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Economic, social and cultural rights and the internet

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SOUTH AFRICA

DETERMINING USER CAPABILITIES TO ENSURE THE ACHIEVEMENT OF ESCRS THROUGH INTERNET USE

KEYWORDS: access, gender

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Introduction

The South African national broadband policy, "South Africa Connect", acknowledges the internet as a basic human right that may be used to improve equality in South Africa.[1] The national policy recognises the importance of creating a digital ecosystem that will lead to improvement of people's lives and enable equality in the rights, privileges and benefits of citizens and assist in poverty eradication and empowerment of marginalised members of society. Presently, internet access at the national household level is 53.5%.[2] Mobile devices are the most popular means of connecting to the internet with 47.6% of national respondents using it to access the internet. While closing the gender gap has been the main focus, there is a need to assess how people use the internet to ensure that economic, social and cultural rights (ESCRs) are realised. Increased internet access is often matched with limited optimal use, more so among women.[3]

The Western Cape provincial government in South Africa, in line with the national policy, implemented the "Connected Leadership" broadband roll-out for purposes of provincial development and growth.[4] The provincial roll-out forms the crux of our assessment of ESCRs and the internet. A provincially representative Digital Readiness Assessment conducted by Research ICT Africa (RIA) in 2014 found that 57% of individuals in the province of Western Cape were internet users, with 53.5% of women using the internet.[5] Of the remaining 43% of the population, comprising people who did not use the internet, 61.4% were female. Social networking was the main driver for internet, with 48% of internet users stating that it was the main reason why they first used the internet, while work-related use was the main reason for 20.6%.[6] Broken down into demographics, more females – 56.8% percent of the female internet users compared to 39.3% of male internet users – used the internet for the first time for social networking. Work-related or educational purposes were not the main reasons people went online for the first time.

This report assesses user capabilities to use the internet to attain the right to education, health, and work opportunities, focusing on the differences between men and women. We use individual and household survey data collected from the 2014 Digital Readiness Assessment survey. The analysis provides descriptive statistics on internet use with a focus on the demographic of the internet user in the province; that is, we consider the activities of internet users and information-seeking behaviour linked to internet use.

Policy background

The Bill of Rights is the cornerstone for the South African constitution, with the state constitutionally bound to work towards the best of its abilities to protect and ensure these rights.[7] ESCRs such as education, health, labour and cultural rights are enshrined in the constitution. South Africa also ratified and enforced the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) in 2015.

The national broadband plan has been designed to help protect and achieve these rights through internet-based information and communications technology (ICT) access and use. The plan focuses on infrastructure roll-out and creation of associated

1 Department of Communications. (2013). South Africa Connect: Creating Opportunities, Enabling Inclusion. South Africa's broadband policy.

2 Statistics South Africa. (2016). General Household Survey 2014. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa

3 Chair, C. (2014). *Mobile phones for development: How have women in the informal sector made use of their mobile phones to enhance themselves and their business?* Masters thesis, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa. hdl.handle.net/11427/6833; and Deen-Swarray, M., Gillwald, A., Morrel, A., & Khan, S. (2012). *Lifting the veil on ICT gender indicators in Africa*. Cape Town: Research ICT Africa and University of Cape Town. www.researchictafrica.net/publications/Evidence_for_ICT_Policy_Action/Policy_Paper_13_-_Lifting_the_veil_on_gender_ICT_indicators_in_Africa.pdf

4 Research ICT Africa. (2015). *Western Cape Digital Readiness Assessment 2015*. Cape Town: Western Cape Department of Economic Development and Tourism. www.westerncape.gov.za/assets/departments/economic-development-tourism/digital_readiness_full_report.pdf

5 Research ICT Africa (2014). Western Cape Survey Data.

6 Ibid.

7 www.gov.za/documents/constitution/chapter-2-bill-rights

TABLE 1.

