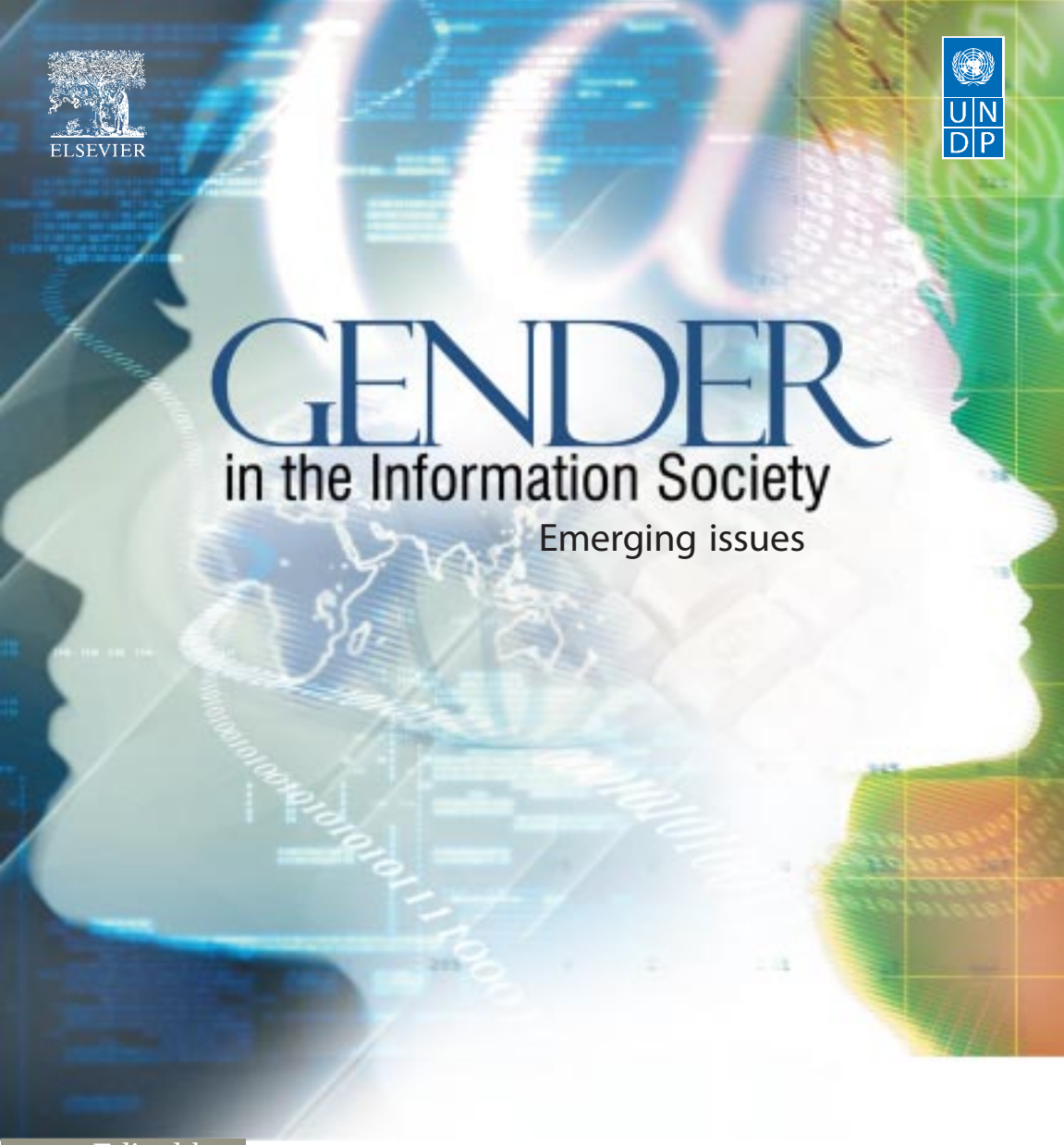

GENDER in the Information Society

Emerging issues

Edited by
Anita Gurumurthy, Parminder Jeet Singh,
Anu Mundkur and Mridula Swamy

UNDP-APDIP ICT4D Series

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Table of Content

List of Abbreviations

AID	Alternative for India Development
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AP	Plan Of Action (of WSIS)
APCWNSP	Association of Progressive Communications Women's Networking Support Program
APDIP	Asia-Pacific Development Information Programme
CBO	Community-Based Organization
CD	Compact Disk
C-DIT	Centre for the Development of Information Technology
CENWOR	Centre for Women's Research
CIO	Chief Information Officer, Chief Innovation Officer
COLLIT	Commonwealth of Learning Literacy
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
DAW	Division for the Advancement of Women
DAWN	Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era
DDS	Deccan Development Society
DOI	Digital Opportunities Initiative
DoP	Declaration of Principles (of WSIS)
DOT	Digital Opportunity Task
EGM	Expert Group Meeting
GAD	Gender and Development
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HR	Human Resources
IANWGE	Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ICT4D	Information and Communications Technology for Development
ICTA	Information and Communication Technology Agency (of Sri Lanka)
ILO	International Labour Organization
IP	Intellectual Property
IPR	Intellectual Property Rights
IS	Information Society
IT	Information Technology
ITES	Information Technology Enabled Services
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
JDCP	Jhabua Development Communication Project (of India)
KLJB	Kutch Log Ji Bani (The voice of Kutch – a radio channel)
KMVS	Kutch Mahila Vikas Sanghatan (a CSO)
LSGI	Local Self-Government Institution
MAM	Mobile Access Mode
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MKSS	Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (a CSO)

NASSCOM	National Association of Software and Services Companies (of India)
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
NIAS	National Institute of Advanced Studies (of India)
NWICO	New World Information and Communication Order
PPP	Public-Private Partnership
PREAL	Project in Radio Education and Adult Literacy
SEWA	Self Employed Women's Association
SITE	Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (of India)
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
SMS	Short Message Service
TC	Tunis Commitment
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VAP	Village Access Point
WAD	Women and Development
WID	Women in Development
WiFi	Wireless Fidelity
WiPLL	Wireless Internet Protocol in Local Loop
WIPO	World Intellectual Property Organization
WLL	Wireless in Local Loop
WSIS	World Summit on the Information Society

Foreword

On behalf of UNIFEM South Asia, it gives me great pleasure to present this compilation of papers, which was shared at the South Asia Seminar on Gender in the Information Society.

