cases and stories shared through the online platform illustrate the urgent need for effective responses from different actors. Examples quoted verbatim include:

### Threats of violence

*"Its been a month since I have been receiving nasty mean text messages, death threats and rape threats. I was also being watched. Whenever I receive a text its either they say that they are watching me or following me. Its becoming more scary everyday. The problem is I don't know who is those people who send those text messages. (...) As much as I want to file a case I cant do anything because I have no proof on such person. (...) I tried to contact the network company if they can help me regarding my case. But they just said the person who sends me those text is using a prepaid and they cannot do anything about it."* (Story from the Philippines)

### Misogynist hate speech

*"My own 'mentions' tab on Twitter is generally flooded with unoriginal misogynist, heteronormative responses, ranging all the way from claims that I'm a feminist because I'm 'too ugly to land a man' to claims that I'm actually a 'confused lesbian', all the way to threats of 'corrective rape' because I choose to tweet – just tweet – about issues such as childhood sexual abuse, sexual harassment, and other forms of sexualised violence. I've received vile, detailed messages from random strangers who decide to tell me my home address and then live out their rape fantasies online by telling me in graphic detail which parts of my body they would like to do things to."* (Story from Pakistan)

### Surveillance

*"Eventually she found out that her husband had managed to bribe someone working at the mobile phone service provider which she used. He had used her identity card number and name to find out the details of her account and managed to secure a print-out of all the calls she had made and received."* (Story from Malaysia)

### Normalisation of violence

Prominent women bloggers, journalists and leaders are regularly subjected to online abuse and violent threats that attack their sexuality and right to express an opinion, especially when it is related to fields where men have traditionally been held as experts, such as gaming, politics and technology. One of the highest profile cases of misogyny and harassment recently is the case of Anita Sarkeesian. Her "crime" was to raise money for a series of videos "exploring female character stereotypes throughout the history of the gaming industry."<sup>6</sup> A campaign against Sarkeesian began which included calls for her to be gang-raped and emails sent to her that contained images of her being raped by video game characters. It culminated in the Beat Up Anita Sarkeesian "game" which allowed gamers to punch her image until the screen turned red with her "blood". Sarkeesian's own analysis drives to the heart of what makes online harassment and misogyny, even in their extreme forms, acceptable, when similar actions offline would be condemned – and that it is more than just the anonymity of the harassers, but also the online misogynist culture that accepts and even celebrates it. The normalisation of violent behaviour and the culture that tolerates VAW – such as that exercised against Sarkeesian – mimic trends offline.<sup>7</sup>

While there is still a pronounced gender gap in internet use and access, data collected by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) shows that women's presence online is massive. According to the ITU, globally 37% of all women are online compared with 41% of all men. The developing world is home to about 826 million female and 980 million male internet users, while in the developed world the estimate is 475 million female and 483 million male internet users.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, technology-

5 See [www.takebackthetech.net/mapit](http://www.takebackthetech.net/mapit) – an Ushahidi platform that is building evidence on the nature and extent of technology-related forms of VAW by documenting, reporting, monitoring and analysing cases. The platform is part of the APC project End Violence: Women's rights and safety online, supported by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DGIS) Funding Leadership and Opportunities for Women (FLOW) Fund.

6 From Anita Sarkeesian's fundraising page at Kickstarter: [www.kickstarter.com/projects/566429325/tropes-vs-women-in-video-games](http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/566429325/tropes-vs-women-in-video-games)

7 Moolman, J. (2013) APC Statement to the CSW 57th Session: Violence against women and information and communications technology. [www.genderit.org/sites/default/upload/csw\\_apc\\_statement\\_final\\_version\\_o.pdf](http://www.genderit.org/sites/default/upload/csw_apc_statement_final_version_o.pdf)

8 [www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/facts/material/ICTFactsFigures2013.pdf](http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/facts/material/ICTFactsFigures2013.pdf)

related forms of VAW have become part of women's online interactions. In the same way we face risks offline in the streets and in our homes, violence turns the internet into an unsafe space with specific dangers and risks for women, such as those mentioned above.

## Not black and white

As women's rights activists concerned with addressing technology-related forms of VAW, the terrain we work in is complex and we are often confronted with binary positions that close down the opportunities to find effective solutions. These include anonymity, accountability and responsibility of non-state actors in relation to the governance of the internet, and others. To illustrate with one example, in May 2013 a group of feminists and women's rights activists launched a campaign to "Take action to end gender-based violence on Facebook". The campaign called on Facebook to take immediate action to address how it dealt with the representation of rape and domestic violence, and called on advertisers whose ads appeared next to this content to immediately withdraw their ads until Facebook addressed this issue by banning "gender-based hate speech" on the site.<sup>9</sup> The campaign was a huge success. Within a week Facebook had met with the campaigners, accepted that there were inconsistencies in implementing their own community standards, and committed to taking actions to improve their content policy by identifying and removing gender-based violence content on their platform.<sup>10</sup>

Despite this victory, some freedom of expression activists argued that it was not Facebook's role to be censoring speech, even if it is hate speech. While agreeing that the speech highlighted by the campaign is "abhorrent, awful and offensive", Jillian York, director for international freedom of expression at the Electronic Frontier Foundation, pointed out that these forms of speech are already covered by law, cautioning that the campaign sets a dangerous precedent for other "special interest groups looking to get their pet issues censored."<sup>11</sup>

Garcia outlines the complexity of positioning a response to gender-based hate speech in opposition

to freedom of expression.<sup>12</sup> She argued, firstly, that the right to freedom of expression is not absolute and is also subject to other rights, pointing out that part of the problem is that gender-based hate speech – despite its pervasiveness and the harm it causes to almost half the world's population – is typically not included in definitions of and legislation on hate speech, which York argues is covered by existing laws. Secondly, she argued, Facebook should decide on its human rights policies including standards about the acceptability of misogynist and gender-based hate speech on its online platform, in the same way that a workplace or any company has standards about sexist behaviour. And lastly, Facebook does already have existing rules and community standards and regulates content, but these need to be implemented better and in consultation with their users

## What next?

Technology-related forms of VAW are gaining increasing recognition as a critical area for intervention in the broader women's and human rights movements. In 2013, the outcomes document<sup>13</sup> for the Commission on the Status of Women's 57th session for the first time included the issue of technology and violence, calling for states to:

Support the development and use of ICT and social media as a resource for the empowerment of women and girls, including access to information on the prevention of and response to violence against women and girls; and develop mechanisms to combat the use of ICT and social media to perpetrate violence against women and girls, including the criminal misuse of ICT for sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, child pornography and trafficking in women and girls, and emerging forms of violence such as cyber stalking, cyber bullying and privacy violations that compromise women's and girls' safety.

Earlier this year the UN Working Group on Discrimination Against Women in Law and Public Life also highlighted technology and violence against women in their first thematic report.<sup>14</sup>

9 Chemaly, S., Friedman, J. and Bates, L. (2013) An Open Letter to Facebook, *Huffington Post*, 21 May. [www.huffingtonpost.com/soraya-chemaly/an-open-letter-to-facebook\\_1\\_b\\_3307394.html?utm\\_hp\\_ref=tw](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/soraya-chemaly/an-open-letter-to-facebook_1_b_3307394.html?utm_hp_ref=tw)

10 Garcia, C. (2013) #fbrape is about gender-based hate speech, not about censorship. [www.genderit.org/feminist-talk/fbrape-about-gender-based-hate-speech-not-about-censorship](http://www.genderit.org/feminist-talk/fbrape-about-gender-based-hate-speech-not-about-censorship)

11 York, J. (2013) Facebook Should Not be in the Business of Censoring Speech, Even Hate Speech. [www.slate.com/blogs/xx\\_factor/2013/05/30/facebook\\_and\\_hate\\_speech\\_the\\_company\\_should\\_not\\_be\\_in\\_the\\_business\\_of\\_censorship.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx_factor/2013/05/30/facebook_and_hate_speech_the_company_should_not_be_in_the_business_of_censorship.html)

12 García (2013) Op. cit.

13 Commission on the Status of Women (2013) Agreed conclusions on the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls. [www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw57/CSW57\\_Agreed\\_Conclusions\\_\(CSW\\_report\\_excerpt\).pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw57/CSW57_Agreed_Conclusions_(CSW_report_excerpt).pdf)

14 UN Working Group on Discrimination Against Women in Law and Public Life (2013) *Report of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice*. [www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session23/A.HRC.23.50\\_EN.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session23/A.HRC.23.50_EN.pdf)

The Internet has become a site of diverse forms of violence against women, in the form of pornography, sexist games and breaches of privacy. For women who engage in public debate through the Internet, the risk of harassment is experienced online, for example, an anonymous negative campaign calling for the gang rape of a woman human rights defender, with racist abuse posted in her Wikipedia profile. Female ICT users have publicly protested about sexist attacks.

The report recommends that states support women's equal participation in political and public life through ICTs, including by:

- Increasing women's digital literacy, particularly among marginalised women.
- Ensuring gender-responsiveness in the promotion and protection of human rights on the Internet.
- Improving women's access to the global governance of ICTs.

Effectively responding to and preventing technology-related forms of VAW require multiple strategies and actions by different actors. This includes amongst other things:

- Strengthening the capacity of women's rights organisations, activists and users to use technology safely and contribute towards building evidence and understanding of this emerging form of violence.
- Calling on state and non-state actors (particularly private sector actors) to recognise and address technology-related forms of VAW and be accountable for developing, supporting and encouraging online environments and prevention and service responses that foreground women's rights and realities. These should include effective and responsive complaints mechanisms, laws (for legal remedies) and policies.
- Raising awareness amongst all users about the issue of VAW.

If we as internet rights and women's rights activists believe that the promised freedoms and opportunities of the internet and other ICTs should be accorded to all who use them, then we must confront the assumptions and systemic inequalities which continue to marginalise women, even in these supposed liberated spaces. We need to ask ourselves what kind of internet rights activists we are if we do not take women's rights and safety seriously enough to do something about technology-related VAW. ■





Men often feel that they own their families. They are the “head of the household” and the family is nothing without them. In South Africa we have experienced many incidents where a man will kill his wife and children and then kill himself. This often happens when economic hardship hits the family.

This idea of masculinity is skewed, dangerous and kills women and children. The notion that women and children are owned by men and are not allowed or able to exist outside of men’s control is dangerous. This kind of cultural violence perpetuates the view that women and children are entirely vulnerable and dependent and negates their autonomy and independence. This image illustrates hands moving away from the mouth to enable women to speak out against this tragic cultural violence. For a colour reproduction of the image, please visit: [www.giswatch.org](http://www.giswatch.org)

# Digital security online

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**Mary Lawlor**

Front Line Defenders  
www.frontlinedefenders.org

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## Taking back control...

For human rights defender Satang Nabaneh, social media and new technology have been a fast, effective way for her to reach out to other young women in The Gambia. It is what makes her different from the older generation of women's rights defenders in the small West African nation.

"Facebook is there, Twitter is there," she says, "all of those communication tools, and this is what young people are interested in, so I can actually relate to them and talk to them and they can see what I want them to, what I am working on."

Digital technology – from computers and tablets to mobile phones – is increasingly being recognised across the world as an important tool for the empowerment of women and women human rights defenders, lifelines through which they can share experiences, access information and mobilise for their rights.

This is one of the reasons why the United Nations is pressing countries to address the current digital security gap between men and women users of devices, because technology enables women to create a space where they can operate.

For many women rights defenders – just like their male counterparts – the reliance on digital technology has a darker side. It raises the spectre of being tracked and defamed, monitored and hacked. If women rights defenders are to make the most of the opportunities these new tools offer, they have to make sure they are also ready to counter these threats with a comprehensive digital security plan.

## The dangers of revealing too much

For small, cash-strapped organisations a couple of decades back, it was often a challenge to get word out. The internet seemed to change all that: a web page for a few dollars for your contact details, a Facebook page and a Twitter account to keep supporters up to date with what you are doing.

But spreading all these details around has its own dangers that human rights defenders have been forced to think about. Women human rights defenders are finding that once their personal details are in the public sphere, it is impossible to control who sees them.

Roma rights defender Agnes Daroczi was shocked to find her personal details, including her address, plastered all over the internet on neo-Nazi websites, alongside racist incitement to violence against her. She is planning to build a larger fence around her home to protect herself from physical attack, but are there online security measures she could also be adopting?

In Ukraine, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights defender Olena Shevchenko has decided that it is time for her and her colleagues at Insight Public Organisation to restrict information about the organisation in the public domain, following a flood of threatening letters from right-wing and religious activists, emboldened by anti-LGBT political rhetoric.

They had moved from their old premises, but found the same pattern of threats following them. After three moves in the last year and the installation of CCTV and security equipment in their new offices, the staff finally decided that they would have to limit the information they put on the internet. They now keep their office location secret and rely on word-of-mouth, a simple way to limit risk.

## Sheltering from state surveillance

If an organisation is at risk from attacks by other groups in society, there are simple steps that can be taken to protect workers, as shown by Insight Public Organisation. But in some parts of the world, human rights defenders are less threatened by ideological gangs, and more by the very institution that is supposed to protect them: the government.

Governments have been quick to latch onto the internet, computers and mobile phones, as great tools for hunting their citizens. By hacking emails, eavesdropping on phone calls, or tracking people through GPS, it is easier than ever before for governments to know where you are, who you are with, and what you are saying.

Confronted with mighty state apparatus, it is tempting for human rights defenders to cross their fingers, put their heads down, and press on with their work. But you do not have to rely on luck to ensure safety.

In Europe's last dictatorship, Belarus, Tatsiana Reviaka knows the government watches her. With her colleagues at the Human Rights Centre Viasna in Minsk, she has been helping political prisoners and their families in Belarus for the last 15 years, since one of the first brutal crackdowns by the Alexander Lukashenko government back in the spring of 1996.

She is on the government's radar, recalling an incident last year when a KGB officer phoned her and told her to come to the agency's office. She asked for an official letter, setting out why they wanted to question her. He said it was on its way. He knew exactly where she was.

Because Reviaka has realised this, she makes sure to take certain measures to try to limit what the government can hear. She is careful about what she says over the phone, saving sensitive conversations for face-to-face meetings. She will leave her phone at home if she is going to a secret meeting. These measures are important not only for her own safety, but also for the safety of those she is trying to help.

As the recent scandal over the US National Security Agency's vast spying programme has shown, it would be wrong to assume that this is just a problem in authoritarian regimes. In 2011, indigenous rights defender Cindy Blackstock from Canada got hold of records showing that the Canadian government had been systematically monitoring her professional life, and her personal online activity, to try to get information to use against her in a court case she had filed.

### **With great data comes great responsibility**

For many human rights organisations, a vital part of their work is documenting abuses to make sure that when the time arises to hold people accountable for terrible crimes, there is the evidence to back up accusations.

In Mali, Fatimata Toure and her organisation GREFFA have played a key role in documenting the use of rape as a weapon of war in the northern region of Gao, where young men trained in the Libya conflict have been responsible for hundreds of sexual attacks against girls and women. Women have been raped, forced into marriage – at times to several men – flogged in public and beaten.

GREFFA's report is the only documentation of sexual violence and rape by armed groups in Mali and, on the basis of their work, the government of

Mali has started a case against these rebel groups at the International Criminal Court.

Because their documentation is so important for the court case, GREFFA employees are vulnerable to attacks from groups implicated in the report. The rebels know who they are and have threatened workers at the organisation, making their work more difficult and dangerous. Their office has been ransacked and human rights defenders working there have received serious death threats.

For organisations like GREFFA, it is vital to know how to keep all the data they have collected safe, to protect not only their employees but all those who have been brave enough to step forward and share their harrowing stories.

This includes not only making sure that an office is secure so that hardware cannot be easily stolen, but also making sure that computers are secure as well, so that nobody can access the data. But how do you do this?

This can include something as simple as setting a password for the computer, not your mother's maiden name, or your place of birth, but a hard-to-crack combination of upper case, lower case and digits. The next step is to use a unique password for each account, so that if one is compromised then someone will not be able to maliciously gain access to all of your digital assets. Even if the files on your computer are safe, your electronic communications across the internet can still be intercepted. To protect information you send over the internet, it can be encrypted to hide its contents from anyone trying to monitor it. However, in some countries, even to use encryption software is a crime.

While there are many options for encryption and other security measures, it is important to pay attention to which software you use. It might seem like a good idea to turn to programmes made by Microsoft or Apple, but do not be fooled by the price tag. Open source software – which is software not provided by a big-name company, but instead honed by hordes of enthusiastic, freelance developers – is far more secure. Because the code is available to all, and not a trade secret of a giant company, any weaknesses in the encryption can be spotted and exposed by the global community of digital security experts. There has been recent concern that weaknesses have been purposefully built into some proprietary software at the demands of security agencies, so that they would have a "back door" into what were otherwise considered to be secure systems. Open source software is a more reliable way of ensuring that encryption works as it is supposed to.

## Conclusion

As Daroczi, Shevchenko, Reviaka, Blackstock and Toure all know, it is impossible to talk today about personal security without talking about digital security, which is why there was a whole day dedicated to digital security training at this year's Front Line Defenders Dublin Platform, one of the largest gatherings of human rights defenders in the world, held on 9-11 October.

The training provided by Front Line Defenders is based on our manual *Security in-a-box*,<sup>1</sup> and covers everything from secure passwords to protecting your email to mobile and social media security.

Digital security can be intimidating, and is often seen as the reserve of male computer boffins and techie types. But around the world, women rights defenders are becoming more confident about securing their networks and communications, safe in the knowledge that by using technology to press for their rights, they are not losing control, but taking it back. ■

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<sup>1</sup> Available online at: [securityinabox.org](http://securityinabox.org)



"When it is the person you have entrusted your life to who rapes you, it isn't just physical or sexual assault, it is a betrayal of the very core of your marriage, of your person, of your trust."

# **SPEAK UP AGAINST MARITAL RAPE**

[www.takebackthetech.net](http://www.takebackthetech.net)

While the statistics on rape are notorious for underreporting, the statistics on marital rape are even more problematic. Not even recognised as a crime in over 40 countries, one study on women in San Francisco reported that it accounts for 38% of all rapes, making it the most prevalent form of rape. For a colour reproduction of the image, please visit: [www.giswatch.org](http://www.giswatch.org)



# Online disobedience

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**Nadine Moawad**

Association for Progressive Communications (APC)  
[www.apc.org](http://www.apc.org)

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## Dot feminist resistance: Online disobedience, sabotage and militancy

Adria Richards has not tweeted to her 14,000 followers<sup>1</sup> in six months. Previously a vocal advocate for women in technology, Adria endured a harsh wave of racial slurs, rape threats and misogynistic trolling for tweeting a photo<sup>2</sup> of two men making sexist comments at PyCon, a conference for Python coders in the United States. Hackers shut down her employers' website and she was then terminated from her job. Adria chose to lay low and keep safe in the months that followed, her voice silenced and her online presence made invisible.

Her story, though devastating, is unfortunately neither shocking nor unique to the thousands of women technologists around the world. The increasingly dominant role of technology as well as the shifting dimension of the internet into a social space have brought forth new forms of familiar attacks against women for the most basic of actions – from self-expression to calling out sexist behaviour, from taking on leading positions to advocating for gender justice.

Yet feminists continue to fight – individually and collectively – to impose their voices and values in a difficult digital world. Over 25 years ago, Anita Borg with 12 other women created a small electronic mailing list that kick-started a community of technical women in computing called Systems (women working in systems). Organising and building power in numbers has been a long-running strategy used by women in male-dominated spaces and fields to challenge patriarchy and discrimination collectively. Still, since the 1980s until today, women organising to resist isolation have been made to frequently, as Borg put it, “justify the exclusion of men and to explain why [the group] is not discriminatory.”

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1 [twitter.com/adriarichards](https://twitter.com/adriarichards)

2 [www.theatlanticwire.com/technology/2013/03/adria-richards-sendgrind-fired/63400](http://www.theatlanticwire.com/technology/2013/03/adria-richards-sendgrind-fired/63400)

## Denying sexism and difference feminism

To resist the isolation and bullying that comes with the territory of self-identifying as a feminist in patriarchal spaces, many women techies opt to downplay the effects of sexism on their work. “I am not a female gamer, I am just a gamer,” for example, is a common reaction from women who get bothered by calls for women organising safe spaces. Others have opted for advocating for features that play on feminine or masculine stereotypes. E-commerce discussions focus on shopping for women. Gaming companies create fashion or makeup counterparts for their gangster or city planning games.

But the feminists fight on. As their offline counterparts have done for centuries, digital feminists have organised in information technology (IT) and cyber spheres to resist exclusion, isolation, stereotyping, misogyny, racism and sexual harassment. The majority of strategies have been similar – save for a special set of tactics that are customised to subvert technology itself. Feminist resistance is embedded in geek rebel culture and hacktivism, navigating the particularities of the internet in anonymity, transnational connections, and the viral capacity of social media.

## Feminist hackerspaces

Hackerspaces gained popularity towards 2008 when more groups sprouted around the world, creating community-built spaces where techies with common interests met regularly to socialise and collaborate on projects, usually for the public benefit. Activists in these spaces (hacktivists) use technology to challenge authority, oppression, government, surveillance and violations of human rights. They use tactics like electronic protests, boycotts of websites or e-services, distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks to take down websites, reputation sabotage, or mirror mock websites.

As in most male-dominated spaces, feminists in hackerspaces find themselves on two missions: one is to ensure safe environments for women<sup>3</sup> and trans people and to challenge the prominent hacker “dudecore” culture. And the second is to influence

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3 [dpi.studioxx.org/feminist-hackerspaces-safer-spaces](http://dpi.studioxx.org/feminist-hackerspaces-safer-spaces)



the gears of social justice hacktivism to prioritise misogyny and sexism as systemic forms of discrimination that merit challenging.

Mz Baltazar's Laboratory is a feminist hacker-space based in Vienna that brings together women and trans persons to freely exchange equipment, build circuits, and play with DIY electronics and interactive art. The group challenges the minority status of women in both "the creative development and applications of new technologies." Foufem does similar work in Montreal and is part of a hackerspace called Foulab, as does the Anarchafeminist Hackerhive in San Francisco, the Hactory in Philadelphia and the Miss Despionas in Tasmania.

The activities of feminist tech collectives focus on trainings and skill sharing, as well as responses to sexist trends and attacks on women. But there are also fun projects and widgets that drive feminist consciousness home. Jailbreak the Patriarchy<sup>4</sup> is one of them.

A Chrome extension created by Danielle Sucher, the script "genderswaps" the internet. When installed, the text loads with pronouns and other gendered words swapped. For example, "he loved his mother very much" would read as "she loved her father very much." Sucher says she had the idea when discussing ebooks with a friend and thinking that someone ought to make an app that toggles male/female characters' genders. She wanted to challenge internet users' assumptions about gender when they see the roles reversed. Marianna Kreidler gave the app a more radical twist with a gender-neutral version<sup>5</sup> using ze/hir and other non-gendered terms.

### Dads subverting video games

The Entertainment Software Association released a report<sup>6</sup> in June 2013 debunking the myth that women do not play video games, showing evidence that 45% of gamers are female, and 46% of the most frequent game purchasers are female. Yet, when Electronic Entertainment Design and Research sampled 669 action, shooter and role-playing games<sup>7</sup> in 2012, only 4% had an exclusively female protagonist and 45% had the option of selecting one.

And so techie parents who wanted more relatable role models for their daughters in video games got to work on the protagonists. Michael Chabon

hacked into Legend of Zelda<sup>8</sup> and simply flipped the gendered forms of address in the text of the game from male to female for his daughter, Maya. Scott and Casey Goodrow made "Sorry Mario Bros!",<sup>9</sup> a spin-off of the iconic game where the princess actually jumps, stomps, floats and warps her way out of the dark castle dungeon herself. "Sorry King Koopa!" the text reads, "Turns out I can jump." Mike Mika re-programmed Donkey Kong<sup>10</sup> when his three-year-old daughter asked: "How can I play as the girl? I want to save Mario!" He had initially expected the video he posted documenting the changes to stay in a small technical discussion among friends on Facebook. Instead, it went viral and triggered a sea of anti-feminist rage amidst applause from feminist techies.

### Feminist comics

Ripped muscles and domineering personalities are common characteristics of the comic superhero. Female characters – as rare as they come – are either drawn from a male gaze fantasy (large breasts, thin waists) or positioned as love interests that represent the weakness of the macho superhero. Digital artists have offered subversive storylines and characters that tackle actual women's issues. "Princeless", published by Action Lab Comics, is about, well, a woman superhero who defies the concept of needing saving by men. Book one is called "Save Yourself". And it is not just gender stereotypes that the comic challenges, but also questions of race in a critique of "fair maidens". Princeless is not merely a "strong female character", which is an adjective never given to male characters because their strength is a given. She is a rare woman of colour character that is rarely the star of comics.

Qahera<sup>11</sup> is a fresh bilingual comic in which the protagonist, a veiled superhero, combats Islamophobia and sexual harassment, amongst other things. She was the brainchild of Deena, a female Muslim Egyptian artist, and was launched in September 2013 after many years of Egyptian feminists highlighting the pervasiveness of sexual harassment on the streets of Cairo. Campaigns like #OpEndSH, Operation End Sexual Harassment, allowed female protestors to call the numbers of hundreds of volunteers in Tahrir Square in case they felt threatened, and HarassMap, an Ushahidi

4 [www.daniellesucher.com/2011/11/jailbreak-the-patriarchy-my-first-chrome-extension](http://www.daniellesucher.com/2011/11/jailbreak-the-patriarchy-my-first-chrome-extension)

5 [www.stuff.co.nz/life-style/life/8842873/Feminist-parodies-are-so-hot-right-now](http://www.stuff.co.nz/life-style/life/8842873/Feminist-parodies-are-so-hot-right-now)

6 [www.theesa.com/newsroom/release\\_detail.asp?releaseID=202](http://www.theesa.com/newsroom/release_detail.asp?releaseID=202)

7 [penny-arcade.com/report/editorial-article/games-with-female-heroes-dont-sell-because-publishers-dont-support-them](http://penny-arcade.com/report/editorial-article/games-with-female-heroes-dont-sell-because-publishers-dont-support-them)

8 [geekfeminism.org/2012/11/08/daughter-wins-with-geek-dad-who-hacks-gender-pronouns](http://geekfeminism.org/2012/11/08/daughter-wins-with-geek-dad-who-hacks-gender-pronouns)

9 [www.thewildeternal.com/2013/07/30/sorry-mario-bros](http://www.thewildeternal.com/2013/07/30/sorry-mario-bros)

10 [www.wired.com/gamelife/2013/03/donkey-kong-pauline-hack](http://www.wired.com/gamelife/2013/03/donkey-kong-pauline-hack)

11 [qahera.tumblr.com/](http://qahera.tumblr.com/)

mapping platform for sexual harassment, have been leading initiatives on that front.

### Collective action to break taboos

On the internet, feminists got together to build connections and run websites or online campaigns that broke taboos of “appropriate” behaviour. India’s Blank Noise campaign made waves in 2008 when it asked women to send photos of the garments they wore when they were “Eve-teased”<sup>12</sup> (sexually harassed). Entitled “I never ask for it” – to debunk the myth that what you wear somehow is correlated to the sexual harassment you will face on the streets – the campaign received hundreds of photos within weeks and posted them on their website. From saris to jeans, the campaign showed – with numbers and photo documentation from massive nationwide participation – that attire neither prevents nor encourages harassment. The Pink Chaddi<sup>13</sup> campaign launched by the Consortium of Pub-Going, Loose and Forward Women used the same method after an incident where morality police attacked a group of women in Mangalore, India in February 2009. The group asked women to send pink underwear (“chaddi” in Hindi) to the office of Pramod Muthalik, head of an orthodox Hindu group, on Valentine’s Day. The response was massive, with over 500 chaddis sent in one day. Shortly after the campaign took off, the campaign’s Facebook group was attacked by trolls and eventually taken over and flooded with racist slurs and death threats.

Writing about sex and sexuality has also been a strategy to amplify women’s narratives to an online readership only used to mainstream erotic representation. “Adventures from the Bedrooms of African Women”<sup>14</sup> takes contributions (anonymously is an option) from sexually diverse women on matters of sexual experience.

### Parodies

Although mostly based in the global North and requiring ample production resources, parodies have sprung up virally across Twitter and Facebook to resist demeaning representations of women. Students from New Zealand parodied the Robin

Thicke video “Blurred Lines”, criticised for condoning rape, with a video called “Defined Lines” that included lyrics like “What you see on TV, doesn’t speak equality, it’s straight up misogyny.”<sup>15</sup> Also popular is the Twitter Taylor Swift parody account<sup>16</sup> tweeting feminist versions of her lyrics and songs.

### Bridging feminism with open source

In being a movement that aims primarily to deconstruct power binaries, feminism has aligned itself with open source and internet rights activism. Women techies organising in digital and offline spaces are more often than not rooting for a free and open internet, safe from monopoly and accessible to everyone, particularly marginalised groups. LinuxChix is one such community, founded in 1999, for women in computing who advocate for free and open source software. They also maintain a resourceful online bibliography on gender and open source.<sup>17</sup>

While much has been done over the decades to highlight the contributions of women to the world of computing, stories of discrimination and sexism continue to make noise in techie spaces around the world. And, in response, women continue to organise collectively on a number of issues, from influencing internet policy towards gender inclusivity to encouraging young women and girls to pursue studies and careers in technology, from challenging violence against women online to amplifying women’s sexual self-expression in blogospheres and on social media. Perhaps the era of “Where are the women techies?” now gives way to more exciting times when we recognise the significant participation of women in different technological fields and can now look forward to an internet that is freer, more inclusive, and far more interesting. ■

12 [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eve\\_teasing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eve_teasing)

13 [thepinkchaddicampaign.blogspot.com/2009/02/welcome.html](http://thepinkchaddicampaign.blogspot.com/2009/02/welcome.html)

14 [adventuresfrom.com/](http://adventuresfrom.com/)

15 [www.youtube.com/watch?v=tC1XtnLRLPM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tC1XtnLRLPM)

16 [www.stuff.co.nz/life-style/life/8842873/Feminist-parodies-are-so-hot-right-now](http://www.stuff.co.nz/life-style/life/8842873/Feminist-parodies-are-so-hot-right-now)

17 [www.linuxchix.org/women-open-source-free-software-bibliography.html](http://www.linuxchix.org/women-open-source-free-software-bibliography.html)

# From string theory to clothes wringers: A historical map of women shaping science and technology

Compiled by Sonia Randhawa

2000 BCE

## **Enheduanna**

(c. 2285-2250 BCE)

An astronomer, one of the first written poets, and High Priestess of the Moon Goddess, writing about 300 years after the invention of cuneiform letters.

0

## **Aglaonike**

(2nd century BCE)

Astronomer who could predict eclipses.

## **Hypatia**

(370-415 AD)

Mathematician and natural philosopher. Developed scientific instruments including a hydrometer that measured “specific gravity” of liquids – used today to check a car battery’s charge by testing the acid.

1000

## **Fatima de Madrid**

(10th-11th century AD)

Corrected Arabic astronomical tables, collaborated with her father in mathematical investigations.

1800

**Maria Gaetana Agnesi**

(1718-1799)

Discovered a solution for an algebraic problem, still used today, plotted on a curve called “the witch of Agnesi”.

**Maria Angela Ardinghelli**

(1728-1835)

Renowned physicist and mathematician.

**Wang Zhenyi**

(1768-1797)

Astronomer who modelled how lunar eclipses were caused. A Venusian crater is named after her.

1850

**Ada Lovelace**

(1842-1843)

Wrote the first computer programme and originated the concept of using binary numbers. Imagined a greater potential for one of the earliest computer models than simply crunching numbers.

**Hertha Marks Ayrton**

(1854-1923)

Physicist who worked on electric arcs and sand ripples.

**Beulah Louise Henry**

(1887-1973)

Dubbed “Lady Edison” by the media. First patent at age 25 for an ice cream freezer with a vacuum seal. Created hundreds of items including a hair curler, typewriter attachments, and movable dolls that could kick, blink, eat and even talk.

**Ellen Eglin**

(1880s)

Invented a highly successful clothes wringer but did not patent it. Sold it for a small amount because she believed that white women would not use the wringer if they knew it was created by a black woman.

**Elizaveta Ivanova**

**Karamihailova**

(1897-1968)

Pioneered nuclear physics in Bulgaria. She also initiated experimental nuclear physics in the country.

1900

**Rosza Peter**

(1905-1977)

One of the founders of computational theory, who suffered persecution under the Fascists in Hungary and worked to secure opportunities for girls to study mathematics in Soviet Hungary.

**Grace Hopper**

(1906-1992)

In 1944, she was one of the first programmers for the Harvard Mark I Calculator, the earliest large-scale automatic digital computer in the USA. She also developed the first compiler for a computer programming language.

**Paris Pismis**

(1911-1999)

One of the first astronomers to study young clusters using photometric photometry. She was also the first woman to graduate in science from Istanbul University.

**Hedy Lamarr**

(1913-2000)

Sexy movie star of the 1930s and 1940s. Co-inventor of a remote-controlled, jam-proof radio communications system for the US military that was patented during WW II.

**Margaret Burbidge**

(1919- )

One of the first to publish that all the elements, except the very lightest, are born in stars.

## 1950

### **Olive Ann Beech**

(1920-1986)

Co-founded Beech Aircraft, which she ran until her death when it was an international aerospace corporation.

### **Xide Xie**

(1921-2000)

Banished during the Cultural Revolution, she was key to the development of solid state physics in China.

### **Betty Jennings, Betty Snyder, Fran Bilas, Kay McNulty, Marlyn Wescoff and Ruth Lichterman**

Original programmers in 1946 of the ENIAC, the first general-purpose electronic computer. Received formal recognition of their contribution 50 years after the development of ENIAC through the Hall of Fame award from Women in Technology International.

### **Erna Schneider Hoover**

(1926- )

Created the first computerised telephone switching machine for Bell Laboratories.

### **Grace Alele Williams**

(1932- )

The first Nigerian woman to earn a doctorate, awarded in mathematics, she has been at the forefront of mathematical education in Africa – and was inspired by the Sputnik programme!

### **Roseli Ocampo-Friedmann**

(1937-2005)

Apart from working in SETI, this Filipino-American microbiologist has a mountain in Antarctica named after her, for her work exploring the terraforming of Mars.

### **Mary Allen Wilkes**

(1937- )

In 1965, she became the first person to use a computer in a private home, and was the first developer of an operating system (LAP) for the first minicomputer (LINC)

### **Mary Spaeth**

(1940- )

Developed several inventions around laser technology, including the integral part of laser devices used to scan barcodes at cash registers.

### **Neta Assaf Bachall**

(1942- )

Specialises in the study of the universe, helped to calculate the weight of the universe.

### **Bozena Czerny**

(1952- )

Studies accreting black holes to look at the behaviour of and test general relativity in a strong gravitational field.

### **Dora Nkem Akunyili**

(1954- )

A Nigerian pharmacist who has survived violence and assassination attempts for her war against deadly fake drugs.

### **Rose Dieng-Kuntz**

(1956-2008)

A Senegalese scientist and one of the first scholars to understand the importance of the Web and to map how it would evolve, specialising in artificial intelligence and knowledge management.

### **Kalpna Chawla**

(1962-2003)

Astronaut who perished in the Space Shuttle Columbia disaster in February 2003.

### **Itziar Aretxaga**

(1965- )

Mexican astrophysicist with over 100 publications.

### **Katherine Adebola Okikiolu**

(1965- )

Mathematician of Nigerian origin who works on differential geometry and operator theory.

## Today

### **Susan Kare**

Created the icons and many of the interface elements for the original Apple Macintosh in the 1980s.

### **Shafi Goldwasser**

Two-time recipient of the Gödel Prize for research on complexity theory, cryptography and computational number theory, and the invention of zero-knowledge proofs.

### **Sally Floyd**

Extensive research and development on the Transmission Control Protocol (often referred to as TCP/IP), one of the core protocols of the Internet Protocol Suite that enables and controls delivery of messages and data between one computer and another.

### **Czarina Saloma**

Conducts research into the sociology of technology, with a focus on gender, looking primarily at her home country of the Philippines and neighbouring Southeast Asian states.

### **Sau Lan Wu**

A particle physicist who was part of the team who recently (appear to have) found the Higgs Boson.

### **Doria Daou**

One of the founders of the Spritzer Space Telescope Research programme for teachers and students and creator of the “Ask an Astronomer” video series.

### **Fernanda Viégas**

Brazilian communications expert who has done exciting work democratising important internet communication tools for visualisation.

### **Irene Cruz-Gonzalez Espinosa**

A Mexican astronomer, her “passion is in the delicate scientific observational work to understand galaxies, their environment and nuclear activity and star formation processes.”



## Institutional overview



# Whose internet is it anyway?

## Shaping the internet – feminist voices in governance decision making

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Heike Jensen

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Gender politics in internet governance can be fruitfully explored at two levels. At the level of feminist interventions, gender is often conflated with women and girls, on whose behalf normative commitments and specific measures are sought. Attention to the link of gender with other forms of social hierarchies may lead to nuanced propositions on behalf of particular groups of women and girls, for instance, rural women or poor black girls. Nevertheless, the female category appears quite straightforwardly as that which defines these groups of people and their specific roles and needs. At the level of the larger political processes in which these feminist policy interventions are embedded, gender can be analysed as an abstract system of power and representation through which the dominant, hegemonic forms of masculinity are negotiated. Here, gender remains implicit because the institutions, constituencies and issues appear deceptively gender-blind. With such twofold analysis, I will now contextualise the achievements of progressive gender politics as part of the complex gendering mechanisms currently at work in a sphere like internet governance.

### Normative feminist legacies at the global level

Feminists working in internet governance can draw on a substantial legacy created by many decades of feminist involvement at the global political level. Most recently, feminists have become a highly visible political constituency in the course of the world conferences on women held by the United Nations in 1975, 1980, 1985 and 1995. The agreed conclusions and the follow-up process of these conferences, and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) that entered into force in 1981, constitute the most comprehensive global political tools to date. They have spelled out a normative framework of non-discrimination, women's human rights, gender equality and women's empowerment that is meant to be applied in all spheres of policy making.

### Gender mainstreaming

To apply this normative framework, the strategy of gender mainstreaming has been mandated at global as well as regional, national and sub-national political levels since the late 1990s. Gender mainstreaming calls for an analysis and a consideration of women's and men's stakes in all policies and programmes and at all stages, from design to implementation to monitoring to evaluation. Unfortunately, gender mainstreaming has never been consistently applied. Because of this, in internet governance, just as in any other field of politics that does not exclusively and explicitly address gender, political processes are initiated and agendas are set without any explicit attention to the gender stakes involved. Such an approach does not create random gender effects, however, but bolsters male hegemony and hegemonic masculinity.

### Male political hegemony

The crux is to understand that male hegemony and patriarchies perpetuate themselves in political and economic arenas by not drawing attention to themselves as gendered and hierarchical undertakings. Instead, they claim a universal outlook, but this outlook, far from being universal, is informed by quite specific standpoints and habits of perception. It is an outlook indebted to privileged positions in the hierarchy between men and women as well as the hierarchy among different groups of men. In internet governance, in which privileged perspectives of the global North and the global South meet, information and communications technologies (ICTs) are for instance predominantly framed as tools for economic power or as tools potentially threatening national sovereignty and security. While these framings are challenged by those who frame ICTs in relation to development and human rights, even the latter contribute to male hegemony as long as they relate development and human rights only to an abstracted citizen-subject and not to specific groups of women and men with differing concerns and needs.

## Male hegemonic institutions

When male hegemonic factions compete for the predominance of economic, multilateral, developmental or human-rights related frameworks for ICT policies, their comparative influence can already be judged by the kinds of political institutions in which the crucial debates and power brokering are housed. The internet governance sphere is particularly varied in this regard. It ranges from the global level of institutions such as the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the UN Development Programme (UNDP), to regional and national institutions and their divergent approaches and mix of stakeholder groups. Each of these institutions has a unique historical trajectory of hegemonic positions, reflected in the internal agreements these have achieved over time.

From a feminist perspective, the institutions vary tremendously in terms of the possibilities for meaningful involvement, from relatively open setups such as the IGF to relatively closed ones such as the ITU. Many deliberative processes that are open to all concerned stakeholders are very drawn out and consequently require a lot of time, attention and financial resources, such as the negotiations concerning generic top-level domains (gTLDs) that took place in ICANN. In other scenarios, the political weight of the final outcome may be very uncertain, such as with the IGF, UNESCO or UNDP. Yet other processes with high political stakes may largely be conducted behind closed doors, for instance at WIPO.

## Homosocial setups

In internet governance, as in many other spheres of politics, women are still under-represented in each stakeholder group, and particularly so as real power brokers and visible experts, including panellists. Because of this, a special measure for women that has consistently been advocated by many feminists is affirmative action in internet governance deliberative and policy-making bodies. But normative commitments, such as the acknowledgment of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) that women should fully participate in all decision-making processes, are not even implemented in forums that directly follow from WSIS, such as the IGF and comparable forums at the regional level.

Conceptually, women's involvement of course needs to be differentiated from feminist involvement, since both men and women can either be complicit with male hegemony or oppose it and take feminist stances. However, it has long been argued in feminist circles that a critical mass of women in any institution is needed to enable women to begin developing feminist positions. This includes an analysis of the gendered stakes in supposedly universal issues.

## Hegemonic framing of issues and agendas

The standpoints and habits of perception of comparatively privileged men lead to the identification of certain political issues and their adoption within specific rhetorical frameworks. Consequently, any mainstream political agenda of issues already represents the outcome of power struggles among groups of privileged men, and the outcome of the subsequent policy debate largely reflects which groups of men have achieved dominance, or in gendered terms, which groups of men now represent hegemonic masculinity.

Such processes of agenda setting and framing successfully serve to alienate many women – and also groups of men – and keep them from entering the political process in the first place. Many marginalised groups neither relate to the issues, nor is it easy for them to adopt the perspectives from which these issues have been identified. Consequently, these groups also cannot immediately see how these issues connect to their own lived realities or the political issues they find most critical. For many feminists, for instance, clear-cut gender-political issues such as violence against women, the feminisation of poverty or the exploitation of women workers represent reasonable choices to engage with politically in scenarios that expressly address them. The fact that internet governance issues such as cyber crime, digital intellectual property rights and neoliberal ICT policies, respectively, may have a crucial bearing on each of these feminist issues is not immediately apparent, even though their influence might be quite decisive.

The problem of setting priorities for feminist advocacy needs to be understood in the context of a scarcity of resources that feminists can utilise. Scarce resources require a careful selection of the issues and political venues that we think are most pressing to engage in. In addition, abstracted internet governance issues in particular require substantial resources because a lot of feminist

academic groundwork is needed, both in terms of top-down projections of how certain decisions might impact different groups of women and men, as well as bottom-up analyses of good-practice examples and prognoses of which groups of women would require which kinds of internet governance policies to remedy which forms of discrimination against them.

Even under these adverse conditions, however, some feminists and their associations do find it worthwhile to engage in internet governance scenarios, and we will now turn to the strategies we employ and the limits and problems we encounter with them.

### **Demands for normative commitments**

At the normative level, we lobby for a reaffirmation of non-discrimination, gender equality and women's empowerment as guiding principles. Concurrently, we seek a reaffirmation of the historical legacy of gender politics as such. We therefore lobby for the inclusion of references to the agreed conclusions of the world conferences on women and the outcomes of their review process, CEDAW, and any other relevant precedents. We also call for a reaffirmation of the strategy of gender mainstreaming, which, when successful, leads to the paradox of a policy document that demands gender mainstreaming while not having itself been indebted to it.

The strategy of reiteration and reaffirmation is chosen because feminists have so far not experienced any significant trickle-down effects of previously successful interventions. We have therefore not been able to directly build on the gains achieved in any previous forum and political process. Instead, we seem to have to engage in the same kinds of lobbying and advocacy in each new setting and process.

### **Demands for the collection of gender-disaggregated data**

Gender mainstreaming requires the collection of gender-disaggregated data, and this is a crucial feminist demand because it constitutes the basis for any meaningful policy interventions. This demand is not only ideologically contentious from mainstream perspectives, because it makes injustices visible; it also involves a fight over budgets, because data collections require substantial monetary and labour resources. At issue here is the collection and analysis of rough demographic data as well as the creation of indicators that will lead to

qualitative and quantitative data of sufficient quality and granularity.

### **Erasure of “bad” language**

Political negotiations not only revolve around concepts but also around their wording. In certain contexts, it may be as important for feminists to achieve the erasure of specific concepts, phrases or conjunctions as it may be to achieve the inclusion of items. If successful, this can only be seen when examining the history of the negotiations, as, for instance, preserved in draft documents, while it cannot be gleaned from the text of the agreed conclusions. In gender politics, what many feminists seek to avoid at all costs is a conflation of women with other marginalised groups such as children, differently abled people, or people living in landlocked countries.

### **Engaging with mainstream, gender-blindly worded issue politics**

Of course, we also seek to influence the negotiations around specific internet governance issues, such as those concerning internet censorship and digital surveillance, free and open source software (FOSS), or intellectual property rights. Given the absence of gender mainstreaming when these issues arrived on the political agenda, this means that gender analyses often have to be commissioned and conducted “on the fly”, while the larger political deliberations are already in full swing. Concurrently, there is often not a lot of time left to develop a feminist consensus on the policy positions that should be developed accordingly. This is not only an analytic and intellectual problem, because it also leaves little room for strategic considerations, bargaining and coalition building.

### **Advocating special measures for girls and women**

These analytic and strategic concerns also affect another crucial type of feminist policy input: the demands for special measures on behalf of girls and women. The rationale behind such demands is that unjust structures, institutions, practices and resource allocations that disadvantage many girls and women vis-à-vis many boys and men need to be fought by strengthening those that are discriminated against. However, in otherwise gender-blind political processes, all that can be achieved in this regard is that some of this feminist input is taken up selectively. The result can be problematic on account of the following issues.

## The conflation of gender and women

The terms “gender” and “women” come to be used interchangeably. Women, because of their visibility as the marked gender, become stereotyped. Above all, they come to appear as a problem group that needs to be helped, which is a notion that is quite compatible with paternalistic frameworks. Concurrently, the male gender remains non-marked, non-gendered and hence retains its claim to universality. The groups of men who profit from the gender hierarchies that work to their advantage remain invisible, as do the gender hierarchies themselves.

## The hijacking of feminist positions

Moreover, the selective uptake of only some measures for girls and women by mainstream political processes means that certain measures might in fact have become championed by constituencies who use them for ends other than gender equality and social justice. For instance, the paternalistic aim to protect women and children from digital pornography and cyber stalking is often voiced by constituencies who are in fact interested in installing far-reaching, society-wide internet censorship and surveillance regimes.

## The selective uptake of feminist input

Often feminists are unable to insert special measures into the core areas of hegemonic power brokering. So, for instance, while a lot of knowledge has recently been developed in the area of women-friendly infrastructure development, including regulation and resource allocation, lobbying efforts regarding these issues have largely been in vain. Concurrently, the special measures that become part of the political consensus often constitute longstanding and more generalised feminist issues. For example, in many internet governance forums, the special measures that are most likely to be adopted refer to girls’ education and women’s professional training and employment. Even when positive on the face of it, this uptake might be seen as problematic in those internet governance negotiations that are strongly driven by transnational corporations and neoliberal market politics, emphasising the free reign of the private sector. Feminist analyses of economic globalisation have consistently pointed out that unbridled capitalism tends to severely exploit disadvantaged women in developing countries. As a result, special measures for girls’ and women’s education and training could function to mainstream the groups at issue more seamlessly into such exploitative setups.

## Inappropriate contexts for gender mainstreaming

Concurrently, the limits of gender mainstreaming as a feminist strategy become obvious: gender mainstreaming can be employed in any context, including contexts that might be completely antithetical to social justice considerations. This at times might suit a small group of privileged liberal feminists, but it is untenable as a global feminist position. To put gender mainstreaming to good use, what is called for is not a compensatory approach within existing hierarchies, but a transformative one that combats these hierarchies.

## Concluding thoughts

Internet governance constitutes a new global political field that has been elaborated during a time period of comparatively strong feminist and social justice constituencies at the global level. Nevertheless, it has been established as a sphere that perpetuates male hegemony in general and hegemonic business masculinity in particular. Feminist input in this field has at best attained the status of a marginal add-on. Neither the agendas and the issues and their framing, nor the abstracted nature of masculinity and patriarchies, nor the actual predominance of men in the respective forums have successfully been challenged.

At the same time, constant feminist input has possibly made it harder for hegemonic groups to pretend that talking about issues without any reference to groups of people and their highly divergent positions and needs is natural and should be sufficient. In fact, mainstream ICT policy makers are now faced with a newly consolidated field of expertise: the academic groundwork done by feminists has validated a gender-conscious approach to ICTs and has legitimated feminist involvement. Feminists have built and strengthened networks, have gained new capacities and skills for building caucuses and pressure groups in different political arenas, and have made a lot of information available to interested parties. We have achieved all of this on the fly, parallel to political negotiations that have been in progress, and will undoubtedly continue to do so.

But it might also be time to step back a little and reflect more strategically on the gains, losses and conundrums we have faced. To begin with, we need an ongoing analysis of the shifting power grid of internet governance forums. We need to understand where the decisions are made that are likely to have the strongest impact on different types of power relations and hierarchies, and who will likely get

empowered and disempowered by them. We need to discuss strategic lobbying and tactical feminism. This needs to encompass procedural issues such as successful agenda setting and the definition of political issues. But it also needs to encompass strategic gender approaches, including questions of how to make the male gender visible, curb the privileges associated with hegemonic masculinity, and engineer male gender roles towards feminist and social justice directions. A central issue will therefore be the one of how concerns for gender equality could

be linked more systematically with other concerns for social justice, so that strong political alliances between feminists and non-feminists can be formed. After all, given the high likelihood of a continuation of far-reaching ICT-induced changes, the ferment and upheaval linked with these developments will persistently open hegemonic positions to challenge and in doing so will also favour ongoing feminist contestations. These opportunities need to be seized at all levels, because only “constant dripping wears away the stone.” ■



If I had access to  
the airwaves, I  
would sing away the  
pain



With the media largely owned and controlled by men, women's voices take a backseat. The sector of the media where women are best represented is community media, emphasising the importance of giving women not just a voice in the mass media, but the opportunity to make and create their own media. The right to community media is the right to a diverse, representative and egalitarian media. For a colour reproduction of the image, please visit: [www.giswatch.org](http://www.giswatch.org)

# Whose internet is it anyway?

## Shaping the internet – women’s voices in governance decision making in the Middle East and North Africa

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It has always been a challenge to explain what I do for a living to my family and friends, but everyone agrees I have an interesting career path; they just don’t understand what it means exactly, to be managing an internet governance programme. The credit for my current involvement in internet policy and governance goes to my curiosity; I started using the internet around the mid-1990s and it took me a few years to start asking questions like: “Who manages the internet?” When I carried out my Master’s thesis research on “freedom of expression on the internet” ten years ago, I hardly found any references on the subject apart from Lessig’s *Code* (first edition, 1999), even though it was not directly related to the theme of my research.

Explaining what internet governance and policy means in simple terms can be challenging – and being a woman working in this field and focusing on the Arab region is complicated – but not impossible. One would expect that, generally, women are not fairly represented within the policy decision making process in the Arab region due to deeply rooted perceptions both in the society and the workplace. It is not a question of how many women are leading policy battles in the Arab region; it is a matter of there being a will to give women an opportunity to prove they can be effective in decision making. When female representation in the technology sector is added to the discussion, another layer of complication is inevitably added to the question of gender imbalance, which does not apply only to the Arab world but other regions as well.

### Challenges facing Arab women in information and communications technology (ICT) policy

There is a considerable digital gender gap in the Arab region. Using ICTs to improve the social standing of Arab women seems to be feasible due to the unlimited opportunities new technologies can

offer.<sup>1</sup> Yet, without having a clear vision of how to overcome the challenges hindering Arab women from integrating into the field of technology, it will be impossible to address this issue.

Arab women struggle to overcome various obstacles related to the culture and traditions of the region. The perception of women’s role in society still revolves around the family unit, even if they have a successful career. They are not empowered to be an equal contributor and are restricted from being a driving force to accelerate the social and economic development of the Arab region.

It is safe to state that Arab women are not yet able to make it into the boardrooms of tech companies or government entities where high-level decisions are made, for the very same reasons. The structure of the society dictates that women should be followers but not leaders. This results in low self-esteem and obligates them to abide by the rules of a society which tends to give more leverage to men.

### Influential Arab women’s voices in ICT policy

Internet governance and policy as a field of expertise is fairly new. A limited number of women at the global level have stood out and managed to secure influential positions, mainly in the business sector or civil society organisations. In the Arab region, the public sector seems to be the main host of influential Arab women when it comes to local internet governance and policy mechanisms. However, only one woman has managed to reach the top of the decision-making pyramid: Dr. Hassa Al Jaber, the head of the national telecom regulator ICT Qatar, and one of the most powerful women in the Arab region. Al Jaber has been instrumental in the liberalisation of Qatar’s telecommunication market and has helped spearhead the modernisation of Qatar’s government through information technology.<sup>2</sup>

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1 [www.diplointernetgovernance.org/profiles/blogs/the-role-of-information-and-communication-technologies-in](http://www.diplointernetgovernance.org/profiles/blogs/the-role-of-information-and-communication-technologies-in)

2 [www.arabianbusiness.com/100-most-powerful-arab-women-2012-448295.html?view=profile&itemid=448218#.UilO7-dkTRd](http://www.arabianbusiness.com/100-most-powerful-arab-women-2012-448295.html?view=profile&itemid=448218#.UilO7-dkTRd)

## Impact of internet governance arrangements on Arab women

It is difficult at this point in time to assess the impact of internet governance and policies adopted in the Arab region on the situation of women. There are pressing priorities which need addressing first, such as bridging the gender digital gap in Arab countries. Little attention is allocated to the role of the internet, for example, in sustainable development and how it can effectively change the perception of women and their capabilities. Moreover, it is quite a challenge for Arab countries to devise a clear vision on how to integrate an effective ICT strategy for the benefit of women.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, the internet and the widespread use of social media specifically have helped computer-literate Arab women to advance causes that are hard to advocate for offline. Cyber feminism is a significant outcome of Arab women using the internet, which has allowed them to escape the patriarchal control of centralised organisations by providing them with a space where their fragmented subjectivities can exist;<sup>4</sup> whether any future internet governance arrangements will positively affect women in the Arab region entirely depends on whether the decision-making circles are aware of the existing struggle against social and political restraints.

## Conclusion

Internet governance and policy is meant to shape the future of the internet by involving various stakeholders using a bottom-up approach. Encouraging women to integrate themselves in the discussion and to influence the decision-making process will help them in proposing better policies to address the issues at stake and the challenges they are facing. The hope for women in the Arab region is to be in a better position to drive the change, and design a better future for them through the internet. Therefore, efforts should be made by decision makers in the Arab region to be more inclusive and aware of the prominent role women can play in internet policy making by establishing a special task force with the objective of considering the impact of new technologies in general on Arab women's empowerment. Such an initiative can facilitate women's integration in the policy-making scene organically, since it will make them active stakeholders that can advocate for their own cause. At the same time they will share their own perspective on internet governance and policy issues, which in essence is meant to be multi-stakeholder. ■

3 [www.diplointernetgovernance.org/profiles/blogs/the-role-of-information-and-communication-technologies-in](http://www.diplointernetgovernance.org/profiles/blogs/the-role-of-information-and-communication-technologies-in)

4 [www.e-ir.info/2013/08/28/cyberfeminism-and-its-political-implications-for-women-in-the-arab-world/](http://www.e-ir.info/2013/08/28/cyberfeminism-and-its-political-implications-for-women-in-the-arab-world/)

## Country reports



# Hidden alphabets: An A-Z of women's rights online

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Alan Finlay

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**A** is for **ASH**: “This surgery is done in a non-clinical setting with only a knife and a handful of ash to seal the wound.” (Iraq)

**B** is for **BRIDE**: “Although the Nigerian Senate passed a law criminalising child marriage in 2003, only 24 out of the 36 states have adopted the law.” (Nigeria)

**C** is for **CHOICE**: “[T]he focus was on her honour rather than her choice, which defines the boundary between pleasure and violence...” (Philippines)

**C** is also for **CONCRETE**: “[W]omen who support the Islamists do have concrete plans. They are calling for women to retreat into the home, to leave the public arena, to live a more secluded life, to restore traditional moral values, to decrease the need for personal consumption and, by leaving work, to create employment for the thousands of young males.” (Egypt)

**D** is for **DECEPTION**: “Deception is the preferred method used by abductors...” (Argentina)

**D** is also for **DECAPITATION**: “Richards received several death threats (one accompanied by a grotesque tweet with a picture of a decapitated woman on a bed).” (United States)

**E** is for **EFFICIENCY**: “The fact that the government forced the ISWN on victims whose lives are threatened and are hiding in shelters shows that the administration values efficient work processes over the human rights of victims.” (Republic of Korea)

**F** is for **FACEBOOK**: “Another female Facebook user, Irene Akhter, married her classmate after a long affair. Soon after their marriage, they became estranged. Her husband, a vindictive man, posted indecent pictures of her on the internet in retaliation. After the incident, she suffered a mental collapse. Having being rejected by her own family, Irene now lives alone.” (Bangladesh)

**G** is for **GENDER**: “The gender digital divide adds to pre-existing gender inequalities. It interplays with economic and power relations, beliefs, prejudices and stereotypes and also reproduces and consolidates them. Specific initiatives to challenge this phenomenon are needed.” (Uruguay)

**H** is for **HUMMING**: “[F]our women [were] killed in the remote northern village of Gizar Alitray, for being exposed as having a good time (clapping to a song, humming) at a wedding function.” (Pakistan)

**I** is for **INVISIBILITY**: “The reality for many women victims of violence, in different spaces, is that they face multiple forms of invisibility.” (Ecuador)

**J** is for **JUDICIAL**: “[W]omen and girls who are the victims of this abuse are generally not aware of the judicial means available to them.” (DRC)

**K** is for **KNOW**: “[R]ecent surveys suggest that women are less likely to know and use the internet and that they are less likely to own mobile phones and cover the expenses of using them.” (Ethiopia)

**L** is for **LEASH**: “Radio Africa and their advertisers must sanction her rudeness and hold her on shorter leash.” (Kenya)

**L** is also for **LUCK**: “In America you should be killed by your husband with gun. This is real American way. You're so lucky to be in China!” (China)

**M** is for **MIRROR**: “Give a woman a CD-ROM and she will use it as a mirror.” (Romania)

**N** is for **NUCLEAR**: “Some governmental experts, magnifying its effects, even compared this technology to nuclear bombs.” (Iran)

**N** is also for **NAKED**: “Thai teens enjoy popularity and fame from posting sexy/half-naked photos of themselves on the internet as a way to gain acceptance.” (Thailand)

**O** is for **OPPORTUNITY**: “[The internet] gave me a huge and unprecedented opportunity to express my opinions and ideas to people who want to receive information...” (Jordan)

**P** is for PIN: “The website works with a concept it calls ‘Pin the Creeps’, allowing women to report incidents of harassment and abuse.” (India)

**P** is also for PRESENT: “The challenge for feminist activists is to find ways of remaining present in the digital sphere in order to transform online relations and advance ethical digital citizenship.” (New Zealand)

**Q** is for QUOTA: “Although the quota provides an opportunity for women to have a voice at the table, they are aware that ‘token’ females could be selected to run in constituencies where they have no chance of winning.” (Cook Islands)

**R** is for RELIGION: “Religion and culture should be used to empower a woman and not to prevent her from full self-actualisation and equal opportunities...” (Uganda)

**S** is for SUPERWOMEN: “Women are expected to perform like superwomen, juggling their responsibilities to their electorates as well as to their families.” (Cook Islands)

**S** is also for SEVEN: “Seven out of ten students accept unknown contacts in social networks and display themselves over the webcam or exchange photographs.” (Bolivia)

**T** is for TRAGEDY: “The insecurity faced by Indigenous women and girls in Canada is a national human rights tragedy.” (Canada)

**T** is also for TRIVIALISATION: “This trivialisation of harm is reminiscent of the many years domestic violence was downplayed in Kenya.” (Kenya)

**U** is for UNIVERSAL: “Communications must be universal. Everyone has a right to communications that are available, affordable and accessible.” (South Africa)

**V** is for VIOLENCE: “Violence against women is a violation of human rights, and an expression of power, domination and control over their bodies and lives.” (Peru)

**W** is for WARSHIP: “In October 2012 Women on Waves was in Morocco, at the invitation of local rights organisation MALI, to launch the Moroccan safe abortion hotline. Warned of their coming, a warship waited at sea, ready to block the entrance to the marina.” (The Netherlands)

**X** is for SEX: “Other women, often personalities from the world of politics, journalism or business, regularly see photographs of themselves circulated in photo montages of naked bodies in the sexual act.” (DRC)

**Y** is YASMINA: “Yasmina became a champion for online and offline communities in citizen engagement in legislative and democratic processes. She accepted the role, informing us via Twitter and Facebook of all the issues that she believes are important to the citizens.” (Côte d’Ivoire)

**Z** is for SILENZIO: “*Per uscire dal silenzio* (Stop the silence).” (Italy) ■



# ARGENTINA

## Convergences between ICTs and the trafficking of women in Argentina



### Nodo TAU

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### Introduction

Argentina is considered a country of origin, transit and destination for human trafficking, for the purpose of sexual exploitation and forced labour. Places of origin are impoverished provinces such as Misiones, Santa Fe, Chaco, Tucumán and Salta. The southern region of the country is considered to be a destination, given its well-developed tourism industry, oil and gas industry activities and port regions.<sup>1</sup>

According to studies, 84% of human trafficking in Argentina is for the purpose of sexual exploitation, as compared to 14% for forced labour, and 2% of cases where the purpose is unknown.<sup>2</sup> The trafficking of people for sexual exploitation almost exclusively affects women (91%),<sup>3</sup> and most victims are over 18 years old. There is a small prevalence of Argentine victims (51%) over foreign women, with a significant number of Paraguayan women (36%), and, to a lesser extent, women from the Dominican Republic, Colombia and Brazil.

In most cases, the victim/survivor did not previously know the abductor. Deception is the preferred method used by abductors (in 42% of cases, compared to 5% for outright kidnapping).

There is a low rate of conviction for human trafficking-related crime, and in general traffickers have earned the complicity of police forces and political power. Statistics in this field are difficult to compile because a low percentage of cases reach the courts.<sup>4</sup>

Traffickers use information and communications technologies (ICTs) to communicate with each other, as well as to communicate with potential victims. ICTs are used to advertise women, and traffickers

can share information about accessing victims over the internet.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, however, ICTs can be used to prevent trafficking, to remedy the situation, to assist survivors, and to aid women's recovery.

### Policy and political background

In 1957 Argentina ratified the Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others (1949).<sup>6</sup> Later, in 2000, the country signed the International Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.<sup>7</sup> The protocol defines trafficking as including such activities as sexual exploitation, forced labour and organ removal, and recognises that the crime exists not only between countries, but also within national territories.

Susana Chiarotti from the Instituto de Género, Derecho y Desarrollo, a women's organisation in Rosario, highlights two aspects of these documents: first, the convention was an abolitionist agreement, and second, the protocol was influenced by countries that wanted to legalise prostitution (and categorise it as work) as an essential step prior to the collection of taxes on the gains of this activity. The protocol also introduced the difference between children and adults as regards trafficking and established the requirement for the victim to prove non-consent for an act to be considered trafficking. The discussion around the protocol was bitter and broke feminism in two worldwide.

In April 2008, Argentina approved and enacted Law 26.364 on the "prevention and punishment of trafficking of persons and assistance to victims",<sup>8</sup> which followed the protocol's definitions. As directed by the law, the government created the Office for the Rescue and Support of Victims of the

1 [contralatrata.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/cartilla-final.pdf](http://contralatrata.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/cartilla-final.pdf)

2 [www.mpf.gov.ar/docs/Links/Ufase/Informe\\_anual\\_2012\\_UFase.pdf](http://www.mpf.gov.ar/docs/Links/Ufase/Informe_anual_2012_UFase.pdf)

3 Ibid.

4 [www.abrepuestas.inecip.org/abrepuestas.php?contenido=noticia\\_detalle&idnoticia=194](http://www.abrepuestas.inecip.org/abrepuestas.php?contenido=noticia_detalle&idnoticia=194)  
[www.fundacionmariadelosangeles.org/images/pdf/la-trata-sexual-en-argentina-aproximaciones-para-un-analisis-de-la-dinamica-del-delito.pdf](http://www.fundacionmariadelosangeles.org/images/pdf/la-trata-sexual-en-argentina-aproximaciones-para-un-analisis-de-la-dinamica-del-delito.pdf)

5 Maltzahn, K. (2006) *Digital dangers: Information and communication technologies and trafficking in women*. [www5.apc.org/es/system/files/digital\\_dangers\\_EN\\_1.pdf](http://www5.apc.org/es/system/files/digital_dangers_EN_1.pdf)

6 [treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg\\_no=VII-11-a&chapter=7&lang=en](http://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=VII-11-a&chapter=7&lang=en)

7 [www.unodc.org/unodc/en/treaties/CTOC/countrylist-traffickingprotocol.html](http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/treaties/CTOC/countrylist-traffickingprotocol.html)

8 [infoleg.mecon.gov.ar/infolegInternet/anexos/205000-209999/206554/norma.htm](http://infoleg.mecon.gov.ar/infolegInternet/anexos/205000-209999/206554/norma.htm)

Crime of Trafficking,<sup>9</sup> which receives anonymous reports of the crime 24/7 by telephone, SMS text messages or email. Article 23 of the law also creates the Synchronized System of Reports on Human Trafficking. In this system, the prosecutor in the public ministry keeps records of phone calls and text messages received for no less than ten years, so that the authorities have a database to help in the investigations.

The law was modified<sup>10</sup> in December 2012, mainly in connection with the extension of penalties and the redefinition of consent, stating that it “does not constitute any grounds for exemption of the responsibility (...) of the creators, participants, collaborators or instigators [of the crime].” The amendment was sent to congress after a court ruling in the case of Marita Verón,<sup>11</sup> who was kidnapped in 2002 in Tucumán, and is still missing. After a trial with copious evidence against the defendants, they were all acquitted, causing outrage and calls for justice. Today the case is emblematic in the fight against the trafficking of women.

In July 2011, the government enacted Presidential Decree 936, which forbids the publication of sexual services advertising, mainly in the print media (newspapers, magazines, etc.). In order to enforce the decree, an Office for the Monitoring of Advertisements and Publications in the Sex Trade<sup>12</sup> was created. This initiative was adopted as a model by 193 UN member countries.

Since the enactment of Law 26.364 in 2008 and until 2013, 4,602 victims were rescued, in around 2,103 anti-crime initiatives.<sup>13</sup> According to Chiarotti, what is still missing is the inclusion of Law 12.331 – an old law on procuring or “pimping” – in the Penal Code: “The system that sustains pimping is the same that facilitates the trafficking of women. This can be seen in the same complicities between police, the judicial system, political actors, etc. One activity is totally accepted as natural and the other, the trafficking, is considered a crime.”

## Yazmin's story

*“I met a man on the internet and he persuaded me to go to live with him since his father was very sick and he needed my support,” she said. As soon as Yazmin went to live with the man, Sergio, his attitude towards her changed. He started mistreating her verbally and raped her. His mother also enslaved her, forcing her to do all sorts of housekeeping chores. Yazmin also had to take care of Sergio’s sick father. The abductor kept threatening Yazmin that he would hurt her family if she ran away. He isolated her, taking away her access to the telephone and internet, and forced Yazmin to tell her family that everything was going fine.*

*After Sergio had raped her many times without using a condom, Yazmin realised that she was pregnant. Sergio did not change his abusive behaviour towards her. He forced her to eat, saying that he needed a healthy child to sell it and that he would get her pregnant again very soon. Finally, he took her to the hospital, as a result of which her family found out about the real situation she was going through and went to see her.*

*Yazmin denounced Sergio, but because the law considered him her husband, the case was characterised as family violence. She could not access the resources available to assist victims in her situation. Justice only provided her with a restraining order.*

*Yazmin is still being threatened by her former abductor, who is now involved in the case of Patricia, a young Colombian woman that he abducted a few years ago.<sup>14</sup>*

## Patricia's story

*Patricia, a 23-year-old Colombian woman, had a small child and was unemployed.<sup>15</sup> She wanted to become an actress. She started to search for work on social networks and spent two years chatting with Sergio, who told Patricia that he worked in one of the main newspapers in Argentina and his brother worked in a big entertainment company in Buenos Aires and would give her a job. Patricia asked for personal data and verified the information on the internet. It was all true.*

*Once she arrived in Argentina with her daughter, Sergio took away her passport and money, beat her up and told her that from that moment on she was his property. Patricia was raped and tortured. Making him believe that she was in love with him,*

9 [www.jus.gob.ar/areas-tematicas/trata-de-personas/oficina-de-rescate-y-acompa%C3%B1amiento.aspx](http://www.jus.gob.ar/areas-tematicas/trata-de-personas/oficina-de-rescate-y-acompa%C3%B1amiento.aspx)

10 [www.mpf.gov.ar/Noticial\\_Detalle.asp?IdNoticia=193&idInstitucion=8](http://www.mpf.gov.ar/Noticial_Detalle.asp?IdNoticia=193&idInstitucion=8)

11 [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marita\\_Veron](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marita_Veron)

12 [prezi.com/embed/j96q9rhcs7qm/?bgcolor=ffffff&lock\\_to\\_path=0&autoplay=0&autohide\\_ctrls=0&features=undefined&disabled\\_features=undefined](http://prezi.com/embed/j96q9rhcs7qm/?bgcolor=ffffff&lock_to_path=0&autoplay=0&autohide_ctrls=0&features=undefined&disabled_features=undefined)

13 [www.fundacionmariadelosangeles.org/micrositios/delito-de-trata-de-personas/zaida-gatti.pdf](http://www.fundacionmariadelosangeles.org/micrositios/delito-de-trata-de-personas/zaida-gatti.pdf)

14 [redrattargentina.blogspot.com.ar/2013/02/esclavitud-del-siglo-xxi-yazmin-otro.html](http://redrattargentina.blogspot.com.ar/2013/02/esclavitud-del-siglo-xxi-yazmin-otro.html)

15 A video about Patricia's case can be seen at: [www.noticiasacarol.com/nacion/video-290602-trata-de-personas-internet-la-esclavitud-del-siglo-xxi](http://www.noticiasacarol.com/nacion/video-290602-trata-de-personas-internet-la-esclavitud-del-siglo-xxi)

she succeeded in sending her daughter back to Colombia. She lived for five months as a servant at her abductor's house and at his family's. She also found out that he trafficked girls and managed a network of brothels.

After Patricia managed to escape, Sergio started posting notices in the streets asking for help to find his "missing wife", so that she could not prove that she had been a slave.

Now NGOs are helping both Yazmin and Patricia seek justice.

According to the National Network to Stop Smuggling, Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents (RATT - Red Nacional Alto al Tráfico, la Trata y la Explotación Sexual Comercial de Niños, Niñas y Adolescentes),<sup>16</sup> these are not isolated cases: "Most cases remain unknown, because rescued women escape or do not want to make a complaint for fear of retaliation."

These cases also highlight the most extensively used method of capture: deception.<sup>17</sup> There are different ways used to deceive. One of them is deception through electronic media, used mainly against women from middle social classes who meet traffickers through social networks, email, online chatting or mobile phone. Traffickers build a relationship of trust online and convince the victims to leave their homes, families or even their country. This method is frequently used with teenagers, who find in these relationships the possibility to escape from family problems.<sup>18</sup>

The other method is the offer of a fake job. Taking advantage of social, gender and economic inequalities, traffickers offer attractive jobs, usually in other cities or countries, and promise salaries that exceed the average. The offer could be published in a newspaper, on the internet or in a public space, but it could also be shared by a person known by the victim.

In both cases described above, the perpetrator's strategies involved ICTs, mainly video chat. There is, however, a lack of information about how perpetrators select their victims. Social networking sites, chat rooms and blogs can work as great sources of information on potential victims, and anonymity and false identities facilitate the perpetration of the crime.<sup>19</sup> Lack of information, little awareness and the absence of resources leave women more exposed to these dangers.

According to the handbook *The crime of human trafficking: A guide for journalists*,<sup>20</sup> in those cases for which information could be gathered, recruitment takes place mostly face to face. "The proportion of cases in which other forms such as chat, internet, SMS or telephone are used is insignificant."<sup>21</sup>

However, many cases could exist where the role of ICTs has not been properly recorded, remaining invisible to statistical monitoring. The fact that most of the victims were not previously familiar with their abductors can lead us to suppose that some interaction prior to the abductions must have taken place, probably by means of some sort of technology. Secondly, the alarmingly high percentage of cases in which "no data" is available on the method of recruitment (45%)<sup>22</sup> leads us to suppose that some data collection gap is hiding crucial analytical information.

As mentioned, what the data does suggest is that among women over 18, middle-class women are the main targets for recruitment using ICTs. But girls and boys under 18 also represent an important target group for recruitment using ICTs.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, among trafficking survivors, there is very little data on girls and boys under 18, although it is known that many children are missing at the hands of trafficking networks.

The handbook suggests that measures should be taken to make children and adolescents aware of the implications of sharing pictures and videos in online spaces.<sup>24</sup> But an excessively protectionist approach to online spaces could favour the violation of other rights, such as freedom of expression and access to information, and enable censorship, affecting adolescents' and women's communication and information rights.

## Conclusions

*Lack of access to justice for women:* The cases analysed suggest that beyond the existing legal tools to help victims of certain crimes, there are groups that still experience serious difficulties in accessing justice – and this is particularly true for women in a situation of vulnerability. The main factors that lead them to being excluded from justice are a lack of economic and social resources.

16 [www.rattmercosur.net/ingles/main.html](http://www.rattmercosur.net/ingles/main.html)

17 "Handbook against human trafficking", developed by the organisation Sin Cautivas (No Captives) in Neuquen, Argentina. [contralatrata.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/cartilla-final.pdf](http://contralatrata.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/cartilla-final.pdf)

18 Ibid.

19 [www.fundacionmariadelosangeles.org/trata-de-personas.htm](http://www.fundacionmariadelosangeles.org/trata-de-personas.htm)

20 [www.memoriaenmovimiento.gov.ar/images/Trata/cuadernillofinal.pdf](http://www.memoriaenmovimiento.gov.ar/images/Trata/cuadernillofinal.pdf)

21 [www.fundacionmariadelosangeles.org/micrositios/delito-de-trata-de-personas/cuadernillo\\_trata\\_FINAL\\_web.pdf](http://www.fundacionmariadelosangeles.org/micrositios/delito-de-trata-de-personas/cuadernillo_trata_FINAL_web.pdf)

22 [www.mpf.gov.ar/docs/Links/Ufase/Informe\\_anual\\_2012\\_UFASE.pdf](http://www.mpf.gov.ar/docs/Links/Ufase/Informe_anual_2012_UFASE.pdf)

23 [contralatrata.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/cartilla-final.pdf](http://contralatrata.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/cartilla-final.pdf)

24 [www.memoriaenmovimiento.gov.ar/images/Trata/cuadernillofinal.pdf](http://www.memoriaenmovimiento.gov.ar/images/Trata/cuadernillofinal.pdf)

*Role of ICTs in the trafficking of women and girls:* In the cases analysed, the most notable role played by ICTs is in the deception and recruitment phases. The abductor managed to maintain quite longstanding virtual relationships with his victims (with many of them at the same time), and the video chat might have played a key part in this, since image and sound allow a deeper involvement and generate a greater sensation of familiarity and trust than other tools.

*Every law has a loophole:* There is significant difficulty in identifying the *modus operandi* through which young boys and girls are abducted using ICTs. Experts suspect that trafficking networks might have adapted their procedures after the modification of Law 26.364 in 2012, working with the blind spot in the registration of cases.<sup>25</sup>

*Lack of information and specialised mechanisms for measurement:* There are no specialised indicators that allow us to understand the extent and the ways in which ICTs are being used to recruit victims.

*Women and girls' online safety:* Women and girls inhabiting online spaces do not always have the necessary tools to navigate these spaces safely, being exposed to many situations that could be harmful or violent. But even if this implies vulnerability, extreme protectionist approaches should be avoided in order not to endanger the privacy and communication rights of women and girls.

*Evidence building:* Increasing the level of awareness among women and girls about the importance of keeping track of evidence (and how to do this) will help them secure redress and will create awareness for others about these mechanisms.

## Action steps

- There is a huge need to achieve better knowledge of trafficked women's experiences and to identify the role of ICTs in the process in more depth. Special research should be developed to investigate the role that technology plays in the phase between the identification of the victim and the abduction.

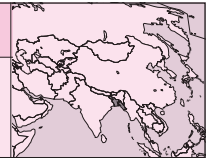
- There is a need to work on building women's capacity when it comes to online safety and to build evidence regarding trafficking of women as an extreme form of violence against women (VAW). It is particularly important to understand how to proceed when a woman is going through a trafficking-related situation, especially involving online environments.
- According to the 2012 annual report by the Specialised Office for Investigation of Kidnapping and Trafficking in Persons (UFASE), information dissemination and training targeting girls and boys in secondary school should be reinforced. And we add: This should be done in association with women's rights organisations specialised in human trafficking.<sup>26</sup>
- ICTs and women's rights advocates should review how existing national laws and international protocols address trafficking and the technology related to VAW implicated in the crime, so that they can define the gaps and propose alternatives.
- There is a need to monitor the treatment of the subject of trafficking in the mass media and denounce (creatively and engaging different sectors) cultural products that promote VAW.
- Besides the government's regulation of print advertising for the sex trade, mechanisms to warn against dangerous sites on the internet could be created, within a framework that is respectful of the right to freedom of expression. ■

25 [www.memoriaenmovimiento.gov.ar/images/Trata/cuadernillofinal.pdf](http://www.memoriaenmovimiento.gov.ar/images/Trata/cuadernillofinal.pdf)

26 [www.mpf.gov.ar/docs/Links/Ufase/Informe\\_anual\\_2012\\_UFase.pdf](http://www.mpf.gov.ar/docs/Links/Ufase/Informe_anual_2012_UFase.pdf)

# BANGLADESH

## Women's rights, gender and ICTs in Bangladesh



### Bytes for All Bangladesh

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### Introduction

Bangladesh has witnessed a tremendous growth in mobile and internet connectivity in the last few years. Today it has more than 100 million mobile phone subscribers and more than 33 million internet users.<sup>1</sup> An estimated 95% of users connect to the internet through mobile phones and the rest use broadband internet from different internet service providers.<sup>2</sup> However, the total number of desktop users is likely bigger, as a single connection is used by many people.

These data do not classify usage information, for instance, according to nature of usage or gender-based participation in online activities. But it is clear that the growth of internet penetration has expanded social media access and usage in the country. There are about 3.8 million Facebook users from Bangladesh, out of which close to one million are female users.<sup>3</sup> There is no way of knowing how many of these Facebook accounts have been set up using fake IDs. Dutch Bangla Bank Limited reported that at least 15% of their mobile banking users are female, while according to data from oDesk on freelance IT professionals, as of the fourth quarter of 2012, 1,200 of 30,000 registered users were female.

G&R Ad Network<sup>4</sup> conducted an interesting research study into how users within the country and abroad browse the web. Users tend to access the web on three separate occasions throughout the day, with usage peaking during the morning hours. Usage of social networks and email services account for a considerable portion of web activity, followed by web browsing.

### Policy and political background

Violence, harassment and infringement of privacy were ongoing problems in society, but the advent of technologies has made them more penetrating and difficult to stop. Even though Article 43 of the Bangladesh constitution states, "Every citizen shall have the right, subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interests of the security of the State, public order, public morality or public health, to be secured in his home against entry, search and seizure; and to the privacy of his correspondence and other means of communication," there is no comprehensive policy to protect privacy in Bangladesh.

In 2009, a revision of the ICT Policy, designed primarily to support ICT development in the country, focused on gender as a cross-cutting theme for a number of areas. In order to create social equity, it promotes "mainstreaming social advancement opportunities for disadvantaged groups as an immediate priority to minimize economic disparity and bridge the digital divide for (a) lower income groups, (b) ethnic minorities, (c) women, and (d) persons with disabilities and special needs." It also refers to establishing women's e-commerce centres to expand market access in order to promote women-led micro-enterprises. Action items 174 and 175 of the revised ICT policy suggest that the government should work to increase enrolment of female students in ICT courses and foster a gradual increase of the female workforce in the ICT industry.

The ICT Act of 2006 is probably the first comprehensive legislation to deal with online harassment, cyber stalking, etc. and provides a framework to define and penalise these crimes. Article 54 of the act defines a range of cyber crime offences, including the downloading, copying or extraction, without the permission of the owner, of any data, computer database or information from a computer, computer system or computer network, including information or data held or stored in any removable storage medium; and generating or causing the generation of spam or sending unwanted email without the permission of the sender or receiver for the purpose of advertising goods or services.

Article 57 of the act refers to the penalty for publishing false, obscene or defamatory information in electronic form:

1 Bangladesh Telecom Regulatory Commission (BTRC) [www.btrc.gov.bd](http://www.btrc.gov.bd)

2 [www.theindependentbd.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=171715:33-million-internet-users-in-bangladesh&catid=132: backpage&Itemid=122](http://www.theindependentbd.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=171715:33-million-internet-users-in-bangladesh&catid=132: backpage&Itemid=122)

3 [www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm](http://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm) and [www.btrc.gov.bd](http://www.btrc.gov.bd)

4 [foursquare.com/v/gr-ad-network/4d3e932ffb4c548167f9e614](http://foursquare.com/v/gr-ad-network/4d3e932ffb4c548167f9e614)



(1) If any person deliberately publishes or transmits or causes to be published or transmitted in the website or in electronic form any material which is fake and obscene or its effect is such as to tend to deprave and corrupt persons who are likely, having regard to all relevant circumstances, to read, see or hear the matter contained or embodied in it, or causes to deteriorate or creates possibility to deteriorate law and order, prejudice the image of the State or person or causes to hurt or may hurt religious belief or instigate against any person or organization, then this activity will be regarded as an offence.

(2) Whoever commits offence under sub-section (1) of this section shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to ten years and with a fine which may extend to Taka one crore (USD 1.3 million approximately).

Section 68 of the ICT Act 2006 also states that the government must establish one or more cyber tribunals to ensure the speedy and effective disposal of cases under the act, that the tribunal should try only the offences under the act, and that the government can determine the local jurisdiction of the tribunal.<sup>5</sup>

The Pornography Control Act of 2012<sup>6</sup> bans the production, transportation and marketing of any kind of pornographic material. It establishes that if a person produces pornography using a child, and prints, distributes and publishes such material, or sells, supplies or exhibits child pornography, he/she will be punished with up to 10 years of rigorous imprisonment and a fine of up to BDT 500,000 (USD 6,500). The law also provides for seven years of rigorous imprisonment and a fine of up to BDT 200,000 (USD 3,000) for producing any pornography or forcing or luring any man, woman or child into joining pornography and taking pictures, video or film with or without their knowledge.<sup>7</sup>

The cabinet has recently approved a draft amendment to the Information and Communication Technology Ordinance which increases the punishment for any violation of the law to 14 years of imprisonment. This proposed amendment will now consider destroying information with malicious intent, transfer of data without proper authority, hacking, and the release of vulgar and defaming information in the electronic media as offences under this law.