Demographics of internet users by gender

		Male	Female
Age	Youth	15.1%	21.5%
	Non-youth	84.9%	78.5%
Highest educational attainment	Primary	7.5%	7.7%
	Secondary	61.5%	67.2%
	Tertiary	31.0%	24.4%
Activity engaged in	Pupil/student	8.3%	10.8%
	Unemployed	11.7%	17.5%
	Employed	60.4%	54.2%
	Self-employed	8.9%	3.9%
	Others	10.6%	13.70%

Source: RIA database, 2014 Western Cape survey data.

content, applications and services. This highlights South Africa's political will at a policy level, with issues of implementation often raised. Following the national plan, the province of Western Cape has made progress in implementing the necessary infrastructure to connect its communities and citizens. Realising the full benefits of broadband will, however, depend on the extent to which end users make use of the technology and the services it provides.[8]

Conceptual framework

The capability approach which this study uses defines development as a process whereby the substantive freedom of individuals can be expanded in order for them to achieve the lives they value. This approach assumes that well-being and agency should be looked at based on people's effective opportunities to undertake the actions and activities they want to engage in and be whom they want to be.[9]

The capability approach used as a framework for this study has several dimensions that focus on well-being and the freedom of agency.[10] These include economic capability, which highlights that wealth and employment are freedoms;[11] social capability, which emphasises the freedom to enhance literacy and the scope of knowledge and in this way provide social opportunities;[12] and cultural capability, which focuses on the capability for entertainment and leisure.[13] In particular, this report focuses on the capacity of individuals to use the internet to gain access to employment, education and health activities.

Results and analysis

Demographics of internet users

This section provides a summary of the demographics of female and male internet users. Based on the survey data, both male and female internet users are more likely to hold secondary education in comparison to primary or tertiary education, to be employed, and to be past the stage of youth as defined as 15-24 by the United Nations (See Table 1). Secondary education is the highest level attained by the majority of Western Cape residents – 60.5% to be precise; it is not surprising that this is where most internet users are found.[14] Only 2.6% of the population had not attained any formal education.

Internet use is highest among individuals from both sexes who are employed. Considering that cost is often cited as a limitation to internet use, it is understandable that the internet is being used more by those who are employed. There are more men (60.4%) than women (54.2%) who are employed that use the internet. With attempts by the government to connect schools and institutions of learning, it is of concern that internet use is relatively low among pupils and students. Table 1 shows this to be 8.3% for males and 10.8% for females. Users

8 Calandro, E., Deen-Swarray, M., & Chair, C (2015). Demand side stimulation strategies to boost broadband access in South Africa: Case study of the Western Cape. Conference paper presented at CPRsouth 2015, 27 August, Taipei, Taiwan.

9 Wang, R. (2015). Internet use and the building of social capital for development: A network perspective. *Information Technologies & International Development*, 11(2), 19-34.

10 Gigler, B.-S. (2011). *Informational Capabilities: The Missing Link for the Impact of ICT on Development.* Washington: World Bank. https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/19011

11 Heeks, R., & Molla, A. (2009). *Impact Assessment of ICT-for-Development Projects: A compendium of approaches.* Manchester: Development Informatics Group, Institute for Development Policy and Management, University of Manchester.

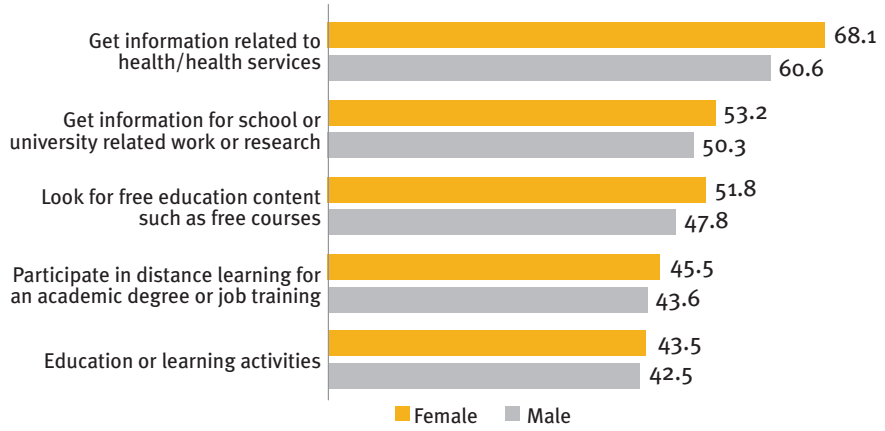
12 Ibid.

13 Gurstein, M. (2003). Effective use: A community informatics strategy beyond the Digital Divide. *First Monday, 8*(12). firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/1107/1027

14 Research ICT Africa. (2015). Op. cit.

FIGURE 1.