The Seminar, which was held to engender the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) process, was the collective effort of diverse agencies. The partnerships of IT for Change, who envisioned and organized the intervention, Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era and Centre for Public Policy-Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore, which held the seminar, and UNIFEM South Asia and the UNDP Asia-Pacific Development Information Programme, which collaborated and catalyzed a tremendous mobilization. It brought together a widespread community of thinkers and practitioners, experienced in gender and development and women's rights issues, to jointly examine the issues of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and gender – in development and in the information society.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate and acknowledge the thinkers, activists, organizations, writers as well as women in the media in this region, who contributed so abundantly and powerfully to a dialogue that needed their voices and perceptions.

With gender issues peripheral in the information society, the World Summits on this issue have provided opportunities for engendering them. As an advocate for gender and women's rights, UNIFEM has supported these processes in an effort to influence and integrate gender perspectives in every facet of the Summits. In this joint effort, we were able to strategically use the Seminar to prepare for the final phase of the WSIS at Tunis,[1] formulating recommendations and promoting a feminist engagement in the interface of issues pertaining to the new economy. It is encouraging to see that these recommendations led to a strengthening of perspective building and were successful in influencing the Tunis Commitment document.

Even though the ICT sector was first made visible as an effective instrument for advocacy on gender issues at Beijing, it still remains secluded. At Beijing, women's organizations had successfully lobbied for the need for involving women in decision-making and in the formulation of policies related to the development of new ICTs, in order to participate fully in

[1] This seminar was held in April 2005, when the preparatory meetings for the Tunis phase of WSIS were underway. The Summit was held in Tunis in November 2005.

their growth and impact. However, the progress made on the commitments undertaken, has so far, been meagre. Though ICTs are playing an increasingly vital role in the development paradigm and are recognized as an integral means for transformation, it is clear that development in ICTs is far from equal.

The access of women and girls to ICTs remains limited even today. Even in situations of poverty, where both women and men share equally the lack of access to the gains from technology, the poverty of exclusion exacerbates the situation for women. For them the problem is compounded by other obstacles, such as social and cultural norms that constrain their mobility and access to resources. There is a compelling need now to direct efforts towards enabling women to utilize the new avenues opened by ICTs for social, economic and political empowerment. The greatest challenge that we face is that of harnessing ICTs for social transformation.