## Analysis

There are numerous stories and incidents of on-line harassment and privacy and security breaches where women are primarily the main victims. Many of these stories are documented in Bangladesh news media but many remain unreported, mostly due to social stigma, exclusion and other forms of social harassment. In February 2013, when the government of Bangladesh established a fast-track court to deal with cyber crimes, Rahman Khan, an assistant director of the Bangladesh Telecom Regulatory Commission (BTRC), told AFP, “We are receiving a growing number of complaints about abuse and harassment using fake Facebook IDs, doctoring photos, filming porno footage with mobile phones and posting them on websites, and hacking of websites.” The BTRC set up a taskforce to deal with cyber crimes last year and it was “overwhelmed with thousands of complaints,” he added.<sup>8</sup>

Here we present some sample stories of gender based online violence and harassments. Although the names of the victims have been changed to protect their identity, these stories are true, collected from several sources.<sup>9</sup>

Shumona Sharmin was forced to close a Facebook account that she had been using after she found a number of indecent messages personally addressed to her on her wall. She had no other option but to close the account.

Another female Facebook user, Irene Akhter, married her classmate after a long affair. Soon after their marriage, they became estranged. Her husband, a vindictive man, posted indecent pictures of her on the internet in retaliation. After the incident, she suffered a mental collapse. Having being rejected by her own family, Irene now lives alone.

Nasrin Akhter is a garment worker. She had developed an affair with a young man who raped her one day, taking advantage of their relationship. She was not aware that the rape incident was taped. The rapist then distributed it among his friends and acquaintances, causing great humiliation to her and her family.

Mrs. Huq received a missed call from an unknown person. She called back to tell the caller that it was not the mobile phone of the person he was trying to reach. In spite of this, the caller continued to bother her with missed calls. Mrs. Huq’s daughter blacklisted the number for her, but the unknown

5 [www.icnl.org/research/library/files/Bangladesh/comm2006.pdf](http://www.icnl.org/research/library/files/Bangladesh/comm2006.pdf)

6 [phys.org/news/2013-02-bangladesh-tribunal-cyber-criminals.html#jCp](http://phys.org/news/2013-02-bangladesh-tribunal-cyber-criminals.html#jCp)

7 [phys.org/news/2013-02-bangladesh-tribunal-cyber-criminals.html#jCp](http://phys.org/news/2013-02-bangladesh-tribunal-cyber-criminals.html#jCp)

8 [www.bangkokpost.com/tech/computer/334858/bangladesh-forms-tribunal-to-try-cyber-criminals](http://www.bangkokpost.com/tech/computer/334858/bangladesh-forms-tribunal-to-try-cyber-criminals)

9 [www.newsnetwork-bd.org/cyber-crimes-up-against-women-in-bangladesh](http://www.newsnetwork-bd.org/cyber-crimes-up-against-women-in-bangladesh)



caller kept on calling from different numbers, causing her emotional upset.

Aruny trusted her boyfriend enough to speak freely with him about romance, love and sex. As a result, Aruny paid a high price for her frankness. Her boyfriend recorded their intimate conversations on his phone and passed them on to her family through a friend when she refused to marry him.

Salma met Shafik while visiting a festival. They exchanged phone numbers and developed a relationship by mobile phone, which later turned into their marriage. Shafik took Salma to the house of his friend in a ploy to traffic her out of the country. She, however, managed to go to the police station with the help of the locals. Following the incident, Salma's family and society rejected her. She has taken shelter at the Center for Women and Children Studies at Dhaka University.

## Conclusions

Civil society organisations need to organise advocacy and campaigns around two issues. One of these is the right to privacy, which needs to be bolstered with the formation of an independent commission on privacy rights, an amendment of the 2006 ICT Act, and awareness building on the right to information (RTI) and freedom of expression legislation in Bangladesh. On the other hand, we need to be vigilant so that government institutions cannot infringe on the rights to privacy or security of ordinary citizens and do not use legislative tools to silence dissident voices. This is a delicate balancing act, but civil society needs to be always alert.

Recently, the government of Bangladesh amended the 2006 ICT Act by broadening the definition of cyber crime, as well as establishing tougher punitive measures for cyber crime offences, allowing police to arrest suspects without a warrant, and making cyber crime a non-bailable offence. In a country like Bangladesh, where corruption is rampant, this can very easily become a tool for extortion by different authorities.

Some have pointed out that many cyber crimes or digital crimes do not fall under the purview of this law. For instance, it does not address any crimes committed through mobile phones, although many social scientists and rights activists have long been arguing that mobile phones are frequently used for preliminary introduction, to communicate threats, to take obscene pictures for blackmailing, and to provide false information for the purposes of fraud, among other offences. Moreover, this law considers emails as evidence, conflicting with the country's Evidence Act, which does not. As Mustafa Jabbar,

president of Bangladesh Computer Samity, has stressed, "Even the amendments did not address these issues." The ICT capacity of the law enforcement agencies is also in question, as the country still lacks a well-equipped IT forensic lab.

## Actions steps

In order to facilitate this research project, Bytesforall Bangladesh together with CNews Magazine,<sup>10</sup> Bangladesh Computer Samity<sup>11</sup> and the Bangladesh Open Source Network (BDOSN)<sup>12</sup> organised a roundtable on 12 June 2013 in Dhaka to collect feedback from online or gender rights activists, ICT professionals, social science researchers and journalists. That roundtable provided us with insight and a list of real-life experiences and action items.

Everyone agreed that there has been an increase in cyber crimes targeted towards women, but no centralised and organised database is available to estimate the trend or impact of these crimes. In an interview with the media, Salma Ali, executive director of the National Women Lawyers Association, recognised the lack of exact data on people who commit suicide after falling victim to cyber crimes.<sup>13</sup> Therefore there was a suggestion that an open, online database be created where such information could be entered on an ongoing basis, either by the victims directly (maintaining anonymity if necessary) or by the relevant stakeholders.

Many of these incidents of harassment occur at educational institutions, but female students are often unaware of their rights and the actions they can take. There was a suggestion that educational institutions provide such information on a mandatory basis through their websites and update it regularly.

There was also a recommendation that the 2006 ICT Act should be updated or separate legislation should be created from a gender perspective, taking into account issues such as privacy infringement, online harassment and security issues involving women, as they are the main victims or most vulnerable to such crimes and often they cannot come out publicly due to social stigma and other forms of social exclusion.

It is also important to develop the capacity of law enforcement agencies to ensure that they are aware of the necessary legal provisions to deal with such issues. There is a cyber crime desk in each police station of Dhaka city, but hardly any cases are filed as per the cyber crimes laws in Bangladesh. ■

<sup>10</sup> [www.cnewsvoice.com/pdfnews.php](http://www.cnewsvoice.com/pdfnews.php)

<sup>11</sup> [www.bcs.org.bd](http://www.bcs.org.bd)

<sup>12</sup> [bdosn.org](http://bdosn.org)

<sup>13</sup> [thenewnationbd.com/newsdetails.aspx?newsid=40262](http://thenewnationbd.com/newsdetails.aspx?newsid=40262)

# BOLIVIA

## Preventing digital violence in schools



### REDES Foundation

José Eduardo Rojas

[www.fundacionredes.org](http://www.fundacionredes.org)

### Introduction

Between 20 September and 15 November 2012, a total of 1,121 students from nine schools were trained in 40 workshops on the prevention of digital violence. The workshops were held in the municipalities of Cercado, Tiquipaya and Colcapirhua in the department of Cochabamba. The content was developed by experts in internet governance from the REDES Foundation, who were inspired by the importance of educating new generations in the overall uses of the internet, in order for them to exercise their human rights as well as reduce risk behaviours online.

In order to carry out the workshops, it was important to develop an introductory methodology for schools that do not have experience, policies or activities to prevent or deal with crimes on the net. Diagnostic visits showed that schools lack adequate technology, infrastructure and connectivity, which greatly hampers learning processes using the internet. Overall, teachers under the age of 30 show greater interest towards this subject; on the other hand, parents have shown a great disregard and ignorance about the risks and vulnerability of their children online. We used online educational video games with free software,<sup>1</sup> using a mobile connection from the REDES Foundation.

### Cyber crime and digital violence common in Bolivia

The REDES Foundation is now opening up a new field for work and research, which we are certain is of interest to Bolivia and Latin America. There is a fine line between computer crimes related to legal concepts which are formally criminalised in domestic law, and “digital violence” which is not recognised or penalised, but is affecting many people.

Bolivia does not have a specific legal framework to criminalise and punish cyber crimes. Moreover,

there is no institutional capacity to deal with them, because in late 2008 the Special Force Against Crime shut down the Computer Crimes Division. There is a lack of specialised judges and trained personnel in the judicial system. Moreover, in the public sector, there is also a lack of trained personnel in the Office of the Ombudsman for Children and Adolescents, the Family Protection Brigades and the Municipal Comprehensive Services. Overall, there is a complete lack of knowledge among Bolivian schools, teachers, parents and students on how to deal with different forms of digital violence.

The core of the problem is that, whether we see it as a crime (in legal terms) or as digital violence (in social terms), we are dealing with the violation of human rights of various groups of the Bolivian population, particularly women, girls, boys, teenagers, young and sexually diverse populations.

Since 2010 the REDES Foundation has raised the awareness of the Bolivian public, denouncing the offences being committed against students over the internet and other internet-related problems, such as phishing, hacking, pornography, child pornography, lolicon<sup>2</sup> and shotacon,<sup>3</sup> sexting, grooming, the trafficking of personal images, internet addiction and plagiarism, among others.<sup>4</sup>

During the 2012 workshops, we noted that the online rights violations occurred because people engaged in the following “digital risk behaviours”: a) placing a positive value on having large numbers of contacts on social networks, even if they are strangers; b) considering the mobile phone as an effective device to control people (family members, partners, employees), to the point that it is being used for harassment and dependency through SMS and calling; c) considering the searching of personal account information, emails and social network activity as a common practice; d) having a self-perception of utter vulnerability to harassment and anonymous messaging (“can’t do anything about it”); e) exposure to violent video games and interactive digital content; f) tagging and indiscriminate use of the images on other peoples’ social networks

<sup>2</sup> [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lolicon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lolicon)

<sup>3</sup> [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shotacon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shotacon)

<sup>4</sup> [www.enredomino.fundacionredes.org](http://www.enredomino.fundacionredes.org)

<sup>1</sup> [www.cuidatuimagenonline.com](http://www.cuidatuimagenonline.com)

and the internet; g) free access to porn in public internet cafés as well as easy access to “parental advisory” content through indiscriminate access to pirate DVDs; h) the social perception of internet addiction as something positive due to the high internet service costs in Bolivia.

## Highlights

Research by the REDES Foundation demonstrates that a great majority of teenagers and youth in social networks expose themselves to the violation of their human rights. In May 2012 there were 966,560 teenagers and youth in Bolivia, between the ages of 13 and 24, with personal accounts on the social network Facebook, making them potential victims of digital violence and cyber crimes.

A study by the REDES Foundation with 700 students in 2010 showed that there is a high rate of exposure of new generations to violence through the internet and mobile phones. In the city of La Paz:

- Ten out of ten students do not know there are ways to find specialised information quickly and effectively on the internet.
- Seven out of ten students divert from their search when pop-ups or hyperlinks emerge.
- Seven out of ten students accept unknown contacts in social networks and display themselves over the webcam or exchange photographs.
- Three out of ten then go on to engage with these previously unknown individuals in casual encounters (frequently sexual).
- They have no references for finding information about how to exercise their own human rights.
- The direct relationship between the use of the mobile phone and the exercise of their human rights is unknown.

The 2012 research, which included data collection from 1,121 adolescents, also revealed that:

- Ten out of ten teenagers watched school fights filmed by Bolivian students on their mobile phones and/or over the internet.
- Ten out of ten students received frequently false and fraudulent messages (phishing) on their phones, including false awards which turned out to be related to cases of deceptive recruitment of people for human trafficking and/or sexual violence.
- Ten out of ten know a student whose email account or game account has been hacked.

- Four out of ten students acknowledge they have lost access to their accounts due to the use of public internet cafés. (Subsequently, research has shown that internet café managers use software to spy on the internet browsing of women and girls.)
- Ten out of ten students go online at public internet cafés, despite having internet access in their own homes or the homes of relatives and friends. Internet cafés are social spaces.
- All internet cafés lack the necessary security measures to protect children and adolescent users.

## In addition, regarding the educational institutions, we found that:

- The educational community is not prepared to address the issue of digital violence in their schools.
- Parents, teachers and educational authorities fear technology, and feel protected by the myth that their children and students have a better understanding of technology than they do.
- Adolescents do not in fact have a deeper understanding of technology; they only know how to use commercial applications which in fact expose them to risks and cyber crime.
- There are a series of daily internet practices that violate the rights of girls and young women, including misogyny online, digital sexual violence, sexism and patriarchy online, homophobia, racism and xenophobia.

## Final considerations

Our country has no specific legislation on cyber crime, and there are no conceptual or methodological frameworks that facilitate a comprehensive approach to the social effects of internet and mobile device use on new generations. It is also important to stress the particular vulnerability of girls and women in the Bolivian digital culture.

The REDES Foundation (based in La Paz) and CREPUM Foundation (in Cochabamba) are working on the definition of digital violence, generating new findings about a new crime: digital sexual violence. Research on this subject is an unprecedented contribution to Bolivia and Latin America.

The research aims at educating new generations in general, and women in particular, to configure their control over their privacy in all email, social network, gaming and personal and public user accounts, including mobile phone applications.

Due to the popularity and widespread use of social networking and gaming, many children and adolescents provide their personal information without knowing that all the information they share is visible by anyone worldwide. According to Miriam Rojas, an expert on the treatment of digital violence disorders and a psychologist at the CREPUM Foundation: “There is a marked tendency to make personal information public online among teenagers, due to the logic behind consumption and fashion. Teenagers imitate the images they see over the internet, showing themselves as movie stars, rock stars, celebrities and top models, assuming their bodies and images are products for the market, and disregarding the fact that they are engaging in potential risk behaviour.”

### Action steps

Digital risk behaviours include the series of actions in which people overexpose their personal and private information over the internet. This behaviour is based on a false sense of trust or on a perceived need to access the various services available over the internet (such as games, social networks, websites and applications). In order to access these services, whether through computers, tablets, mobile phones, or most recently, digital TV, people feel obliged to give away their information.

Bolivian families have a high acceptance and positive perception of internet cafés and telecentres as leisure and recreation centres. This perception has a serious effect on people’s online behaviour, whether at public internet access points, at home or at school, and the way they socialise. This effect is mainly due to overexposure to harmful content over the web – and it is this exposure which needs to be urgently addressed. ■

# BRAZIL

## ICTs and black women's empowerment: Unmasking domination in several layers



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### Introduction

In the Yoruba<sup>1</sup> language, *Yalodê* is the word used to refer to women who represent and speak in the name of other women, who emerge as political leaders and agents of transformation, who are emblematic in the development of their community, in the defence of rights, in the maintenance of cultural and religious traditions, and in challenging the status quo by fighting against the stratified powers of the dominant order – male-centred, Euro-centred, based on the capitalist exploitation of peoples and nature.<sup>2</sup> This was the word chosen to give a local name to the Women-gov project<sup>3</sup> in Brazil, so it can be instantly understood and easily pronounced by its participants and their communities. The *Yalodê* is a warrior, and anyone can immediately associate the concept to the group of women who are engaged in this initiative: strong, determined, prepared women, ready to raise questions, point out concerns, propose alternatives, lead processes, and commit to the urgently needed changes in our societies.

The primary question that the Women-gov project addresses is: How can digital technologies be suitably employed to create participatory governance models that enable socially and economically marginalised women in local contexts to gain centre stage? To this end, the partnering organisations are working in each place with women's collectives/organisations at the grassroots level, exploring the possibilities offered by digital technologies to

facilitate women's political mobilisation, their active engagement with governance structures, and their collective articulation and negotiation of interests. In Brazil, Nupef is working with the non-governmental organisation Criola<sup>4</sup> in the implementation of the Yalodês project. The Yalodês are a group of women leaders from different communities of Rio de Janeiro and other municipalities in the Baixada Fluminense<sup>5</sup> region of Brazil, who have been participating in Criola's initiatives for the strengthening of capacities and political articulation.

At the very first meeting between the Nupef team and participants in the Yalodês project, it became clear that a lot of attention should be paid to language when working with this group: we were questioned/corrected twice during the meeting due to words that were used. When explaining the objectives of the project, talking about the strengthening of women's political participation and increasing poor and marginalised women's influence over the wider decision-making processes which affect their lives, we were questioned: "Why marginalised?" A bit later, when discussing how the strategic use of ICTs may enhance the informational, associational and communicative power of women's collectives, we were (correctly) reminded: "Here, you're talking to *black women collectives*."

Language, besides being deeply linked with identity, can be a powerful means of exercising social control. It can give people a strong sense of belonging or of being excluded. This is brilliantly put in Jurema Werneck's<sup>6</sup> article "De Ialodês e Feministas", where she affirms that "the capacity of giving names to things refers to a situation of power. So, it's about the possibility of ordering the world according to one's own, singular basis, be it from individual perspectives or from the perspective of collectives, of entire populations. It is thus

1 An African language which is an important part of the origins of Brazilian culture.

2 For a deeper analysis of the concept and history of the *Yalodê*, see: Werneck, J. (2005) De Ialodês e Feministas - Reflexões sobre a ação política das mulheres negras na América Latina e Caribe, *Nouvelles Questions Feministes - Revue Internationale Francophone*, 24(2).

3 Women-gov is a feminist action-research project 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 partnering organisations are IT for Change in India, Instituto Nupef in Brazil and the New Women's Movement in South Africa. [www.gender-is-citizenship.net/women-and-governance](http://www.gender-is-citizenship.net/women-and-governance)

4 Criola is an NGO founded and run by black women. Its mission is "to empower black women, adolescents and girls to stand up against racism, sexism and lesbophobia, and to undertake actions aimed at the improvement of the living conditions of the black population."

5 [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baixada\\_Fluminense](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baixada_Fluminense)

6 Jurema Werneck is one of the founders and coordinators of Criola, the NGO which is Nupef's partner in the Women-gov project in Brazil.



a position of privilege.”<sup>7</sup> It became clear to us from the very beginning of this project that language, the power of words, and the strength of these women’s voices would be one of the pillars of this collective construction.

The Afro-Brazilian identity is fundamental in this project. The need to differentiate feminism from black feminism has emerged from our observation and praxis – and is one of the most important learnings for our research team. Black feminist movements have been stressing for years that patriarchy and sexism cannot be dissociated from class oppression, capitalism, colonialism and racism – if diversity and inequality are not addressed in feminist political action, there is a risk that feminism itself might fall into the trap of repeating the homogenising, reductionist approaches that deepen invisibilities. It is important not to forget that hegemonic consensus are intimately bound to silence, to the disregard of differences, to the masking of conflicts.

It is in this scenario that the concept of the Yalodê emerges.

### Yalodês, voice and action

According to Werneck, “The leadership and responsibility of women in dealing with transcendental religious issues, and cultural and political issues, is a very old reality that precedes the history of colonialism in Africa.” Among the several possible manifestations of the exercise of women’s political leadership is the *lalodê* (the Brazilian word for the term *ìyálòdè* in the Yoruba language). Werneck points out that the *lalodês* have been “confronting the notions of centre and periphery” for centuries – through promoting and being part of “initiatives that have in common the recognition of women’s leadership, women’s presence in public activities, as well as the political role of women.” She explains:

lalodê also refers to the woman who represents women, some kinds of emblematic women, the one who speaks on behalf of others and participates in the spaces of power. [...] The ialodês, on the other hand, have been affirming their presence and relevance in the 21st century through bodily and oral narratives, transmitted from mouth to ears, to attentive eyes, in the different spaces where the tradition is inherited and actualised. In the Brazilian case, this is seen in any black community, where women, undertaking

roles of leadership or collective responsibility, develop actions of affirmation of a future for all of the subordinated group. This happens through the struggles for improvements in the material conditions of life, as well as in the development of behaviours and activities that aim to affirm the pertinence and actuality of immaterial life. Thus, not only in the Afro-Brazilian religious communities, where they have a fundamental role in the propagation of *axé*,<sup>8</sup> but also outside sacred spaces, the ialodê is actualised, necessary and celebrated.<sup>9</sup>

In this context we understood that the most pressing need in terms of empowering and enhancing black women’s collective participation in local governance is to strengthen and amplify these women’s voices, especially aiming for greater recognition of these leaders as legitimate political actors, improving the quality of their impact on local governance structures and processes. Here, the amplification of voices must be understood in two ways: first, as the re-signification and affirmation of the black women’s voice and place in the local institutional ecosystem, which we may help to achieve by supporting them in different practices for discursive and symbolic production. The affirmation of their voices affects the way the Yalodês understand and situate themselves in democratic processes, helping to establish more articulate and sustainable dialogues with state and non-state actors involved in governance processes.

Secondly, this amplification can be understood in a more concrete way: as the amplification of the reach of these voices, by having them heard in a wider spectrum of political spaces, through processes that involve identity and difference, or what Lister refers to as “a politics of recognition and respect”.<sup>10</sup> As Gaventa and Jones observe, “Citizens’ voices derived from identities that are not recognised, nor indeed respected, are not likely to be heard.”<sup>11</sup> Among the Yalodês there is consensus about the need for more symmetry in their relations with the local powers – even in spaces that were conceived to be “participatory”, where more deliberative and inclusionary forms of policy making and

7 Werneck (2005) Op. cit. The references to Jurema’s work in this report are freely translated from Portuguese by Graciela Selaimen. Please note also that Jurema uses the spelling “lalodê” instead of “Yalodê”, which is why both versions are used in this report.

8 “Axé means strength, in an existential sense. This means that axé is the basis of existence, what puts it in movement. Axé may also be understood as the power of engendering and realisation. Without axé, existence would not exist.”

9 Werneck (2005) Op. cit.

10 Lister, R. (2002) A politics of recognition and respect: Involving people with experience of poverty in decision making that affects their lives, *Social Policy and Society*, 1(1), p. 37-46.

11 Gaventa, J. and Jones, E. (2002) *Concepts of Citizenship: A Review*, IDS, Brighton UK.



democratic governance are supposed to take place. Our hypothesis is that the empowerment of their voices makes it easier to establish the institutional linkages necessary to guarantee their rights and entitlements, grounded “in a conception of rights which, in a development context, strengthens the status of citizens from that of beneficiaries of development to its rightful and legitimate claimants.”<sup>12</sup>

## Spaces for participation

Among the wider community of women who responded to the project’s initial survey,<sup>13</sup> it is evident that a huge gap exists between their recognition of their rights (including the right to assembly and participation) and the actualisation of practices for the affirmation and defence of those rights. Although the huge majority think that women should participate in community decision-making processes (98.2% of respondents affirmed this), their practice of participation is still very much linked to supporting political parties and candidates during election campaigns. This participation is mostly informed by husbands or family members (40.0%) or depends on the information given by neighbours and friends (46.7%). In this sense, the role of the Yalodês is significant in terms of the possibility of altering structures of power so that information flows towards and from the periphery, in building a “new geography”. In the words of Aminata Diaw, “The transition to democracy is a narrative of the exclusion of women. What is needed is a new geography to give women space. This new space which women seek is one where there is negotiation between those with power and those without.”<sup>14</sup>

For this negotiation, an empowered, consistent voice, able to reaffirm black women’s identity and assure its inclusion in a multiplicity of spaces, is crucial. This means not only occupying existing spaces within the present architecture of power and governance, but also creating spaces for articulating new, more inclusive meanings. The survey results show us that this is a most pressing need, as in the communities visited, political spaces exclusively for women are non-existent and/or widely unknown by the population: 40.8% of the respondents said that there are no spaces for the defence of

women’s rights in their community, and 28.6% said that they do not know of any. When it comes to the affirmation and defence of women’s rights, the most frequently mentioned spaces are local residents’ associations (44.7%) and religious groups (24.5%) – which are the spaces where most of the Yalodês carry out their work.

The approach taken by Cornwall<sup>15</sup> in her examination of the kinds of “spaces” in which participation may occur focuses on the need to understand these spaces in the contexts in which they are created. In particular, as Gaventa notes:

[Cornwall] argues for distinguishing, amongst other factors, between “invited spaces” created from above through donor or governmental intervention, and spaces which are chosen, taken and demanded through collective action from below. Whatever their origins, however, no new spaces for participation are neutral, but are shaped by the power relations which both permeate and surround them. While attention has been paid to what spaces and mechanisms exist for public participation, more attention, she argues, must be paid to who is creating these spaces and why, who fills them, and how the new spaces carry within them “tracks and traces” of previous social relationships, resources and knowledge. What prevents long-established patterns of power from being reproduced? Who speaks, for whom, and who is heard?<sup>16</sup>

The reflection on spaces of political participation must be contextualised within the political traditions of each place – by which the concept of “participation” has multiple nuances and meanings. In Brazil, new social policy models were initiated with the promulgation of the 1988 constitution, which has created spaces for direct civil society-state interaction in the form of local councils and public hearings. “Local councils serve as spaces for deliberation and debate in the design and monitoring of social services. In the area of health alone, there are more than 5,000 health councils, almost one for each of 5,507 municipalities, providing a large-scale case study of attempts to institutionalise direct forms of citizen participation.”<sup>17</sup> It is clear for many authors researching the functioning of

12 Cornwall, A. (2000), cited in Gaventa and Jones (2002) Op. cit.

13 This survey was answered by 152 women from four different sites: one *favela* in Rio de Janeiro and three communities from the periphery of the Baixada Fluminense municipalities. The participation of these women in the survey was facilitated by the Yalodês, who invited and mobilised women to come to their centres or, in some situations, took the research team to the women’s houses. The survey was conducted in July 2012.

14 Cited in Taylor, V. (2000) *Marketisation of Governance: Critical Feminist Perspectives from the South*, SADEP/DAWN.

15 Cornwall, A., Gideon, J. and Wilson, K. (2008) Introduction: Reclaiming Feminism: Gender and Neoliberalism, *IDS Bulletin*, 39, p. 1-9.

16 Gaventa, J. (2006) Finding the Spaces for Change: A Power Analysis, *IDS Bulletin*, 37, p. 23-33.

17 Coelho, V. S. P., de Andrade, I. A. L. and Montoya, M. C. (2002) Deliberative fora and the democratisation of social policies in Brazil, *IDS Bulletin*, 33, p. 1-16.

the councils that the spaces alone do not guarantee voice. “Despite their Constitutional guarantee, there is still the question of whether the most marginalised groups are able to articulate their voice in these arenas, and a question of the alliances and institutional arrangements which help them to do so.”<sup>18</sup> In these “invited spaces” for participation, not everyone feels invited – or at least not everyone sees meaning in going to meetings where they observe in silence the decisions being made. As Coelho, Andrade and Montoya propose, for the improvement of citizens’ participation (both women and men) in the councils, “broader approaches are needed, which recognise the diversity and identities of local actors and the ways in which they can be pre-empted from claiming rights by forces of social and economic exclusion.”<sup>19</sup> It is also important to recognise that in Brazil, politics is a territory of the elites. Until 1930, political bosses and landowners imposed their voting choices on workers. Today, the practice of vote buying is widespread and common. Votes and voices have been a bargaining chip since the inception of our republic.

## Action steps

This analysis leads us to the reflection on how crucial it is to invest in initiatives that are built upon dynamics inspired by what Freire proposed as a “pedagogy of the oppressed”, which consists of two stages:

- (1) The oppressed unveil the world of oppression and through the praxis commit themselves to its transformation, and (2) in the second stage, in which the reality of oppression has already been transformed, this pedagogy ceases to belong to the oppressed and becomes a pedagogy of all people in the process of permanent liberation.”<sup>20</sup>

The Yalodês have made it clear to our team how eager they are for information, skills and strategic thinking in order to understand and reclaim the political language, to communicate better with local governance institutions, and to raise their voices to gain greater visibility and legitimacy, especially among the local governance players. Many of the project participants are feeling reassured, through the project implementation, of the legitimate political influence they hold as religious and spiritual leaders; they are slowly perceiving the possibility of acting as role models, of harnessing community knowledge while engaging their communities in the externalisation of issues through information authorship and alternative representations. ■

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>20</sup> Freire, P. (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Herder and Herder, New York.

# BULGARIA

Divided movements, divided rights



## BlueLink

Rosa Vroom and Pavel Antonov  
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## Introduction

Thousands of people crowded on the streets of Sofia, Varna, and Bulgaria's other major cities in the first months of 2013 demanding change and immediate reforms in government. But unlike previous waves of protest over the past two decades, this time it was not about removing one party from power and replacing it with another. The crowds now chanted against all political parties together, both ruling and opposition. What had ignited a spark in 2012 as an environmentalist protest against unlimited construction in the country's pristine natural areas has now expanded into a firestorm of social and civil society demands against corporate monopolies, overwhelming corruption, privatisation of the national railways, and ever tightening austerity. Demands were made by civil society for reforms that would guarantee adequate public participation in decision making, transparency, access to justice, fairer politics, and improved living standards. The wave of anti-status-quo protests reached its peak in February, when the centre-right government of Boyko Borissov (a police general and former security guard) resigned, the parliament disassembled, and preliminary elections were scheduled for May.

The purpose of this article is to examine the way in which women's, gender and LGBT rights movements and activists have been part of these recent developments in Bulgaria, touching on the role of the internet in creating virtual communities.

## Policy and political background

In what appears to mark an important new stage in Bulgaria's post-socialist developments, civil society has reacted decisively against democratic and economic dysfunctions<sup>1</sup> that had accumulated over the period commonly described as "transition"<sup>2</sup>. A problematic

concept in itself,<sup>3</sup> "transition" implies a unidirectional development from something supposedly ultimately evil (dictatorial state socialism) to a supposed capitalist paradise of democracy and market economy. This concept has been instrumental in sidelining and marginalising critical thought, and preventing alternative solutions and views of how society should operate, paving the way for a prevailing discourse which prioritises economic development and financial profit over collective and social interest.<sup>4</sup>

Although the development of civil society has been largely influenced by this mainstream discourse, "islands" of resistance have taken shape around issues and problems of collective interest, such as the protection of nature, endemic poverty, quality of health care and education, access to justice, and the rights of minorities. In this context gender rights have also received attention. Civil society structures around these issues have consisted mostly of project-based grant-funded NGOs and policy think tanks. Grassroots activism and participation has been relatively rare, concentrated around specific issues (e.g. threats on protected areas, changes to family laws, etc.) or occasions (e.g. Sofia Pride – the annual LGBT parade), and very few organisations have enjoyed sustainable membership across the past decades.

Growing access to the internet,<sup>5</sup> and particularly Facebook and other social networks, have brought change to this picture. The internet and social networks have offered a medium for unlimited communication and exchange of ideas and thoughts, which has compensated for the decline of independent mass media and deteriorating standards of journalism and freedom of speech in Bulgaria.<sup>6</sup> Arguably the internet and social networks have

- 1 Brunwasser, M. (2009) Bulgaria Still Stuck in Trauma of Transition, *New York Times*, 10 November. [www.nytimes.com/2009/11/11/world/europe/11iht-bulgaria.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/11/world/europe/11iht-bulgaria.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)
- 2 Smith, A. and Pickles, J. (1998) Introduction: Theorising transition and the political economy of transformation, in *The Political Economy of Post-Communist Transformations*, Routledge, London.

- 3 Welsh, H. A. (1994) Political Transition Processes in Central and Eastern Europe, *Comparative Politics*, 26(4), p. 379-394. [www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/422022?uid=3737608&uid=2134&uid=2474118273&uid=2&uid=70&uid=3&uid=2474118263&uid=60&uid=21102634803483](http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/422022?uid=3737608&uid=2134&uid=2474118273&uid=2&uid=70&uid=3&uid=2474118263&uid=60&uid=21102634803483)
- 4 Smith, A. and Rochovská, A. (2007) Domesticating neo-liberalism: Everyday lives and the geographies of post-socialist transformations, *Geoforum*, 38, p. 1163-1178.
- 5 Internet World Stats (2010) *Bulgaria: Internet Usage and Population Statistics*. [www.internetworldstats.com/eu/bg.htm](http://www.internetworldstats.com/eu/bg.htm)
- 6 Reporters Without Borders (2013) *World Press Freedom Index*. [fr.rsf.org/IMG/pdf/classement\\_2013\\_gb-bd.pdf](http://fr.rsf.org/IMG/pdf/classement_2013_gb-bd.pdf)

gradually become the primary field for social engagement, participation, and intellectual and political debate, with developments in real-life spaces and institutions appearing often as mere reflections of what is happening in this virtual “world”. At the same time, processes, dynamics and tensions in the outside world have often been aggregated and extended in the social media space. Unpredictable and volatile, net-based activism came in to complement actual real-life social movements, increasingly standing in as a substitute for them where they had been absent.

### Defending the rights of minorities

Influenced by different stereotypes and prejudices, few Bulgarians are prepared to defend the rights of minorities, including LGBT minorities. “Bulgarian democracy is not yet in that stage that the majority cares about the minority; the minority has to justify the lack of equal rights,” said Monika Pisankaneva,<sup>7</sup> an LGBT rights activist and founder of Bilitis Resource Centre Foundation. In her view, Bulgaria’s government has achieved the minimum standard, for example, with the Anti-Discrimination Act, through which it has complied with EU accession requirements. But few further steps have been made since 2007 when Bulgaria joined the EU. Bulgarian societal attitudes toward homosexual, bisexual or transsexual people can still be categorised as negative. According to a 2012 report by Amnesty International,<sup>8</sup> unjustified violence against these groups persists, with a lack of concern shown by state institutions.

There were minor improvements over the past two years, mostly due to increased access to the internet, which has made it possible for people to organise protests on the streets. Through the new channels of communication, various civil society movements have arrived at a common ground, and formulated common demands, such as transparency of institutions and civic oversight of their operations. However, interestingly, this cohesion was not sustained. Referring to the recent protests in Bulgaria’s major cities, Tatyana Kmetova,<sup>9</sup> executive director of the Centre of Women’s Studies and Policies (CWSP) Foundation explains: “The February 2013 protests were organised through social media. When people communicated in forums or

social media there was a high level of agreement between them. However, when they went onto the street, they couldn’t articulate a common message. They immediately divided and started to fight. They started fighting in conventional media against each other.”

The primary discussion within the LGBT community emerged over the possibility of modifying the constitution. “If there is going to be a revision of the constitution, of course the LGBT movement will demand that it be changed on the topic of marriage,” Pisankaneva explains. However, advocating openly about LGBT rights has been difficult. Stana Iliev,<sup>10</sup> a German activist in Sofia, confirms that “nobody was asking for social change in the sense of, we have to respect minorities, be more aware of gender.” Iliev, a Red Cross social worker, has also seen a change inside Bulgarian society in her five-year stay in the capital city: “For sure, civil movements increased tremendously and social media have a big role in this.” Some of the LGBT activists participate in the protests, but do not represent their struggle, and even hide their homosexual identity, Pisankaneva adds.

Fear of rejection, aggressiveness, prejudices and hate are some of the reasons that stopped the LGBT collective from taking part in the last protest in Bulgaria. As reported by Pisankaneva: “LGBT people simply don’t know how people will react. It’s a common prejudice that LGBT people are demanding special rights. Maybe if LGBT people go with their own demands as part of a national protest, people from the other protest will start beating them or something.”

At the same time, prominent LGBT activists have engaged with other causes, not necessarily linked with the values and goals of the movement. For instance, lesbian activist Desislava Petrova (alias Soldier) has joined a freedom of choice movement whose primary focus is in favour of tobacco smoking and against recently adopted legislation that prohibits it in public. This has been met with some disapproval. “It is worrying to see an LGBT activist joining forces with industry front groups against a piece of legislation which aims to resolve a problem that has proven to have grave effects on women and young girls in Bulgaria,” commented Dr. Masha Gavrilova, a co-founder of the Women Against Tobacco Society and a former public health official.

Gender and women’s rights issues did not get a prominent place in the course of the recent protests, either. While many individual women led and participated in the protests, few organisations

7 Monika Pisankaneva, personal interview, 17 April 2013.

8 Amnesty International (2012) *Changing laws, changing minds: Challenging homophobic and transphobic hate crimes in Bulgaria*. [www.ilga-europe.org/home/guide\\_europe/country\\_by\\_country/bulgaria/changing\\_laws\\_changing\\_minds\\_challenging\\_homophobic\\_and\\_transphobic\\_hate\\_crimes\\_in\\_bulgaria](http://www.ilga-europe.org/home/guide_europe/country_by_country/bulgaria/changing_laws_changing_minds_challenging_homophobic_and_transphobic_hate_crimes_in_bulgaria)

9 Tatyana Kmetova, personal interview, 19 April 2013.

10 Stana Iliev, personal interview, 18 April 2013.

placed special emphasis on it. According to Kmetova, women were present and participated, but without raising their specific voices and demands. She explains that women were visible and active and their presence in the protests was even better justified because they are more affected by issues such as rising prices, but civil organisations related to women did not seem to be present. The reason for this lies in the common misperception of feminism, dating from the days of state socialism, Kmetova believes. Back then, feminism was seen to be a decadent concept promoted by the West. For her part, Krassimira Daskalova<sup>11</sup> points at the persistence of stereotypical myths among feminists, which contribute to the persistence of a gap between the sexes: there is the common myth of women's emancipation and full gender equality in the labour market, and the myth that women have the same status as men in education.

A strengthening of civil society action using ICTs can be seen in a number of examples on the internet. With regard to the women's rights movement, the BG-Mamma Forum<sup>12</sup> is a good illustration. Through a virtual forum, its members discuss issues that are common to Bulgarian mothers, and they gather on the streets when negative measures are taken by the government. As for the LGBT rights movement, you find small protests, such as the one organised by the youth organisation Deystvie in November 2009 in the town of Pazardzhik.<sup>13</sup>

Still, the most paradigmatic example in gay rights is the pride parade that has taken place in Sofia every June since 2008. Since then, this demonstration has become the most powerful tool for the LGBT movement to express their discontent in Bulgarian society. Sofia Pride attracts a lot of people who do not participate in the event, but "like" it through Facebook and express their positive attitudes towards it online, said Pisankaneva.

Not everyone has remained inactive. Still far from achieving rights such as legal marriage or adoption for LGBT people, organisations like Bilitis and LGBT Deystvie in the capital city and LGBT Plovdiv in Plovdiv have been struggling for the self-confidence and self-reliance of LGBT people in Bulgaria. Explaining the movement's actions, Marko Markov<sup>14</sup> clarified

that it "is focused on the community itself" and its members "encourage people to come out."

Markov, who claims to have met almost all the LGBT people in Sofia, says that some cannot even imagine always being gay and raising a family as gay people. "They will eventually marry someone of the opposite sex and hide their homosexuality for the rest of their lives," he says. Markov, a 27-year-old activist, maintains that the main challenge of the movement is "coming out". The problem in Bulgaria is that the LGBT community is largely hidden and people are not open to accepting them, he believes. "When you go out and talk about gay couples and their needs it is like talking about the Tooth Fairy or Santa Claus," Markov adds with a smile.

The persistence of negative and stereotypical myths inside their own community suggests that the movement has started in a hostile environment. "A lot of gay people believe in the homophobic lies: that gay people should not have children because they will become homosexual as well; that gay people are not normal. I've heard one of them say that it's disgusting for two men to hold hands on the street," said Markov. This movement's members still need to deal with the acceptance of their own identities.

Indeed, during the Communist era, LGBT people were thought to be the result of the moral decline of Western countries. Despite an increase in women's rights during the socialist period, LGBT rights were totally restricted. As a consequence, there were strict laws against them, which remained in force until 2002, when the EU accession process began.

In comparison to the LGBT rights struggle in Bulgaria, gender equality movements have a longer history of development. As a consequence of the socialist regime, "Bulgaria had the highest [percentage of] employed women in the world by the end of Communism," according to the executive director of CWSP Foundation. With the fall of Communism, she maintains, the plight of women became worse, with women running the risk of falling into poverty and sexual exploitation.<sup>15</sup>

The impact of patriarchal values on the gender rights struggle is a matter of disagreement within the movement. According to Kmetova, in the last 20 years Bulgaria has reproduced Western traditional roles, with women desiring to stay at home. For Pisankaneva, socialist ideology did not eliminate patriarchal relationships. In "The Forbidden Fruit:

11 Daskalova, K. (n.d.) Bulgarian Women's history and socialist myths, CWSP, Sofia. [www.cwsp.bg/upload/docs/history\\_and\\_myths\\_en.pdf](http://www.cwsp.bg/upload/docs/history_and_myths_en.pdf)

12 Shenter, O., Stoyanov, A. and Yordanova, M. (eds.) (2010) BG-Mamma.com: From discussions through advocacy to charity, in Civil Society in Bulgaria: Trends and Risks, Center for Study of Democracy, Sofia.

13 [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT\\_rights\\_in\\_Bulgaria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT_rights_in_Bulgaria)

14 Marko Markov, personal interview, 17 April 2013.

15 Gorse, K. (2004) Red Nostalgia? Communism, Women's Emancipation, and Economic Transformation in Bulgaria, *L'Homme European Journal of Feminist History*, 1, p. 15. [www.academia.edu/225663/\\_Red\\_Nostalgia\\_Communist\\_Womens\\_Emanicipation\\_and\\_Economic\\_Transformation\\_in\\_Bulgaria](http://www.academia.edu/225663/_Red_Nostalgia_Communist_Womens_Emanicipation_and_Economic_Transformation_in_Bulgaria)



Sexuality in Communist Bulgaria”,<sup>16</sup> she claims that gender equality was just a slogan that reflected the economic vision of the socialist movement, and that patriarchal values dominated in the vast majority of Bulgarian families.

Nowadays, four networks of NGOs, two trade unions and other important international organisations<sup>17</sup> devote themselves to defending women in the social, political and economic spheres in Bulgaria. Although disagreements persist, they have managed to address most issues, such as domestic violence, labour market gender gaps, trafficking of women, the need for gender parity policies, etc.

Perhaps because of a lack of self-confidence, there are only a few activists behind the LGBT movement. Around the country, Markov has counted no more than 20 or 30 activists. This is one of the reasons why Stana Iliev was asked to participate for the first time in 2010 in the organisation of Sofia Pride. At some point in her stay in Bulgaria she decided to become an activist: “The longer I stayed here, the more frustrated I became. I couldn’t say I got angry, but I got, like, annoyed by constantly having to defend basic human rights.” Despite the fact that she considers Bulgaria “more progressive than other countries,” she believes there is no awareness about gender stereotypes.

## Conclusions

Women’s, gender and LGBT rights groups had a low profile in the civil society protests of January-February 2013 in Bulgaria, in spite of their members’ access to ICTs and activism on social networks. The LGBT movement is prominent online. Analyst Monika Pisankaneva confirms that the members of this activist community define themselves mostly as a virtual community. The main reasons for this lie in civil society dynamics, unfavourable social attitudes and the inadequate role of the state.

Civil society organisations lack proper engagement with the rights of gender minorities. Although Bulgarian citizens are demanding a change in the political, economic and social systems, the demands of minorities – including gender minorities – are not listened to or even accepted. But an increase in the number of participants in Sofia Pride has shown that there is an improvement in this respect, mostly thanks to social media like Facebook.

Participants interviewed for this research have confirmed that the LGBT rights struggle is very far

from achieving its goals. Rejection and hate against this collective have had a negative influence on their own self-reliance and self-confidence. A slow process to improve the situation has already started. However, society’s attitudes and behaviour are supported by the negative speech of political institutions.

With regard to women’s rights, Bulgaria’s situation still needs to improve, even though women are well positioned in society. Gender think tanks do not appear well connected to activist and civil society organisations. Women also do not appear to be aware about gender organisations or feminist concepts. Myths about women and women’s roles mask the problem: the stigmas and stereotypes related to patriarchal values.

State institutions aggravate the situation. Anti-discrimination and parity policies are not applied. In relation to LGBT rights, the actions and language of political parties and the inactions of law enforcement institutions, provide a negative example to society. Homophobic attitudes are justified by the majority of the population.

## Action steps

- The state has to commit to implementing policies to improve social attitudes towards gender and LGBT rights. The perspective that these are “special rights” must be done away with in order to make these rights normative. Promoting respect and tolerance is a requisite for empowering people to “come out” or to fight for their rights.
- In this sense, efforts at the educational level – in schools and universities – need to be increased.
- The gender movement in Bulgaria is divided and has lost its main purpose: to involve women in their actions. A way to tackle this problem could be to empower women who are already engaged in protests at the street level. Understanding the concept of feminism could help them identify the deeper lack in society and start to battle this lack.
- Both the women’s rights movement and the LGBT movement have to continue improving their use of new ICT tools in order to avoid misunderstanding, to increase public debate and to organise social struggle. ■

<sup>16</sup> Pisankaneva, M. (2005) The Forbidden Fruit: Sexuality in Communist Bulgaria, E-magazine LiterNet, 7(68). [litternet.bg/publish14/m\\_pisankaneva/forbidden.htm](http://litternet.bg/publish14/m_pisankaneva/forbidden.htm)

<sup>17</sup> [www.cwsp.bg/en/htmls/page.php?category=123](http://www.cwsp.bg/en/htmls/page.php?category=123)



# CAMEROON

## Access to the internet for women



### PROTEGE QV

Sylvie Siyam, Balbine Tsafack and Serge Daho  
[www.protegeqv.org](http://www.protegeqv.org)

## Introduction, policy and political background

In the late 1990s, Cameroon embarked on a broad privatisation campaign in the telecommunications sector that culminated in the adoption of a series of legal measures, most importantly Law 89/014 of 14 July 1998 which, up to now, regulates telecommunications in our country.

This law made provisions for approximately ten regulations, establishing the end of the public monopoly in the telecommunications sector. It also led to the dismantling of the government department responsible for telecommunications and instituted three sets of provisions, namely provisions for exclusive concessionary rights, provisions for regulated competition, and provisions for free competition.

Thanks to the liberal framework set forth in the 1998 Telecommunications Act, the sector was opened to competition and on June 1999 a mobile phone licence was granted to a private enterprise. Towards 2000, internet service providers (ISPs) appeared in the sector.<sup>1</sup> It is worth pointing out that the state-owned telecommunications company (CAMTEL) is the only authorised access provider, thereby providing access to the ISPs who serve as “secondary providers”. However, the ISPs provide their services based on economic activity, population density and availability of infrastructure, such as ICT backbone, and in doing so, they abandon rural and unprofitable areas.

To redress this and in accordance with provisions 19 and 20 of the Telecommunications Act, plus the recommendations of the World Summit on the Information Society, the Cameroonian government launched its ICT outreach policy, aimed at building multipurpose community telecentres (MPCTs)<sup>2</sup> to

bridge the digital divide between the well-off areas and the underserved ones.

## A survey of MPCTs

The 2002 move to set up MPCTs had the goal of developing rural areas by allowing women and young people to access the internet. The objective was to set up 2,000 internet access points throughout the country by 2015.

In 2010, PROTEGE QV<sup>3</sup>, with the support of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), carried out research entitled “The contribution of five multipurpose community telecentres to secondary education in rural Cameroon”. The objective of the research was to identify and analyse the impacts of MPCTs set up in Cameroonian rural areas on secondary education.

During the course of this research, out of the 34 MPCTs that were functioning at that time, PROTEGE QV selected the MPCTs of five localities for its case studies. These five localities were Ambam (in southern Cameroon), Bangang (in western Cameroon), Bankim (in northern Cameroon), Jakiri (in northwest Cameroon), and Makenene (in central Cameroon).

The criteria for the selection of these MPCTs included: regular access to the internet; equipment in a good state; regular energy supply; and the MPCTs being operational for at least three years.

In each telecentre, a team of two persons was selected and trained in order for them to be able to conduct interviews with all the students and teachers who visited the telecentres in order to identify what interests they had. A representative sampling was used.

One month later, the interview forms were collected by the research team and the data contained was analysed. In all, 1,015 students and 235 teachers were interviewed. The findings included the following:

<sup>1</sup> There are numerous internet service providers (more than 30), but the market is led by CAMNET, a CAMTEL subsidiary, and two mobile operators, namely MTN and Orange.

<sup>2</sup> In an interview with the magazine “Performances du Ministère des Postes et Télécommunications” in 2008, the former minister of Posts and Telecommunications, Bouba Bello Maigari, set the ambitious target of creating 2,000 multipurpose community telecentres throughout the country by the year 2015.

<sup>3</sup> PROTEGE QV (Promotion of Technologies that Guarantee the Environment and the Quality of Life) is a Cameroonian association created in 1995 which aims for the promotion of individual and collective initiatives geared towards the protection of the environment and the amelioration of the quality of life of Cameroonian families. [www.protegeqv.org](http://www.protegeqv.org)

- Of the five MPCTs selected, two were managed by women while the rest were managed by men.
- Of all the services offered, the most solicited was the internet. Others included photocopying, word processing, printing, photography, scanning, use of the telephone, and postal services.
- Of the 1,015 students interviewed, 453 were female while 562 were male.
- Of the 235 teachers interviewed, 70 were women while 165 were men.

It was observed that those who make use of ICTs at the centres are generally youths under the age of 25 (55%), and few people over 40. These youths and young adults include students who use the centres to do research and homework assignments, and teachers who prepare their lessons.

The results also made it clear that women have less access to the internet and computers than men. However, despite the fact that they have less access, there is increasing interest in and use of ICTs amongst women. For many people the MPCTs were places where they encountered their first computer and learned how to use it.

When it was asked during the interviews why few girls visited the MPCTs, the reasons, which are a reality of everyday life, included:

- Many girls still think that computers and technology are a man's issue.
- Some girls do not see what benefit they will gain from using technology.
- Many girls are not even encouraged to use technology because of cultural constraints which create a situation where many boys end up oriented towards science subjects while girls end up oriented towards the arts.

Apart from girls who go to the MPCTs for school-related work, there has been a growing tendency for many women, and even men, to become addicted to social networks, the most common being Facebook, Twitter and his. Most of the youths who visit MPCTs spend at least 30 minutes on these social networks to chat with friends, to comment on friends' status updates and events which have been posted, to make new friends, and – in the case of girls and young women – to look for boy-friends and husbands. This attitude has become so common that it is tarnishing the image of girls who access the internet in public venues such as MPCTs and cybercafes.

However, a positive image of women and their use of ICTs is equally pervasive. Throughout the world, and in Cameroon, governments are working to reduce the gap between men and women who use ICTs and to empower women to make use of ICT tools. One will find more women today learning how to use computers and connecting to the internet, and more women are involved in computer studies. There are associations here in Cameroon which have that goal, such as PROTEGE QV, and even associations specialised in the promotion of women computer scientists, such as PROFIN.<sup>4</sup>

In addition, the involvement of women in the smooth functioning of MPCTs has also been remarkable. Women managers work very hard in order to be recognised as good performers. This is how Salamatu Yinyuy Sule, a woman manager at the Jakiri MPCT in the northwest region of Cameroon since 2008, received an award from the Telecentre.org Foundation<sup>5</sup> for being one of the outstanding telecentre managers in 2012. She distinguished herself through her leadership and management capabilities, and her efforts to make her MPCT one of the most visited in the country. During the research by PROTEGE QV, her MPCT was found to have the greatest positive impact on students' education (70% of the students who used the centre had better grades in class due to their use of the MPCT).

Another aspect of ICTs is the use of mobile phones. Nowadays, their use is widespread in Cameroon. Almost every youth has a mobile phone. In general, females tend to have more sophisticated phones than males.

Women, it was found, prefer sophisticated phones to show off to peers. However, many of them do not make use of one third of the phones' applications. The applications they make most use of include chatting applications like WhatsApp, Viber, Yahoo Messenger and Skype.

According to Research ICT Africa's Gender Assessment of ICT Access and Usage in Africa survey,<sup>6</sup> the diffusion of ICTs is unevenly concentrated in urban areas, leaving some rural areas almost untouched. Access to these technologies is constrained by income, as is usage, and – as they become more complex – access is increasingly constrained by literacy and education. The survey

4 Promotion de la Femme Informaticienne: [www.profin.cam.cm](http://www.profin.cam.cm)

5 An independent, non-profit, non-stock international organisation that manages the global programme telecentre.org; this programme supports the establishment and sustainability of grassroots level telecentres. [www.telecentre.org](http://www.telecentre.org)

6 [www.researchictafrica.net](http://www.researchictafrica.net)

revealed that women in Cameroon have greater knowledge of the internet than men.

Concerning mobile access, the survey found that women with similar income, education and employment status are as likely as men to own a mobile phone. It also found that although men spend more money on mobile phones, women with revenue spend a greater share of their monthly income on mobile usage.

Due to a lack of mobility and access to income, rural women are more likely to be deprived of access to ICTs than rural men.

We can see from this that there exist gender inequities in access to and usage of ICTs in rural Cameroon – and even urban Cameroon to some extent. These inequities cannot be addressed through ICT policies *per se*. There need to be policy interventions in areas that would allow girls and women to enjoy the benefits of ICTs equally. For example, policies and programmes can be set up to incentivise the education of girls, and particularly their participation in subjects such as mathematics, science and engineering, as more girls in secondary school tend to orient themselves towards arts subjects because of the stereotypical mentality that science is for males and the arts are for females. Many of these barriers that women face are related to religious and cultural norms and practices that are difficult to legislate away.

## Conclusion

ICTs in general and the internet in particular provide individuals and communities with opportunities. They can also present solutions to social and economic oppression. Women and girls have been discriminated against for too long and the violence against them encompasses all things that deny a woman the right to realise her potential for development because of gender. Examples of these rights violations include rape, forced marriage, pregnancy in underage children, female circumcision or genital mutilation, sexual harassment at work, forced prostitution, honour killings, and child prostitution.

In Cameroon, women constitute over 52% of the country's 19.5 million inhabitants,<sup>7</sup> the greater percentage of them living in rural areas where the MPCTs have provided them with basic access to the internet.

Despite the emancipating potential of the internet, the PROTEGE QV survey noted that the few

women who use the telecentres are teachers and students. In rural Cameroon, women do not use the internet to access critical information useful to support those that have been discriminated against. They have also not used the internet for information that could help them make decisions about themselves, their lives, their bodies, or to exercise autonomy or self-determination.

The survey also suggested that women and girls have not profited from their access to the internet in ways such as using it to overcome cultural limitations, discuss the difficulties encountered in their various communities, exchange experiences, share ideas, or provide mutual support.

ICTs are powerful tools to denounce and report various women's rights violations. Women can use their mobile phones or laptops to send text messages to groups, take photographs, or to report cases of violations.<sup>8</sup> However, we learned from Cameroonian rural women that this has not been their experience so far, and has not been amongst their concerns. Overall, in rural Cameroon, women and girls have, up to now, used the internet merely for educational purposes and to overcome limitations in mobility. Mobile phones have broadened their livelihood options and well-being. However, they have yet to experience all the opportunities they can draw from their internet access to improve their daily lives, their general condition, or to promote their rights.

## Action steps

MPCTs are likely to play a vital role in rural Cameroon when it comes to the promotion of women's rights. Appropriately used and designed ICTs could help otherwise vulnerable groups to move out of the disadvantage of "information exclusion". To serve this purpose, we suggest the following steps:

- The local authorities and the MPCT managers should organise campaigns to reach the most vulnerable sectors in their respective localities to let them know that information and services are available and intended for them and their well-being.
- Free training campaigns targeting women's groups for the use and mastery of ICTs should be organised on a regular basis.

<sup>7</sup> According to the results of the third general population and housing census (GPHC) in 2010, Cameroon's overall population is estimated at 19,406,100 inhabitants, with a rural population of 9,314,928 inhabitants, 4,745,697 of whom are women.

<sup>8</sup> Women's Rights Programme, Association for Progressive Communications (2012) Going Visible: Women's Rights on the Internet. [www.apc.org/en/pubs/going-visible-women%E2%80%99s-rights-internet](http://www.apc.org/en/pubs/going-visible-women%E2%80%99s-rights-internet)

- MPCT managers should regularly update the centres with information and advice, both in hardcopy and electronically on a centre's website, on rural women's concerns, and information related to the protection of their rights.
- Financial or technical assistance should be extended to women to facilitate access to and appropriation of ICTs by providing credit, training and education to rural women in Cameroon.<sup>9</sup>
- The government should increase the number of MPCTs as many in rural areas find them far from their home. The quality of their equipment should also be upgraded.
- Groups of women leaders should be identified and trained on the use of ICTs. The same groups will have to convince other women on how the internet can bring to light the violation of their rights and represent a platform where they can converge to inform the public and the government, and in turn, influence policy. ■

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<sup>9</sup> APC (2006) Gender Evaluation Methodology for Internet and ICTs: A Learning Tool for Change and Empowerment. [www.apc.org/en/node/2835](http://www.apc.org/en/node/2835)

# CANADA

#OpThunderbird: Anonymous engagement to combat violence against Indigenous women in Canada



## Association for Progressive Communications (APC)

Shawna Finnegan

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## Introduction

Violence against Indigenous women and girls in Canada has reached a point of crisis. Faced with persistent insecurity, Indigenous women in Canada are three times more likely to experience spousal violence and seven times more likely to be murdered than non-Indigenous women.<sup>1</sup> Law enforcement around the country has consistently failed to address this issue, with reports of police misconduct, harassment and sexual assault.<sup>2</sup>

In December 2012, the case of a racially motivated abduction and rape of an Indigenous woman in Thunder Bay, Ontario,<sup>3</sup> and subsequent failure by local police to adequately respond, prompted the development of Operation Thunderbird.<sup>4</sup> Started by a group of local Indigenous women and allies using the Anonymous network,<sup>5</sup> Operation Thunderbird is a community-based initiative to raise public awareness and pressure local authorities to take effective action. This initiative is part of a larger Indigenous-led movement in Canada called Idle No More, and reflects growing engagement by the Anonymous network in cases of violence against women and girls.

## Background

### *Erosion of Indigenous rights in Canada*

The insecurity faced by Indigenous women and girls in Canada is a national human rights tragedy. Despite receiving strong recommendations at the United Nations Human Rights Council,<sup>6</sup> including the launching

of a national commission of enquiry,<sup>7</sup> the government of Canada has continued to uphold the status quo.<sup>8</sup>

Despite systemic violence against Indigenous women in the country, individual cases are often given low priority by local authorities and media. In 2005, a Canadian media analysis<sup>9</sup> suggested significant disparities in how local police and media respond to reports of missing Indigenous women when compared to non-Indigenous women. Reports from Amnesty International<sup>10</sup> indicate widespread failure by local authorities to protect Indigenous women and girls from violence, while recent research conducted by Human Rights Watch<sup>11</sup> in the north of British Columbia documents cases of physical and sexual assault by officers of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP).

Violence against Indigenous women is part of the growing inequality and marginalisation of Indigenous people in Canada, including endemic child poverty,<sup>12</sup> structural discrimination and the erosion of treaty and land rights.<sup>13</sup> Despite many issue-focused campaigns, public awareness has been historically low. In November 2012, in response to proposed federal legislation that would lower the threshold of community consent in the designation and surrender of Aboriginal Reserve lands,<sup>14</sup> four women developed a grassroots campaign<sup>15</sup> to raise awareness of the impact of Bill C-45 on both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada. This campaign developed into Idle No More,<sup>16</sup> a

1 [www.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?DocId=5056509&File=18](http://www.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?DocId=5056509&File=18)  
2 [www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/story/2013/02/12/bc-human-rights-watch-abuse-report.html](http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/story/2013/02/12/bc-human-rights-watch-abuse-report.html)  
3 [www.cbc.ca/news/canada/thunder-bay/story/2012/12/31/tb-police-investigate-sexual-assault.html](http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/thunder-bay/story/2012/12/31/tb-police-investigate-sexual-assault.html)  
4 [www.wawataynews.ca/archive/all/2013/4/10/operation-thunderbird-rallies-Indigenous-women-thunder-bay\\_24354](http://www.wawataynews.ca/archive/all/2013/4/10/operation-thunderbird-rallies-Indigenous-women-thunder-bay_24354)  
5 [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anonymous\\_%28group%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anonymous_%28group%29)  
6 [www.upr-info.org/IMG/pdf/a\\_hrc\\_wg.6\\_16\\_l.9\\_canada.pdf](http://www.upr-info.org/IMG/pdf/a_hrc_wg.6_16_l.9_canada.pdf)

7 [www.amnesty.ca/blog/un-committee-canada-needs-comprehensive-action-to-uphold-Indigenous-rights](http://www.amnesty.ca/blog/un-committee-canada-needs-comprehensive-action-to-uphold-Indigenous-rights)  
8 [www.vancouversun.com/life/report+finds+Canada+doing+enough+stop+violence+against+aboriginal+women/8315408/story.html#report+finds+Canada+doing+enough+stop+violence+against+aboriginal+women/8315408/story.html](http://www.vancouversun.com/life/report+finds+Canada+doing+enough+stop+violence+against+aboriginal+women/8315408/story.html#report+finds+Canada+doing+enough+stop+violence+against+aboriginal+women/8315408/story.html)  
9 Madison, L. M. (2006) *Immediacy, Where Is It For Aboriginal Women Who Are Reported Missing?*  
10 [www.amnesty.ca/our-work/issues/Indigenous-peoples/no-more-stolen-sisters](http://www.amnesty.ca/our-work/issues/Indigenous-peoples/no-more-stolen-sisters)  
11 [www.hrw.org/news/2013/02/13/canada-abusive-policing-neglect-along-highway-tears](http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/02/13/canada-abusive-policing-neglect-along-highway-tears)  
12 [www.cbc.ca/news/canada/story/2013/06/18/f-poverty-first-nations-Indigenous-report.html](http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/story/2013/06/18/f-poverty-first-nations-Indigenous-report.html)  
13 [www.amnesty.ca/blog/un-committee-canada-needs-comprehensive-action-to-uphold-Indigenous-rights](http://www.amnesty.ca/blog/un-committee-canada-needs-comprehensive-action-to-uphold-Indigenous-rights)  
14 [www.cbc.ca/news/politics/story/2012/10/19/pol-list-2nd-omnibus-bill.html](http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/story/2012/10/19/pol-list-2nd-omnibus-bill.html)  
15 [idlenomore.ca/about-us/item/1-history-of-idle-no-more-grassroots-movement](http://idlenomore.ca/about-us/item/1-history-of-idle-no-more-grassroots-movement)  
16 [www.idlenomore.ca](http://www.idlenomore.ca)

protest movement that has gained significant support across Canada and internationally. Social media have been an essential part of the movement, to both raise awareness and provide a space for Indigenous people – particularly youth – to speak out and have their voices heard.<sup>17</sup>

### Anonymous “hacktivism”

Often referred to as “hacktivists”,<sup>18</sup> Anonymous is a loose network of hackers, technologists, activists, human rights advocates, geeks and pranksters, using the name as a banner for disparate collective action to protect and promote the free flow of information.<sup>19</sup>

Anonymous gained public attention in 2010 as a result of Operation Payback,<sup>20</sup> a series of distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks against websites of financial institutions refusing to transfer funds from donors to WikiLeaks following the US diplomatic cable leaks.<sup>21</sup> Months later, in 2011, members of the Anonymous network participated in attacks on government websites in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya in support of the Arab uprisings.<sup>22</sup>

The Canadian branch of the Anonymous network, CanAnon,<sup>23</sup> has taken a slightly different approach to anonymous activism, raising awareness and rallying support against policies that limit freedom of expression online, including the proposed online surveillance bill, C-30.<sup>24</sup> In 2012, members of Anonymous released details through social media about an alleged suspect in the blackmail and sexual assault of a 15-year-old girl who committed suicide after private photos were shared without her consent.<sup>25</sup> The allegations were ultimately found to be false, leading some to raise concerns over the negative impacts of online “vigilantism”.<sup>26</sup>

### Operation Thunderbird

On 27 December 2012, an Indigenous woman was abducted and raped by two white men in Thunder Bay, Ontario, in alleged response to ongoing pro-

tests connected to the Idle No More movement.<sup>27</sup> During the assault the woman was told by her attackers that she deserved to lose her Treaty rights, referencing recent protests. Reports indicate that local police devoted few resources to investigating the racially motivated crime, and the perpetrators were never found.

After years of similar cases and police response, a group of like-minded Indigenous and allied women and men identified the need for direct action. Using the Anonymous network, Operation Thunderbird was developed to raise awareness and demand that police allocate sufficient resources in order to conduct full investigations.<sup>28</sup> In January 2013, the Anonymous network released a video<sup>29</sup> from Operation Thunderbird, criticising police response to the assault and releasing descriptions of two suspects. Referencing Anonymous action in other cases,<sup>30</sup> the video contained a message to police stating that if no public progress was made, a second phase of Operation Thunderbird would be undertaken.

In February 2013, Operation Thunderbird began a second phase through the development of an online crowdsourced map to demonstrate the extent of violence against Indigenous women in Canada and the United States.<sup>31</sup> Using Anonymous online networks, Operation Thunderbird receives and shares information on missing Indigenous women, and communicates directly with police and media to address the disparity in resources deployed to protect and bring justice to victims. In an interview, the principal researcher for Operation Thunderbird described the importance of the internet and social media in addressing violence against Indigenous women:

The internet community is the global digital community now connected, discussing and sharing resources like never before. We believe this is useful in terms of knowing what has and has not been done to combat disparity and systemic racism.<sup>32</sup>

17 [www.thestar.com/news/canada/2013/01/11/social\\_media\\_helps\\_drive\\_idle\\_no\\_more\\_movement.html](http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2013/01/11/social_media_helps_drive_idle_no_more_movement.html)

18 [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hacktivism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hacktivism)

19 [canopycanopycanopy.com/15/our\\_weirdness\\_is\\_free](http://canopycanopycanopy.com/15/our_weirdness_is_free)

20 [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation\\_Payback](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Payback)

21 [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United\\_States\\_diplomatic\\_cables\\_leak](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_diplomatic_cables_leak)

22 [www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/05/201151917634659824.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/05/201151917634659824.html)

23 [www.cananon.info](http://www.cananon.info)

24 [www.brockpress.com/focus/a-new-breed-of-activism-unmasking-canada-s-anonymous-culture](http://www.brockpress.com/focus/a-new-breed-of-activism-unmasking-canada-s-anonymous-culture)

25 [www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/16/amanda-todd-bully-anonymous-suicide\\_n\\_1969792.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/16/amanda-todd-bully-anonymous-suicide_n_1969792.html)

26 [www.theglobeandmail.com/news/british-columbia/hacktivist-group-names-second-person-in-amanda-todd-case/article4619867](http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/british-columbia/hacktivist-group-names-second-person-in-amanda-todd-case/article4619867)

27 [www.cbc.ca/news/canada/thunder-bay/story/2012/12/31/tb-police-investigate-sexual-assault.html](http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/thunder-bay/story/2012/12/31/tb-police-investigate-sexual-assault.html)

28 Interview with @org9, Operation Thunderbird, 2 June 2013.

29 [www.cbc.ca/news/canada/thunder-bay/story/2013/01/24/tby-anonymous-hacker-thunder-bay-police-investigation.html](http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/thunder-bay/story/2013/01/24/tby-anonymous-hacker-thunder-bay-police-investigation.html)

30 [jezebel.com/5973165/anonymous-releases-more-intel-on-the-alleged-steubenville-rape-crew](http://jezebel.com/5973165/anonymous-releases-more-intel-on-the-alleged-steubenville-rape-crew)

31 [www.cbc.ca/news/canada/thunder-bay/story/2013/02/06/tby-thunderbay-anonymous-map-tracks-missing-murdered-aboriginal-women.html](http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/thunder-bay/story/2013/02/06/tby-thunderbay-anonymous-map-tracks-missing-murdered-aboriginal-women.html)

32 Interview with @org9, Operation Thunderbird, 2 June 2013.



Using its crowdsourced map and confidential tips from witnesses, Operation Thunderbird raises public awareness through Tumblr and Facebook,<sup>33</sup> using the Twitter handle @anony\_mmis to tweet updates and connect to related movements. Although the group has experienced some opposition and online harassment, Operation Thunderbird has developed strong support through connections within the Idle No More movement and hacktivist communities. Members of the group have been involved in online crisis mapping, including with the Standby Task Force during the Libya conflict in 2011.<sup>34</sup> In the future Operation Thunderbird plans to investigate sources of funding to develop a website to house databases, documents, research catalogues and a specialised map to assist further research and advocacy.

While Operation Thunderbird has used online platforms to put pressure on local authorities, its members believe that this online advocacy must be tied to offline strategies:

Only by meeting people in person and physically being at the location of the crimes with the intent of demanding answers from authorities will any real longer term impact come from internet-based [...], crowdsourced or digital activism.<sup>35</sup>

Offline organising has been a regular component of action by Operation Thunderbird, including holding rallies outside of local police headquarters. In April 2013, Operation Thunderbird staged a peaceful protest outside of the Thunder Bay Police Services office, with protestors coming in support from nearby cities and towns. While some of the protestors wore Anonymous Guy Fawkes masks,<sup>36</sup> others revealed their identity, including the communications officer of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, and families of women who had been murdered or gone missing.<sup>37</sup>

## Surveillance and exclusion

While online platforms and networks have played an essential role in holding local authorities accountable for cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada, there are also risks posed by new technology. The Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) and the RCMP were accused in 2012 of spying on environmentalists and Indigenous groups in order to provide information

to the energy corporations in the Arctic.<sup>38</sup> In May 2013, Canada's Privacy Commissioner confirmed reports that the government had unlawfully spied on Cindy Blackstock, the executive director of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, after her organisation filed a human rights complaint over funding of child services on reserves.<sup>39</sup>

These cases, as well as recent revelations of US National Security Agency spying, demonstrate the growing importance of privacy and anonymity online. The Association for Progressive Communication's (APC) EROTICS research<sup>40</sup> from India and South Africa found that while the internet is an increasingly important public space for democratic deliberation, anonymity is key to provide a safe space for the negotiation of rights, particularly for those denied access to other spaces based on sexuality or gender identity.

In addition to increased surveillance of individuals and civil society groups in Canada, experts suggest that because of significant digital divides, the use of social media may exclude individuals living in rural communities from participating in political activism.<sup>41</sup>

## Conclusions

In March 2013, the outcome document of the 57th session of the Commission on the Status of Women made recommendations for governments, national human rights institutions, the private sector, civil society and other stakeholders to "[s]upport the development and use of ICT and social media as a resource for the empowerment of women and girls, including access to information on the prevention of and response to violence against women and girls."<sup>42</sup>

"Hacktivists" associated with the Anonymous network are a growing source of support for community-based development and use of technology to prevent and respond to violence against women in Canada. Moving away from DDoS attacks and towards legal protest, outreach and information sharing, groups collaborating under the Anonymous banner are working with local communities to tackle structural inequalities. While questions continue

33 [ophthunderbird.tumblr.com/](http://ophthunderbird.tumblr.com/)

34 [standbytaskforce.wordpress.com/2011/09/01/libya-crisis-map-report](http://standbytaskforce.wordpress.com/2011/09/01/libya-crisis-map-report)

35 Interview with @org9, Operation Thunderbird, 2 June 2013.

36 [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guy\\_Fawkes\\_mask](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guy_Fawkes_mask)

37 [wawataynews.ca/node/24354](http://wawataynews.ca/node/24354)

38 [www.dominionpaper.ca/articles/4640](http://www.dominionpaper.ca/articles/4640)

39 [www.thestar.com/news/canada/2013/05/29/conservative\\_government\\_found\\_spying\\_on\\_aboriginal\\_advocate\\_tim\\_harper.html](http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2013/05/29/conservative_government_found_spying_on_aboriginal_advocate_tim_harper.html)

40 [www.apc.org/en/node/12804](http://www.apc.org/en/node/12804)

41 [www.thestar.com/news/canada/2013/01/11/social\\_media\\_helps\\_drive\\_idle\\_no\\_more\\_movement.html](http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2013/01/11/social_media_helps_drive_idle_no_more_movement.html)

42 [www.genderit.org/feminist-talk/agreed-conclusions-csw-57th-include-violence-against-women-and-ict](http://www.genderit.org/feminist-talk/agreed-conclusions-csw-57th-include-violence-against-women-and-ict)

to arise as to the evolving nature of this heterogeneous network, and how it can be held accountable, local Anonymous action to address women's rights issues is having a real impact and merits further study.

Moreover, in considering anonymity and accountability in the public sphere,<sup>43</sup> and in light of growing convergence between Anonymous activism and work to combat violence against women, it is essential to critically discuss risks posed by new technology, as well as the barriers to access and engagement.

### Action steps

Operation Thunderbird provides important guidance for individuals and civil society groups working to address violence against Indigenous women in Canada. At the same time, further action is needed to strengthen this initiative, and others like it:

- Support community-based social media initiatives to gather and disseminate information, raise awareness, and demand justice for missing and murdered Indigenous women.

- Combine online mobilisation with offline engagement to hold local authorities accountable.
- Work together with community informatics groups to demand greater access to the internet in Indigenous communities.
- Develop strategies for secure online communications, such as those set by the Take Back The Tech (TBTT) campaign.<sup>44</sup>
- Conduct research on the impact of Anonymous activism in advocating for the protection and promotion of women's rights. ■

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43 [www.genderit.org/feminist-talk/anonymity-accountability-and-public-sphere](http://www.genderit.org/feminist-talk/anonymity-accountability-and-public-sphere)

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44 [www.takebackthetech.net/be-safe](http://www.takebackthetech.net/be-safe)



This collection of images celebrating diversity was launched as a banner for the Take Back The Tech! 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence campaign in 2012. The theme was “16 Days, 16 Stories”, documenting gender-related violence and discrimination against women, and strategies to overturn them, including re-telling fables and stories with a gender twist; calling on mobile technology users not to forward violent content; and sharing ways of healing after violence. For a colour reproduction of the image, please visit: [www.giswatch.org](http://www.giswatch.org)

## CHINA

Microblogs: An alternative, if limited, venue for addressing women's rights violations in China



### Danwei and Media Monitor for Women Network

Hudson Locket and Lu Pin

[www.danwei.com](http://www.danwei.com) and [www.genderwatch.cn](http://www.genderwatch.cn)

### Introduction

Early 2013 and 2012 saw two major events with ramifications for China's women play out on the national stage via microblogs, or weibo (微博), platforms which as of November 2012 had 309 million users, according to the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC). In both cases, posts containing graphic mobile phone photos of violent acts against women stirred online tumult over two longstanding Chinese institutions – one state-enforced, one culturally inescapable, both facts of life for much of the country's female populace:

- The forced abortion performed in June 2012 on Shaanxi resident Feng Jianmei, who was seven and a half months pregnant, by local officials enforcing China's one-child policy.
- The April 2013 ruling granting a divorce and custody to US citizen Kim Lee, former wife of the famed Chinese English teacher Li Yang, on grounds of domestic violence.

Both cases hold lessons for those seeking to use weibo as a vehicle for improving the lot of mainland Chinese women, who by many accounts have seen a steady backslide in terms of gender equality since the beginning of "Reform and Opening Up" in 1978.

### Background

With the ousting of central leadership candidate Bo Xilai in 2012, weibo once again proved its influence as a lever with which the public could exert some degree of oversight on the country's governing body.<sup>1</sup> Bo's crooked dealings were exposed when word spread online that his right-hand man fled to a US consulate with reportedly incriminating documents. While blaming the central government directly remained off limits, weibo showed it could still play an influential role in determining the course of certain events by making

them undeniable among a large enough portion of the population.

There is also precedent for online outrage prompting genuine reform of government policy. Prior to weibo's 2007 debut, heated online discussion erupted after the 2003 death of migrant worker Sun Zhigang, who had been severely beaten and died while being detained for not having a temporary living permit or ID. The furore led then-Premier Wen Jiabao to announce the abolition of the custody and repatriation procedure, which had allowed anyone travelling without proper documentation to be detained and returned to their registered place of residence.

### Case 1: The forced abortion of Feng Jianmei

On 1 June 2012, the Zhenping County Family Planning Bureau in southern Shaanxi province ordered 23-year-old Feng Jianmei and her husband, Deng Jiyuan, to pay a massive fee of CNY 40,000 (around USD 6,500) or face the abortion of Feng's seven-month-old foetus. According to a report on the incident eventually released by China's National Population and Family Planning Commission, Feng's failure to change her household registration after moving to the town meant she was still an urban resident, unlike her rural neighbours who were allowed two children through a loophole in the "one child" family planning policy. Late-term abortions, coerced or otherwise, are illegal in China. Accounts differ as to when the couple was notified, but imposing hefty (technically illegal) fines has long been popular among local governments looking to turn a profit while enforcing the policy under central government mandate. Family members said that local officials accosted Feng while Deng was away and took her to a hospital, where on 2 June the staff injected shots into her womb to induce labour. Prior to injection Feng, isolated and blindfolded, was forced to give her thumbprint and signature consenting to the procedure. Early on the morning of 4 June she gave birth to a stillborn girl.

Word of the forced abortion began spreading through online discussion forums (Bulletin Board Systems, or BBS), with pictures posted by at least 11 June. That morning, one discussion thread on a

<sup>1</sup> For more details, see the country report from China in GISWatch 2012: [giswatch.org/en/country-report/internet-and-corruption/china](http://giswatch.org/en/country-report/internet-and-corruption/china)

BBS run by Shaanxi province's China Business News (华商报) posted a description of the incident alongside two pictures of Feng and the aborted foetus on a hospital bed. The post included Deng's mobile phone number and an official response released by the Zhenping County Family Planning Bureau, which claimed it had acted in accordance with the law. Deng also posted about the incident on his verified Sina Weibo account on 11 June, though he did not post an image containing uncensored pictures of Feng and the foetus until 13 June. The latter was re-published by other users 1,650 times. Another post that day with essentially the same content was re-published 6,580 times and received 4,243 comments. As the image went viral, commercial Chinese media began picking up the story. *The Wall Street Journal* reported that the issue was among the most forwarded on Sina Weibo that week and that the phrase "seven-months pregnant forced abortion" was the most popular search term on 15 June according to data from the University of Hong Kong.

That day, the website *China Digital Times* released a leaked directive from the Central Propaganda Department instructing media outlets to refrain from independent reportage or opinion columns on the incident and requiring them to use only reports from the Xinhua state news service, but the online furore continued. On 25 June, after giving an interview to a German news organisation, Deng posted a picture on weibo of "protestors" he said had been hired by the local township government holding up banners calling him and Feng traitors. The post was re-published by other users over 5,000 times.

That day, state-run paper *The Global Times* ran an opinion piece under the headline "Policy must reflect generation changes", and the next day lawyer Zhang Kai wrote on commercial media site *Caixin* that the local government's actions, which prompted Deng and Feng to accept an out-of-court settlement, had squandered an opportunity for reform through rule of law by giving the issue its day in court. A 27 June Xinhua report announced that officials had been punished for the forced abortion following an investigation by the Ankang city government – though it made only slight mention of the graphic images online and said nothing of weibo. On 11 July, in a story mentioning neither weibo nor the internet, the final word came down through another Xinhua story with the headline "Family compensated for forced abortion, case 'settled'".

A Chinese media report in February 2013 showed that Feng was still suffering from after-effects of the forced abortion and that the local government

had not covered her medical bills as promised. It also found that Deng, working sans contract at a government-arranged job for a concrete plant, would no longer speak with the media for fear of repercussions.

## Case 2: Domestic violence and Kim Lee

On 31 August 2011, the Sina Weibo user "Li Na Hua's Mom" responded to a post by the founder of the wildly successful Crazy English<sup>2</sup> language programme, Li Yang. Li exhorted his millions of followers to "love losing face" by making mistakes while learning English. "Li Na Hua's Mom" responded in Chinese: "I love losing face = I love hitting my wife's face?" and attached a picture of a woman's forehead covered in bruises and welts. The account published more photos of the woman's bruised and bloody body over the next few days. It quickly became clear that the user was Li's wife Kim Lee, a US citizen. The account name was a reference to the couple's three young daughters.

Domestic violence is endemic in China, normally goes unmentioned in public, and is widely accepted as part of married life by many women on the mainland. A 2011 survey by the All China Women's Federation, a state-controlled NGO, found that one in four women had been victims of domestic violence. A gender-based violence survey by Tianjin Normal University made public in May 2013 found that half of Chinese men reported physically or sexually abusing their partners.

Indeed, initial reactions in the media tended to focus on the scandal of a celebrity's wife divulging such private matters to the public at large. Kim Lee's handling of the situation would change that.

The pictures quickly went viral, spurring cacophonous debate. A picture of Lee's bloody ear, posted on 4 September 2011, was re-posted by other users over 24,000 times and received over 10,000 comments. While some users criticised Lee for not suffering silently, others offered encouragement, gratitude, or related their own trauma. Lee continued to post about her experiences while her husband refused to respond publicly or to come with her to a local police station to face charges – though he continued to make media appearances promoting Crazy English.

On 9 September, state-run English newspaper *China Daily* ran a story on legislation being drafted to combat domestic violence, though it gave no details about its contents or when it might be passed. China lacks a national law against

2 [www.bjcrazyenglish.com/](http://www.bjcrazyenglish.com/)



domestic violence, and the exacting requirements for evidence in such cases – stipulated by local laws drafted at the provincial or municipal level – often act as systemic disincentives against going to court over abuse.

Later that month Li Yang admitted to state-run newspaper *China Daily* that “I hit her sometimes but I never thought she would make it public since it’s not Chinese tradition to expose family conflicts to outsiders.” Li failed to attend therapy to deal with the issue, and began making appearances on TV talking about it to mixed reactions.

On 27 October 2011, Kim Lee filed for divorce at the Beijing Chaoyang District Court, requesting equal division of the couple’s property and full custody of their three children. In weibo posts Lee said she insisted on using the Chinese legal system to both teach her daughters a lesson and to provide an example for other women suffering domestic violence. By this time Lee’s weibo account had around 61,000 followers, according to the blog Shanghaiist.

Over the course of the next year Kim Lee posted not just about her experiences building her case and dealing with an intransigent legal system, but of her life raising her daughters. Li Yang occasionally sent her threatening text messages which she would then post to Sina Weibo, such as one on 12 April 2012 reading: “In America you should be killed by your husband with gun. This is real American way. You’re so lucky to be in China!”

On 3 February 2013, Chaoyang District Court finally granted Kim Lee a divorce on the grounds of domestic abuse and, in a first, issued a three-month restraining order against Li Yang. The ruling ordered Li to pay CNY 50,000 in compensation to Lee and an annual fixed stipend of CNY 12 million until all three daughters reached 18. But the amount was minuscule compared to what Li had made from his Crazy English empire, which the court did not force him to disclose.