Activities relating to education and health performed on the internet by gender (%)



Source: RIA database, 2014 Western Cape survey data

in these demographics have the choice to make use of the internet in order to realise their ESCRs.

User activities online

The majority of individuals across both sexes make use of the internet to get information related to health or health services and more so among the female population (see Figure 1). Over 50% of men and women search for information for educational purposes or research. This provides evidence of how important the internet is as a source of information for educational purposes. Also, the share using the internet to look for free educational content is above 50% among women, though below that among men.

Across all activities, more women than men are engaging online. This suggests that internet users who are women are harnessing the use of the internet as a source of information and learning opportunities more than men. This also shows that the internet can be used to make more relevant health and educational materials available to reach those who are unable to access such materials via other means.

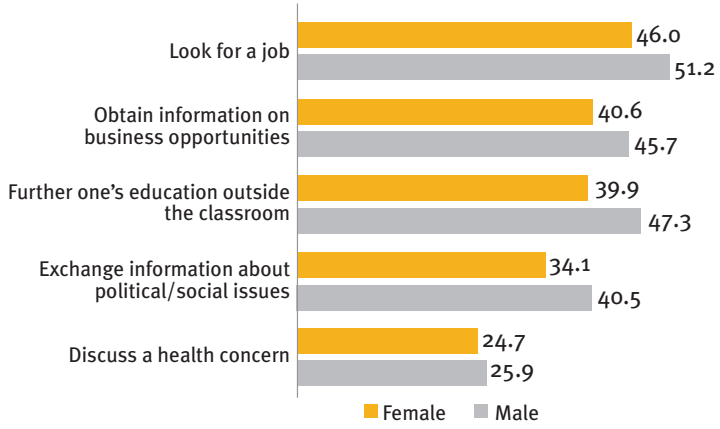
Potential use of the internet for information-seeking purposes

Taking the analysis further, the study looks at the responses of all individuals surveyed when asked how they potentially would use the internet to conduct specific health, education and economic activities. About 51.2% of men stated they would use the internet to "look for a job", compared to 46% of women (see Figure 2). However, this is where the highest responses are recorded for both sexes. For women, using the internet to "obtain information on business opportunities" was the activity that recorded the second highest response. This seems to indicate that women are showing more inclination towards getting economically empowered and seem to be identifying the internet as a medium that can allow them to achieve this. Using the internet as a medium to educate oneself further also recorded relatively higher figures compared to other activities. The results indicate that if given a choice, only about a quarter of the respondents would use the internet to "discuss a health concern". Whereas in the previous section it was recorded that the majority of both men and women use the internet to get health/health services information, in this section using the internet for health purposes recorded the lowest figures. This suggests that while people feel comfortable getting information on health issues online, discussing their health concerns online does not seem that appealing.

Activities that would enhance economic well-being are among the ones where more people stated that they would make use of the internet. While women expressed interest in using the internet to conduct specific activities, it is noteworthy that for each activity, there are more men than women who indicate their readiness to use the internet. This could be due to the fact that more men use the internet than women, but further investigation research

FIGURE 2.

Share of individuals who indicated the internet as an option they would use to conduct specific activities (%)



Source: RIA database, 2014 Western Cape survey data

would need to be conducted to determine the reluctance for women to use the internet for activities that would enhance their economic well-being.

Barriers to internet use for users and non-users

The above sections show the capabilities of people to make use of the internet in a way that would result in effective opportunities for ESCRs. However, barriers for both internet users and non-users result in the limitation of achieving ESCRs through internet use. It seems that women were more likely to face barriers to internet use as users and non-users when compared to men (see Tables 2 and 3).

Limitations for internet users

Internet speed, the cost of using the internet, and concerns with surveillance or privacy issues are the top three concerns cited for limited internet use by internet users (see Table 2). Concern about surveillance or privacy issues seems more of an issue for women, as close to 9% more women than men stated that the factor of surveillance and privacy online limits their use of the internet.

Limitations for non-internet users

For non-internet users – 43% of those surveyed – it is interesting to note that the reason most commonly cited for not using the internet is the lack of access to a computer or internet connection, as seen in Table 3. Provincially, about 60% of non-internet users cited this as a barrier to internet use, with about 63% of female non-internet users claiming the lack of access to a computer or internet connection as their main barrier for not using the internet. Among the male respondents, cost was the most selected reason cited as a barrier to internet use.