Rooted in the ground realities of women, the Seminar was more than a debate about ICTs. It was a discussion and strategy, which focused around the larger economic and social context in which technology is located. It brought to the table, frameworks of analysis and action that are rooted in national and sub-national experiences in the region. The implications of economic globalization, the changing face of women's work and international division of labour in the new economy, the intellectual property regime and the appropriation of local knowledge by corporations, the media industry and the narrow-banding of information production, were some of the key areas that were added to the existing parameters of the information societies' debate, and built into the discussions around the WSIS agenda.

This selection of papers, which were presented at the Seminar, makes available a valuable body of information on areas, which have, so far, not been central to the dialogue on ICTs and development. Highlighting the developing interplay between economic opportunities and socio-cultural hierarchies, they are special because of the unique lens that has been used to treat them. They provide an admirable resource for fresh thinking and learning on issues that continue to burn and which beg solutions and answers.

In addition, the publication provides an excellent tool for advocacy. We hope that it will be used widely by diverse stakeholders and development practitioners, to engender the information society. Our hope is that these papers will provide a powerful lens for meaningful and empowering insights, to assist women in South Asia, and define the parameters of the development and rights debates. What they already do is provide a magnificent trigger for informed advocacy in the region around ICT and gender.

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Preface

This collection of papers comes from a seminar organized by IT for Change in April 2005. The impetus for the seminar came from the pressing need to engender the emerging policy discussion spaces concerning the information society, specifically the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), with feminist perspectives that are rooted in Southern realities. The first phase of WSIS was over in 2003, and the second was held in November 2005. Gender equality had been established as a normative overarching principle in the context of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in the WSIS discussions and in the Geneva outcome documents. But towards Phase 2 of WSIS, which was to make decisions of significance at practical levels, the task of articulating a feminist critique of the emerging information society, and sizing up what it means for development and rights through a gender lens, was urgent. This required that gender advocates grasp the complexities of the vast and evolving information society arena to bridge analysis and action.

Further, given the extremely peripheral involvement in Phase 1 of WSIS of those Southern feminists who had the rich experience of representing local struggles and interests in global governance fora to assert the rights of and seek gains for the most disadvantaged women in global policy, it was even more critical to mobilize gender perspectives that could highlight Southern agenda in Phase 2 of WSIS.

The seminar 'Gender Perspectives on the Information Society: South Asia Pre-WSIS Seminar' was an effort to engage with this task on hand. It was organized by IT for Change, in partnership with Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) and the Centre for Public Policy, Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore. The seminar was supported by UNIFEM and the UNDP Asia-Pacific Development Information Programme.

Given that many feminist activists and scholars in the South Asia region were still uninitiated into the WSIS process, the seminar provided a space to seek their engagement with information society issues – to examine how these issues have been framed, how they link to 'old' debates on development and rights and to come up with directions for future engagement. The seminar also sought to encourage the Information and Communications Technology for Development (ICT4D) community, to present gendered perspectives from the ground.

This collection of papers from the seminar (two papers, however, are from contributors who could not be present during the seminar) represent a broad variety of issues and perspectives that are implicated in the wide, and still not well-articulated, arena of gender concerns in the information society. The reader may not find these papers building a clear consensus on the risks, challenges, opportunities and action items vis-à-vis gender in the information society. In a sense, the collection represents the un-reconciled plurality of the discourse and also signifies the nascency of feminist engagements with information society issues, as much as it denotes the necessary heterogeneity of perspectives in areas where critical analysis is emerging.

The first paper 'Women, Media and ICTs in UN Politics: Progress or Backlash?' by Heike Jensen in the section on 'Gender at WSIS' traces the history of women's engagement with issues of media and information technologies at various global fora in the last few decades. She highlights the elements of continuity of these engagements with gender debates at WSIS, also underlining new issues that are emerging. The second paper in this section, 'Civil Society and Feminist Engagement at WSIS: Some Reflections', traces how the concept of WSIS evolved, civil society's involvement in WSIS and explores these spaces from Southern and feminist viewpoints. Radhika Lal, in her paper 'WSIS: Some Reflections on Emerging Discourses and Frameworks' explains how the issue of whether or not new ICTs will play a positive role for development and for greater social justice will be determined by the policy choices we make as a society. In this context, she underlines the importance of development actors engaging with ICT policy spaces including the WSIS.