Still, the ruling was landmark, and Lee told the *International Herald Tribune*’s *Rendezvous* blog that since going public in 2011 she had received 1,141 letters and emails from abused women and their children. “It quickly became a matter of the other women and their stories,” she told the blog. “No one else was speaking out. I just felt I had to.”

## Conclusions

Feng’s case clearly demonstrates the power of net-enabled camera phones and microblogs to raise awareness both of a specific incident and broader issue, provided conditions are right. The incident only truly vaulted itself into the public consciousness

via weibo; Deng’s post and the accompanying mobile phone photos combined with a screenshot of text messages from local authorities were visceral enough to prompt reactions from netizens that quickly spread knowledge across a broad swath of users and attracted attention from commercial media.

Later, more central government organs stepped in to conduct an official investigation, and state media ran opinion pieces condemning those responsible. However, state media also announced the “solution” to Feng’s case, after which media coverage of Feng and weibo-based discussion of family planning in China dropped off precipitously. Despite short-term popular awareness within China, the incident’s connection to a central government policy ultimately limited criticism and further discussion of family planning enforcement.

Kim Lee’s case is admittedly exceptional given her background as a US citizen and high profile as the wife of a Chinese celebrity. However, her insistence on treating the issue as one of domestic violence, her continued efforts at keeping it in the public eye, her refusal to settle out of court, and her decision to work within the Chinese court system while drawing public attention to the trials and travails of the process can serve as a model for those who find themselves thrust suddenly into the spotlight by similar incidents. Even so, it remains to be seen whether national legislation will be passed addressing domestic violence in China.

Both cases are particularly important for the substantial portion of Chinese women who still live in the countryside, and may be echoed by subsequent incidents as more become net-savvy. The latest reports from China’s Ministry of Industry and Information Technology indicate the number of mobile phone-only internet users is on the rise as PC-only users decline, and rapid growth of the former cohort is set to continue in many of China’s poorer, less-industrialised provinces.

## Action steps

- Visceral subject matter (particularly pictures) is a key component for initially drawing attention to an issue online such that it can become a popular social cause.
- Caution should be exercised when pushing for reforms that run counter to major central government policies (e.g. population control). Even in areas characterised by a lack of explicit policy (e.g. domestic violence), the perception of any broader organisational effort may lead to a clampdown on discussion.



- Actively participating in the shaping of a story via weibo can help activists frame the debate over an issue such that it remains both useful and popular, as well as acceptable to the government.
- Continuous updates over a long period showing progress made working within the Chinese legal system may be more likely to remain unregulated, and as a result reach a wider audience.
- However, mere popularity or widespread outrage can still result in government backlash. In June 2013, when many other women joined activist Ye Haiyan in using weibo to shame a Hain-

an province principal and local official accused of raping students, Ye was beaten, temporarily detained and evicted by local authorities.

**Coda:** In recent months, however, a major crackdown by the government aimed at “online rumours” has targeted and shamed major microblog users, and a judicial ruling recently held that if a weibo post is retransmitted by other users over 500 times, or simply gets 5,000 views, the original user will be held responsible for any content the government deems inaccurate or harmful. It now seems likely that these measures will rob microblogging in China of its ability to effect any serious social change. ■

# COLOMBIA

Women's rights, gender and ICTs



## Colnodo

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## Introduction

In Colombia, the use and ownership of information and communications technologies (ICTs) have been a priority on the last government's agenda and therefore easy to implement. The most recent initiative is the Vive Digital Plan<sup>1</sup> designed and implemented by the Ministry of Communications in the last three years and with four priorities: users, services, applications and infrastructure.

Vive Digital does not include a gender perspective, although some organisations have highlighted the need to include this perspective in order to promote applications aimed at women and developed by women with a differential approach – without reinforcing stereotypes.

Regarding women's organisations, most of them work to defend women's rights, a pressing issue due to the armed conflict in the country. The right to be heard and the rights of women in digital spaces have started to be recognised, although more sectors need to be involved in their defence.

This is the context for this GISWatch report on Colombia: the right of women to a safe virtual space free of violence.

## Policy and political background

In Colombia, as in most developing countries, the widespread use of devices such as computers, mobile phones and tablets, and access to internet services such as applications, portals and social networks, are contributing to new ways of exerting violence, and, for the aggressors, new and easy ways of approaching their victims. This is worsened by the armed conflict in the country, where human rights are constantly violated. Therefore it is important to recognise and name the growing forms of violence committed against women using ICTs.

There are no laws legislating against violence against women in the field of ICTs: "The present legislation on ICTs does not refer to gender, and the

legislation that protects women from violence does not mention ICTs as means used to exert violence."<sup>2</sup> Therefore, it is important to refer to the human rights framework of the Colombian constitution, and to the international treaties and agreements signed by the Colombian government.

In recent years there has been significant progress in recognising acts of violence against women as human rights violations and women's rights protection as a priority for society and the state, through promoting the prevention of violence, protection of women and the fight for the eradication of violence against women. One of the most important tools is Law 1257 of 2008, which stipulates norms for recognising, preventing and punishing all forms of discrimination and violence against women. This legislation is commonly known as the law on "the right of women to a life free of violence".

## The gender digital divide in Colombia

Class, generation and gender differentiate the use of ICTs. Women face more obstacles to access ICTs and to make the most of them. With older women or women in low-income sectors the gender digital divide increases dramatically.

The national government, through the Ministry of ICT,<sup>3</sup> has made important efforts to promote the use of ICTs among the population: around 56% of Colombians are internet users, the coverage of mobile phones is almost 100%, the ownership of technological resources is growing, and the potential of technological tools is increasing due to falling prices. Despite these trends, the country still has a significant gap in the access women have to ICTs, especially among the poorest inhabitants and in rural areas.<sup>4</sup> This situation is making access to technology more difficult for women, and has reduced the potential impact of ICTs on their work and educational and social opportunities.<sup>5</sup>

1 [www.mintic.gov.co/index.php/vive-digital](http://www.mintic.gov.co/index.php/vive-digital)

2 Caicedo Naranjo, D. C. (2012) Baseline study of the legislative framework on violence against women and ICTs in Colombia, conducted as part of the APC project Women's Rights in Digital Spaces, funded by FLOW.

3 [www.mintic.gov.co](http://www.mintic.gov.co)

4 [www.slideshare.net/alfreakm/percepccion-usos-y-hbitos-frente-a-las-tecnologas-de-la-informacin-y-la-comunicacin](http://www.slideshare.net/alfreakm/percepccion-usos-y-hbitos-frente-a-las-tecnologas-de-la-informacin-y-la-comunicacin)

5 According to a study conducted by Ipsos, 70% of the men and 56% of the women surveyed access the internet regularly. (Ibid.)

Women in Colombia have less access to ICTs given the multiple roles they have to assume as mothers, wives, workers and citizens, which can make it difficult for them to find the time to learn new skills. Another reason is the level of income and economic resources needed to buy ICT tools when the family could have other priorities, such as buying a new household appliance (e.g. a refrigerator) or fulfilling basic family needs.

The Ministry of ICT has promoted several initiatives in order to encourage the use of ICTs among women, which mainly involve training in how to use a computer, surf the internet, use office applications and take advantage of the online resources offered by different ministries.

### Violence against women in the context of ICTs

According to the National Public Policy for Gender Equality in Colombia, violence is the main human rights violation against women and has become “a problem of justice, public health, and public security needing a holistic approach, engaging all groups of society in order to change the cultural patterns which would enable the eradication of all forms of violence against women.”<sup>6</sup>

One of the most important initiatives regarding this issue was called Women You Have Rights, We Are with You, launched in March 2011 and developed in accordance with Law 1257 of 2008, which aims to diminish all forms of violence against women. The initiative was carried out by the Colombian government’s Inter-Institutional Communications Committee, set up to tackle violence against women. This committee was promoted by the Ministry of ICT and included members of governmental agencies and international cooperation agencies. The initiative ended at the beginning of 2012.

The national policy for responsible use of ICTs supported by the Ministry of ICT and the Vive Digital plan is called *En TIC Confío* (In ICTs I Trust). This policy<sup>7</sup> aims to teach and raise awareness of the opportunities and risks that the internet entails, particularly for children and young people. This initiative needs a gender perspective, considering that women are more at risk and given that the hostile, misogynist and discriminatory acts they have had to endure in real life are translated into the virtual world.

The UN Women office in Colombia leads and takes part in several campaigns and strategies in order to eradicate violence against women. In

September 2012 it officially joined the Secretary General’s UNiTE to End Violence against Women campaign.<sup>8</sup>

Although cases of violence against women using ICTs have become more visible and recognised, there are no specific initiatives for the prevention of this violence. The Colombian Institute for Family Welfare<sup>9</sup> is responsible for tackling issues to protect children under the age of 18, while the national police deals with ICT crimes. The State Prosecutor’s Office has a department in charge of handling ICT crimes. However, often women do not report these offences for lack of trust in these institutions. Organisations defending human rights may be even more distrustful given the information they have access to and the lack of confidence in untrustworthy civil servants.

In Colombia, Law 1257 of 2008 is recognised as a crucial law to defend the rights of women to a life free of violence. Although this law does not include violence against women using ICTs, civil society organisations following this issue are beginning to consider its relevance across the board.

The project Women’s Rights in Digital Spaces, coordinated by the Association for Progressive Communications,<sup>10</sup> supported by the Dutch Ministry for Foreign Affairs (DGIS) Funding Leadership and Opportunities for Women (FLOW) Fund and coordinated in Colombia by Colnodo,<sup>11</sup> is completing a map of cases of violence against women involving ICTs, from which we have identified the most common acts of aggression:<sup>12</sup>

- Young women are at risk of being approached by paedophiles who use false profiles in social networks to gain the confidence of their victims and convince them to send intimate pictures of themselves so that they can later use these images to blackmail them. Often these aggressions end up in sexual abuse and sometimes in homicides. The victims’ parents have denounced some of these cases and the aggressors have been captured. However, it is difficult to follow up on the cases and to know if the aggressors have been prosecuted.
- Women have been discriminated against because of their sexual orientation and because of their work in defence of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and intersexual (LGBTI) community.

8 <http://www.un.org/es/women/endviolence/>

9 <http://www.icbf.gov.co>

10 <http://www.apc.org>

11 <http://www.colnodo.apc.org>

12 <http://www.dominemoslatecnologia.co/mapa/>

6 [www.equidadmujer.gov.co/Documents/Lineamientos-politica-publica-equidad-de-genero.pdf](http://www.equidadmujer.gov.co/Documents/Lineamientos-politica-publica-equidad-de-genero.pdf)

7 <http://www.enticconfio.gov.co/>

- Women activists and human rights defenders have been victims of threats and aggression using ICTs. This situation has been reported and recorded by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Colombia. In a 2010 report, the High Commissioner reported: “In 2009, our office in Colombia observed an increase in the number of death threats and intimidations through emails and pamphlets against human rights defenders, social and community leaders and other marginalised groups” (Document A/HRC/13/72, paragraph 23).<sup>13</sup>
- Women activists and human rights defenders and NGO, network or movement members have been the victims of hackers, phone hacking and spyware or have had their computers stolen. These aggressions are committed to intimidate and threaten women but also to acquire confidential information such as databases with information about the victims of the Colombian conflict, claims and court cases, among others.
- Adult women have been recorded without their consent in sexual activities and later blackmailed or intimidated.
- Young women have been incessantly harassed by their partners or ex-partners via mobile phones. There have been cases in which the partner has installed spyware in the woman’s personal computer. Unfortunately, most of these cases are not reported for lack of confidence in the authorities or because of fear.

In addition to these violations, women are also typecast in a way that does not favour equitable gender relationships in a country with a strong macho culture, and with a biased view of beauty, usually westernised.

## Conclusions

Although Colombia has progressed significantly towards reducing the digital divide, it is necessary to design and develop strategies to cross-fertilise growth in access and ownership of ICTs with a gender approach, targeting women from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, ethnic minorities, older women, women with disabilities and victims of armed conflict, so they can improve their quality of life and enjoy the opportunities that ICTs can provide.

With the widespread use of ICTs, violence against women in the virtual space has also increased. So far there is no institution promoting any formal action to make ICTs safe for women. To achieve a virtual space free of violence, more advocacy work with the women’s movement and civil society organisations is required in order to tackle the problem at a political and legislative level. However, there is currently no specific plan in place to tackle violence against women online where government institutions and civil society organisations can unite their efforts using the formal and legal tools available.

Human rights and women’s organisations recognise the great potential that ICTs have for empowering women and – for women working for the defence of human rights – their usefulness for coordinating activities, improving communications, making their work known to the general public, fundraising, and communicating in emergency situations or when the safety of women is at risk. However, ICTs have also been used to attack women involved in the defence of human rights. Some of the most common modalities are threats, violation of the right to privacy and safety through social networks, stealing computers to get private information, and the interception of communications, including phone hacking, sometimes by government intelligence agencies. These threats are used to destabilise women, frightening them and preventing them from speaking out.

Most of these threats are carried out using mobile phones, emails and messages distributed online, which have a massive impact on women’s organisations and their families. As one woman human rights defender explains: “This way of threatening is more omnipresent than when it is direct and physical. Whoever sends a threat could be anywhere; he or she could be living next door or many miles away.”<sup>14</sup>

Even though ICTs allow people to communicate rapidly or to warn someone about a risk or threat, human rights defenders maintain that they do not always trust the security measures provided by the state. They have found out that their personal mobile phones can be tracked and all their phone calls and movements monitored. Instead of feeling protected they feel controlled and surveilled.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Quote from “Diagnostic on the use of ICTs and violence against women who are human rights defenders in Colombia”, prepared by Ana María Díaz, Human Rights and Humanitarian Law consultant for Colnodo, as part of the Cyber Stewards Network, with the aid of a grant from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), April and May 2013.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

## Action steps

- Continue involving women's organisations and human rights defenders in the defence of a virtual space free of violence against women.
  - Develop a proposal specifically to tackle violence against women using ICTs. This should include governmental institutions with information about violence against women as well as a network strategy to unite efforts between different sectors and institutions.
  - Encourage the prevention, reporting and punishment of offences by the institutions responsible for protecting the population.
- Lobby the institutions responsible for legislating on these matters. To this end, it is essential to document cases of violence against women using ICTs and to prepare bills to improve the content of Law 1257 of 2008 and/or produce new bills or laws related to violence against women online.<sup>16</sup>
  - Promote citizens' mobilisation acknowledging the violence against women using ICTs online. It is also essential to launch online campaigns in order to eradicate all acts of violence against women.<sup>17</sup> ■

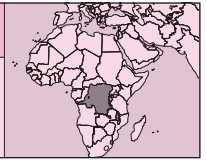
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<sup>16</sup> For more information see Caicedo Naranjo (2012) Op. cit.

<sup>17</sup> The FLOW-funded Colnodo project, Women's Rights in Digital Spaces, is leading up the APC campaign Take Back The Tech in Colombia and has launched a website where resources, campaigns and actions on the issue are provided. [dominemoslatecnologia.org](http://dominemoslatecnologia.org)

# CONGO, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF

Online violation of women's rights



Si Jeunesse Savait  
Françoise Mukuku

## Introduction

During the electoral campaign of 2011, a female politician from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) stood for parliament and was duly elected. One day, while I was watching television, I saw that she had been the victim of phone harassment. A stranger regularly threatened her because she had been successful in the elections.

The insults included insinuations that she had prostituted herself to win the post and that she was no longer worthy of being a wife. The man, who failed to introduce himself every time, also used a blocked number. Despite her fear at seeing that anybody could access her number, she said that she felt an inner reassurance because she had campaigned well and deserved her seat in parliament.

The story of our parliamentarian is unfortunately not isolated. For women who dare to take public office, or are in some way in a position to give their opinions on the running of the country – such as journalists, female politicians or public figures in other domains – it is not uncommon to receive telephone threats to discourage them in their work, or to have their private photographs circulated without their consent or even doctored photo montages showing them in compromising positions. Identity thefts on Facebook have also multiplied.

## Policy and political background

In 2006, the DRC organised its first democratic and transparent elections in 40 years. Although the new constitution adopted by referendum included, for the first time in black and white, the principle of equal male-female representation, the implementing law for this parity was not adopted in time to force political parties to submit electoral lists with equal numbers of female and male candidates.

The fact that in the DRC power is still perceived to be in the hands of men and women are culturally regarded as unsuitable for the public arena has also had an impact on the election of female politicians.

In every election, they find it difficult to be accepted. Their personalities are sullied by false accusations, and the publication of compromising photographs and videos on the internet or via Bluetooth is a way of discouraging them and tarnishing their images in the minds of the Congolese electorate.

With regard to privacy violations, Congolese laws do not recognise the sanctity of personal data, which may include email. The provisions of the Criminal Code stipulate that defamation is applicable if newspapers publish false information. But in most cases, only influential people and politicians go beyond their right to respond and resort to the legal system to assert their rights. There is no provision in the law for the theft of data, which falls under misappropriation of goods belonging to another person, as any type of fraud is classified by the Criminal Code. In the case of publication without consent, there is no real misappropriation as the data still exists and is accessible to the owner. Sometimes, the data was given in good faith, but for a different purpose.

## Using technology to violate women's rights

With the increase in the number of internet users and service abuses and owing to the easy access provided by mobile telephones, we are witnessing the appearance of violence against women making use of these technologies.

Telephones and applications that allow anonymity are used to frighten women. They are threatened to discourage them from talking about “distressing” subjects. This is what happened to three female radio journalists from Nord-Kivu who provided regular news coverage about women who had been the victims of brutal and cruel rape in the east of the country. They received threats to force them to stop tarnishing the image of the country.

Most of the time, these women do not report such acts because they do not know what to do in such cases.

Other women, often personalities from the world of politics, journalism or business, regularly see photographs of themselves circulated in photo montages of naked bodies in the sexual act. This is all to reduce them to what their detractors wrongly



believe their primary function to be: an object of pleasure and procreation; this is even truer in the political world where debates break out every time the gender parity enshrined in the constitution is mentioned.

It is a reminder that women have no business getting involved with politics, that they should return to their kitchens or take care of their husbands, that they have only won the post because of their intimate relations with one influential male politician or another.

However, in the DRC today, women believe that they have the potential to motivate development. They are active in the country's economy and come together in associations that work towards community development and, increasingly, in political parties not only working with women as mobilisers but creating women's federations and involving them in their management.

Despite the cultural conservatism which means that, although they represent 60% of the electorate, Congolese women only represent 20% of candidates and occupy only 10% of decision-making posts, the draft implementing law on equal representation which stipulates measures to ensure that political parties have equal numbers of women and men on their electoral lists should rectify the current situation and ensure more justice for women in politics. This should also lead to less stigmatisation of women in politics because their presence will be legally justified.

With regard to curbing these offences against women, the Criminal Code has become obsolete as it does not incorporate the new forms of violence against women. Sexual violence is the subject of a specific law and the Criminal Procedure Code has been amended to adapt to the specific nature of such violence, but a law covering technology-based violence against women should also be envisaged.

Moreover, the women and girls who are the victims of this abuse are generally not aware of

the judicial means available to them. Companies offering internet-based services should also see to what extent they should make their customer policy public if they have already found technological solutions to the theft of personal data, identity misappropriation, telephone threats, etc.

## Conclusions

Violence against female politicians using information and communications technologies (ICTs) may merely be the reflection of the cultural conservatism which believes that women are not meant to be decision makers. However, above and beyond female politicians, Congolese women need legislation to be developed with regard to violence against women and the use of ICTs. Such types of abuse should be taken into account so that women are able to take part in the country's development in an effective and egalitarian manner.

## Action steps

- Take legal measures to protect women against technology-based violence.
- Encourage women to report these violent acts.
- Before the next general elections, vote in the implementing law to ensure equal male-female representation.
- Raise awareness of the benefits of including women and the opinions of women in decision making.
- Encourage companies offering internet-based services to openly fight these violent acts and publish the different judicial remedies available to the users of their services.
- Work with parliamentarians to ensure that a law curbing technology-based violence against women and girls reinforces the country's legal arsenal. ■

# CONGO, REPUBLIC OF

Women's rights and access to the internet



**AZUR Développement**

Romeo Mbengou

www.azurdev.org

## Introduction

The internet is an important resource that allows individuals in general, and women in particular, to exercise their right to free speech, share their opinions and ideas, develop new skills and understanding, and share information. Internet access allows women to participate in the information society, exercise their rights as citizens, access information about health care and other services, form communities, engage in both the formal and informal processes of shaping their social, cultural, and political lives, and construct movements for their own rights.

However, in recognising the role of the internet in the empowerment of women in the West, one might ask if the internet plays the same role for women and girls in African countries, such as the Republic of Congo.

Before responding to this question later on in the report, it is first important to specify how many internet subscribers there are in the Congo. According to the Agency of Regulation of Post and Electronic Communications (ARPE), there were approximately 15,000 subscribers in 2009 out of an estimated population of four million. Additionally, ARPE indicates that there are 4.3 million mobile phone subscribers accessing internet service through the four telecommunication companies in the country.

This study examines how information and communications technologies (ICTs), especially the internet, are used to both promote and defend the rights of women, as well as to support their fight for equality and the end of social, economic, cultural and political inequalities. What are the challenges that are facing women and their organisations?

## Analysis of legislation relating to ICTs and women's rights

For the purposes of this report, it is important to understand how the legal framework relates to ICTs, as well as how it relates to the protection of women's rights.

## *The legal framework for ICTs*

Currently, Law No. 9-2009 of 25 November 2009, which regulates the electronic communications sector, is the only one that relates to ICTs. This law describes the conditions for the installation and use of electronic communication services and networks. Article 6 of the law specifies that electronic communication activities may be carried out freely as long as they strictly respect the conditions of the legislation.

Article 85 of the same law states that the public powers shall guarantee the necessary conditions for developing universal access and service. To this end, the Republic of Congo adopted a national policy on the development of ICTs. Law No. 11-2009 also created an agency that regulates electronic communication.

Other laws are currently in the works; these include a law that would protect personal data in the Republic of Congo, a law on cyber security, a law to combat cyber crime, and a law on the digital economy. A national high-speed internet development plan is also in the offing.

## *The legal framework for women's rights*

With respect to legislation on women's rights, it is important to emphasise that different laws cover different aspects. These include a law from 17 October 1984 establishing the Family Code, the Penal Code of 1810, a law from 14 June 2010 on the protection of children, a law from 25 February 2011 that promotes and protects the rights of indigenous populations, and a law from 3 June 2011 that supports the fight against HIV/AIDS and protects the rights of those living with HIV. Drafts of other laws are underway, such as a law on gender parity. No specific law exists on violence against women and girls, and the texts that do touch on the subject, notably the penal code dating from 1810 and the family code of 1984, no longer correspond to the current realities of our society.

## *Pertinent questions on women's rights*

The women's movement can be considered as the ensemble of groups and networks of women who have fought in the political, social and economic spheres for the empowerment of Congolese women

and girls. Congolese women have been actively involved in the fight for independence up to today. The fight for women's rights has been primarily focused on social, economic and political rights, and Congolese women have worked on numerous issues important to them. These include the fight for women to be able to assume positions of power, particularly in politics; education; the fight against HIV/AIDS, malaria, sickle cell anaemia and other illnesses; the fight against violence against women and girls; the fight against discrimination of indigenous populations; and more recently, gender parity.

Whether the demands were put forth by women in political groups or women in civil society, they have been successful in bringing about change. The demands of women in both political groups and in civil society have produced tangible results, such as the creation of a Ministry for the Promotion of Women and Integration of Women in Development in 1992, the adoption of a national action plan, and their integration in strategic documents and programmes.

## The strategic use of ICTs in promoting women's rights in the Congo

### *Internet access for women's organisations*

Despite problems of internet access for Congolese society, and particularly women – problems even more pronounced in rural areas – the internet's contributions since 2000 must be recognised. It has supported women's movements on crucial topics such as the right to health care, education and female leadership, and the fight against violence, among others. Some women's organisations describe having paid 5,000 CFA francs (USD 10) an hour to use the internet in cybercafés, and today they are able to do so for 500 francs (USD 1). The desire to gain knowledge and to be connected has led women to seek information and develop new programmes. Many stories like the following have been told.

This story takes place in Makoua, approximately 800 kilometres north of Brazzaville. Lucie, the director of a women's rights NGO, is there to monitor the activities being carried out by an organisation leading the fight against HIV/AIDS. Aware of the difficulties of accessing the internet in the area, she buys a modem in the form of a USB drive from a mobile phone company so that she may access the internet during her trip to Makoua. As soon as she has arrived in the area, she discovers that she is unable to connect to the internet. There is no network, and no internet connection. Having resigned herself to the fact that she cannot connect to the internet,

residents of the neighbourhood inform her that she must go to another neighbourhood to try to access the network. However, after two days, she is still unable to access the network. Faced with the need to connect to the internet to get news from partners and colleagues, she said, "I cannot spend an entire day without internet. It's my sole source of communication with our organisation's partners." Finally, she ends up going to the only cybercafé in the town, which is operated by a religious group. This story, among others, shows that internet access in certain areas of the country remains extremely difficult and requires overcoming obstacle after obstacle.

In the Republic of Congo, as in many African countries, violence in its many forms is a daily occurrence for many women and girls. Faced with these cases of violence, some associations are fighting back, each with its own approach and particular methods. Today, with the help of the internet, many organisations are now working together. Among these organisations are AZUR Développement, l'Association pour le Développement des Femmes dans la Bouenza (AFDB), Réseau des Associations de Solidarité Positive du Congo (RASPC), and l'Agence Régionale d'information et de prévention sur le SIDA (ARIPS). Their work consists of educating women in order to prevent these types of violence. Additionally, these organisations train survivors on social communication to further prevent the violence and to provide psychosocial, medical and legal aid. The internet has been an asset in this fight; specifically, women are able to use an internet platform created by the Association for Progressive Communications and AZUR Développement<sup>1</sup> to report and map domestic violence. Now, domestic violence, long considered normal in our country, is being denounced and reliable data on this violence is available online.

However, as the story of Lucie in Makoua demonstrates, Congolese women still experience difficulties in gaining internet access. The internet is helping women in their fight, but under what circumstances and with what results?

"In theory, we would love to be on the internet every day, but we have a problem: we have no computers or internet connection at the office. In short, we're able to use the internet at least four times a week because we access it at the office of another women's association," declared Blandine Sita, president of Association Femme Plus du Congo, a women's AIDS organisation. Internet access for Congolese activists who work with civil society organisations is further complicated by a lack of equipment, financing and technical skills.

<sup>1</sup> [africatti.apc.org](http://africatti.apc.org)

## *The different uses of ICTs for women's rights*

The most commonly used internet applications are email and search engines, such as Google. Electronic forums, online classes and workshops, blogs and social networks are also occasionally used by women's organisations.

However, as a result of skills workshops organised by AZUR Développement, Association Dynamique Plurielle and Handicapés Sans Frontières, more women and organisations are now using blogs to make their voices heard.<sup>2</sup>

The personal accounts received from women recognise the place of the internet in their work: "Before we had access to the internet, we would call friends on the telephone to let them know that we had a meeting. People would either come to the meeting or not, and when the quorum was not met, we weren't able to hold the meeting and had to push back certain deadlines. Today, we no longer need to meet up in one location; we are able to connect with each other via the internet and can exchange ideas there," stated Carine Ndamba, president of Association Dynamique Plurielle (ADP). As such, the internet has not only facilitated the work done within associations, but it has also improved the ability of organisations with similar goals to work collaboratively.

Some women's organisations have seized upon the idea of using ICTs and the internet to carry out tasks, do research, and communicate with other organisations and networks. These organisations have been able to join regional and international networks, as well as benefit from the reinforcement of skills, grants and knowledge.

Today, "certain at-risk women who have been trained have created blogs and been contacted by others, even here in the Congo. Each year, we receive emails from people who tell us, for example, 'I am a victim of violence and I don't know where to go. Am I alone?'" Several years ago, this wasn't possible," said Sylvie Niombo, director of AZUR Développement.<sup>3</sup>

As women's organisations today search for current information on women's rights, the internet has allowed them greater access to the information they need. Often, existing texts are outdated; for

example, the Penal Code dates back to 1810. Internet access has improved the response to the needs of the women these organisations serve. Amaïcool Mpombo, of the Women Lawyers Association of Congo, describes this change:

Before the internet, people had to head to libraries. Law books are expensive, so most people didn't have them readily accessible. But even then, women in the professional world didn't have much time to go to the library. Now, when I'm in my office, I can easily access the internet and find the information that I need on the subjects that interest me. The internet is of fundamental importance and helps us greatly in our work, most notably in improving our research so that we can better help the people who contact us.

Enough cannot be said about how much the internet has aided in advocating for and inciting change in legislation, policies and programmes for women.

## *Factors limiting internet usage among women's organisations*

It is important to remember that electricity is a prerequisite to internet access. However, the electricity grid remains inadequate and unreliable in both urban and rural zones, presenting a great obstacle to internet access. In Sibiti, Makoua, Mossaka and Mossendjo, among other places, the population has electricity only between 6 pm and 11 pm, and even then, it is not guaranteed, despite the current efforts to bring electricity to these areas of the country.

As there is a lack of basic infrastructure, it is inherent that there is also insufficient ICT infrastructure. The National Coverage Project seeks to extend access to remote areas and to move closer to universal broadband access. The country also foresees joining the fibre-optic cable system in West Africa through the WACS Project. The CAB Congo-CITCG project (Central Africa Backbone-Communication Infrastructure and Technology) in Central Africa should also improve connectivity.

Moreover, competition in the mobile phone market has intensified in the past few years. Consequently, approximately 70% of the country's population is covered by a GSM signal as compared with 48% in resource-rich African countries, according to a March 2010 study published by Africa Infrastructure Country Diagnostic (AICD). While it is true that all the mobile phone companies provide internet access through the use of modems, it must be recognised that not only is the service extremely weak, but certain areas are still not completely covered.

2 The blog [feministescongo.wordpress.com](http://feministescongo.wordpress.com) publishes various women's blog entries. Other women's rights blogs include [www.iteco.be/Au-Congo-des-blogs-pour-les-femmes](http://www.iteco.be/Au-Congo-des-blogs-pour-les-femmes), [arletteraymonde.unblog.fr/2009/12/30/la-cedef-bilan-et-perspectives](http://arletteraymonde.unblog.fr/2009/12/30/la-cedef-bilan-et-perspectives), [azurweb.blogspot.com/2008/02/formation-pour-le-leadership-des-jeunes.html](http://azurweb.blogspot.com/2008/02/formation-pour-le-leadership-des-jeunes.html) and [pambazuka.org/fr/category/features/66640](http://pambazuka.org/fr/category/features/66640)

3 Several blogs published by women on the subject of violence can be viewed at [feministescongo.wordpress.com/blogroll-des-congolaises](http://feministescongo.wordpress.com/blogroll-des-congolaises)

A lack of infrastructure also means that there is a lack of personal computers. According to a 2010 study done by the Pratic Association, 0.9% of the population used personal computers and 56% used mobile phones. Certainly the situation has changed since then, but not significantly; the price of a computer remains high, at least USD 500.

There is a gap in internet accessibility for women in both rural and urban zones. Problems linked to women's socioeconomic status, family responsibilities, and the lack of content responding to their needs can account for some women's disinterest in the internet.

The strategic use of the internet by women's organisations to advance women's rights assumes that they are already savvy internet users. Women's technology skills remain weak, however. According to surveys conducted with 15 organisations, among groups of 20 to 50 members, only two or three female leaders on average per group are trained in and regularly use the internet.

## Conclusion

Although the internet is an invaluable tool for raising awareness about the challenges faced by Congolese women, internet access remains limited for many women. As such, actions must be undertaken in order to give Congolese women from every level of society and from all corners of the country the ability to access and use the internet to both gain autonomy and contribute to the development of the country. These efforts can be realised only if the suggested measures are implemented.

## Action steps

In order to allow Congolese women to benefit from all that the internet has to offer, civil society, the government and even international groups must take certain measures:

### *Civil society organisations*

- Train women on the strategic use of the internet in the domain of women's rights.
- Encourage the creation of internet content that responds to the needs of women and girls.
- Advocate at the national level for national coverage of ICT infrastructure.
- Encourage networking and collaboration among different organisations and movements on the internet.

### *Public authorities*

- Pursue projects to connect to the fibre-optic network.
- Pursue policies to bring electricity to rural and outlying zones.
- Integrate the teaching of ICTs into the Congolese educational system at all levels.
- Develop and adopt legal policies protecting women, taking into account the strategic use of ICTs.

### *International organisations and partners*

- Grant the necessary financial resources to civil society to train women on the internet. ■



# COOK ISLANDS

Balancing leadership: A pathway to parliament for Cook Islands women



## Pan Pacific and Southeast Asia Women's Association (PPSEAWA)

Maureen Hilyard, Alexis Wolgramm  
and Lynnsay Rongokea  
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### Introduction

Oral history from the Cook Islands indicates that women have held political leadership roles for generations, by way of a traditional system of inheritance. Genealogies were memorised by someone who was designated with this important responsibility until the written language arrived and this information became documented in courts for historical and succession purposes. The missionaries arrived on Rarotonga in 1821 and engaged with the Ariki (High Chiefs), many of whom were women. They were treated equally by the missionaries, whose objective was to introduce Christianity to the Cook Islands and to wipe out the pagan culture.<sup>1</sup> Missionaries encouraged the natives to become converts with material benefits, and then used them as policemen to ensure community compliance with the “Blue Laws”. Such was the influence of the church on the locals that, even today, any political aspirant is advised to put in plenty of “church time”.<sup>2</sup>

The first woman leader in a formal political organisation was Ariki Makea Takau,<sup>3</sup> who was president of the early Council of Ariki from 1891 to 1901. After the Cook Islands became self-governing in 1965, the House of Ariki was formally constituted by the 1966 Cook Islands Act. A subsequent amendment in 1972 recognised traditional leaders and sub-chiefs and their status as advisors to the government on matters relating to custom and the welfare of the people, by establishing the Koutu Nui (a council of traditional leaders). Women have held the position of president of the House of Ariki on several occasions. The current president of the Koutu Nui is Turi Mataiapo, Maria Henderson, who was elected after the sudden death of former president Dorice Te Tika Mataiapo Reid in 2011. A majority of the current executive of the Koutu Nui are women.

Since self-governance in 1965, women have run for parliament 39 times – either in general elections, snap elections or by-elections – and have been elected 10 times.<sup>4</sup> However, only seven women have ever been elected to parliament.<sup>5</sup> Within a parliamentary context, the first woman to be elected to parliament with the advent of self-government in 1965 was Marguerite Story,<sup>6</sup> sister of Sir Albert Henry,<sup>7</sup> the first premier of the Cook Islands. Story was the speaker of the legislative assembly from 1965 to 1979 and was the first female member of the cabinet of the Cook Islands and the first woman in the Commonwealth to become speaker of parliament.<sup>8</sup> The next woman to be elected to parliament was Fanaura Kingstone,<sup>9</sup> a Cook Islands Party candidate, who was elected in 1983 to the overseas seat. More recently, Ngamau Munoko<sup>10</sup> has held her Democratic Party seat in Nikao-Panama since 1996. The Democratic Party successfully campaigned in by-elections in 2012 and 2013 so that three women from the party currently hold parliamentary seats.<sup>11</sup> The constitution of the Democratic Party specifically supports “the development of women and (...) their rights to opportunity in development and decision-making.”

### Challenging gender imbalances in politics

Studies conducted in the United States<sup>12</sup> have identified that although women leaders perform just as well as their male counterparts, they tend to lack confidence to run for office within an electoral environment that is usually very highly competitive and biased against female candidates. Male opponents frequently raise the conflict between career and family obligations<sup>13</sup> as a high barrier for success for

4 [www.cookislandsnews.com/2010/November/Wed17/other.htm#1011151423](http://www.cookislandsnews.com/2010/November/Wed17/other.htm#1011151423)

5 Ibid.

6 [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marguerite\\_Story](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marguerite_Story)

7 [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albert\\_Henry\\_\(politician\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albert_Henry_(politician))

8 Vom Bosch, W. et al. (1994) *New Politics in the South Pacific*, Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, p. 283.

9 [www.guide2womenleaders.com/Cook\\_Islands.htm](http://www.guide2womenleaders.com/Cook_Islands.htm)

10 [www.parliament.gov.ck/members/munoko.htm](http://www.parliament.gov.ck/members/munoko.htm)

11 [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cook\\_Islands\\_general\\_election,\\_2010](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cook_Islands_general_election,_2010)

12 [www.american.edu/spa/wpi/upload/2012-Men-Rule-Report-final-web.pdf](http://www.american.edu/spa/wpi/upload/2012-Men-Rule-Report-final-web.pdf)

13 [www.worldywca.org/YWCA-News/World-YWCA-and-Member-Associations-News/Overcoming-Barriers-to-Better-Gender-Representation-in-Politics](http://www.worldywca.org/YWCA-News/World-YWCA-and-Member-Associations-News/Overcoming-Barriers-to-Better-Gender-Representation-in-Politics)

1 [www.ck/religion.htm](http://www.ck/religion.htm)

2 [www.ck/religion.htm](http://www.ck/religion.htm)

3 [www.guide2womenleaders.com/cook\\_islands\\_parliament.htm](http://www.guide2womenleaders.com/cook_islands_parliament.htm)



women entering politics. Women are expected to perform like superwomen, juggling their responsibilities to their electorates as well as to their families. Any deficiencies result in destructive criticisms.

Malaysia is one of the most developed countries in the Asia Pacific region, but is second to last with regard to women's political participation.<sup>14</sup> Their barriers are both political and cultural and are heavily influenced by their religion, education and the media. Women entering politics in some countries in Africa are seen as a serious challenge to chauvinism. Women suffer public ridicule and name calling, and even physical threats.<sup>15</sup> Ireland recently legislated<sup>16</sup> that parties must ensure that at least 30% of candidates at general elections are women. The quota system is seen as a temporary measure to enable women to get to the starting post in terms of major decision making. Although the quota provides an opportunity for women to have a voice at the table, they are aware that "token" females could be selected to run in constituencies where they have no chance of winning. Quotas can be a way of accelerating women's political participation<sup>17</sup> but they should only be seen as one step towards the balance of leadership.<sup>18</sup>

In 1994, the world organisation of national parliaments, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, developed a plan of action to correct the present imbalances in the participation of men and women in political life.<sup>19</sup> A working group consisting of an equal number of male and female parliamentarians was formed to address the fact that "forty years after the adoption of the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, and despite undeniable progress, political and parliamentary life remains dominated by men in all countries." The IPU Plan of Action addressed the conditions needed for women to participate actively in political life, the legal basis for equality of men and women, and women's participation in politics at national level, including such issues as action to promote women's "political awareness", respect for the principle of equality in political parties, measures for affirmative action, the participation of women in elections and the sharing of political responsibilities by men and women. The Plan of

Action was conceived as guidelines to inspire and stimulate national action for women's participation in politics, and it is expected that governments, parliaments, political parties and organisations, as well as non-governmental organisations and the media will all contribute to this learning process.

In 2012, Asia Pacific parliamentarians predicted that it would take 50 years for gender balance to be achieved in the region if women's participation in parliaments remains at its current pace.<sup>20</sup> They proposed a six-step action plan to fast track women into politics – including constitutional reform which would expand women's rights to vote and to hold public office; electoral, campaign finance and party laws to regulate the nomination, campaigning and election process for entering parliaments; reserved seats and legal gender quotas; party selection rules and nomination procedures; capacity development policies and programmes, including candidate training, induction and mentoring programmes, as well as awareness campaigns that counter stereotyping of candidates according to their gender; and gender-sensitive rules and procedures in elected bodies to help women candidates to do their jobs once in office.

### Tracking quotas online

While electoral quotas are meant to allow more women to be involved in parliamentary representation, their use raises issues about whether quotas actually do contribute to the political empowerment of women, or whether they violate the principles of liberal democracy.<sup>21</sup> The idea is to recruit women into politics, via reserved or legal candidate seats which are legislated, or they could be included within political party quotas and therefore be voluntary. The latter is considered the more desirable outcome.

A total of 116 countries have joined the Quota Project,<sup>22</sup> an online initiative which records and explains how quotas are contributing to the increase of women's participation, and the representation of women in decision-making bodies at executive and legislative levels over the past decade. The most successful countries in terms of the number of women in parliament among those whose political parties have opted for voluntary quotas (31 out of 116 quota countries) include Sweden (45%), Nicaragua (40.2%), Ghana (39.7%), Mozambique (39.2%)

14 [www.themalaysianinsider.com/sideviews/article/womens-political-participation-in-malaysia-what-are-the-barriers-nazreen-nizam](http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/sideviews/article/womens-political-participation-in-malaysia-what-are-the-barriers-nazreen-nizam)

15 [www.pri.org/stories/world/africa/women-in-sierra-leone-face-high-barriers-to-participation-in-politics-12120.html](http://www.pri.org/stories/world/africa/women-in-sierra-leone-face-high-barriers-to-participation-in-politics-12120.html)

16 [www.thejournal.ie/gender-quotas/news](http://www.thejournal.ie/gender-quotas/news)

17 [www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?newsid=41445&cr=un#.Ub2kB\\_nVDng](http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?newsid=41445&cr=un#.Ub2kB_nVDng)

18 [www.thejournal.ie/readme/column-there-are-barriers-to-women-participating-in-politics-332330-Jan2012](http://www.thejournal.ie/readme/column-there-are-barriers-to-women-participating-in-politics-332330-Jan2012)

19 [www.ipu.org/wmn-e/planactn.htm](http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/planactn.htm)

20 [www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2012/09/20/undp-offers-six-point-plan-to-fast-track-women-in-politics-in-asia-pacific/](http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2012/09/20/undp-offers-six-point-plan-to-fast-track-women-in-politics-in-asia-pacific/)

21 [www.quotaproject.org/aboutQuotas.cfm](http://www.quotaproject.org/aboutQuotas.cfm)

22 [www.quotaproject.org/country.cfm](http://www.quotaproject.org/country.cfm)

and the Netherlands (38.7%). Of the countries with legislated quotas, Rwanda has a minimum of 30% of their 26-seat Senate and 80-member Chamber of Deputies reserved for women. They also reserve another three seats for youth and disabled members. Rwanda is the only country with a female majority in its national Parliament (56.3%). Ireland<sup>23</sup> has recently introduced a bill that proposes to decrease state funding to parties by half if a minimum of 30% of their electoral candidates are not women at the next general election. Their required quota will be raised to 40% in the 2019 election.

In the Pacific, UN Women Pacific's Gender Equality in Political Government Programme<sup>24</sup> aims to promote more representation at the political level. Women's participation in decision making and women's representation in Pacific parliaments are among the lowest in the world, despite international commitments to gender equality in CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action, the Millennium Development Goals and regional commitments to the Pacific Platform for Action.

Samoa<sup>25</sup> proposes to legislate for a 10% quota for women, while Fiji already has a voluntary quota of about 10%.<sup>26</sup> The Cook Islands does not have a quota system and its representation by women currently stands at 12.5%, all in the opposition party. Just before the 2010 elections in the Cook Islands, the matter of special temporary measures was raised in a community consultation by the Pan Pacific and Southeast Asia Women's Association (PPSEAWA) Cook Islands.<sup>27</sup> Party leaders were non-committal at the time, but recent actions by the opposition Democratic Party affirm a commitment to women participants in the election process.

The Pacific Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2012-2015)<sup>28</sup> was developed to address women's role in conflict prevention and peace building in the Pacific. Incorporated into the plan is "enhanced capacity of governments to adopt measures to increase women's representation and participation at all levels of leadership and decision-making." The plan is coordinated by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and proposes to increase existing knowledge-building and advocacy efforts to support women's political representation in the region, and to introduce new

measures to support an increase in women's representation and participation.

Women in the Cook Islands do not experience the same extreme pressures against standing for election as those in some other countries, because our history has demonstrated that women have been elected to leadership roles according to traditional custom in the past. So why are women today less inclined to take on leadership positions in government departments or in parliament? And how do we change people's traditional voting behaviours so that they will vote for a woman?<sup>29</sup>

### Using ICTs to support the participation of women in Cook Islands politics

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, in Section J, emphasises the need to "[i]ncrease the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies of communication."<sup>30</sup> The Geneva Declaration of Principles of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) affirmed that "development of ICTs [information and communications technologies] provides enormous opportunities for women, who should be an integral part of and key actors in the Information Society." It also explicitly mentions the potential of ICTs to promote "gender equality and empowerment of women."<sup>31</sup>

One of the key reasons for the reluctance of women to participate in party politics is the lack of information about what they might be getting themselves into. They fear the unknown. They do not think that they are qualified to run for office. They are less competitive, less confident, and more risk averse.<sup>32</sup> Our two women members of parliament in Titikaveka (on Rarotonga island) and Tamarua (on Mangaia) have proved that women can do it. But what is required is a campaign to raise awareness about women leaders and their capacity for leadership. Despite the slow uptake of the internet as a major ICT tool in the Cook Islands, the internet and related technologies are the means by which we can spread messages that will raise awareness amongst women, as well as the wider community. The community needs to be educated about political parties and about the electoral process – how to vote and how to become involved. The Pacific Islands ICT Policy 2002<sup>33</sup> focused on ICTs being used to inform and

23 [www.quotaproject.org/uid/countryview.cfm?country=102](http://www.quotaproject.org/uid/countryview.cfm?country=102)

24 [unwomenpacific.org/pages.cfm/our-programmes/advancing-gender-justice/gepg-design](http://unwomenpacific.org/pages.cfm/our-programmes/advancing-gender-justice/gepg-design)

25 [www.pacwip.org/future-elections/samoa](http://www.pacwip.org/future-elections/samoa)

26 [www.pacwip.org/future-elections/fiji](http://www.pacwip.org/future-elections/fiji)

27 [ppseawacookislands.wordpress.com](http://ppseawacookislands.wordpress.com)

28 [www.forumsec.org.fj/resources/uploads/attachments/documents/Pacific%20Regional%20Action%20Plan%2001%2001%20Women%20Peace%20and%20Security%20Final%20and%20Approved.pdf](http://www.forumsec.org.fj/resources/uploads/attachments/documents/Pacific%20Regional%20Action%20Plan%2001%2001%20Women%20Peace%20and%20Security%20Final%20and%20Approved.pdf)

29 [www.ndi.org/files/Global\\_Action\\_Plan\\_NDI\\_English.pdf](http://www.ndi.org/files/Global_Action_Plan_NDI_English.pdf) - a set of practical recommendations to help political parties broaden their appeal by becoming more inclusive and representative.

30 [www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/media.htm](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/media.htm)

31 [www.itu.int/wsis/docs/geneva/official/dop.html](http://www.itu.int/wsis/docs/geneva/official/dop.html)

32 [www.american.edu/spa/wpi/upload/2012-Men-Rule-Report-final-web.pdf](http://www.american.edu/spa/wpi/upload/2012-Men-Rule-Report-final-web.pdf)

33 CROP ICT Working Group (2002) *Pacific ICT Policy and Strategic Plan*.

connect Pacific island populations. Technology will play a major part in this strategy for change.<sup>34</sup> Fortunately, in the Cook Islands, technology is already an equaliser with just as many women as men working with ICTs, in both technical and governance areas.

Using technology to educate the community about voting is also important. Voting generally follows traditional patterns in the Cook Islands, and communities need to be better informed about making their own choices, and not simply voting the way that their parents or families vote. Fiji is introducing e-voting at a future election<sup>35</sup> which could help to solve privacy concerns. Social media are popular and could be the means by which information can be more widely disseminated via NGOs and other networks. During the 2012 by-election in Titikaveka, on Rarotonga, the Democratic Party demonstrated a more strategic use of popular media – radio and television – to get information out to voters about the candidates and their views on a wide range of issues. Television is available on Rarotonga (and privately on Mangaia), but radio reaches all the outer islands. Access to the internet is available at various levels of connectivity across the whole of the Cook Islands, but both major political parties have yet to develop communication strategies that will include the internet as a major medium for disseminating information about the electoral process and potential candidates. The Cook Islands’ changeover to O3B<sup>36</sup> satellite connectivity before the end of 2013 will provide faster and more reliable internet communications between the islands, and will narrow the communications divide between remote outer islanders and the main island of Rarotonga.

PPSEAWA Cook Islands has developed a new initiative which will combine skilled women, technology and social messaging in a single media project. Audiovisual material will be employed to influence community thinking about women as political leaders and to consider the importance and value of one’s vote at national elections. Television commercials will be produced by a group of emerging women filmmakers who will craft a response to the lack of women representatives in parliament by promoting the attributes that women bring to leadership and to political debate. A second set of commercials will highlight the negative voting patterns that have historically marked Cook Islands’ elections and promote the need for critical thinking when choosing political representation.

PPSEAWA will also run a workshop on campaign strategy for women candidates prior to the next election in 2014. The workshop will be filmed by the women filmmakers group for inclusion in a short film that will accompany an election handbook for women candidates. The film will promote the roles of women not only as political leaders but also as credible filmmakers and strong social commentators. Audiovisual materials, the handbook and progress reports on the project will be uploaded to PPSEAWA’s page on the Cook Islands Social Services website (the project of another NGO, the Cook Islands Internet Action Group)<sup>37</sup> so that it is widely available across the Cook Islands, to PPSEAWA International branches across the Pacific, and to the community at large. The short film will be made available for broadcast by Cook Islands Television and be put on the internet as a promotional YouTube presentation of women in politics in the Cook Islands.

Ensuring access to ICTs and providing information that meets their needs is critical for women in the Cook Islands, especially those in remote outer islands where isolation is a significant barrier to learning and being better informed about issues that could have a significant impact upon them. Our aim is to employ the internet and other technologies to take the message of representative democracy to all the people in the Cook Islands, and to encourage them to make informed choices about who is standing and who they will vote for in the next general election in the Cook Islands in 2014.

### Action steps

As a lead up to the next election PPSEAWA aims to address the following actions from the Pacific Action Plan:

- Promote women’s “political awareness” – gain wide support amongst women’s groups and the community at large.
- Promote women in leadership and support women candidates in the outer islands.
- Lobby for equality principles to be endorsed and put into practice by political parties at every stage of candidate selection.
- Lobby for affirmative action by political parties to get them to voluntarily engage in the quota system and ensure that at least one third of their candidates are women, and that those women are supported by their chosen party in their stand for election. ■

<sup>34</sup> Bhagwan-Rolls, S. and Griffin, V. (2006) *Gender in Media and ICTs: A view from the Pacific Islands*, IT for Change.

<sup>35</sup> [www.electionsfiji.gov.fj](http://www.electionsfiji.gov.fj)

<sup>36</sup> [www.telecom.co.ck/content/page/o3b/m/4](http://www.telecom.co.ck/content/page/o3b/m/4)

<sup>37</sup> [www.ciiag.org/index.php/about-us](http://www.ciiag.org/index.php/about-us)

# COSTA RICA

The ICT sector requires the full participation of women



## Cooperativa Sulá Batsú

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### Introduction

When we talk about gender and technology, we cannot ignore women's participation in the information and communications technologies (ICT) sector. It is quite important to think about this theme from an equality and equity perspective, since Costa Rica has a dynamic and growing ICT sector. This is an economic opportunity sector for business ventures and constant growth. Men living in the main cities of the country have made the most of the opportunities generated by this sector, which can be said to result in a double exclusion for young women living in rural areas.

### Women in the ICT sector

Costa Rica has had the capacity and infrastructure to support the development of ICT companies and business endeavours, among which we can mention national companies that develop software and a number of big international companies that have factories in the main cities in Costa Rica, such as Intel, IBM and Hewlett Packard. Some of the characteristics that attract international investors in the ICT sector are well-trained professionals able to speak different languages and the political stability of the country, among others. Based on these, a recent study by the international consultant Tholons identified the capital of Costa Rica, San José, as the third best city in Latin America to establish outsourcing of technological services.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, if you take a look at the statistics for women's participation in the sector, you can assume that there are issues that result in their exclusion. There are only a few women studying majors related to technology. Once those women enter the workplace, you will find even fewer in specialised fields of work, and owning or managing technology companies.

A whopping 96.6% of professionals working in ICTs as their main economic activity are male, and

only 3.4 % are female.<sup>2</sup> In management positions, 86.15% are male and only 13.85% female. In the Costa Rican ICT Chamber, only 9.6% of the companies are run by women. Regarding the academic sector, only 18% of the students doing ICT majors are female, compared to 82% male.

The low participation of women in the ICT industry has three main consequences:

- There is a high demand for professionals and technicians in the ICT sector that is not satisfied by the skills available. At the same time, there is a great need for employment opportunities in Costa Rica, where women make up the majority of the population.
- The ICT industry requires diverse visions, abilities and sensitivities for innovation and for the generation of quality products. The integration of women will strengthen creativity and originality in the technological products developed.
- Technological products that can solve social, economic, political and cultural issues in Costa Rica need to be developed. The design of these solutions involves the contributions of very diverse groups living in Costa Rica, among them women.

### Action steps

The incorporation of women in the ICT sector should start from a comprehensive approach. This should begin with an analysis to try to understand the reasons behind their exclusion in such an important economic sector. Cooperativa Sulá Batsú, a member of the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) network, has been working on this subject for years. Currently Sulá Batsú is developing a process supported by UN Women called TIC-as. The integration of women in the ICT sector should include:

- Working with girls (especially ten years and older), their parents and teachers to combat the stereotypes in relation to gender and technology. In addition, girls should be encouraged to appropriate technology.
- Creating conditions in universities so that fewer women doing ICT majors drop out before they

<sup>1</sup> [www.centralamericadata.com/en/article/business\\_commerce/Costa\\_Rica\\_Among\\_Leaders\\_in-Outsourcing](http://www.centralamericadata.com/en/article/business_commerce/Costa_Rica_Among_Leaders_in-Outsourcing)

<sup>2</sup> According to the 2007 Household Survey.

complete their studies. We need to create an environment that assists as many women as possible in completing their studies (including enrolment conditions that support pregnant students, and creating more general support networks).

- Creating the appropriate conditions in the ICT sector that can take advantage of the possibilities of technology to support the incorporation of women in the production processes and management of ICT companies (flexible schedules, women's networks, online training, among others).
- Creating policies that increase the number of women entrepreneurs working in the sector, not only through technical but also financial support. In addition, it is quite important that support networks are created and resources made available for women entrepreneurs.
- It is important to mention that the issue of incorporating women in the ICT sector in Costa Rica is generating a lot of interest, especially at universities and colleges, which have begun to think about how to attract women and encourage them to stay in classes. Similarly, some companies are developing mentor programmes for female students and creating women engineer networks to help simplify the integration of women in the ICT sector.
- There is a lot of work left to do in this field in Costa Rica, especially in governmental institutions working on gender, digital policies and entrepreneurship. ■



# CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Yasmina Ouégnin: A strong “NO” that leads to a stronger “YES” for women’s rights



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www.nnenna.org

## Introduction

Also known by bloggers and football fans as “Drogba’s country”, Côte d’Ivoire is the “mini” West Africa of West Africa. With a high rate of immigration from neighbouring countries, its population of 21 million is a consistent ethnic mesh that dates farther back than the early 1960s. The youth population is one of the highest in Africa. In 1988, only 4% of the population was classified as “aged”. The level of education has been rising slightly over the years and currently stands at 24% of the population with post-high school enrolment.

Orange, white and green are the national colours – the green aptly representing not just the lush vegetation of the south and the green grasslands of the north, but equally agriculture, which is the economic mainstay of the country. In this, the men handle the key crops: coffee, cocoa, cashews, oil palm, cotton, bananas and plantains, which are mainly for export. The women cultivate vegetables, yams, cassava and other food products, mainly for national consumption.

On the political front, much has been written about the 1960-1970 years of economic boom in the country, which were followed by an economic downturn, political crisis and finally civil war. The country has started on its way to recovery and key data are gradually moving from red to green. The Bretton Woods institutions are foreseeing greater growth in the coming years. The present government, made up of 28 ministers, out of which five are women, predicts that the country will be among the “emerging economies” by 2020.

Noticeable in its resurgence is an increase in citizen engagement through social media. Having used the internet as a major enabler during the post-election crises, both leaders and citizens have come to accept the “internauts” as a living, thriving part of the society, as well as the internet’s capacity to give men and women fair access to services, opportunities and the power to engage.

As one of the more upward-looking nations in terms of women’s rights, Côte d’Ivoire has come

under the international limelight after its war. The vice presidency of the national assembly has been reserved for women, and the post of the national grand chancellor has also been handed to a woman. Nevertheless – and even though it is inherently a matriarchal nation, owing to the Akan<sup>1</sup> ethnic groups that make up over 40% of its population – women’s rights have yet to make a full comeback.

## Yasmina Ouégnin

It is in this context that Yasmina<sup>2</sup> Ouégnin emerged to embody, from a certain perspective, the “new Cote d’Ivoire”. In her early 30s, she holds a post-graduate degree in risk management and is the general director of a company in Abidjan. Also a mother, she speaks French and English. She grew up in the opulent Cocody Commune, which is the high-end part of Abidjan. Her father has been a national personality in Cote d’Ivoire, having served the first and second presidents of the republic as the chief protocol officer. Her name, therefore, does not go unnoticed.

## Bonjour to Yasmina on social media

In 2012, the government of Côte d’Ivoire finally got around to convening the electoral college to hold legislative elections. The last elections had been held in 2001, and the official terms of the members of parliament had ended in 2006. After that, the country was in a legislative limbo. So, in 2012, there was a real electoral fever across the nation.

That was when Yasmina rose through the social media limelight, with her official Facebook page and two Twitter accounts. She was open, engaging and very personal in her communications with Ivorians. She was seeking election as a member of parliament for the Cocody Commune district, representing the Democratic Party of Côte d’Ivoire (PDCI).

The “internauts” of Cocody Commune and the national online community in general were enamoured by her youth, her beauty, her openness and

<sup>1</sup> The Akan ethnic groups include the Baoulé, Nzima, Ebríé, Attié, Abbé, Bété and other smaller groups in the south, east and central regions of the country

<sup>2</sup> Fondly addressed as “Yas” by many online.





her capacity to engage people. She shared her daily schedule, uploaded pictures, answered questions and shared information. But there was great doubt about her age, and her capacity to pull through in the elections. She did, and became one of the youngest members of parliament in the country's history.

### Au revoir to Article 53 and major changes to a group of related laws

One of the major constitutional revisions that were undertaken by the newly elected parliament concerns the family. The Ministry of Justice and the Ministry for Family, Women and Children Affairs suggested the abolishment of Article 53 of the Family Code, and in consequence alterations to Articles 58, 59, 60 and 67 of the same code.

#### *What did they say? What was to change?*

Article 53 states that both spouses shall contribute to family expenses in proportion to their respective capacities. In the event that any spouse refuses this obligation, s/he may be obligated by a court of law to do so. Article 58 states that the husband is the head of the family. He exercises this function in the common interest of the home and children. The wife supports the husband in ensuring the moral and material direction of the home. She cares for the home, raises the children and sees to their well-being. The wife replaces the husband in the event that he is unable to play his role as the head.

In keeping with the above, Article 59 states that the husband is the principal breadwinner of the family. He has an obligation to provide for the

economic needs of the wife according to his capacity. If he does not fulfil this obligation, he may be obligated by a court of law to do so. Article 60 states that the choice of residence for the family is made by the husband and the wife is obliged to live there. Article 67 states that a wife may engage in a profession different from that of the husband as long as the profession is not contrary to the interest of the family.

On 26 September 2012, the government voted to change these articles. In its note of intention, the government explained that the reasons behind the changes were:

- A drive for shared responsibility of spouses in marriage, conferring to both the equal moral and material direction of the family
- The need for both spouses to contribute to family expenses
- To secure a common agreement in the choice of a residence
- To allow both spouses to freely choose a profession
- To spur the autonomy of women
- To conform to international standards.

Following the decision, Article 53 was annulled. Article 58 now states that both spouses jointly head the family in the common interest of the home and children. They shall both cater to the moral and material needs of the family, provide for the education of the children and ensure their future. In keeping with the above, Article 59 now states that both spouses contribute to the



**Yasmina Ouégnin** · 9,095 like this

November 24, 2012 at 2:33am · 🌐

Pour répondre aux questions que se posent certains ivoiriens, je voudrais vous expliquer pourquoi j'ai voté NON.

Le mardi 13 novembre 2012, un projet de loi portant abrogation de l'article 53 et modifiant les articles 58, 59, 60 et 67 de la loi n°64-375 du 07 octobre 1964 relative au mariage, telle que modifiée par la loi n°83-800 du 02 août 1983, a fait l'objet d'examen suivi de délibérations au sein de la Commission des affaires générales et institutionnelles de l'Assemblée Nationale de la République de Côte d'Ivoire.

family expenses according to their respective capacities. If one spouse does not fulfil this obligation, the other may seek and obtain authorisation from a court of law in their residential precinct. Such authorisation will allow the spouse to receive a portion of the salary or revenue earned by the other spouse for the needs of the home.

Article 60 now states that the choice of residence for the family is made by both spouses. In the case of a disagreement, a court of law shall decide for the common interest of the family. Finally, Article 67 now states that both spouses are free to choose their profession as long as the profession is not contrary to the interests of the family.

The government tabled the text for approval by the members of parliament at the national assembly. It was submitted to a vote on 21 November. The debates were long, hard fought and unprecedented. Contrary to expectations, Yasmina voted "no". On 24 November she posted an 894-word explanation of her reasons on Facebook and signalled on Twitter that any of her constituents who were interested could read her reasons there. The article received 370 likes, 97 shares and 221 comments on Facebook alone.

#### *What were her reasons? Basically these:*

- Proposals from a member of parliament to amend the government's text were rejected. It was either take it or leave it. She felt that the essential work of the legislative body was being done by the executive.
- The notion of a "head" is inherent to the Ivorian nation. In all domains of life, there is a clear leader. Removing this notion from the family

does not necessarily contribute to furthering the rights of women.

- Laws that have been adopted since independence on the protection of women and children, especially in the areas of domestic violence, female genital mutilation, the right to education and health, child trafficking and child soldiers, have yet to be fully operationalised. She felt the current amendments would go the same way.
- On the day of the vote, she felt that the parliament was being pressured to adopt the executive's decisions.

The so-called "Non de Yasmina" (Yasmina's No) debate took off on her official Facebook page, on her personal Facebook page, on Twitter and across the social media spaces in Côte d'Ivoire. Her reasons were argued over and over again. Some citizens thought that for such landmark legislative decisions, members of parliament should have held town hall meetings and heard from their constituents. They wanted a voice.

Though some disagreed with Yasmina's position, they did agree that the process of the adoption of the law itself endangered its application. The overwhelming consensus was for there to be more openness, more transparency and more consultation. Yasmina became a champion for online and offline communities in citizen engagement in legislative and democratic processes. She accepted the role, informing us via Twitter and Facebook of all the issues that she believes are important to the citizens.

In March, when the electoral college was informed of regional and county elections that would



**Franck Eric** Merci, Honorable et courage pour les combats intellectuels à venir!

November 24, 2012 at 3:14am via mobile · Like



**Aremou Osa** Après avoir dit ce qui précède, je pense aussi qu'il faut être réaliste pour comprendre la puissance des partis politiques. Il y a aussi une discipline de parti, une solidarité qu'il faut avoir. Quand le parti délibère et adopte une position finale, je pense que tous les députés doivent suivre cette ligne. A défaut, c'est se voir marginaliser et peut être perdre l'investiture du parti pour les prochaines élections. Je souhaiterais que vous y fassiez attention. Vous savez très bien que sans la bénédiction du parti, il est très difficile de gagner des élections dans nos contrées, comme ailleurs! Vous serez députée indépendante, cela ne poserait pas de problème. Si le parti adopte une position, il ne faut surtout pas aller contre. Tout ce que vous pouvez faire, c'est de vous abstenir, vous excusez. Bon courage à vous.

November 24, 2012 at 3:17am · Like · 1



**Philippe-olivier Zirimba** Chapeau Honorable Y. Ouegnin pour ton courage...

November 24, 2012 at 3:52am via mobile · Like



**Catherine Audrey Balife Seya** bien que je sois neutre a cette nouvelle loi, les raisons notees ci-dessus ne sont pas convaincantes...mais, merci de nous rendre compte.

November 24, 2012 at 4:11am · Like · 1



**Sir-ricky LeKod** Faut dire que moi aussi je n'ai pas voté pour vous le 11 decembre 2011 (je regrette beaucoup) mais désormais je sais que, loin de ces demi-intellectuels, vous êtes celle qui vient redonner du sens au travail de "contrôle du gouvernement", loin de ces rabaissés qui pense qu'il est rabaissant pour un député de rendre compte au peuple, vous êtes celle qui s'élève en expliquant au peuple pourquoi elle n'est pas un béni oui oui. Mme Yasmina Ouegnin, vous êtes celle que je voterai aux prochaines législatives si Dieu me donne longue vie.

November 24, 2012 at 7:34pm · Edited · Like · 1



**Arouna Marlone** Merci encore honorable pour cet éclaircissement. Sous nos tropiques cette loi qui du reste n as pas été expliqué clairement a la population comme la majorité des lois prise par notre assemblée restera dans les tiroirs car difficilement applicable du fait de nos cultures et aussi du fait que cette loi ne s applique qu aux couples liés par le mariage civil et qui ne constitue pas la majorité des ménages en Cote d ivoire. Plus de béni ouioui a l hemicyde sinon ne parlons pas de democratie

November 24, 2012 at 4:43am via mobile · Like · 1



**Vamara Dao** Great

November 24, 2012 at 4:56am · Like

be held in April, some citizens decided to approach Yasmina with an initiative that had never been seen in the country since its independence: a face-to-face debate between the mayoral candidates in the Cocody Commune. She set to work on this initiative and on 15 April, the good news came: "Of the nine candidates contacted, five have confirmed, and two are considering. The debate will take place on Thursday the 18th, at 7 p.m. at the County Hall."

The news went viral: unprecedented citizen mobilisation was underway. The announcement received 50 shares on Facebook alone. The #Cocody hashtag on Twitter also came alive. A youth organisation volunteered to offer free logistics services. Bloggers volunteered to live-tweet the debate, and an online TV service took up the challenge of live streaming. The debate went well, and was followed by thousands online and via live streaming. The ensuing discussions and media coverage are still flowing. It is expected that for the next elections in Côte d'Ivoire, the town hall debate will become mainstream.

## Bonjour to issues

The "Non de Yasmina" debate has shone a spotlight on women's rights issues as well as others. She herself raised some of them. The biggest is the role of the legislator in the policy process. Among other issues in her explanatory note on Facebook, Yasmina referred to her impression that due to party politics, parliament was being constrained by a situation where it may only serve to rubber stamp bills proposed by the executive.

The other issue was the operationalisation of laws that have already been adopted. Is it enough to pass bills into law and not establish the framework for their execution? How have laws that affect the rights of women been tracked, monitored, evaluated and reported? How is the country doing in relation to laws that have been put in place: access to education and health, female genital mutilation, domestic abuse, etc.?

Widespread consultation on women's rights laws is also a challenge. It is not clear that there

was any kind of consultation before the cancellation of Article 53 and proposed changes to its related laws. There are indications that many citizens only heard about the bill when it was about to be tabled before parliament for approval. Even at that stage, members of parliament did not consult their constituents. There was a clear consensus on many social media platforms on that one point.

What exactly changed with the new framing of the law? What remained? Did the citizens understand these changes? The answer is “no”. The one message that most people understood was “now men and women are both heads of the family and they both pay the bills.” Given that the law was voted on towards the end of the year, many men exercised their “legitimate” right not to buy gifts for their partners, since they had also become a co-head of the family. In the long run, such an understanding will end up being detrimental to women.

## Quo vadis?

Where do we go from here? What can we do and how can we do it? Among other steps, it is important to:

- Use the internet to establish an observatory of women’s rights. It is important to track laws that exist, their implementation and their outcomes.
- There is a great need for more consultation with the population. Members of parliament, like Yasmina, need to consult their constituents. Social media networks have proved their capacity to make this happen at little or no cost.
- Though there is increased openness in legislative procedures in terms of live broadcasting and streaming of key sessions of the national assembly, more work needs to be done in this area.
- There are civil society organisations working on the promotion and protection of women’s rights. They need to be trained to be able to mainstream the use of the internet in their work.

Overall, we need more Yasminas who can say “no” so that when we finally say “yes” it will be strong, resolute and sustainable. ■



# ECUADOR

Violence against women: The production of information to promote social transformation



## CIESPAL

Alexander Amézquita Ochoa  
www.ciespal.net

## Introduction

This report describes the process of conducting the First National Survey of Family Relations and Gender Violence against Women in Ecuador, carried out between 2011 and 2012. The report's focus is on the production of information using technology in a way that supports social transformation.

## Policy and political background

Since 1995 Ecuador has had a law prohibiting violence against women and the family. Adopted during the Sixto Durán Ballén administration (1992-1996), and in the political context of accelerated structural adjustment that shaped neoliberalism in Ecuador, the law was not however effective enough to prevent everyday violence against women. This was particularly the case during the economic crisis that Ecuador experienced in the following decade, which affected the poorest segment of the population, and therefore its most vulnerable groups – women, children, teenagers, the elderly, Afro-Ecuadorians and indigenous people. These groups experienced other kinds of violence related to a lack of access to the protection of the state.

With its “modernisation plan” – a recurring theme in most economic policies during the decades of the 1980s and 1990s in Latin America, the Ballén government pursued economic liberalisation and the dismantling of the welfare state. This shift was important, if we consider that the previous administration, under Rodrigo Borja Cevallos (1988-1992), emphasised a process of popular participation. This at least partially allowed the voices and demands of a wide range of movements to be heard, including gender rights organisations. However, most of these demands were systematically diluted during the Ballén period, and replaced by development policies centred on dealing with the social dissatisfaction that was the result of increasing economic crisis<sup>1</sup> – a

crisis that undermined the livelihoods of the vulnerable social classes and increased social inequality in ways not seen before.<sup>2</sup>

Two reports were completed in Ecuador in line with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the first published in 2003 and the second in 2006. Both show the ineffectiveness of institutions to enforce the law passed in 1995, from the National Congress and other public institutions, to police stations, courts and health centres.

Violence against women, particularly domestic violence, was seen as a problem to be solved through reconciliation, with the intervention of social workers, and ultimately, through the vote. The failure to treat it as a crime pointed to perverse judicial and legal practice, in which the lack of protection and defence of women increased women's feeling of being defenceless.

The lack of clear procedures for reporting, as well as a lack of protection offered by health professionals, created a significant disparity between the number of cases of women treated for attacks, possibly related to their gender, and the number of complaints received by authorities. On the other hand, it created a sort of parallel justice system, for example, in universities, where solutions to sexual assault and abuse were dealt with by the universities themselves – despite surveys and research showing that sex crimes were widespread on many campuses.

These reports corroborated the existence of a culture in which shame, fear or belief in the possibility of resolving violent situations without resorting to the state were stronger than the precarious official structures built to eradicate violence against women.

In the period between these two reports, the National Council of Women (CONAMU)<sup>3</sup> included a section in the 2004 Demographic, Maternal and Child Health National Survey (ENDEMAIN)<sup>4</sup> which included a series of questions about domestic

1 Lind, A. (2001) Organizaciones de mujeres, reforma neoliberal y políticas de consumo en Ecuador, in Herrera, G. (ed.) *Antología Género*, FLACSO, Quito, p. 295-324.

2 Salgado, J. (ed.) (2006) *Informe Alternativo ante el Comité para la Eliminación de Todas las Formas de Discriminación contra la Mujer*, PADH-UASB, CLADEM, CPJ and UNIFEM, Quito.

3 A technical agency working under the Presidency of the Republic of Ecuador, created in 1997 and operating as such until May 2009, when a constitutional provision changed it to the Transition Commission Towards the National Council of Women and Gender Equality (from hereon called Transition Commission).

4 [www.cepar.org.ec/endemain\\_04/nuevo05/pdf/texto/01\\_introduccion.pdf](http://www.cepar.org.ec/endemain_04/nuevo05/pdf/texto/01_introduccion.pdf)

violence and violence against women in relationships. The ENDEMAIN survey has been conducted in Ecuador since 1987. Information obtained in 2004 was crucial to expanding knowledge about the situation of women in Ecuador.

In this context, in 2007 the Ecuadorian government initiated the National Plan for the Eradication of Gender Violence against Children, Youth and Women, bringing together various levels of government and trying to create an agency to coordinate these levels. Among the activities proposed by this plan was the need to conduct a survey of available national data with which the agency could establish an information base truly representative of the gender violence phenomenon in the country. This was particularly needed to overcome and draw attention to the underreporting of gender-based violence, given the different sources of administrative information, such as health centres, police stations and courts. In this regard it should be noted that already in 2001 it had been recognised that “the single record for data collection agreed on years ago was not being used by several of the commissioners dealing with women and families, further limiting national statistics on violence against women reported by the commissioners.”<sup>5</sup>

The need for information is one of the priority tasks in the process of eradicating gender violence. This priority existed at various levels, some deeper and more complex, according to Alba Pérez, coordinator of strategic information for the Transition Commission:

We worked with a single record, as a first step. However, the issues don't reflect the violence completely, nor its magnitude, because there are many people living constantly in violence, but who never report it. But the other thing is: they do not even know that it is violence.<sup>6</sup>

The reality for many women victims of violence is that they face multiple forms of invisibility, whether on the record – as shown by the 2004 ENDEMAIN survey, which was only applied to married women or those living with a partner, concealing the violence that single women might face – or from the experience of women who do not report acts of violence because of a social structure that makes them feel either guilty or resigned to being passive recipients of abuse.

But in the most extreme cases, it is precisely the kind of invisibility that Pérez alerts us to: when

women are not even aware that they are being victimised.

Faced with this reality, CONAMU, the Transition Commission and the various agencies involved in the National Plan for the Eradication of Gender Violence against Children, Youth and Women launched the First National Survey on Family Relations and Gender Violence against Women. The survey was conducted in November 2011 and initial findings were presented in March 2012. It was a process that was necessary to confront and remedy the lack of information on violence against women in Ecuador, which had resulted in underreporting and a lack of awareness and public discourse on gender violence.

Different steps were necessary for this purpose. First, the creation of a technical secretariat to organise and centralise methodologies and the data collection process was needed. Secondly, the active participation of the National Institute of Statistics and Census (INEC), which developed the survey tools and took charge of the survey process, was sought. INEC created a statistical framework for the survey, forming special and sectoral committees, including a special commission on gender statistics. This special commission resulted in much discussion around the development of the survey methodology, as well as training in the field for both members of the Transition Commission, who assumed the presidency of this special commission within the INEC, and INEC officials who were sensitised on gender issues.

Finally, it was necessary to create a team for intersectoral coordination and cooperation between the Transition Commission, INEC, the Ministries of Government and Social Development, the National Secretariat of Planning and Development (SENPLADES), and women's organisations. Former studies were focused only on married women, assuming violence against women takes place exclusively at home. The work of this team extended the framework to women in general (not just married women) as well as girls over the age of 12, implying access to sensitive information.

This pioneering survey also required extensive training of the personnel involved in the data processing, especially given the influx of new information. Workshops were conducted that lasted about a week. They became laboratories that demonstrated the reactions of a society still reluctant to talk about these issues:

Then I remember there was a girl who sat in front of me. She was in the front row. She got up and said: “I have five children; now I realise what kind of life I've lived. The violence I put up

5 Jara, L. (2001) Ecuador: hacia un sistema de estadísticas sobre violencia contra las mujeres. Resumen, in CEPAL, *Estadísticas e indicadores de género para medir la incidencia y evolución de la violencia contra la mujer en América Latina y el Caribe*, UNIFEM, Quito.

6 Interview with Alba Pérez, 19 April 2013.



with all my life. If I have five children you will realise from my situation...” And then she began to cry. The workshop was extremely intense, not only for them, for me too, despite having worked on these issues. But, of course, these issues are much more complicated in reality. That was just on the first day.<sup>7</sup>

Women, asking women about their lives, trying to unravel the complex web of individual and social experiences, making them visible in a society that has systematically refused to recognise this complexity. And it still does not recognise it. But the survey revealed some very complex and alarming situations.

Amongst the most troubling findings is that in Ecuador, six out of ten women have experienced some form of violence, whether physical, psychological, sexual or related to property and assets.<sup>8</sup>

While it was revealed that one out of four women has experienced some form of sexual violence, the most recurrent form of violence is psychological, which reinforces the existence of a social and cultural problem. Restrictions faced by women mean that such violence is difficult to verify, punish or treat. The survey also revealed that this is the case regardless of ethnic self-identification, income and even educational level: 52.8% of women with graduate degrees have suffered some form of violence. And despite this, or perhaps because of it, only 20.6% of cases result in formal complaints.

The most widely shared story from the research was the case of Karina del Pozo. It is believed that this young woman was raped and murdered by men she knew, and her murder was described as a case of femicide. While in Ecuador there is no specific criminalisation of this type of crime (differentiated, that is, from homicide), since October 2011, and coinciding with the start of the survey, people started using the term femicide for the first time in messages posted on Twitter from Ecuadorian accounts. According to the website Topsy, which specialises in

social network analysis, before October 2011 the hashtag #femicide had not been used in Ecuador. However, its use reached a peak between February and March 2013, coinciding with the spread of the Karina del Pozo case. Over 100 messages were written, while the hashtag #KarinadelPozo was retweeted 15,000 times.

It is safe to assume that this, and all the other cases that became visible after it, have allowed the issue of femicide to enter the Ecuadorian imaginary, and helped gather support for a proposal to include this specific type of crime in the Criminal Code. Prior to the survey, this kind of proposal would have been more difficult and met with greater resistance.

## Conclusions

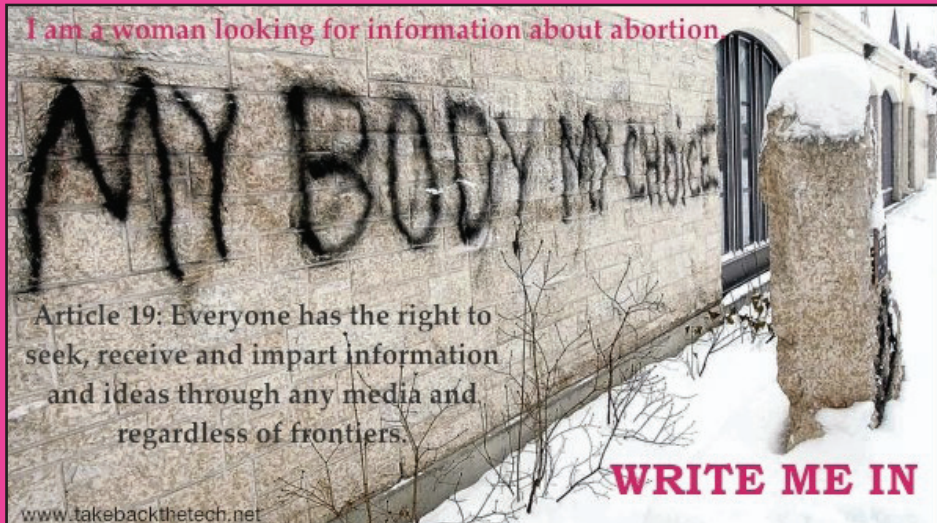
The conclusion of this experience, which is still ongoing, is that information is a scarce and much-needed resource. It can change collective behaviour and perception, and support the possibility of reconstructing an image of a society and its culture. The legitimacy of the information is important. In this case the survey was lent legitimacy through its design, its multisectoral support and input, and the implementation process. The kind of pressure exerted through these platforms can, at least as shown in the case of Ecuador, lead to discussion of a dark side of the reality and identity of nations, and to beginning to recognise problems that are hidden under very strong and capable former customs, labels, recriminations and social sanctions.

## Action steps

It is necessary not only to spread these social discussions through media platforms, but to encourage activists, organisations and the public in general to demand more information from institutions, exercising the right of access to information. It is also necessary for people to ask questions about themselves, of their own behaviours that they feel are “natural”, to be critical and to transform as a human collective. ■

7 Interview with Alba Pérez, 19 April 2013.

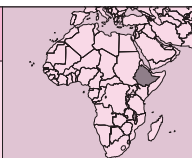
8 “The gender asset gap in Latin America with respect to ownership of land is significant. In few countries do women constitute even one-quarter of the landowners. Gender inequality in land ownership is related to male preference in inheritance, male privilege in marriage, male bias in community and state programmes of land distribution as well as gender bias in the land market, with women less likely than men to be successful buyers.” Deere, C. D. and León, M. (2003) *The Gender Asset Gap: Land in Latin America*, *World Development*, 31(6), p. 925-947.



Write Me In is a series of digital postcards created by women expressing how respect for universal human rights has an impact upon them. In this powerful postcard, a woman says that freedom of expression is vital for her, as she searches for information about abortion. With over 20 million women having unsafe abortions each year, and 47,000 of these ending in the pregnant woman's death, access to information on abortions can save women's lives. For a colour reproduction of the image, please visit: [www.giswatch.org](http://www.giswatch.org)

# EGYPT

Gender and civil rights: How effective is women's online activism?



## ArabDev

Leila Hassanin  
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### Introduction

ICTs were and continue to be an important tool for political resistance for Egyptian women. Egyptian women have used Web 2.0 channels for online disobedience, sabotage and resistance. There are many examples of women activists working online. This short report lists only a handful.

### Women's rights activists working online

Israa Abdel-Fattah co-founded the April 6th Youth Movement,<sup>1</sup> an activist group supporting industrial workers in the town of El Mahalla El Kubra. The movement created a Facebook page calling for a peaceful civil strike on 6 April 2008, asking Egyptians to wear black and abstain from public life that day. The strike included a wider protest against the general political and social degeneration in Egypt, including police tyranny and torture, political, judiciary and social injustice, and wide income disparities and illegal wealth. The strike call-out was also announced through Twitter, blogs and Flickr and gained mass popularity.

Israa Abdel-Fattah was arrested by the Egyptian security forces after the 6 April strike and kept in detention for two weeks. Despite the arrest, she continued her political participation and was an active protestor in the 25 January Revolution of 2011, where she communicated events on the ground via Facebook, Twitter and Al Jazeera.

Tens of thousands of youth members joined the April 6th Movement through its Facebook presence and it soon became the nucleus of youth activism against the Mubarak regime. They organised rallies and were a permanent target of police surveillance and repression.

Asmaa Mahfouz, a young woman, posted a YouTube message<sup>2</sup> urging people to protest Mubarak's corrupt government by rallying in Tahrir Square on 25 January. Her plea for participation was made

out of personal frustration after the lack of demonstrators at a rally just days before. Mahfouz used the patriarchal Egyptian stereotype of the vulnerable unmarried woman, the virgin,<sup>3</sup> to spur more participation in peaceful street rallies. She said: "I, a girl,<sup>4</sup> am going down to Tahrir Square, and I will stand alone. And I will hold up a banner. Perhaps people will show that they have some gumption.<sup>5</sup> Don't think you can be safe anymore. None of us is. Come down with us and demand your rights, my rights, your family's rights. I am going down on 25 January and will say no to corruption, no to this regime." The shaming technique worked, especially as it coincided with a boost to national pride after the ouster of the Tunisian president through a popular mass uprising.