Also, a large proportion of females (62.5%) claim that they do not use the internet because they "don't know how to use it" compared to 48% of males. There is still a high share of individuals who

TABLE 2.

What limits the use of the internet by internet users

	Male	Female	Provincial level
Internet is very slow	53.7%	56.3%	55.1%
Too expensive	52.2%	54.1%	53.2%
Worried about surveillance or privacy issues	44.8%	53.4%	49.3%
Few people to communicate with via the internet	27.9%	34.1%	31.2%
Lack of local language content	26.7%	31%	28.9%
No interesting content	17.3%	25%	21.4%

Source: RIA database, 2014 Western Cape survey data

TABLE 3.

Reasons cited for not using the internet (multiple responses)

	Male	Female	Provincial total
No computer/internet connection	56.2%	63.3%	60.5%
Don't know what it is	53.7%	61.4%	58.3%
Too expensive	56.9%	57.6%	57.3%
Don't know how to use it	48%	62.5%	56.8%
No interest/not useful	44.8%	54.2%	50.5%

Source: RIA database, 2014 Western Cape survey data

do not use the internet because they "don't know what it is", and this figure is higher at 61.4% among women. Cost is still a barrier and almost equally so among both sexes.

Conclusion

Overall, internet access in the province of Western Cape is still on the increase, but for women it remains low in comparison to men, which would affect using the internet for the realisation of ESCRs. However, our user assessment shows that while social networking may be driving internet access, more and more users have shown the capacity to use the internet for purposes of achieving ESCRs. Based on our framework, people with internet access and those who could have the choice of access would use the internet to take action on activities that would lead to improving their well-being. Women who were internet users were more engaged with health and educational information to further their well-being as compared to men.

However, the barriers to internet use that would lead to achievement of ESCRs, such as cost and surveillance, in particular among women, might be limiting the opportunities for internet use. The barriers for non-internet users are more significant among women than men. This reflects that more women are still not using the internet compared to men – a worrying trend given that in many contexts, women are less likely than men to have their ESCRs realised. There is still a relatively large proportion of women who are not aware of the internet and its uses, and for those who are aware, a large share are not aware of know how to use the internet.

Action steps

The following should be advocacy priorities for civil society:

- Challenges of affordability and quality of service need to be addressed by policy makers and regulators to ensure that the internet is affordable for all with a good quality of services. There is a need for policies that tackle pricing in the aspect of data costs, alternative cheaper or free access models, and educating internet and non-internet users on the optimal internet use to achieve ESCRs. Alternative access models such as public Wi-Fi could be seen as complementary to providing internet services for users.
- Prioritisation of the development of digital skills is crucial to ensure that all users and non-users may use the internet optimally in order to have the choice and freedom to achieve their ESCRs. The increased concerns with privacy and surveillance online require further analysis to develop policy recommendations as to how to build more trust with internet access and use.
- There is a need for a critical assessment by civil society and academia of e-education and e-health policies in South Africa to determine whether they are reaching their target audience and if the information is relevant and sufficient for users.

GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2016

Economic, social and cultural rights and the internet

The 45 country reports gathered here illustrate the link between the internet and economic, social and cultural rights (ESCRs). Some of the topics will be familiar to information and communications technology for development (ICT4D) activists: the right to health, education and culture; the socioeconomic empowerment of women using the internet; the inclusion of rural and indigenous communities in the information society; and the use of ICT to combat the marginalisation of local languages. Others deal with relatively new areas of exploration, such as using 3D printing technology to preserve cultural heritage, creating participatory community networks to capture an "inventory of things" that enables socioeconomic rights, crowdfunding rights, or the negative impact of algorithms on calculating social benefits. Workers' rights receive some attention, as does the use of the internet during natural disasters.

Ten thematic reports frame the country reports. These deal both with overarching concerns when it comes to ESCRs and the internet – such as institutional frameworks and policy considerations – as well as more specific issues that impact on our rights: the legal justification for online education resources, the plight of migrant domestic workers, the use of digital databases to protect traditional knowledge from biopiracy, digital archiving, and the impact of multilateral trade deals on the international human rights framework.

The reports highlight the institutional and country-level possibilities and challenges that civil society faces in using the internet to enable ESCRs. They also suggest that in a number of instances, individuals, groups and communities are using the internet to enact their socioeconomic and cultural rights in the face of disinterest, inaction or censure by the state.

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