Moving from policy to practice, the second section of the collection, 'Gender Perspectives on ICT4D', begins with a narrative from a grassroots movement in India, 'The Right to Information and the Information Society', based on Nikhil Dey's presentation at the seminar. This piece captures the political value of 'information' and speaks about some ingenious processes used by grassroots actors – poor wage labourers – to legitimize, communicate and use important information for obtaining rightful entitlements. The next paper by Leelangi Wanasundera, 'Expanding Women's Capacities through Access to ICTs: An Overview from Sri Lanka' takes up the important issue of access of women and girls to ICTs in Sri Lanka, examining their access to education, especially technology education. Usha Vyasulu Reddi and Rukmini Vemraju in their article, 'Using ICTs to Bridge the Digital Divide', analyze the issues that have contributed to the success and failure of various ICT4D initiatives and list some lessons for future projects, especially those concerning women's empowerment.

In the paper 'Empowering Communities through IT: Multi-stakeholder Approaches and the Akshaya Experiment', Aruna Sundararajan presents the case study of a partnership between the government and the local community that has addressed the three basic components of access, capacity and content in a holistic manner, and the importance of such an approach to meet the needs of disadvantaged sections, including women. The debate on the impact of the new ICTs, especially in the context of South Asia, cannot be complete without examining the issues connected to work and employment in the IT sector. Carol Upadhya in her paper, 'Gender Issues in the Indian Software Outsourcing Industry', based on her ongoing research, examines the work environment in the IT sector from a gender perspective.

The new ICTs as media constitute an important aspect of the information society. They have enormous relevance to gender-related debates on the portrayal of women, and to the new opportunities for women in asserting their voices. The section on 'Women and Media in the Information Society' looks at how ICTs can anchor a bottom-up public discourse that gives greater centrality to gender issues. Tasneem Ahmar in her paper, 'Local Media and Women's Identity Articulation', discusses how FM radio has been appropriated by women in Pakistan for mainstreaming gender debates. In the next article in this section, 'Community Media and Women: Transforming Silence into Speech', Vinod Pavarala, Kanchan K. Malik and J.R. Cheeli discuss the intersection of two important streams in media and development discourse – gender and participation. This paper is followed by Ammu Joseph's analysis titled 'Diversity as Casualty: Gender in the Time of Media Globalization' on the portrayal of women in mainstream media in India, which attempts to critique various movements for media reform from a gender lens.

The seminar was unique not only for the breadth of discussions it made possible, but also for being an important landmark that allowed the crystallization of some new conceptions on gender and the information society. We therefore find it appropriate to include a last section in this collection on the personal reflections by two scholars on the proceedings of the seminar, and their own impressions and thoughts on the issues that were under intense scrutiny during the two days of the seminar. In this section, Gita Sen and Nivedita Menon speak mostly about the dilemmas and the ambivalences with respect to feminist engagement with information society issues. These views present a tentative reconnaissance of this emerging but important area that throws up a new agenda for feminist struggles.

We hope that the present collection contributes to further shaping an informed gender discourse in South Asia on the compelling phenomenon of the information society that is reshaping the social, economic and political reality around us.

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Bangalore, India

Part 1

Gender at WSIS

Chapter 1.1

Women, Media and ICTs in UN Politics: Progress or Backlash?

–*Heike Jensen*

Introduction

A large range of media issues, encompassing questions of access, content, work and decision-making structures, has been on the agenda of many women's movements around the world for decades,. These movements have developed media strategies, voiced media policy demands, and have inspired, conducted and utilized media research. Given the decades of political engagement with media issues at the local, national, regional and global levels, it might be presumed that feminists have been well positioned to negotiate and shape the information society. The UN World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS, 2003, 2005), called to determine the parameters of this kind of society, should have been the opportune time for the completion of this task.