Gigi Ibrahim<sup>6</sup> was a Twitter pioneer at the 25 January Revolution. She was one of the most outspoken Egyptian women right from the start, with an accurate vision predicting the end of the Mubarak regime. It should be noted, however, that she is an Egyptian who was raised in the United States and came back to Egypt as a university student.

### Using ICTs for protest

Current Egyptian women's activism is nearly synonymous with the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs). Most activists use at least one platform, or a combination of mobile communication, email and social networks, including Twitter. ICTs played a major role in exchange, with information being shared quickly, points of view being discussed, and actions organised throughout the Egyptian revolution and its aftermath. For women, the internet, especially the social networks and Twitter, were a convenient way to express their opinions, call for national and international alerts to sexual attacks and harassment, call for rallies and boycotts, voice their opposing points of view, and uncover and warn about attacks and dangers.

3 Which is a very real vulnerability in light of the constant harassment that women, especially young ones, face on the streets of Egypt.

4 A "girl" means an unmarried woman, aka virgin, in colloquial Arabic.

5 Here she used shaming as she was especially addressing men, as in, "If a 'girl' can do this, where are you?"

6 en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gihan\_Ibrahim

1 [www.6april.org/](http://www.6april.org/)

2 [www.youtube.com/watch?v=SgjlGmDsEuk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SgjlGmDsEuk)

Online protests over “virginity tests” and gender-based violence translated into street protests. The rape incidents in Tahrir Square on 8 June 2012 went public through social networks, including pictures and video clips, resulting in an immediate national and international outcry.<sup>7</sup> Throughout the experience, the internet has allowed Egyptian women to transcend the barriers that restrain and impede their political and social participation.

Facebook has been widely used as a communication tool between groups of Egyptians where women were often leading the conversation, urging participation in the many rallies and protests that were organised during the anti-Mubarak uprisings and later on in the attempt to formulate the new state.

### The marginalisation of Egyptian women protestors

Nevertheless, despite Egyptian women’s active presence online and in the streets, they were quickly marginalised after the climax of the Mubarak abdication. The main youth groups that sustained the Tahrir rallies asked for the creation of a “group of ten wise men” to advise them on the next steps. Mona Makram Ebeid was quickly made the tenth member of this venerable group in an attempt to include a woman. As a Coptic Christian, she added the diversity bonus. The problem was that the youth, including the young women, did not have a plan, let alone a vision, for a post-Mubarak Egypt. After having their demands met by Mubarak stepping down, they literally did not know what to do next.

This lack of a political strategy highlighted two major shortcomings:

- Poor education and a lack of in-depth political thought and understanding. The naiveté of the “activists” seems hard to fathom: how can one rally politically, risking life, without having a plan for a viable alternative?
- The young, supposedly secular activists were the first to disfranchise and marginalise their female activist colleagues. The youth never saw women as a group capable of giving advice, nor did they see women as a cornerstone of the revolution and the new Egypt. This attitude also surfaced repeatedly in online networks, especially Facebook, where the revolutionary youth spokespersons are mostly males.

In modern history, Egyptian women were politically vocal in the 1919 revolution against British occupation. The national movement spearheaded by the Wafd Party and Saad Zaghloul had a secular approach that was used by educated women to highlight the importance of women’s participation in building a modern Egypt. In *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics*, Beth Baron<sup>8</sup> argues that despite Egyptian women’s support of nationalism, they were excluded from political participation once the national movement gained power and did not need women’s support any longer. The author sees this as a contradiction to the main message sent out by the nationalists who equated Egypt to a woman.

However, as an Egyptian, I do not support Baron’s hypothesis that Egypt was depicted “visually and metaphorically as a woman.” Instead, Egypt was depicted by Saad Zaghloul, the Wafd and by the Egyptian people as their “mother”, thereby singling out the country’s femaleness only in that specific role. But “Egypt, the mother” only supported women’s participation in nation building in line with their traditional roles (i.e. within the established patriarchal system). Despite this limitation, women were successful in the 1919 revolution in setting aside the face veil and obtaining more education and public participation for themselves, claiming that an educated “mother” is the base to build an educated society. They established public roles that grew with time and became ingrained in Egyptian society.

From a historical perspective, it seems that the 1952 army coup and the militarisation of Egypt’s ruling elite brought with it a diminishing role for women. As an ultra-patriarchal organisation, the military supported a secular regime that appeared to create equal gender opportunities, though these never materialised into meaningful political participation by women. Women were added as a quota to political bodies like the parliament and the cabinet of ministers, but they never played a marked and strong political role in Egypt.

The 2011 revolution followed the 1919 revolution in its use of women to catalyse the nation, but once the goal was achieved, women were quickly removed from the power-talk table. A difference with the 25 January Revolution was that the Egyptian youth were not prepared, as their predecessors were, with implementable plans for the transition of power. The Egyptian youth, female and male, had been disabled by an inefficient educational system and the absence of venues for political participation. In addition, Egypt has been ridden with a culture of ageism

7 Momtaz, R. (2012) Egypt: Women Sexually Assaulted at March Against Sexual Harassment, *ABC News*, 13 June. [news.yahoo.com/egypt-women-sexually-assaulted-march-against-sexual-harassment-004250792--abc-news-topstories.html](http://news.yahoo.com/egypt-women-sexually-assaulted-march-against-sexual-harassment-004250792--abc-news-topstories.html)

8 Baron, B. (2007) *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender and Politics*, University of California Press, Berkeley.

so pervasive that it crippled the youth from being true revolutionaries, beyond using their bodies and voices for opposing a regime online and in the streets without having a concrete alternative. When the goal was achieved, they looked for elders to lead the way.

Women activists showed the same deficiencies. Another difference between the revolution of 1919 and the 2011 revolution was that in the former, women had definite propositions on how they would support Egypt's national quest besides ending the British occupation. Aside from repudiating face veiling, they advocated public education for girls and women, raising the slogan that only educated women can raise the generations needed to make Egypt a modern state. They further pushed for women's participation in the workplace. Although it was seen as too early to ask for political participation, this seemed more of a tactical delay, as active institutional political participation by Egyptian women was in the plans for the future, with education as its road paver.

In comparison, one does not find many progressive women activists proposing solid solutions for Egypt's current problems where women play a leading and unique function. On the contrary, women who support the Islamists do have concrete plans. They are calling for women to retreat into the home, to leave the public arena, to live a more secluded life, to restore traditional moral values, to decrease the need for personal consumption and, by leaving work, to create employment for the thousands of young males. This is seen as a fundamental first step to reduce social strife and build a better-functioning society and nation.

It is interesting to note that these demands are more articulated through the traditional means of face-to-face meetings, flyers, through providing services while sending out political messages, and so forth, rather than social media or the internet. This raises the question of how effective online female activism is without a formula to solve Egypt's current problems – and without using “the street” to promote these ideas and to build mass support in concrete numbers.

## Conclusions

Women activists were more focused on securing and expanding women's rights in a post-Mubarak era, rather than showing how women are going to build a new Egypt. This backfired immediately: it left the rudder in the hands of groups that had a plan. More importantly, these groups had been working for years among the masses providing health care, emotional and financial support, and catering to the psychological needs of many Egyptians. It

also shows that online activism is just one aspect of activism. The traditional “street-based” activism is still needed to sustain the momentum of a revolution.

It is remarkable that a group of military officers in their early to mid-30s were able, by themselves, to establish a republic in 1952, with deep political and social changes, yet the regimes that were set in place produced youth, female and male, unable to do the same 60 years later.

## Action steps

The recent Egyptian experience shows that:

- Online women's activism was effective in raising issues, mobilising vast public rallies and publicising transgressions against women.
- Women need to have a detailed plan for building a new regime and correcting socioeconomic inequities. Demanding rights first is an ineffective tactic. What is your role in the new regime, in the new country, in the new society? What needs to be done and how are women going to contribute?
- ICTs are an effective tool for publicising these plans, but women cannot rely on them in the absence of traditional methods of political campaigning and support-base building. The latter are indispensable.
- The Egyptian feminist movement began with education – education that women demanded to be expanded publicly, beyond home education, to include higher education and to be made universal. At present it seems that a detailed proposal for quality education is essential. Education made by Egyptians for Egyptians. Women are the main educators of societies – they need to set educational policies and ensure their proper implementation.
- As part of the educational policy, ICTs should be used by Egyptian women to provide tools for independent thinking, research and access to knowledge that enriches the education provided through brick-and-mortar institutions and means.
- Abstain from rallying if you do not know what you are going to do if you get what you want! ■



# ETHIOPIA

## Empowering women through ICTs



### Ethiopian Free and Open Source Software Network (EFOSSNET)

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### Introduction

Ethiopia is a country of over 85 million people,<sup>1</sup> nearly half of whom are women. It is also a predominantly rural country, with 85% of the entire population employed in agriculture. It has been leading the way with regard to making market information instantly available to the country's smallholder farmers, many of them women.<sup>2</sup> Over 90%<sup>3</sup> of agricultural output is driven by smallholder farmers, and with a contribution to the country's GDP of over 40%, agriculture plays a major role in the overall Ethiopian economy.

The role of gender in the Ethiopian agricultural system is also critical: in post-harvest activities for cereals, women contribute as much as 70% of on-farm labour; in marketing, particularly in cereals, the participation of women is as high as 60% of the labour market share. While government strategies do identify the role of women in the agricultural value chain, the gap is in the implementation of these strategies.

Ethiopia has witnessed rapid penetration of telephone technologies and access to other information and communications technology (ICT) services in the last five years. By the end of 2012, Ethiopia's mobile penetration had reached over 18 million subscribers (nearly 21% penetration). However, fixed-line penetration remains less than 1.5%, and internet and data users account for a mere 1.1% of the population.<sup>4</sup>

Research shows that although the type of ICT tools that women tend to use differs from men, increasing awareness and use of ICT tools by women in their social and economic lives is evident. This

report tries to explore how the use of ICTs empowers women in their social and economic activities. It considers the case of women smallholder farmers who use mobile phones to access market information in order to enhance their income. It also looks at how ICTs are being used to empower women entrepreneurs through networking among women in business in Ethiopia.

### Policy and political background

As a commitment to gender equality, Ethiopia issued the national Ethiopian Policy on Women in 1993 and granted equal rights for women in its constitution. Furthermore, the recently adopted family law, a new pension rights policy for women, and other efforts made for the advancement of women such as an affirmative action provision for higher education, employment and promotion, are some of the policy and legislative instruments worth mentioning. These are all ensured through institutional mechanisms created to implement policies and strategies on women, where currently the Ministry of Women's, Children and Youth Affairs takes responsibility to this effect.

However, despite positive government legislative, policy and programme initiatives, gender equality is far from being realised. This is evident in that Ethiopia ranked 72nd out of 93 countries according to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM), which focuses on women's and men's capacities to engage actively in the economic and political sphere.<sup>5</sup>

The national ICT policy of Ethiopia clearly stipulates in its strategies for implementing the policy that it "supports the development of ICT systems and programs that enhance the participation of women and the disabled." The policy's overall guiding principle indicates that it will provide unhindered access to ICTs, where gender inequalities shall be gradually eliminated by building the capacity of women and girls in the use of ICTs.<sup>6</sup>

1 [www.csa.gov.et](http://www.csa.gov.et)

2 Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (2010) *Accelerating Ethiopian Agriculture Development for Growth, Food Security, and Equality*. [www.ata.gov.et/wp-content/uploads/Ethiopia-Agriculture-Diagnostic-Integrated-Report-July-2010.pdf](http://www.ata.gov.et/wp-content/uploads/Ethiopia-Agriculture-Diagnostic-Integrated-Report-July-2010.pdf)

3 Ibid.

4 [www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm](http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm)

5 UNDP (2008) *Human Development Report 2007/2008*, UNDP, New York.

6 Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (1997) *The Ethiopian National Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Policy*. [www.eictda.gov.et/Downloads/Policies/ICT\\_Policy\\_English.pdf](http://www.eictda.gov.et/Downloads/Policies/ICT_Policy_English.pdf)



## Empowering women in the agricultural sector

In Ethiopia, women play an active role in family-based agriculture, and female-headed households make up 21% of all households.<sup>7</sup> However, until recently they have had limited public recognition as farmers within the national agricultural development framework. Structural barriers, such as the heavy burden of domestic drudgery, reinforced by local cultural perceptions, have limited women's participation in official agricultural extension activities to a large extent. In addition, women's lack of access to land, finance, technology and decision-making power have critically impeded their ability to take part in profitable market activities. However, more than ever, farmers and particularly women farmers need access to relevant agricultural information to help them plan for and cope with changes and enhance their income and the contribution of agriculture to the overall economic development of the country.

In Ethiopia, like many other African countries, gender disparity in agricultural markets is a big issue. As Oxfam's studies in Ethiopia, Mali and Tanzania show, women smallholders face many barriers in market access and services and are poorly represented in formal producer groups in key economic sectors.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, a number of factors appear to affect women's capacity to engage effectively in agricultural markets, including barriers such as having resources at their command (e.g. land), socio-cultural attitudes and beliefs, and domestic workload. It is recognised that these barriers may vary between places and can change when new market opportunities appear (if, for example, roles in the household can be renegotiated; values change over time). Literacy, education level and access to information are also factors. As a result, smallholder farmers are always reliant on market information obtained from traders they know in their locality and trade only with people they know. In the end, they would not have any means or power to bargain a better price for their produce.

Given these challenges, there is one successful example of an initiative that tried to address the challenges of smallholder farmers, and particularly women, by enhancing their access to markets

and benefiting from increased income generation through a mobile market information system. The Ethiopian Commodity Exchange (ECX)<sup>9</sup> has allowed "price discovery" for farmers where previously producers had little knowledge of international market prices and could rely only on middlemen who pocketed the largest share of the profits by selling on heavily marked-up goods. Through this system, farmers can now access live market information from the ECX via four different channels: by using their mobile phone to call a toll-free number and listen to the prices in local languages (using IVR – interactive voice response); by subscribing to receive the prices on their mobiles via SMS (short message service); by viewing one of the 83 electronic ticker boards (price display boards) in rural areas which are customised into local languages; or by visiting the ECX websites. Although how many farmers access the information through the ticker boards is not known, the IVR channel receives 61,000 calls a day (or 1.1 million a month) on its 120 telephone lines, hundreds of thousands of SMS messages are sent every month, and the website gets 2,000 hits a day – 50% of which come from outside Addis Ababa, the capital.

The ECX service also has another advantage that women benefit from considerably, in terms of not only getting market information and making the decision when to sell, but also receiving their money on time. The ECX introduced what is termed a "T+1" clearing and settling time which it implemented in partnerships with ten local banks. In this system, farmers receive payment by 11 a.m. the day after a sale is agreed. Between 2011 and 2012, 109,500 transactions were made, with the value of commodities (coffee, sesame, pea beans and maize) traded totalling USD 1.5 billion. The efficiency of the system was well maintained during this time: there were no defaults on payments or deliveries, no trading order errors, and the system did not go down once. Even though not all commodities produced are traded on the exchange, as they may be sold through farming cooperatives or at auction houses (i.e. coffee, beans and sesame), about 90% of these items move through the commodities exchange. This has resulted in improving the livelihoods of the farmers and the producers, and farmers have been encouraged by greater profits to both produce more and improve the quality of production.

Previously, about a third of the price of goods sold went to the farmer, but those who sell through

7 World Bank (2005) *Well-Being and Poverty in Ethiopia: The role of agriculture and agency*, Report No. 29468-ET. [siteresources.worldbank.org/INTETHIOPIA/Resources/well\\_being\\_o605.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTETHIOPIA/Resources/well_being_o605.pdf)

8 Oxfam (2013) *Women's collective action in the honey sector in Ethiopia: Involving marginalized women in collective action – making a difference through NGO interventions*. [policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/womens-collective-action-in-the-honey-sector-in-ethiopia-275773](http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/womens-collective-action-in-the-honey-sector-in-ethiopia-275773)

9 The ECX was started five years ago with support from the Ethiopian government, as well as donors including USAID, UNDP, Sida and the EU.

the exchange take as much as 80% of the sale price home. In the entire agricultural value chain from the farmers and producers to traders, this system demonstrates how ICTs empower women in their social and economic activities. A woman trader interviewed by *Gebeyachin*,<sup>10</sup> the bilingual newspaper produced by ECX, and who is currently participating in the ECX, indicated that she was previously not actively involved in the family company that was trading coffee. She said her husband was the one in charge; however, after the ECX introduced new market possibilities, she started to work and lead the company's activities, including marketing with other male traders. She said that female traders do not need to go through the process of negotiating, selling and receiving money, as the exchange does all the work for them, using ICTs.

### Empowering urban women entrepreneurs

Women entrepreneurs have also demonstrated how ICTs empowered them to participate in other social and economic activities. The Association of Women in Business (AWiB) is a good example of a platform for mid-level career women and business owners that has enabled women from diverse backgrounds and with diverse dreams to come together using its dynamic website<sup>11</sup> and to help each other explore their career paths. The online forum facilitates discussions on various topics, which members can participate in from the comfort of their homes or offices. Members of the association are also able to blog on the website, where they share their experiences in business, mostly from a gender perspective, enabling other women in the network to discuss issues that commonly face women and how they can be addressed. To support the skills development of its members, the association is also providing an e-learning platform where it has successfully launched a 12-week online personal development course led by an internationally certified life coach. It also aims to bring more offerings to its pool of e-education packages for personal and professional growth.

Both cases – involving women at the grassroots in rural areas, on the one hand, and mid-level professional women and business owners who are mostly based in urban areas, on the other – show how ICTs can empower women and bridge the inequality gaps.

10 Ethiopian Commodity Exchange (2012) *Ethiopia Commodity Exchange Monthly Newspaper*, 7(5), August 2011. [www.ecx.com.et/downloads/Newsletter/20120309102708781Gebeyachin-Issue%205\\_English.pdf](http://www.ecx.com.et/downloads/Newsletter/20120309102708781Gebeyachin-Issue%205_English.pdf)

11 [www.awib.org.et](http://www.awib.org.et)

## Conclusions

Studies show that the challenge that women face in their entrepreneurship activities and in participating in the small and medium enterprises (SMEs) sector, among others, include absence of technological know-how and integration into business processes and problems of finding markets and distribution networks.<sup>12</sup> The case studies highlighted in this report demonstrate how ICTs can empower women to enhance their equal participation in their social and economic activities.

Nevertheless, generally, the diffusion of ICTs is highly uneven. There is a concentration in urban areas, and some rural areas are almost untouched. Access to ICTs is further constrained by income, and also increasingly constrained by literacy and education. This is evident from the greater use of the interactive voice response (IVR) option in the ECX market information system, which costs more compared to use of the SMS-based services. Furthermore, these factors particularly affect access to and use of ICTs by women, as recent surveys suggest that women are less likely to know and use the internet and that they are less likely to own mobile phones and cover the expenses of using them.<sup>13</sup> As a result, as much as access and usage greatly enhance women's empowerment, economic empowerment itself would help improve women's access and use of ICTs – and this is not instantly achievable. It has been argued that there is a link between the magnitude of the gender divide and overall ICT penetration levels. The argument also asserts that as income and development improve, overall penetration levels increase. As income increases, and as it is distributed fairly in the household, households will be able to afford more phones, providing more women with access.<sup>14</sup>

However, there continue to be other challenges that limit equitable access and the use of ICTs. These are cultural and social aspects that are considered by many as normal social practices, household gender relations, and discrimination against women and girls in key areas of ICT access and usage, such as education and employment. Studies reveal that

12 Singh, G. and Belwal, R. (2008) Entrepreneurship and SMEs in Ethiopia: Evaluating the role, prospects and problems faced by women in this emergent sector, *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 23(2), p. 120-136.

13 Amde, W. (2011) Investigating gender-associated patterns in ICT access and usage in Ethiopia, paper presented at the CPRAfrica Conference 2011, Nairobi, Kenya, 15-19 April.

14 Zainudeen, A., Iqbal, T., Samarajiva, R. and Ratnadiwakara, D. (2008) Who's got the phone? Gender and the use of the telephone at the bottom of the pyramid, paper presented at the 2008 International Communications Association Conference, Montreal, Canada, 26 May.

various cultural barriers limit the opportunities for women to access ICTs, including harassment, work overload (particularly in rural areas) and gendered perceptions in relation to the use of certain ICTs. Given the key role of women both in household food security and in improving agricultural productivity, ICT-for-agriculture interventions should include explicit strategies for assuring access by women, and for strengthening the information, communication and networking resources of women. Therefore, in addition to economic empowerment, it is of paramount importance from the policy perspective to ensure the implementation of the various legislative instruments adopted by the government to safeguard the equal rights of women and men – to accelerate equitable participation in society and the economy by all.

### Action steps

In the framework of the guiding principles of Ethiopia's ICT policy, it is noted that the policy seeks to ensure unhindered access to ICTs, and that gender inequalities shall be gradually eliminated by building the capacity of women and girls in the use of ICTs.

To this effect, one of the pillars of the policy is ICT and education, which aims to ensure that ICTs are an integral part of education and training at all levels. One of the strategies to achieve this is developing special ICT training programmes for women – and groups such as people with disabilities – in order to address gender and social inequalities. To this end, it is of paramount importance for the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology to start implementing this strategy. This is needed both in order to achieve the government's commitments in ensuring women's rights, and to enable women to play an active role in the social and economic spheres, thereby accelerating economic growth.

It is noted that women's contribution in the agriculture sector is greater than men's, particularly in post-harvest activities. It is therefore important that the ECX provide special support to women, particularly in rural areas, to ensure their equal access to market information. These measures could include working with networks of community ICT access points, both to create awareness on the use of mobile- and internet-based services and to enable women to use these services. ■



## Digital Empowerment Foundation

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## Introduction

“Equal access to participation and decision making by women in the social, political and economic life of the nation,” states the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women presented by the Ministry of Women and Child Development in 2001.<sup>1</sup> But the truth is that women in India are still struggling in a male-dominated culture despite various efforts made by a number of organisations to introduce gender equality in the society.

According to the National Crime Records Bureau, a total of 244,270 incidents of crime against women were reported in 2012 compared to 228,650 in 2011 – an increase of 6.4% during 2012.<sup>2</sup> But these crimes are not limited to the offline environment. For example, a well-known journalist and prominent face on Indian television news, Sagarika Ghose, was threatened online on her Twitter account.<sup>3</sup> A similar online attack was experienced by Kavita Krishnan, secretary of the All India Progressive Women's Association and a prominent Delhi-based women's activist, during a recent online discussion on violence against women on Rediff.com.<sup>4</sup> Writer and activist Meena Kandasamy chose to file a police complaint when she faced online abuse via Twitter in connection with a beef-eating festival at Osmania University in the city of Hyderabad. She was threatened with “live-telecasted gang-rape and being torched alive and acid attacks.”<sup>5</sup>

On 18 November 2012, two girls in Mumbai were arrested by police over their Facebook post after they questioned the shutdown of the city due to the death of local politician Bal Thackeray. They were arrested under Article 66A of the Information

Technology Act (IT Act).<sup>6</sup> According to the act, “(a) any information that is grossly offensive or has a menacing character; or (b) any information which [is known to be] false, [and distributed for] the purpose of causing annoyance, inconvenience, danger, obstruction, insult, injury, criminal intimidation, enmity, hatred or ill will...” can be punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years or with a fine.<sup>7</sup>

Information and communications technologies (ICTs) have been identified as a potential tool to empower women and to promote democratic values. But social media have become an easy platform for online violence, reflecting the worst instincts of gender inequality. Empowering women from all classes must be ensured at any cost.

## Inequality

The United Nations report *Women 2000 and Beyond: Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women through ICTs*<sup>8</sup> not only highlights the potential of ICTs as a tool for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women, but also identifies the “gender divide” – that is, the lower number of women accessing and using ICTs compared with men.

Women represent 48% of the Indian population,<sup>9</sup> but India is one of the lowest performing countries according to the UNDP's Gender Inequality Index,<sup>10</sup> ranking 132 out of 186 countries – worse than Pakistan (123) and Bangladesh (111). Interestingly, India has been the fastest growing internet market, adding over 18 million users with a growth rate of 41%, but women comprise just 17% of total internet users, according to the 2007 *Internet in India (I-Cube)* report,<sup>11</sup> revealing a major gender gap.

In Indian society, disparity between men and women is blatantly glaring economically and social-

1 wcd.nic.in/empwomen.htm

2 ncrb.gov.in/CD-CII2012/cii-2012/Chapter%205.pdf

3 www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-22378366

4 articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-05-05/social-media/39041682\_1\_sexual-abuse-menendez-case-non-working-women

5 kafila.org/2012/04/22/nwmi-condemns-the-violent-abuse-of-meena-kandasamy/

6 indiatoday.intoday.in/story/2-mumbai-girls-in-jail-for-tweet-against-bal-thackeray/1/229846.html

7 cis-india.org/internet-governance/blog/breaking-down-section-66-a-of-the-it-act

8 www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/public/W2000andBeyond.html

9 www.tradingeconomics.com/india/population-female-percent-of-total-wb-data.html

10 www.undp.org/content/dam/india/docs/In-the-News-2013/UNDP\_India\_in\_the\_news\_1503201317.pdf

11 www.iamai.in/upload/research/11720111091101/icube\_3nov11\_56.pdf

ly. In the context of ICTs, the majority of women have been excluded from the “world wide web”. Women have also traditionally been excluded from the information society in general, due to factors working to their disadvantage such as lack of freedom of movement or low levels of education.

It is imperative for sustainable development in developing, over-populated countries like India for women to be free to use technologies to access education and services. The existing and persistent gender inequalities in the labour market, education and training opportunities, and the allocation of financial resources for entrepreneurship and business development, can negatively impact women’s potential to fully utilise ICTs for economic, social and political empowerment.

In India’s Vision 2020, a strategy for the country’s development, ICTs are earmarked as one of the vital tools to achieve developmental goals. According to a study by the International Centre for Research on Women on women’s entrepreneurship and use of information technology, women’s employment in the IT sector was approximately 35% in 2008, which is higher than other sectors. In general, the number of female workers is less than half the number of male workers: 68.4 percent of workers are men and 31.6 percent are women, according to the 2011 Census.<sup>12</sup>

## Policy and political background

Women in India have long been deprived of equal participation in the socioeconomic activities of the nation, despite the fact that the Constitution of India guarantees equality (Article 14) to all women,<sup>13</sup> and the sustainability of India’s developmental efforts hinges on their equal participation in the social, political and economic fabric of the nation. Several articles in the constitution express provisions for affirmative action in favour of women, prohibiting all types of discrimination against women to enable them in all walks of life. Article 15 (1) guarantees no discrimination by the state, and equality of opportunity is guaranteed through Article 16.<sup>14</sup> Article 51 (A) (e) guards against practices that are seen to be derogatory to the dignity of women and also allows for provisions to be made by the state for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief (Article 42). The constitution also recognises equality of the sexes and provides certain provi-

sions under the chapter on Fundamental Rights, but in actual practice they are observed more in breach than in compliance.

Feminist activism in India first picked up momentum in the 1970s when women activists came forward after an incident of custodial rape of a tribal girl, Mathura, in 1972.<sup>15</sup> The protests were widely covered by the national media and forced the government to amend the Evidence Act, the Criminal Procedure Code and the Indian Penal Code, and introduced the category of custodial rape for the first time.

In 1985, the Department of Women and Child Development was set up as a part of the Ministry of Human Resource Development to give the much needed impetus to the holistic development of women and children.<sup>16</sup> Later, the National Commission for Women (NCW) was set up as a statutory body in January 1992 under the National Commission for Women Act (1990) to review the constitutional and legal safeguards for women, recommend remedial legislative measures, facilitate redress of grievances and advise the government on all policy matters affecting women.<sup>17</sup>

The government of India ushered in the new millennium by declaring the year 2001 as “Women’s Empowerment Year”, focusing on a vision “where women are equal partners like men.” The National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) was formed in 2010 on International Women’s Day, with the aim of strengthening the all-round developmental context for women.

Yet in spite of the various government policies and programmes that have been initiated, Indian women continue to lag behind men in education, employment, health and political empowerment. Statistics such as a sex ratio of 940,<sup>18</sup> a female literacy rate of 53.7%,<sup>19</sup> maternal mortality of 450 per 100,000 live births, an adolescent fertility rate of 68 births per 1,000 live births, and a low level of representation of women in the legislature (below 10%) substantiate this assertion. Indian women suffer from lifelong subjugation, discrimination and exploitation. The plight of rural women is particularly dismal.

Despite numerous challenges, social actors have exploited new technologies as a tool for social transformation and gender equality in India. These new technologies have given power to go beyond issues of access and infrastructure to consider the larger social context and power relations.

12 [censusindia.gov.in/Census\\_And\\_You/economic\\_activity.aspx](http://censusindia.gov.in/Census_And_You/economic_activity.aspx)

13 Constitution of India; Article 14: <http://lawmin.nic.in/olwing/coi/coi-english/Const.Pock%202Pg.Rom8Fsss%286%29.pdf>

14 Constitution of India; Article 16: [lawmin.nic.in/olwing/coi/coi-english/Const.Pock%202Pg.Rom8Fsss%286%29.pdf](http://lawmin.nic.in/olwing/coi/coi-english/Const.Pock%202Pg.Rom8Fsss%286%29.pdf)

15 Mathura Rape Case: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mathura\\_rape\\_case](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mathura_rape_case)

16 The Department of Women and Child Development: [wcd.nic.in/](http://wcd.nic.in/)

17 National Commission for Women: [ncw.nic.in/](http://ncw.nic.in/)

18 [www.indiaonlinepages.com/population/sex-ratio-of-india.html](http://www.indiaonlinepages.com/population/sex-ratio-of-india.html)

19 Female Literacy rate: [censusindia.gov.in/Census\\_And\\_You/literacy\\_and\\_level\\_of\\_education.aspx](http://censusindia.gov.in/Census_And_You/literacy_and_level_of_education.aspx)



## Using ICTs in support of women's rights

Women's empowerment is defined as "women's ability to make their strategic life choices where that ability had been previously denied them."<sup>20</sup> New ICT technologies have provided women opportunities to reorganise economic activities in ways that can bypass the traditional male-dominated society. In many examples, ICTs have opened up a direct window for women to the outside world. In 1972, the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA),<sup>21</sup> a Gujarat-based organisation, was the first organisation to realise the potential of using IT for growing productivity in the informal sector. In an effort to provide computer literacy to their "barefoot managers", SEWA established its Technology Centres in 11 districts of Gujarat. The aim was to build the capacity of women organisers and leaders and strengthen the micro enterprises of SEWA members. While more and more women are getting online, rural women who are remote from the urban centres are falling behind in the access stakes.

### 60 million women in India online

Out of the total 150 million internet users in the country, around 60 million women in India are now online and use the internet to manage their day-to-day life, according to a new report by Google India. Women have easy access to internet at homes, cyber cafés and offices and there is a growing adoption of smartphones. Women who are online are relatively more affluent and younger – 75% are in the 15-34 age group, with over 24 million women accessing the internet daily.

*Source: The Women & Web Study, Google India, 2013*

According to the National Family Health Survey, India has the highest number of cases of anaemia in the world. Almost 79.1% of India's children between the ages of three and six and 56.2% of married women in the age group 15-49 were found to be anaemic in 2006. Almost 20% of maternal deaths are caused directly by iron-deficiency anaemia, which is a contributory factor in 20% more deaths.

In an effort to bridge the gap in delivery of health services, projects like e-Mamta, initiated by the state government of Gujarat and the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM), have enabled pregnant women to receive health information on their mobile devices.

The Datamation Foundation<sup>22</sup> initiated a project for Muslim women living in the slum areas of Delhi in 2003, and established an ICT centre to link resource-poor women to the information and tools for knowledge management. This ICT centre has created self-confidence in women, an awareness of their interesting lives, and enabled them to take collective decisions.

A Pune-based voluntary organisation, Savitri Marketing Institution for Ladies Empowerment (SMILE), has enabled women entrepreneurs to sell their products like soft toys, candles, bags, utility items, etc.<sup>23</sup>

This revolution in the use of ICTs is not only limited to urban-centric women's organisations, but has also inspired rural women, particularly those who are poor and illiterate. One example is of a 55-year school dropout, Nortri Bai, living in a desert state of western India, Rajasthan. She can hardly speak any language besides her local dialect, but she uses a computer to disseminate water-related information to 11 villages.<sup>24</sup>

In India, there are 700 million mobile phone subscribers, and 97 million people access the internet through their mobile phones. With the revolution of the mobile phone in India as an affordable means of communication, Indian women have started using mobile phones not only as a social communication tool but also as a tool to communicate with frontline health workers, receiving health information, safety alerts, etc.

Women community health workers in Bihar state use an interactive voice response (IVR) feature on the mobile phone with special-coded keys, called Mobile Kunji, to communicate with pregnant women while counselling them.<sup>25</sup> The mobile app, Helpls, allows women to ask for help when they are in danger even if they do not have internet access.

Last year's brutal rape and murder of a 23-year-old girl in Delhi sparked a nationwide outcry. Women's organisations, activists, media groups and protestors joined together over the issue of women's safety and security, not only through offline vigils, but

<sup>22</sup> Datamation Foundation: [www.datamationfoundation.org](http://www.datamationfoundation.org)

<sup>23</sup> SMILE Foundation: [smilepune.org/](http://smilepune.org/)

<sup>24</sup> Nortri Bai: [news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/2940242.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/2940242.stm)

<sup>25</sup> Mobile Kunji: [www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/where\\_we\\_work/asia/india/india\\_sdp\\_empowering\\_chw\\_ma\\_mk.html](http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/where_we_work/asia/india/india_sdp_empowering_chw_ma_mk.html)

<sup>20</sup> [josiah.berkeley.edu/2007Fall/ER275/Readings/DP3/kabeer-dev\\_ch-99.pdf](http://josiah.berkeley.edu/2007Fall/ER275/Readings/DP3/kabeer-dev_ch-99.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> [www.sewa.org](http://www.sewa.org)



also by using social media as a platform for venting outrage and lending solidarity to street protestors.

Within four days of the incident, the online petition site, Change.org, received over 65,000 signatures after an appeal to sign the petition, “President, CJI: Stop Rape Now!”<sup>26</sup> The appeal was initiated by ex-journalist Namita Bhandare, and sought the intervention of President Pranab Mukherjee and Chief Justice of India Altamas Kabir. Netizens also created their own online petitions such as “Death to Rape and Rapists in India: Death Penalty to Rapists”,<sup>27</sup> and “Death Penalty For Rapists”,<sup>28</sup> seeking capital punishment for the accused.

Internet users used social media sites like Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter and replaced their profile photo with a “Black Dot”, signifying “shame in a country where women are unsafe.”<sup>29</sup> Within 10 days of the incident, Facebook groups such as “Gang Raped in Delhi”,<sup>30</sup> created on 20 December 2012, and “Delhi for Women’s Safety”, created on 18 December 2012, received 5,046 and 4.263 “likes” respectively.

While Facebook called for mass protests, Twitter witnessed moment-by-moment reports by protestors. Twitter has about 16 million users in India, and has been abuzz with news of the protests. Hashtags such as #Damini and #Nirbhaya (a name created for the victim), #JantarMantar, #Delhirape, #DelhiProtest, #IndiaGate, #stopthisshame, #RapeFreeIndia, #braveheart, #delhigangrape, #StopCrimeAgainstWomen, and many more emerged.

After outrage and protests erupted, four businesswomen set up Safecity.in, a website set up to identify locations where women have experienced or witnessed any type of sexual harassment. The website works with a concept it calls “Pin the Creeps”, allowing women to report incidents of harassment and abuse. The mobile app FightBack was also launched by Anand Mahindra, chairman of the automobile company Mahindra. This allows women to seek emergency help. The app sends SMS messages to emergency contacts if a woman presses a panic button. It also flashes the live alert page of a web portal, and can update a user’s Facebook wall.

The continued efforts of media and social media have created an atmosphere compelling the authorities to fast-track sexual assault cases. On 23 December 2013, a three-member committee was

formed, headed by Justice J. S. Verma, former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Its purpose was to recommend amendments to the Criminal Law so as to provide for quicker trial and stronger punishments for criminals accused of committing sexual assault against women.<sup>31</sup> As a result, the draft Anti-Rape Bill – Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill, 2013 – was presented in the parliament on 22 March 2013.<sup>32</sup>

## Conclusion

Swift technological change and increasing urbanisation have put the internet in the hands of more people than ever before, and in the coming years, these factors will continue to reduce the impediments that women and girls face in accessing the internet. Broadband and 3G access in urban areas will continue to increase. More women will be pulled online by their interests, social networks, and improved accessibility. However, without long-term, dedicated interventions, rural women will potentially fall farther behind, as will women and girls at the bottom of the social pyramid.

More affordable technology penetration alone will not help women gain awareness of the internet’s benefits, improve their technological skills, or reduce the effects of confining gender norms. Without help reducing these barriers to access, women and girls risk getting left out of a world that is increasingly connected. With rapid structural change afoot, there has never been a better time to help women and girls realise the transformative potential of the internet. All stakeholders should work hard in the upcoming years to remove the bottlenecks. Doing so will give women and girls the tools to imagine and live better lives, not only for themselves, but for their nations and of course for the world.

## Action steps

In an effort to create an enabling environment and to support women’s social and economic empowerment through ICTs, action needs to be taken by different actors – at local, regional, national and international levels. The recommended action steps are:

- Adopt legislative, regulatory and administrative measures and approaches to encourage the participation of women in the ICT arena, and in particular, adopt legislation in ICT-specific sectoral areas to address gender equality and create monitoring frameworks and capacity to ensure implementation of these frameworks.

26 [www.change.org/petitions/president-cji-stop-rape-now](http://www.change.org/petitions/president-cji-stop-rape-now)

27 [www.change.org/petitions/death-to-rape-and-rapists-in-india-death-penalty-to-rapists](http://www.change.org/petitions/death-to-rape-and-rapists-in-india-death-penalty-to-rapists)

28 [www.ipetitions.com/petition/death-penalty-for-rapists](http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/death-penalty-for-rapists)

29 [articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2012-12-21/chandigarh/35952817\\_1\\_delhi-gangrape-city-student-dot](http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2012-12-21/chandigarh/35952817_1_delhi-gangrape-city-student-dot)

30 [www.facebook.com/pages/Gang-Raped-in-Delhi/416228328446678](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Gang-Raped-in-Delhi/416228328446678)

31 [www.prsindia.org/uploads/media/Justice%20verma%20committee/js%20verma%20committee%20report.pdf](http://www.prsindia.org/uploads/media/Justice%20verma%20committee/js%20verma%20committee%20report.pdf)

32 [www.thehindu.com/news/national/antirape-bill-passed/article4534056.ece](http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/antirape-bill-passed/article4534056.ece)

- Develop gender-sensitive technical and regulatory instruments when addressing ICT policy issues such as universal access, regulatory frameworks, licensing, tariff plans, spectrum allocation, infrastructure, and labour policies. Attention is required in drawing up a list of ICT policy issues and integrating gender issues in this.
- Encourage and facilitate collaborative action for gender equality among government bodies responsible for ICTs.
- There is a need to understand that ICT training, adoption and use must be “gender neutral”.
- NGOs and the government should come together to develop poverty alleviation programmes through women-centric initiatives, in particular circumventing the problems of liberal development. Self-help groups are formed by government agencies or NGOs to benefit women members economically and socially by helping them engage in micro-entrepreneurship activities and share generated income between themselves. Women in India derive access to low-cost financial services and learn a process of self-management and development. These self-help groups can help women take social action, accumulate social capital, practice better economic viability and demonstrate a greater sustainability than individual-based models for women’s empowerment.
- It is envisaged that the Mobile-based Value Added Services (mVAS)<sup>33</sup> launched by the government of India will provide rural self-help groups with education, information and training, access to occupational opportunities, markets, financial services, government programmes, health agencies/workers, social agencies/workers, feedback mechanisms, support systems, networking, etc. These self-help groups should be supported by rights organisations working in the field of ICTs.
- There is a need to push basic communications services (and by extension, markets) into the rural regions of the country.
- Women-centric organisations need to be engaged in decision making concerning the development of new technologies in order to participate in their growth and impact.
- In India, there are 2.5 million *panchayat* (local self-government body) members and 2.2 million elected representatives of which nearly a million

are women.<sup>34</sup> However, the patriarchal culture of restricting women to the family domain limits their access to new technology. Apparently, the husbands or other male relatives of approximately 89% of elected women representatives (who do not own mobile phones themselves) have mobile phones. This clearly shows that most male members of families are influencing power structures through their women representatives. Because of this, it is necessary for the Ministry of Panchayati Raj<sup>35</sup> to exclusively target the elected women representatives and have special capacity-building sessions with them on how to use mobile phones. Through this it should develop strategic plans to move to mobile governance through these representatives.

- In the absence of any specific ICT agenda for women, who constitute half of India’s population, do we need a “Gender ICT Policy” for the country? This policy will certainly go a long way to increase ICT access by women, especially in rural and remote locations, and for those who are marginalised among tribal peoples and minorities. This policy framework can take up specific interventions such as an ICT fellowship programme for women, digital literacy for women, and access and connectivity cafés for women only. The critical ministries in this endeavour could be the Ministry of Women and Child Development in alignment with the Ministry of Communications and IT, with collaborative support from bilateral agencies such as UNDP or UN Women.
- A gender gap in internet policy and gender-focused research in India does not expressly prevent women’s internet access, but it does restrict its ability to grow. On the policy front, government policies already aim at increasing internet access for the general population, specifically with the rapid take-up of broadband. For example, India has adopted national plans to expand broadband access. Such ICT policy plans are created without reference to gender-specific barriers that women and girls often face, such as safe access to public internet sites. However, a root challenge remains the lack of experts at the intersection of technology and gender, and this needs to be addressed. ■

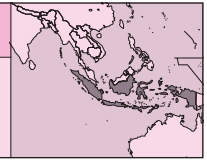
34 [web.undp.org/comtoolkit/success-stories/ASIA-india-demgov2.shtml](http://web.undp.org/comtoolkit/success-stories/ASIA-india-demgov2.shtml)

35 [www.panchayat.gov.in](http://www.panchayat.gov.in)

33 [pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=70578](http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=70578)

# INDONESIA

## Transformation of social roles through ICTs for rural women



Nieke Jahja

### Introduction

This report is a reflection on practical experiences that were the result of an evaluation on the effects and methodology used in training and facilitation of the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) for women in Indonesia. The training programme has been conducted since 2009. The beneficiary is a women's organisation. The evaluation that uses a gender perspective is intended to obtain an appropriate and adequate methodology in endorsing the success of the intervention. In addition, it also tries to see how ICTs can change the position of women in the social and cultural structures.

### Providing ICT training to a rural cooperative

ICT training was given to a women's cooperative organisation consisting of more than 1,600 members. The vision of the organisation is to promote women's independence to achieve positions equal to those of men through activities such as revolving fund management, savings and loan activity, productive activities, and business assistance for the cooperative members.

If viewed from the perspective of culture, especially that of Indonesian pastoral culture which operates in a collective way, women play multi-layered roles in their daily lives. On the one hand, their reproductive role as wives and mothers requires them to carry out domestic tasks. On the other hand, as an extension of their domestic role, they have social responsibilities as women in their communities. The reproductive role in socio-cultural values ranks the highest compared to the other roles women must play.

Most of the members of this women's organisation are trained to fulfil the roles of reproduction and production at the same time. However, so far, the production activities are part-time jobs done even while nurturing their children and doing domestic tasks, and are often not appreciated as activities with economic value. However, these activities are those sustaining the local economy.

At the beginning of the intervention, training was given on the assumption that there are no

obstacles of time and distance for the women. However, their time management for fulfilling their multi-layered roles proved this assumption wrong.

In terms of methods of training, the orientation is developed more in practice because it is more appropriate that the knowledge and skills gained can be directly tested and evaluated. The participants are introduced to tools such as a computer; they learn how to use technology to help them complete their work and meet their needs. They also learn to use the internet as an instrument for communication and for browsing for information. Although it must be done gradually, learning through practice is easier and more effective than beginning with an introduction of the concept and terms. The women master the skill of using the technology first, before understanding the theory or concepts that they may find difficult to relate to their daily work and habits. Moreover, most technological terms are still written in a language foreign to the women.

### The impact of ICT skills on rural women

For rural women who are not engaged in the public domain, mastering technology such as a computer has proven to produce significant effects. For example, a facilitator said that several members who had obtained basic computer skills have more frequently been asked to participate in village meetings. Knowledge and skills they have received from the training can be used directly to do their tasks and jobs in their villages. They are invited by the village elites to help document activities or prepare print documentation. Therefore, knowledge and skills in using ICTs have successfully changed the position of women in accessing public affairs, which are strategic in their social life. Women eventually and gradually acquire important social positions, and even within their current capacity can have a bargaining position and influence village policies.

Although they create the opportunity to change women's social position, the use of ICTs cannot always challenge the issue of inequality in the gender-based distribution of jobs and resources that is controlled by a patriarchal system.

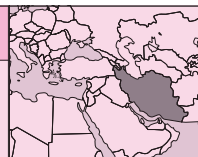
The skill of using modern technology for communication does not immediately contribute to equality and women's empowerment. The result of the evaluation on the ICT training that has been ongoing for three years proved that the skills can also increase the women's burdens. Nuraini, one of the women who have been able to use the internet, admitted that her spending has increased because of paying to visit an internet café. Several women even said that they had developed new consumer or spending habits soon after learning how to browse the internet. They are now interested in buying clothes that certain models wear which they see on websites. The consumerism trap for these village women can be an obstacle for the prospect of social transformation potentially offered by ICTs.

### Action steps

Based on the above lessons learned, it was clear that a project intervention that merely provides infrastructure, access and skills is not enough. The capacity for using ICTs must be directed toward resolving the problem of unequal distribution of resources rooted in the culture. The use of the internet must be geared to increasing women's knowledge and productive skills. When the internet can be used by women who make snacks to learn techniques such as product packaging, then it can boost their economic productivity. When it is used by a woman who teaches a preschool play group, it can help her obtain information to expand her knowledge of teaching. When ICT training is aimed at tackling the challenge of unequal gender roles, then the transformation of social roles through the acquisition of knowledge and skills can change the status of women in the society. ■

# IRAN

Women's rights, gender and ICTs



## Volunteer Activists

Maryam Shirazie

[www.volunteeractivists.org/en](http://www.volunteeractivists.org/en)

## Introduction

The influences of information and communications technology (ICTs) on culture, politics, the economy and daily lives have caused contradictory reactions amongst decision makers in Iran. While drastic changes brought about by technology – including in business and IT services – have not been prevented by those in power, the negative outlook of the government suggests its fear and anxiety over how these technologies might be used in the hands of people.

For many years the widespread use of satellite TV channels among the Iranian population has been prohibited, giving the police and militiamen a justification to break into people's houses to seize equipment and to create a legal context for questioning. At the same time, legislation has been passed to limit the use of bandwidth and services such as MMS and WiMAX in order to create stricter control over the internet and mobile services.

Even though the major infrastructures in the country are affected by international sanctions and the ICT sector has not been a major priority in macro planning, the misuse of existing communications facilities is evident. During and after the 2009 presidential election, the rulers' fear and panic over the use of ICTs by the people intensified. Bandwidth and speed were lowered, and the interception of mobile services – such as SMS – became common practice, as well as surveillance of landline calls. Internet outages at certain times, widespread filtering of internet sites, and noise transmission to the Persian news satellite channel increased. In the meantime, the presence of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard and related entities connected to the supreme leader and other leaders in major telecom infrastructural projects was strengthened.

Based on the mindset of the Iranian regime, especially regarding women's issues, and with an insecure atmosphere dominating the web, the communications environment in the country has worsened. The lack of reliable statistics and indicators on gender is a serious obstacle to developing a gender-based analysis of ICT use. This is a matter of concern.

## ICT penetration rates in Iran

According to a World Economic Forum report and remarks from the general director of the Department of Economic Surveys at the Ministry of Communications and Information, by 2012 Iran ranked 16th among 20 countries in the region on the Networked Readiness Index, and 104th in the world. According to the same report, in the ICT social and economic impact sub-criteria, Iran ranks 17th in the region, and 14th in the ICT applications sub-criteria.

Official statistics show a growth in the internet penetration rate in the country in recent years: according to data from the last official census in 2010, approved by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), penetration in urban areas was 18.9% while in rural areas it was only 4%, which indicates a wide digital gap between these two areas. Penetration is 16.6% among men and 12.7% among women.

But conflicting data regarding the official definition of "internet users" in Iran hampers the analysis:<sup>1</sup> The National Internet Development Management Centre reports 59.50% penetration<sup>2</sup> for spring and summer 2012, with most web connections being mobile.<sup>3</sup> If the documents submitted to the ITU are true, the development of mobile networks can be expected to narrow the digital divide between urban and rural areas, although the limited speed of GPRS is a considerable issue.

## Taking on gender-based studies of ICTs

The unfavourable conditions in the ICT industry have resulted in lost potential to empower women through the development of equal work opportunities. The lack of proper statistics, which include gender indicators, in most ICT research, and a lack of awareness amongst women's rights activists of ICT issues and challenges such as electronic violence against women, suggest the need for more studies in this area.

## Women's use of ICTs

The role of the internet and social networks, their influence on women's lifestyle and the scale of women's legal needs online undoubtedly require research.

1 [www.tabnak.ir/fa/news/240263](http://www.tabnak.ir/fa/news/240263)

2 [www.matma.ir/matma/mnu-internet-penetration.html](http://www.matma.ir/matma/mnu-internet-penetration.html)

3 [iraneconomist.com](http://iraneconomist.com)



However, non-official surveys indicate that blogs and social networks such as Facebook have provided women an opportunity to express their experiences as women, as well as a chance to expose particular experiences which are less talked about in public. For instance, we are witnessing the disclosure of experiences that women used to keep in silence, due to a sense of “modesty”. The internet is providing more and more women with a place to express feelings of love in a public space, or to talk openly about motherhood, pregnancy and childbirth, and loneliness, for instance.

The internet has also been an effective tool for women’s rights activists to make progress in claiming their rights. For example, email and internet were used as an effective networking tool for the “One Million Signatures for Equality” campaigners in the past years. The internet was also used effectively to gather support for political prisoners, including women, in 2009.

The “Say No to Compulsory Hijab” campaign is another example of network activism in which campaigners, including thousands of women, actively disclosed their personal experiences and points of view about the veil, and many of them posted their pictures with the logo objecting to the compulsory use of the hijab. Another blog was created discussing the chador – the black robe that covers the body from head to toe – from a personal point of view.<sup>4</sup> Although these discussions had no tangible influence on changing the present situation, they created the opportunity to talk about such controversial subjects as the hijab through the personal points of views of women.

### Education and information literacy

A gender-based rationing and localisation policy has been adopted for admission in Iranian universities. This has limited access to admittance exams for a vast majority of young women, particularly in some cities and in many engineering branches, which is a matter of concern. Except for this, the presence of women in IT studies and communications is officially accepted, and women can continue their education through to high academic levels if they are interested. However, the quality of education and the failure of educational systems have resulted in a reduction in digital literacy, which is another issue to be considered.

In some disadvantaged provinces, professional and advanced training courses in ICT fields are almost impossible, at both the university level and in institutes, due to a scarcity of facilities, while a lack of proper infrastructure does not allow local people to take advantage of internet-based distance education programmes.

As of 2008, unofficial statistics indicated a very low proportion of women in Master’s level technology-related engineering courses and technical education. In Bachelor’s level engineering branches, 10.9% of the students are women. In ICT-related Master’s classes, the proportion of women is also lower than men: 19.51% in electronics engineering, 38.71% in IT, and 27.64% in the field of computer sciences.

### Women’s employment in the ICT field

According to the experiences of experts in the ICT industry, although obstacles limit the academic presence of women, especially in rural areas, many women finish their education and receive a degree. But because of the dominance of men in this industry, women have serious difficulties finding a proper occupation. In fact, besides inadequate educational facilities, the biggest obstacle that undermines women’s progress in this field consists of a set of cultural beliefs that exclude women.<sup>5</sup>

Regarding employment, the approach of decision makers towards female labour is devastating: they manage to promote gender-segregated rules and practices in different work fields instead of protecting women through supportive laws and services.

The high speed of the evolution of technology is an obvious reason for the need for continuous training and education of employees in ICT subjects. At present most experts acquire their knowledge through experiences at work. While the number of women remains scant in professional and engineering positions, women have less experience and therefore earn lower incomes, in both the governmental and private sectors.

Most women find themselves having to take a job as an assistant, or in logistical services, system administration, sales, or other lower-paid jobs, since the chances of finding a professional occupation consistent with their education are narrow.

Due to the traditional religious attitude that permeates governmental organisations and the official hypocritical conservatism, gender segregation is actively practiced. For example, jobs in fields such as engineering, which require frequent trips, are considered improper for “ladies”, and women are rarely chosen for the trips or excluded outright. In the private sector, where economic profitability is the main concern, companies usually prefer not to invest in women. The general gender-based approach often shows up in avoiding employing women.

Women are still few in management occupations. Most of the boards of directors of governmental and semi-governmental telecom companies are made

4 [khaterechador.blogfa.com](http://khaterechador.blogfa.com)

5 [www.itna.ir/vdcef1do.w6dtmagiiv.html](http://www.itna.ir/vdcef1do.w6dtmagiiv.html)



up by men and few women hold management or entrepreneurial positions. Only 6% of 65 science and technology parks in Iran are headed by women. However, because of self-motivation and a hard-working attitude amongst women, the number of them as senior experts and coordinators at middle-management levels is increasing.

Men in urban societies enjoy better educational opportunities and resources than women. But women in rural and tribal societies are the most oppressed, with the least availability of educational resources.

Given the economic difficulties and high unemployment rate among rural women, the need to provide them with ICT facilities is not a matter of doubt. But poor infrastructure and a low educational base should be taken into consideration when implementing an international model adapted to the context of rural society in Iran.

In recent years, some governmental organisations launched teleworking plans. This brought hope to female employees who thought they would be able to continue their job responsibilities at home using ICTs, while being mothers. Pregnant women especially counted on this scheme as a method of empowerment that would mean a quicker re-entry into their careers. Unfortunately, mismanagement and the administration mentality caused these plans to fail by forcing a majority of women to turn their work schedules into part-time employment, with a drastic income reduction.

### Electronic violence against women and judicial/security measures

Virtual violence against women is a malfunction of the internet. Filming women's private relations without their permission and uploading them on the web, posting personal pictures of them on social network pages, publishing nude pictures after retouching a normal photo, etc., are evident violations of personal rights which have victimised a lot of women in recent years.

According to statistics, "desecration" is the second most common internet crime.<sup>6</sup> Humiliation and disrespect, often through mobile phone text messages, threatening women with publishing their private photos on the net, and blackmailing them or their families are some prevalent methods. Although most of the statistical reports do not include gender indicators, the number of cases of desecration opened in the judicial system indicates this is an expanding problem.

Security organisations such as the Iranian Cyber Police, known as the FTA, have started to confront

cyber crimes. A list of internet crimes was published,<sup>7</sup> but the approach to cyber security has resulted in more censorship for women.

Moreover, the composition of the members of institutions and organisations such as the FTA, the Supreme Council of Virtual Spaces and the Council of Litigation on Cybercrimes reflects a male dominance which insists on male structures.

### ICTs and threats to cultural identity

Discussion about women's identity and Iranian culture when it comes to ICTs is diverse: it ranges from the effects of ICTs on secularisation, to the topic of "soft war", which has been recently introduced into political literature, with an emphasis on stabilising Islamic norms. The different points of view have sparked considerable debate. The main discussion usually involves women, public morals and chastity.

One of the latest controversial topics among religious leaders and state groups is that of 3G technology and its influences. Some of the leaders confronted the question by prohibiting 3G, arguing that it endangered public and family chastity because of its visual capabilities.<sup>8</sup> Some governmental experts, magnifying its effects, even compared this technology to nuclear bombs. Its more positive effects are often ignored: it can at least provide parents and especially mothers with psychological comfort at work by allowing them to "televatch" their children. Such confrontations are not new: technologies are often challenged by hardliners and then accepted, under pressure from the public and businesses. In this context, cultural activities are necessary to prevent a new trend of violence against women.

### Action steps

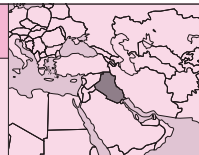
Regarding the potential of ICTs, as well as solid indicators on the information society, the following steps are necessary to protect the role of women:

- Technical and infrastructural issues and how women can access infrastructure need to be addressed.
- Problems created by legal limitations on women, based upon cultural matters, need to be solved.
- Targeted projects to empower women through ICTs are necessary. Further research is also needed in this regard, and ICT-related occupations and virtual violence might be considered as the main priorities of study. ■

6 [www.hamshahrionline.ir/details/193606](http://www.hamshahrionline.ir/details/193606)

7 [www.itna.ir/vdcexv8w.jh8nf9bbj.html](http://www.itna.ir/vdcexv8w.jh8nf9bbj.html)

8 [www.itna.ir/vdcccioqi.2bqpx8laa2.html](http://www.itna.ir/vdcccioqi.2bqpx8laa2.html)



Richmond University in London

John Chua

[www.stopfgmkurdistan.org](http://www.stopfgmkurdistan.org)

## Introduction

A decade after coalition forces invaded Iraq and toppled Saddam Hussein's rule, the country is still in turmoil. Although much of the international media's attention has shifted to conflict zones elsewhere, Iraq remains a place of extreme violence, with daily bombings, shootings and kidnappings. Over 700 people were killed in April 2013 alone, according to United Nations data, the highest monthly figure in almost five years.<sup>1</sup> Over the last six years, significantly more civilians died from the conflict in Iraq than in Afghanistan.<sup>2</sup>

With this as a backdrop, the issue of women's rights as they relate to information and communications technologies (ICTs) in Iraq is complicated by several other factors. Iraq as a whole suffers from a poor record of women's rights, despite ostensible improvements in recent years. Honour killings and forced marriages are not uncommon.<sup>3</sup> Female genital mutilation or cutting (FGM) is also a significant problem. For the last several years, Iraq (along with several other notable countries) did not even appear on the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report annual country ranking.<sup>4</sup> Internet usage jumped dramatically between 2010 and 2012, from 1.1% of the population to an estimated 7.1%.<sup>5</sup> But globally speaking this is still a low percentage, with much of this increase likely from the growth of smartphones. In fact, only 3% of households in 2012 have regular internet access.<sup>6</sup> The daily electrical blackouts, even in the prosperous and more peaceful Kurdish north, make online access frustrating.

Iraq has two administrative zones, the semi-autonomous Kurdish north with its own regional

government, and the rest of the country ruled from Baghdad. Kurdistan was one of the results of the first Gulf War, when the UN declared a no-fly zone across the north, protecting the Kurds from Saddam. Since then, Kurdistan has developed separately from the rest of Iraq, establishing its own armed forces as well as judicial and political systems. Today, Kurdistan is using its energy wealth to develop economically.

Founded by Germans and staffed by Iraqis, the NGO Wadi has been working in Kurdistan since 1992, helping to build schools, provide access to electricity and clean water, as well as improve women's health. Wadi also has a radio station with programmes for and created by women and youth. Initially Wadi was not involved with the issue of FGM, but during a meeting in 2004 with female villagers, several of them mentioned medical problems associated with FGM. Wadi followed this up with a pilot study revealing that 907 out of 1,544 women across villages were victims of FGM.<sup>7</sup> Since 2004, Wadi has taken a leading role in the fight against FGM, focusing initially on Iraqi Kurdistan and subsequently across many countries in the Middle East. This report looks at how an NGO incorporated the use of ICTs to put a global spotlight on a problem, which in turn led to new local laws and attitudes.

## Using ICTs to expose female genital mutilation

The origins of FGM and its introduction into the region are lost in the annals of time. The UN considers FGM a human rights violation. FGM pre-dates Islam and is not mentioned in the Koran, although Iraqis who practise it claim it is an obligation for Muslim women. FGM, as performed in Iraq, is the cutting and removal of the clitoris, in the belief that it preserves the "honour" of females. Women who are uncut are considered unclean and cannot serve food or drinks. This surgery is done in a non-clinical setting with only a knife and a handful of ash to seal the wound. The procedure is so dangerous that some victims die from the pain or from infections. Those who survive suffer from psychological, physical and sexual traumas.

1 [www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/05/201351951234492490.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/05/201351951234492490.html)

2 [musingsoniraq.blogspot.co.uk/2013/02/iraq-still-far-deadlier-place-than.html](http://musingsoniraq.blogspot.co.uk/2013/02/iraq-still-far-deadlier-place-than.html)

3 [travel.state.gov/travel/tips/safety/safety\\_5485.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/safety/safety_5485.html)

4 [www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GenderGap\\_Report\\_2012.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GenderGap_Report_2012.pdf)

5 [www.internetworldstats.com/me/iq.htm](http://www.internetworldstats.com/me/iq.htm)

6 [www.nytimes.com/2012/04/16/technology/iraq-emerges-from-isolation-as-telecommunications-hub.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/16/technology/iraq-emerges-from-isolation-as-telecommunications-hub.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)

7 [stopfgmmiddleeast.wordpress.com/background/how-it-all-started](http://stopfgmmiddleeast.wordpress.com/background/how-it-all-started)

Until about a decade ago, activists and experts in the West considered FGM mostly an African problem. When Wadi began its investigations into FGM in Kurdistan and beyond, its findings were groundbreaking, revealing this violation as a widespread problem.

Following the pilot study mentioned above, some in Iraq denied or minimised the existence of FGM.<sup>8</sup> Activists shot a short video in 2004 documenting FGM as a common practice and placed excerpts from it online.<sup>9</sup> Wadi subsequently conducted a more comprehensive survey within three major regions of Iraqi Kurdistan in 2010, which indicated that over 72% of females were FGM victims.<sup>10</sup> These studies were led by female activists, because the victims were unlikely to openly discuss such matters with men. The female activists also met with local leaders and politicians to lobby their cause. Wadi published its findings on the internet and issued press releases to encourage local and international press to cover the problem. Realising that access to the internet is not ubiquitous within Iraq, Wadi targeted the global media with its data, in effect shaming the regional politicians into action. With the overwhelming video and statistical evidence, Kurdish politicians and leaders could no longer ignore the issue.

In August of 2011, the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) enacted local laws criminalising the practice of FGM. However, Wadi subsequently conducted an even more provoking study revealing that FGM is not just a Kurdish practice but can be found among Arab and Turkmen populations within Iraq. At great risk to their personal safety, Wadi activists along with others from Pana, another local women's rights NGO, went to Kirkuk to survey 1,212 women there. Despite the end of the war, Kirkuk remains one of the most violent Iraqi cities, with its mixed population of Kurds, Arabs, Turkmen and others. Located outside the KRG's control, Kirkuk represents a smaller version of the entire nation. Kirkuk was previously thought to be a region free from FGM. To their surprise the activists found that over 25% of Arab women and over 12% of Turkmen women interviewed were victims of FGM.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, 65.4% of Kurdish females interviewed in the Kirkuk region were also victims. Because FGM is a taboo topic, activists speculate that the self-reported numbers, particularly among Arabs, are not accurate, and that the true figures could be even higher.<sup>12</sup> The existence of FGM among non-Kurds within Iraq suggests that anti-FGM laws should be national rather than regional. Again

the activists turned to the internet for global attention, hoping for international pressure on the central government in Baghdad to look into this issue.

But many Iraqi politicians continue to deny that FGM is a national issue and the activists have yet to convince the central government to enact anti-FGM laws.<sup>13</sup> Activists have turned to forming international alliances and partnerships to make this struggle a wider one. In January 2012, Wadi co-created the first conference on FGM in the Middle East, with participants from the region discussing evidence of FGM in such countries as Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Yemen. Using ICT tools, activists first connected the disparate experts from within the region (and even one from outside, specifically Indonesia), convinced them to come to Beirut, and then continued their dialogue after the meeting. Following this conference, Wadi was invited to speak at the US State Department in Washington D.C. regarding FGM as a global issue, and this discussion too was propagated as an online video.<sup>14</sup> It is key for the activists to continue to get international press coverage, and only ICTs would make this possible.

Meanwhile, the struggle against FGM in Iraq continues. Despite the 2011 law banning FGM within the Kurdish region, Human Rights Watch reported in August 2012 that the practice continues and the law is widely ignored.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the government avoided publicising the existence of this law to avoid upsetting powerful mullahs.<sup>16</sup> Opposition to the law also continues among midwives who perform the cutting and mothers who submit their daughters to the procedure. (In Kurdistan, fathers are often ignorant or left out of these decisions.) Clerics who support mutilation have even taken to the airwaves to fight against the law. Appearing on television, one prominent mullah claimed that the anti-FGM law is part of a Zionist plot to influence Kurdistan.<sup>17</sup>

Wadi responded to the opposition by creating a media campaign publicising the anti-FGM law using print, online tools and a key series of public information films. These public service announcements for television and online media reminded audiences of the law against female genital cutting, citing the punishments imposed for violations.<sup>18</sup>

The many successes of Wadi depended on the NGO training and enabling female activists to use

8 [www.youtube.com/watch?v=O2gqoPxQXjc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O2gqoPxQXjc)

9 [www.stopfgmkurdistan.org/html/english/resources.htm](http://www.stopfgmkurdistan.org/html/english/resources.htm)

10 [www.stopfgmkurdistan.org/html/english/fgm\\_e.htm#mape](http://www.stopfgmkurdistan.org/html/english/fgm_e.htm#mape)

11 [www.stopfgmkurdistan.org/media/Study\\_FGM\\_Kirkuk-en-1.pdf](http://www.stopfgmkurdistan.org/media/Study_FGM_Kirkuk-en-1.pdf)

12 [www.stopfgmkurdistan.org/media/Study\\_FGM\\_Kirkuk-en-1.pdf](http://www.stopfgmkurdistan.org/media/Study_FGM_Kirkuk-en-1.pdf)

13 [www.hivos.nl/Actueel/Nieuws/FGM-not-merely-an-African-problem-high-rates-in-the-Middle-East](http://www.hivos.nl/Actueel/Nieuws/FGM-not-merely-an-African-problem-high-rates-in-the-Middle-East)

14 [www.stopfgmkurdistan.org/html/english/updates/update013e.htm](http://www.stopfgmkurdistan.org/html/english/updates/update013e.htm)

15 [www.hrw.org/news/2012/08/29/iraqi-kurdistan-law-banning-fgm-not-being-enforced](http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/08/29/iraqi-kurdistan-law-banning-fgm-not-being-enforced)

16 [www.eyeseonline.com/2011/11/iraqi-kurdistan-free-yourself-from-fgm-%E2%80%93-a-new-approach](http://www.eyeseonline.com/2011/11/iraqi-kurdistan-free-yourself-from-fgm-%E2%80%93-a-new-approach)

17 [www.youtube.com/watch?v=8p816HKU6xs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8p816HKU6xs)

18 [www.stopfgmkurdistan.org/html/english/updates/update015e.htm](http://www.stopfgmkurdistan.org/html/english/updates/update015e.htm)

multimedia presentations in their visits to women in the villages to discuss health issues, tap radio or television broadcasts to promote their cause, access the internet to communicate with key influencers within Iraq and abroad, as well as use ICT tools to gather and analyse statistical evidence. While these activists are using ICTs to engage in participatory democracy and citizenship, we do realise that these women represent an educated minority in this public sphere. In a country where ICTs and indeed even electricity are not consistently available to all, an NGO is fortunate to have dedicated activists and volunteers who can be trained with the right ICT tools to reach out to their communities. These core members facilitate an NGO building a women's movement. As the world's media continue to take notice of their tireless work, the issue of FGM within Kurdistan and surrounding regions has attracted the attention of filmmakers and international broadcasters. A feature-length documentary film that would expose the problem to a global audience is currently in production. An international spotlight on this issue can ultimately only help the cause.

In defying opponents of the new law, Wadi can also report on its major recent success in convincing seven Kurdish villages to abandon the practice of FGM. Collectively, the women and the leaders in these villages pledged to end FGM. Since the beginning of this programme, there has been no evidence of the villages failing to keep their promise. Wadi aims to spread this approach to other areas of the country. Mobile teams of female activists approach remote villages where, besides the multimedia presentations mentioned above, they screen a short film about FGM using a portable projector and laptop. They hold discussions with women and village elders. The decision to end the practice is never coerced but rather encouraged through education. The activists also help with small development projects such as installing a small electrical generator or a portable classroom for the village. They also teach the women sewing, computer and literacy skills as well as provide first aid training, since many of these villages are far from medical centres.<sup>19</sup> It is with this kind of multi-pronged commitment that the locals grow to trust the Wadi activists and their push to end FGM.

## Conclusions

There are several conclusions to make regarding Wadi's experience using ICTs in their fight against FGM. Wadi's struggle to end FGM in Iraq has been

a long and as yet incomplete journey. Wadi realises that success comes in incremental steps. First, they disproved sceptics within Iraq and abroad to show that FGM is a problem. With video and statistical evidence, they got the attention of the world's media as well as Kurdish politicians. Second, Wadi also realises that local laws are not enough, as the issue is a national problem. Through their surveys and documentation, they proved FGM exists outside Kurdish communities within Iraq. Efforts to lobby the central government to enact national laws are a crucial development. Third, Wadi needs to continuously train a strong team of activists in using ICTs to conduct educational outreach to women throughout their region. Fourth, for the women and the villages to trust the activists, Wadi must work on a long-term basis with them through education, development and assistance. Fifth, the involvement of international partners should not be understated. Receiving global support for their work would lead the central government in Baghdad as well as politicians in Kurdistan to pay particular attention to the dangers of FGM.

## Action steps

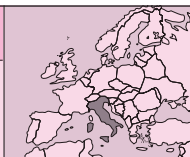
NGOs seeking to use ICTs to further the cause of women's rights should consider implementing the following steps:

- Recruit and train activists to use not just online but also other varieties of ICTs. Realising that the internet is not always available to all, activists found that knowing how to present a radio programme, edit a video or use multimedia presentations in remote villages are examples of the many ICT skills that work with or without internet access.
- Use ICT tools in all aspects of work, from communication and implementation to research and management.
- Lobby governments to enact laws protecting women but realise that the passing of new laws is not enough. Activists must also lobby to have governments implement the laws as well as encourage the public to change their attitudes. In all these efforts, ICTs can be very helpful.
- Whenever necessary and possible, add international components to the project by tapping the internet. Whether these components are international funding, publicity, lobbying or training, external help can elevate the importance of some projects. Sometimes international press coverage and outrage can shame politicians into action. ■

<sup>19</sup> [www.stopfgmkurdistan.org/html/english/updates/update017e.htm](http://www.stopfgmkurdistan.org/html/english/updates/update017e.htm)

## ITALY

### The internet and activism for women's rights



Lea Melandri and Giacomo Mazzone (with the support of Centro Nexa and Arturo di Corinto)  
nexa.polito.it and www.dicorinto.it

### Introduction

The women's movement in Italy started 40 years ago – in line with other movements born all over Europe at the beginning of the 1970s. Its moments of glory included the mobilisation around various civil liberties (such as the law that legalised abortion in Italy in 1978) and the protest against violence against women that brought millions of women onto the streets to claim their rights.

The general decline of political action in the 1980s (characterised in Italy by the rise of terrorism) impacted on the women's movement, which renounced mass street protests and preferred to concentrate on local action and on initiatives affecting daily life.

The trend changed again in 2005, thanks to the use of the internet by the women's movement. Myriad micro-initiatives have found ways of mobilising again using the internet, without the support of big organisations (such as unions and left-wing parties) and even without the support of the traditional media which, in Italy, seem to have totally forgotten civil rights campaigns and gender debates since the end of the 1990s.

### Political context

This phase of “underground” activities coincided with the nearly 20 years of Silvio Berlusconi-led governments ruling Italy (1994-2011, with two interruptions). The political rise of Berlusconi was characterised by the aggressive use of traditional media (he owns the three major commercial TV channels, two of the main national newspapers, one radio network and the biggest chain of cinemas in the country). This provoked major changes in the level of the country's national discourse. One of its main characteristics has been the deliberate use of women's images in the media (often naked or half naked), the total denial of the civil rights campaign, the criminalisation of immigrants and, in general, a negation of diversity in society.

In such a context, union action became more difficult and access to rights for women (such as abortion in public health structures) became virtually impossible. Not only was civil action difficult to organise, but when it finally did happen, because of Berlusconi's tight control on the media, these protests were not covered at all, or their support and impact were minimised. The message was clear: all action against the official dogma was not welcome and needed to be censored.

As a result, any social activism that wanted to succeed in Italy needed to reorganise at the turn of the century according to new criteria and principles. The internet, as the only medium that cannot be controlled in the traditional way (and by the usual suspects), is welcomed by all social movements as a unique opportunity to communicate, raise awareness and act – even if this means taking on the traditional media.

### The women's movement and the internet

Today the women's movement is divided in two: the groups, initiatives and organisations existing before the mainstreaming of the internet (that now have a second life thanks to the web) and groups, initiatives and organisations that were started online and then have tried to create an offline presence.

Among the best known examples of the first kind are LUD (*Libera Università delle Donne* or Free Women's University) in Milan, which was founded in 1987 as a centre for study and debate on gender and the feminist movement, and which launched its website in 1999,<sup>1</sup> and *Libreria delle donne* (Women's Bookshop), founded in 1975, which launched its website in 2001<sup>2</sup> and completely revamped it in 2013.

As for the second category of women's organisations, the most relevant is probably the website [www.controviolenzadonne.org](http://www.controviolenzadonne.org), the result of a successful national demonstration held under the same name on 24 November 2007. This became the portal to access all the centres that assisted women who had been victims of violence in Italy.<sup>3</sup>

1 [www.universitadelledonne.it](http://www.universitadelledonne.it) (English version: [www.universitadelledonne.it/english/index.html](http://www.universitadelledonne.it/english/index.html))

2 [www.libreriadelledonne.it](http://www.libreriadelledonne.it)

3 [www.controviolenzadonne.org/index.html](http://www.controviolenzadonne.org/index.html)



Both these groups emerged from the darkness of the 1990s at the turn of the century, and moved to the front of the political scene thanks to the interaction between political action, networking and mass demonstrations. But their mass demonstrations were totally different from those of the 1980s and now focused on specific problems that women wanted to bring to the attention of society. Mobilisation has focused on three key topics: the right to abortion, violence against women, and the exploitation of women's bodies and the associated images that appeared daily in the commercial media.

### 2006: The women's movement discovers the internet as a tool to defend its rights

The first event of this new form of mobilisation took place on 14 January 2006 with a national demonstration in Milan under the banner "*Per uscire dal silenzio*" (Stop the Silence). This campaign was against the Catholic Church and Berlusconi's coalition parties, which aimed to restrict the number of cases in which abortion is legal. The demonstration started with an email chain launched by journalist Assunta Sarlo, who worked at the newspaper *Il Diario* and invited women to protest and stand up for their rights. The emails called for a protest to take place on 25 November at the headquarters of the leftist Trade Union Congress in Milan. More than 250,000 women attended the demonstration, although it was launched over the internet, virtually ignored by the government, and received very little coverage in the media. This was a lot more than expected.

This successful experience – which was a mix between a call for action using the internet and traditional tools for political action, such as public demonstrations – became a reference for many other initiatives that occurred in the last year of Berlusconi's government. Many women's organisations have started to consider the internet as a possible platform for political actions.

### The internet and the campaign opposing violence against women

The next big event took place in November 2007 in Rome under the slogan "Manifestazione nazionale contro la violenza maschile sulla donna" (National Demonstration Opposing Male Violence against Women).<sup>4</sup>

The demonstration, again, was started on the internet using the website [www.controviolenza.org](http://www.controviolenza.org)<sup>5</sup> as an advocacy platform. The website had been created for the purpose of sharing daily examples of violence against women with the public. One moving example is Hina Saleem, a young Pakistani immigrant in Sarezzo, a village near Brescia, who was killed by her father and brothers because she refused an arranged marriage and wanted to marry her Italian boyfriend.<sup>6</sup>

The demonstration was attended by more than 150,000 women from all over Italy, with the participation of many representatives from local government and municipalities. Parties from the left tried to ride the wave and wanted to enrol the initiative under their flags. But the organisers rejected their offers and preferred to stay out of the political game.

This first initiative was followed by another one with the same advocacy agenda in Rome on 22 November 2008, and by a third in 2011.

In the meantime websites like [www.controviolenzadonne.org](http://www.controviolenzadonne.org) and [www.zeroviolenzadonne.it](http://www.zeroviolenzadonne.it) had become hubs for coordinating all the disparate activities aimed at fighting violence against women.

The mix of street demonstrations and web activism created a new form of representation over the internet. A new portal was launched on 6 February 2009 by the journalist and activist Monica Pepe, called [www.zeroviolenzadonne.it](http://www.zeroviolenzadonne.it).<sup>7</sup>

Its basic idea is quite simple: to keep an updated account of all episodes of violence against women occurring in Italy through the constant monitoring of newspaper articles and electronic media, and publishing analyses and editorial reflections on these data and on media behaviour. The portal became the main coordination point for a national demonstration against violence against women, held in November 2011 in various towns across Italy.

Now the transformation is complete: the net is no longer simply a window on activities existing in the offline world. It holds an advantage over offline organisation, because it abolishes the barriers of time and space and can assist in coordinating groups through the efforts of a single person who supports a cause. It also has the advantage of fitting perfectly with the refusal of the women's movement to create permanent centralised structures, with consequent hierarchies and levels of engagement and participation. The internet seems to be the

5 [www.controviolenzadonne.org/html/appello.html](http://www.controviolenzadonne.org/html/appello.html)

6 According to data collected in 2006 by the National Statistical Institute (ISTAT), more than 6,743,000 women aged between 16 and 70 had been victims of sexual or physical violence over the course of their lives. In the 12 months before the research alone, 150,000 acts of violence against women were reported.

7 Lea Melandri, co-author of this article, is the head editor of this website.

4 [www.noidonne.org/articolo.php?ID=01440](http://www.noidonne.org/articolo.php?ID=01440) [www.controviolenzadonne.org/html/archivio\\_24-11-07.html](http://www.controviolenzadonne.org/html/archivio_24-11-07.html)



long-awaited answer for a movement that wants to remain dispersed but connected and without a hierarchical organisation.

### The internet and the degrading use of images of women

Another issue around which the women's movement and its supporters have been mobilised is the use of degrading images of women in public. This protest followed the discovery of the "bunga bunga" parties held by then prime minister Berlusconi and involving underage girls.

The revelations quickly resulted in public demonstrations. On 13 February 2011 nearly one million people gathered in the streets of the main Italian cities under the slogan SNOQ – "Se non ora quando?" (If not now, then when?)<sup>8</sup> – supported by the newspaper *La Repubblica* as well as the TV station Rai3.

The initiative was started by a group called "Di Nuovo", led by some well-known women in the world of the performing arts, cinema and TV (such as film director Cristina Comencini, actress Francesca Izzo and many others).<sup>9</sup> This group emerged thanks to the internet.

Following the success of the demonstration, Di Nuovo – claiming to represent the one million participants – opened negotiations with traditional parties, trying to negotiate rights in favour of women including a reserved quota for women's candidates at the next national elections.

### The internet as an aggregation tool for the women's movement?

After these three successful initiatives in the "real" world, the Italian women's movement decided to go one step beyond and to determine if, through the widespread use of the internet, a new form of organisation (more agile, totally decentralised and open) could replace the traditional organisation of parties or unions.

Using the net once more it launched a call for three days of discussion and analysis in Paestum on 5, 6 and 7 October 2011 (right in the middle of the crisis in Berlusconi's government and his resignation, and a few days before the inauguration of Mario Monti as prime minister). The choice of the place to hold the discussion was not an accident: Paestum was the venue for the last gathering of the Italian women's movement in 1976, when it was still called the feminist movement. However, with the inclusion of younger women, the agenda for the

discussions was quite different, including perspectives on jobs, equality and so on.

### The women's movement discovers its international voice using the internet

In February 2013, on Valentine's Day, many collectives in Italy promoted the idea of participating in the Italian chapter of the "One Billion Rising" campaign.<sup>10</sup>

Once again, thanks to the internet, the initiative was celebrated in many Italian towns.<sup>11</sup> The campaign aimed to combat violence against women using the language of music and dance with the idea that this would be more appropriate than political slogans and political quarrels.

The circle is now closed: a national movement made up of small groups and local initiatives is also able to interact, coordinate and exchange information on an equal footing with global initiatives using the internet.

### Conclusion

The women's movement in Italy discovered the internet quite late (around 2005). Activists studied it carefully, and once they realised that the online world supported a non-hierarchical and decentralised movement, they started to use it widely for information sharing, support and campaigns. Essentially, the women's movement adopted the internet as an alternative to the traditionally highly centralised structures of political parties and trade unions, linking initiatives, groups and individuals around specific and concrete battles such as combating violence against women and ensuring respect for women's dignity. But in doing so, the Italian women's movement has also been consistent with its different and quite unique approach to feminism since its origins 40 years ago, in its view that it is more important to produce changes in daily life than to change laws. According to this approach, gender problems, such as foregrounding the debate on gender roles, are more important than parliamentary political battles. The key phrase of this approach is: "The thinking that produces concrete changes in human behaviour is already politics." The internet supports this approach perfectly, because it allows political action and campaigning without the need to obtain the approval of traditional political channels of expression.

8 [www.senonoraquando.eu](http://www.senonoraquando.eu)

9 [www.leiweb.it/celebrity/personaggi-news/10\\_a\\_di-nuovo-comencini.shtml](http://www.leiweb.it/celebrity/personaggi-news/10_a_di-nuovo-comencini.shtml)

10 The Italian initiative is a local chapter of the global initiative of the same name, promoted by US playwright Eve Ensler, best known as the author of the "Vagina Monologues". [www.onebillionrising.org](http://www.onebillionrising.org)

11 [www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=Kngnnon46ac](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=Kngnnon46ac)

## Action steps

### *Paestum 2013*

Just before summer 2013, an online appeal was launched by the Association of Italian Art Directors (ADCI). It called on the minister in charge of gender equality to clamp down on “sexist advertising” in Italy. It asked for the introduction of rules for protecting the dignity of women in advertising campaigns based on a European Parliament resolution of 3 September 2008. Using social networks, it has arranged the second national gathering of the women’s movement in Paestum (called “Paestum 2013”). This year the campaign will be dedicated to issues such as “sexual behaviour” and the vulnerability of women in the workplace when it comes to short-term contracts that can be renewed without permanent employment being granted.

### *Infrastructure*

The new government (an Italian “grosse coalition” with left- and right-wing parties) has announced massive investments in spreading access to broadband and liberalising Wi-Fi infrastructure all over the country. This is expected to increase the number of internet users in Italy, currently amongst the lowest in the EU. This has the potential to strengthen the women’s movement, and should be supported.