Yet instead of seeing steady progress in achieving long-established feminist media aims and in successively engendering all spheres and issues of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) policy and development, we have encountered fundamental obstacles and backlash against women's demands in these areas. Furthermore, there appears to be some wariness in many women's movements to keep media and ICT issues squarely on the agenda. New challenges such as gender issues related to the digital divide have hardly impacted the political agenda of the broader women's movements, despite the fact that numerous feminists and organizations from around the world have highlighted not just these challenges, but also the opportunities represented by ICTs.

Given this state of affairs, the central question is how women and men might best continue to engage with media and ICT issues to guide developments in the directions of gender equality, non-discrimination and sustainability in the wake of the WSIS process. To approach this question, it appears pertinent to go back in history and re-examine central feminist media and ICT issues raised in UN summit documents as well as the follow-up evaluations of progress they have spurred. Assessing how women's political demands have been voiced and understood, and the obstacles they have encountered, will prevent us from going around in circles and help us rethink our strategies. For this purpose, I will sketch and discuss three landmark stages, marked by the World Conference on Women in Nairobi (1985) and its follow-

up process, the World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995) and its follow-up processes, and the WSIS (2003, 2005).

The Nairobi Process

The UN World Conference on Women in Nairobi in 1985 was held "to review and appraise the achievements of the United Nations International Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace" (1975-1985). The three themes reflect the areas of focus of the three world blocks that existed at the time, i.e., the Western block, the Southern block and the Communist block. The World Conference adopted the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women,[1] which contain a wealth of paragraphs concerned with all kinds of media, from traditional cultural media to mass media, to communications and information networks. All media, if harnessed appropriately, were seen as potential resources for women's empowerment. A visionary, positive and inclusive view of the media was, for instance, expressed in the following paragraph, which concerns itself with "Current trends and perspectives to the year 2000". It states:

> "It is expected that the ever-expanding communications network will be better attuned than before to the concerns of women and that planners in this field will provide increasing information on the objectives of the Decade – equality, development and peace – on the Forward-looking Strategies, and on the issues included in the sub-theme – employment, health and education. All channels, including computers, formal and non-formal education and the media, as well as traditional mechanisms of communication involving the cultural media of ritual, drama, dialogue, oral literature and music, should be used." (para. 30)

What is envisioned here is a kind of concerted effort by all media to contribute to an overall public sphere or to provide an overarching public service informed by norms and values, particularly those characterizing the UN Decade for Women. In further paragraphs, media outside of the UN as well as those belonging to the UN itself were called to this task (paras. 314, 368, 369, 370). Each of the three main themes, as laid out in the Strategies document, contained media issues, most of which overlapped.

With respect to equality in social and political participation and decision-making, the prime concern of the Western block, an elimination of stereotypes and pornography and the promotion of respectful portrayals of women and women's political rights through media were demanded (paras. 56, 77, 85, 90). Beyond content considerations, women were called upon to participate in councils and review bodies concerned with media and advertising, and to contribute to the implementation of the decisions reached in such venues (para. 85).

Concerning development, the central issue of the South , the need to eradicate stereotypes was reiterated (para. 206). Additional content provisions included addressing the information

[1] 1A/CONF.116/28/Rev.1 (85.IV.10), http://www.un.org/womenwatch/confer/nfls/Nairobi1985report.txt

needs of women in general and rural women in particular (paras. 206, 181), and to teach men to share in the rearing of children (para. 228). With respect to infrastructure, the necessity to build efficient communications and information networks for women in development was expressed (para. 208); and emphasis was laid on the requirement to integrate cultural media with larger schemes to develop communications structures. Regarding women as actors, a comprehensive list of demands was provided to promote women at "all levels of communications policy and decision-making and in programme design, implementation and monitoring", in publicly operated mass communication networks, in alternative forms of communication, in public information efforts and cultural projects, and with particular emphasis on the allocation of financial support (paras. 206, 207).

With respect to peace, the prime concern of the Communist block, again the need to combat stereotypes and to achieve respectful representations of women was mentioned. A particular concern with stereotypes of elderly women was voiced (para. 286); and the promotion of "war, aggression, cruelty, excessive desire for power and other forms of violence" was denounced, particularly as targeted at young people (para. 273). The need to promote peace in the family, neighbourhood and community and to champion the idea of a world community of people was stressed (paras. 256, 272).

Thus, throughout the document, the overarching concern expressed in all thematic areas was the predominance of stereotypes, including sexually exploitative images of women.[2] But all in all, the Nairobi document is very comprehensive in addressing the breadth of media from the points of view of content, structure and access, as well as economic and political participation and decision-making. It is hence quite noteworthy that the 1995 Report of the Secretary-General, which reviewed and appraised the implementation of the Nairobi provisions, noted that the Nairobi document "said very little about media and communication".[3] Possibly, the Nairobi media provisions were less noticeable because they were not consolidated into one part but appeared scattered throughout the document.

The 1995 Report identified contradictory developments. On the positive side, it found an increase in women's alternative media, women's associations and networks, the number of women working in mainstream media and the number of women in media training. On the negative side, the overall agenda of the media was diagnosed to have remained unaltered. It was noted that women had not gained access to decision-making structures, but tended to cluster in low-prestige jobs. Thus, the verdict was that "the power to develop media policy, and to determine the nature and shape of media content, continue to elude women" (para. 16).

[2] The connection between sex-role stereotyping and media was very much an issue within the UN in the course of its Decade for Women. See the historical overview contained in the Report of the Secretary-General to the 40th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) on "Elimination of stereotyping in the mass media" (E/CN.6/1996/4, dated 23 January 1996), introduction, para. 4. http://www.un.org/documents/ecosoc/cn6/1996/ecn61996-4.htm

[3] Report of the Secretary-General to the 39th session of CSW "Second review and appraisal of the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, Addendum, II. Critical Areas of Concern, J. Insufficient use of mass media to promote women's positive contributions to society" (E/CN.6/1995/3/Add.8, dated 27 January 1996), para.1. http://www.un.org/documents/ecosoc/cn6/1995/ecn61995-3add8.htm
The text is credited to a contribution prepared by UNESCO for the 1994 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development.

The global media environment was judged to pose the threats of conglomerization, monopolization, cultural imperialism and disempowerment (paras. 14(a), 31). In particular, transnational media content was diagnosed as "further disempower[ing] the powerless" (para. 30) and destroying alternative spaces of articulation. The geopolitical subtext here was that media and entertainment companies from the global North , especially the US, were seen to increasingly export their products and formats and to penetrate foreign markets with them. The associated questions of if and how countries and regions could safeguard their cultural and linguistic diversity and local articulations had been hotly debated for at least 20 years by then.[4]

The issue of stereotypes needs to be reconsidered in this context with respect to the problem of how marginalized groups or regions can counter denigrating stereotypes circulating about them. A unidirectional spread of content and formats means that the global South has few chances to portray itself on its own terms to the global North. Not surprisingly, this state of affairs can and does also impact international politics including development cooperation. The specific ramifications for women are well-researched. They have manifested in a series of development approaches, from Women in Development (WID) to Women and Development (WAD) to Gender and Development (GAD). At issue in these approaches has been how women in the South have (stereotypically) been imagined and what roles and options they have been assigned or have been able to claim in the respective development schemes.[5]

The 1995 review suggested that the living conditions of girls and women needed to change for them to be able to impact the development of media. Mentioned were basic education, literacy and technical training, access to resources and to public spaces as well as full self-determination in the private sphere (paras. 54-60). Such an assessment contradicted the earlier idea that media would pave the way for women's empowerment, because it stressed the opposite trajectory that as long as women were not empowered, they would not be able to direct media.

The Beijing Process

The year 1995 not only saw a Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) session to review the progress and setbacks since Nairobi, but another full-fledged World Conference on Women. Among the 12 Critical Areas of Concern that were addressed at this Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, one was called "Stereotyping of women and inequality in women's access to and participation in all communication systems, especially in the media". Section J of the

[4] These issues created a substantial controversy at UNESCO from 1975 to 1985 under the heading of the "New World Information and Communication Order" .The debate pitted developing countries primarily against the US, because the former wanted to curtail foreign media empires' influx of information and entertainment and enable an articulation of their own cultural narratives and values. These issues have still not been resolved and more recently also entered into GATS and TRIPS negotiations.

[5] See the anthology *Feminism/Postmodernism/Development* edited by Marchand, Marianne H. and Parpart, Jane L. (London, New York: Routledge, 1995). See in particular the article by Chowdhry, Geeta "Engendering Development? Women in Development (WID) in international development regimes", pp. 26-41. See also Moser, Caroline : Gender Planning and Development: Theory, Practice and Training. New York, London: 1993. It is also useful to recall that representations of women function in complex ways, often additionally being made to stand for (the virtue of) "one's own" country and (the shortcomings of) the "other" women and other countries.