## Legislation

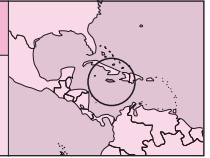
Little progress has been made over the last ten years when it comes to women’s rights in Italian legislation – except for a law against stalking which was approved in 2009 under the pressure of various TV personalities. However, recently a number of activities have arisen, thanks mainly to the fact that the new speaker of the parliament since March 2013 has been Laura Boldrini, a human rights activist. Since her arrival, the Italian parliament has finally ratified the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, known as the Istanbul Convention (on 19 June 2013). The legislature had been dragging its feet for some time over this ratification because of the lack of political will of the previous parliament. The ratification was supported through an internet campaign for signatures under the slogan: “No more”. In just a few months 100,000 signatures were collected. This shows that the internet can be successfully used to support and encourage the development of legislation – which might usher in a new tactic for activism in the women’s movement in Italy.

### *Join the women’s movement!*

The women’s movement in Italy is now well publicised online. For an updated list of websites, visit: [www.universitadelledonne.it/siti.htm](http://www.universitadelledonne.it/siti.htm) ■

# JAMAICA

## Women's rights, gender and ICTs: Empowering household workers in Jamaica



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### Introduction

Household or domestic workers around the world have been using information and communications technologies (ICTs) to organise for gender equality and their basic rights as women and as workers. A range of ICT platforms are being used to conduct public education campaigns and lobby their governments to ratify and implement a new convention approved by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in June 2011. Convention 189 (C189) concerning decent work for domestic workers promotes the Decent Work Agenda for an estimated 53.5 million domestic workers, one fifth of whom live in Latin America and the Caribbean. In Jamaica, an estimated 100,000 household workers, the majority of them women, are using ICTs to encourage the adoption of C189, which is based on four principles: 1) employment promotion (access to employment and a decent wage), 2) working conditions and social protection, 3) fundamental principles and rights at work, and 4) social dialogue.

The rapid expansion of ICTs globally has facilitated the C189 campaign in many parts of the world. The case study of the Jamaica Household Workers' Union (JHWU) provides opportunities to reflect on the current policy situation of women's rights and differences in access to and use of ICTs for the future. The analysis focuses on how ICTs can significantly enhance women's political and economic empowerment, human rights and gender equality.

ILO conferences are major international events providing considerable access to and use of ICTs. In this global campaign, a wide range of ICT platforms have been used to communicate the messages. These ICT platforms have helped to transform the president of the JHWU, Shirley Pryce, from a national and regional advocate into one of the global spokespersons for women domestic workers' rights worldwide.

The use of internet and social media at ILO conferences in 2010 and 2011 which she attended

enabled events to be streamed live around the globe. The use of websites, special listservs and e-networks facilitated coverage and comment on the events as they developed. These ICT platforms enabled excited JHWU members and other stakeholders in Jamaica to participate virtually in celebrating the ILO's adoption of C189. Shirley's message – "We did it" – resonated with excitement across many digital platforms.

While ICTs played an important role in the global media campaign, many of the world's 53.5 million household workers were oblivious to this historic event because of the "digital divide". This demonstrates the gap in access to and use of media mediated by class and gender, including the limited access of the majority of domestic workers globally to diverse new media outlets and differences in women's and men's access to and use of ICTs in different regions and countries.

Policy makers play an important role in closing the gender-based digital divide and ensuring more equitable ICT access and gender equality for all citizens. Broader access to ICTs will support national development goals and human rights commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment. A 2011 study on broadband and ICT use in Jamaica by Dunn et al.<sup>1</sup> highlighted a gender divide in access to and use of technologies. It noted rapid expansion of telecommunications and ICT services in the last decade, following the government's policy of telephony deregulation, initiated in 1999, the adoption of the Telecommunications Act of 2000 and phased implementation culminating in 2003. The study noted that mobile penetration was over 100%, with ICT infrastructure growing to facilitate increased wireless access. This was consistent with ITU data for Jamaica<sup>2</sup> which reported growth in mobile subscribers per 100 inhabitants from 14.2 per 100 in 2000 to 108.25 per 100 in 2009. A 2010 ITU report<sup>3</sup> also noted growth in wireless, as well as a reduction in fixed-line connections per 100 inhabitants from 19.1 in 2000 to 11.1

1 Dunn, H., Williams, R., Thomas, M. and Brown, A. (2011) *Caribbean Broadband and ICT Indicator Survey: Jamaica Report*, Telecommunication Policy and Management (TPM) Programme, University of the West Indies.

2 ITU (2013) *ICT Usage Statistics*. [www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx](http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx)

3 ITU (2010) *The World in 2010: ICT Facts and Figures*. [www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/material/FactsFigures2010.pdf](http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/material/FactsFigures2010.pdf)

in 2009. The Dunn et al. study found that while there was rapid growth in mobile telephone penetration, there was low growth in adoption and use of computers and the internet.

This low ICT use was evident among household workers examined in an ILO-funded Situation Analysis of Household Workers in Jamaica.<sup>4</sup> The 2011 ICT study provided reasons, noting that the high cost of computers and internet resulted from high consumer taxes on computers and IT services. In the ITU's 2010 study,<sup>5</sup> only 22.5% of households in developing countries had access to computers and 15.8% had access to the internet. By comparison, the 2011 ICT and broadband study by Dunn et al. reported that approximately 24% of households in Jamaica had access to a computer and 15.6% had access to the internet.

It is therefore not surprising that the majority of household workers consulted reported that their main point of access to ICTs was the mobile phone. However, in a 2013 focus group with JHWA members, the majority of these women reported that they would like to have access to email, computers and the internet. They also used their mobile phones to manage their personal household affairs, caring for their children and elderly family members while they were at work, and a few used their mobiles to earn additional income.

## Gender inequalities

The estimated 56,000 to 100,000 household workers in Jamaica reported by Dunn are part of the country's population of 2.7 million, which includes 51% females and 49% males.<sup>6</sup> The daily lives of these women reflect contradictions in the situation of women in Jamaica compared to their counterparts in many industrialised and developing countries. A very high percentage of women in Jamaica are pursuing education and are enrolled in tertiary education institutions (70% compared to 30% of males). For example, at the University of the West Indies (UWI) 70% of students are female and 30% male.<sup>7</sup>

Advanced education of women has not, however, translated into equality in labour force participation, wages and access to power and decision making, or the elimination of gender-based violence. While there have been significant advances in gender equality in many occupations and employment in Jamaica, several barriers remain,

which undermine women's rights and their development. ICT platforms provide opportunities to build awareness of gender disparities, unequal wages and working conditions and can mobilise action to change laws, policies and practices.

Examples of gender inequalities in data from the Statistical Institute of Jamaica (STATIN)<sup>8</sup> and the 2011 Economic and Social Survey of Jamaica (ESSJ)<sup>9</sup> show that women as a group experience lower levels of labour force participation (46% women compared to 54% men); lower rates of employment (83.2% for women compared to 90.5% for men); and higher rates of unemployment (16.8% for women compared to 9.5% for men).

Ascribed gender roles for each sex are the main causes of these gender inequalities: the female family caregivers and the male family breadwinners. However, in Jamaica the reality is that almost half of women (46%) are the main caregivers *and* breadwinners. Nevertheless, the ESSJ reports that more women than men are among persons outside of the labour force (446,200 women compared to 290,800 men). In addition to gender, other factors including age, class, ethnicity and disability also intersect to influence the development status of women and men.

The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2012<sup>10</sup> indicates that the labour force participation rate for women in Jamaica was 61% compared to 78% for men, indicating a similar trend when compared to STATIN's 2011 data.

Current gender inequalities also reflect historical precedents. Consistent with the demographic profile in Jamaica's 2010 census data, over 80% of Jamaicans are descendants of enslaved Africans who worked in the sugar cane fields and in great houses of British planters between 1655 and 1838.<sup>11</sup> The ancestry of household workers in Jamaica would likely not deviate from this pattern. Current struggles for decent work reflect historical occupational challenges such as labour exploitation and sexual harassment from employers. Jamaica's ratification and implementation of C189 will therefore help to improve the wages and working conditions of over 100,000 domestic workers at high risk of poverty.

Expanding access to and use of ICTs will enhance household workers' political power. This will enable them to influence national policies and decision-making processes more effectively. Gender

4 Dunn, L. (2011) *Situation Analysis of Household Workers in Jamaica*, ILO Caribbean Office, Port of Spain.

5 ITU (2010) Op. cit.

6 Dunn, L. (2011) Op. cit.

7 UWI (2011) *UWI Annual Report 2010-2011*, UWI, Kingston.

8 [www.statinja.com](http://www.statinja.com)

9 Planning Institute of Jamaica (2011) *Economic and Social Survey of Jamaica 2011*.

10 World Economic Forum (2012) *Global Gender Gap Report 2012*.

11 Statistical Institute of Jamaica (2010) 2010 Census.

inequality at the highest level of decision making persists, despite Jamaican women having attained universal adult suffrage and the right to vote in 1944. In 2013, females are 51% of the population, but only 13% of members of parliament are women, and 20% of government ministers.<sup>12</sup> Jamaica also has a female prime minister. Portia Simpson-Miller first served as prime minister from March 2006 to September 2007, and was then re-elected and took office on 5 January 2012. While she is publicly very supportive of household workers and women in general, gender inequality in the system of governance and in political and public leadership means that the process of institutional change is slow, hence the need to use ICTs to accelerate advocacy to address structural gender inequalities.

Many household workers are single female heads of their families. They are among the poorest quintile in the population. They are at higher risk of poverty and face increased economic hardships associated with Jamaica's structural adjustment programme newly negotiated with the International Monetary Fund. Impending layoffs in the public and private sector will in turn negatively impact employment levels of household workers as their employers are mainly middle and upper class employees who, if retrenched, are less likely to be able to afford their services.

Poverty is a problem not only for Jamaican household workers but also for the ILO-estimated 53.5 million domestic employees worldwide, one fifth of whom work in Latin America and the Caribbean. In 2011, Jamaican household workers earned an average wage equivalent to USD 50 per week, according to a pilot survey of domestic workers conducted for the ILO Caribbean Office.<sup>13</sup> Not surprisingly, the majority of household workers consulted in that study reported that they were unable to cover their basic family expenses. Their low socioeconomic profile would also explain their low level of access to and use of ICTs reported by Dunn et al.<sup>14</sup> and the ITU.<sup>15</sup> Members of the JHWU, therefore, depend on their mobile phones to lobby for decent work and the Jamaican government's ratification of C189.

### Household workers' interest in ICTs

In response to JHWU members' expressed interest in learning computer skills to enhance their development, the union is establishing a training

institute which includes training members to acquire computer skills. The union's recent acquisition of a computer and internet access in their Kingston office has facilitated increased access to national, regional and international partners and broadened options for advocacy and organising members. Having increased membership to over 2,000 women and established 11 chapters island-wide, using mobile phones, the expectation is that with increased access to and use of the internet and other ICT platforms the union will over time be able to reach and register the estimated 100,000 household workers in the country. If successful, the JHWU would become the largest trade union in Jamaica. This was the view of noted trade unionist Dwight Nelson, now lecturer at the Hugh Lawson Shearer Trade Union Education Institute at UWI's Mona campus. He made the point while delivering training in trade unionism at three capacity-building workshops for JHWU members held across Jamaica in May and June 2013. This was part of a UN Women-funded project with the Ministry of Labour and Social Security. JHWU parish organisers used their mobile phones to mobilise members in the rural parishes of Portland and St. Elizabeth and in the urban centres of Kingston and St. Andrew.<sup>16</sup>

The Jamaican government's accelerated implementation of ICT policy will result in improved access for the majority of citizens to technology platforms. This will have several direct economic and social benefits to household workers. Impacts in the short term can include improved capacity for the JHWU and its members to communicate with each other and with other stakeholders via email and a JHWU website for advocacy campaigns. In the medium to long term, impacts can include improved access to online education, training and certification for members, enabling them to access more diverse and more highly skilled and paid jobs.

An important example of the digital divide with gender and class providing differential access to and use of ICTs was evident in the current campaign to build awareness of C189 among stakeholders in Jamaica. In June 2013, a sensitisation workshop was organised for employers in partnership with the Jamaica Employers Federation (JEF). JHWU members at the low end of the ICT spectrum depended mainly on mobile phones to organise events. JEF members, mainly from middle and upper class backgrounds, were at the higher

12 World Economic Forum (2012) Op cit.

13 The 2011 minimum wage was equivalent to USD 50 per week for a 40-hour work week at an exchange rate of JMD 90 per USD 1. The National Minimum Wage Order of 25 July 2012 established an increase from JMD 4,500 to JMD 5,000.

14 Dunn et al. (2011) Op. cit.

15 ITU (2010) Op. cit.

16 The workshops for JHWU members were part of a project funded by UN Women with the Ministry of Labour and Social Security and implemented by the UWI's Institute for Gender and Development Studies Mona Unit.



end of the ICT spectrum, reflecting use of a broader range of ICT platforms to organise: computers, email and internet, smartphones, Blackberries, iPads and the JEF's website.

This digital divide also influences the capacity of each organisation's members for follow-up. JEF members have immediate access to the electronic presentations from the seminars, while most household workers will have to depend on printed copies which are more expensive to produce and disseminate. This reality reinforces a point made in the ICT studies by Dunn et al. and the ITU that low socioeconomic profile is correlated with low ICT access and use. It also confirms that ICT policies are not gender neutral. Attitudes, access, use and benefits from ICTs are influenced not only by gender and class, but also age, religion and disability, among other factors.

This example of the digital divide also underscores the importance of government policy supporting the UN's ICT for development (ICT4D) agenda. ICT4D is an initiative that seeks to overcome the digital divide between the "haves" and "have-nots" – both related to geographical locations and countries as well as to demographic groups such as the JHWU members and JEF members. The ICT4D agenda also seeks to promote economic development by promoting equitable access for all groups to a wide range of ICTs such as computers, network hardware and software, satellites, radio, television and of course mobile phones. This agenda also includes access to services and applications associated with ICTs such as distance learning and videoconferencing.<sup>17</sup> As household workers increase their access to and use of ICTs, many new opportunities will emerge to achieve their rights as women workers and their goal for gender equality. The process to transition from low to high ICT users and to benefit from the process is clearly explained by Heeks, whose conceptual framework of the transition from ICT4D 1.0 to ICT4D 2.0 is characterised by a state of readiness – awareness of ICTs, infrastructure and the digital divide and also availability of ICT supply. Over time, he argues, changes to ICT4D 2.0 are characterised by an update in ICT demand, usage and use divide. The impact of ICTs is then evident in the achievement of economic and social development goals.<sup>18</sup>

This is great news for household workers. With a supportive ICT policy framework, they can expect to achieve economic empowerment though decent

work, improved wages, compensation for overtime, formal instead of informal work contracts, greater social protection, improved professional status, and improved respect and value accorded to household work and its financial contribution to national income statistics around the world. Ratifying and implementing C189, ICT policies and the ICT4D agenda supports the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), especially MDG 1 on poverty reduction and MDG 3 on gender equality and the empowerment of women.

## Policy framework for gender equality and ICTs

### Gender equality policy

The government of Jamaica has established an enabling policy framework for promoting both gender equality and ICT4D in Jamaica. This is good news for household workers as they advocate for ratification of C189, decent work and women's rights. In March 2011, Jamaica's parliament approved the National Policy for Gender Equality (NPGE). The NPGE promotes gender mainstreaming in all policies and programmes as a strategy to eliminate discrimination against women. It also supports the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which Jamaica has ratified.

### ICT policy

The government's telecommunications policy decision in 1999 to deregulate the then existing telephone monopoly and to open the market to competition in mobile telephone services<sup>19</sup> has helped to close the digital divide and gender gap in women's access to and use of ICTs in the last 15 years. The mobile phone has become an essential tool for women and men across social, economic, political, religious and other categories, who use the technologies to manage their work, family and social responsibilities.

### Gender and ICT research

This analysis of household workers' use of ICTs to promote their rights and decent work underscores the importance of interdisciplinary research on gender and technology. One such study is *Genderstanding Mobile Telephony: Women, Men and their Uses of the Cellular Phones in the Caribbean*,<sup>20</sup> which was the result of collaboration between the

17 [whatis.techtarget.com/definition/ICT4D-Information-and-Communications-Technologies-for-Development](http://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/ICT4D-Information-and-Communications-Technologies-for-Development)

18 Heeks, R. (2009) *The ICT4D 2.0 Manifesto: Where Next for ICTs and International Development?*, Development Informatics Working Paper No. 42. [www.oecd.org/ict/4d/43602651.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/ict/4d/43602651.pdf)

19 Dunn, H. and Dunn, L. (2006) *Genderstanding Mobile Telephony: Women, Men and their Uses of the Cellular Phones in the Caribbean*, DIRSI.

20 Ibid.



UWI's Mona ICT Policy Centre and the UWI's Institute for Gender and Development Studies Mona Unit. Caribbean studies noted that women were the dominant mobile phone users and reported using them for security, linking family, work and social contacts. For some women, it was their "lifeline". Men used them for networking, profiling and work tasks.

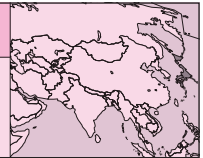
### Conclusions and action steps

Globally and in Jamaica, household workers are embracing ICTs to promote their rights for gender equality and decent work consistent with global and national development goals. The JHWA with the support of its tripartite partners and other stakeholders can better galvanise the 100,000 domestic workers using more advanced ICTs to advance the gender agenda for social, economic and political equality for women. To propel this movement forward it is recommended that:

- The Ministry of Labour and Social Security conclude the legal reform process that will enable Jamaica to ratify and implement C189.
- The Ministry of Finance should remove taxes from computers and internet-enabled ICT products to reduce costs and increase access and use.
- The JHWU and its partners should seek additional funding support to expand computer and ICT training programmes to enhance the skills, confidence and ability of its members to increase their use of ICT platforms. This would improve their education, employment options, organising and advocacy to achieve their goals.
- The government should facilitate greater cross integration and collaboration in areas of technology policy and gender equality strategies to enhance women's development and help redress the digital divide.
- Researchers in gender and development, in science and technology and in telecommunications policy in Jamaica and the Caribbean should improve their collaboration to promote women's increased use of technologies for development. ■

# JAPAN

Dealing with the backlash: Promoting dialogue and discourse rather than division



## Japan Computer Access for Empowerment (JCAFE)

Tadahisa Hamada

[www.jcafe.net](http://www.jcafe.net)

### Introduction

Although there had been an increase in the use of the internet by Japan's feminist movement at the time of the Beijing women's conference in 1995, this was not sustained. For example, scholars in gender and women's studies have barely used the internet to share their work, and have mostly published books since the mid-2000s – even as a means to oppose the “backlash”<sup>1</sup> against feminism in the country, which had been spreading through the mainstream media.

Although women's rights advocates have started to use the internet recently, it is difficult to say – because of the relatively low number of online activities – whether they have constructed effective media strategies. Furthermore, using the traditional media for advocacy, which was an advantage feminists had in the past, has also weakened,

This report looks back at the history of internet use by feminists and highlights some of the issues involved.

### Policy and political background

The Japanese government coined the phrase “danjo kyodo sankaku” in 1991 (although it literally means “co-participation and planning between men and women”, the official English translation is “gender equality”). It also put the Basic Act for a Gender-Equal Society in force in 1999. There were two reasons for the government to promote the “co-participation” policy. The first is the trend in the United Nations and in the international community more broadly to promote gender equality, and the second is the need to create a new labour force given a low birth rate and high life expectancy, as well as a protracted economic slump. The side effect of this second reason has been to weaken traditional grassroots feminist movements.

The Tokyo Women's Foundation also introduced a new term – “gender-free” – aimed at changing gender

consciousness, especially in school education. It proposed to use the term instead of “equality between genders”, which was used conventionally and was felt to be a concept that ignored the history of the women's movement until then. They explained that Houston<sup>2</sup> had advocated for the use of the concept, and argued that the term “gender-free” was also used in Europe and North America. Later, it became clear that such an understanding is a fundamental misconception.<sup>3</sup>

The “co-participation” policy and “gender-free” education faced intense backlashes from many conservative groups using various media in the first half of the 2000s. At the same time, the feminist movement could use neither the internet nor conventional small-scale communication effectively, and had turned into the information “have-nots”.

### Internet usage by women's groups

The Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995 was an opportunity to realise the possibility of the internet for many women's movement organisations and activists in the world. Of course, this was not necessarily exceptional. Japan Computer Access (JCA, now called JCAFE), the partner node of the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) in Japan, has supported Japanese women's groups since the time of its establishment in 1993. It circulated electronic information and documents at APC e-conferences organised for Japanese women's groups, including the draft Beijing Platform for Action, as well as hosting computer training courses, amongst other initiatives.

The APC Women's Networking Support Programme (APC WNSP) led an all-women team of 40 participants from 25 countries at the Beijing conference, where they provided email and web access to

2 Houston, B. (1994) Should Public Education Be Gender Free?, in Stone, L. (ed.) *The Education Feminism Reader*, Routledge, New York.

3 Yamaguchi, T. (2004) The root of confusion in the issue of 'gender-free': Part 1 ['Gender-free' wo meguru konran no kongen (1)], *We: The connection between life and education* [Kurashi to kyoiku wo tunagu we], Vol. 27, p. 10-18, Femix, Tokyo. For further references, see also: Yamaguchi, T. (Forthcoming 2013) (Un)making Sense of “Gender Free”: Mainstreaming and Backlash against Feminism in Contemporary Japan (accepted by *Feminist Studies*) and Yamaguchi, T., Saito, M. and Ogiue, C. (2012) *Social Movements at a Crossroads: Feminism's “lost years” vs. grassroots conservatism* [Shakai Undō no Tomadoi: Feminizumu no “ushinawareta jidai” to kusanone hoshu undō], Keisō Shobo, Tokyo.

1 This term was coined by feminists, who described conservative anti-feminist groups as “backlashers”.

over 10,000 delegates. It was a powerful message to the world: there is no innate barrier to women using computer technology. JCA sent three female members to join the APC team. They constructed internet servers, held email training for many women's rights activists, and reported from the venue using the net.

JCA also started JCA-NET in 1997 as a business unit, which provides internet services for social movements, and carried out the following projects in cooperation with the Asia-Japan Women's Resource Center (AJWRC):

#### *VAWW-Net*

In November 1997, AJWRC and the Asian Center for Entrepreneurial Initiatives (ASCENT) organised an international conference on violence against women in war and conflict situations (VAWW) in Tokyo. Fifty female experts gathered for this conference, where all of them presented cases detailing their individual circumstances and discussed possible responses to such cases. They compiled the discussions into the "Tokyo Declaration". The event was meaningful in that they were able to highlight cases from Asia.

They decided to organise a network – VAWW-Net – acting on issues concerning violence against women in war and conflict situations. They started a mailing list to exchange their knowledge, as well as their views. The mailing list has been quite instrumental in facilitating their activities. It is linked to the APC network's newsgroup called "women vaw", which has been accessed by many women around the globe.

#### *AWORC*

The Asian Women's Resource Exchange (AWORC) is an internet-based women's information service and network in Asia. It is an initiative geared towards developing cooperative approaches and partnerships in increasing access and exploring the application of new information and communications technologies (ICTs) for women's empowerment.

AWORC resulted from a workshop organised by Isis International-Manila on 20-23 April 1998. They explored strategies for electronic resource sharing and networking among women's information and resource centres in the region. It is part of their continued effort to develop empowering information and communication models that strengthen the women's movement in Asia.

#### *fem-net*

A network for women's movements initiated in March 1999, fem-net was an electronic forum for those engaged in the women's movement, and

those interested in women's issues. It was a combination system of mailing lists, APC newsgroups and web bulletin boards. Although it became the foundation for a culture of using mailing lists among feminists, it did not strategically share information through the web, and activity by fem-net slowed down gradually.

In the early 2000s, while local organisations that work internationally continued to use the internet as a useful tool for information exchange, feminists who act locally tended to avoid the internet out of fear. One significant cause was the intense criticism of feminism by conservative groups in the first half of the 2000s.

#### **Backlash against "co-participation" and "gender-free"**

The Basic Law for a Gender-Equal Society (Danjo Kyodo Sankaku Shakai Kihon-ho, hereafter referred to as the Basic Law) was approved unanimously in 1998, and came into force in 1999. Subsequently, municipal governments across Japan, starting with Tokyo and Saitama, developed their own ordinances for the promotion of gender equality. A large amount of tax revenue was injected into municipalities all over the country for the construction of gender equality centres and for many educational initiatives.

However, as mentioned, the notions of "co-participation" and "gender-free" resulted in a backlash from conservative groups. The conservatives successfully passed a conservative-friendly gender equality ordinance in Ube City, Yamaguchi Prefecture in June 2002. The ordinance included phrases such as "We must not unilaterally dismiss the idea that there is innate masculinity and innate femininity" and "We must not dismiss the role of the full-time housewife." These were directly contrary to the aims written in the Basic Law. The following year, 2003, Domoto Akiko, the feminist (and female) governor of Chiba prefecture, failed to pass the Gender Equality Ordinance bill; it was the first time that a bill proposed by a governor had failed to be passed in the history of the Chiba Prefectural Assembly. While the conservatives became energised as a result of the Ube ordinance, the cases in Ube and Chiba shocked feminist scholars and activists, and they started to be more vocal on the issue of the conservative backlash.

#### *Backlash spreads online*

The internet became a pivotal field of discourse for conservatives. Former Tokyo Women's College psychology professor Hayashi Michiyoshi, journalist Chiba Tensei, independent writer Okamoto

Akiko and teacher Nomaki Masako (whose online name is Nomarin) set up personal websites with the aim of actively criticising feminism. In addition, reactionary bloggers, including Brucknero5, Mt. Fuji 2000 and Nameneko (“licking cat”), were also active.

Feminist bashing also occurred on 2channel,<sup>4</sup> the biggest Japanese text board, and many people engaged in editorial battles over terms such as “feminism”, “gender” and “gender-free” on Wikipedia. Attacks on feminism spread to social networking websites in Japan such as mixi<sup>5</sup> as well. When the mass media reported on “gender-free”-related subjects, conservatives posted many critical articles on 2channel and other websites.

Activities by scholars in gender and women’s studies were few and far between on the internet. There were only a small number of counter-arguments to the conservative backlash published online, such as Ida Hiroyuki’s blog, and a resource called “Q&A: Present point of argument involving gender equality” on the website of the Women’s Studies Association of Japan.

### *Results of the backlash*

In April 2004, the cabinet office indicated that it was better not to use the term “gender-free”, a decision that was supported by the Gender Equality Bureau. This was evident in the second Basic Plan for Gender Equality drafted in December 2005. Moreover, the bureau issued an administrative circular to municipal governments instructing them not to use the term. After the notice, the term “gender-free” disappeared from administration-sponsored projects at both the national and local level. That is, the administration propagated the “gender-free” concept, and then the administration itself denied and erased it.

### *Dialogue with backlashers*

Tomomi Yamaguchi and Masami Saito, who are feminist researchers, interviewed the “backlashers” and tried to understand the background and thinking which resulted in the action. They also met local citizens and feminists who confronted the backlash, and listened to their experiences and thoughts. They were able to understand how the phenomenon called the “backlash” had been built by listening attentively and carefully to the words of the people who played key roles in the anti-feminist movement.

## **Current situation**

Many people are concerned that Japanese society and politics have been drifting to the right in recent years. In the general election in December 2012, voters gave the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) a landslide victory, ejecting the Democratic Party of Japan from power after three years.

Abe Shinzo, who is the president of the LDP, was elected as the prime minister. He is viewed as a right-wing nationalist. When he first became the prime minister in 2007, he said that the so-called “comfort women” were not coerced into becoming sexual slaves by the former Japanese Imperial Army during World War II, and repeated this in 2013, when he became prime minister for the second time.

His views are reflected elsewhere. Hashimoto Toru, the mayor of Osaka and co-leader of the Japan Restoration Party, has also denied that Japan abducted and trafficked women for frontline brothels during World War II based on the will of the state authority.

Given these developments, it seems that the struggle for gender rights in Japan may be entering a new phrase – and it is this that activists need to take into account.

## **Conclusions**

Women’s movement organisations have used ICTs practically, being ignited by the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. Although the internet has had a positive effect on organisations that work internationally, many of the organisations and activists who work locally appear to be “internet fearful”, and there are few who use it actively.

Moreover, the backlash against feminism became intense, mainly driven by the conservative media from the end of the 1990s to the 2000s. Conservative media and organisations used the internet proactively, and negative and distorted accounts of feminism increased in the 2000s.

Although many feminists avoid direct dialogue with backlashers, Yamaguchi and Saito interviewed both the feminists and the backlashers actively, and made the origins of opposing ideas clear.

The confrontational interactions between conservatives and feminists are unproductive. A positive way of thinking is needed, wherein both sides try to learn, look for common ideas, and improve society. The confrontation might have been unnecessary, but was the result of continuing disputes based on surmises without talking to each other face to face.

It is necessary for feminists to re-examine their positions, including developing an understanding

<sup>4</sup> www.2ch.net

<sup>5</sup> mixi.jp

of the circumstances that led to the introduction of the “gender-free” concept, and the responses and criticisms from the conservative side.

### Action steps

Many women’s movement organisations and activists are fearful of the internet, and are not comfortable with using it, especially when it comes to information dissemination. In order to master the internet, feminists need to understand its characteristics, advantages and disadvantages deeply. As Josh Rose wrote in his blog, “The Internet doesn’t steal our humanity, it reflects it. The Internet doesn’t get inside us, it shows what’s inside us.”<sup>6</sup>

The work of Yamaguchi and Saito is very important. If we avoid encounters with conservative “backlashers” because they intimidate us, or we feel they are enemies, nothing will change.

We propose the four following points of action which we feel should help with the situation:

- Hold workshops dealing with the practical use of the internet for women.

- Develop and offer spaces (both of real and virtual) which women or women’s groups can use with a sense of security.
- Measure and quantify social issues relating to the internet, especially when it comes to privacy.
- Advocate for an improvement in the social environment so that women’s rights are guaranteed.

### Acknowledgements

My heartfelt appreciation goes to members of the Global Feminism Research Group, Tomomi Yamaguchi, Masami Saito, Chung Haeng-ja and Tamura Takanori, who offered information about feminism in Japan, as well as continuing support and constant encouragement. Special thanks go to Ms. Yamaguchi and Ms. Saito, who provided the key story about the interactions between the backlashers and themselves, and whose meticulous comments were an enormous help to me. ■

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6 [mashable.com/2011/02/23/social-media-culture](http://mashable.com/2011/02/23/social-media-culture)

# WRITE ME IN

I have limited mobility and the internet helps me buy things without having to always depend on others



## Article 25

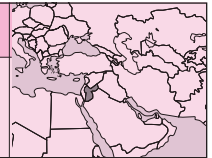
Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of herself and of his family.

Access to ICTs helps in the fulfilment of other basic and universal human rights, such as the right to an adequate standard of living. This postcard, also part of the Write Me In campaign, emphasises how the rights of people with disabilities can be upheld effectively through access to ICTs. Decreasing dependency makes women with disabilities safer as well, and this is vital given that they are disproportionately affected by domestic violence and sexual assault. For a colour reproduction of the image, please visit: [www.giswatch.org](http://www.giswatch.org)



# JORDAN

ICTs help ex-Jordanian MP fight corruption and cancer



**Alarab Alyawm**

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## Introduction

Throughout the last half-century, the world has witnessed an expansion in female participation in politics and civil society. This trend has not yet emerged in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.<sup>1</sup>

Many countries in MENA, including Jordan, are undergoing a profound transformation. Popular movements in what has been named the Arab Spring have called for reforms to make governments more inclusive and more accountable for their performances, to extend social and economic freedoms, and to increase employment opportunities.

Information and communications technologies (ICTs) have been used extensively to mobilise the masses to take part in shaping the new history of their countries. Arab women who have been deprived of their rights to participate in decision making took this unique opportunity to take part in expressing their own views in the streets and the main squares in Arab capitals and others cities, from Tunisia to Yemen. Arab women became active in demonstrations.

Jordan was not an exception. ICTs gave a space to many Jordanian women to participate in political debates, and offered them a new and cheap medium to communicate on social, economic and cultural issues. It created a valuable platform and a loudspeaker for the voiceless.

## Participation: Access, economic and political

The most recent survey on ICTs showed that Jordanians had nine million mobiles at the end of 2012, which means 120% of Jordanians have mobile phones. More than half of Jordanians have access to the internet.<sup>2</sup> There is also an increasing demand for social media: there were 2.653 million Facebook accounts opened by Jordanian users by the end of

the same year, which makes Jordan number 57 by country in the ranking of all Facebook users. This amounts to 41% of the population. The number of Facebook users also grew by nearly 170,000 in the last six months. The largest user age group is currently 18-24, accounting for 40% of users, followed by the 25-34 age group; 58% of all Facebook users in Jordan are male and 42% are female.<sup>3</sup>

Jordan has adopted the National Strategy for Jordanian Women (2012-2015)<sup>4</sup> in order to increase women's participation in development. While Jordanian women achieve higher grades than men at all educational levels, the participation of women in the economic field does not exceed 15%, and unemployment amongst women (24%) is double that amongst men.<sup>5</sup> Females account for only 5% of ministerial positions, 13% of judiciary positions, and 12% of legislative positions.

While the government makes a point of emphasising its desire to push women forward in each sector, the experience on the ground is quite different. Jordanian women received their right to vote in 1974, but it took almost 20 years for a woman to become a member of parliament: Tujan Faisal was the first woman to be elected, in 1993. In a patriarchal society, which considers women as being inferior to men, Faisal reversed the traditional stereotype.

## Who is Tujan Faisal?

After the democratisation process started in Jordan in 1989, Tujan Faisal, a prominent TV anchor, an unveiled blonde woman from the Circassian community, decided to run for office. In an Islamic and conservative country, Faisal became a victim of a smear campaign engineered by Islamists opposed to any participation by women in Jordanian public life. These activities were especially hostile to Faisal, who was an outspoken feminist and had published a newspaper article refuting Islamist interpretations of women's rights in Islam. A *fatwa*<sup>6</sup> declared her apostate, despite her devout Muslim beliefs, and Islamist activists tried to have her marriage rescinded. She was forced to stand trial,

<sup>1</sup> World Bank (2013) *Opening Doors: Gender Equality and Development in the Middle East and North Africa*, p. 52.

<sup>2</sup> [www.trc.gov.jo/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=2335&lang=arabic](http://www.trc.gov.jo/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2335&lang=arabic)

<sup>3</sup> [www.alghad.com/index.php/article/613718.html](http://www.alghad.com/index.php/article/613718.html)

<sup>4</sup> [docs.amanjordan.org/laws/jordan/rights\\_31/3531.html](http://docs.amanjordan.org/laws/jordan/rights_31/3531.html)

<sup>5</sup> [www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GenderGap\\_Report\\_2012.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GenderGap_Report_2012.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fatwa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fatwa)

but the case was ultimately dismissed just before election day.

In the 1989 elections, no woman had succeeded in being elected to parliament. In response, Jordan introduced a 10% electoral quota for women to ensure women's representation in parliamentary and municipal elections. In the next elections, for the period 1993 to 1997, Faisal won a seat in the most competitive elite constituency in Amman.<sup>7</sup> She ran in the elections with a reform manifesto similar to what the "Harak" (the Jordanian version of the Arab Spring) demands now.

Tribal and Muslim MPs were shocked when they saw her entering the parliament wearing a short skirt with the minimum amount of clothing required by law. In the parliament, Faisal was a strong hero in fighting corruption, which she considers a cancer in Jordan.

Faisal is an icon in Jordan for many women and men. Many call her the "strongest man" in fighting corruption. She opposes such statements, but she understands their context in a patriarchal society.

In 2002 she wrote an article for a US-based website called Arab Times,<sup>8</sup> which is still blocked in Jordan, accusing the prime minister, Ali Abu al-Raghib, of having personally benefited from a new government policy that doubled the costs of car insurance.

The State Security Court sentenced her to 18 months in prison for spreading information harmful to the reputation of the state. Her jailing "coincided with the beginnings of the internet boom," she told me.<sup>9</sup> She added that "the broad local, Arab and international support I received forced my release." She went on a hunger strike for 29 days, and King Abdullah II pardoned her after she had served 100 days in prison.

"After my release (unconditional, because I refused all deals to stop or limit my media activities), and after I was prevented from running for parliament, I resumed my fight against corruption not only as a political writer, but also as a 'legislator' by discussing new laws in detail, the way I would have done in parliament," she said. "The interest of the media in the case was logically bound to go beyond freedom of speech, and look into the magnitude of the corruption that caused such an arrest," she added. She was banned from running in the 2003 elections for having been sentenced to prison.

At that time, Faisal was boycotted by the Jordanian media, as no media outlet dared to publish her articles. Nonetheless, from outside the walls of parliament, Faisal continued to campaign for women's rights and democracy in the country.

Faisal had also been prevented from continuing to teach at a private university. While she was banned by the state-controlled TV, radio and most printed media, the relatively uncontrolled internet space offered an outlet for her views. Many people believed that she had emigrated or was living in exile, she noted.

"[The internet] gave me a huge and unprecedented opportunity to express my opinions and ideas to people who want to receive information," she explained.<sup>10</sup> "The internet also gave me and is still giving me a hand in fighting cancer," she added. Faisal knows what cancer is, as she has been suffering from it for ten years – she covers her head with a modern hat because she is losing her hair.

"ICTs help people share information which leads to more transparency, and helps to fight another type of cancer, but one which is more dangerous to the state: corruption," said Faisal.<sup>11</sup> She added, "Corruption is the worst type of cancer."<sup>12</sup>

When the Arab Spring buds started in Tunisia and exploded in Egypt and Libya, the Spring was bound to impact on Jordan. On the day of the first big pan-Jordan rallies, in January 2011, Faisal was confined to bed suffering the effects of chemotherapy. Yet the demonstrators were shouting her name: "God bless your times, Toujan!"

If what is said about the patient's morale being a crucial factor in combating cancer is true, then that dose of people's love sustained over years of imposed intellectual exile in her home country was more effective than the chemotherapy, and its gentle touch outweighed the harshness of the medical treatment: "I felt the 'blessing', no less!" she said.<sup>13</sup>

Her fans number in the thousands. She appears frequently on Al Jazeera satellite TV. She also writes regularly for the Qatari daily *Al Raya*, which many Jordanian websites republish, and which has attracted a wide readership.

## A carrot and stick approach

Faisal's is a representative story of a pioneering woman working tirelessly ahead of the Arab Spring. That phenomenon started three years ago already

7 This means that she chose to run in the most difficult constituency in Jordan's capital.

8 [www.arabtimes.com](http://www.arabtimes.com). The article can be reached in countries that block it at: [www.arabmail.de/16\\_3.o2jordan.html](http://www.arabmail.de/16_3.o2jordan.html)

9 An email from Faisal answering the writer's questions on 13 April 2013.

10 Ibid.

11 [www.filmirsad.com/opinions](http://www.filmirsad.com/opinions)

12 For more information on corruption in Jordan, see GISWatch 2012 - The internet and corruption, at: [www.giswatch.org/en/country-report/internet-and-corruption/jordan](http://www.giswatch.org/en/country-report/internet-and-corruption/jordan)

13 An email from Faisal answering the writer's questions on 13 April 2013.

– when desperate Tunisian young people used new media in challenging a police regime. The wind of the Arab Spring has reached Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Syria and Jordan.

However, Jordan has been hesitant to make adjustments to its policies and implement changes to manage the new situation, and has also tried to keep control over new media. The country amended its constitution in 2011 in response to demands for political change; but in response to the new media influence, the government tried to pass new laws to control the new “technology for freedom”. The Press and Publication Law constitutes the principal tool used by successive Jordanian governments to control the press. Law No. 18, 1998 was amended through Law No. 17 in 2011, which expanded the definition of “publication” to include “electronic means, digital or technical”. This means that news websites are considered newspapers and the Press and Publication Law is applicable to news websites.

Officials also use the “carrot and stick” approach *inter alia* to interfere in web news content. One of the carrots is advertisement, and there are many examples of how government officials use a “soft containment” policy to control the press.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, political news websites are flourishing in Jordan because “old media” is considered less free in reporting corruption and the wrongdoings of the government. There are more than 500 political news websites; 40 of these sites have formed a union.

## Conclusions

Jordan has fallen to 121st place out of 135 countries in the Global Gender Gap Report for 2012. The country dropped four places following a decrease in the scores for the economic, education and political sub-indexes.<sup>15</sup>

Closing this gap will change the future of women – gender parity can no longer be treated as a superfluous concern.<sup>16</sup> To overcome the challenges, the Jordanian think tank institute SIGI-Jordan<sup>17</sup> suggests tackling three types of poverty that impact on women: a poverty of knowledge, a lack of available opportunities, and skills poverty.

The first step to overcome gender imbalance is deciding to do something about it. The internet is not only a means of communication, but a tool to support democratisation and development. It is also a vital tool for connecting people and acting

as a forum for exchanging and sharing opinions and ideas. Facebook, YouTube and Twitter all offer a forum where information and materials are exchanged between millions of users daily.

In repressive societies, the internet provides new channels for voiceless minorities and vulnerable groups who have been deprived of access to the means of public communication. As the World Bank puts it in a report on gender equality in the Arab world: “Sitting on the sidelines waiting to be invited in is no longer an option... The sooner women have an equal opportunity to contribute, the sooner the region will benefit from this vast, untapped human potential.”<sup>18</sup>

It is clear that ICTs are important tools for bridging the gender digital divide between men and women, and can play a vital role in women’s empowerment. Democratisation will not be achieved without freedom of expression. Pluralism and diversity means many voices and not a one-note chorus. Recycling discourses to satisfy donors and improve their corporate image at home and abroad is not sustainable.

## Action steps

It is time to take into consideration the following steps in Jordan:

- Explicit efforts are necessary to create opportunities for women in the public sphere and to facilitate greater participation by women in the political realm. This is a prerequisite to foster women’s participation in politics.
- New media are part of the information society and offer a huge opportunity to consolidate democracy and to promote development. The internet is a simple and cheap medium for communication and education and a vital tool in fighting for gender equality and defending women’s rights, as well as ensuring that marginalised and vulnerable groups are not subject to discrimination. Internet access is an essential human right for every person in Jordan.
- ICTs can empower women in achieving social, cultural and economic development. NGOs are encouraged to offer training to women in rural areas, particularly in the use of social media, such as blogging, Twitter, YouTube and Facebook. ■

14 [www.alarrabnews.com/newsView.php?id=1170](http://www.alarrabnews.com/newsView.php?id=1170)

15 [www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GenderGap\\_Report\\_2012.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GenderGap_Report_2012.pdf)

16 [www.weforum.org/women-leaders-and-gender-parity](http://www.weforum.org/women-leaders-and-gender-parity)

17 [www.sigi-jordan.org/pages/index.php?news=335](http://www.sigi-jordan.org/pages/index.php?news=335)

18 [www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2013/03/14/missing-voices-gender-equality-in-the-arab-world](http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2013/03/14/missing-voices-gender-equality-in-the-arab-world)

# KENYA

## Women and cyber crime in Kenya



### Kenya ICT Action Network (KICTANet)

Alice Munyua

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### Introduction

The internet continues to provide secure tools and spaces where women can enjoy their freedom of expression, information and privacy of communication, but the same benefits of anonymity and privacy also extend to those who employ it for committing violence against women.

Emerging online crimes threaten to take away the safe and secure spaces, denying women's ability to use the internet for their empowerment and development due to safety concerns. It is estimated that 95% of aggressive behaviour, harassment, abusive language and denigrating images in online spaces are aimed at women and come from male partners or former partners.<sup>1</sup> Many information and communications technology (ICT) tools such as spyware, wireless technology and webcams are used to perpetrate violence against women.

According to a 2012 study conducted by the Kenya ICT Action Network (KICTANet), cyber crime against women is becoming a widespread and destructive problem involving stalking, sexual harassment, digital manipulation of photographic images, fraudulent postings and advertisements, persistent abusive mobile messages, sex trafficking, humiliating comments that reinforce gender-constructed stereotypes, professional sabotage, identity theft, and intimate photos and videos used for blackmailing women in violent relationships, among others.<sup>2</sup>

While both men and women are affected by cyber stalking, victims aged between 18 and 32 were predominantly female. The report notes that women are affected differently, and cyber crime against women is a uniquely gendered phenomenon. Most of the criminals invoke humiliating, gendered stereotypes making it clear that women are targeted due to their gender. It has a profound impact on the women targeted, interfering with their full participation in online activities and impacting negatively on their personal and professional lives, sometimes raising

vulnerability to possible offline harassment. This can result in women getting discouraged from engaging in internet-related activities including learning, social connections and economic activities.

### Policy and legislation

Cyber security/crime legal and regulatory frameworks lack consideration of the social and gender impact of cyber crime. Despite several legal and regulatory provisions, including the new constitution in Kenya, none begin to specifically address online harassment against women. The new constitution of Kenya, promulgated in August 2010, contains the "Bill of Rights", which provides for various rights and fundamental freedoms to be enjoyed by all persons, including women. They include the right to life; the right to equality and equal protection and benefit of the law; the right to respect and protection of human dignity; the right to freedom and security of the person, including the right not to be subjected to any form of violence, torture or treatment in a cruel, inhuman or degrading manner; the right to privacy, including the right not to have information relating to family or private affairs unnecessarily required or revealed, or the privacy of communication infringed; the right of access to information required for the exercise or protection of any right or fundamental freedom; protection of the right to property; the right to access justice; and the right to a fair hearing. Other relevant pieces of national legislation include:

- The Sexual Offences Act, No. 3 of 2006, Penal Code, Cap. 63 (Rev. 2009)
- The Children Act, No. 8 of 2001
- The Kenya Information and Communication Act, Cap. 411A (Rev. 2012), which provides the framework for the regulation of the ICT sector. Apart from section 84D on pornography, the act does not explicitly deal with conduct which would amount to online violence against women. However, the cyber crimes provided for in the statute deal with activities whose commission could result in or facilitate the commission of online offences against women.
- The National Cohesion and Integration Act, No. 12 of 2008, which seeks to encourage national

1 [www.kictanet.or.ke/?page\\_id=57](http://www.kictanet.or.ke/?page_id=57)

2 Ibid.

cohesion and integration by outlawing discrimination on ethnic grounds, while also providing for the powers and functions of the National Cohesion and Integration Commission.

- The Evidence Act, Cap. 80, which provides the procedural legislation that governs the production and admissibility of evidence in Kenya. In cases involving cyber crime, and more so violence against women, achieving this burden of proof may sometimes be difficult given the nature of evidence that is required to mount a successful prosecution. Where, for example, victims of rape take showers, or stalkers hide behind proxies, it may be difficult to obtain sufficient evidence to discharge the burden of proof.
- The Criminal Procedure Code, Cap. 75 (Rev. 2009), which provides the general framework for the enforcement of criminal law in Kenya and provides the procedural guidelines for the conduct of investigations, arrest, prosecution, trial and sentencing of accused persons.
- The National Gender and Equality Commission Act, No. 15 of 2011, which established the National Gender and Equality Commission, whose aim is the promotion of gender equality and freedom from discrimination.
- The Kenya National Commission on Human Rights Act, No. 14 of 2011, which established the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights, whose mandate is the promotion of human rights.
- The Mutual Legal Assistance Act, No. 36 of 2011, which provides a framework for legal assistance to be given or received by the Kenyan government in investigations, prosecutions and judicial proceedings.
- The Prevention of Organised Crimes Act, No. 6 of 2010, which seeks to prevent and punish organised crime while also providing for the recovery of proceeds of organised criminal group activities.
- The National Police Service Act, No. 11A of 2011, which provides for the functions and powers of the National Police Service.
- The Crime and Anti-Money Laundering Act, No. 9 of 2009, which seeks to combat money laundering and provides for, among others, the identification, tracing, freezing, seizure and confiscation of the proceeds of crime. As cyber crimes spread, activities such as prostitution are being run by highly organised criminal groups who launder money from such activities into legitimate businesses.

- The International Crimes Act, No. 16 of 2008, which domesticates the Rome Statute and provides for the cooperation of Kenya with the International Criminal Court.
- The Data Protection Bill, 2012, which seeks to regulate, among others, the collection, processing, storing, use and disclosure of information relating to individuals that is processed through automated or manual means.

In addition to national legislation, Kenya has ratified several international and regional treaties and conventions that have a bearing on human rights, including sexual and online offences. These include:

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), 1948
- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), 1966 (entry into force 1976)
- The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), 1966 (entry into force 1976)
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), 1979
- The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (DEVAW), 1993
- The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Banjul Charter), 1981
- The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, 2003
- The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (VDPA), 1993
- The Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), 1995
- The Victoria Falls Declaration of Principles for the Promotion of the Human Rights of Women, 1994
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), 1989
- The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, 1990.

### Case study

Caroline Mutoko<sup>3</sup> is a radio presenter. She hosts the “Big Breakfast Show” on Kiss FM in Nairobi, Kenya. The show is one of the most popular morning shows, commanding a huge following and fan base. Mutoko is regarded as “the queen of radio” and she has a

<sup>3</sup> [www.Facebook.com/carolinemutoko?fref=ts](http://www.Facebook.com/carolinemutoko?fref=ts)



huge online following. Known as an apt advocate for civil rights, she is considered fearless, and while this has attracted numerous fans it has also attracted several lawsuits by politicians, as well as online abuse. She is known to involve her fans in developing topics for her daily show and solicits ideas using several social networks, including Facebook. It is against this backdrop that in December 2012, some fans wrote on her Facebook wall requesting her to host the Safaricom<sup>4</sup> CEO, Bob Collymore, so that he could address a few pressing consumer issues, including quality of service and high charges. Mutoko did not oblige her fans on this request, and this resulted in online abuse that lasted several weeks.

Safaricom is the leading mobile service provider in Kenya, with a 69.9%<sup>5</sup> market share and with nearly as many subscribers as Kenya has adults.<sup>6</sup> According to the Communications Commission of Kenya's (CCK) quality of service report,<sup>7</sup> Safaricom only complies with six out of the eight parameters set by the CCK key performance indicators for cellular mobile service providers. Mutoko's refusal to engage listeners in a discussion with the Safaricom CEO was therefore seen as "arrogance" and "ignoring average citizens". She was accused of defending Safaricom, which is one of the largest advertising clients on the radio station. Thousands of hate messages were posted on her Facebook page and several new Facebook pages were set up targeting her. One titled "RIP Caroline Mutoko" went viral. Below is an excerpt from the Facebook page:

Not even the President. The Kiss 100 brand suffers when its brand leader wears the veil of cockiness and speaks in corrosive tongues of spite and disdain. No business will survive for long with such verbal indiscretion and harlotry.

She is no longer average or idle...she is an angry, hormonal wreck and has lost all emotional there [sic]. Radio Africa and their advertisers must sanction her rudeness and hold her on shorter leash.

As this case study demonstrates, online harassment most often invokes women's sexuality and gender in ways that interfere with their dignity, wellbeing,

livelihood and identity. In some cases it may take a more indirect form of professional sabotage by discrediting women's competence in their careers. Some of the ensuing injuries are unique to women because men do not typically experience demeaning comments and sexual threats suggesting their inferiority due to their gender.

Cyber crimes against women go largely unreported due to feelings of embarrassment, shame, and the belief that nothing will be done by the police or other authorities. This suggests existing statistical evidence on cyber crime against women is likely to be underestimated and the scope is still quite difficult to ascertain. A 2005 study by Azy Barak, "Sexual Harassment on the Internet",<sup>8</sup> suggested that approximately 40% of women internet users had experienced online harassment. Another study by Francesca Philips and Gabrielle Morrissey, "Cyberstalking and Cyberpredators: A Threat to Safe Sexuality on the Internet",<sup>9</sup> estimated that one third of women internet users have been harassed online.

Online violence against women has a profound effect on the women targeted. It interferes with their personal and professional lives, causing considerable emotional distress. It also raises vulnerability to offline harassment, in some cases branding victims as incompetent and inferior sexual objects. This can result in women getting discouraged from engaging in online activities including learning and social connections.

While online violence impacts the most on the targeted individuals, according to Philips and Morrissey, "it also harms society by entrenching male hierarchy online."<sup>10</sup> While Mutoko did not abandon the use of online spaces, several women would find it difficult to continue maintaining social networks, blogs or websites after such experiences.

A 2010 KICTANet study found that some internet service providers (ISPs) were "advising Internet users to stay away from social networks as a possible social strategy against cyber crime." ISPs need to be discouraged from this approach, as women who maintain an active online presence, including on social networks, should not be required to forgo it to escape harassment and violence. And disengaging from online communities does come at a cost, with women missing opportunities to advance their professional reputations through networking effectively online, participating and contributing to policy-related discussions, and blogging, among

4 Safaricom Ltd is the most dominant mobile network operator in Kenya by market share. [www.safaricom.co.ke](http://www.safaricom.co.ke)

5 [www.cck.go.ke/links/consultations/current\\_consultations/Regulated\\_Services.pdf](http://www.cck.go.ke/links/consultations/current_consultations/Regulated_Services.pdf)

6 [www.economist.com/news/finance-and-economics/21574520-safaricom-widens-its-banking-services-payments-savings-and-loans-it](http://www.economist.com/news/finance-and-economics/21574520-safaricom-widens-its-banking-services-payments-savings-and-loans-it)

7 [www.cck.go.ke/consumers/other\\_info/downloads/QoS\\_Report\\_2011-12.pdf](http://www.cck.go.ke/consumers/other_info/downloads/QoS_Report_2011-12.pdf)

8 [construct.haifa.ac.il/~azy/SexualHarassmentBarak.pdf](http://construct.haifa.ac.il/~azy/SexualHarassmentBarak.pdf)

9 [con.sagepub.com/content/10/1/66.full.pdf+html](http://con.sagepub.com/content/10/1/66.full.pdf+html)

10 *Ibid.*



others. Some may even lose income upon closing their blogs and websites.

Unless women are willing to forgo the internet's economic, social, and political opportunities, they cannot walk away from the online environment without paying a high price. This is particularly true for younger individuals whose lives are inextricably tied to the net, such as Mutoko, who uses her Facebook page to engage with her fans and the public. According to Jack Balkin's "captive audience theory", "employees should not be forced to leave their jobs to escape otherwise unavoidable harassment and coercion." While women working online are not physically confronted by cyber criminals, they have no means to avoid online attacks and harassment against them unless they walk away from the networked environment by shutting down blogs and websites, changing passwords, etc.

Another approach is that rather than playing victim, women should counter online harassment with retaliation. However, a study by Patricia Sanchez Abril, "(My)Space of One's Own: On Privacy and Online Social Networks",<sup>11</sup> explains that most often, social networking sites refuse to take down material that is purportedly defamatory or embarrassing. Therefore, requesting intermediaries to take down harassing defamatory postings does not always work. In Kenya it is a long and tedious process in the absence of an intermediary liability policy and regulation. Further, even if the ISP complied and took down offending material, the material would probably have spread to other sites hosted by other service providers. In his "Free Speech and Hostile Environments",<sup>12</sup> Balkin notes that even if women could fight back, they may be unlikely to do so. Some individuals may feel too intimidated to engage in retaliation, as it is not always effective in deterring online harassment and might instead be counterproductive. This was seen in Mutoko's case, where more Facebook pages were created, including a "RIP Caroline Mutoko" page, after she responded and asked her followers to address Sarifom directly instead of using her wall.

## Conclusions

No matter how serious the impact of cyber crime on women, most of society, including the private and public sectors, is not taking it seriously. For example, user agreements with major ISPs fail to address this issue as part of their terms and conditions. In addition, most online media platforms

in their coverage seem to trivialise it, sometimes branding the incidences as harmless, targeted at overly sensitive individuals. This trivialisation of harm is reminiscent of the many years domestic violence was downplayed in Kenya. It took the Kenyan women's movement over a decade to get the sexual harassment bill enacted and even then, the ensuing debate of the bill in parliament trivialised the issue despite the pervasiveness of the practice.

Further, cyber security/crime legal and regulatory frameworks lack consideration of the social and gender impact of online crime. Despite several legal and regulatory provisions, none begin to specifically address online harassment against women.

It is therefore not surprising that online violence against women is not yet taken seriously. With access to the internet increasing at an exponential rate in Kenya (annual growth is estimated at 11.9%),<sup>13</sup> it is important to address cyber crime against women at this time before the practice becomes entrenched.

A key component of addressing cyber crime is education and empowerment. Women users should be provided with clear information about their rights, and directions on how to protect themselves against crimes and how to report incidents in case they occur.

Industry, technical community, civil society and law enforcement organisations should also be provided with education to address the issue and should collaborate to raise awareness, provide solutions and conduct investigations. In addition, the development of legal and regulatory provisions that recognise the special needs of women can play a critical role in defining cyber crime against women and in shaping online behaviour, by changing the way online violence against women is perceived by law enforcement, perpetrators and the broader public. Revision of existing cyber security frameworks to include gender-based online violence is essential, and so is equipping law enforcement agencies and officers with skills and resources to address and investigate the complex nature of gender-based cyber crime.

Recognising that online harassment against women is gender discrimination and is also a civil rights violation is important in placing the issue on the public and policy agenda, to create awareness about the gendered harms it leads to, and to change online misogynistic culture. This may change online behaviour and deter perpetrators in order to create a safer internet for all.

11 [scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1058&context=njtip](http://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1058&context=njtip)

12 [www.yale.edu/lawweb/jbalkin/articles/frsphoen.htm](http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/jbalkin/articles/frsphoen.htm)

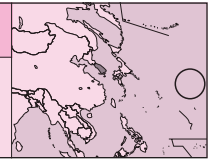
13 [www.cck.go.ke/news/2012/Internet\\_access.html](http://www.cck.go.ke/news/2012/Internet_access.html)

## Action steps

- Lobby to have online violence against women recognised as a civil rights violation, thereby placing it on the policy agenda.
- Lobby for the revision of various pieces of legislation including the Sexual Offences Act and the Kenya Information and Communication Act, in order to take into account cyber crimes that result in the violation of the rights of women on-line.
- Contribute to intermediary liability discussions to establish responsibilities and legal mechanisms that would require ISPs and other service providers to report criminal activity perpetrated through their services and respond to takedown requests, among other provisions.
- Lobby the government to establish gender focal points in all ministries and gender desks in police stations to make services accessible to gender violence survivors, so that they can seek redress easily.
- Ensure that the cyber security framework takes into account gender-specific provisions.
- Build the capacity of women's organisations to address the issue of online violence against women, as well as collaborating with other stakeholders including the government, private sector, technical community and media.
- Build the capacity of media partners to report on online violence against women so they can contribute to creating awareness of the issue by placing it on the public agenda. ■

# KOREA, REPUBLIC OF

Digitising social welfare: Challenges of privacy



## Korean Progressive Network Jinbonet

So-young Park and Yeo-kyung Chang

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## Introduction

Currently, the Republic of Korea occupies a prominent position globally in internet access and utilisation. According to a 2012 report from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Korea is the first country to exceed 100% access to high-speed wireless internet. In addition, the Korea Communications Commission's 2012 Internet Usage Status Report also notes rising internet usage in Korea.

According to a statistics breakdown, 83.6% of men and 73.2% of women use the internet. At a glance, it appears that there is a 10% gap between the internet utilisation rates of the sexes. However, an age group breakdown reveals that the gap becomes apparent among those in their 40s and older. Therefore, it seems that this gap is bridged at least in the younger generation. In the meantime, research conducted by the Ministry for Gender Equality and Family Affairs (currently the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family) did not indicate a clear difference between male and female internet utilisation rates.

This can be attributed to a number of factors, which include the government's "Informatisation Education for One Million Housewives" policy in 1999, which sought to expand women's access to the internet and, in doing so, promote informatisation. Korea also has a "smart device" sociocultural context, in which over 60% of the population over the age of six owns a smart phone or smart pad. In addition, women's movements in Korea actively use the internet as a tool to raise awareness on issues.

However, questions still remain over whether the quantitative increase in women's access to the internet has resulted in a shift in Korea's male-dominated social governance structure.

## Policy and political background

With the spread of the internet in Korea, Korean women have made consistent efforts to use it as a medium to voice their opinions. The early online women's

movement was led by existing women's rights movements, whose main focus was to elevate women's social status and fight sexual discrimination.

In fact, the internet provided Korean women's movements with great benefits, as it reduced labour needs and costs. The internet was also an effective tool through which women could publicise their issues in the media. The most notable of these is the "comfort women" issue.

Comfort women, or Japanese sex slaves, are women who were forcibly or collectively taken by the Japanese imperial army during World War II to satisfy the sexual needs of Japanese soldiers. Some were tricked into providing service, others were kidnapped or bought by human traffickers and pimps.

Surviving comfort women in Korea believe that Japan has not done enough to show its remorse or make amends. In 2005, Korea's Comfort Women Resolution Council cooperated with relevant organisations within and outside Korea. In addition, the council initiated a "million member international petition" among international NGOs to warn Japan that it cannot become a permanent member of the UN Security Council unless it takes legal responsibility for this issue.

In the petition, over 250,000 showed their support through the internet and international NGOs. The petition was submitted to the International Labour Organization in March 2005.

As the internet became more prevalent in Korea, women began to voice their socio-political opinions, even in ostensibly non-political forums. For example, women's online communities such as "Soul Dresser", "Ssangko" and "Hwajangbal" – which primarily discuss fashion, cosmetic surgery and make-up – actively participated in the candlelight vigils that protested against the import of US beef out of concerns over bovine spongiform encephalopathy. Their active participation is credited with having publicised the issue.

Women's internet access is consistently expanding in Korea, and with it, more women utilise the internet and proactively engage in socio-political issues. However, it seems that the current government's internet policies do not sufficiently encourage an improvement in women's legal rights.

For example, although the abovementioned “one million housewives” policy is noted for greatly advancing women’s internet access, it also faced heavy criticism that its intent was not to qualitatively foster women’s internet capacity as active producers of information; rather, the programme was part of an effort to increase the number of consumers in the internet market to boost the economy following the 1997 Asian economic crisis.

Today, Korean women face a growing risk of personal information leaks, which inevitably rises with internet usage. Female victims of sexual and domestic violence are especially at greater risk, as exposure of their private information can have a far greater and destructive impact on their lives. Surprisingly, Korea’s legal system does not protect these women.

On the contrary, the Korean government forcibly collects and accumulates the women’s information through the Integrated Social Welfare Network (ISWN), which was built to digitise social welfare work. This increases the risk of revictimisation. In this regard, this report will address the problems with the government’s collection and accumulation of personal information from female sexual violence victims through case examples provided by the Korea Sexual Violence Relief Centre. Based on this, this report will seek alternatives to construct an internet environment that upholds the legal and systemic rights of female victims and the human rights of socially disadvantaged citizens in general.

### **Practical challenges with the ISWN system**

The Korea Sexual Violence Relief Centre is a women’s organisation that has provided counselling, legal and medical support for victims of sexual violence since April 1991. The organisation has also worked to promote a human-centred sexual culture with equality between the sexes, and the restoration of women’s human rights. It also operates the “Open Centre” which provides shelter for those who require immediate assistance due to violence, and supports their livelihood, rehabilitation and independence.

However, the organisation’s female victim support services faced a crisis when the government changed its policy in 2010. Resulting from the change, the government would provide support payments only to shelters that register victims’ personal information in the ISWN. The required data included the victim’s resident registration number (RRN), which consists of the individual’s year and date of birth, sex, place of birth, and a verification number.

Women’s organisations that support victims of sexual and domestic violence and prostitution protested against the policy change, but the government enforced the new policy and announced that organisations that refuse to comply will no longer be eligible for government subsidies. The Korea Sexual Violence Relief Centre in particular cited the violation of female victims’ human rights and resisted the change. As of now, it is the only shelter for female victims that refuses to register victims’ personal information in the ISWN.

At the time, the government’s bases for the change were that ISWN will alleviate the workload for asset and income identification, and improve service provision and welfare payment work. The government contended that if women registered their personal information in the ISWN system, they would not have to endure tedious procedures and visit multiple offices to receive livelihood and welfare support. In addition, this would reduce the bureaucratic workload and raise efficiency in welfare work. Furthermore, the government intended to gauge the victims’ current assets by calling up their personal information in the system, and give proportional support to women with greater need. The system could prevent illicit or redundant payment.

However, the centre points out that the government is overlooking the fact that the new policy can have a devastating effect on female victims. The biggest concern is that the change greatly inhibits victims’ rights to the privacy of personal information. The fact that the government forced the ISWN on victims whose lives are threatened and are hiding in shelters shows that the administration values efficient work processes over the human rights of victims.

In the past, there have been many cases where government officials provided a perpetrator with a victim’s personal information. All too often, this put victims and their social service workers at risk. In an emergency situation, the fear that such a scenario can come to pass is likely to strip the victim of her capacity and right to make rational judgment. Most female abuse victims come to the shelter as they require immediate refuge. Demanding their personal information and refusing to provide assistance until they acquiesce in effect does not allow them to make an autonomous choice. Because of this, they are vulnerable to making rash judgments without fully understanding the importance of their personal information and the implications that their choice can have on their future.

This is nothing less than a threat from the government, with cruel disregard for the urgency of the abuse victims' needs. In addition, the government's plan to call up victims' financial information and provide proportional support denotes that it is not mindful of how victims who flee from violence to seek security in shelters have great difficulty in exercising their legal rights over property.

Unfortunately, relevant ministries (Ministry of Health and Welfare, Ministry of Gender Equality and Family) are not aware of how severely victims' rights to the privacy of personal information are violated.

For example, until 2010, vocational training for abuse victims was partially paid for by the government to assist victims' rehabilitation. However, as part of an electronic government system established in 2011, it was advised that female victims also visit the local employment support centre to register their personal information, including their RRN, and engage in job-seeking activities just as any unemployed or job-seeking individual does.

The current law does not mandate women victims of violence to update their current address in their resident registration, in order not to disclose their location to the perpetrators. However, the victim is required to visit a local employment support centre that is in the proximity of the address on their resident registration, not their current address (i.e. the shelter). There is no consideration for concerns that a victim may unwillingly expose her location to the perpetrator, or be accosted by the perpetrator or the perpetrator's relatives.

This reveals the government's painful lack of understanding regarding the different needs of social service providers and recipients. This also shows that the government lacks the least understanding of women's rights, and this even oppresses the victims' future economic and social activity.

It is also alarming that collecting victims' personal information increases the possibility of information leaks. As of May 2013, there have been ten cases of personal information leaks since the ISWN began. These are only the reported cases in which victims were aware of the leak; there could be many more leaks that victims are not aware of.

This raises the chance of perpetrators attacking the victim again. Recording the victim's information on the ISWN makes it easy for perpetrators to identify her location. For example, when abused wives flee from their husbands, they are apt to take their children with them. In fact, prior to the ISWN, there

were cases in which abusive fathers who located their children through the National Education Information System came to the shelter to threaten their wives and children.

If these abusers access the ISWN, the information could precipitate more violent actions. Victims of sexual abuse are by no means free from the threats their perpetrators can pose if their personal information is compromised.

The government should note that due to social prejudice, most women prefer not to disclose the fact that they have stayed at a shelter. However, when her RRN and personal information are accumulated into administrative information, there is virtually nothing a woman can do to protect her privacy.

To these assertions, the Korean government made the following counterargument: RRNs are replaced by electronic management numbers that cannot be matched to a person, so that a person accessing data cannot identify a person with a RRN. However, this is a flawed argument. The electronic management number is not randomly created. Rather, it is a serial code that is derived from the victim's RRN. In addition, the serial code contains the type and location of the facility where a victim seeks support. This means that a perpetrator could derive a victim's location. Someone may also discover that a victim had once stayed at a shelter. Further, the serial code can be exposed not only to government officials who process data, but even to officials in other offices. There have been reported cases where someone was able to confirm from a local provincial office clerk that a certain woman had stayed at a shelter. What would happen if such sensitive information, which is so poorly protected, were released on the internet at once?

For the above reasons, the Korea Sexual Violence Relief Centre has refused to disclose female victims' personal information to the government at the cost of losing subsidies. They have come up with alternatives, which include raising funds through internet portal sites and using social network services such as Twitter to promote their activities and attract sponsors.

## Conclusions

From the above examples, we can see that the internet itself presents neither a positive nor negative effect on women per se; rather, it is how the social governance structure allocates internet technology that affects women's rights.

In addition to the cases mentioned above, there is increased electronic monitoring of women in care work, such as daycare centre and hospice workers. Methods include using mobile devices and the internet to record workers on their job and GPS to track their locations. This increases social surveillance on women in care work and increases the intensity of their labour.

Unless Korea's chauvinistic culture and male-centred governance structure undergo qualitative changes, technical tools such as the internet can have only limited impact on promoting women's rights.

### Action steps

It is the government's duty to protect its citizens; therefore, there is little justification for the government to prioritise administrative efficiency over the rights of the socially disadvantaged. As a short-term goal, relevant laws must be amended so that female victims of violence can minimise exposure of their personal information. Of course, in the long term, legislators should consider gender-specific needs prior to making all policies in order to prevent such trial and error.

In this process, civil society has a duty to monitor government policies, reach out to victims and raise awareness on relevant issues. It is undeniable that the internet will be the greatest partner in this endeavour. ■



## MEXICO

### Fighting online violence against women in Mexico



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*“Hon, which folder did we put that in? ‘Crazy people’? Or ‘Threats’?”*

*“No, remember, ‘Crazy people’ is for people we actually try to reason with. You remember that religious woman who said we’d burn in hell for corrupting girls? She came around finally. It’s gotta be in ‘Threats’.”*

Luzma and Louisa,<sup>1</sup> a journalist and a therapist, have been together for almost a decade. Well-known women’s rights activists in their community and beyond, between the two of them they have pressured corrupt politicians out of office, defended women against violence, provided support groups for lesbians, and even helped to found an all-women soccer team in their home state in central Mexico.

The therapist, perhaps more tech-adventurous than her mate, began promoting both their activist organisation and her therapy services on public websites early on:

*“I wanted everyone to know there was support available for lesbians. I put up announcements of my services for group and individual therapy everywhere I could. I had no idea back then about the implications of posting my address and phone number – how else would people find me, after all? I was so naive!”*

Louisa’s office is also their home, and she had shared all phone numbers as well as the street address where patients could come for therapy. Menacing SMS text messages and horrible emails came tumbling in, along with constant phone calls from men asking “for lesbians”. They created a filing system for different types of emails, including one for “crazy people”, with whom Luzma and Louisa tried to dialogue, in some cases convincing anonymous haranguers that lesbianism had nothing to do with “perversion” or the “corruption of girls”. Another folder is simply called, “threats”:

*“We got a lot of religious stuff. But that one, that one – I went green, purple out of fear. I locked all the doors and was afraid to walk outside even to the corner. I just hid trembling under the covers waiting to see when they would come to kill us.*

*Of course we went to the public prosecutor’s office to file a complaint. They told us it wasn’t a crime, there was nothing that says that sending an email warning they were coming to rape you and burn down your house with you in it is against the law. And since it wasn’t a crime, they weren’t going to register the complaint, much less begin an investigation.”*

In Mexico, a complaint must be filed with the police for the federal cybercrime unit to initiate investigations:

*“They said that citizens should understand that the Public Prosecutor’s Office is there to pursue crime, not suspicions of a crime, or threats of a possible crime. They said, to threaten is not a crime,” says Luzma. “My concern was that I leave to go to work, and Louisa is alone at the house giving therapy all day. He knew our schedules, when and where we went. He’d been studying us.”*

*“He sent text messages saying he was watching us having a barbecue in the front yard. He said he had photos of all of us. What do I care about my photo going public? But some of my patients, they are closeted,” adds Louisa.*

Then Luzma, “who never takes no for an answer,” got the bright idea of going to CONAPRED, the National Council to Prevent Discrimination, Louisa reports with pride:

*“We got an immediate response, and they contacted the police and human rights office directly. They sent official letters by courier to several departments saying the police had to ‘take the necessary measures to safeguard our physical and psychological integrity.’ Then the police were actually calling US, asking us to go down and file a report. They came to the house when we couldn’t go in. We understand they contacted the person and warned him that charges would be brought against him if he continued. The harassing emails and SMS messages stopped. We never knew who he was.”*

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<sup>1</sup> Names and location changed to protect privacy.

Two years later, when facing a similar threat due to Luzma's investigative reporting on an official in a nearby town, Luzma could get no support from either the local police or CONAPRED, who indicated that the situation did not fall under their areas of competence.<sup>2</sup> In this case, not only were Luzma and Louisa under threat, but Luzma's minor daughter was threatened with rape in the messages. Finding no official response, they held a protest which was covered in the media, insisting that their safety was at risk and if anything happened to them, the municipal authority in question should be held responsible. The threats stopped.

The two have received many other threats in all types of electronic formats. Though still ardent activists, eventually they closed their organisation's offices at their home, and even disbanded the soccer team, in part because of these constant attacks. Their home address and personal contact information are a matter of permanent record on the internet.

Louisa and Luzma's experience parallels that of many other activists, journalists and individual women who have experienced technology-related violence in Mexico: harassment, threats, hate speech, "sextortion", surveillance by intimate partners, cyber stalking, revelation of private images and information – in some cases resulting in job loss.<sup>3</sup> It is unclear who to report the problem to. If women take matters to the police, they frequently cannot even get to the stage of filing a complaint because local officers do not understand that threats, extortion and harassment *online* should fall into the penal or civil code established for such crimes *offline*.<sup>4</sup>

Police are even less clear about how to apply the much acclaimed federal law<sup>5</sup> establishing women's right to live free of violence, and frequently are dismissive about such violence due to their own gender bias. Countless women have been told that until something "actually happens" there is nothing to be done. Very few recognise online violence as part of a continuum of generalised violence against women. Many women would not bother to go to the police anyway, given Mexico's poor record<sup>6</sup> in addressing

violence against women, or because they themselves – though in many cases quite terrified by online harassment and threats – do not identify such acts as a "crime". Others do not report out of embarrassment at their own naiveté, or because intimate photos and information are at risk – data they would never want to be in the police's or anyone else's reach. The importance of addressing access to justice to end violence against women is evident in Louisa's comments:

*"I was terrified, but the learning was greater. It was a huge relief that CONAPRED paid attention to our situation. I truly thought that we'd be killed and no one would know anything about it."*

Legislators recognise there is a problem with online violence, focusing concern on grooming, cyber bullying and trafficking of women and girls. The National Commission on Human Rights acknowledges that Mexico holds second place in the "export" of victims of trafficking to the United States, after Thailand.<sup>7</sup> False promises of modelling, hostess or child care jobs – or simply finding "true" love – lure young girls and women to making face-to-face contact with traffickers only days after meeting online.<sup>8</sup> For organised crime, child pornography and human trafficking for sexual exploitation are second only to the drug trade in profitability – surpassing the illegal arms trade. A representative of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime estimated that in 2010 at least 20,000 children were victims of commercial and sexual exploitation in Mexico.<sup>9</sup> Mexico is a principal producer and consumer of child pornography worldwide, occupying first or second place in production depending on the source.<sup>10</sup>

Legislative solutions, however, are protectionist, resulting in bills that directly violate basic human rights covenants, including freedom of expression and children's human rights. Antonio Martínez Velázquez, the Communications and Digital Content officer from Article 19's Mexico office, has flagged such legislation as moralistic: "Basically everything

2 This determination is not surprising – it is important to note that CONAPRED makes recommendations and is a voluntary mechanism, it is not a police unit for hate speech and discrimination.

3 Mexico's map documenting tech-related violence against women: [mx.dominemoslatecnologia.net](http://mx.dominemoslatecnologia.net)

4 In fact, in June 2012 during the 20th session of the UN Human Rights Council, Mexico signed a joint resolution affirming that the same human rights which apply offline must also be protected online, particularly freedom of expression. See the joint submission to the Human Rights Council by LaNeta and APC: [www.apc.org/en/pubs/joint-submission-internet-related-human-rights-iss-o](http://www.apc.org/en/pubs/joint-submission-internet-related-human-rights-iss-o)

5 Ley General de Acceso de las Mujeres a una Vida Libre de Violencia

6 As noted in paragraph 18C of the Committee to End Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) 52nd Session "Final Observations" for Mexico in July of 2012.

7 [www.oem.com.mx/laprensa/notas/n2893750.htm](http://www.oem.com.mx/laprensa/notas/n2893750.htm)

8 In an extra-official conversation at a forum in Cuernavaca, Mexico in October 2012, a Mexico City cyber police representative asserted it now takes a trafficker only four days online to convince his target to meet him in person. In 2010, experts speculated it took two weeks ([www.genderit.org/sites/default/upload/mexico\\_ctryrpt\\_es\\_tics\\_violencia.pdf](http://www.genderit.org/sites/default/upload/mexico_ctryrpt_es_tics_violencia.pdf))

9 [www.noticias.mvs.com/#!/noticias/desplaza-pornografia-infantil-y-trata-de-personas-del-segundo-sitio-a-la-venta-de-armas-onu-158.html](http://www.noticias.mvs.com/#!/noticias/desplaza-pornografia-infantil-y-trata-de-personas-del-segundo-sitio-a-la-venta-de-armas-onu-158.html)

10 In 2013, news sources cited the Red Internacional por el Fin de la Prostitución Infantil y Tráfico de Niños con Fines Sexuales as reporting Mexico in first place in child pornography production ([www.oem.com.mx/laprensa/notas/n2919357.htm](http://www.oem.com.mx/laprensa/notas/n2919357.htm)). However, a 2009 ECPAT International report put Mexico in second place, a statistic which continued to be cited even as late as November 2012. Either statistic is alarming.

has to fit into categories of good and bad, and what is not good must be bad.” Allowed speech becomes fenced in to that which is “politically correct”.

The recently vetoed cyber bullying proposal from the State of Nuevo Leon is an excellent example of such emerging legislation regarding the internet, as its vague wording not only advocated censorship, but also criminalised speech and made internet service providers responsible parties, as well as suggesting jail sentences for those participating in “offensive” activities via electronic media – activities which the bill never clearly defined, making interpretation and application of the law entirely subjective. “It meant having less speech in order to guarantee a vague and subjective understanding of what might offend an individual,” Velázquez points out. He has raised similar concerns regarding the Supreme Court decision to outlaw words like “maricón” and “puñal” (both of which are derogatory terms in Mexico for homosexual men) as hate speech.<sup>11</sup>

In fact, Luzma is a journalist in one of the most dangerous countries in the world to practice her profession: more than 75 journalists have been killed in Mexico from 2000 to August 2013.<sup>12</sup> CIMAC, the Women’s Communication and Information Agency, has documented 115 cases of specific aggressions against women journalists, noting an alarming increase in the last three years, and analysing the different forms of violence that women journalists face – beginning with defamation and sexualised violence and including 13 cases of femicide. Similar tactics are used against women human rights defenders, as Luzma and Louisa well know. The Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders noted in her 2011 report that human rights defenders and activists dedicated to women’s rights or gender issues in the Americas are those that appear to be the most exposed to murder and attempted murder, particularly in Colombia, Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras.<sup>13</sup> Despite international recommendations, Mexico still does not have an official database disaggregated by sex, nor one that takes into account these specific threats faced by women human rights defenders and women journalists.<sup>14</sup>

In a general climate of increasing violence in Mexico and the urgency of addressing organised crime, there is pressure to dismiss and further nor-

malise violence against women – even more so in cases of tech-related violence. Similarly, limitations on citizens’ mobility, privacy and freedom of expression are put in a counterbalance with militarisation and surveillance to ensure public safety. The necessary exercise of putting legislation to the test and due process are at risk of being forgotten.

Interestingly, although Luzma’s and Louisa’s experience was a bit of a trial by fire, important practice emerges from it:

- They documented and made back-up copies of threats, at least the email ones.
- They reported the problem to authorities – to police, to human rights entities and also to the service providers that the threats were posted on, appealing for action based on the providers’ terms of service.
- When one authority did not respond, they went to another authority. They insisted on making the system work, despite its weaknesses.
- When no authority responded, in the second case, they went on public record in the media with the problem, and on the internet.
- They also followed one of the basic tenets of freedom of expression: fight offensive words not with censorship but with more words – and in at least one case, they convinced religious conservatives to change their views about lesbianism.

Finally, they try to learn as much as they can about online safety, and share what they learn. We met in a workshop about tech-related violence, which is where they discovered their situation was not an isolated case.

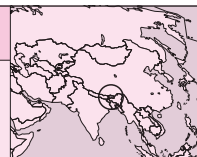
*“We learned a lot from that first experience. I became more aware about online safety and I began to look at online ‘advertising’ differently. But especially I learned you should never stop knocking on doors. If one authority won’t do anything, then you have to make a move. We wouldn’t have been able to do this without our feminist background. That’s one of the things that feminism has taught me: that you can change the world – it’s not just the terrain of men or extraordinary people. And I can change the internet. What is on the internet? A bunch of bull, so we put in our own ‘bull’ – I try to get my ideas out everywhere, in online magazines, Facebook, blogs. I try to write as much as I can on all sorts of issues – lesbianism, diversity – trying to get out a different vision of the world on the internet.” ■*

11 [www.animalpolitico.com/blogueros-altoparlante/2013/04/24/los-punales-de-la-suprema-corte/#axzz2Y6nLSCXU](http://www.animalpolitico.com/blogueros-altoparlante/2013/04/24/los-punales-de-la-suprema-corte/#axzz2Y6nLSCXU)

12 Article 19 map of journalists murdered in Mexico: [secure.flickr.com/photos/77679119@No2/9352532083/sizes/k/in/photostream](https://secure.flickr.com/photos/77679119@No2/9352532083/sizes/k/in/photostream)

13 [consorciooaxaca.org.mx/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/PronunciamentoDefensorasMesoCSW-FINAL-2.pdf](http://consorciooaxaca.org.mx/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/PronunciamentoDefensorasMesoCSW-FINAL-2.pdf)

14 [132.247.1.49/PAPIME306511/pdfs/Anex2\\_ObservcsfinalesCocedaw.pdf](https://www.observatorio.org.mx/PAPIME306511/pdfs/Anex2_ObservcsfinalesCocedaw.pdf)



### Development Knowledge Management and Innovation Services Private Limited

Kishor Pradhan  
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On 15 April 2013, International Girls in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Day was celebrated for the first time in Nepal.<sup>1</sup> It was a joint effort by the Ministry of Information and Communication, the Nepal Telecom Authority (NTA) and Equal Access International Nepal, with support from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

Though the International Girls in ICT Day was celebrated for the first time, it was not the first event mainstreaming ICT for development (ICT4D) for women in Nepal, or for women in ICTs. There were several efforts in the past to make use of ICTs for women and development, some of them concerned with building women's capacity in ICTs by providing training and creating networks.

More than a decade ago, led by three women's organisations, Sancharika Samuha (SAS), Saathi and the Centre for Legal Research and Services (CLRS), an electronic network called MahilaWeb was started with a nine-month start-up grant from the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD). The initial goal of MahilaWeb was to produce and share information about women and gender in Nepal, locally and globally. MahilaWeb developed an electronic repository of information collected from government, non-governmental organisations, media and the private sector based on the 12 critical areas of concern from the Beijing Platform for Action, as well as other gender issues confronting Nepal.<sup>2</sup> The MahilaWeb website was launched in July 2000, but the website is no longer available at the URL [www.mahilaweb.org](http://www.mahilaweb.org).

### Women and ICT policies

Until the late 1990s, Nepal did not have policies related to new ICTs such as the internet. The Nepal Information Technology (IT) Policy was formulated in 2000 and paved the way for applying ICTs in various sectors in Nepal, such as the economy,

education, governance and the overall development of the country. It also enabled the formation of governmental institutions to promote ICTs in Nepal, like the Nepal Information Technology Centre.

After the Nepal IT Policy 2000<sup>3</sup> was implemented, which included varied application of ICTs in different sectors and the need to regulate the use (and abuse) of ICTs, there was a need for new regulations to reinforce it, and so the Nepal Electronic Transactions Act was enacted in 2008.<sup>4</sup>

However, neither the ICT policy nor the act distinctly addresses issues related to gender, especially for women. The IT Policy 2000 has provisions for developing human resources in the ICT sector in general by developing ICT educational institutions, encouraging both private and public investments in the development of ICT industries and businesses, and providing training and scholarships. But given that women make up more than half of Nepal's population, the policy remains silent about what would be the role of women in ICTs and development in Nepal – or what specific provision there would be to develop the capacity of Nepali women in ICTs. In brief: the policy does not safeguard women's rights in line with the provisions made in the current interim constitution of Nepal.

Although it does not directly address gender-related issues, the Electronic Transactions Act 2008 takes a step towards being gender-sensitive as it makes provisions for liability, not exceeding about USD 1,000, or imprisonment, not exceeding five years, or both, in case of the publication of illegal materials in electronic form. The ban on such publications includes damage to a person's privacy and character assassination, which to some extent indirectly prevents online violence against women such as online harassment and cyber stalking. Earlier this year, a woman politician in Nepal suffered character assassination on Facebook; the victim was able to file a case and the perpetrators were brought to justice.<sup>5</sup>

1 [girlsiniict.org/girls-in-ict-day-events/girls-ict-day-nepal](http://girlsiniict.org/girls-in-ict-day-events/girls-ict-day-nepal)

2 [unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/apciv/unpan007116.pdf](http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/apciv/unpan007116.pdf)

3 [nta.gov.np/en/.../Policies/IT%20Policy%202005%202000.pdf/download](http://nta.gov.np/en/.../Policies/IT%20Policy%202005%202000.pdf/download)

4 [www.tepc.gov.np/uploads/files/12the-electronic-transaction-act55.pdf](http://www.tepc.gov.np/uploads/files/12the-electronic-transaction-act55.pdf)

5 [www.myrepublica.com/portal/index.php?action=news\\_details&news\\_id=56973](http://www.myrepublica.com/portal/index.php?action=news_details&news_id=56973)

| TABLE 1.                        |           |           |           |           |           |
|---------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Women employed in NT: 2009-2013 |           |           |           |           |           |
| Year                            | 2009      | 2010      | 2011      | 2012      | 2013      |
| Total employees                 | 5733      | 5659      | 5542      | 5529      | 5493      |
| Male employees                  | 5036      | 4976      | 4856      | 4842      | 4811      |
| Female employees                | 697 (12%) | 683 (12%) | 686 (12%) | 687 (12%) | 682 (12%) |

Source: [www.nta.gov.np/files/GirlsInICT2013/ICT\\_Career\\_for\\_Women\\_Nepal\\_Telecom\\_Prospect.pdf](http://www.nta.gov.np/files/GirlsInICT2013/ICT_Career_for_Women_Nepal_Telecom_Prospect.pdf)

## Situation and efforts

The latest data available from sources like the ITU indicates that internet penetration in Nepal is more than 20% of the total population of about 26 million. There has been rapid growth in internet access primarily due to phenomenal growth in access to mobile phones.

According to Nepal Telecom Authority statistics, almost 70% of the Nepali population has access to mobile phones with 3G, GPRS and CDMA facilities. The internet is accessed primarily through the use of mobile phone internet facilities.<sup>6</sup> However, gender-disaggregated data on internet and mobile phone use in Nepal is not available. It is not known exactly how many Nepali women have access to the internet and mobile phones.

Similarly, there is no available data on how many people in Nepal have a degree, certificate or training in ICTs. This means there is no data on how many Nepali women have ICT educational qualifications.

If we look at the employment of women in the ICT sector, national level statistics are not available. But taking the case of Nepal Telecom (NT), the state-owned telecom service provider, gender-disaggregated data for the past five years (2009-2013) is presented in Tables 1 and 2. While Table 1 illustrates the percentage of NT employees who are women, in Table 2 the data is further disaggregated to consider women's employment in technical positions specifically.

The five-year data shows that although women have been employed in the ICT sector in Nepal, the trend has not been encouraging. The employment of women in NT has remained static over five years. And even when there are more women employed in NT, they have not been able to occupy significant senior and decision-making positions.

Putting aside the unavailability of national gender-disaggregated data, and low employment of women in ICT sectors like NT, in the past few years there have been several efforts made by the

government, non-governmental organisations and the private sector to recognise the importance of women in ICTs and to build women's capacity in terms of access, training and participation.

As already mentioned, the government of Nepal celebrated International Girls in ICT Day for the first time this year. On this occasion, the director and acting chief of the Nepal Telecommunications Authority (NTA) expressed his commitment to continue encouraging women and girls to pursue ICT careers. The secretary of the Ministry of Information and Communication (MOIC) repeated the government's commitment to the empowerment of girls and women by mainstreaming gender through extensive use of ICTs, and said that the government has made a number of targeted interventions through several initiatives.

The NTA made the public aware of International Girls in ICT Day through a public notice published on 4 April 2013. The NTA also made a request to ICT-related companies, government agencies, academic institutions, NGOs working in the field of women's empowerment and other interested organisations to hold local or national events for International Girls in ICT Day on 25 April 2013, targeting teenage girls and university students. The NTA additionally organised an essay competition on that day on the theme "The Role of ICT in Empowering Girls and Women".

A workshop was held on 25 April by MOIC and NTA in collaboration with Equal Access Nepal and promoted by SPARROW (a private SMS mobile marketing solution company),<sup>7</sup> on ICT careers, the status of women's participation in ICTs, the use of ICT tools and techniques in personal empowerment, etc. Likewise, the Sambriddhi Nepal Foundation, a social entrepreneur NGO, organised a half-day motivational programme at the Chundevi Higher Secondary School on the outskirts of Kathmandu in Thankot. Similarly, WikiWomen in Nepal organised a programme called Wiki Editathon, primarily targeting college students, on how to create accounts and

6 [www.nta.gov.np](http://www.nta.gov.np)

7 [www.sparrowsms.com](http://www.sparrowsms.com)



| TABLE 2.                           |      |      |      |      |      |
|------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Women in technical positions in NT |      |      |      |      |      |
| Year                               | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 |
| Manager                            | 2    | 2    | 3    | 3    | 3    |
| Deputy manager                     | 8    | 8    | 7    | 7    | 7    |
| Senior engineer                    | 3    | 3    | 7    | 7    | 8    |
| Engineer                           | 16   | 21   | 21   | 36   | 35   |

Source: [www.nta.gov.np/files/GirlsInICT2013/ICT\\_Career\\_for\\_Women\\_Nepal\\_Telecom\\_Prospect.pdf](http://www.nta.gov.np/files/GirlsInICT2013/ICT_Career_for_Women_Nepal_Telecom_Prospect.pdf)

add/edit contents on Wikipedia. Telecom operators in Nepal also provided promotional offers targeting female students.

Later this year on 16 June, in an event held by the World Bank, the International Finance Corporation, Young Innovations and the Computer Association of Nepal, experts and technologists came together to address the challenges of violence against women by finding innovative technological solutions to issues surrounding prevention, response and awareness at the Violence Against Women (VAW) “Hackathon”.<sup>8</sup>

In November 2011, Yuwa,<sup>9</sup> a youth NGO in Nepal, teamed up with SPARROW SMS (as part of its corporate social responsibility) and launched a campaign intended to hear and act upon voices being raised against VAW in Nepal. The team has launched a Facebook group named “Voice Heard” which allows people to post their views or report VAW issues online, including by email, by submitting a form, and real-time SMS. This project allows the public to report VAW incidents and issues openly and anonymously by posting directly on the Facebook group’s timeline, or by SMS or email.<sup>10</sup>

In 2011 the Computer Association of Nepal (CAN) formed a Women in ICT Sub-Committee as a result of persistent lobbying by its women members.<sup>11</sup> The CAN sub-committee on women has been raising awareness on the participation of women in the ICT sector in Nepal, as well as trying to carry out research to generate data on women in ICTs.

Earlier this year in January the sub-committee undertook an online survey on the role of ICT for women in the media and organised a workshop on “The Role of ICT for Women in Journalism: Challenges and Opportunities for Women in Media”. The workshop was attended by more than 30 participants from different media groups and ICT sectors in Nepal and its aim was to share best practices as

well as the challenges of using ICT for women engaged in the media sector.<sup>12</sup>

There have been commendable efforts by the CAN Women in ICT Sub-Committee to understand and mainstream gender issues in the ICT sector. A member of the sub-committee remarked, “First the gender sensitivity has to develop within CAN as an institution, before it can effectively work on women in ICT issues in Nepal.”<sup>13</sup>

While in the past few years there have been positive developments as far as women’s ICT issues are concerned, the demise of MahilaWeb raises questions about the sustainability of women and ICT issues in Nepal. There is a need to assess what worked, what did not work and what may work. There is a need to learn from past efforts and move into the future.

## Conclusion

The MahilaWeb effort, started more than a decade ago, was already having sustainability problems after its nine-month pilot period, according to the paper “Using ICT in Development: Perspectives on Nepali Experiences”.<sup>14</sup> It faced difficulties in collecting information from various organisations. Training on using the internet, email and web page design were given to women from partner development organisations, with the expectation that trainees would share their organisation’s information. But the contribution of information to MahilaWeb by the partner organisations did not happen. When funding ended, MahilaWeb staff members kept working voluntarily for a time but eventually the project was discontinued.

What we can conclude from the MahilaWeb experience is that the initiative was ahead of its time. More than a decade ago, access to ICTs such as the internet and email in Nepal was limited to a select

8 [www.vawhack.org/about-hackathon](http://www.vawhack.org/about-hackathon)

9 [www.yuwa.org.np](http://www.yuwa.org.np)

10 [www.data.yuwa.org.np](http://www.data.yuwa.org.np)

11 [www.can.org.np/content/women-in-ict.html](http://www.can.org.np/content/women-in-ict.html)

12 Based on information provided by a member of the CAN Women in ICT Sub-Committee.

13 Quoted from a personal conversation with a member of the CAN Women in ICT Sub-Committee

14 [unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/apcity/unpan007116.pdf](http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/apcity/unpan007116.pdf)



group of users. At the same time, the culture of sharing information in Nepali society and organisations and working collectively on a common issue was a distant vision.

The situation has changed now. More and more Nepali people and organisations have access to ICTs and social media. Though there is no official data, from general observation it can be said that every woman, whether working outside the home or at home, has access to mobile phones and SMS and is familiar with social media. With growing access to ICTs Nepali women and men alike are more open to sharing information and their public sphere has grown. However, at the same time, the open space provided by advances in ICTs has been turned upside down, as women and men alike have become subject to online harassment. It is time to review ICT-related policy and laws in Nepal in the context of massive growth in access and the advancement of social media and networks like Facebook.

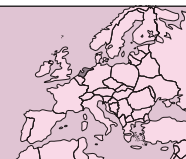
The perspectives of Nepali women in ICTs have their own share of highs and lows. While projects like MahilaWeb completed their cycle more than a decade ago, the ultimate outcomes of recent initiatives like Voice Heard and the VAW Hackathon deserve a grace period before conclusions are drawn.

## Action steps

- First, the IT Policy and Cyber Law in Nepal need to be revised and amended to make them gender-sensitive and inclusive.
- The IT Policy should also be revised to incorporate clear gender-specific provisions such as scholarships for women to pursue IT education; employable ICT skills development and training for women; and quotas for women in IT sector employment.
- The Cyber Law in Nepal needs to be developed differently in the context of rapidly changing uses and abuses of social media, with specific safety and security measures provided for women users.
- Women's leadership in the ICT sector, their inclusion and their rights need to be developed as in any other developing sector.
- Rights for women have been provided for in most of the laws of Nepal, but there is a need for more concerted efforts for women to be aware of and claim their rights.
- Over more than a decade of experience, a majority of ICT and ICT4D programmes or initiatives have not been able to sustain their work. Multi-stakeholder partnerships that include the private sector, especially IT companies, can ensure some degree of sustainability of ICT4D initiatives. ■

# NETHERLANDS

Internet, information and the right to perform your own abortion



## NETSHEILA

Lin McDevitt-Pugh  
www.netsheila.com

### Introduction

The Dutch foundation Women on Waves and its sister organisation Women on Web (addressed together as WoW) operate from a core value: that women have a right to their health and a right to access information about safe abortions. Women on Web offers an online abortion consultation service with a licensed doctor through its website.<sup>1</sup> The service is offered in ten languages and the safe abortion information on the website is in twelve languages. The online abortion help service can provide information to women living in countries where safe abortion is not accessible, as well as medical guidance and a medical abortion for pregnancies up to nine weeks. A medical abortion is procured through a combination of drugs, Mifepristone and Misoprostol, and women can administer it themselves. WoW's claim: it is reducing the number of deaths due to unsafe abortions and making women the primary agents in deciding whether or not to terminate a pregnancy.

In Morocco, 600 to 800 women per day undergo an illegal abortion and at least 90 women per year die as a result. In October 2012, Women on Waves was in Morocco, at the invitation of local rights organisation MALI, to provide safe medical abortions to women in international waters and to launch the Moroccan safe abortion hotline.<sup>2</sup> Warned of their coming, a warship waited at sea, ready to block the entrance to the marina. This did not work as the Women on Waves yacht had already entered the harbour before. Their yacht displayed banners showing the telephone number of the local safe abortion hotline. Police arrived to make the abortion activists leave, which precipitated a media frenzy. Hundreds of photos and film footage of the yacht were taken and disseminated through media channels, effectively launching the hotline through mainstream media. The Moroccan authorities immediately expelled the Women on Waves' yacht and prevented them from bringing women to international waters and providing them with an early medical abortion.

### Policy and political background

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 42 million abortions are induced each year, of which nearly 20 million are performed in unsafe conditions and result in the deaths of an estimated 47,000 girls and women.<sup>3</sup> According to WHO, abortions are as common in countries where they are illegal as in countries where they are legal.

In 29% of all countries, abortions are possible for women who request them. In 71% of the world, abortion law restricts access to abortion; in some countries abortions are illegal under all circumstances. More than one quarter of the world's people live in these countries.<sup>4</sup>

### ICTs internationalise the range of influence

Through its campaigns in Morocco, Spain, Portugal, Poland and Ireland, the Women on Waves ship has successfully drawn attention to the availability of safe medical abortions. With global numbers of deaths from unsafely performed abortions so high, and knowing that a self-administered safe medical abortion is possible, Women on Waves wanted to change the way abortion is regulated and performed worldwide. They started by publishing online information on the combination of Mifepristone and Misoprostol, drugs that safely produce an abortion. They also provided detailed information on how to find the drugs and self-administer them.

Taking the potential of the internet a step further, Women on Waves worked with partners to develop the Women on Web website,<sup>5</sup> launching it in 2006. Women on Web facilitates a medical consultation for women who are less than nine weeks pregnant, live in a country where access to a safe abortion is restricted, and have no severe illnesses. Women are advised to do a pregnancy test and an ultrasound before the consultation. A doctor prescribes Mifepristone and Misoprostol and ensures the medical abortion is sent to the woman by post. The service is entirely financed by donations.

1 [www.womenonweb.org](http://www.womenonweb.org)

2 [www.womenonwaves.org/en/page/3416/in-collection/2604/safe-abortion-campaign-morocco-october-2012](http://www.womenonwaves.org/en/page/3416/in-collection/2604/safe-abortion-campaign-morocco-october-2012)

3 World Health Organization (2007) *Unsafe Abortion: Global and Regional Estimates of the Incidence of Unsafe Abortion and Associated Mortality in 2003*, 5th edition.

4 [www.prb.org/pdf11/abortion-facts-and-figures-2011.pdf](http://www.prb.org/pdf11/abortion-facts-and-figures-2011.pdf)

5 [www.womenonweb.org](http://www.womenonweb.org)



The Women on Waves sailing vessel is subject to Dutch law. According to Dutch law, a medical practitioner must have a licence to terminate a pregnancy if the woman's menstrual period is more than 16 days late. For pregnancies of less than 6.5 weeks after the previous menstrual period, no licence is needed to administer an early medical abortion.

Today a help desk operates in 12 languages, all hours of the day, and deals with a stream of 8,000 emails per month. The team closely monitors the use of the website and usefulness of the service.

The online service is now supplemented by safe abortion hotlines, operating in Argentina, Chile, Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela, Poland, Thailand, Pakistan, Indonesia, Morocco and Kenya, most of which have been set up by local partners who invited Women on Waves to train the consultants and/or facilitate the training process.

The Kenyan safe abortion hotline, the first in Africa, was launched in 2012. It pioneers the use of an interactive voice response (IVR) system with a set of pre-recorded messages. In countries where the legal risks are substantial for activists, the IVR hotline has great potential, as it can be anonymous and does not require "live" counsellors. Two different numbers (on different mobile networks to make it cheaper for the callers) are offered and the service is available 24 hours a day in English and Swahili. The hotline provides information about safe abortion, postpartum haemorrhage prevention and other reproductive health matters. Counsellors return the calls of women who leave a voicemail or an SMS.

During the launch of the Kenyan hotline, activists from Kenya, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Nigeria and Tanzania were trained to set up, maintain and replicate an IVR hotline project.

### Information strategies

Getting the word out is key to the success of these initiatives. In Morocco, the press helped launch the safe abortion hotline through their articles, photos and video presentations of the news of the boat in the harbour. More than 300 media outlets distributed information on WoW and the safe use of Misoprostol in 2012. Social media is an important part of the WoW information strategy mix, and WoW counted millions of visitors to its websites and social media in 2012.<sup>6</sup> The WoW websites and online system were renewed in 2012 and are now available on multi-platform (mobile and desktop) devices.

As with any information strategy, local presence is key. With its local partners, WoW trains community health workers, youth group leaders and pharmacists in slum communities on how to

<sup>6</sup> Conversation with coordinator at Women on Web, 25 May 2013.

procure a safe medical abortion. These are the first people women reach out to for help.

### Problems faced

The governments of Saudi Arabia and Yemen block access to the WoW website. In response, WoW is looking at the possibility of developing a mobile abortion app for use in those and other countries.

Customs regulations in most countries permit people to receive international shipments of medicines for personal use. Mifepristone and Misoprostol are on the list of essential medicines of the WHO.<sup>7</sup>

WoW has a broad network of organisations willing to honour the intentions of the women who reach out to have a safe abortion in a country where only illegal, unsafe abortions are available.

### Legal action in the Netherlands

In 2008 the Dutch Health Inspection requested the public prosecutor to start legal procedures against Women on Waves. The Inspection claimed that Women on Waves did not have a licence to provide women with an early medical abortion in international waters. The public prosecutor declined, saying there is no indication that Women on Waves broke any Dutch law. In 2012 the Dutch Health Inspection and the Ministry for Health, Welfare and Sport again asserted that Women on Waves was not licensed to provide an early medical abortion, in response to the Morocco mission. In doing so it projected a false image that the doctors and staff of Women on Waves were acting outside the law, undermining the credibility of the organisation inside and outside the Netherlands. It failed to protect Women on Waves in the performance of activities that are legal under Dutch law. It failed to defend Women on Waves in the international press and put the lives of the staff of Women on Waves in danger.<sup>8</sup>

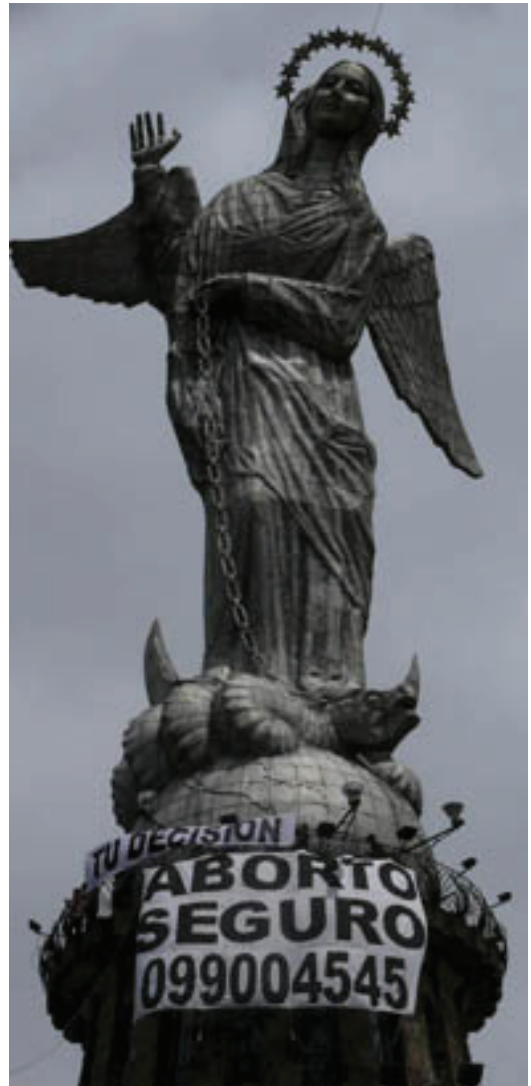
### Analysis

The sister organisations operate in a newly emerging framework in which harm reduction and human rights merge. The three core principles of harm reduction are neutrality, humanism and pragmatism.

1. **Neutrality:** Harm reduction strategies ignore legal and social contexts and are concerned only with the risks and health-related harms of an activity. Public health officials have a professional

7 Misoprostol can be used as a morning-after pill, for the cure of depression, and as a treatment for gastric ulcers and breast cancer.

8 Kleiverda, G., Gomperts, R. and Swaab, E. H. (2012) Women on Waves volkomen legaal, *Medisch Contact*, November. [www.womenonwaves.org/en/page/4030/publicatie-medisch-contact-november-2012](http://www.womenonwaves.org/en/page/4030/publicatie-medisch-contact-november-2012)



Virgin with safe abortion hotline banner, Quito, Ecuador.  
Photo: Mrova ([www.womenonwaves.org](http://www.womenonwaves.org))

responsibility to provide, as WoW does, information about technologies such as Misoprostol, to minimise women's personal harms. Public health officials should assure client confidentiality and are not part of the legal apparatus policing a woman's adherence to the law.

2. **Humanism:** All individuals have a right to have their health needs understood and addressed, regardless of their assigned moral status or deviance from laws.
3. **Pragmatism:** Harm reduction recognises that individuals choose to participate in an activity



whether it is legal or not. If abortion is illegal, women will seek an abortion by illegal means. Harm reduction is grounded in realistic evidence-based assessments and not moral imperatives.

In addition to promoting the harm reduction framework to save the lives of thousands of women, WoW promotes the concept of women's agency rather than women's empowerment. It assumes that the women it communicates with are capable of making their own decisions.

This approach is gender transformative. Where gender transformative approaches typically transform gender roles and promote equitable relationships between women and men, WoW transforms the relationship between women and the state.

As a consequence of the activities of WoW, more and more women who need an abortion consider it as something they themselves regulate, and not as a realm owned by the state and medical institutions. WoW allows them to bypass the patriarchal version of morality-based legislation and act in their own interests – as they would anyway – but now in a way that does not endanger their lives.

International human rights law can be said to have evolved to the point where it now imposes obligations on governments to provide, and to refrain from interfering with the communication of, information that is necessary for the protection and promotion of reproductive health and choice.<sup>9</sup>

International human rights jurisprudence is increasingly taking abortion as a major cause of death as its starting point.<sup>10</sup> In the face of known and avoidable suffering and death in countries where there are legal restraints on safe abortions, international human rights jurisprudence holds that states are legally accountable to do more than nothing. States that omit or fail to act breach human rights law.<sup>11</sup> This raises the question of whether the Dutch state infringed its obligation to reduce the harms of unsafe abortions when it publicly and falsely claimed that Women on Waves was operating without a licence in Morocco.

Even social media sites are baffled by WoW. Nothing in Facebook's Community Standards states that one may not post information on how to procure a legal abortion, yet Facebook closed the account of Dr.

Rebecca Gomperts, director of Women on Waves in the Netherlands, for doing just this. Recently YouTube blocked a WoW information video on the best use of Misoprostol to induce a safe abortion. There are laws governing appropriate behaviour and courts that uphold these laws, and WoW operates within these laws, yet social media sites are using their power to mould society into an expression of what they think is acceptable. The behaviour of the social media sites exemplifies how the dominant normative order<sup>12</sup> is confronted by WoW and its commitment to realising the human right of women to safe abortions.

## Conclusions

ICTs have enabled Women on Waves to radically expand its ability to provide safe abortions and inform women on how to access safe medical abortions. The organisation is committed to using innovative strategies and links to issues of autonomy and social justice in order to change the public discourse around abortion. Its commitment to harm reduction and human rights is a global commitment. It operates in a patchwork of national conversations, working with women who live in countries that restrict the autonomy of women and curtail their right to terminate a pregnancy.

## Action steps

Women on Web and Women on Waves will lobby for support and recognition of the work of the smaller organisations by the big international networks and for the creation of a good database and communication platform to exchange information about outreach efforts.

Women on Web will continue to invite women to share their stories on the "I had an abortion" section of the website,<sup>13</sup> to remove the taboo on talking about abortion. It will continue to encourage people to donate money, to ensure that the service remains available as long as it is needed. It will continue to train local leaders to provide information on how to procure an abortion safely, even in countries where abortions are legally restricted.

In 2014 WoW will expand its ICT offerings with games, videos and audio abortion testimonies.

There is a women's human rights dimension to this story, and a dimension that is relevant to any activist operating on the global stage. ICTs make it possible to ignore political borders. Our only limitation is our imagination and our willingness to act. ■

9 Coliver, S. (1995) The Right to Information Necessary for Reproductive Health and Choice under International Law, in Coliver, S. (ed.) *The Right to Know: Human Rights and Access to Reproductive Health Information*, University of Pennsylvania Press.

10 Erdman, J. N. (2011) Access to Information on Safe Abortion: A Harm Reduction and Human Rights Approach, *Harvard Journal of Law and Gender*, 34, p. 413-462, footnote 77.

11 Commission on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (2000) General Comment 14: The Right to the Highest Attainable Standards of Health, Article 12, UN Doc. HRI/GEN/Rev.9, quoted in Erdman (2011) Op. cit.

12 Erdman (2011) Op.cit.

13 [www.womenonweb.org/en/page/864/about-the-i-had-an-abortion-project](http://www.womenonweb.org/en/page/864/about-the-i-had-an-abortion-project) and [www.womenonweb.org/en/page/488/i-had-an-abortion#lang=all](http://www.womenonweb.org/en/page/488/i-had-an-abortion#lang=all)

# NEW ZEALAND

Proposed new laws and their impact on women



## APC (New Zealand)

Liz Paton and Joy Liddicoat

[www.apc.org](http://www.apc.org)

## Introduction

The New Zealand government is taking steps to extend its powers in an effort to manage “harmful digital communications” through new laws proposed in two bills: the Communications (New Media) Bill (developed by the Law Commission and due to be tabled in parliament in 2013) and the Objectionable Publications and Indecency Legislation Bill (still before the New Zealand parliament in 2013). Both attempt to place greater controls on the use of the internet and online digital environment.

The bills have been criticised by internet rights groups for enabling new, invasive censorship by the government and for limiting free speech. Despite high rates of violence against women in New Zealand and high rates of internet access and use, a significant concern is that little attention has been given to the impact of the proposed new laws on women.<sup>1</sup> The bills have not been subject to thorough feminist or gender analysis by women’s organisations. The Ministry of Women’s Affairs provided a gender impact statement in the Cabinet Paper for the draft New Media Bill but it focused on women as victims of violence and incitement to commit suicide.<sup>2</sup> Little attention was paid to the enabling aspect of internet access and the role of women as agents with the power to occupy and utilise the digital sphere as a site of engagement, collaboration and empowerment.

As feminists, we know that the digital sphere can be a site of oppression and liberation, pleasure and harm, but this reflects the realities of the offline world; the power dynamics and processes are being acted out on a more dynamic and fast-changing stage. The challenge for feminist activists is to find ways of remaining present in the digital sphere in order to transform online relations and advance

ethical digital citizenship. We must use the digital sphere to progress rights, enhance liberation, minimise harms, model ethical digital relations and challenge processes which exclude us and destroy our ability to act as agents of online transformation.

In New Zealand the questions at this moment are: (a) How might the proposed bills shape women’s freedoms and protections in the digital environment? (b) Are the bills a balanced and appropriate response to the perceived harms? and (c) Will the bills increase censorship and, if so, what are the implications for women’s rights?

## Proposed laws

The primary purpose of the Communications (New Media) Bill is the mitigation of harm caused to individuals by electronic communications. The bill has been developed by the New Zealand Law Commission as a result of their 2013 report on Harmful Digital Communications and New Media.<sup>3</sup> The general objective is to shift the process and responsibility of online harm mitigation to an offline environment by establishing an approved agency that will assist and advise people suffering from harmful digital communications. A new criminal offence will be created, targeting digital communications which are “grossly offensive or of an indecent, obscene or menacing character and which cause harm”. Harm includes physical fear, humiliation, and mental and emotional distress. The bill will set out communication principles providing that digital communication should not:

- Disclose sensitive personal facts about an individual
- Be threatening, intimidating or menacing
- Be grossly offensive to a *reasonable person* in the complainant’s position (emphasis added)
- Be indecent or obscene
- Be part of a pattern of conduct that constitutes harassment
- Make a false allegation

<sup>1</sup> Only one women’s rights group, the National Council of Women, made a submission to the policy review of the Law Commission.

<sup>2</sup> Minister of Justice of New Zealand (2013) “Harmful Digital Communications” Cabinet Social Policy Committee Paper, paras 114-117, p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> New Zealand Law Commission (2013) *The News Media Meets ‘New Media’: Rights, Responsibilities and Regulation in the Digital Age*. [www.lawcom.govt.nz/project/review-regulatory-gaps-and-new-media/report](http://www.lawcom.govt.nz/project/review-regulatory-gaps-and-new-media/report)



- Contain a matter that is published in breach of confidence
- Incite or encourage anyone to send a message to a person with the intention of causing that person harm
- Incite or encourage another person to commit suicide
- Denigrate a person by reason of his or her colour, race, ethnic or national origins, religion, ethical belief, gender, sexual orientation or disability.

Remedies will include an order that internet content be taken down (the order may be against a perpetrator or an internet service provider “or any other internet intermediary”); that the perpetrator stop certain conduct; that a correction be published; that a right of reply be given; that an apology be published; or that the identity of an anonymous communication be released. A new criminal communication offence is to be created that entails “using a communication device to cause harm”.<sup>4</sup> The new offence will be punishable by up to three months imprisonment or a fine of USD 2,000.

The stated purpose of the Objectionable Publications and Indecency Legislation Bill is to increase penalties for producing, trading or possessing child pornography. The bill purports to achieve this by increasing the penalties for distributing, importing or possessing “objectionable publications”. A presumption of imprisonment will be imposed for repeat offenders and a new offence created of exposing a person under 16 to indecent material.

“Objectionable publication” is comprehensively defined in the Films, Videos, and Publications Classification Act 1993. It includes a number of criteria and a general consideration of material which “describes, depicts, expresses, or otherwise deals with matters such as sex, horror, crime, cruelty, or violence in such a manner that the availability of the publication is likely to be injurious to the public good.” The new bill has raised concerns because while it purports to relate only to child pornography, by establishing a scope that incorporates objectionable publications *per se*, in fact it will capture more than this, including, for example, lawful adult material.

Taken together, these bills have the potential to curtail, or hinder, the exchange of information online and raise at least three significant issues for feminists and for women’s rights and freedoms

in the digital environment. The first is the transfer of responsibility for determination of whether or not a communication is objectionable, offensive, indecent or obscene, or causes harm, from the online space to a new offline state agency. The new agency’s mandate will allow for state censorship of online communications. Increasing state censorship is always a concern, especially for women and sexual rights advocates.

For example, women, young people and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/transsexual and intersex (LGBTI) identities and their bodies have been, and continue to be, the site of moral and political battles about decency and indecency, objection and repulsion – bodies are policed, sexual morality is subjective and highly contested. There is a risk that increased censorship will decrease our online presence through the chilling effect of the possibility of complaints (particularly if malicious or mischievous). In addition, the state may further “police” our gender and sexualities by censoring other ways of being that are normatively considered objectionable.

In addition, missing from the discussion on the bills is any analysis or concern about how the bills’ contents or processes acknowledge or comply with international standards and norms relating to human rights and internet freedoms. For example, the United Nations Human Rights Council has confirmed, through a resolution signed by 85 countries, that the same human rights standards and norms apply online and offline.<sup>5</sup> But the New Zealand government did not sign the Human Rights Council resolution and has not referred to it in the development of the new bills. In addition, while the New Zealand government has been active in reporting to the United Nations Committee for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and to the Commission on the Status of Women on progress in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action, there has been no direct focus on women’s rights and the internet. The absence of any such analysis is deeply concerning when one of the rationales given by the government for the bill is that it will better protect women.

Advancing women’s rights requires a transformation of social relations in the online and offline

<sup>5</sup> Human Rights Council (2012) *The promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet*, A/HRC/20/L.13, 20th Session. The Resolution provides that the Council, inter alia: “Affirms that the same rights that people have offline must also be protected online, in particular freedom of expression, which is applicable regardless of frontiers and through any media of one’s choice, in accordance with articles 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.”

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, para 76, p. 11.

world. The gender inequalities played out in an online environment mirror the inequalities in the street – online violence plays on the same sex and gender-based power relations. But new complexities also arise, so that it is not a simple transfer of power relations and forms of rights violations.

A further risk is that the new agency will have little oversight and knowledge of the emancipatory potential of the digital environment and the empowerment of women. The associated risk is that, through a narrative of “protection” of women from harm, online discussion which is deemed harmful but which would otherwise have led to valuable outcomes for women will be removed from the digital space. One example is the use of the digital environment for coalescing discussion around abortion rights and sexual and reproductive health and rights. Some state actors would define discussion of abortion as objectionable or obscene or may even consider it appropriate to intervene to protect the foetus. This would be a particular concern given the age limits in the bill and could affect young women’s access to sexual health information. Another example is whether politically and socially contentious reproductive issues will be reframed as obscene and complainants seek to have these removed from the digital sphere. This would also have significant impact on activism and could affect access to vital information about health services for women.

A second issue relates to the legal test in the new bills for material deemed grossly offensive to a “reasonable person”. The legal standard of a “reasonable person” has been highly contested in feminist legal critique, which analysed this as a gendered male standard, which has defined reasonableness through the looking glass of masculinity. Associated with masculinity are “protection” narratives that extend to the protection of women from harm by attempting to reduce their exposure to objectionable or obscene material. Applied in the online context, the subjective and politicised tests for objectionable, obscene or offensive material could exclude women from viewing sexually explicit material which may actually be focused on increasing their power, pleasure and agency in sexual relations. Women have the right to claim and maintain the online space as a place where they can actively engage in challenging and changing normative assumptions about gender, sex and sexuality. The bills’ application is unclear and therefore poses risks for advocates.

A third and related issue is how women making complaints of online harassment will be treated by offline agencies, including the District Court, in

these cases. There is little reason to believe that the approach of the courts (still largely informed by normative gender ideals of appropriate masculine and feminine offline behaviour) would provide an appropriate process or response for complaints from women about online conduct.

The new agency will need to be careful that its processes are not similar to court processes which are often harrowing and traumatic for victims. A quick review of comments online, for example on blogs, suggests that women are not engaged in discussion on the bills. If women are excluded from the public conversations about the content of the bills, it is very unlikely that their online interests will be represented in ways which give them agency and which are empowering and enabling of their rights.

Despite these issues, a number of the proposals may be useful for women who are victims of violence online. For example, the proposal to allow complaints about disclosure of personal facts or information may enable action to be taken against online violence which is not currently adequately provided for (such as sharing of intimate photos without consent or disclosure of information designed to humiliate). Many of those in support of the proposal point to its use to prevent or resist cyber bullying (a major concern for many New Zealanders), to help protect children and young people, to ensure that abusive recording and distributing of intimate filming (such as on mobile phones) can be properly addressed, and to protect the vulnerable from incitement to suicide.

## Conclusion and action steps

The digital sphere provides a critical site for transforming relations, but there is a danger that, in the name of protecting women from harm, “keeping them safe” from objectionable or obscene material will simultaneously reduce the transformative capacity of the digital sphere and reduce women to digital victimhood. Rather than a space for democratic dialogue, for challenging inappropriate behaviour and developing *in situ* solutions and responses to online violence, the bills empower a state agency to do this on an individual’s behalf. This approach takes away the opportunity of using the digital sphere as a site of social transformation. Exclusion from the digital sphere, exclusion from a transformative space, can occur through a variety of mechanisms, including a lack of considered, robust feminist and gender analysis of policy and legislative initiatives associated with increased state censorship. We cannot let this happen.

*So, what can we do? Here are just a few ideas:*

- Use a human rights approach to advancing and maintaining women's interests and presence in the digital sphere.
- Keep a very close watching brief on policy and laws related to the digital sphere and fully engage in policy discussions.
- Engage with the new agency to ensure it takes an enabling approach to the internet as a space of transformation and power for women, rather than a protectionist approach.
- Ensure women's rights defenders are appointed to the new agency and recommend gender audits and analysis of complaints.
- Consider the use of social media, including the use of hashtags, for reporting perpetrators of violence online – deal with violence *in situ*.
- Advocate for a model of ethical digital citizenship, including ethical relationships.
- Advocate for the promulgation of digital literacy skills, including the ability to understand how the digital world influences individuals themselves and others.
- Become a digital bystander: intervene in online conversation to prevent the perpetuation of gendered ideas and comments.
- Form a digital bystander group, develop shared peer norms, and express online support for ethical use of digital communications. ■

# NIGERIA

The use of ICTs to express public outrage in Nigeria over child marriage



## Fantsuam Foundation

John Dada

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## Introduction

The areas of the Nigerian national life in which gender inequality appears to be entrenched include the workplace, health services, physical protection, education and politics. Most recently, the issue of child marriages has caused public outrage.<sup>1</sup> In 2010, a Nigerian senator, Ahmed Sani Yarima, divorced a girl-bride whom he had married when she was 15 years old, and then married a 13-year-old.<sup>2</sup> Although the Nigerian Senate passed a law criminalising child marriage in 2003, only 24 out of the 36 states have adopted the law. Yarima has been at the centre of a recent child marriage furore in the Senate,<sup>3</sup> and was the cause of much public outrage against the government.

## Using ICTs to channel outrage

The Senate could not muster the number of votes needed to expunge a clause in the 1999 constitution (Section 29 clause 4b) that assumes that any woman who is married is also an adult: “Any woman that is married in Nigeria is of full age.” The general public has interpreted this as a Senate endorsement of child marriage. The Senate’s attempt at clarification went largely unheeded,<sup>4</sup> as the Nigerian press, websites, magazines, bloggers and the electronic media reported citizens’ concerns and editorialised their disapproval. Ikenna Azuike, the Nigerian-British creator of viral videos, posted a video to satirise and shine light on the dispute<sup>5</sup> and a Nigerian woman, Dupe Killa, was the brain behind

the #ChildNOTBride<sup>6</sup> petition which was oversubscribed within hours of its launch.

Most national papers on Sunday, 28 July 2013 gave prominence to the issue: *Thisday*, *The Nation On Sunday*, *Leadership* and *Sunday Vanguard* had headlines such as “In Support Of The Girl Child”, “No Cover For Pedophiles”, “Much Ado About Child Marriage” and “Building Nigeria On Deceit”.

It is noteworthy that the loudest voices in the demand for expunging the offending section of the Nigerian constitution have been from women. Studies of how Nigerian women use information and communications technologies (ICTs) have shown that in spite of the challenges of relevant skills, cost and access<sup>7</sup> and role models,<sup>8</sup> more women are utilising ICTs to facilitate “their empowerment and in the fight against gender-based violence.”<sup>9</sup>

Similar to the specific case of the rights of the girl whom the senator divorced, various ICT tools including tweets, blogs, discussion lists, mass SMS distribution and YouTube were widely deployed to raise awareness of the Senate’s discussions, as well as to keep the issue in public view long enough to get the Senate to reverse its earlier decision. With the level of internet penetration in Nigeria, the costs and access challenges, this gives hope for the increased use of ICTs in the furtherance of women’s rights and gender equality in the country.

The Women Empowerment and Legal Aid (WELA) initiative called for the prosecution of Senator Yerima.<sup>10</sup> Women leaders like former minister of education Oby Ezekwesili and Joe Okei-Odumakin, the national coordinator of Women Arise, which represents over 60 civil society organisations, demanded the immediate removal of the offensive section from the constitution permitting child

1 [www.itwebafrica.com/ict-and-governance/265-nigeria/231227-fight-nigerias-gender-discrimination-with-ict#sthash.DazQORRa.dpuf](http://www.itwebafrica.com/ict-and-governance/265-nigeria/231227-fight-nigerias-gender-discrimination-with-ict#sthash.DazQORRa.dpuf)

2 [7evenminutes.com/2013/07/30/senate-says-child-marriage-is-outlawed-in-nigeria-but-12-states-are-yet-to-adopt-the-law](http://7evenminutes.com/2013/07/30/senate-says-child-marriage-is-outlawed-in-nigeria-but-12-states-are-yet-to-adopt-the-law)

3 [atlashrugs2000.typepad.com/atlas\\_shrugs/2013/07/nigeria-senator-lamblasts-critics-urges-child-marriage-as-a-solution-to-nations-problems-i-can-give-.html](http://atlashrugs2000.typepad.com/atlas_shrugs/2013/07/nigeria-senator-lamblasts-critics-urges-child-marriage-as-a-solution-to-nations-problems-i-can-give-.html)

4 [www.clutchmagonline.com/2013/07/nigerian-senator-we-didnt-legalize-child-marriage](http://www.clutchmagonline.com/2013/07/nigerian-senator-we-didnt-legalize-child-marriage)

5 [blazingcatfur.blogspot.co.uk/2013/07/nigeria-video-mocks-yeriman-countryrs.html](http://blazingcatfur.blogspot.co.uk/2013/07/nigeria-video-mocks-yeriman-countryrs.html)

6 [talent.adweek.com/gallery/ChildNotBride-The-story-behind-the-image/10001269](http://talent.adweek.com/gallery/ChildNotBride-The-story-behind-the-image/10001269)

7 [www.itwebafrica.com/ict-and-governance/265-nigeria/231227-fight-nigerias-gender-discrimination-with-ict#sthash.DazQORRa.dpuf](http://www.itwebafrica.com/ict-and-governance/265-nigeria/231227-fight-nigerias-gender-discrimination-with-ict#sthash.DazQORRa.dpuf) and [unlib.unl.edu/LPP/PNLA%20Quarterly/ogbomo75-3.htm](http://unlib.unl.edu/LPP/PNLA%20Quarterly/ogbomo75-3.htm)

8 [www.dailykos.com/story/2011/05/12/975497/-Women-Strive-to-Close-ICT-Gender-Gap-in-Nigeria](http://www.dailykos.com/story/2011/05/12/975497/-Women-Strive-to-Close-ICT-Gender-Gap-in-Nigeria) and [www.punchng.com/business/technology/addressing-gender-imbalance-in-ict-industry/](http://www.punchng.com/business/technology/addressing-gender-imbalance-in-ict-industry/)

9 Buskens, I. and Webb, A. (eds.) (2009) *African Women & ICTS: Investigating technology, gender and empowerment*, Zed, IDRC. [www.idrc.ca/EN/Resources/Publications/Pages/IDRCBookDetails.aspx?PublicationID=61](http://www.idrc.ca/EN/Resources/Publications/Pages/IDRCBookDetails.aspx?PublicationID=61)

10 [www.dailytimes.com.ng/article/child-marriage-women%E2%80%99s-group-wants-former-gov-prosecuted](http://www.dailytimes.com.ng/article/child-marriage-women%E2%80%99s-group-wants-former-gov-prosecuted)

brides.<sup>11</sup> The WOMAN 2.1 Summit<sup>12</sup> and Women's Health and Action Research Centre (WHARC),<sup>13</sup> the former government minister Fani-Kayode<sup>14</sup> and the Movement for Islamic Culture and Awareness have all criticised the Senate's (in)action.

Apart from being an affront to the fundamental human rights of the victims, teenage marriage has profound disadvantages on the health and social and physical well-being of underage mothers. Many are not physically or emotionally ready to handle a pregnancy, survive childbirth or nurture a baby. Therefore they face grave dangers during childbirth and are susceptible to pregnancy-related injuries such as obstetric fistula (VVF). Children born to child brides frequently suffer low birth weight. These young brides are unable to negotiate safe sex with older men, making them vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, and sexual and domestic violence.

## Gender inequality

This public outrage on the issue of child marriage highlights the persisting gender inequality in Nigeria, especially in female access to education and economic and political empowerment. The WomenAid Collective in its CEDAW Shadow Report states that females are lagging behind in access to primary, secondary and tertiary education, with a consequent literacy rate of 43% for adult women (compared to 57% for men).<sup>15</sup>

While ICTs have been seen as a tool for enhanced opportunities for all, they can also end up exacerbating the existing gender divide. In this child bride issue, several kinds of ICTs were mobilised to keep the issue in the public domain long enough to force a back down by the Nigerian Senate. But the incident also highlights the underlying gender inequities in the national socio-political arena. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action specifically calls on states to "increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies of communication." However, as long as females are subjected to early marriage, domestic responsibilities and socio-cultural prac-

tices can only reduce their access to the information economy and increase the gender gap.

As of September 2013 the situation has yet to show significant improvement, with women's participation and contributions at all levels and in all sectors still largely undervalued and constrained. Moreover, Nigeria has yet to domesticate the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), despite the increase in violence against women as reported by its minister of women's affairs.<sup>16</sup>

## Conclusion

Nigeria was among the first countries in Africa to sign and ratify CEDAW, and has also had one of its nationals elected to the CEDAW Committee.<sup>17</sup> Yet 29 years after the ratification, the 2008 shadow report on CEDAW and gender accountability in Nigeria observed that Nigerian women were still being subjected to substantial discrimination as a result of the lack of enabling legal and institutional support. The lack of progress is particularly glaring in the areas of access to education, incidence of high maternal and child mortality due to early marriage, human rights violations, harmful traditional and cultural practices such as female genital mutilation, widowhood rites and disinheritance, high incidences of gender-based violence, the trafficking of women, and teenage pregnancy<sup>18</sup>.

The Association for Progressive Communications Women's Rights Programme (APC WRP) advocates gender equality in the "implementation, access and use of [ICTs]."<sup>19</sup> Nigerian women and the general public have demonstrated what ICTs can achieve to promote the rights of girls and ensure that child marriages are abolished. Two recent bills can only strengthen these efforts: the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill and the Violence Against Persons Bill,<sup>20</sup> which have been presented to the national assembly.

## Action steps

There is a need to work closely with civil society groups whose focus is on women's rights to raise public awareness regarding the non-domestication of CEDAW in Nigeria. Linking this with regular reports of violence against women will help to keep

11 [allafrica.com/stories/201307261128.html](http://allafrica.com/stories/201307261128.html)

12 [ghanagist.com/woman-2-1-summit-stands-against-underage-child-marriage-in-nigeria/#.Ufdn5FPagM](http://ghanagist.com/woman-2-1-summit-stands-against-underage-child-marriage-in-nigeria/#.Ufdn5FPagM)

13 [www.wharc-online.org/2013/07/25/wharc-rejects-child-marriage-in-nigeria](http://www.wharc-online.org/2013/07/25/wharc-rejects-child-marriage-in-nigeria)

14 [premiumtimesng.com/opinion/141879-a-word-for-yerima-and-the-pedophiles-in-power-femi-fani-kayode.html](http://premiumtimesng.com/opinion/141879-a-word-for-yerima-and-the-pedophiles-in-power-femi-fani-kayode.html)

15 WomenAid Collective (2008) *CEDAW and Accountability to Gender Equality in Nigeria: A Shadow Report*, WACOL.

16 [www.nguardiannews.com/national-news/132759-minister-decries-non-domestication-of-cedaw-gender-bill](http://www.nguardiannews.com/national-news/132759-minister-decries-non-domestication-of-cedaw-gender-bill)

17 [www.dailyindependentnig.com/2012/07/nigerian-elected-into-uncedaw-committee](http://www.dailyindependentnig.com/2012/07/nigerian-elected-into-uncedaw-committee)

18 WomenAid Collective (2008) Op. cit.

19 [www.apc.org/en/about/programmes/womens-networking-support-programme-apc-wnsp](http://www.apc.org/en/about/programmes/womens-networking-support-programme-apc-wnsp)

20 [allafrica.com/stories/201305231144.html](http://allafrica.com/stories/201305231144.html)

the issue in the public eye until positive steps are taken.

Closely related to this is the domestication of the Convention on the Rights of the Child through the Child Rights Act, which has yet to be endorsed by some states in Nigeria. The progress of the efforts of UNICEF and civil society entities to promote the process needs to be monitored.

The bills that are now being considered by the legislature will also be closely monitored: the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill and the Violence Against Persons Bill.

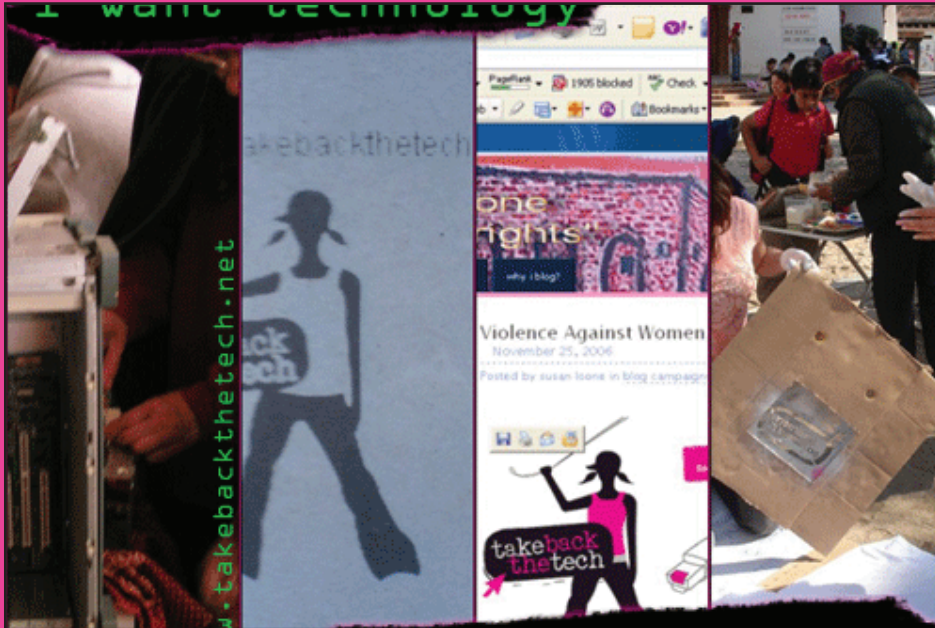
The use of ICTs to express public outrage in the child bride case is similar to the initiation of the nationwide Occupy Nigeria movement of 2012 – a movement that started with a tweet. The implication of the use of social media for galvanising public

opinion is not lost on the Nigerian government, and it is now making efforts to limit citizens' access to information on the internet. This challenge provides the opportunity for another action step: sustained and coordinated action by civil society to monitor and evaluate the government's bill, titled "An Act to Provide for the Interception, Development and Protection of Communications Networks and Facilities for Public Interest and other related matters", and the push for endorsement of a national surveillance programme that has both serious financial and civil rights implications. This can be pursued by forging closer networking with ICT journalists and relevant civil society organisations, such as the Paradigm Initiative,<sup>21</sup> to ensure public oversight and discussions to monitor how these initiatives might infringe on the right to free communication. ■

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<sup>21</sup> Paradigm Initiative (2013) *Nigeria: Making a case for enduring internet freedom*, PIN Policy Brief No. 1. [pinigeria.org/download/pinbrief001.pdf](http://pinigeria.org/download/pinbrief001.pdf)

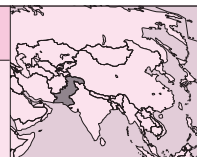




It is not Google's fault that the auto-complete of “women should” flags results ranging from “not vote” to “not be allowed to work”, but it highlights the sexism that pervades the internet. From the trolling and stalking of public, political women, to the howls of rage when women speak out, the internet is a patriarchal paradise. Only through concerted policy efforts, through brave trailblazers challenging male hegemony and assiduously fighting for a rights-based internet, can we build a tech free from sexism. For a colour reproduction of the image, please visit: [www.giswatch.org](http://www.giswatch.org)

# PAKISTAN

## Shaping ICTs in Pakistan using women's empowerment principles



### Bytes for all

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### Introduction

This report seeks to provide a broad overview of the status of women's rights in Pakistan, to identify unique areas peculiar to Pakistan, and to contextualise them in terms of the impact and potential of information and communications technologies (ICTs). It will seek to highlight current challenges posed to women's rights in Pakistan by ICTs as well as identify the benefits already evident. The report will conclude with recommendations aimed at changing the current harm-benefit ratio when it comes to gender and ICTs, moving away from the violation of rights, towards the protection of rights.

### Background

Cultural and societal diversity in Pakistan is extensive compared to most developed/Western nations. In practice, women's rights, apart from those enshrined in law, vary widely depending on geography, education levels, and sometimes ethnicity. The case of Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATAs) in Pakistan is unique in that they are not governed by the same set of laws applicable to the rest of Pakistan, which impacts adversely on all genders in those areas. Women's rights in FATAs (as defined and recognised by international human rights conventions and organisations) suffer more acutely because of the nature of tribal societies. It is therefore important to note that the incidents mentioned in this report do not necessarily reflect the condition of *all* Pakistani women, but may typify the condition of many belonging to a certain geographical, ethnic or religious space. Likewise, observations of societal attitudes in this report will reflect threads developed from reported incidents across the country that may or may not apply in all instances.

### Women's rights issues: The spectrum at a glance

On average, Pakistani society may be described as conservative and patriarchal in the social and religious areas. Over the past 30 years, this

conservatism has increased both qualitatively and quantitatively. That is, cultural and religious practices have, over time, become visibly more conservative, and a larger number of people adhere to them. As an example, while the hijab (Islamic head cover) was unknown in Pakistan 20 years ago, it is a common sight in urban centres today. There is also evidence of some elements of tribal culture seeping into small pockets of urban areas too.

One major aspect of this phenomenon is how it affects women's human rights in the country. Control over women is a significant element of tribal and religious values, giving shape to cultural practices. Separately, it is generally recognised in human rights and educated civil society circles that many female-subjugating cultural practices (whether arising from tribal/feudal customs or religion) aim to control women economically as well as to control their sexuality. For example, the practice of "marrying" a woman to the Quran<sup>1</sup> in some feudal families is in reality a means of keeping her portion of the inheritance from falling out of the control of male members of the family. Upon death, the inheritance of the unmarried woman passes on to the male family members of the deceased (brothers, nephews, uncles).

Given this, we see the manifestations of fiercely patriarchal/conservative/feudal/tribal practices affecting almost all areas of women's life such as the right to education, right to work, freedom of association, freedom of choice (in marriage, movement, clothing, etc.), and freedom of speech.

Whether triggered by a woman's resistance to the infringement of her rights or some other factors/motivations, these violations are often criminal in nature. One typical and recurring example is the parading of women naked or rape (to dishonour them) to requite male members of their families for real or perceived grievances.<sup>2</sup>

### ICTs mirror society

With the advent of ICTs it has become evident that these technologies, especially the internet and mobile telephony, have become additional ways to violate, harass, threaten, subjugate or dishonour

1 [www.islamawareness.net/Marriage/Quran/married.html](http://www.islamawareness.net/Marriage/Quran/married.html)

2 [www.humanrights.asia/news/urgent-appeals/AHRC-UAC-o85-2013](http://www.humanrights.asia/news/urgent-appeals/AHRC-UAC-o85-2013)

women. Many times these attacks through ICTs are as concrete, and with consequences as serious, as those that take place in real life. To illustrate the point we present later in the report a case study of three women killed in 2013 in Chilas, a remote town in the north of the country, as a result of the electronic dissemination of an audio recording of a woman in a romantic conversation with a man. Another example, from 2012, is of four women killed in the remote northern village of Gizar Alitray, for being exposed as having a good time (clapping to a song, humming) at a wedding function.<sup>3</sup> A mobile phone recording of the event was put out in the public space over the internet to “dishonour” them and their families. As a result, the women were murdered to recover family/tribe “honour”. These cases are illustrative of the growing vulnerability of women in the face of the expanding teledensity and internet penetration in the region.

Further, more common challenges arising from the misuse of ICTs are exemplified by incidents rewarding male chauvinism and punishment of women who rebel or exercise their legal rights to mobility, thought or expression. Multimedia mobile phones and the internet have been used to record rapes and circulate videos of the crime to either “punish” and humiliate the victim, or as revenge for ransom demands unmet by the families.

Law enforcement is severely lacking, and does not support the nuances that the internet requires in terms of protecting women online. This extends to the use of mobile phone technology. Only in rare cases are such crimes taken to court and the perpetrators punished.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, women remain at a constant risk of harassment through the use of bullying tactics, exposure and threat of character assassination in the cyber world where such punishment is considered by some as an inevitable outcome of “stepping out of the chador (veil) or chardevari (four walls).”

While on the one hand ICTs are often used by men against women in such cases with disastrous and sometimes fatal consequences, on the other hand ICTs are seen as a threat to the established order and women are prevented from using them. Illustrative of this reality is the case of the woman found using a mobile phone after the local jirgas (tribal courts of male elders) banned women

from using them. She was stoned to death for her “crime”.<sup>5</sup>

Clearly, the tribal/feudal societies and religious lobbies within Pakistan understand the potential of ICTs to empower and protect women, thereby reducing their own control.

## Honour, crime and punishment of women in Pakistan

The statistics of violence against women in Pakistan reveal that an astounding 80% have been victims of domestic violence, and one in three experience some form of violence such as rape, honour killing, immolation, acid attacks and verbal or psychological abuse.<sup>6</sup>

Against this bleak landscape, cyber crime against women in Pakistan often carries very serious consequences. And a significant portion of cyber crimes against women relate to “honour” – the definition of which is broad, vague and all encompassing. So ingrained is the concept of “honour” with the sanctity of life that if, for example, the digital identity of a woman from a conservative family or area is exposed, it can become life threatening. If this happens, the woman can be thought to have brought shame upon herself. In extreme cases, the only means of redress considered by the family is to kill the woman to regain honour and acceptability in their society. Unfortunately, such honour killings are not limited to remote areas only (where they are more common) but also evidenced sporadically in urban centres, and even amongst the Pakistani diaspora in Europe.

Pakistan’s history of honour killing is a long and bloody one with almost 900 women murdered annually,<sup>7</sup> usually by their male relatives. Women on whom suspicion has fallen are usually not allowed to defend themselves, and with the growth of technology both the flare-up and the retribution are explosive.

One consequence of the threat of dishonour is women being paralysed by the *fear* of retribution, remaining cautious, restricted and fearful, limiting their potential.

## The role of ICTs in creating a conformist, claustrophobic environment

Total teledensity in Pakistan is about 74%<sup>8</sup> and internet penetration around 15.3% (30 million users,<sup>9</sup>

3 [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/pakistan/9315872/Pakistan-orders-investigation-into-suspected-honour-killings.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/pakistan/9315872/Pakistan-orders-investigation-into-suspected-honour-killings.html)

4 [www.bbc.co.uk/urdu/pakistan/2013/07/130724\\_rape\\_video\\_sentence\\_25.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/urdu/pakistan/2013/07/130724_rape_video_sentence_25.shtml)

5 [www.humanrights.asia/news/ahrc-news/AHRC-STM-128-2013](http://www.humanrights.asia/news/ahrc-news/AHRC-STM-128-2013)

6 [tribune.com.pk/story/125993/four-in-five-women-in-pakistan-face-some-form-of-domestic-abuse-report](http://tribune.com.pk/story/125993/four-in-five-women-in-pakistan-face-some-form-of-domestic-abuse-report)

7 [www.rferl.org/content/pakistan-honor-killings/24948795.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/pakistan-honor-killings/24948795.html)

8 [www.pta.gov.pk/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=269:telecom-indicators&catid=124:industry-report&Itemid=599](http://www.pta.gov.pk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=269:telecom-indicators&catid=124:industry-report&Itemid=599)

9 [tribune.com.pk/story/567649/30m-internet-users-in-pakistan-half-on-mobile-report](http://tribune.com.pk/story/567649/30m-internet-users-in-pakistan-half-on-mobile-report)

with Pakistan's internet ranking at 27th<sup>10</sup> in the world), with a high growth rate amongst developing nations. However, these ICTs have unfortunately assisted in glorifying notions of women's piety, chastity and honour. Facebook groups such as "My Beauty is for my husband to see and not the world" promote among both genders the narrow view of what women are religiously permitted to do, reinforcing the weight of centuries of oppression and fear. Obscurantist attitudes towards women have spread to the extent that even moderate/liberal political parties now avow support of women's rights as long as the women stay "within the culture".

With such implicit renunciation of women's rights, these political parties automatically make acceptable retribution towards women who do not follow the social construct of "culture" – be it stepping out of the veil, travelling without a male guardian, working for a living, voting, being educated, etc. The definition of what encompasses culture can be narrowed infinitely and choke existing spaces for women in society.

However, successful campaigns such as Take Back the Tech!<sup>11</sup> have questioned these attitudes and perceptions and fought harassment of women by reporting these offences, although much more work is required.

### The Chilas honour killing case

In the recent case of honour killing in Chilas, two young women were murdered along with their mother when an audio clip was shared among the conservative community in this remote town in the north of Pakistan. The audio clip contained evidence of a romantic interest between the mother and a man other than her husband. In that audio conversation, there was mention of her two daughters. In a bizarre twist, her stepson obtained the clip, and apparently pushed by a grotesque cultural feeling, he murdered all three women to protect the family honour.

Interestingly, the Chilas story was entirely misreported by the national and international press, based on a video that had gone viral of two women dancing in the rain. It was claimed their murders were committed due to that video being released on the internet.<sup>12</sup> The misreporting happened despite the fact that the first investigative report by the police mentioned the audio clip. The facts were

uncovered by an investigative team from Bytes for All that went to Chilas on a fact-finding mission.<sup>13</sup> The mission uncovered that the family honour was a guise for trying to keep money and property within the family.

Acts such as the Chilas women's murders continue to go unpunished for several reasons, the discussion of which is beyond the scope of this report. However, the jirga system of justice is part of the problem. Set up to be like a town meeting, this collective group of local elders comes together to decree on issues of importance. Prevalent mostly in FATAs, the jirgas have historically spelt bad news for women, who are typically blamed and punished for crimes against them.

The Chilas incident highlights the manner in which cyberspace becomes a resonant chamber for a manufactured story, especially in areas where internet penetration is low, investigative journalism is difficult, and law enforcement authorities are protective of local cultural practices.

### The positive aspects of ICTs *vis-à-vis* women's rights in Pakistan

There is a body of evidence that demonstrates the role of ICTs in shaping positive outcomes for women's rights in Pakistan. One of the most notable incidents in the recent past (early 2009) was of a woman being flogged in public in Swat (a northern Pakistani city) by the Taliban for an alleged honour crime.<sup>14</sup> The degrading and painful treatment inflicted on her, pinned face down to the ground by men, and flogged repeatedly by another man while she screamed piteously and helplessly, was recorded on a mobile phone and released on the internet. The video eventually had to be noticed by the mainstream media, generating furious debate and outrage in the country.<sup>15</sup> It may be safe to assert that that video became one of the major catalysts for the country's political and military leadership's decision to conduct a military operation in Swat to clear out the militants and regain the writ of the state over the region, thereby bringing relief to the general population and especially women in the region.

Other examples of women's empowerment through ICTs include the world famous case of Malala Yousafzai, the teenage girl from Swat who wrote a regular blog for the BBC, diarising the

10 [www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/statistics/2013/Individuals\\_Internet\\_2000-2012.xls](http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/statistics/2013/Individuals_Internet_2000-2012.xls)

11 [www.takebackthetech.net](http://www.takebackthetech.net)

12 [www.nydailynews.com/news/world/sisters-killed-pakistan-video-dancing-rain-article-1.1386938](http://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/sisters-killed-pakistan-video-dancing-rain-article-1.1386938)

13 [tribune.com.pk/story/576737/chilas-town-saving-honour-or-family-riches](http://tribune.com.pk/story/576737/chilas-town-saving-honour-or-family-riches)

14 [www.theguardian.com/world/video/2009/apr/02/swat-valley-flogging](http://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2009/apr/02/swat-valley-flogging)

15 [news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7984958.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7984958.stm)

Taliban's oppression during their period of control over the region.<sup>16</sup> She used the internet to speak for the rights of girls to education, which the Taliban had banned in Swat. She now stands recognised internationally with several peace awards.

Less famous, but no less significant, are examples of large numbers of women who have found ICT platforms to voice protest, opinion and advocacy to bring positive change. ICTs made it possible for these women to become a significant part of the national debate generated by the Swat flogging incident.

## Conclusion

The use of technology can be, and has been seen to be to a certain extent, catalytic in shifting gender roles in Pakistan. However, an acceleration of the process can only happen if technology is increasingly claimed and used to empower women with information and know-how on the processes of securing their rights, lives and livelihoods. It is imperative, therefore, to allow the internet to be democratic and provide amplification to progressive ideals/voices. A vocal civil society can help achieve women's empowerment, protection, and advocacy of their rights via ICTs. Through campaigns such as Take Back The Tech! activists must create avenues for monitoring, reporting and documenting abuses. Over time, raised awareness and a trail of evidence should lead to enhanced accountability and justice for women.

Bytes for All runs the successful Take Back The Tech! campaign in Pakistan, as well as Vawmap.pk where it monitors and reports cases of violence against women. Women are emboldened as a result of this work and have come forward to not just report violations, but to exert pressure on law enforcement agencies to bring the perpetrators to justice.

## Action steps

- A campaign to assert pressure on the government to urgently constitute the independent National Human Rights Commission. This commission is an international obligation for the government of Pakistan and will help provide remedies for women's rights abuses.
- Efforts to change the objectified perception and treatment of women to their treatment as individuals with equal capabilities, rights and responsibilities as men. The media and local authorities should be engaged to propagate the merits of households/communities where women are empowered.
- More investment is needed for initiatives to promote the education of the general public, and women themselves, on women's fundamental human rights, especially the right to access information (on legal protections, reporting violations of rights, effective legal recourse, etc.).
- Strengthen the voices of different networks and women's groups online, especially in cases of violation of their rights, enabling them to congregate quickly and effectively and exert pressure on the government and justice system to work for their rights.
- Encourage activism to promote the introduction of punitive legislation to protect women from ICT-based libel, propaganda, breach of privacy, harassment and other forms of violence.
- Introduce and strengthen sustainable technology platforms to establish mechanisms which women under threat can use to seek help. This can be a multi-stakeholder programme with nationwide reach, including international donors and local, national and regional partners. ■

<sup>16</sup> [www.theinternational.org/articles/447-malala-yousafzai-and-the-fight-for-young](http://www.theinternational.org/articles/447-malala-yousafzai-and-the-fight-for-young)



# PERU

Women against violence: Using the internet as a tool for collaboration and advocacy



**Red Científica Peruana  
and Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú**  
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## Introduction

Violence against women is a violation of human rights, and an expression of power, domination and control over their bodies and lives. Such violence restricts the enjoyment of rights such as equality, freedom, autonomy and integrity. This violence includes rape and abduction, femicide, domestic violence, gendered bullying and sexual harassment in the street, and can be physical and psychological. The internet, as a social phenomenon, has been an arena for violence against women. This includes psychological violence (such as cyber bullying) or the active encouragement of physical violence (with hate pages, for example). But the internet is also being used to combat violence against women by different actors, such as civil society organisations (CSOs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), governments and academics. This report presents experiences of using the internet to combat violence against women in Peru.

## Policy and political background

According to Lisbeth Guillén, from the organisation Manuela Ramos and an expert on political and civic participation, in recent years Peru has made many advances in formal aspects related with the recognition of the rights of women. One example is the approval of the National Plan for Gender Equality 2012-2017. Recent developments in this plan include the recognition of the right of inheritance for unmarried couples and the announcement that political candidates will be alternated by gender when represented on the candidates list. However, she said, it is necessary to see if these provisions become national government policies and whether or not institutions actually implement the policies, especially in rural areas where the state has no presence and where inequality and exclusion are most often seen.

In addition to the abovementioned policy, there is the law dealing with equal opportunity between

men and women passed in 2007, which is showing significant progress in its recent implementation, and the recognition of the crime of femicide and the current debate over hate crimes. However, according to PROMSEX lawyer Brenda Alvarez, the government is ignoring setting targets related to sexual and reproductive rights, which is one of the main concerns about the implementation of gender equality policies.

While the use of ICTs has grown amongst young women in recent years, reaching 35% of the female population over six years of age,<sup>1</sup> its potential for changes related to new opportunities for women in society is not yet clear, especially in rural areas. According to Andrea García from the project *Nuevas Trenzas* (“New Braids”),<sup>2</sup> mobile phones are presented as a tool that provides an opportunity to help young women break their isolation – but the evidence for this is not yet sufficient.

## Getting support through using social networks

Colectivo P.U.T.A.S. was formed in June 2011 to organise the *Marcha de las Putas de Lima* (Lima’s “SlutWalk”),<sup>3</sup> maybe the first Peruvian demonstration against sexual harassment in the street. One of the members of the group was informed about the SlutWalk movement by a friend in Buenos Aires. She then created a Facebook page<sup>4</sup> and invited several friends; soon the word of mouth (through email and Facebook chat) took effect and approximately 20 women met. They constituted themselves as a collective with responsibilities for communication, logistics and finance, in order to organise the Lima SlutWalk. A Facebook event page<sup>5</sup> was used to call for participation in the SlutWalk (in November 2011) and their Twitter account was a trending topic two days before the demonstration. Around 500 people marched for more than 50 blocks in the demonstration. After that, activity slowed down for a while and some members left the group, but four months later they started to work again. They asked for

1 [www.inei.gob.pe](http://www.inei.gob.pe)

2 [www.nuevastrenzas.org/es](http://www.nuevastrenzas.org/es)

3 [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SlutWalk](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SlutWalk)

4 [www.facebook.com/Colectivo.PUTAS](http://www.facebook.com/Colectivo.PUTAS)

5 [www.facebook.com/events/191506574254232](http://www.facebook.com/events/191506574254232)



volunteers on Facebook and used a Google form to get their information. With new volunteers they organised the second SlutWalk.

After this they formed Apala,<sup>6</sup> a CSO which aims to work on issues to do with violence against women. This initiative appears to be needed because they received lots of complaints from women. Now they are looking to be able to provide psychological, social and/or legal support. They also use Twitter for sharing information.<sup>7</sup> Their main achievement is that they allow women's issues to be heard – not only through demonstrations but also at media and academic meetings. This includes the problem of being harassed by men in public places. They have met with some resistance from Lima's local government and from the Women's Secretariat, which tracks what happens on social networks. They have also been criticised because of their name ("puta" means prostitute or slut, but the acronym P.U.T.A.S. also stands for the Spanish phrase "for an authentic transformation of society"). They are subject to the negative comments of trolls and several aggressive debates have taken place on Facebook.

*Paremos el Acoso Callejero* (Stop Street Sexual Harassment) is an action-research project funded by the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (PUCP) and directed by lecturer Elizabeth Vallejo. The issue of sexual harassment in the street had not been addressed by either academics or political groups before the project concept was presented in 2011. It had not even been considered a problem by most of society or the media, except when violent harassment occurred. The project started in February 2012 as a virtual observatory drawing on the participation of several volunteers who are students in different departments at PUCP. Their objective was to expose the problem. In order to do this they set up a blog<sup>8</sup> to explain issues around sexual harassment in the street, and a Facebook page<sup>9</sup> which they use as a communication platform.

The Facebook page has proven to be their most useful tool; according to Vallejo, "Everything goes on Facebook." They also use Twitter,<sup>10</sup> mostly to let followers know what is going on during events, and a mapping tool<sup>11</sup> which allows people to record incidents of harassment. This mapping tool – which was launched in February 2013 – has been successful in getting hundreds of posts.

However, the initiative has faced two major problems: the first is trolling on its Facebook page, and the other is that they cannot do anything more with reports of harassment than provide some psychological support and recommend passing on the report to a limited number of institutions, such as the women's police, DEMUNAS<sup>12</sup> or Warmi Wasi.<sup>13</sup>

They have still achieved a lot in just over a year, however. The issue is now reported on by the media, and Vallejo and other project members have participated in several TV and radio shows. One of the objectives is to raise awareness in the academic community, and several students are writing their dissertations about the issue. Now there is statistical data on sexual harassment in the street,<sup>14</sup> and this is having some political impact on Lima's local government. The project has also achieved some results by using social networks to criticise the actions of private companies that implicitly justify or promote sexual harassment. For example, they forced a retraction from TV Channel 2 for a show on "flirtatious remarks"<sup>15</sup> and changes to the design of a men's toilet in a restaurant.<sup>16</sup> Given that this successful project is now coming to its end, they are also considering building a civil society organisation in order to continue to pursue the issue.

*Justicia para Jhinna* (Justice for Jhinna) is a campaign by CHS Alternativa,<sup>17</sup> an NGO that works against human trafficking. It has been using the internet for dissemination since 2009, first through a website and then a YouTube channel.<sup>18</sup> In 2007, Jhinna Pinchi was lured into working at a men's club (the nightclub *La Noche*) in Piura, where she was forced to stay and work, letting clients buy her beer and acting as a prostitute. She was able to escape and report the business and its owner for her abduction in September 2009. During the two years that she was held in captivity, she was drugged and raped. She also fell pregnant and gave birth there. Most victims of human trafficking cannot escape and those who escape do not report the crime. This makes Jhinna's case unique – and was the reason she has been supported by CHS since they learned about her plight in November 2009. There had

6 [www.facebook.com/AsociacionApala](http://www.facebook.com/AsociacionApala)

7 [twitter.com/ApalaPeru](https://twitter.com/ApalaPeru)

8 [paremoselacosocallejero.wordpress.com](http://paremoselacosocallejero.wordpress.com)

9 [www.facebook.com/paremoselacosocallejero](http://www.facebook.com/paremoselacosocallejero)

10 [twitter.com/noacosocalles](https://twitter.com/noacosocalles)

11 [datea.pe/#/mapeo/49](http://datea.pe/#/mapeo/49)

12 Municipal Ombudsman for Children and Adolescents

13 A municipal programme that helps women, children and older adults affected by domestic, sexual and/or gender-based violence. Warmi Wasi means "Women's House" in Quechua.

14 [puntoedu.pucp.edu.pe/noticias/encuesta-acoso-sexual-callejero](http://puntoedu.pucp.edu.pe/noticias/encuesta-acoso-sexual-callejero)

15 [paremoselacosocallejero.wordpress.com/nosotros/que-estamos-haciendo](http://paremoselacosocallejero.wordpress.com/nosotros/que-estamos-haciendo)

16 [www.facebook.com/paremoselacosocallejero/posts/271659566277859](http://www.facebook.com/paremoselacosocallejero/posts/271659566277859)

17 [www.chsalternativo.org](http://www.chsalternativo.org)

18 [www.youtube.com/user/tratadepersonas](http://www.youtube.com/user/tratadepersonas)

been delays in the judicial response to the case, which motivated CHS to work on a campaign to get public attention. The campaign started with a documentary called *La Noche de Jhinna* (Jhinna's Night),<sup>19</sup> first shown in September 2011. Through this they received media attention which helped to secure protection for Jhinna through a programme run by the Public Prosecutor's Office. In April 2012, CHS started the second phase of the campaign by opening a Facebook page<sup>20</sup> and getting the support of personalities such as politicians, journalists and artists. They use Facebook as their main platform for sharing information, which also serves as a gateway to access other campaign content, such as newspaper articles, photos of famous supporters (in meme style) or news of the case.

The first-level courts declared the bar owner not guilty. Because of this the campaign is looking for social, media and political support to continue fighting in the higher courts. CHS considers the media attention, the public demonstrations in Piura, and the fact that the case was covered by international channels such as CNN as their main achievements. Jhinna continues living under protection – meaning that she is not free – while she waits for justice to be served.

Another organisation, PROMSEX, has relied mainly on social networks and web platforms for campaigns and political action and to disseminate research and publications on women's sexual rights. Social media is considered very important for them to join forces with other groups. For example, advocacy for the approval of a therapeutic abortion protocol was carried out with a Facebook fan page called PATA (Therapeutic Abortion Protocol Now)<sup>21</sup> that was developed with other feminist organisations. It attracted more than 20,000 fans in a month of campaigning. In the same vein, they are developing another initiative called "Let Her Decide",<sup>22</sup> a campaign aimed at the decriminalisation of abortion in cases of rape, and seeking signatures to put a bill before Congress. In this case two additional tools have also been used: Twitter and YouTube. However, Facebook is the most effective channel so far. This campaign requires the collection of signatures from the public in the street. Social networking is helping PROMSEX to

join forces with different activist groups and students who come into contact with the initiative and offer their support.

## Conclusions

These experiences show that the internet – especially internet-based social networking applications – have been a useful tool to raise awareness and achieve visibility for women's rights campaigns, and also express the voices of different groups against violence against women. These tools have proven to be useful when promoting participation in street demonstrations or other kinds of events; it is obvious that clicking on the "Going" button on a Facebook event page does not mean that the person will actually attend, and organisers of events should be aware of this, but social networks help with providing information about events and motivating people to attend them.

The internet and social networks have been the main tools used in positioning sexual harassment in the street as an issue in the media and in academia in Peru. The problem of this form of harassment is now known, thanks to the many testimonies, videos, opinions and discussions launched through social networks.

Online geographic data on crimes is shared through social networks and is useful to prevent people from going to unsafe places. Mobile phones have been used as a tool for defence when used with an internet-connected camera to publicly expose the faces and behaviour of the aggressors.

Now the public, politicians, media and public servants, among others, can easily get information on cases of violence against women, not because of the number of cases but because they are available on the internet. The information is created by interested actors and shared through social networks. This helps to increase consciousness about the problem, but does not necessarily help to avoid the problem.

Changing public policy is far more difficult than getting support through social media. For this to happen, more media support – including social media support – is necessary. Accurate statistical data and contacts with policy makers are also needed. Problems should be heard in the traditional media and policy makers should receive the right information at the right moment.

The recent commitment made by the president of the Council of Ministers to initiate actions to combat street harassment is proof of how this campaign

19 [www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=1b\\_29QohSbg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=1b_29QohSbg)

20 [www.facebook.com/JusticiaparaJhinna](http://www.facebook.com/JusticiaparaJhinna)

21 [www.facebook.com/protocoloabortoteraeutico.peru](http://www.facebook.com/protocoloabortoteraeutico.peru)

22 [www.facebook.com/dejaladecidir](http://www.facebook.com/dejaladecidir)

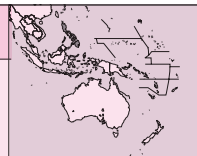
and the issues raised have come to be taken into account by the government.

### Action steps

- Track the actions that the government plans to implement to combat sexual harassment in the street.
- Complement virtual campaigns with actions in public spaces where incidents occur more frequently. For example, there is an initiative to place banners pointing to buildings under construction saying “Here We Respect Women”.
- It is necessary to develop the capacity to connect to the web regardless of the access tools available to the public. Access-friendly forms used to register complaints should be developed. But it is also necessary to develop the capacity to register cases using electronic tools – and *ad hoc* legislation reforms to support this should be made.
- Relevant public institutions such as the Women’s Ministry, local governments and the police should take into consideration the information collected through social networks or GIS tools to inform their policies and actions. ■

# PHILIPPINES

## Violence against women and children online



### Foundation for Media Alternatives (FMA)

Nina Somera

[www.fma.ph](http://www.fma.ph)

### Introduction

It is not uncommon to see movie producers, talent managers and television hosts and newscasters become political kingmakers. But rarely do we find show business influencing policy making, especially around women's human rights and gender equality – and this in less than six months.

Back in 2009, the country was gripped by yet another spectacle that involved personalities whose glamorous lifestyles alone had been fodder for conversations of admiration, awe and resentment, especially given the everyday context of poverty and inequality. Yet this spectacle was out of the ordinary. A dashing doctor, Hayden Kho, who was then in a relationship with another celebrity dermatologist and business magnate, who was two decades his senior, was found to have had trysts with at least three younger women actors and models. These were revealed in videos which were uploaded and distributed online, allegedly by former buddies who had grudges against him.

The incident exposed too much of the public personalities' private lives, demeaning anyone's sense of dignity, besmirching reputations and careers and, in the end, resulting in Republic Act 9995, otherwise known as the "Anti-Photo and Anti-Voyeurism Act of 2009".

The Hayden Kho controversy is just one of the more obvious manifestations of the link between women and information and communications technologies (ICTs), yet violence against women (VAW) and discrimination are ripe for discussion in any analysis of access to technologies and access to justice. Moreover, the presence of power relationships online brings to the fore the otherwise intellectual discourses around body and control. For Filipino women, these are less intellectual than practical choices.