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action[6] addressed "Women and the Media" in detail and codified two strategic objectives: Strategic objective J.1 asked to "Increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies of communication". Strategic objective J.2 asked to "Promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media".

Hence, the basic Nairobi provisions regarding content, structure and access, and regarding economic and political participation and decision-making, were taken up and reiterated, given that the Nairobi monitoring process found these concerns had not been resolved. Due to the lack of progress in these matters, all that the Beijing conference could do was point to the capacities of the media, and particularly ICTs, without predicting any probability of success for women, as reflected in the following sentence, "Everywhere the potential exists for the media to make a far greater contribution to the advancement of women" (para. 234). In this assessment, the Beijing document appears much more cautious than the confident Nairobi one. Two other features of the Beijing document need to be discussed: first, its use of the term freedom of expression and, second, the importance it accords the new ICTs.

References to freedom of expression in a document about women's rights, it might be expected, are a good thing. After all, what women are fighting for is freedom of expression through the media. But in the Beijing document, these references were used as qualifiers, in the sense that almost all calls for a revision of media content and new guidelines for content were framed by the half-sentence "to the extent consistent with freedom of expression". This restriction, which was absent from comparable paragraphs in the Nairobi document, testifies to an appropriation of freedom of expression which has been a central issue of contention until today. Freedom of expression here constituted a right that had mostly been claimed by Northern commercial media institutions to safeguard against content or programming obligations that could potentially be imposed by States. While this right can thus serve as a tool for commercial media institutions to protect themselves from being turned into mouthpieces of State propaganda, it can also be a tool for them to block public service obligations or to override women's right to respectful representation.

Freedom of expression, from a women's rights point of view, becomes a tricky concept in this form of usage. On the one hand, ample examples show that women are hardly the winners when media are State-controlled. On the other hand, women also lose out when freedom of expression through the media is only enjoyed by those who own media, not many of whom are women. There are, of course, middle roads between the options of total State control and total business control of the media sector. These have, for instance, taken the shape of public service obligations and multi-stakeholder regulatory bodies for private media, and of multi-stakeholder regulatory bodies for public media. Yet even these setups have not profited women to a significant extent, because women have been seen as just one more homogeneous and marginal interest group among many. Thus patriarchal relations permeate all kinds of different media landscapes and setups, a fact that could already be inferred from the joint concern with stereotypes expressed by representatives of all power blocks in Nairobi.[7]

[6] A/CONF.177/20/Rev.1 (96.IV.13), http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/

[7] A forceful testimony to the continued stereotyping and marginalization of women in the media around the world is provided by the Global Media Monitoring Project, which regularly compares prominent news coverage on women and men. See http://www.globalmediamonitoring.org.

In these circumstances, could the new ICTs then be regarded as a source for hope? The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 1995 is widely held to have been decisive in putting ICTs firmly on the global women's agenda.[8] Section J indeed acknowledged that if women had a say in how ICTs develop, ICTs could serve as alternative sources of information, to facilitate networking, to challenge derogatory stereotypes and instances of abuse of power by the media industry, to strengthen women's participation in democratic processes and to promote international, South-South and South-North cooperation. ICTs hence appeared as a possible remedy for the drawbacks of established media, which, as we have traced, had proved quite resistant to feminist politics up until that point in time. And ICTs were also seen as offering additional opportunities that went beyond what the established media could do to further women and women's rights, especially regarding the global dissemination of information and global networking. But, on the other hand, ample evidence was already cited in 1995 that ICT content and employment structures had fallen in line with the stereotypes and restrictions that existed in the other media businesses. Furthermore, digital divides between South and North as well as between women and men were already pointed out as specific challenges.