### Policy and political background

The cases involving Hayden Kho are somehow instructive in the development of policies in general. Back in the 1990s, news on VAW involving wives, partners, parents against their own children, Filipino domestic

workers abroad, "mail order brides", young girls, among others, had influenced the crafting of national laws which are specific for women and girls. It also helped that the 1990s was a decade of conferences – and at least three of these have had a profound impact on women's human rights discourses. These conferences include one on human rights in 1993, where the resulting Vienna Declaration affirmed that women's rights are human rights and in no way could culture be used to deny a woman's exercise of her rights. The others were the 1995 World Conference on Women (Beijing Conference), which is responsible for the gender and development (GAD) framework and the recognition of the "girl child"; and the 1993 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) that affirmed sexual and reproductive health and rights. The Philippines played a key role in the drafting of the Beijing Platform of Action and, much earlier, in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).<sup>1</sup>

In the Philippines, these have been translated into several legal measures which include the 1992 Women in Development and Nation Building Act, the Anti-Rape Law of 1997, the Anti-Sexual Harassment Act of 1995, the Mail Order Bride Act, and later, the Anti-Trafficking of Persons Act of 2003, the Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children Act of 2004, and the Special Protection of Children Against Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act.<sup>2</sup>

- 1 Patricia Licuanan, currently the head of the Philippine Commission on Higher Education (CHED), was the co-chair of the Beijing Conference, while Senator Leticia Ramos Shahani was with the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) when she together with her Russian counterpart wrote the first drafts of CEDAW back in the 1970s.
- 2 Republic Act 6955: Mail Order Bride Law, 24 July 1989. [www.pcw.gov.ph/sites/default/files/documents/laws/republic\\_act\\_6955.pdf](http://www.pcw.gov.ph/sites/default/files/documents/laws/republic_act_6955.pdf), Republic Act 7192: Women in Development and Nation Building Act, 22 July 1991. [www.pcw.gov.ph/sites/default/files/documents/laws/republic\\_act\\_7192.pdf](http://www.pcw.gov.ph/sites/default/files/documents/laws/republic_act_7192.pdf), Republic Act 7610: Special Protection of Children Against Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act, 22 July 1991. [www.pcw.gov.ph/sites/default/files/documents/laws/republic\\_act\\_7610.pdf](http://www.pcw.gov.ph/sites/default/files/documents/laws/republic_act_7610.pdf), Republic Act 7877: Anti-Sexual Harassment Act of 1995, 25 July 1995. [www.pcw.gov.ph/sites/default/files/documents/laws/republic\\_act\\_7877.pdf](http://www.pcw.gov.ph/sites/default/files/documents/laws/republic_act_7877.pdf), Republic Act 8353: Anti-Rape Law of 1997, 28 July 1997. [www.pcw.gov.ph/sites/default/files/documents/laws/republic\\_act\\_8353.pdf](http://www.pcw.gov.ph/sites/default/files/documents/laws/republic_act_8353.pdf), Republic Act 8505: Rape Victim Assistance and Protection Act of 1998, 28 July 1997. [www.pcw.gov.ph/sites/default/files/documents/laws/republic\\_act\\_8505.pdf](http://www.pcw.gov.ph/sites/default/files/documents/laws/republic_act_8505.pdf), Republic Act 9208: Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act, 22 July 2003. [www.pcw.gov.ph/sites/default/files/documents/laws/republic\\_act\\_9208.pdf](http://www.pcw.gov.ph/sites/default/files/documents/laws/republic_act_9208.pdf), Republic Act 9262: Anti-Violence Against Women and their Children Act of 2004, 8 March 2004. [www.pcw.gov.ph/law/republic-act-9262](http://www.pcw.gov.ph/law/republic-act-9262)

The 1992 Women in Development and Nation Building Act confers equal rights and opportunities for both women and men, supporting the right of women to enter into contracts and workplaces, including the government, and to enrol at educational institutions including the Philippines Military Academy. The law also mandates government offices to allot a substantial portion of official development assistance to projects for women. The Anti-Rape Law of 1997 amends the former definition of rape as a crime against chastity into a crime against the person, punishable by up to 30 years imprisonment or death. The law also covers marital rape. In support of the Anti-Rape Law of 1997, RA 8505, or the Act Providing Assistance and Protection for Victims, was approved. RA 8505 mandates the establishment of crisis centres in every province and city that would provide medical, psychological and other kinds of assistance to rape survivors. The Anti-Sexual Harassment Act of 1995 prohibits sexual harassment in workplaces, educational and training institutions.<sup>3</sup> The Mail Order Bride Act prohibits practices of matching Filipino women to foreigners for marriage. It also bans the advertisement of women for this market.

The Anti-Trafficking of Persons Act of 2003 penalises the “recruitment, transportation, transfer or harboring, or receipt of persons” resulting in exploitation such as forced labour and sexual slavery. In trafficking, recruitment involves deceit, as victims are usually made to believe they have prospects of employment. Persons operating this business may receive punishment of up to 15 years imprisonment and fines ranging from PHP 500,000 (around USD 11,500) to PHP 1,000,000 (USD 23,000). Persons who engage the services of trafficked persons are likewise held liable under this law.

The Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children Act of 2004 covers various forms of violence. Aside from consolidating provisions from the Anti-Rape Law of 1997 and the Family Courts Act of 1997, the law also includes provisions on economic abuse or acts which make women financially dependent on perpetrators as well as harassment. Under the law, women who are found to be suffering from “battered wife syndrome” or those who experience a “scientifically defined pattern of psychological and behavioral symptoms found in women living in battering relationships as a result of cumulative abuse” are not denied custody of their children. The Special Protection of Children Against Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act

prohibits all forms of child-targeted abuse, specifically addressing child prostitution, including child pornography.

While the law imposes stringent penalties on various forms of child abuse, its weakness manifests in child pornography over the internet. Cases against operators of online pornography may only be filed with the physical presence of children who are involved. A different but allied dilemma is faced in cases involving women who were involved in so-called online sex dens, which in the earlier days were run mostly by expatriates who could afford computers and fast internet connections. The women who were involved were usually arrested and charged for obscenity, while foreign operators could easily slip out of the country.

The year 2009 indeed marked a change in these laws with the Anti-Photo and Video Voyeurism Act and the Anti-Child Pornography Act (RA 9779), which now covers online pornography involving children. Until the cases involving Kho, stories of women whose nude pictures and sexual acts had been shot without their consent remained mere montages which had been packaged into DVDs and inconspicuously sold among pirated movies. On several occasions, these “scandals” had been linked to universities where the parties were allegedly enrolled as students or where the acts supposedly happened. After being talked about and, at times, reported in mainstream media, none of the masterminds, particularly in instances when women did not give their consent, were prosecuted, much less punished.

It was also in the same year that the Philippine Congress passed RA 9710 or the Magna Carta of Women (MCW), which is meant to serve as a framework for all laws related to women and girls. The salient points of MCW include the renaming of the National Commission for the Role of Filipino Women (NCRFW) to the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW), which signals a shift from a women in development (WID) paradigm into one that suggests women’s sense of ownership of a space within the bureaucracy. The MCW also provides equal access and elimination of discrimination in education, scholarships and training. This provision prohibits any school from dismissing and expelling students who became pregnant out of wedlock.

## Analysis

These laws are indeed a boon to many women and girls across the country. However, there is a big gap between the fine print and the implementation of laws on the ground, which entails the adequate

3 Unfortunately, this law is quite limited in scope as it does not cover sexual harassment that takes place outside workplaces and schools even as power relationships are involved.



infrastructure, clear processes and genuine political will. The three laws passed in 2009 – the Anti-Photo and Video Voyeurism Act, the Anti-Child Pornography Act and the MCW – were crafted and processed at a time when people’s confidence in the government was at its lowest and, as a result, the administration had the tendency to redeem itself from time to time based on what was popular.

Take for instance the MCW. While this was legislation that was obviously for women and girls, its authors chose not to define “gender”, which is critical particularly in addressing the power relationships that develop between the sexes, and foster gender-based discrimination and violence. Such a glaring lack has been attributed to the interventions by the Catholic hierarchy in the legislative process – earlier texts of the legislation referred to same-sex partnerships and reproductive health. As her administration was wracked by crisis around legitimacy, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo had the tendency to both court and appease the religious orders. As Ana Maria Nemenzo of WomanHealth expressed: “I am so disgusted and frustrated with the intervention of the church in corrupting a secular and credible legislative process.”

Meanwhile, the Anti-Child Pornography Act was easily lauded by child rights groups but its content and implementation can potentially curtail communication rights, as the law provides for content filtering that can also be used for censorship. Such finer aspects of the law were hardly deliberated.

It is important to note that it was the Arroyo administration that oversaw the passage of several laws related to ICTs, including the creation of institutions such as the Department of ICT. However, the administration, being a staunch ally of the right-wing government of US President George W. Bush, is also known for having attempted to curtail basic communication rights including freedom of expression, freedom of association and the right to privacy. For instance, in 2005, Arroyo ordered the authorities to exercise a “calibrated pre-emptive response” in managing street protests. Two years later, she supported the passage of the Human Security Act, which provides for warrantless arrests and surveillance as a means to deter terrorism. The earlier versions of the now controversial Cybercrime Law were likewise introduced during her administration.

## Access to justice

It is still too early to judge the efficacy of the Anti-Photo and Video Voyeurism Act. At the moment, a number of cases have been filed and

some are being heard in courts.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, hopes are high that it will be effective. The law forbids the recording of an individual without one’s knowledge, especially in compromising situations such as when one is nude or scantily clad, and the copying and distribution of such content, whether without a cost or for sale. The controversial Cybercrime Law, which has been widely criticised for its “take down” provisions or those which allow government agents to block libellous content, has provisions around protection of one’s privacy.

However, for the women’s political party, Gabriela, these supposedly protective provisions of the Cybercrime Law and the Anti-Photo and Video Voyeurism Act as a whole are not enough to address VAW online. For Gabriela, the latter only covers images despite there being other ways where ICTs can violate women’s human rights. Because of this, the party’s representatives in Congress filed a bill that amends the Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children Act of 2004 to include “electronic violence against women” or e-VAW. In the bill, e-VAW is defined as “any acts or omissions that involve the use or exploitation of information and communications technology (ICT) which causes or is likely to cause mental, emotional or psychological distress or suffering to the victim.”<sup>5</sup>

Aside from the limitations of existing laws, partly owing to the very history of how these have been crafted, there remain the more practical and immediate barriers in the country’s judicial system. Laws are still written in English, which is not accessible to the majority despite claims of the Philippines’ relatively high proficiency rates compared to other parts of Southeast Asia.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, tapping legal services is quite expensive and in the long haul can be equally damaging, especially in the absence of ancillary services such as counselling. Although the government has agencies which provide free legal advice and services as well as social work, the services needed in a VAW case are not comprehensive enough in terms of both frame-

4 The case filed against Kho was dismissed twice and with finality, as there was insufficient evidence to support that he was the one who uploaded the sex video that involves another actress. *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (2012) Hayden wins anew vs. Katrina, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 16 August. [newsinfo.inquirer.net/251392/hayden-wins-anew-vs-katrina](http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/251392/hayden-wins-anew-vs-katrina)

5 Gabriela Women’s Party Representatives Emmi De Jesus and Luzviminda C. Ilagan (2013) House Bill 6815, filed at the 15th Congress of the House of Representatives of the Philippines. [www.congress.gov.ph/download/basic\\_15/HBo6815.pdf](http://www.congress.gov.ph/download/basic_15/HBo6815.pdf)

6 Mendoza, S. (2012) PH: Best in the best business English, *Yahoo! News*, 25 April. [ph.news.yahoo.com/ph--world-s-best-country-in-business-english.html](http://ph.news.yahoo.com/ph--world-s-best-country-in-business-english.html)



work and implementation.<sup>7</sup> Feminist legal theory and practice are not mainstreamed enough, particularly at the legislative and judicial branches of the government. Similarly, psycho-social services, especially those which account for the economic needs of survivors of violence at a time when they are emotionally rehabilitating themselves and pursuing legal recourse, are not quite established.

### Morality in modernity

The relationship between gender and ICTs is likewise informed by morality as much as modernity. At the outset, the uproar over the controversy resulting from the sex videos which featured Hayden Kho and several women signified awareness over women's human rights. Sympathy for actress Katrina Halili – one of the women involved – was overwhelming, as her body and her sexual desires were exposed almost in a very permanent manner as it is quite possible to store and play the images of her trysts with Kho for generations to come. As one senator who used to be an actor described the series of events, the images “ruined the dignity and honour of this hapless woman.”

But this seems to be an overstatement that tends to belittle one's agency. To a certain extent, the support for Halili was backhanded, especially as she was seen as a desirable subject who seduced Kho who was in a relationship with a more than 50-year-old celebrity dermatologist who owns a PHP 1-billion business empire. Hence Halili was both a victim and a villain to the public that consumed the spectacle.

With this lens, the consensus over the violence against Halili is distorted, in that the focus was on her honour rather than her choice, which defines the boundary between pleasure and violence, between what she permitted and what she did not. It is interesting to note Halili's formal complaints against Kho were isolated to the act of uploading the videos, not the recording of them.

For the public, it still appears that there must be no room for pleasure, that if indeed it exists, it must be invested with love.<sup>8</sup> As Alankaar Sharma put it in *in plainspeak*: “It may be difficult to wrap our brain around this idea due to connotative values of the

two concepts. (...) Abuse is negative while pleasure is positive. (...) Pleasure is a terribly complex and multi-dimensional concept that refuses to fit so neatly into boxes.”<sup>9</sup> But the recognition of pleasure is actually critical in understanding the impact of violence on a body.

In many ways, the idea of morality still dictates how a sense of agency can be appreciated, particularly women's exercise of individual human rights, especially those related to their body, control and mobility and their supposed obligation to a community, especially through marriage and family life. Although “public morality” has been part of international human rights standards such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR),<sup>10</sup> it has never been defined objectively. Instead, its interpretation has relied on the dominant patriarchal and political order in a particular place at a particular time.<sup>11</sup> This also explains the evasion of the most intrinsic issues for women as well as gender and sexual minorities in the MCW. Aside from refusing to define “gender”, the final text did not bolster the chances of a progressive law on reproductive health, where women and girls are given the chance to obtain information on sexual and reproductive health and rights and plan and manage their pregnancies. It was only in early 2013, after 16 long years of advocacy and campaigning, that a reproductive health bill was passed.<sup>12</sup> Yet, at the time of writing, this new law is still being challenged in the country's Supreme Court.

### Rethinking agency online and offline

The controversy surrounding Hayden Kho indeed shows different dimensions in assessing the link between gender and ICTs and its corresponding policy processes. The haste in passing the Anti-Photo and Video Voyeurism Act can be read as a policy-making process that aims to catch up with the developments in technology. Narrowing the gap between the efficacy of laws and the pace of technology and subsequent updating also has implications for feminist and other social movements.

For several years now, women and young girls have outrun their male counterparts in education and

7 Defensor-Santiago, M. (2010) The Praxis of Gender Justice in the Philippines: Implications for Lawmaking, paper presented at the *Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA) Panel on Gender Justice and Women's Rights, Istanbul, Turkey, 24 October*. [miriam.com.ph/newsblog/?p=489](http://miriam.com.ph/newsblog/?p=489)

8 This also brings to mind the Karen Vertido rape case, which was dismissed by local courts because Vertido, who was already married and a mother, was found not to fit the image of a “rapable” woman. After all national remedies were exhausted, the case was elevated to the United Nations CEDAW Committee, which found the Philippine state remiss in administering justice.

9 Alankaar Sharma (2007) Focusing on the sexual in child abuse, *in plainspeak*, Issue 4.

10 Article 29.

11 Yuval-Davis, N. (1997) *Gender and Nation*, Sage, New York and London.

12 Analysts often say that unlike his predecessor, President Benigno Simeon Aquino III has political capital, beginning with his reputation, since he has never been implicated in any corruption case and other scandals, making him relatively more resilient and less dependent on some traditional power brokers such as the Catholic church.

employment. While science courses are still roughly dominated by men, there are far more women who finish high school and reach tertiary level. Cheaper communication tools such as Android phones, coupled with faster services, have made it easier for more people to be connected to the internet.

Such access has enabled more and more Filipino women to develop relationships with men online and later migrate to marriage. The dynamics remain essentially the same: women are typically younger while men are older, mostly blue collar workers in their own countries. However, there has been a significant change in the medium and reach of this way of communicating. The webcam has been quite a strategic tool in facilitating intimacy between parties. Placement agencies which process fiancé visas and marriage permits have heavily tapped this resource.

But the women tend to be more informed in using technologies compared with the previous generation, and have a better chance of obtaining information from the other party involved. In fact, even more educated and middle-class Filipino women such as Al Jazeera host Veronica Pedrosa and Broadway singer Lea Salonga have engaged in this form of courting. Meanwhile, men are no longer limited to the English-speaking Western countries such as the United States, Australia and some parts of Europe. Older men from East Asia are increasingly participating in online courting.

Moreover, the phenomenon challenges perspectives around migration, which becomes coupled with

so-called migratory “push factors” and marriage as a sacred institution. For years, the dominant discourse on labour migration has described women as devoid of agency because of the daunting responsibility of providing for their families. But there is reason to believe that migration, even urban migration, is increasingly becoming a choice – even when displacement and disempowerment occurs.

Similarly, one’s entry into a marriage is not necessarily informed by love but rather one’s own strategy in exercising mobility and uplifting one’s life. The latter is facilitated by better ways of accessing information and therefore calculating risks.

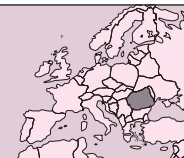
### Action steps

The agency women exercise in engaging in internet-facilitated migration in order to marry tests the victim approach of existing laws, such as those on mail-order brides and even trafficking, as well as feminist perspectives, including those on prostitution and sex work. As Tesa de Vela, former deputy director of Isis International asserts: “Development players are not here to judge why women go into marriage migration. The job of governments is to ensure that the rights and welfare of women are protected. The job of NGOs is to look into ways of supporting women wherever they may be. One way of achieving this is to accept the challenge to broaden or create multiple frames of analysis that is reflective of what women want and the life they choose.”<sup>13</sup> ■

13 Rina Jimenez David (26 October 2008). “Migrant women: wives and workers.” [services.inquirer.net/mobile/08/10/26/html\\_output/xmlhtml/20081026-168473-xml.html](http://services.inquirer.net/mobile/08/10/26/html_output/xmlhtml/20081026-168473-xml.html)

# ROMANIA

## Gender and ICTs: An untold story



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### Introduction

“Give a woman a CD-ROM and she will use it as a mirror”: this offensive statement epitomises Romanian media discourses on women in general, and in relation to technology in particular.<sup>1</sup> Either as elitist contempt or sexist humour, gender stereotyping is omnipresent in the Romanian public space. Critical reflection on gender equality remains hidden in the ivory tower of academic discourses and the backstage of civil society initiatives. Mihaela Miroiu, a prominent Romanian feminist scholar, explains: “While men are portrayed on the first pages of media outlets, women are only on the last pages; while men sell head – competence and performance, women sell full body – sexual services, and hands – care services. The best way for a woman to be uninteresting in the Romanian mediascape is to be either a professional, or a student.”<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, a new tone in the public discourse is conveyed by businesses targeted at urban professional women: glossy magazines and cosmetic companies’ websites portray successful, connected female entrepreneurs. However, even the new wave of media discourse is loaded with gender stereotypes: “digital divas”<sup>3</sup> must be young and attractive.

This report focuses on the ways in which online media from Romania portrays women in relation to information and communications technologies (ICTs).

### Policy and political background: “Room-service feminism”

In a strongly worded article on the status of Romanian women, Miroiu<sup>4</sup> argues that in post-socialist

countries a new patriarchy has developed, a “political apartheid” excluding women from key public positions. Meanwhile, European Union (EU) accession has imposed formal, convenience, top-down gender equality policies called “room-service feminism” by the author.<sup>5</sup>

A shadow report submitted in 2000 by 17 Romanian women and human rights NGOs to the United Nation’s Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) stated that gender equality issues are marginalised in Romania after the fall of Communism. Poor resource allocation and a lack of interest amongst opinion leaders has resulted in a “serious deficit in defining and approaching the situation of women, and in identifying the causes and formulating the strategies and policies for the improvement of this situation.”<sup>6</sup>

The Communist regime in Romania collapsed in 1990, but it took 12 years to regulate sexual harassment in the country (Law 202/2002). Although the legislative framework improved significantly<sup>7</sup> during Romania’s accession to the EU from 2000 to 2006, gender mainstreaming remained a low priority on the public agenda. Women’s issues “popped up” mainly when high profile personalities were involved.

On 18 June 2013 a media scandal emerged when Romanian President Traian Basescu declared at a meeting with businesswomen, suggesting that they should return to their traditional roles as mothers: “How on earth can Roma women raise five, six children, while Romanian women cannot?”<sup>8</sup> As a result, several NGOs have publicly protested and 12 women together with human rights organisations submitted a petition to the Romanian Council for Combatting Discrimination.<sup>9</sup> The petition expressed concerns related to discriminating against women in general, Roma women in particular, and to perpetuating gender stereotypes.

1 [www.thesexist.ro/femeite-si-tehnologia-386.html](http://www.thesexist.ro/femeite-si-tehnologia-386.html)

2 Miroiu, M. (2005) Sex si maini si cap si muschi, *Revista* 22. [www.revista22.ro/sex-si-maini-cap-si-muschi-1594.html](http://www.revista22.ro/sex-si-maini-cap-si-muschi-1594.html)

3 [www.digitaldivas.ro/2013](http://www.digitaldivas.ro/2013)

4 Miroiu, M. (2004) State men, market women: The effects of left conservatism on gender politics in Romanian transition, *Feminismo/s*, 3, p. 207-234. [rua.ua.es/dspace/bitstream/10045/3243/1/Feminismos\\_3\\_14.pdf](http://rua.ua.es/dspace/bitstream/10045/3243/1/Feminismos_3_14.pdf)

5 *Ibid.*, p. 215.

6 [www.legislationline.org/documents/id/7703](http://www.legislationline.org/documents/id/7703)

7 As shown in the Romanian CEDAW report submitted in 2006: [www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/35sess.htm](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/35sess.htm)

8 [www.wall-street.ro/articol/Social/150548/mai-multe-ong-uri-cer-sanctionarea-lui-basescu-pentru-declaratii-discriminatorii-despre-femei.html](http://www.wall-street.ro/articol/Social/150548/mai-multe-ong-uri-cer-sanctionarea-lui-basescu-pentru-declaratii-discriminatorii-despre-femei.html)

9 On 3 July 2013 the Romanian Council for Combatting Discrimination ruled that no discrimination had been committed.

One of the protesting organisations represented Roma women via its Facebook campaigning platform called eRomnja.<sup>10</sup> Roma women are among the most disadvantaged social groups in Romania, with the highest rate of illiteracy and unemployment, and the lowest level of ICT use.<sup>11</sup> A survey conducted in 2011 found that only 19% of Roma households owned a desktop or a laptop computer,<sup>12</sup> compared to the 52.9% country average.<sup>13</sup> Very few visible projects have tackled the issue of Roma women and ICTs, and those that have been implemented have met with mixed success. For example, an EU-funded initiative aimed at improving access for Roma women to the labour market (2009-2011) succeeded in training only 11 Roma women from two Romanian counties in using computers.<sup>14</sup>

Measuring access to ICTs in a gender-sensitive way using gender indicators is a key issue for the developmental agenda, but gender-aggregated information on a macro level is scarce. Gender and ICT statistics are collected inconsistently across countries and regions.<sup>15</sup> For the gender gap index, the World Economic Forum has developed a composite measurement called the Global Gender Gap Index or GGGI: Romania ranked 67th out of 135 countries in 2012, with better scores for economic participation, education levels and health, but lagging far behind other countries in the field of political empowerment.<sup>16</sup>

### From gender equality to digital inclusion?

At the lower end of the digital opportunities spectrum in Romania stand elderly Roma women, most of them living in rural areas; the higher end is represented by young, urban, connected businesswomen – the “digital divas”.

A project website called “Digital Divas” features, at its very centre, a man:<sup>17</sup> no matter how successful one is as a woman, there must be a guardian, a male key figure offering a warranty of quality, reliability and validity of the discourse.

But how connected are digital divas?

### The gender gap and the digital divide: Romania in the European context

A comparative analysis of 31 European countries using a gender and ICT indicator system called GIC-TIS, conducted by Spanish researchers in 2011, has resulted in a ranking that combines gender equality and digital inclusion.<sup>18</sup> The authors explain that gender equality has moved forward in recent years, but further research is needed to find out whether the gender gap coincides with the digital divide.

European countries were grouped into five categories:

- High e-inclusion and high e-equality: Iceland, Finland, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and to a lesser extent France, Slovenia and the Netherlands.
- High e-inclusion and low e-equality: Luxembourg, Germany and the United Kingdom.
- Medium e-inclusion and e-equality: Hungary, Malta, Portugal and Slovakia.
- Low e-inclusion and high e-equality: Romania, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, and to a lesser extent, Poland and Belgium.
- Low e-inclusion and low e-equality: Greece, Cyprus, Macedonia, Croatia, and to a lesser extent, Italy, Ireland and Spain.<sup>19</sup>

Romania ranked 13th out of 31 on the e-equality scale – measuring gender differences in access to ICTs – but last on the e-inclusion scale, which assesses the level of ICT use in general.

Another study aimed at comparing EU countries in terms of gender equality and digital inclusion has found significant improvements in women’s access to ICTs across Europe from 2009 to 2011, but Romania ranked the lowest among the 27 countries assessed.<sup>20</sup> Overall, ICT use in Romania lags behind other EU member states, but there are significant differences between the young and the elderly, the urban and the rural, the educated and the less educated people in the country. The typical Romanian non-ICT user lives in a rural area, is older than 55, has not completed high school, and is more likely to be a woman. The broadband penetration rate measured

10 [www.facebook.com/pages/E-Romnja/488288607894622](http://www.facebook.com/pages/E-Romnja/488288607894622)

11 Nagy, E. (2010) Esetbemutató: egy roma család számítógép- és internet-használati szokásai, *Reconnect*, 2(2), p. 138-141.

12 [www.feminism-romania.ro/publicatii/rapoarte/672-studiu-sociologic-privind-situatia-femeilor-rome-din-romania.html](http://www.feminism-romania.ro/publicatii/rapoarte/672-studiu-sociologic-privind-situatia-femeilor-rome-din-romania.html)

13 International Telecommunication Union (2012) *Measuring the Information Society*, p. 209.

14 [www.fonduri-structurale.ro/detalii.aspx?eID=5445&t=Stiri](http://www.fonduri-structurale.ro/detalii.aspx?eID=5445&t=Stiri)

15 Hafkin, N. J. and Huyer, S. (2007) Women and Gender in ICT: Statistics and Indicators for Development, *Information Technologies and International Development*, 4(2), p. 27.

16 Hausmann R., Tyson, L. and Zahidi, S. (2012) *The Global Gender Gap Report 2012*, World Economic Forum, p. 9-10.

17 [comunic.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/digital-divas-screenshot.png](http://comunic.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/digital-divas-screenshot.png)

18 Castano Collado, C., Fernández, J. M. and Martínez, J. L. (2011) The digital divide from a gender perspective in Spain and Europe: Measuring with composite indicators, *Reis*, 136, p. 127-140.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 136.

20 Guerrieri, P. and Bentivegna, S. (2011) Digital Inequalities in Europe, in Guerrieri, P. and Bentivegna, S. (eds.) *The Economic Impact of Digital Technologies: Measuring Inclusion and Diffusion in Europe*, Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham, p. 115.

for Romanian households was 45.2% for fixed and 37.4% for mobile connections in 2012, with significant differences between urban and rural areas.<sup>21</sup>

As suggested, the level of gender mainstreaming in assessing the digital divide is absent from public discourse in Romania. However, there is a growing interest in the business sector in the issue of women and ICTs: a niche market of women as gadget users is developing in the country.

The EU Kids Online Romanian report has raised concerns about the low level of e-literacy among parents, leading to children's vulnerability online. Growing numbers of girls as victims, and – unexpectedly – as e-bullying offenders,<sup>22</sup> have shown that education has a long way to go for the new wave of “digital immigrants”.<sup>23</sup>

### *Women and technology in Romanian online discourses*

Access for Romanian women to the public sphere is limited: Romina Surugiu, a media expert, argues that they are more bystanders than active participants. Because of this, political parties do not include women's problems on their agendas. The media tend to follow the public agenda set by political leaders, ignoring most of the topics important to women's lives.<sup>24</sup>

A simple web search with the keywords “women” and “information technology” in the Romanian language shows a wide range of business, media and NGO initiatives tackling the issue of gender and ICTs. Businesses are the key drivers of economic development and innovation in Romania, and therefore it is not surprising that women and technology issues are promoted mainly by the media and ICT companies.

In 2012, *MarketWatch* magazine initiated the “Women in Technology” awards. Five awards have been established for Romanian women: “Successful career in ICTs”, with a business and a technical track; “Promoting organisational diversity”; “The best initiative in sustaining women in ICTs”; and “Women entrepreneurship in ICTs”.<sup>25</sup> The award winners were women managers from branches of

multinational companies set up in Romania, and from an organisation founded in 2012 called Girls in Tech Romania, a branch of an international network established in San Francisco in 2007.<sup>26</sup>

An NGO – Institute for Sustainable Development – has featured as topic of the month “Women and Technology”, highlighting the role women managers play in international corporations in general, and in ICT businesses in particular. High-profile CEOs like Virginia Rometty (IBM), Marissa Mayer (Yahoo), or Meg Whitman (HP) are set as role models for Romanian businesswomen.<sup>27</sup>

Glossy women's magazines encourage readers to use gadgets customised for women,<sup>28</sup> while others promote young and successful women in technology,<sup>29</sup> highlighting those who are “sexy and bright”.<sup>30</sup> Technology and attractive women sell – at least according to the mindset of a patriarchal society, even if disguised in “room-service feminist” discourses.<sup>31</sup>

The “E-lady” online discussion forum has a more pragmatic approach, and an educational purpose: to share ICT information among women. Topics vary from general computer use issues to blogging, phishing and internet safety.<sup>32</sup>

Two academic initiatives worth mentioning in changing the tone of the mainstream discourse on women and ICTs are the DigiTales project and the Catalogue of Ads Offending Women. Both have been coordinated by universities, but targeted at civil society actors at large; these are presented in the next section of this report.

### *Empowering women through ICTs: Good practices*

The DigiTales project, initiated in 2012 and coordinated by Goldsmiths, University of London, involved civil society organisations from Romania, Slovenia and Finland, and was aimed at extending the creative practices of elderly people through digital storytelling.<sup>33</sup> In Romania, 14 librarians from 12

21 Autoritatea Nationala pentru Administrare si Reglementare in Comunicatii (2013) *Piata serviciilor de comunicatii electronice din Romania. Raport de date statistice pentru perioada 1 iulie – 31 decembrie 2012*, p. 41.

22 Outnumbering boys.

23 Velicu, A. (2013) Violence on the internet: Victims versus bullies, paper presented at the New Media Conference, Targu Mures, Romania, 12-13 April.

24 Surugiu, R. (2012) “Glossy” politicians: Portraying women politicians in Romanian consumer magazines, in *Challenges of the Knowledge Society: Conference Proceedings*, Pro Universitaria, Bucharest, p. 1930.

25 [www.computerblog.ro/dan/romania/premiile-femei-tehnologie.html](http://www.computerblog.ro/dan/romania/premiile-femei-tehnologie.html)

26 [gitromania.com/about](http://gitromania.com/about)

27 [www.imdd.ro/media/subiectul-lunii/femei-tehnologie-547](http://www.imdd.ro/media/subiectul-lunii/femei-tehnologie-547)

28 [www.unica.ro/detalii-articole/articole/it-gadgeturi-aplicatii-mobile-smartphone-special-femei-32570.html](http://www.unica.ro/detalii-articole/articole/it-gadgeturi-aplicatii-mobile-smartphone-special-femei-32570.html)

29 [gadgetrends.ro/2013/04/29/cele-mai-importante-30-de-femei-sub-30-de-ani-din-tehnologie](http://gadgetrends.ro/2013/04/29/cele-mai-importante-30-de-femei-sub-30-de-ani-din-tehnologie)

30 [www.yoda.ro/hardware/sunt-sexy-si-geniale-13-femei-fatale-care-au-cucerit-lumea-sutelor-de-miliarde-de-dolari-din-tehnologie.html](http://www.yoda.ro/hardware/sunt-sexy-si-geniale-13-femei-fatale-care-au-cucerit-lumea-sutelor-de-miliarde-de-dolari-din-tehnologie.html)

31 [incomemagazine.ro/articles/tehnologie-performanta-si-femei-frumoase-intr-un-spatiu-deposit](http://incomemagazine.ro/articles/tehnologie-performanta-si-femei-frumoase-intr-un-spatiu-deposit)

32 [www.elady.ro/forums/index.php?act=SF&s=&f=44](http://www.elady.ro/forums/index.php?act=SF&s=&f=44)

33 Rooke, A. and Slater, I. (2012) *Extending Creative Practice. Final Evaluation Report*, Goldsmiths, University of London, p. 11-13. [www.gold.ac.uk/media/Extending%20Creative%20Practice%20Evaluation%20Report.pdf](http://www.gold.ac.uk/media/Extending%20Creative%20Practice%20Evaluation%20Report.pdf)



county libraries have been trained to teach digital storytelling. As a result, 105 elderly people have learned to use a computer, most of them women. The tangible output was a series of 99 “DigiTales” created by trainees, and facilitated by trainers.<sup>34</sup>

Another empowering project was the online campaign organised by the feminist centre Filia, from the National School of Political Science and Public Administration, Bucharest: “Say No to Offensive Advertising”.<sup>35</sup> In 2012 the group published a catalogue of ads considered offensive towards women; the booklet is available online.<sup>36</sup>

No doubt there are many more civil society initiatives in Romania aimed at empowering women in general, and in relation to ICTs in particular. However, these projects and actions are not vocal enough and do not reach large audiences.

## Conclusions

Romania’s level of access to ICTs is improving rapidly, but it is still lagging behind other European countries. The typical digitally excluded person in the country is older than 55, lives in a rural area, has not completed high school, and is more likely to be a woman.

As the 2000 CEDAW report put it, “Media is not gender-sensitive; therefore it has no contribution to the definition of the general problems of women in Romanian contemporary society or to the formulation of possible measures and actions for improving their status.”<sup>37</sup> Women and ICTs are still an untold story.

Online media discourses in Romania are loaded with gender stereotypes, even when hidden between glossy covers for urban, connected digital divas. Behind “room-service feminism” rests a patriarchal society, but ICTs offer spaces and tools for change.

## Action steps

According to the Gender Evaluation Methodology (GEM) principles<sup>38</sup> developed by the Association for Progressive Communications (APC), participatory critical reflection and a methodologically sound, context- and gender-sensitive approach to women and ICTs are necessary.

In Romania, projects like DigiTales and Say No to Offensive Advertising should be promoted more broadly and replicated in order to empower women through ICTs.

Civil society organisations should stand up more often and more consistently against gender stereotyping and discrimination against women, with a special regard to vulnerable groups like Roma women.

Local, national and international projects on gender and ICTs should connect through the platforms and tools of the interactive web. New media can carry a new, inclusive discourse: bridges are there. ■

34 [www.progressfoundation.ro/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=95&Itemid=227](http://www.progressfoundation.ro/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=95&Itemid=227)

35 [nupublicitatiiofensatoare.blogspot.ro](http://nupublicitatiiofensatoare.blogspot.ro)

36 [www.scribd.com/doc/134511271/Catalogul-reclamelor-ofensatoare](http://www.scribd.com/doc/134511271/Catalogul-reclamelor-ofensatoare)

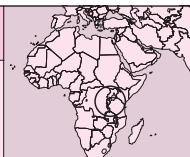
37 [www.legislationline.org/documents/id/7703](http://www.legislationline.org/documents/id/7703)

38 [www.genderevaluation.net/sites/default/files/sites/dev.genderevaluation.net/files/GEMEnglish\\_o.pdf](http://www.genderevaluation.net/sites/default/files/sites/dev.genderevaluation.net/files/GEMEnglish_o.pdf), p. 23.



# RWANDA

Women's rights, gender and ICTs: Girls in ICT Day leads to policy shaping



## HeHe Limited

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## Introduction

As traditional Rwandan society was characterised by men controlling social power relations, the introduction of information and communications technologies (ICTs) in the country was portrayed by the media as a field dominated by men. Despite today's countrywide gender awareness, Rwanda is still struggling to reduce poverty and ensure that men and women have equal rights.

All government policy making and planning is required to reflect these rights. This is a result of both international and national commitments, including but not limited to the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). To translate these international commitments into action, national instruments like the national constitution, Vision 2020, the economic development and poverty reduction strategy (EDPRS), national gender policy, decentralisation policy, ICT for development (ICT4D) policy, an action plan known as the National Information Communication Infrastructure (NICI) plan and a long-term investment framework are in place. These national instruments highlight gender as a cross-cutting pillar in all sectors of development.

The ICT4D roadmap, established in early 2000, addresses developmental challenges and aims to accelerate the country's socioeconomic development process. Since its adoption, however, technology-related disciplines in Rwanda have been dominated by males.

Following the celebration in Rwanda of the international Girls in ICT Day, initiated by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), three outcomes among others were recorded: the creation of Girls in ICT Rwanda, the creation of Camp TechKobwa, and the establishment of SMART Girl as a main pillar for the SMART Rwanda programme.

## Policy and political background

The current Rwandan constitution, enacted in June 2003 through a referendum, required a quota of 30% women in all government decision-making bodies. By June 2013, Rwanda's bicameral parliament had female representation of 56.2% in both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. This made Rwanda the first country in the world with such a high degree of female political representation in the legislative branch.<sup>1</sup>

Various mechanisms were used to reach this number: the gender-progressive constitution; the establishment of a gender ministry with a clear mandate; a national women's council elected at the grassroots and represented at the national level; and a women-only ballot for electing their representatives to parliament.<sup>2</sup>

These policies are paired with the promulgation of gender-related laws, including Law No. 22/99 of 12 November 1999, which supplements the civil code regarding matrimonial regimes, liberalities and successions;<sup>3</sup> Law No. 08/2005 of 14 July 2005, which determines the use and management of land in Rwanda;<sup>4</sup> and Law No. 59/2008 of 10 September 2008, which provides legal sanctions against perpetrators of gender-based violence, to name a few.

## Best practices

- The Rwanda Development Board (RDB) has a department in charge of women's entrepreneurship through ICT development, business development services, market orientation and the scaling up of businesses.
- The use of ICTs in telecentres established in all districts and internet cafés established in different urban areas provide both men and women with easy access to business-related information.<sup>5</sup>
- The One Laptop per Child (OLPC) programme is progressing well. Young girls and boys are being

1 [www.nytimes.com/2013/09/08/magazine/paul-kagame-rwanda.html?emc=eta1&r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/08/magazine/paul-kagame-rwanda.html?emc=eta1&r=0)

2 [www.thesolutionsjournal.com/node/887](http://www.thesolutionsjournal.com/node/887)

3 [www.migeprof.gov.rw/IMG/pdf/MATRIMONIAL\\_REGIMES\\_LIBERALITIES\\_AND\\_SUCCESSIONS-2.pdf](http://www.migeprof.gov.rw/IMG/pdf/MATRIMONIAL_REGIMES_LIBERALITIES_AND_SUCCESSIONS-2.pdf)

4 Official Gazette No. 18 of 15/09/2005.

5 [www.migeprof.gov.rw/IMG/doc/BEIJING\\_15\\_UN-3.doc](http://www.migeprof.gov.rw/IMG/doc/BEIJING_15_UN-3.doc)

trained to be accustomed to gathering information online on various topics at an early age and encouraged to work in the science and technology field.<sup>6</sup>

- The cabinet meeting of 18 November 2011 passed a prime minister's order determining modalities in which government institutions prevent and respond to gender-based violence. Since then, the institutions in charge have put in place toll-free hotlines which victims or witnesses of gender-based violence can call to seek help and report cases.

### Some weaknesses

By reviewing the abovementioned policies in a gender responsive manner, a big gap was identified in the role of ICTs in promoting women's right, fostering women's economic empowerment, and involving women actively in the transformation of daily life using ICT opportunities. Starting with the national gender policy, one can rarely find inputs emphasizing the importance of ICTs in women's socioeconomic development. There is mention of women accessing ICT facilities, including the internet, and an emphasis on women accessing various sources of information.<sup>7</sup> As for the ICT4D policy, NICI I and NICI II list various planned actions for the benefit of women in the form of the creation of an enabling environment that supports and encourages strategies to access ICT opportunities, the promotion of women's produce that allows direct sales online (also allowing women to apply for micro-lending),<sup>8</sup> the training of girls and women in ICT skills,<sup>9</sup> and formal education with special consideration of young girls. As for NICI III, it is rare to find consideration of women in its content.

These very limited ICT programmes for women may have been caused by reasons identified by the Rwanda civil society platform while analysing the gender policy: low capacity in planning, weak advocacy, limited budget allocation, insufficient gender-disaggregated data, few gender targets, and inadequate monitoring and evaluation by gender advocates and others responsible for mainstreaming gender equality in the development process.<sup>10</sup> This has led to an absence of data on women and ICTs in the gender statistics reports.<sup>11</sup>

To tackle this challenge, the Ministry of Youth and ICT (MYICT) came up with a new vision for the ICT sector, under the acronym "SPREAD" (Solution, Private-sector led, Reliable, Enabler, Accessible/affordable and Demand-driven).<sup>12</sup> The ministry initiated various flagship programmes to deal with the identified gaps. Among others, they designed a five-year ICT literacy and awareness campaign, which started this year. It targets three million people from rural communities. MYICT also designed a programme that aims at increasing ICT device ownership in the country. The ministry believes that once citizens have access to the internet, at affordable prices, their needs and rights are going to be expressed and satisfied as they arise.<sup>13</sup>

### What is "Girls in ICT Day"?

Rwanda is steadily moving towards its vision of becoming an information-rich and knowledge-based economy and society, and an ICT hub in the region.<sup>14</sup> A country with over 10,537,222 people (51.8% females against 48.2% males),<sup>15</sup> it now boasts three mobile phone operators: MTN RwandaCell, Tigo and Airtel. The mobile phone penetration is 62.8% as of July 2013.<sup>16</sup> Rwanda has over 10 licensed internet service providers. This offers a huge opportunity for women to voice their views on policy making and expose abuses of their rights. Social media, especially Facebook and Twitter, are also emerging as a popular means of online interaction. Currently, among Facebook users, 69% are males compared to 31% females as of 31 August 2013.<sup>17</sup>

A lack of awareness among students, teachers and parents on what a career in ICTs could offer led to the celebration of Girls in ICT Day. The event concept paper states: "Attitudes can change when girls meet ICT professionals and see what life is like on the job so they better understand the opportunities the ICT sector holds for their future."<sup>18</sup>

The day was celebrated for the first time on 9 May 2012, when Rwanda was celebrating World Telecommunication and Information Society Day under the theme "Women and Girls in ICT". Prior to this event, the women entrepreneurs involved formed a group: Girls in ICT Rwanda. The group consists of

6 [www.migeprof.gov.rw/IMG/doc/BEIJING\\_15\\_REGIONAL\\_RWANDA\\_REPORT\\_02\\_July\\_2010\\_1\\_-2.doc](http://www.migeprof.gov.rw/IMG/doc/BEIJING_15_REGIONAL_RWANDA_REPORT_02_July_2010_1_-2.doc)

7 [www.rcsprwanda.org/IMG/doc/NGP-FINAL\\_VERSION\\_JULY\\_2010\\_cabinet.doc](http://www.rcsprwanda.org/IMG/doc/NGP-FINAL_VERSION_JULY_2010_cabinet.doc)

8 NICI II, p. 157.

9 NICI II, p. 166.

10 [www.rcsprwanda.org/spip.php?article127](http://www.rcsprwanda.org/spip.php?article127)

11 [statistics.gov.rw/sites/default/files/user\\_uploads/files/books/National%20Gender%20Statistics%20report%2C%202013\\_1.pdf](http://statistics.gov.rw/sites/default/files/user_uploads/files/books/National%20Gender%20Statistics%20report%2C%202013_1.pdf)

12 [admin.theiguides.org/Media/Documents/Rwanda-ICT-Profile-2012.pdf](http://admin.theiguides.org/Media/Documents/Rwanda-ICT-Profile-2012.pdf)

13 Interview with the minister of MYICT, May 2013.

14 [blogs.worldbank.org/ic4d/co-creating-smart-rwanda-smart-africa-and-smart-world](http://blogs.worldbank.org/ic4d/co-creating-smart-rwanda-smart-africa-and-smart-world)

15 [www.statistics.gov.rw/sites/default/files/user\\_uploads/files/books/2012\\_POPULATION\\_HOUSING\\_CENSUS\\_latest.pdf](http://www.statistics.gov.rw/sites/default/files/user_uploads/files/books/2012_POPULATION_HOUSING_CENSUS_latest.pdf)

16 [www.rura.rw/fileadmin/docs/statistics/Monthly\\_telecom\\_subscribers\\_July\\_2013.pdf](http://www.rura.rw/fileadmin/docs/statistics/Monthly_telecom_subscribers_July_2013.pdf)

17 [www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics/rwanda](http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics/rwanda)

18 Girls in ICT Concept Paper, April 2012.

tech women of all ages including entrepreneurs, professionals and university students. It was established to encourage women and girls to venture into ICTs.<sup>19</sup> The group has visited a number of schools in Rwanda where the group's members speak to teenage girls to encourage them to consider ICTs as a career option as well as help them to understand and appreciate the importance of developing ICT skills in any career.

The first celebration was marked by awarding outstanding women and girls in ICTs who demonstrated ability, either by implementing innovative projects in ICTs, or in their respective workplaces.<sup>20</sup> Those who received awards included Akaliza Keza Gara, the managing director of Shaking Sun, a multimedia company; Paula Saphir Helene, the senior network security engineer at RDB; Immaculate Bugingo, the chief executive officer of Rwanda Gateway Limited; and Marie-Christine Gasingirwa, the director general of science and technology at the Ministry of Education. They were recognised for using the power of ICTs to provide new digital opportunities for the Rwandan community.<sup>21</sup>

The day was celebrated for the second time on 25 April 2013, under the theme "Expanding Horizons and Changing Attitudes". It focused on knowledge sharing, training, collaboration, social networking, generating business opportunities, and enhancing business exposure and visibility for players in the ICT domain. The guest of honour of the event was Ann Mei Chang, the senior advisor for women and technology in the Secretary's Office of Global Women's Issues at the US Department of State.<sup>22</sup> She declared: "The importance of your career is to stay true to yourself, otherwise you will lose your identity as you try and merge with your colleagues. Information technology is a male-dominated field, but not out of bounds to women."<sup>23</sup>

### Outcomes of Girls in ICT Day

- **Girls in ICT Rwanda:** This is a forum of women working in the field of ICTs whose main goal is to improve the current statistics regarding women in the ICT sector as well as to alter the stereotype held by many young girls that ICTs is a man's job.<sup>24</sup> The testimonies of Girls in ICT

Rwanda members inspire young girls to join the ICT field. Esther Mbabazi, Rwanda's first female pilot, encouraged young Rwandan women to follow their dreams and never stop being passionate. Clarisse Iribagiza, CEO of HeHe Limited, a mobile computing technology company, said that the biggest reason for girls not taking courses in ICTs is the way that science and technology subjects are structured. "I studied computer engineering, but before it was combined with entrepreneurship I was not sure why I was taking this course, apart from repairing people's computers," Iribagiza said.<sup>25</sup>

- **Camp TechKobwa:** A newly founded programme inspired by Rwanda's resilient and ever-growing ICT scene, its purpose is to provide young women with unhindered access to computers in order to develop skills and creativity and to inspire them as the next generation of Rwandan entrepreneurs.<sup>26</sup> The camp encourages young women to become active citizens by building their self-esteem and confidence, and empowering them to start computer and media clubs with their ICT teachers upon returning to their schools. Camp TechKobwa is an ideal way to offer adolescent girls self-development opportunities in a fun and friendly atmosphere.<sup>27</sup>
- **Smart Girl:** This initiative is one of the ten pillars of Smart Rwanda, which aims at using ICTs to enable the production value chain using mobile solutions by equipping female farmers with the right knowledge to negotiate for better prices. Through e-learning it trains women farmers in areas such as vocational issues, saving, entrepreneurship, HIV/AIDS, positive parenting and preventing unwanted pregnancy. Smart Girl seeks to increase the awareness, knowledge and confidence of girls in rural areas. Disadvantaged girls in rural areas with little exposure to ICTs will benefit by leveraging existing school infrastructure like computer clubs. Girls are encouraged to spend several hours a week to gain structured exposure to ICT skills and knowledge. This government programme is designed in partnership with the World Bank.

19 [focus.rw/wp/2013/04/ict-ministry-puts-girls-in-the-spotlight](http://focus.rw/wp/2013/04/ict-ministry-puts-girls-in-the-spotlight)

20 [m.gov.rw/Rwanda-hosts-ITU-Annual-Regional-Development-Forum,821.html?lang=en](http://m.gov.rw/Rwanda-hosts-ITU-Annual-Regional-Development-Forum,821.html?lang=en)

21 [www.rwandagateway.org/fr/spip.php?article1011](http://www.rwandagateway.org/fr/spip.php?article1011)

22 [itu4u.wordpress.com/2013/04/15/a-networking-night-out-with-girls-in-ict-rwanda](http://itu4u.wordpress.com/2013/04/15/a-networking-night-out-with-girls-in-ict-rwanda)

23 [www.newtimes.co.rw/news/index.php?a=65346&i=15309](http://www.newtimes.co.rw/news/index.php?a=65346&i=15309)

24 [www.gov.rw/Rwanda-celebrates-second-annual-Girls-in-ICT-Day-encouraging-girls-to-expand-their-horizons?lang=en](http://www.gov.rw/Rwanda-celebrates-second-annual-Girls-in-ICT-Day-encouraging-girls-to-expand-their-horizons?lang=en)

25 [www.newtimes.co.rw/news/index.php?i=15330&a=66039](http://www.newtimes.co.rw/news/index.php?i=15330&a=66039)

26 [sites.google.com/site/techkobwa/](http://sites.google.com/site/techkobwa/)

27 [www.facebook.com/media/et/?set=a.386241714808630&type=3&l=10eb22eea3](http://www.facebook.com/media/et/?set=a.386241714808630&type=3&l=10eb22eea3)

## Conclusion

The government of Rwanda is committed to promoting ICTs as a key driver for rapid socioeconomic development. Efforts have been made to put in place an enabling environment for girls to use and benefit from ICTs, along with their brothers, through building infrastructure and training – both formal and informal education.

However, statistics show that citizens living in rural areas have limited ownership of ICT devices, such as computers, smartphones and TVs. Most of these are women.

MYICT has proposed a shift in perspective so that people no longer see ICTs as something beyond their reach, but rather as a tool that offers solutions, services and a system that enables people conduct their ordinary business in a smart manner. This is expected to increase the number of female users of ICT devices and services.

Data on women's rights violations online is not enough. For members of Girls in ICT Rwanda, the current struggle is to ensure access to ICTs and then to monitor their positive and negative effects.

## Action steps

- The private sector should continually be encouraged to launch initiatives that expand coverage to rural areas and provide ICT devices and services at affordable prices.
- Through mentorship and internships, the private sector should initiate platforms that empower women in getting more knowledge on ICTs to help them be whoever they want to be, and to reach their full potential.
- Through awareness raising, the government should create an environment that empowers and encourages girls and young women to consider careers in the growing field of ICTs.
- The government should support outstanding women to make sure that they realise their goals in the promotion of ICTs in our country.
- Data collection for ICT indicators should consider disaggregating results on gender to inspire planning that considers women in ICTs. ■

# SOUTH AFRICA

Women, secrecy, freedom of expression and access to information



## Right2Know and Women'sNet

Caroline Tagny

[www.r2k.org.za](http://www.r2k.org.za) and [www.womensnet.org.za](http://www.womensnet.org.za)

## Introduction

The past three years in South Africa have been rich in debates in the media and information landscape. More particularly the submission of the Protection of State Information Bill, dubbed by activists as the “Secrecy Bill”, has seen the creation of a multi-sectoral campaign, rallying civil society groups and press bodies demanding the “right to know”. On the premise that strong democracy must be responsive and accountable, and therefore must be transparent and guarantee the free flow of information, the campaign has demanded that the bill be rewritten in order to be in line with the values of the South African constitution.

The Right2Know campaign has developed a broad analysis of the media and information landscape over the past two years, simultaneously organising its advocacy in terms of access to telecommunications, and in particular mobile communications. Having inherited a telecommunications network shaped by apartheid, where formerly white areas were prioritised in terms of service delivery, South Africa, although one of the most connected countries in the sub-continent, still faces enormous challenges in terms of access to communications and information and communications technologies (ICTs).

This report is based on the experiences of the Right2Know campaign and attempts to question the implications of the Secrecy Bill as well as the current communication landscape for women in South Africa.

## Policy and political background

Despite being the largest economy on the continent, more than half of the South African population still lives in poverty. Notwithstanding the efforts of post-1994 governments to redress social, economic and political inequalities, the country is still facing enormous disparities between rich and poor, a direct consequence and legacy of the apartheid regime, where access to social services, employment

and education were based on racial classification. According to Statistics South Africa, 56.8% of the population lives in poverty, with women being more impoverished than men (58.6% for women, 54.9% for men).<sup>1</sup>

Aside from the various acts regulating ICTs and media, the past two years have seen information activists increasingly concerned with new legislation that could potentially threaten the right to freedom of expression and access to information entrenched in the post-apartheid South African Constitution – often seen as one of the most progressive in the world.

On freedom of expression, the constitution states that everyone has the right to freedom of expression, which includes:

- Freedom of the press and other media
- Freedom to receive or impart information and ideas
- Freedom of artistic creativity
- Academic freedom and freedom of scientific research.

And on the right of access to information, the constitution establishes that everyone has the right to:

- Any information held by the state
- Any information that is held by another person and that is required for the exercise or the protection of any rights.

## The right to know and the Protection of Information Bill

The Protection of Information Bill, published publicly for discussion in 2010, was drafted with the intent of keeping state secrets safe. However, as the Right2Know campaign has argued over the past two years, since its inception, the bill, which was passed in parliament at the beginning of 2013, has been flawed in the way that it will impede the public from accessing crucial information under the guise of national security. In effect the Bill now criminalises the public for possessing state information and poses

<sup>1</sup> [beta2.statssa.gov.za/?page\\_id=739&id=1](http://beta2.statssa.gov.za/?page_id=739&id=1)



a threat to the South African public's right to know. Despite making some gains, the campaign still notes that the current bill includes flaws in terms of:

- The delegation of powers in terms of classification of information: the current bill is too broad in defining who can classify information as being restricted to state security services.
- The actual definition of what constitutes “national security” is still open to loopholes that could lead to abuse, and classifiers are not compelled to justify their reasons for determining information as state secrets. The classification review panel which will be created will not be sufficiently independent, as the selection of members and the rules of the panel will be reviewed by members of the state security apparatus.
- The definition of national security includes “the exposure of a state security matter with the intention of undermining constitutional order”. This remains extremely broad and could result in the State Security Agency classifying all activities as secret.
- The bill makes possession and disclosure of classified information by any person a crime, without the provision of a “public-domain” defence. The Right2Know campaign sees this as hindering the balance between citizens' rights to access to information and freedom of expression and national security. The exemptions in terms of public interest disclosures do not go far enough as, for example, whistleblowers, journalists or activists who disclose classified information in the public interest could still be found guilty of espionage, or of receiving state information unlawfully.<sup>2</sup>

In essence, the Protection of Information Bill is worrisome for women and sexual minorities in South Africa. Coming from the understanding that guarantees to the right of freedom of expression and access to information are the basis for a strong democracy and active citizen participation in democratic processes, including the participation of the marginalised and of minorities, the Secrecy Bill as it stands will restrict people's capacity to monitor and to hold governments to account for decisions.

Despite South Africa's commitment to women's empowerment and gender equality through its national policy framework,<sup>3</sup> challenges to the patriarchal order and the expression of

non-heteronormative positions are often met with intolerance and violence. In its report on freedom of information and women's rights in Africa, FEMNET argues that there are no major women's rights organisations championing access to information.<sup>4</sup> FEMNET here identifies a critical gap for the future activities of the Right2Know campaign in making a clear link between women's rights in South Africa and access to information. The capacity for South African women to monitor the government's efforts to fulfil commitments that affect women's rights, such as the Millennium Development Goals and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW,) and to effectively advocate women's social, economic and political rights and mechanisms that take action against violence against women, will be effectively compromised if the Secrecy Bill enables government bodies to restrain access to information under the guise of national security.

### The right to communicate, access to communications and censorship

Due to various factors in the South African telecommunications sector, namely the failures of Telkom (the state, partly-privatised phone operator), and poor infrastructure in previously “black” areas, mobile phone usage has taken over most of voice communications in the country. Introducing the prepaid option for mobile communication, allowing users with no airtime on their mobile phones to still receive calls, and the availability of low-denomination airtime cards have led to exponential growth in the penetration of mobile phones in the country. In 2012, 87% of the population used a mobile phone, with the majority of users being on prepaid plans. However, this incredible pervasiveness of mobile technology in the country does not translate to affordability for users. Compared to similar countries, studies have shown that the cost of SMS and calls in South Africa are amongst the highest. The Right2Know campaign emphasises that “the lack of transparency about pricing has allowed operators to continue these practices [high user costs] relatively unchallenged.”<sup>5</sup>

Gillwald, Milek and Stork<sup>6</sup> note that due to their more precarious economic situation, women in Africa

<sup>2</sup> [www.r2k.org.za/2012/11/28/guide-why-secrecy-bill-fails/](http://www.r2k.org.za/2012/11/28/guide-why-secrecy-bill-fails/)

<sup>3</sup> [www.info.gov.za/otherdocs/2000/gender.pdf](http://www.info.gov.za/otherdocs/2000/gender.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Hambuba, C. and Kagoiya, R. (2009) *Freedom of Information (FOI) and Women's Rights in Africa*, FEMNET and UNESCO, Nairobi

<sup>5</sup> Right2Know (2013) *The Right 2 Communicate: Activist Guide*.

<sup>6</sup> Gillwald, A., Milek, A. and Stork, C. (2010) Gender Assessment of ICT Access and Usage in Africa and Stork, C., Calendro, E. and Gillwald, A. (2012) Internet going mobile: Internet access and usage in eleven African countries, in *19th ITS Biennial Conference, Bangkok, Thailand: Moving Forward with Future Technologies Opening a Platform for All*.



and in South Africa, and by extension rural women, are still the most marginalised when it comes to access to mobile communications. South African women spend on average more than 8% of their monthly income on their mobile phones, spending more of their disposable income than men on such expenses. Women tend to use the free features of their mobile phones essentially to receive calls or to send missed calls, or “please call me” SMSes, even though more women than men own mobile phones.

While access to ICTs is limited by income, literacy, level of education and gender, less than 20% of the population in South Africa has access to the internet, with a larger proportion of men being internet users. On the African continent – and South Africa is no exception – mobile phones are considered a key entry point for internet access, as owners of “feature-phones” or smartphones are more numerous, with the use of social media platforms such as Facebook or Mxit often surpassing or on the verge of replacing email.<sup>7</sup> Although connecting to the internet through mobile phones seems like an important breakthrough for the country and the continent, the lack of access to a fixed broadband connection for most users brings into question the type and the quality of content that women are able to access. While limits to access curtail the freedom of expression of everyone, they impede more particularly the ability of women to access information that would be difficult to discuss for some due to persistent taboos, such as accessing information on sexual and reproductive rights.

Furthermore, the potential of the internet to act as an alternative public sphere where power can be contested and rights advocated on a global scale is under threat for women’s rights activists. According to Jane Duncan<sup>8</sup> and Shereen Essof,<sup>9</sup> many laws that have been promulgated in South Africa for the purpose of protecting children, national security or intellectual property have the potential to surface to censor controversial content. In the past year, at least two cases of censorship of artwork (a painting and a movie) under the pretence of morality and child pornography by the Film and Publication Board can easily be seen as the precursor of censorship that could extend its tentacles in the realm of the internet, with the board having been given jurisdiction over internet content. This essentially gives the government powers to potentially exercise censorship on content it judges too critical or morally unacceptable.

As information that can contain “sensitive” content (for example, sexual health content) is intrinsic to the realisation of women’s rights, the potential power of the state to censor internet content is alarming.

## Conclusion

The Right2Know campaign has been able in recent years to garner incredible support from the public and extensive media coverage. However, it has not specifically addressed how the Protection of Information Bill and issues relating to the costs of communications and the regulation of content will affect women in particular. In a context where mobile communications are used pervasively in women’s and sexual health organisations to mobilise, inform and organise, and where the internet can become a viable space to discuss sensitive topics in South African society such as homosexuality or access to land for women living under traditional leadership, the Right2Know campaign must make sure that women’s voices are heard in the debate. Women’s organisations that have not been extremely vocal in the debates surrounding the recent Right2Know campaign must also discuss and ultimately express their opinions on the right to communicate and access to information in this fast-changing technological landscape.

Ultimately, the structures and mechanisms that form the legislative framework and the commercial practices of our communications and information system must be debated and (re)structured in a way that promotes universal access and fosters dialogue.

## Action steps

As the Right2Know campaign embarks on a new chapter of its advocacy, broadening its scope from the Secrecy Bill and targeting more specifically questions in regards to access to ICTs and communication rights, the campaign proposes to go along with the following principles:

- Communications must be universal. Everyone has a right to communications that are available, affordable and accessible.
- Communications must be ubiquitous. Currently, users are restricted in their choice on how to access information they need, either at home or on the move.
- Communications must be dialogic: users should have the ability both to receive and impart communication.
- Everyone has the right to privacy and anonymous communications, which includes the right to encrypt their communications. ■

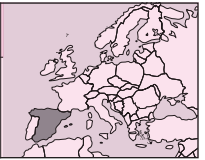
7 Stork, Calendro and Gillwald (2012) Op. cit.

8 Duncan, J. (2012) The Turning Point for Internet Freedom, *SACSIS*, 12 June. [sacsis.org.za/site/article/1329](http://sacsis.org.za/site/article/1329)

9 Essof, S. (2009) *South Africa, Violence against Women and Information and Communication Technologies*, Association for Progressive Communications.

# SPAIN

Shaping the internet: Women's voices in ICT through training<sup>1</sup>



## Pangea

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## Introduction

Over the last 20 years the world of technology has advanced by leaps and bounds and has completely transformed our way of life. Technologies have made their way into all aspects of our daily lives, from work to leisure and personal lives, becoming an indispensable tool, versatile and powerful. As in other areas, gender differences are also clearly visible in the technological world, showing quite clearly and overwhelmingly that women's presence in this field is very poor compared to that of men. Without balanced participation in information and communications technology (ICT) training, women's voices cannot shape the ICT aspects of our current and future world. This report focuses on the root cause of the gender imbalance in ICT training and the subsequent lack of ICT professionals who foreground women's voices in this domain. The report is based on several interviews with female ICT professionals, many involved in different areas of ICT training at the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya (UPC) in Barcelona, Spain, one of the top Spanish universities in ICT training.

## Background

In various sectors – government, academia, etc. – efforts have been made and various initiatives have been launched to bring the world of technology closer to women. Although it can be said that there has been some progress in certain aspects, looking back and viewing the current situation in our country it cannot be said that progress has been sufficient. The current situation is far from perfect. Sadly, the situation is not very different from 20 years ago, and unfortunately many of the initiatives and projects that are carried out seem stuck

in the past and are not evolving, which is really disheartening considering the fast pace of change in the technological world. Technology is moving at lightning speed while many initiatives that focus on women are still in their infancy. Year after year, obsolete plans (e.g. digital literacy) that have proven not to be effective enough are repeated.

UPC has spent many years working to increase the number of women embarking on studies in technology. Tracking their efforts and results may shed some light on the evolution of the relationship between gender and technology in our country, at least in academia.

Because the number of women studying technological degrees at UPC is much lower than the number of men, the “Women's Programme” at UPC was launched in 1996, among other things, to work on and improve these numbers and reduce the disparity. Since its inception the Women's Programme has launched several initiatives to bring technology closer to female students and arouse their interest in pursuing a career in technology. Without very clear criteria at the outset on how to deal with this issue, the initiatives implemented were based on trial and error. At first the programmes were rather protective and segregated in terms of gender, highlighting the differences between men and women and failing to make women feel less like strange specimens within the system. Facing the failure of these early initiatives, in recent years programmes aimed at integration of women on equal terms have been adopted. Now the existing programmes seek to provide tools for women and improve the university education system so that it promotes access and the progress of female students. They include more personalised tutoring programmes geared to the needs of women, activities that take into account the interests and abilities of women, and improvements in the evaluation system – which often favours men because it usually emphasises the kind of evaluation in which men are said to excel, such as multiple choice quizzes, instead of the type of testing where women are said to excel, such as narrative and argument.

It should be noted that these programmes produce better results, but they are not a miracle remedy. There is much uncertainty among the

<sup>1</sup> We would like to thank Eulàlia Formentí Farnadas from the Information Systems Office at UPC, Aurea Libori Ramos from the Communication and Promotion service at UPC, Beatriz Otero Calviño from the Department of Computer Architecture at UPC, Maria Ribera Sancho Samsó from the Department of Service Engineering and Information Systems at UPC, and Eva Vidal López from the Department of Electronic Engineering.

experts consulted and diverging opinions about the reasons why women decide not to undertake technological studies. All experts agree on the need for more research and to delve deeper into the issue to find the important influencing factors and develop more successful solutions and approaches. Some of the factors being debated have to do with the natural tendency of people to become interested in certain issues, or with the idea that women are often more practical and “realistic” in nature, or have greater empathy or an inclination for social interests and relationships with people.

While these inclinations clearly depend not on gender, but on the characteristics and nature of each individual, in general it is observed that there are issues that are of more interest to women while others have little or no appeal. Unfortunately technological topics apparently do not appeal to many women. Some women technologists believe that this is reinforced by society. The lack of real examples of women working and being successful in the technological field does not improve the situation.

Moreover, the eminently more practical and pragmatic nature of women makes them inclined to choose studies that they feel confident about completing – in this respect they tend to avoid unnecessary risks when choosing. Women tend to choose studies that have a clearly defined future employment path, where employment opportunities are broader, more established or more abundant. This leads them towards established and classical studies, where the path of learning and working is better defined and where years and years of experience and examples create role models that they can emulate. In the case of computer science studies, the fact that this science is evolving so fast means that it requires a lot of effort to keep up to date and sustain a leading position. The constant learning process required means that women sometimes feel that it will not be easy to reconcile this with their personal and other interests. This is often combined with the idea that women generally have greater empathy and better skills in fields such as the social sciences.

These choices and perceptions reinforce gender imbalances when it comes to technology. Probably unconsciously, men shape and develop technologies according to their vision of the world, according to their character, their interests and their strengths, regardless of other views, other interests or other ways of thinking. This creates a subtle gender discrimination. Men are not necessarily to blame, because imbalances in the opposite direction occur in other sectors (think of the health

sector and children’s education). But what makes dealing with the imbalance in technology more relevant is the fact that technologies are increasingly an intrinsic part of our lives. Such an influential part of the world around us cannot be left in the hands of only a portion of the population.

While it is not an easy task to address gender imbalances, it is made more difficult because for various reasons the reputation of computer science is not very good. Among technological studies, computer sciences are rather discredited and have had a bad reputation for having a too “extreme and unusual” air about them. Computer scientists are often regarded as being antisocial, nerdy, or too competitive. All these features usually do not attract the female gender. Moreover, despite being a science that spans many fields and sectors of our society and our lives, there is a common belief that the field of computer sciences is something that everyone knows, or thinks he or she knows. This fact counts against it when assessing it as a possible area for study, because future opportunities and potential career paths are not clearly visible.

Given this scenario, it is not an easy task to raise interest among women for computer studies. There are, however, a few women who are studying or have studied computer sciences. And as a distinguishing and revealing feature, the academic results from women in these studies show that, although few, they are among the students who excel in the sciences and computer studies. They are good students, hard workers, consistent and persistent and often get very good results.

UPC statistics<sup>2</sup> show that in the 2010-2011 academic year, the number of women enrolled in undergraduate computer courses was 40 versus 369 men (9.78% women versus 90.2% men) and in 2011-2012 the disparity was even worse, with only 5.8% of computer science students being women. However, the percentage of women who finish their studies often exceeds that of men. The statistics are much better with regards to second-cycle studies (equivalent to Master’s degrees), where the number of women increased to 17% (2010-2011). At UPC, computer science studies account for the most extreme imbalance between men and women, while for all technological studies the gender imbalance exists, but is not so acute. In other studies women represent 12% to 15% of students enrolled in undergraduate courses such as telecommunications engineering or electronic systems engineering,

<sup>2</sup> Statistical data provided by UPC for academic years 2010-2011 and 2011-2012.

and up to 23% to 25% in industrial technology engineering or industrial construction engineering. This trend also shows in the data provided by the UPC Women's Programme. In a period of six years the number of women studying technology has experienced an occasional surge, but generally it has remained stable or fallen. In the case of computer studies there is a downward trend.<sup>3</sup>

### Action steps

It is clear that the current situation is not that good, after so many years of programmes, efforts and initiatives to increase the number of women studying technology. This is not just a lack of success, but a conclusive failure, and should serve as a catalyst for research into the reasons why women are not interested in technology, and to look for possible approaches and solutions more effective than those carried out so far. Some women ICT professionals believe that this problem has to be faced from its earliest origins and that there is a

need to commit to improving science education, which has now been pushed down the curricula of primary and secondary education. Specifically, computing and technology are not only relegated to a secondary role but are usually in the hands of non-professionals in the field, with all that that entails. It is important to show girls in high school the possible career paths for professionals in this field, and what it means for social improvement. Teachers in primary and secondary education should have the tools and the right environment to guide their students according to the different gender needs. It is also important to strengthen the role of society in women's access to technology. Female roles should be given more visibility, and there should be a push towards equality and balance in terms of the presence of women technologists in our society. We need visible examples that help women take on the challenge of participating in a field that is increasingly important in all aspects of our lives. ■

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<sup>3</sup> Data provided by the Women's Programme at UPC, corresponding to the percentage of women students at UPC centres. The data on computer studies corresponds to the Barcelona School of Informatics for academic courses from 1996-1997 to 2001-2002.

# SWITZERLAND

## Women's rights, gender and ICTs



### Comunica-ch

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### Introduction

A casual observer of the country would assume that Switzerland figures well among its neighbouring countries in terms of women's rights and gender issues. Particular historical facts and shortcomings found in Switzerland are not as evident in the surrounding European countries. But a key event for women's rights is rather recent but meaningful: women's suffrage in Switzerland was introduced at the federal level for the first time after 7 February 1971, with the voting resulting in the exact inverse of that reported in February 1959 (when suffrage was rejected 2 to 1).<sup>1</sup> The principal reason for the long delay of the Swiss in granting women's suffrage relative to other European countries is the importance of direct democracy in the political system. The introduction of federal and cantonal universal suffrage necessitated the vote of the majority of the electors – men in this case – for a referendum. Moreover, any new federal constitutional reform must be approved by the majority of the cantons. Some comparisons for the granting of universal suffrage: Finland 1906, Germany and Austria 1918, France 1944, Italy 1946.<sup>2</sup>

### Policy and political background

As the political system in Switzerland is based on strong federalism, the Swiss cantons have much freedom of discretion. It was necessary to wait for the 1960s for eight cantons to introduce women's suffrage at the canton level. Thirty more years were necessary for this right to be generalised for all the cantons. In a judgment on November 1990 the Swiss federal court declared the exclusive male suffrage as had been practiced in the half canton of Appenzell Innerrhoden unconstitutional; the principle of equality between men and women as was

guaranteed by the federal constitution ordered, in effect, an interpretation of the Appenzell constitution so that women's suffrage should be possible. The comparatively late granting of women's suffrage is only one important facet out of many.

It was in 1978 when women were granted the same rights when it came to parental care for their children. In 1981 the principle of equal treatment was introduced into the country's constitution, including the legislative duty to assure legal and practical equality in all laws and spheres of life. Furthermore, and by law, women received the constitutional right of equal pay for equal work. In 1988 the marital law which designated men as "sovereign of the family" and women as in charge of housekeeping was reformed, thus granting women the right to gainful employment without the explicit approval of their husbands. Full citizen's rights were finally granted in 1990. But it was not until 1996 that the Gender Equity Act came into force, removing all structural discrimination for employment.<sup>3</sup>

### Women in Swiss policy

The number of women in the Swiss National Council (lower house) of the Federal Assembly of Switzerland went from 10 in 1971 to 50 in 2003, and from 1 to 11 in the 46-member Swiss Council of States (upper house) in the same period. In 2008 there were 59 women out of 200 members in total (29.5%) in the National Council.<sup>4</sup> The first female member of the seven-member Swiss Federal Council was elected in 1984, serving until 1989, the second female member from 1993 to 1999, and the first president of the Swiss Confederation in 1999. Two women were elected to the Swiss Federal Council from 1999 to 2003. As of January 2008 the Federal Council had three female members. Since September 2010, the Federal Council changed to a female majority of four, which signifies a milestone in the political history of the country.<sup>5</sup>

1 en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s\_suffrage\_in\_Switzerland#Women.27s\_Suffrage\_at\_the\_Cantonal\_Level\_-\_1960s and de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frauenwahlrecht#Europ.C3.A4isches\_Nord-S.C3.BCd-Gef.C3.A4lle and en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s\_suffrage

2 www.meinhard.privat.t-online.de/frauen/frauenwahlr\_weltweit.html

3 www.humanrights.ch/de/Themendossiers/Gleichstellung/Frauenrechte-Schweiz/index.html

4 en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s\_suffrage\_in\_Switzerland#Women.27s\_Suffrage\_at\_the\_Cantonal\_Level\_-\_1960s and de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frauenwahlrecht#Europ.C3.A4isches\_Nord-S.C3.BCd-Gef.C3.A4lle and en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s\_suffrage

5 Ibid.



## Economic activity

At the end of the 1990s, women's economic activity increased slightly; since the beginning of the century it has stabilised at around 45%. During the same period, men's economic activity registered a slight but steady decline and since 2005 it has stabilised at about 75%. But it remains markedly higher than women's: 75% of the male population and 61% of the female population aged 15 and above are gainfully employed or are looking for a job. The economic activity rate gap between women and men is widest in the years preceding the legal retirement age (55-64 years) and during the family formation phase (30-44 years): as of age 25, women's economic activity rate is already markedly lower than men's. This is attributable to the fact that a large number of women of this age (temporarily) leave the labour market to devote themselves to raising their children.<sup>6</sup>

At present, more than half the women in employment have a part-time job, compared with one-seventh of men in employment. Consequently, part-time work is a typical characteristic of women's working life. A part-time job often entails precarious working conditions, insufficient social security (e.g. pension fund) and fewer opportunities for further education and training and career advancement. On the other hand, part-time work does provide the opportunity to pursue other activities, such as caring for one's children, helping other people and doing housework. Since 1991, part-time work has increased among women and men in employment. Since the beginning of the 1990s, more than half of women work part-time, but among men the share does not exceed 14%.<sup>7</sup>

## Leadership functions

While legal barriers for women's gainful employment were removed in 1988 and the economic activity rate over the last 15 years has stabilised at around 45%, the share of women in executive positions is still as marginal as lamentable: from 1990 to 2000 it only increased from 11% to 15%. There are significant differences between the country's regions and economic sectors. In health and social services women reached an employment rate of 80% but are only represented in 31% of leadership

positions. Similar high employment shares and comparably low managerial functions are typical for gastronomy, personal services and in the education sector. Even when women have a high rate of employment in a sector, this does not translate into leadership positions.<sup>8</sup>

## Gender pay gap

A similar, persistent discrimination is found when it comes to the gender pay gap. Despite constitutional enshrinement (Art. 8.3, 1981) and the Gender Equity Act (1996), there are still great gender-based differences in pay in Switzerland. On average, women earn 20% less than men. Discriminatory behaviour accounts for about 40% of this difference. Women in managerial positions even earn up to 30% less than men – the EU average is 15%. There are still typical female and male professions in the world of work. The pay level in typical male professions is considerably higher than that in female professions. If women and men within the same company and with the same qualifications and experience receive different amounts of pay for the same work, pay discrimination within the context of the Gender Equity Act can be said to exist.<sup>9</sup> In other words: "Women need to work 14 months to earn the same as men do in 12 months," says the president of the Business and Professional Women Club in Zurich.<sup>10</sup> The gender pay gap is less significant in the public sector than in private enterprises.

## Women and ICT

In the information and communications technology (ICT) sector the participation of women is still remarkably low – around 13% – while the pay difference is around 18% (21.4% in 2003). The pay level in the IT sector is among the highest in Switzerland after insurance, banking and telecommunications.<sup>11</sup> According to a study into ICTs in Switzerland, 72,500 new professionals will be needed in the country by 2020 – with a predicted shortage of 25,000. And all efforts to increase the share of women and school-girls in this sector have failed so far. The Swiss

6 Gender equality – Data, indicators, Economic activity rate, Swiss Federal Statistical Office, Neuchâtel, April 2013. [www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/en/index/themen/20/05/blank/key/erwerbstaetigkeit/erwerbsbeteiligung.html](http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/en/index/themen/20/05/blank/key/erwerbstaetigkeit/erwerbsbeteiligung.html)

7 Gender equality – Data, indicators, Part-time work, Swiss Federal Statistical Office, Neuchâtel, April 2013. [www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/en/index/themen/20/05/blank/key/erwerbstaetigkeit/teilzeitarbeit.html](http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/en/index/themen/20/05/blank/key/erwerbstaetigkeit/teilzeitarbeit.html)

8 Frauen in Führungspositionen, Swiss Federal Statistical Office, Neuchâtel, 2013. [www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/de/index/regionen/thematische\\_karten/gleichstellungsatlas/erwerbsarbeit\\_und\\_beruf/fuehrungspositionen.html](http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/de/index/regionen/thematische_karten/gleichstellungsatlas/erwerbsarbeit_und_beruf/fuehrungspositionen.html)

9 [de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender\\_Pay\\_Gap](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender_Pay_Gap) and [www.ebg.admin.ch/themen/00008/00072/index.html?lang=en](http://www.ebg.admin.ch/themen/00008/00072/index.html?lang=en)

10 Der Stichtag der Lohngleichheit zwischen Mann und Frau, Tagesanzeiger, Zürich, March 2013. [www.tagesanzeiger.ch/wirtschaft/karriere/Der-Stichtag-der-Lohngleichheit-zwischen-Frau-und-Mann/story/31896948](http://www.tagesanzeiger.ch/wirtschaft/karriere/Der-Stichtag-der-Lohngleichheit-zwischen-Frau-und-Mann/story/31896948)

11 Hohe Löhne in der Schweizer ICT, Computerworld.ch, August 2013. [www.computerworld.ch/marktanalysen/studien-analysen/artikel/hohe-loehne-in-der-schweizer-ict-64015](http://www.computerworld.ch/marktanalysen/studien-analysen/artikel/hohe-loehne-in-der-schweizer-ict-64015)



telecom giant Swisscom launched an initiative called “ICT Week for Girls” in 2012 to attract more female interest in the sector. First results were reported to be promising, but structural problems in the education system are still persistent.<sup>12</sup>

### Access and use of the internet

Age, gender and education were listed as key variables and barriers in the country’s digital divide in 2008 (see the Swiss country report for GISWatch 2008). While women were still considered among the “problem groups” when it came to internet access and usage,<sup>13</sup> the situation has significantly changed since then. According to recent figures from NetMetrix (which conducts the most regular and comprehensive surveys in the country), around 2.6 million women are regularly using the internet, or 81.3% of women (compared to 2.8 million men or 88.9%).<sup>14</sup>

According to other sources, the usage pattern among women is very different from that of men. Women are said to be more selective and less present and outspoken on social media platforms and, for example, are still marginal among Wikipedia authors.<sup>15</sup> This disparity corresponds with female under-representation in the Swiss media system, where women still account for less than 25% of media workers and are continuously ignored as social and political actors by the media.<sup>16</sup>

### Conclusions

Denying basic rights and equality for women over more than a century is one of the darkest sides of Switzerland’s political history. From 1860 onwards the first traces of a feminist movement fighting for equal rights were recorded. And Switzerland’s women’s struggle is just further proof that fundamental rights are not conceded by men or any

third party but must be hard-won.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, traditionalism and conservative values are pronounced in the country and changes, always based on broad consent, usually take enormous time – critical observers complain about the snail’s pace of any reforms. Nordic equality standards (such as those in Sweden, Norway, etc.) in terms of representation in leadership positions or equal pay, amongst other issues, will conceivably take many more years to be implemented.

Switzerland has amongst the best conditions in terms of education, infrastructure, the labour market, wealth and all legal prescriptions since the early 1990s for attaining high gender equality standards. New technologies such as the internet have helped to bridge the gender gap and can promote further female empowerment. Usage of these technologies (mobiles, computers, etc.) is very common among digital natives of the country, and girls are generally more self-aware, skilled and demanding compared to their grandmothers’ generation. The education system, vocational education and the labour market are important factors to facilitate further improvements and to fulfil the legal prescriptions when it comes to gender equality.

However, traditional thinking patterns and all sorts of structural deficits are still to be overcome: there is a lack of day-care centres; all-day schools are the exception; and there is almost no transparency in salaries compared to other countries (and even if pay discrimination is evident, people – particularly women – do not sue offending employers). Unions are also weak in the country. Even more important, a longstanding demand from the feminist movement is still pending: men taking over an equal share of child care and housekeeping are far more the exception than the rule. Consequently, it is mostly women who hold back in their career planning, which explains the high share of female part-time jobs (more than half). Labour market experts – and particular female experts – suggest that another form of work organisation is needed, including a reduction of working hours. Without substantial changes of such deficits and thinking, the best intentions, concepts and even equality laws will remain on paper only. New technologies can provide useful and important tools and means for social and political change, but are not at the centre of it. And men can still be among the enabling factors – or part of the solution – rather than continuing to be part of the country’s problem.

12 Das IT-Land Schweiz braucht diese Frauen, Computerworld.ch, October 2012. [www.computerworld.ch/news/it-branche/artikel/das-it-land-schweiz-braucht-diese-frauen-61546](http://www.computerworld.ch/news/it-branche/artikel/das-it-land-schweiz-braucht-diese-frauen-61546) and Zu wenig Frauen und Männer wählen einen Informatik Bildungsgang trotz besten Job Perspektiven, Medienmitteilung ICT Berufsbildung, July 2012. [www.ict-berufsbildung.ch/fileadmin/user\\_upload/dokumente/Geschäftsstelle/de/ICT-BBCH\\_Medienmitteilung\\_2012-07-03.pdf](http://www.ict-berufsbildung.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/dokumente/Geschäftsstelle/de/ICT-BBCH_Medienmitteilung_2012-07-03.pdf)

13 [www.giswatch.org/country-report/2008/switzerland](http://www.giswatch.org/country-report/2008/switzerland)

14 netmetrix, Aktuelle Zahlen, Internetnutzung nach Geschlecht, March 2013. [www.net-metrix.ch/produkte/net-metrix-base/publikation](http://www.net-metrix.ch/produkte/net-metrix-base/publikation)

15 Warum Frauen im Internet nicht mitreden, Swiss radio DRS3, February 2011. [drs.srf.ch/www/de/drs3/themen/panorama/242052.warum-frauen-im-internet-nicht-mitreden.html](http://drs.srf.ch/www/de/drs3/themen/panorama/242052.warum-frauen-im-internet-nicht-mitreden.html)

16 Frauen sind in den Schweizer Medien untervertreten, Medienheft.ch, June 2011. [www.medienheft.ch/index.php?id=14&no\\_cache=1&tx\\_tnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=668&cHash=96f77a607462e4aa502b3aa602363423](http://www.medienheft.ch/index.php?id=14&no_cache=1&tx_tnews%5Btt_news%5D=668&cHash=96f77a607462e4aa502b3aa602363423)

17 [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s\\_suffrage\\_in\\_Switzerland#Women.27s\\_Suffrage\\_at\\_the\\_Cantonal\\_Level\\_-\\_1960s](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_suffrage_in_Switzerland#Women.27s_Suffrage_at_the_Cantonal_Level_-_1960s) and [de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frauenwahlrecht#Europ.C3.A4isches\\_Nord-S.C3.BCd-Gef.C3.A4lle](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frauenwahlrecht#Europ.C3.A4isches_Nord-S.C3.BCd-Gef.C3.A4lle) and [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s\\_suffrage](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_suffrage)

## Action steps

Switzerland has ratified the UN Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights as well as the Convention on Civil and Political Rights. In 1997 the country finally ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and in doing so took on all related responsibilities and obligations. The Federal Office for Gender Equality (FOGE) published an action plan in 1999 in line with the Fourth UN Conference on Women in Beijing (1995) which is still far from being implemented.<sup>18</sup> A national NGO group is calling for its recommendations to be made binding and for the introduction of appropriate control instruments to enforce gender mainstreaming.<sup>19</sup> In its third report, the FOGE made comprehensive assessments of the situation and listed various needs for further implementation.<sup>20</sup>

Further action steps necessary include the improvement of transparency of salary systems to bridge the gender pay gap and to strengthen monitoring in the private sector. Moreover, effective enforcement of legal prescriptions to guarantee

gender equality in leadership positions according to employment shares is needed. Systematic and sustainable efforts have to be made in the country's education system and incentives offered to increase the share of girls and women in ICTs and related professions.<sup>21</sup>

As in other European countries, pension systems for a high share of women who devoted many years to child and house care need to be better balanced. In 1997 regulations for the splitting of pensions were introduced in the country. On the other hand, the retirement age for women was increased from 62 to 64 years, which is still much contested and perceived as inappropriate without related compensations.

When fundamental rights enshrined in the country's constitution and related laws are not respected and properly granted over years, public authorities need to improve monitoring mechanisms and must develop effective instruments for legal enforcement. The provision of fundamental rights is not a self-service store where anybody can avail themselves at their convenience. ■

18 Gleichstellung von Frau und Mann, Aktionsplan der Schweiz, Federal Office for Gender Equality (FOGE), June 1999. [www.humanrights.ch/upload/pdf/070326\\_aktionsplan.pdf](http://www.humanrights.ch/upload/pdf/070326_aktionsplan.pdf)

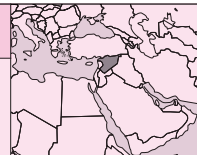
19 [www.humanrights.ch/de/Themendossiers/Gleichstellung/Frauenrechte-Schweiz/index.html](http://www.humanrights.ch/de/Themendossiers/Gleichstellung/Frauenrechte-Schweiz/index.html)

20 Dritter Bericht der Schweiz über die Umsetzung des Übereinkommens zur Beseitigung jeder Form von Diskriminierung der Frau (CEDAW), April 2008. [www.eda.admin.ch/etc/medialib/downloads/edazen/topics/intla/cintla.Par.0041.File.tmp/CEDAW\\_Bericht\\_10\\_04\\_08\\_Internet.pdf](http://www.eda.admin.ch/etc/medialib/downloads/edazen/topics/intla/cintla.Par.0041.File.tmp/CEDAW_Bericht_10_04_08_Internet.pdf)

21 Publikationen zu International/Umsetzung in der Schweiz, Federal Office for Gender Equality (FOGE), August 2013. [www.ebg.admin.ch/dokumentation/00012/00198/index.html?lang=de](http://www.ebg.admin.ch/dokumentation/00012/00198/index.html?lang=de)

# SYRIA

## Women's rights, gender and ICTs in Syria



Hanadi Traifeh

### Introduction

Syria has witnessed fast-paced developments that have affected the different political, economic, social and cultural aspects of the country. These developments led in some cases to the advancement of women's rights and offered women new opportunities in becoming increasingly active in their society. Yet it is still obvious that Syrian society is a masculine society, where women continue struggling to earn their full and equal rights.

Information and communications technologies (ICTs) have offered Syrian women many powerful tools to organise, mobilise and fight for their rights and equality. Many initiatives have leveraged the increasingly ubiquitous access to the internet in the country to advocate their causes of gender equality and participation. A prominent example is Musawa<sup>1</sup> (Equality), an independent civil society organisation founded in 2009 by a group of Syrian women that aims to support women's achievement of full equality in Syrian society.

### Policy and political background

The Syrian constitution provides clear protection of many women's rights, articulated specifically in Article 23, which states: "The state shall provide women with all opportunities enabling them to effectively and fully contribute to the political, economic, social and cultural life, and the state shall work on removing the restrictions that prevent their development and participation in building society."<sup>2</sup> The constitution also contains other provisions that relate to women's and children's rights, such as Article 33 (equality in rights and duties without discrimination) and Article 20 (protection of maternity and childhood).

However, several studies have suggested that Syrian women still suffer from inequality in participating in the political, economic and decision-making spheres.<sup>3</sup> These studies cite laws that

discriminate against women in family affairs, such as children's custody and citizenship, and freedom of movement and domicile.

Despite Syria's ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) on 28 March 2003, the country registered reservations on Articles 2, 9, 15, 16 and 29.<sup>4</sup>

In light of these challenges, Musawa, among other feminist groups, was established to further the cause of gender equality and the elimination of discrimination against women.

### The story of Musawa

In its mission statement, Musawa states that its aim is to "support women's struggle to obtain their full rights, remove all kinds of gender-based discrimination, fight violence against women, and establish the necessary conditions to enable their effective participation in the political, social, economic and cultural spheres."<sup>5</sup> The organisation was founded by a group of Syrian women, or women residing in Syria, in response to what they considered as increased marginalisation of women, deprivation of economic opportunities, and denial of many human rights. The founding members set out to achieve ambitious goals, including:

- Ensuring sufficient and effective participation of women's organisations in any commission or committee tasked with establishing the country's reformed constitution or new legislation.
- Establishing an intellectual framework defining the future of women in Syria.
- Participating in local and regional efforts to remove reservations registered on CEDAW and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and to ratify the optional protocol of CEDAW.<sup>6</sup>

1 [www.musawasy.org](http://www.musawasy.org)

2 [www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain?docid=5100fo2a2](http://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain?docid=5100fo2a2)

3 [www.mokarabat.com/rep.nesasy.htm](http://www.mokarabat.com/rep.nesasy.htm) (in Arabic)

4 [treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg\\_no=IV-8&chapter=4&lang=en#EndDec](http://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-8&chapter=4&lang=en#EndDec)

5 [www.facebook.com/MsawatEquality/info](https://www.facebook.com/MsawatEquality/info)

6 The optional protocol to CEDAW (OP-CEDAW) establishes complaint and inquiry mechanisms for the convention, allowing individuals in ratifying countries to register complaints or inquiries into "grave or systematic violations" of CEDAW. While Syria is a signatory of CEDAW, the country has not yet ratified the optional protocol.

- Conducting social campaigns and activities using all available media outlets to raise awareness of women's rights and contributing to changing the discriminating culture of the society.
- Documenting violations and incidents of violence against women and supporting female victims who suffer emotional and physical harm.

Musawa is not the only organisation fighting for gender equality in Syria. There are several other prominent organisations that include the General Union of Syrian Women<sup>7</sup> (which represents Syria in the relevant UN programmes and agencies), the Syrian Women's League,<sup>8</sup> and the Association for Women's Role Development (AWRD). However, what distinguishes Musawa is its very heavy reliance on the internet and the social web to support and advance its causes. Musawa has an active website, launched in 2009, that serves as the primary communication outlet for the organisation. The website is rich in content and frequently updated. This is in stark contrast to the other organisations that either have non-functioning websites, or have a rather basic web presence.

Musawa's extensive website content includes local, regional and international news, reports, studies, a document archive, information on prominent female figures and culture, and details of publications. Some of the topics covered by the organisation's activities include CEDAW, human trafficking, sexual harassment, gender equality, early marriage, violence against women, polygamy and women's empowerment. This makes the website one of the most comprehensive resources on the subject not only in Syria, but in the whole Arab region.

The gender section of the website includes over 65 articles and studies that discuss the topic, including information on gender-responsive budgets, gender and human rights, an introduction to gender evaluation, and an observatory for violations of gender equality in Syria (such as a story about the Central Bank of Syria advertising to recruit male employees only in early 2011). Interestingly, Musawa's website presents information from a wide spectrum of perspectives, making it one of the few online forums in the Arab region that expand participation and encourage diversity and difference in opinion.

While the Musawa website serves as the primary resource for gender-related information, reports and news stories, the organisation seems to have adopted other ICT and social web tools as its main

participatory platform. This multi-platform approach is an interesting idea that few organisations in the country have successfully embraced. Musawa's website links to its page on Facebook<sup>9</sup> and Twitter stream.<sup>10</sup> Advocacy and influencing policy are two key activities for the organisation, and they require the widest possible level of participation and engagement from the primary target audience (Syrian women) and the public at large.

Musawa's Facebook page had around 1,500 likes as of 15 April 2013. Activity on the page shows several posts per day, an indication of an active and participatory community. Many posts attract interaction from the community in the form of likes, shares or comments. The page also promotes Musawa's activities in the real world, including workshops, events, lectures and festivals. The organisation's account on Twitter, on the other hand, has a rather modest following, with only 155 tweets posted as of 15 April 2013. This could be the result of the much lower popularity of Twitter in the Arab region in general, and in Syria in particular, compared to Facebook.<sup>11</sup>

Interestingly, Musawa seems to have a second, member-only group on Facebook that focuses mostly on events and dialogue. The group had 156 members as of 15 April 2013, and it is not clear why the decision was made not to make it public.

As can be seen from the discussion of Musawa's presence on the web and social networks, the organisation seems to have actively pursued leveraging these vehicles to further its causes and foster a participatory and inclusive community. This is actually an appropriate strategy for an organisation that strives to achieve gender equality and promote women's participation. While most other women's organisations in the country conduct their activities entirely offline, and make little if any use of ICTs, Musawa seems to have struck the right balance between on-the-ground grassroots activism and online dialogue and advocacy.

This strategy has several advantages for Musawa, its membership and their cause. Firstly, it can increase its reach into communities and amongst individuals in ways that would not be otherwise possible. This can expand the organisation's audience and strengthen the movement it is trying to mobilise. Secondly, online communication can facilitate participation and discussion, leading to richer deliberations around the areas of relevance

<sup>9</sup> [www.facebook.com/MsawatEquality](http://www.facebook.com/MsawatEquality)

<sup>10</sup> [twitter.com/musawasy1](https://twitter.com/musawasy1)

<sup>11</sup> The Arab Social Media Report states a total of 3,766,000 users of Twitter in the Arab region (as of March 2013), compared to almost 54,553,000 users of Facebook ([www.arabsocialmediareport.com](http://www.arabsocialmediareport.com)).

<sup>7</sup> [www.wdp-sy.net](http://www.wdp-sy.net)

<sup>8</sup> [www.syriancp.org/ar/womensomite/sbindex.htm](http://www.syriancp.org/ar/womensomite/sbindex.htm)

to the organisation. For example, Musawa used its presence on social networks to organise dialogue events around key events, such as discussing women's rights in the new constitution. In such events, members send offline questions to be answered by a panel of experts, and a live session is held to enable online discussions. At the same time, Musawa transfers its reach in the cyber world to its events in the real world by announcing events it is organising, and inviting visitors or members to attend these events.

Having a well-organised and frequently updated presence in cyberspace preserves the valuable content produced through the organisation's activities, such as documented incidents, studies, reports and discussions, and makes it available and accessible to a wide audience over time. This can significantly increase the organisation's visibility both locally and at the international level, which may lead to opportunities for partnerships with similar organisations or attract contributions and support from prominent figures in the field.

An argument could be made that the use of social networks in general, and Facebook in particular, can in itself be a barrier for free participation. This argument is based on the premise that the use of such technologies usually requires users to reveal their actual identity, which might be problematic in situations where sensitive subjects and issues are being discussed. Many victims of domestic violence or sexual assault may need support from a community that understands their pains, and may also want to talk about their experiences and seek advice from others. However, the dilemma here is that if the only channel for communication requires these victims to reveal their true identity, they will most likely surrender in fear. Even topics as simple as women's right to grant citizenship to their children could be perceived as being culturally sensitive, and are an arena for the brave and fearless only. This phenomenon can be mitigated to a certain degree by using pseudonyms when participating (despite the fact that this violates Facebook's terms and conditions).

## Conclusions

The story of Musawa can be reflected upon through the lens of the Association for Progressive Communications' (APC) Gender Evaluation Methodology (GEM)<sup>12</sup> from two perspectives. Firstly, the initiative itself can be studied to evaluate the extent to which it has succeeded in achieving its objectives, and incorporate learning from this evaluation into the initiative. Secondly, the different platforms

and activities of the initiative (including its website, presence on social networks, and face-to-face events and activities) can be leveraged as effective and useful methods to develop better understanding of gender-related issues in Syria, formulate questions to evaluate changes (either positive or negative) relating to these issues, and collect data to inform gender-evaluation indicators.

Musawa can greatly benefit from a structured and systematic evaluation approach based on GEM to assess its progress towards achieving its goals and objectives. The organisation's main objectives can be summarised as raising awareness about women's issues in Syria, mobilising change, and influencing policies. The content published on Musawa's online outlets, and the interactions generated around this content, clearly indicate a positive impact on awareness raising and network building. The organisation seems to have also achieved significant network building and collaboration with other women's organisations and entities that share similar visions. This is evident in the joint activities publicised by Musawa that it organises with other partners. Such a collaborative and cooperative approach would certainly lead to wider reach and stronger networks that Musawa can mobilise to effect change and improve gender equality.

The issue of access is a very important question that needs to be addressed. Many civil society organisations that restrict their activities to cyberspace risk leaving behind an important portion of their target audience. Not all women have access to the technology required to use the internet, or possess the skills necessary to use these technologies effectively. This may well be the most vulnerable target audience, and the one that needs the greatest attention. Musawa addresses this matter by adopting a hybrid online/offline approach to its activities and engagement. By doing so, Musawa is expanding its network even further, addressing the issues of access and connectivity, and widening the spectrum of its discourse and dialogue. Moreover, the organisation is bridging the offline and online worlds by documenting and archiving the proceedings of events and activities for future reference.

From another perspective, Musawa's online platforms can be leveraged as effective and useful methods to gauge emerging gender-related issues in Syria, and to facilitate the collection of data for the development of meaningful gender indicators. While not strictly structured, Musawa conducted several polls and open consultations around important challenges facing women in Syria, including

<sup>12</sup> [www.apcwomen.org/gem](http://www.apcwomen.org/gem)

gender equality in the new constitution and the elimination of the country's reservations on CEDAW. Undoubtedly, the value of these resources and platforms in identifying changes in gender-related issues and collecting data and contributions to evaluate change in this domain can be greatly enhanced if Musawa adopts a structured methodology for gender evaluation such as GEM.

### Action steps

- Gender activists in general, and Musawa's community in particular, should consider developing the insights they acquire through their online and offline activities into policy briefs that can be used to influence decision makers and policy formulation processes. This is probably the least developed area in the organisation's repertoire.
- Musawa's activities can be greatly enhanced by adopting GEM as a guiding framework and methodology for evaluating the status of gender equality in Syria. By joining the GEM community of practice, Musawa can also learn from other women's organisations all over the world and share best practices.
- In line with Musawa's goals in conducting social campaigns and activities using all available media outlets to raise awareness of women's rights, the organisation should strengthen its reach into the mass media (including radio and TV), and also explore using rich digital media (such as video and podcasts) to increase the impact of its communications. ■



# TANZANIA

Innovative use of mobile phones for women's empowerment in Tanzania



## Collaboration on International ICT Policy in East and Southern Africa (CIPESA)

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### Introduction

Women's development has been placed at the core of development in Tanzania, at least in theory. It is reported that women, especially in rural areas, provide 80% of the labour force and contribute 60% to food production.<sup>1</sup> Women are reported to be the main producers of cash crops as well. It has also been observed that gender patterns in Tanzania are changing and women are now venturing into more market-oriented activities.

However, despite these reported successes, gender inequality still exists in Tanzania. Women still face challenges in economic development and continue to be marginalised. For instance, women are not allowed to own property, are more likely than men to be poor and illiterate, are subjected to gender-based violence, have no say in their reproductive rights, and encounter job discrimination. Traditional or Islamic customs that discriminate against women still prevail in family law. The 2009 Gender-related Development Index<sup>2</sup> ranked the country 125th out of the 155 countries measured, while the 2008 Gender Empowerment Measure put it at 48th out of 108 countries. Further, women's rights are constitutionally guaranteed but not uniformly protected. Human rights groups have sought laws to bar forced marriages, which are most common among Tanzania's coastal peoples.

In this context, there has been an increase in women embracing technology to aid their empowerment drive. Information and communications technologies (ICTs), especially the internet and mobile telephones, are being used to provide services especially in health, as well as to boost entrepreneurial skills for Tanzanian women.

### Policy and political background

The 1977 Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania (Articles 12 and 13) guarantees equality between men and women and supports women's

full participation in social, economic and political life. Gender equality and women's empowerment is also recognised in the country's National Poverty Reduction Strategies (MKUKUTA II<sup>3</sup> on the mainland and MKUZA II in Zanzibar)<sup>4</sup> under the goals on governance, education and health. For instance, the MKUKUTA II strategy streamlines strategies on improving the quality of life and social well-being, focusing on the poorest and most vulnerable groups, including women. On the other hand, among its goals concerning good governance and national unity, the MKUZA II strategy calls for "empowering and increasing representation of women in policy and decision making."

Tanzania has signed international commitments to women's rights, such as the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979); the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989); the Convention on the Political Rights of Women (1952); the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) on women's economic and political empowerment, education and training; the Cairo Declaration on Population and Development (1994); the Millennium Declaration and Development Goals (MDGs), including MDG 3 on gender equality and women's empowerment; the Universal Declaration on Democracy (1997); United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) and Resolution 1820 (2006) on gender equality, protection and participation of women in conflict resolution, peacemaking and state building.

The government has passed several laws in favour of women, such as the Sexual Offences Special Provisions Act of 1998, which protects women, girls and children from sexual harassment and abuse; and the Land Law Act of 1999 and Village Land Act of 1999, which repeal and replace previous legislation on land matters, enabling women to enjoy equal rights with men in access, ownership and control of land. Nonetheless, women's civil rights are limited by the existence of a dual legal system which includes both statutory and religious and customary laws. In addition, the 1971 Marriage Act includes provisions in respect to women's property and

1 [www.tanzania.go.tz/gender.html](http://www.tanzania.go.tz/gender.html)

2 [hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR\\_2009\\_EN\\_Table\\_J.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR_2009_EN_Table_J.pdf)

3 [www.povertymonitoring.go.tz/Mkukuta/Mkukuta%20English.pdf](http://www.povertymonitoring.go.tz/Mkukuta/Mkukuta%20English.pdf)

4 [zanzibar.go.tz/admin/uploads/MKUZA%20II%20Final.pdf](http://zanzibar.go.tz/admin/uploads/MKUZA%20II%20Final.pdf)

inheritance rights. However, in many cases, women, especially in rural areas, do not have access to land due to cultural and tradition restrictions existing in the customary land laws that deny them independent land ownership rights.

### Projects that use mobile phones for women's empowerment

ICTs, including the internet and mobile phones, can potentially play an important role in reducing gender disparities in communities. And in Tanzania there are some illustrative examples of this. Way back in 2002, the BBC ran a story on how women in Tanzania were increasingly accessing the internet to seek business opportunities as a result of the increase in internet cafés in the country.<sup>5</sup> At the time, it was observed that as more women in Tanzania were beginning to use the internet, women's groups were also beginning to look at ways of expanding its use and making it work better for women.

More recently, there have been an increasing number of women's organisations in Tanzania focusing on the use of technology for empowerment. One such organisation is the Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP),<sup>6</sup> which embarked on establishing knowledge centres across Tanzania aimed at giving grassroots women and men access to ICTs. Key to note is that these centres aim to empower both women and men in using ICTs to become more involved in gender advocacy. The TGNP is also working on networking these centres under its "Jamii Voices" project. The project uses SMS and push-to-talk voice messaging to allow local activists to send messages about their work to various audiences. It is hoped that the project will allow grassroots activists to create a bigger, more active and more powerful network for action on gender issues and other community challenges impacting upon women in Tanzania.

Another organisation, Comprehensive Community Based Rehabilitation in Tanzania (CCBRT), is using mobile money, commonly referred to as M-Pesa, to help provide rural women with access to treatment for vesicovaginal fistula (VVF), also known as obstetric fistula, a hole in the birth canal caused by difficult or frequent delivery. The mobile phone-based cash transfer system allows these women to receive funds to undergo treatment for this condition. Although the treatment itself is offered free of charge at the Dar es Salaam hospital involved in the initiative, patients need to pay for transport to

access the centre. For many rural women, transport and accommodation costs were hindering access to this free service. However, CCBRT sends money via M-Pesa to fistula survivors to cover travel and accommodation costs to the hospital in Dar es Salaam for their repair surgery. The money is sent via SMS to fistula volunteer ambassadors, who may be former patients, health workers, or staff of non-governmental organisations, who identify and refer women suffering from fistula for treatment. The ambassadors retrieve the money at the local Vodacom M-Pesa agent and buy bus tickets for the patients. When the patient arrives at the hospital, the ambassador receives a small incentive, again via M-Pesa. It is reported that in 2010, 268 fistula surgeries were performed at the CCBRT hospital, of which 129 were on women who travelled on transport paid for through M-Pesa.<sup>7</sup> The organisation reports that 314 fistula surgeries were conducted between January and June 2013.<sup>8</sup> However, it not stated how many of these were conducted as a result of the facilitation from M-Pesa transactions. M-Pesa, a service provided by Vodacom, is by far the biggest mobile money service in Tanzania, with 9.5 million subscribers out of the 27.6 million mobile subscribers. Further, 38% of the national SMS traffic is exchanged via the same network, making it the leading telecom provider in Tanzania.

Still in health, yet another initiative championed by the government in partnership with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Foundation and other health development partners is called Wazazi Nipendeni – meaning "Parents, Love Me" in Swahili.<sup>9</sup> This is a national Healthy Pregnancy and Safe Motherhood multimedia campaign, which allows expectant mothers to receive free text messages and appointment reminders in Swahili. This service also remains accessible to mothers of newborn babies up to 16 weeks of age. Supporters of the mothers such as husbands, friends and family and general information seekers are also able to access the service. The service uses the short-code 15001, which is listed in all campaign materials of the initiative. Therefore anyone interested in receiving healthy pregnancy information and appointment reminders is free to send the word MTOTO – meaning child – to the short-code 15001 in order to start receiving the free texts. The initiative was launched in November 2012, and it has been reported that "125,000 registrants were reached in April 2013

5 Dickinson, D. (2002) Tanzanian women get online bug, *BBC*, 18 November. [news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/2487821.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/2487821.stm)

6 [www.tgnp.org](http://www.tgnp.org)

7 [www.unfpa.org/public/home/news/pid/7697#sthash.SnH9Vk3W.dpuf](http://www.unfpa.org/public/home/news/pid/7697#sthash.SnH9Vk3W.dpuf)

8 [www.ccbrt.or.tz](http://www.ccbrt.or.tz)

9 [www.cdcfoundation.org/what/program/mhealth-text-messaging-campaign-tanzania](http://www.cdcfoundation.org/what/program/mhealth-text-messaging-campaign-tanzania)

and more than four million text messages were sent to those who signed up for the free healthy pregnancy and safe motherhood information.”<sup>10</sup> It has also been reported that the service continues to add an average of 7,000 registrants weekly.<sup>11</sup> This service is aimed at reducing Tanzania’s maternal mortality rate, which was estimated at 454 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2010 – a figure still higher than the target of 265 by 2015.<sup>12</sup>

The mobile revolution in Tanzania is also attracting projects aimed at improving women’s entrepreneurship. The most recently launched is the Business Women service run by the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women in partnership with the ExxonMobil Foundation, Nokia and the Tanzania Gatsby Trust. The initiative allows women to access vital business tips via their mobile phones.<sup>13</sup> Tanzania is the third country into which Business Women has been rolled out following successful launches in Nigeria and Indonesia. “When a women subscribes to Business Women, she receives a series of messages (one per day) over a 12-month period, containing a broad range of useful entrepreneurship information tailored to both women and the country in which she has subscribed,” notes Matt Strickland, the mobile technology programme coordinator at the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women. In addition, the foundation is targeting 140 Tanzanian women entrepreneurs who will receive specialist entrepreneurship training over a two-year period.

## Conclusions

Technology, especially mobile telephones and the internet, can empower women to make positive contributions to development in their communities. Although there is no reliable information pointing

to the number of women accessing the internet, internet use in Tanzania has increased from 4.9 million users in 2011 to 5.6 million as of June 2012. The number of mobile subscriptions as of March 2013 stood at 27.4 million. In addition, the government is constantly trying to boost connectivity in the country. It is reported that in October 2012, the Tanzanian government borrowed USD 170 million from the Chinese government and raised a further USD 80 million to build a vast fibre-optic cable network, stretching 7,500 km in a ring around the country. However, the cost of access for both mobile phones and the internet is still high. In a country where gender disparities are high and women’s rights are still a challenge, there is a need for strong policies aimed at enabling women to access services via ICTs.

## Action steps

There is a need to promote the adoption of innovative technologies that can be used to empower women and to encourage entrepreneurship. The private sector needs to become more innovative in developing applications – especially mobile applications – that can be used to reach out to more women. Women also need to be encouraged to join simple start-up groups that can be used for providing training in the adoption of technological tools.

Massive sensitisation on the potential of technology in empowering women is needed. There is a need to make simple technological tools available that can aid in reaching out to women so that their voices can be heard. Awareness campaigns need to be developed so that women can use technology to demand the fulfilment of their rights. ■

10 [www.texttochange.org/news/scaled-nationwide-mhealth-campaign-pregnant-women-tanzania](http://www.texttochange.org/news/scaled-nationwide-mhealth-campaign-pregnant-women-tanzania)

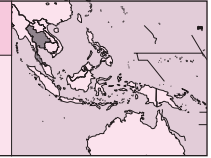
11 [www.cdcfoundation.org/what/program/mhealth-text-messaging-campaign-tanzania](http://www.cdcfoundation.org/what/program/mhealth-text-messaging-campaign-tanzania)

12 [tz.one.un.org/index.php/what-we-do/health-and-nutrition](http://tz.one.un.org/index.php/what-we-do/health-and-nutrition)

13 [www.cherieblairfoundation.org/launch-of-business-women-in-tanzania](http://www.cherieblairfoundation.org/launch-of-business-women-in-tanzania)

# THAILAND

Thai cyber sexuality: Liberation, empowerment and suppression



## Thai Netizen Network

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## Introduction

Thai women can be said to enjoy more equality than women in other countries in the region. For instance, Thailand is now ruled by its first female prime minister. Premarital sex, though taboo in conversation, is actually common. Thailand is also well known for its tolerance. Despite this, the society is dominated by patriarchal values, firmly held by the older generation. There is a lack of legal recognition for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community, which is heavily stigmatised by the media. As a result of social norms, sexualities are not openly discussed in Thai society except within the narrow frame of reproductive health and sexually transmitted infection (STI) prevention, and most formal sex education discourses involve abstinence-based approaches to prevent STIs and teen pregnancy.

Cyberspace has been a new frontier to address the emerging issues and to challenge the abstinence-based approaches through direct communication with teens and young adults – particularly women and teenage girls – as well as parents who seek information, advice and peer recommendations or just want to talk with someone who shares the same situation.

## Policy and political background

“Public morality” plays a key role in Thai law as several sexual practices are considered to contravene public morality. In the name of public morality, prostitution, pornography, sex toys, swinging, group sex, swinger clubs, as well as some forms of kink, are illegal under the Criminal Code in Thailand and penalised with up to 15 years of prison. Nevertheless, the law is not strictly enforced: such services and products are easily found on the streets of Bangkok.

The current Thai constitution (2007) does not clearly stipulate respect for sexual orientation. However, the charter has a broad prohibition against “unfair” discrimination based on “personal

status” – although the civil liberties it respects must be in accordance with “public morality” and national security.

The Thai Computer Crime Act (CCA) also banned pornographic sites and information related to them in the name of public morality. From 2007 to 2012, the Thai authorities blocked access to 23,456 websites with obscene content.<sup>1</sup> Under the CCA anyone who posts immoral or obscene information or pornography on the internet can face a maximum imprisonment of five years or a fine of not more than USD 32,000 or both.

## The internet as a tool to help sexual well-being

Relationship counselling is not popular and rarely available in Thailand because social norms dictate that sexualities and sexual well-being are not topics for discussion even with spouses, parents or doctors. The internet provides an anonymous connection to various online resources, including social media sites and web boards, to answer questions on sexual health and sexualities in an authoritative way. Some websites also provide online counselling or advice. Women and young people can openly discuss sexual and reproductive health and get primary counselling on various topics, from STIs, to planned and unplanned pregnancy, to sexual pleasure. For example, sexual health Q&A websites run by doctors or medical personnel can substitute for professional sex and relationship counselling services, given that these are scarce. The internet also helps to complement sexual and relationship counselling columns found in newspapers or magazines with interactive forums. For example, middle-aged women post questions on how to improve their boring sex lives with their husbands on one of the most popular public web forums in Thailand, Pantip.com. This site has a Suan Lum<sup>2</sup> sub-forum created specifically for discussion on sexual health and an 18+ sign is used to signify that the content is for adults only. Several members are medical doctors and experienced, knowledgeable users. Meanwhile, “Can I get pregnant from ....?” may be one of the most

<sup>1</sup> [freedom.ilaw.or.th/sites/default/files/2012Statistic.pdf](http://freedom.ilaw.or.th/sites/default/files/2012Statistic.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [pantip.com/forum/lumpini](http://pantip.com/forum/lumpini)

frequently asked questions on Teenpath.net, but is seldom asked of Thai parents.

### **The internet as a channel for SOGI activism**

Peer support groups on the internet can support people with different sexual orientations and gender identities (SOGI). User-organised online platforms for SOGI and specific gender- and sexuality-related interest groups can provide counselling, share life experiences and often extend to offline support and connections, such as discussion groups for those who want to come out.

The internet is also a new frontier for campaigns on sexual identities, sexual health and gender identity issues. Gender and SOGI activists use social media to recruit new participants to online and offline campaigns, such as mobilisation to reduce prejudice and homophobia on the International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia. The Anjaree and Saphan groups, for example, use the internet and social media to raise awareness on gender identities, and to counter haters and misconceptions in mainstream society, such as by affirming that lesbians, gays and trans people are not “mentally ill”.

### **The internet as a space to explore sexualities**

Because of the repressive cultural norms on proper sexualities and legitimate relationships (i.e. sex within marriage), which are heavily promoted by the Thai state, individuals use the internet to escape conventions by exploring sexual practices and intimate relationships by themselves.

Unlike girls in the United States who may face cyber bullying after their half-naked photos are published on the internet, Thai teens enjoy popularity and fame from posting sexy half-naked photos of themselves as a way to gain acceptance. Due to the wide distribution of affordable smartphones with high-definition cameras, the practice of teenagers aged 13 to 20 taking pictures of themselves and sharing the photos on social network sites, such as Facebook, has become popular and fashionable.

The most notable example was a teenager with the Facebook username Nuey Pramannanlae. In early 2005, she became an online celebrity attracting admiration among Thai teens after she posted hundred of photos of herself in various sexy poses. Most of the photos show her wearing tight shirts or dresses and focus on her breasts. This inspired other teenage girls to imitate her. Since 2006, numerous Nuey copycats have appeared, revealing themselves to a greater degree – going beyond sexy

to half naked, to nudity. Many of them show half or most of their breasts. Some have gone further by posting pictures of themselves making love. Most of these did this purely to attract attention and gain admiration.

### **The internet as a space to escape repression**

Mainstream Thai society has strict rules on what proper intimacy should entail: heterosexual relationships within the monogamous marriage institution, which is promoted by the state and the mainstream media. Additionally, the law also criminalises certain sexual activities, such as partner exchanges and sex shops, as “indecent”.

Cyberspace allows the opportunity to escape from the “norm” and lets people explore sexualities and enjoy a sexual freedom that is not allowed in the offline world. For instance, online platforms provide even wider opportunities for dating, such as casual relationship personal web boards, and websites for Thais seeking Thais and Thais seeking foreign partners. Explicit casual dating websites and online dating services are not blocked by Thai authorities. Websites such as [www.sexdatenow.net](http://www.sexdatenow.net) offer localised dating services as well as warnings about consensual casual relationships and condom use.

Despite being criminalised under Thai law, swinging parties are not a new phenomenon, but the internet has decentralised the practice, moving it from paid organised events to self-organised appointments through social media and online websites where couples can check one another’s details. Some websites may require membership fees. Most of the websites require registration to prevent police crackdown and arrest under the CCA.

Sex shops are not legalised in Thailand. Buying a sex toy in a roadside shop in a tourist night bazaar can be an awkward experience, especially for women. Online sex shops offer a better experience and anonymity for women and buyers in general. Some websites also have women receptionists or are operated by women. “Ae AengKa Oratai” (in Thai) and “Morning Love” are examples of YouTube users that advertise sex toy products with educational sexuality videos and product demonstrations for women. Some online sex shops also feature products for LGBT people.

Under the current legal framework and cultural norms, online sex shops help overcome legal barriers and embarrassment for women and LGBT people who seek pleasure by allowing them to remain anonymous and enjoy privacy.



| TABLE 1.  |   |        |
|---|---|--------|
| Selected examples of online gender and SOGI advocacy and activism |   |        |
| Target audiences  | Website   | Topics |
| Teenagers, students, young adults, parents, teachers              | <b>Teen Path</b> , an online source of sexuality-related and reproductive health awareness and information<br>www.teenpath.net  |        |
| Lesbian women, LGBT, SOGI and gender activists                    | <b>Anjaree</b><br>www.anjaree.org<br>Social media: www.facebook.com/anjaree and www.facebook.com/anjareefanpage<br><br><b>Bangkok International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia</b><br>Social media: www.facebook.com/bkk.IDAHOT<br><br><b>Sapaan Group: Alternative Media for SOGI Rights</b><br>sapaan.org |        |
| Women and victims of domestic violence                            | <b>Thailand Domestic Violence Information Centre (governmental)</b><br>www.violence.in.th/publicweb/Default.aspx  |        |
| Men who have sex with men (MSM)                                   | <b>Adam's Love</b> , a web counselling centre for MSM<br>www.adamslove.org<br>Social media: www.facebook.com/adamslovethailand  |        |

## Conclusions

- Although numerous services, products and activities related to sexuality are illegal, in practice Thai law is loosely enforced. Most of the services, products and activities are widely available, at least in Bangkok. This does not mean that harsher law enforcement is called for, but suggests that the law is not realistic or practical.
- Because of the structure of the internet, attempts by the Thai authorities to block access to pornography and websites related to sexuality are futile. Most Thai internet users can still access porn sites.
- The Thai authorities, especially the police and the ministry of culture, tend to impose conservative values upon Thai society. Laws against LGBT people are usually invoked when scandals break out or when the authorities want to make a splash in the media.
- Because of the anonymity of the internet, it plays a very important role in improving the sexual well-being of Thai people who live in a



society that discourages open talk about sexuality.

- The internet gives LGBT people a space where they can relax from social constraints and also empowers them by connecting them with peers for peer counselling or creating activist groups against discrimination or for STIs awareness.
- Cyberspace offers the “others” who do not conform to the norm a space to explore their sexualities, meet people with the same interests and even use the internet to enjoy sexual freedom, all of which is obstructed in the offline world.

### Action steps

- Sexuality has to do with personal taste and this should be a clearly guaranteed right in the constitution regardless of “public morality”, which is subjective and tends to be interpreted from a conservative point of view.
- The Thai authorities should change their attitude toward sexuality, from control and suppression to tolerance and regulation.

- Instead of suppressing sexual activities, services and products, forcing users to go underground, the Thai authorities should decriminalise and regulate them in order to better control standards, safety and the age of consumers and providers.
- The Computer Crime Act should be amended to decriminalise pornography and obscene websites, but establish measures, such as age verification, to regulate access to this content.
- Internet literacy should be included in the educational curriculum so teens can understand the risk of posting their photos or personal information on the internet, and know how to control any damage that may result.
- The Thai authorities should establish a centre to receive complaints and provide remedial measures for those (especially minors) who suffer from abuse online. ■

# UGANDA

Using ICTs to create awareness of legislative challenges and change



## Women of Uganda Network (WOUNET)

Harriet Adong

[www.wougnnet.org](http://www.wougnnet.org)

### Introduction

The Domestic Relations Bill (DRB), which reforms and consolidates the marriage and divorce law, has been shelved for half a century in the Ugandan parliament. It has suffered due to its unfavourable link to Ugandan culture, religious concerns and the rural women question, and this delay has led to unequal access to justice among women.

Uganda is a signatory to most international human rights and women's rights conventions, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The country is said to have the most gender-sensitive constitution in the world, with a well-established ministry of gender and a gender-mainstreaming strategy and national plan for the empowerment of women. Nevertheless, several civil society organisations have conducted campaigns for the recognition of women's rights, but with little success. The lack of success is attributed to religious and cultural proponents who have moved on to claim that some of the articulated women's rights violate religious and cultural norms. Others have stated that women activists have exaggerated the plight of rural women and sowed discontent in an otherwise "happy rural woman".

Currently a hot topic in the country, the DRB has sparked wide debate in all quarters, from politicians, activists and the clergy to the people on the streets, as well as in the most remote parts of Uganda. WOUNET has hosted the debate using all available communication channels and platforms, which include online platforms, social media (Facebook), blogs and SMS campaigns.

### Policy and political background

The government of Uganda has been debating the current version of the DRB since 2003 (the first version was tabled in parliament in 1964). The bill is aimed at reforming and consolidating laws relating to marriage, separation and divorce amongst its diverse religious and ethnic communities. In addition, the bill, if passed, would criminalise current customs of widow inheritance, marital rape and the

payment of a dowry, and set the minimum legal age of marriage to 18 years for both men and women.

Polygamy is legal in Uganda, according to customary and Islamic law, and will remain so should the DRB pass. Women currently have no legal course of action to prevent their husbands from taking another wife, although under the new bill, a wife would be allowed to divorce her husband if he attempted to marry a new wife without her consent.

When this bill was re-tabled in parliament by the women legislators in March this year, it raised an uproar from their male counterparts, who stated that if passed in its current form, the bill would perpetuate the break-up of marriages and promote sexual promiscuity and violence. They called for more time for consultation. However, the speaker of parliament had promised that the introduction of the bill would be an Easter gift for women in Uganda.

The constitution guarantees a woman's equal rights within marriage, even in the event of a divorce, but the law currently does not enforce this right. In addition, under customary law in some areas, women wishing to divorce on the grounds of their husband's adultery are required to meet stricter standards of evidence than men in the same position. Customary law dictates that women do not have the right to inherit, but the Marriage Code grants widows the right to inherit 15% of a deceased husband's property.

### Combating conservative cultural and religious demands

Property rights is a contentious issue in Uganda. While no laws prevent women from owning land in the country, the customs of male inheritance have resulted in many women being excluded from property ownership.

Issues that were raised by the clergy were expressed in various forms, including: "If cohabitation is recognised as a form of marriage, at which date do you begin counting? When the woman brings in her first dress? When she finally moves in?" The clergy have brought in such diversionary and contentious views that the policy machinery has been halted, with the head of state coming in to discuss the issue at the party level, and advancing funds for legislators for further consultations and

meetings with their constituents. In addition, different religious groups want different laws, further exacerbating the process.

Violence against women in Uganda is common and perpetrators benefit from impunity, partly due to social attitudes condoning such violence. Law enforcement officials seldom intervene in domestic violence cases. The 2006 Uganda Demographic and Health Survey revealed that 68% of married women suffer domestic violence. In light of this, the Domestic Violence Act was passed in 2009 – but it is a law in name only.

The DRB would empower courts of law to decide whether or not a marriage has irretrievably broken down, on such grounds as adultery, “sexual perversion” on the part of the respondent, cruelty, whether mental or physical, desertion of the petitioner for a continuous period of at least two years, incest, and change of religion, among others.

There are many documented cases of spouses who have been mistreated or even killed in bad marriages. Homes have broken up because of the actions of one person and the consequences have affected generations thereafter. Even while the prospect of legislating marriage and personal relationships goes against the grain, these are realities that Ugandans cannot run away from.

The Marriage and Divorce Bill, as the current version of the DRB is known, addresses, among other things, the different types of recognised marriages in Uganda, marital rights and duties, and recognition of cohabitation in relation to property rights. It also clarifies article 33 (1) of the constitution, which accords women full and equal dignity of the person with men and spells out the rights protected during marriage, which include the right to marry, give consent to marry, receive marriage gifts, and conjugal and property rights.

The DRB has seen tempers flare in parliament and sections of the media. It is important to educate the public about the importance of the bill in Uganda, since domestic violence arises from conflicts relating to rights and responsibilities in the home, and a failure to pass the DRB will affect the realisation of the Domestic Violence Act, rendering it redundant as it only justifies the prosecution of offences where there has been “cruelty”. Ugandan women will not have adequate access to justice due to insufficient information on their rights and the laws protecting them, social pressure, the cost of legal procedures, and inadequate law enforcement of women’s rights.

WOUNGNET believes that there is a need to create awareness amongst the public through the use of social media, other online platforms and mailing lists.

Similarly, throughout the country, various women’s organisations and members of parliament have endeavoured to include information and communications technologies (ICTs) in their awareness-raising efforts. For example, the Uganda Women’s Parliamentary Association has run media campaigns and has posted updates on their Parliament of Uganda Facebook account to ensure that people understand that the bill needs to be passed. WOUNGNET has run SMS campaigns and social media campaigns, and participated in radio and TV talk shows and debates. Various postings have been updated on the WOUNGNET mailing list.

## Conclusions

From WOUNGNET’s perspective, the DRB is a consolidated law on domestic matters that upholds the institution of marriage, offers protection for married people, promotes fairness to achieve social justice, and provides for requirements of a valid marriage in line with the Constitution of Uganda. But not everyone sees it this way.

Therefore, WOUNGNET believes that on behalf of the women’s network and in order to strengthen advocacy in relation to the DRB, there is a need to harmonise disparate messages to ensure that women’s rights advocates speak as ONE. All available platforms and forums at our disposal, which include SMS, email, phone calls and social media (Twitter, Facebook), should be used to spread this uniform message to the wider public.

The failure to pass the DRB will be a hindrance to the development of women across the country. No matter how educated or economically emancipated a woman is, some of her rights as a wife, mother or daughter are capped because there is no law to protect her. This bill intends to amend and harmonise legislation on marriage, separation, divorce and inheritance. Religion and culture should be used to empower a woman and not to prevent her from full self-actualisation and equal opportunities, since religion and culture are often used to prevent women from achieving their full rights.

## Action steps

- Legislation on marriage, divorce, adultery and inheritance needs to be amended and approved at the earliest opportunity. Both offline and online platforms need to be used for advocacy and awareness raising.
- There is a need to harmonise disparate messages so that the women’s network speaks with one voice.
- It is necessary to document the process of trying to pass the bill, for future analysis and record. ■

## UNITED STATES

The flame war on women



**Association for Progressive Communications (APC) and May First/People Link**

Mallory Knodel and Alfredo López  
[www.apc.org](http://www.apc.org) and [mayfirst.org](http://mayfirst.org)

### Introduction

#### The case of Adria Richards

Obsessive public debate over women's bodies, behaviours and careers is nothing new in the US, though increasingly we see them spark in online spaces, ignite with social media and then burn up and out with the help of mass media.

This story is about sexism, racism, techie culture, corporate "hide-from-accountability" amorality and the lack of job protection that jostles the ground under most techies' feet. Adria Richards is a prominent writer and consultant who was in attendance at the 2013 PyCon (Python Conference) on behalf of her employer SendGrid, an email service provider. During a plenary session, Richards overheard what she thought were sexual jokes being made by two men sitting behind her.<sup>1</sup>

The jokes sounded offensively sexual to Richards, so she took their picture and posted it on Twitter with a tweet asking that something be done about their offensive behaviour. Conference officials were on the scene immediately. At their request, she pointed the men out to them and the conference organisers quietly asked them, one by one, to come out to the hallway for a chat.

One of the men, who worked for a game marketing company called PlayHaven, was fired soon after the conference. Criticism of Richards exploded online. Richards' website was hacked, the SendGrid website was hacked (allegedly by activists from Anonymous) and Richards received several death threats (one accompanied by a grotesque tweet with a picture of a decapitated woman on a bed).

The surge of public debate about whether or not Richards' "public shaming" of the men was warranted led to an announcement by SendGrid that Richards had herself been fired.

Sarah Milstein, a speaker, writer and consultant specialising in social media, put the reactions into perspective very well:

I find it more than a bit damning of the tech sector and SendGrid that PlayHaven and PyCon, two of the several players in this episode with considerable power, acted with great respectability, and yet Adria – a player without much power – was attacked at a level we don't see often, with intent to harm and silence her.<sup>2</sup>

### Blowback

Of course, no one should have a lost a job as a result of this. Men learning lessons about their sexist behaviour is a central part of the struggle against sexism. But if that man is fired, how is he going to apply the newly learned lesson? And if you fire the woman for offering the lesson, who will give the next lesson?

Beyond the unfortunate response by SendGrid, Adria Richards' story is part of a larger, growing trend in online spaces. Incidents of violence against women online are on the rise in the US for several reasons.<sup>3</sup> More women are online than ever before.<sup>4</sup> Misogynistic hate speech is a deliberate tactic used to exclude women from public spaces, which includes online spaces.

Groups in the US that seek to exclude and silence women in online (and offline) spaces are often self-proclaimed men's rights groups.<sup>5</sup> Their aims are certainly reactionary and are one manifestation of a severe backlash against women's human rights the world over. These US-based men's rights groups are, like their counterparts overseas, often religiously fundamentalist, though not always. The severity of online trolling has caused several journalists to reduce or stop publishing online.<sup>6</sup> It is not just trolling. Kathy Sierra, a popular web developer, author and blogger, went into hiding after receiving gruesome threats online. Rape and

1 [butyoureagirl.com/14015/forking-and-dongle-jokes-dont-belong-at-tech-conferences](http://butyoureagirl.com/14015/forking-and-dongle-jokes-dont-belong-at-tech-conferences)

2 [www.dogsandshoes.com/2013/03/adria.html](http://www.dogsandshoes.com/2013/03/adria.html)

3 [www.genderit.org/node/3753](http://www.genderit.org/node/3753)

4 [www.genderit.org/node/3748](http://www.genderit.org/node/3748)

5 [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Men's\\_rights\\_movement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Men's_rights_movement)

6 [www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/nov/05/women-bloggers-hateful-trolling](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/nov/05/women-bloggers-hateful-trolling)

murder threats force women bloggers and writers to actually leave the internet behind to stay safe. Writer and activist Deanna Zandt said:

I'm a veteran of the misogynist flame wars – I've been the victim of and helped other women through them since I got online in 1994. And now, I'm looking forward to the day when we discuss how to prevent massive flame wars that hound women into hiding. I'm also looking forward to leaving behind this ugly cultural focus on how women can stop themselves from getting viciously attacked, over and over and over.<sup>7</sup>

It is not individual women who must end violence against themselves, but society that must address violence against women at its roots.

### Squelching the fire

Nobody is advocating repressive control of expression or speech – in fact, just the opposite. A robust and open discussion of the issues that the Richards case raises is the best, indeed the only effective way of moving towards solving this problem.

But free speech does not mean speech that prevents half the human race from participating. It is not a licence for abuse. It should be protected as it has always been progressively defined: the right to express opinions openly without an expectation of being attacked or bullied out of the conversation and without that attack and bullying being the intent.

Setting rules to any discussion and explaining them clearly as tools of inclusion rather than exclusion is not censorship. On the contrary, it is a way of assuring an open discussion. Any discussion between people either openly or implicitly involves “rules of exchange” – every socialised human being knows that and would support it. That should be the norm on the internet.

### Conclusions

Some analysts and activists, many progressive and well intentioned, have sought to position the Richards case as either an isolated incident or a reflection of the way the “code of conduct” or culture of internet events is insensitive to gross sexism. But the case reveals a much deeper problem and difficult challenge.

The internet, structurally, is controlled by men, as evinced by the predominance of men within the ranks of technologists, server administrators and

software developers – the communities that “form” internet culture, use and practice. The issue is brought into relief by a question: Why are women such a minority within these populations in the US (a country where anti-sexist struggles have been relatively successful in affecting popular culture)?

Or, the connected and possibly more important issue: How does this absence of women affect the quality of the internet and its various components (including its software)? In fact, what happened to Adria Richards is not only not an isolated case but, given how male predominance has impacted communications technology, it is unsurprising and epidemic. Technology, in its terminology, development concepts, collaboration procedures and staff structuring, is based largely on male experience, and women who try to participate in this world must demonstrate considerable resolve.

This problem has sparked an impressive number of programmes and efforts designed to bring women into the “driver’s seat” of online technology. The Gnome project, a “server administration” training programme for women activists, co-sponsored by a group of progressive organisations, is one such effort. The People of Color Techie Training Program, sponsored by APC member May First/People Link, also addresses the issue by prioritising the participation of women of colour. Others are planned and will certainly grow.

But there must be a consciousness about this problem and a commitment to resolving it within the progressive movement in the US (and the world) and specifically within the technology community. It must be identified as a problem and its solution must become a priority discussion.

### Action steps

- Our action steps are directed to starting that process, but they are only “first steps”.
- Women’s rights groups who are already talking about hate speech online should be brought to the forefront of this discussion. They should also engage women’s rights groups who deal with hate speech and harassment offline.
- People-centred research must be conducted to collect incidents of hate speech and violence against women online in order to support evidence-based policy advocacy at national and international levels.
- The US, in concert with women’s rights groups, should propose a resolution on women’s rights and discrimination to the UN Human Rights

<sup>7</sup> [www.forbes.com/sites/deannazandt/2013/03/22/why-asking-what-adria-richards-could-have-done-differently-is-the-wrong-question](http://www.forbes.com/sites/deannazandt/2013/03/22/why-asking-what-adria-richards-could-have-done-differently-is-the-wrong-question)

Council that addresses online harassment, as part of a larger movement to recognise technology-related violence against women.

- Civil society must continue to discuss and clarify the lines between online censorship and hate speech and lobby both governments and corporate spaces to put in place policies that protect women while respecting freedom of expression.
- Corporate spaces such as Facebook, Twitter and Reddit, as well as news sites, must implement strong user policies that draw lines for acceptable commentary. Threats of illegal acts such as sexual or physical violence should never be tolerated.
- One major lesson learned from the case of Adria Richards is the enormous value in community-defined codes of conduct, such as the one developed and published by the Python community.<sup>8</sup> Events, online spaces, participatory groups and campaigns should be encouraged to adopt such codes of conduct, especially in spaces where women are under-represented.
- It is important to shift culture online. This is a slow process, but not one without a well-paved path. Tactics to stop online harassment of women range from listening to women's stories of harassment<sup>9</sup> to being able to flag abusive content on Twitter.<sup>10</sup> ■

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8 [github.com/python/pycon-code-of-conduct/blob/master/Attendee%20Procedure%20for%20incident%20handling.md](https://github.com/python/pycon-code-of-conduct/blob/master/Attendee%20Procedure%20for%20incident%20handling.md)

9 [msmagazine.com/blog/2013/01/23/how-some-men-harass-women-online-and-what-other-men-can-do-to-stop-it](http://msmagazine.com/blog/2013/01/23/how-some-men-harass-women-online-and-what-other-men-can-do-to-stop-it)

10 [www.apc.org/en/blog/tweets-women-reflections-challenging-misogyny-onli](http://www.apc.org/en/blog/tweets-women-reflections-challenging-misogyny-onli)



# URUGUAY

ICTs as a means for empowerment and influence: A democratising proposal for female domestic workers in Uruguay



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## Introduction

Uruguay has had policies addressing issues related to the information and knowledge society since the 1980s. In 2000 the first digital agenda was created, which shaped the first national strategy for the information and knowledge society. Later on, in the context of a leftist government, a new digital agenda was created (2008-2010) with a strong emphasis on social inclusion. Both approaches have lacked a gender perspective in their creation and implementation. Moreover, actions have been lacking that specifically address women's issues with the aim of reducing the new gender inequalities that may arise and/or those already existing which may be increased as a result of the expansion of access to and use of technologies.<sup>1</sup>

In this framework, many of the actions designed to promote equal participation between men and women in the use of technologies have been driven by social organisations. In this report we focus on use of ICTs by the Domestic Workers Union, which has appropriated these technologies in order to enhance its members' capabilities.

## Policy and political background

According to the law on equal opportunities and rights for men and women<sup>2</sup> enacted in 2007, the Uruguayan state must adopt every measure in order to assure implementation of a gender perspective in the design, execution and monitoring of public policies. In spite of the creation of this law and the First Plan for Equality of Opportunities and Rights,<sup>3</sup> public policies addressing ICTs have not included a gender perspective. Similarly, in spite of the equal access that men and women have to ICTs, only a few policies have been promoted in order to stimulate

the use of technologies by women in different realms. For example, Centros MEC (telecentres set up by the Ministry of Education and Culture) prioritise digital literacy courses for women in rural villages with less than 5,000 inhabitants.

## Training domestic workers

*This is a way for us to communicate with other workers, thus gaining respect as domestic workers and recognition of the importance that domestic work has for society, improving our quality of life. (Domestic worker, 2010)*

The inclusion of ICTs in women's lives as a tool for social change and the enhancement of citizenship is essential in the digital era in which we live. However, this digital era has not reached women to the same degree. Access, knowledge and appropriation of ICTs vary according to women's socioeconomic and geographical background. This is a concern as ICTs play a very important role in the exercise of rights and in opportunities for participation in every aspect of social, political and economic life.

With this in mind, an initiative involving the Domestic Workers Union (DWU) was developed, aimed at enhancing their political participation and citizenship through access to and use of ICTs. Generally, women who are employed in paid domestic jobs have a low level of education, reside in poor households and mostly work in unstable, precarious and informal jobs.

Domestic labour has historically been a sector with reduced access to labour rights and with serious issues in regard to unionisation and collective organisation. Salaried domestic work within private homes makes interactions and meetings very difficult as the women do not share a physical working space.<sup>4</sup>

The DWU was created in 2005 after several attempts. From that moment on, some milestones regarding the recognition of the rights of waged domestic workers were achieved. Laws were enacted which recognise their rights as well as the social and cultural space of domestic labour.<sup>5</sup>

1 [www.agesic.gub.uy/innovaportal/v/485/1/agesic/agenda\\_digital\\_uruguay\\_2008\\_-\\_2010.html](http://www.agesic.gub.uy/innovaportal/v/485/1/agesic/agenda_digital_uruguay_2008_-_2010.html) and [www.agesic.gub.uy/innovaportal/v/1443/1/agesic/](http://www.agesic.gub.uy/innovaportal/v/1443/1/agesic/)

2 [www.parlamento.gub.uy/leyes/TextoLey.asp?Ley=18104&Anchor](http://www.parlamento.gub.uy/leyes/TextoLey.asp?Ley=18104&Anchor)

3 [www.inmujeres.gub.uy/mides/text.jsp?contentid=594&site=1&channel=inmujeres](http://www.inmujeres.gub.uy/mides/text.jsp?contentid=594&site=1&channel=inmujeres)

4 Batthyány, K. (2012) *Estudio sobre trabajo doméstico en Uruguay*, International Labour Organization, Geneva.

5 Domestic Labour Law (Law No. 18.065).

Because of this the DWU became consolidated, increased its membership and gained more social and political recognition. This process led the workers to acknowledge the importance of improving and enhancing their capacities for action and participation.

In this context, ICTs are acknowledged as important tools that help to improve the union's strategies and interventions.

In Uruguay there are no programmes or public policies which specifically train groups of women. This is even less the case when the goal is to use ICTs to improve their political and public influence. Women from low-income groups and with lower education levels, such as domestic workers, remain excluded from the development of technologies in a country which in recent years has made significant progress towards their access and use.

In order to address these problems, training was provided to women on the use of ICTs, with specific emphasis on their needs. This training took place within the framework of the global project "Raising Her Voice: Promoting poor women's participation in governance", coordinated by *Articulación Feminista Mercosur* (Mercosur Feminist Articulation)<sup>6</sup> and implemented by *Cotidiano Mujer* in Uruguay.<sup>7</sup>

This work aimed at promoting domestic worker empowerment through using ICTs as strategic tools. It also created awareness of human rights, women's rights, labour rights, and the right to access and use ICTs.<sup>8</sup>

Training in the different ICT tools and platforms focused on the internet, social networks, working with documents and creating presentations. It also included meaningful use of the technologies, reinforcing knowledge and practice of rights.

The course lasted six weeks and 15 women participated. The average age was 50. Previously, they had access to different technologies (mainly mobile phones and computers with internet access), which they did not use much. This was largely due to lack of knowledge on how to use them, which created fear and was therefore a barrier to their use.

The training sessions had two goals. On the one hand, it was necessary to overcome the fears that were the result of generational barriers to the use of ICTs. On the other hand, through reflection on the rights to access and use ICTs, and through the women's participation, the goal was to promote meaningful use of these tools to improve and enhance political and social influence. To this end,

the particularities, history, specific rights and the opinions of the domestic workers were considered, allowing the sessions to take on the shape of the demands and needs identified by the women workers. Electronic content was created which could reflect the domestic workers' opinions from their own perspective and without intermediaries. A blog<sup>9</sup> was used to share activities, rules and specific norms. It is still active, and is being used by the group to communicate and share information. In addition, presentations were created for different contexts in which the goal was to create political influence.

The outcomes of the training sessions were good. They helped domestic workers reflect on their use of ICTs and to share opinions and experiences. Post-workshop evaluation by *Cotidiano Mujer* involving the domestic workers who participated concluded that it was an innovative initiative which not only trained the workers in the use of ICTs so that the union was strengthened, but also promoted a shift in the women's perspective on access to and use of ICTs. Through the sessions, a group of domestic workers were made aware of the importance of incorporating ICTs in their daily lives, both professional and personal.

## Conclusions

Why is it difficult for women to appropriate ICTs and use them as "techno-political" tools<sup>10</sup> in order to transform inequalities? For the same reason that it is hard for women to access decision-making positions, create political influence, create scientific knowledge, access better salaries and achieve social recognition. The gender digital divide adds to pre-existing gender inequalities. It interplays with economic and power relations, beliefs, prejudices and stereotypes and also reproduces and consolidates them. Specific initiatives to challenge this phenomenon are needed. This is one of Uruguay's shortcomings.

Even though ICTs are widely available in Uruguay,<sup>11</sup> this does not mean that they are equally used by men and women. It could be said that the gender digital divide is profoundly influenced by social gaps that create significant differences between the access to and use of ICTs by different groups.

The country has a digital infrastructure and policies on access; public access spaces and the market have resulted in the spread of ICTs. However, this

6 [www.mujaresdelsur-afm.org.uy](http://www.mujaresdelsur-afm.org.uy)

7 [www.mujaresdelsur-afm.org.uy](http://www.mujaresdelsur-afm.org.uy)

8 [www.apc.org/es/system/files/APC\\_charter\\_ES.pdf](http://www.apc.org/es/system/files/APC_charter_ES.pdf)

9 [trabajadorasdomesticasdelmercosur.blogspot.com](http://trabajadorasdomesticasdelmercosur.blogspot.com)

10 Namely, technological tools used with strategic ends for political influence.

11 According to the telecommunications company ANTEL, as of April 2013, 58% of the Uruguayan population had access to the internet.

has not been accompanied by strategies, policies and specific initiatives that reduce gender inequalities.

Depending on their use, ICTs may enhance women's participation and strengthen their opinions by stimulating their engagement in different spaces. ICTs can also increase women's capacities to perform in different realms. For this to be possible, training is needed in order to create awareness of the power of the technologies and their possible uses, including strategic uses for women with fewer resources.

In this sense, ICTs are a challenge insofar as they are a symbolic and political space, and key to development and social justice. The active participation of women is fundamental for incorporating their perspective and voice in new ongoing processes. Women's participation causes them to be creators of different policies, with different ways of doing things, different ways of naming, different places to talk and communicate, and different interactions for working and studying.

Finally, the collective work of different actors in this process – unions, public institutions and civil society organisations – is key to the planning of processes which can take the shape of the concrete needs of each group. While limited in scope, the training sessions are an example of the potential of this type of actions if they are extended to other sectors through social organisations or public policy.

## Action steps

- From our analysis we conclude a need for the following measures:
- In order to face the new processes of exclusion generated by technological development, it is essential to promote unification between policies for the expansion, promotion and increased use of ICTs and policies that promote gender equality. Uruguayan public policies are not doing this, thus awareness needs to be raised.
- Public policies including a gender perspective should be adopted by involving experts on gender issues or through joint dialogue and work with the public offices responsible for the issue.
- The initiatives must be designed considering the context, needs and specific demands of women's organisations. This requires the articulation of different actors – the state, unions and social organisations.
- Further training workshops are needed in order to build, guide and continually support actions that reaffirm the acquired knowledge and continue to enhance women's capacities through the use of ICTs.
- These could be repeated in similar fashion in different places in the interior of the country based on the existing infrastructure and institutions. ■



### EsLaRed

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### Introduction

The following report analyses the current state of the Venezuelan government's public policies regarding the rights of women and the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs), and legal instruments that enable empowerment and gender equality in Venezuela. It also discusses the discrimination against women in public institutions and considers some incidents where the use of the internet and ICTs promoted gender violence – but likewise has created opportunities for citizen participation and women's protest. Particular incidents are analysed, including citizens and public officials who were exposed to persecution for political reasons and layoffs in various public agencies between 2004 and 2013. It identifies cases of "mobbing"<sup>1</sup> in the period 2006-2010, and looks at the impact of ICTs on these incidents. Finally, we determine some action steps towards recognising women's rights using ICTs and the internet, and list a series of recommendations to do with employment discrimination against women in Venezuela.

### Legal framework

In Venezuela the state guarantees equality and equity for women and men in the exercise of the right to work. For instance, this is recognised in Article 88 of the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, where fundamental human rights for women are enshrined, such as freedom, equality, life, safety and non-discrimination. Among the laws passed impacting on women are the Organic Law on the Right of Women to a Life Free of Violence,<sup>2</sup> the Law on Violence Against Women and the Family,<sup>3</sup> the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women,<sup>4</sup> the Political

Participation Law,<sup>5</sup> the Social Security Law,<sup>6</sup> the Organic Law on Labour and Workers (LOTTT),<sup>7</sup> and the Organic Law on Work Conditions (LOPCYMAT),<sup>8</sup> among others. The Ministry of Popular Power for Women and Gender Equality<sup>9</sup> and the Ministry of Labour and Social Security (MPPTSS)<sup>10</sup> have also created institutions to ensure the safety and protection of women: the National Women's Institute (INAMUJER),<sup>11</sup> the National Office for the Defence of Women's Rights,<sup>12</sup> the Women's Development Bank,<sup>13</sup> and the National Institute for Workplace Health and Safety (INPSASEL).<sup>14</sup> In 2013 new legislative developments are expected.<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile, Venezuela recognises the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW),<sup>16</sup> the Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women, and the Beijing Declaration, and has also signed numerous other international conventions, such as those introduced by the International Labour Organization (ILO).<sup>17</sup>

### Analysis

In Venezuela, public policies related to ICTs do not include a gender perspective, but there are tools that facilitate the inclusion of women in the work of the country, seen in the "visibility"<sup>18</sup> of women's rights in the legal framework and institutions presented above. However, the creation of laws and institutions alone is not enough to ensure that women exercise their rights

5 [www.tsj.gov.ve/legislacion/LOSPP.htm](http://www.tsj.gov.ve/legislacion/LOSPP.htm)

6 [www.inpsasel.gob.ve/moo\\_doc/ley\\_org\\_sis\\_seg\\_soc.pdf](http://www.inpsasel.gob.ve/moo_doc/ley_org_sis_seg_soc.pdf)

7 [www.lottt.gob.ve/](http://www.lottt.gob.ve/)

8 [www.lottt.gob.ve/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/LOTTT-Gaceta-6.076.pdf](http://www.lottt.gob.ve/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/LOTTT-Gaceta-6.076.pdf)

9 [www.minmujer.gob.ve/](http://www.minmujer.gob.ve/)

10 [www.ine.gov.ve/index.php?option=com\\_content&id=176&Itemid=20](http://www.ine.gov.ve/index.php?option=com_content&id=176&Itemid=20)

11 [www.minmujer.gob.ve/inamujer](http://www.minmujer.gob.ve/inamujer)

12 [www.minmujer.gob.ve/inamujer/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2&Itemid=6](http://www.minmujer.gob.ve/inamujer/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2&Itemid=6)

13 [www.minmujer.gob.ve/banmujer/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1&Itemid=2](http://www.minmujer.gob.ve/banmujer/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1&Itemid=2)

14 [www.inpsasel.gob.ve](http://www.inpsasel.gob.ve)

15 [generoconclase.blogspot.com/2013/05/fiscalia-solicita-antereforma-parcial.html](http://generoconclase.blogspot.com/2013/05/fiscalia-solicita-antereforma-parcial.html)

16 [www.cedaw2010.org](http://www.cedaw2010.org)

17 [www.actualidadlaboral.com.ve/documentos-legales/convenios-oit](http://www.actualidadlaboral.com.ve/documentos-legales/convenios-oit) and [www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/lang-es/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/lang-es/index.htm)

18 [www.razonypalabra.org.mx/anteriores/n55/mgonzalo.html](http://www.razonypalabra.org.mx/anteriores/n55/mgonzalo.html)

1 [es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acoso\\_laboral](http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acoso_laboral)

2 [www.defensoria.gob.ve/dp/index.php/leyes-mujer-y-familia/1341](http://www.defensoria.gob.ve/dp/index.php/leyes-mujer-y-familia/1341)

3 [www.ventanalegal.com/leyes/ley\\_sobre\\_violencia\\_contra\\_mujer\\_familia.html](http://www.ventanalegal.com/leyes/ley_sobre_violencia_contra_mujer_familia.html)

4 [www.defensoria.gob.ve/dp/index.php/leyes-mujer-y-familia/1345](http://www.defensoria.gob.ve/dp/index.php/leyes-mujer-y-familia/1345)

– it is necessary that the laws are enforced for all women to gain access to a life free of violence.

The most significant public policies designed to improve and expand connectivity and the use of ICTs in the country in order to promote the participation of women on the internet, encourage a technological culture and facilitate the conditions for the exercise of women's rights include:

- Establishing the use of the internet as a policy priority for the country's development, in order to provide universal access, as established in Decree 825.<sup>19</sup>
- The creation of projects, plans and programmes that promote the use of technology and knowledge and integrate these into the Simon Bolívar National Project,<sup>20</sup> which marks the strategic lines of development for the country, such as the National Plan for Technological Literacy (PNAT),<sup>21</sup> the Science Mission,<sup>22</sup> Infocentros,<sup>23</sup> the Bolivarian Centre for Informatics and Telematics,<sup>24</sup> and the Virtual Libraries programme, among others. Currently over a million and a half Venezuelans have been trained under the PNAT.<sup>25</sup>
- The promotion of gender equality and empowerment through the following plans: the National Plan of Equality for Women, the Plan for the Prevention and Treatment of Violence against Women, and the Plan for Strengthening the Socio-Political Participation of Women.<sup>26</sup>

With regard to the participation of women in the defence of their rights, in recent years opportunities have been created. In particular, a number of civil society groups have used the internet<sup>27</sup> to establish mechanisms to defend women's rights, inform, educate and denounce gender violence. These include PROVEA,<sup>28</sup> the Forum for Life,<sup>29</sup> the Venezuelan Observatory on Women's Human Rights (OVDHM),<sup>30</sup>

Gender with Class,<sup>31</sup> Venezuela Now,<sup>32</sup> the Ana Soto Women's Movement,<sup>33</sup> Women in Black,<sup>34</sup> the Councils for the Defence of Human Rights,<sup>35</sup> and the Reflections of Venezuela Foundation.<sup>36</sup> Initiatives by individuals have also emerged, such as those by Martha Colmenares,<sup>37</sup> who made allegations of violations against women in cases which became symbolic of the struggle for equal rights. There are also civil society organisations such as Aliados en Cadena<sup>38</sup> that promote the integral development of women through ICTs. This is an indication of the importance of the participation of women in online spaces and the importance of ICTs in the diffusion, promotion and dissemination of information that seeks to open spaces for the defence of their rights.

According to a study by Digital Trends,<sup>39</sup> internet penetration in Venezuela is currently 40%, which means 11.6 million people are online, of whom 46% are women and 54% are men. The study also reveals that 9.7 million Venezuelans are connected to Facebook. This suggests a 33% penetration of the social network. It also suggests the importance of establishing channels of communication using social networks.

Given the political and social dynamics, Venezuelan women have developed – or supported the development of – legal instruments to dignify their working conditions, defend their rights and freedoms, and actively participate through ICTs. However, in practice the delays in handling complaints, lack of evidence, lack of legal advice for victims, little public data on violence against women, and bureaucracy, among other factors, make gender-rights processes ineffective. Most gender violence remains unpunished.

Between 2006 and 2010, INPSASEL<sup>40</sup> recognised six complaints of mobbing from a total of 1,855 complaints – a significantly low number. These six complaints of mobbing came from reports by civil servants over 30 years of age assigned to public institutions such as the Venezuelan state-owned oil

19 [www.cecalc.ula.ve/internetprioritaria/decreto825.html](http://www.cecalc.ula.ve/internetprioritaria/decreto825.html)

20 [www.cendit.gob.ve/uploaded/pdf/Proyecto\\_Nacional\\_Simon\\_Bolivar.pdf](http://www.cendit.gob.ve/uploaded/pdf/Proyecto_Nacional_Simon_Bolivar.pdf)

21 [www.fundacite-anz.gob.ve/documentos/Plan\\_Nacional\\_de\\_Alphabetizacion\\_Tecnologica.pdf](http://www.fundacite-anz.gob.ve/documentos/Plan_Nacional_de_Alphabetizacion_Tecnologica.pdf)

22 [gobiernoenlinea.gob.ve/home/misiones\\_detalle.dot](http://gobiernoenlinea.gob.ve/home/misiones_detalle.dot)

23 [www.infocentro.gob.ve/index.php?id=91](http://www.infocentro.gob.ve/index.php?id=91)

24 [fundabit.me.gob.ve](http://fundabit.me.gob.ve)

25 [pnat.infocentro.gob.ve/vistas/docs/ReporteAlfabetizacionPNAFT\\_010113\\_300413.pdf](http://pnat.infocentro.gob.ve/vistas/docs/ReporteAlfabetizacionPNAFT_010113_300413.pdf)

26 [www.pnud.org.ve/content/view/176](http://www.pnud.org.ve/content/view/176)

27 Including websites, blogs, and social networking platforms such as Twitter.

28 Programa Venezolano de Educación-Acción en Derechos Humanos. [www.derechos.org.ve/informe-anual-2012](http://www.derechos.org.ve/informe-anual-2012)

29 [foroporlvida.blogspot.com/2013\\_04\\_01\\_archive.html](http://foroporlvida.blogspot.com/2013_04_01_archive.html)

30 [observatoriomujeres2006.blogspot.com](http://observatoriomujeres2006.blogspot.com)

31 [generoconclase.blogspot.com/2013/02/venezuela-colectivos-denunciaron.html](http://generoconclase.blogspot.com/2013/02/venezuela-colectivos-denunciaron.html)

32 [venezuelaahora.blogspot.com/2011/09/fiscalia-crea-direccion-para-la-defensa.html](http://venezuelaahora.blogspot.com/2011/09/fiscalia-crea-direccion-para-la-defensa.html)

33 [movimientodemujeresanasoto.blogspot.com](http://movimientodemujeresanasoto.blogspot.com)

34 [venezuela-mujeresdenegro.blogspot.com](http://venezuela-mujeresdenegro.blogspot.com)

35 [consejosparaladefensa.blogspot.com/2013/05/el-morral-de-los-derechos.html](http://consejosparaladefensa.blogspot.com/2013/05/el-morral-de-los-derechos.html)

36 [www.fundacionreflejosdevenezuela.com/index.php](http://www.fundacionreflejosdevenezuela.com/index.php)

37 [www.marthacolmenares.com/2010/04/22/cifra-de-violencia-contra-la-mujer-se-estima-en-100-mil-casos-en-un-ano](http://www.marthacolmenares.com/2010/04/22/cifra-de-violencia-contra-la-mujer-se-estima-en-100-mil-casos-en-un-ano)

38 [www.rsevenezuela.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2365&Itemid=24](http://www.rsevenezuela.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2365&Itemid=24)

39 [www.tendenciasdigitales.com/1433/la-penetration-de-internet-en-venezuela-alcanza-40-de-la-poblacion](http://www.tendenciasdigitales.com/1433/la-penetration-de-internet-en-venezuela-alcanza-40-de-la-poblacion)

40 [www.aporrea.org/ddhh/m153835.html](http://www.aporrea.org/ddhh/m153835.html)



company PDVSA<sup>41</sup> (2), the National Land Institute (2), the University of Zulia (1) and the public water utility Aguas de Yaracuy (1).

In the case of PDVSA, a female employee suffered from an excessive work load, forced overtime, harassment, high levels of abuse, rigid supervision and performance pressure, which led to occupational diseases.<sup>42</sup> She had to undergo intensive psychiatric tests at four institutions<sup>43</sup> during 2009 and 2010. INPSASEL concluded that the worker was subjected to mobbing and a certificate was issued because the harassment caused temporary disability. Meanwhile the company was under an obligation not only to correct and prevent it from happening again but to pay the worker compensation of between 26 UT (USD 442) and 75 UT (USD 1,275).

In some public sector cases, the participation of women through ICTs in the workplace represents a risk that promotes more threats, harassment and workplace violence. In recent years public employees have highlighted cases that involve social networks. This creates a hostile working environment and levels of helplessness that lead potential victims to withdraw complaints for fear of being fired or being accused of exaggerating episodes which are not really “serious”.<sup>44</sup> Below are some incidents:

- In 2004, Venezuela witnessed a number of incidents of gender violence against women participating in peaceful pro-democracy protests organised by the opposition against the government. A shadow report by Venezuela’s OVDHM<sup>45</sup> details the cases of four women who suffered the consequences of excessive violence.<sup>46</sup> Two were killed and the others were beaten, without any prosecution of the aggressors. In the case of Maritza Ron, she died during the demonstration and the three individuals involved in the crime (sentenced to 11 years in prison each) are now on parole. There are moves to take the case to the international courts.<sup>47</sup>

- Other landmark cases occurred in April 2013 following a series of social and political events after the presidential elections. Six teachers and one secretary from schools in the state of Zulia were dismissed on suspicion that they harboured anti-government views, according to the president of the Single Union of Teachers of Zulia, Gualberto Masyrubi.<sup>48</sup> Deputy Delsa Solórzano<sup>49</sup> also said the government implemented a “political cleansing operation” and indicated that teachers from around the country would be reported and dismissed if they did not sign a document swearing loyalty to the president.<sup>50</sup> A team of lawyers have defended 64 cases and have drafted documents for submission to INPSASEL.<sup>51</sup> The General Confederation of Workers of Venezuela (CGT)<sup>52</sup> will also present cases before the ILO.<sup>53</sup>

These cases were reported on blogs<sup>54</sup> which pointed out that the internet was a key instrument in the “political cleansing operation”. A Facebook account was created under the name “Removing the traitors of the fatherland” which published names and photos of civil servants (men and women) who supposedly voted for the opposition candidate.<sup>55</sup> It was accompanied by threatening messages from government supporters. A Twitter account<sup>56</sup> also published photographs of public employees in demonstrations supporting opposition candidates and calling for the “cleansing” of state agencies. The director of the Centre for Human Rights reports that many public employees had their mobile phones seized, after which they were checked for “suspicious signals” – an act which is nevertheless a crime according to Articles 6, 9, 11, 20 and 22 of the Computer Crimes Act.<sup>57</sup>

These cases reflect the levels of helplessness that Venezuelan women feel regarding the enforcement of their labour rights and citizen participation.

41 [www.aporrea.org/ddhh/n153835.html](http://www.aporrea.org/ddhh/n153835.html)

42 [www.medicinalaboraldevenezuela.com.ve/archivo/Anteproyectos%20Normas%20Técnicas%20INPSASEL/listado\\_de\\_enfermedades\\_2009.pdf](http://www.medicinalaboraldevenezuela.com.ve/archivo/Anteproyectos%20Normas%20Técnicas%20INPSASEL/listado_de_enfermedades_2009.pdf)

43 Unidad de Psiquiatría Ocupacional de Pdvsa, Unidad Nacional de Psiquiatría del Instituto Venezolano de Seguridad Social (IVSS), Dirección Regional de Salud de los Trabajadores (Diresat Caracas/Vargas) and Unidad de Medicina y Psicología Ocupacional de INPSASEL.

44 [www.aporrea.org/actualidad/a98375.html](http://www.aporrea.org/actualidad/a98375.html)

45 [www.iwraw-ap.org/resources/pdf/Venezuela2005%281%29.pdf](http://www.iwraw-ap.org/resources/pdf/Venezuela2005%281%29.pdf)

46 Evangelina Carrizo, leader of Acción Democrática (killed), Maritza Ron, homemaker (killed), Elba de Diamante, member of the NGO Women for Freedom (beaten) and Elionor Montes, lawyer (beaten).

47 [www.marthacolmenares.com/2009/08/14/cuando-asesinaron-a-maritza-ron-galeria-fotografica-y-resenas](http://www.marthacolmenares.com/2009/08/14/cuando-asesinaron-a-maritza-ron-galeria-fotografica-y-resenas) and [www.hableconmigo.com/2010/09/03/a-seis-anos-del-asesinato-de-maritza-ron](http://www.hableconmigo.com/2010/09/03/a-seis-anos-del-asesinato-de-maritza-ron)

48 [www.el-nacional.com/politica/Destituidos-docentes-politica\\_o\\_178182479.html](http://www.el-nacional.com/politica/Destituidos-docentes-politica_o_178182479.html)

49 Coordinadora de la comisión de derechos humanos de la Mesa de La Unidad Democrática (MUD) de Venezuela and [www.ntn24.com/noticias/denuncian-en-venezuela-acoso-87553](http://www.ntn24.com/noticias/denuncian-en-venezuela-acoso-87553)

50 President Nicolás Maduro

51 [www.ultimasnoticias.com.ve/noticias/actualidad/economia/hay-pruebas-de-64-casos-de-acoso-laboral-tras-elec.aspx](http://www.ultimasnoticias.com.ve/noticias/actualidad/economia/hay-pruebas-de-64-casos-de-acoso-laboral-tras-elec.aspx)

52 [www.espectador.com/noticias/263933/venezuela-denunciaran-persecucion-ante-oit](http://www.espectador.com/noticias/263933/venezuela-denunciaran-persecucion-ante-oit)

53 [www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/lang-es/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/lang-es/index.htm)

54 [venezuela-mujeresdenegro.blogspot.com/2013/05/la-razon-caza-de-brujas-chavista-en-las.html](http://venezuela-mujeresdenegro.blogspot.com/2013/05/la-razon-caza-de-brujas-chavista-en-las.html)

55 Opposition candidate Henrique Capriles

56 [www.notitweets.com/opinion/65-todo/91500-chavismo-despidio-a-5000-empleados-publicos-por-opositores.html](http://www.notitweets.com/opinion/65-todo/91500-chavismo-despidio-a-5000-empleados-publicos-por-opositores.html)

57 [www.tsj.gov.ve/legislacion/ledi.htm](http://www.tsj.gov.ve/legislacion/ledi.htm)



Even when the state has made efforts to strengthen laws and institutions, implement policies to democratise the use of the internet and defend against gender violence, the weaknesses of the responsible agencies and political conflicts hinder the enforcement of laws in the workplace, and impunity remains the norm.

## Conclusions

The use of ICTs in Venezuela has opened a window on the rights of women and expanded participation in various spheres of society. However, these spaces are also being threatened and used to damage the integrity of women who hold various social and political positions in the country. Similarly, women are exposed to employers who unduly violate the privacy of information, disclose information without authorisation on social networks, and engage in harassment, threats and dismissals.

Public policies regarding technology have been designed to democratise the use of ICTs and the internet and develop literacy plans and programmes in the use of software and hardware. But beyond that, women have not yet appropriated technologies in a way that is socially meaningful and relevant. That is why it is important to incorporate ICTs into the daily work of women, making them a useful tool to improve their quality of life and that of their community. Networking and information dissemination, literacy programmes in the use of content, website management and training in collaborative tools (such as blogs, wikis, etc.) are important. Policies that defend against gender violence and encourage gender perspectives in the activities of both society and government, among others, are needed to facilitate the participation of women online.

However, to achieve effective actions using ICTs, the government should create mechanisms to enable citizens to access data online as well as accurate and timely information on safety and security measures that have been implemented, records of domestic violence cases (reported and managed by

the appropriate authorities), and gender statistics, among others. In this way, citizens, women's groups and NGOs can be vigilant in the battle against gender violence and raise their voices to encourage the responsible agencies to take action.

## Action steps

- Government measures that are necessary include: a) Implement new policies and establish plans and training programmes in the use of ICT tools and content geared toward women. These should facilitate the appropriation of technology, encourage participation and defend the rights of women; b) Evaluate and improve the administrative procedures used by agencies such as INPSASEL and prosecutors in the prosecution of allegations of domestic violence in the interest of making these processes more efficient; c) Take appropriate measures in relation to cases of violations of the law that emerged in 2004 and 2013; d) Design and implement training plans for employees and officials of the justice system, where they learn about existing laws on violence against women, gender issues and psychological and social aspects that influence the problem of gender violence; e) Allocate sufficient budgets for the proper functioning of government institutions and NGOs working to support victims of violence, and f) Reform and improve legislative instruments to ensure greater safety and security for women.

Citizens, civil society groups and NGOs need to: a) Join forces to raise complaints of gender violations before the competent national and international courts, and push for sanctions against those responsible; b) Require public bodies to be accountable to plans and policies for preventing and dealing with cases of violence against women; c) Demand that the government create online mechanisms for the promotion and dissemination of plans and programmes for the safety and protection of women. ■



## **TECHNOLOGY CAN BE A GIRL'S BEST FRIEND**

This image from Pakistan captures the imagination: rainbow-coloured bangles, a barrage of books balancing in the background, and in the foreground, a woman communicating. Whether it is the search for information on sexuality and sexual health, information about shelters and domestic violence, or just the quest to freely communicate beyond imposed domestic barriers, information technologies can be used to empower, educate and enrich women's lives. For a colour reproduction of the image, please visit: [www.giswatch.org](http://www.giswatch.org)