In the wake of the Beijing Conference, gender-sensitive ICT projects and policy issues gained importance at the UN level. The WomenWatch website is one such project. It was established in 1997 to support the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, acting as "a central gateway to information and resources on the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women throughout the United Nations system".[9] WomenWatch has thus combined several Beijing mandates, such as the use of ICTs for information dissemination, the mainstreaming of women's issues throughout the UN and the linking of gender equality efforts within the UN. WomenWatch also collaborated with the NGO website Women Action 2000 to strengthen information dissemination through the Internet as well as traditional means of communication in the regions.[10]

Gender advocacy in ICT policy became a new focus of feminist intervention in the late 1990s. On the international plane, it was inaugurated in the context of the World Telecommunications Development Conference organized by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in Malta in 1998.[11] In its wake, the ITU established a Gender Task Force. Thus, right before the beginning of the new millennium, feminists had successfully begun to politicize the infrastructure and politico-economic framework of ICTs within the UN, and public platforms were in place to broadly disseminate the relevant information. Given that information and the appropriate structures to disseminate it are the keys to dialogue and peaceful social change, it seemed that women were well-poised to make their concerns heard, to network and to impact societies.

[8] See Burch, Sally and Leon, Irene: "Directions for Women's Advocacy on ICT: Putting New Technologies on the Gender Agenda." Networking for Change: The APCWNSP's First 8 Years. Philippines: APCWNSP, 2000. 31-47: p. 36.
[9] See http://www.un.org/womenwatch/about/
[10] Report of the Secretary-General: Beijing to Beijing+5: Review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. New York: United Nations, 2001: p. 239.
[11] See Hafkin, Nancy: "Gender Issues in ICT Policy in Developing Countries: An Overview." UN DAW Expert Group Meeting on "Information and communication technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women." Seoul, Republic of Korea, 11 to 14 November 2002. (EGM/ICT/2002/EP.1, dated 25 October 2002), p. 3. http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/ict2002/reports/Paper-NHafkin.PDF

Then in the year 2000 came the five-year "Review and Appraisal of the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action". WomenWatch was one of the UN web sites highest in demand, with approximately 10,000 hits per month.[12] But the overall verdict concerning media and ICTs was negative. The traditional facets of discrimination in terms of content, participation and decision-making were found to persist:

> "Media, globally, is virtually unregulated in terms of promoting balanced and non-stereotyped portrayals of women. Governments do not seem to exert meaningful control or influence in respect of the promotion of equality, or the eradication of stereotypes, violence against women, pornography and other degrading images. Still more must be done in the area of information and media to promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in policies and programmes. There is the need for the development of information policies and strategies with clear gender-sensitive approaches." (ibid., p. 201)

Moreover, the recent developments in the field of ICTs were clearly diagnosed to constitute new sources of discrimination:

> "[W]omen have been slow to enter ICTs-based professions worldwide and have been largely excluded from designing and shaping information technologies. Where women are employed in this sector, they tend to hold low-paying and less prestigious positions. Traditionally, gender differences and disparities have been ignored in policies and programmes dealing with the development and dissemination of improved technologies. As a result, women have benefited less from, and been disadvantaged more by, technological advances. Women, therefore, need to be actively involved in the definition, design and development of new technologies. Otherwise, the information revolution might bypass women or produce adverse effects on their lives." (ibid., p. 295)

The finding that the new ICTs constituted a new source of inequality for women loomed particularly large. So the stakes were clear when the negotiation process of the UN WSIS started in earnest in the year 2002.

The WSIS Process

Until December 2003, when the first summit event took place in Geneva and generated the Declaration of Principles (DoP)[13] and Plan of Action (AP),[14] two feminist lobbying groups worked tirelessly to get women's concerns on the WSIS agenda: the WSIS Gender Caucus as a multi-stakeholder group made up of representatives from governments, international agencies,

[12] Report of the Secretary-General: Beijing to Beijing+5: p. 196.
[13] WSIS-03/GENEVA/DOC/4-E, http://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-s/md/03/wsis/doc/S03-WSIS-DOC-0004!!PDF-E.pdf
[14] WSIS-03/GENEVA/DOC/5-E, http://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-s/md/03/wsis/doc/S03-WSIS-DOC-0005!!PDF-E.pdf

business, and civil society; and the NGO Gender Strategies Working Group, a civil society entity. Their work could draw on substantial backing within the United Nations "women's machinery", from Expert Group Meetings called by the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), to briefing notes prepared by the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE), to recommendations issued to WSIS by the CSW. After many political setbacks, one strong commitment to women's human rights, empowerment and key participation in shaping the information society was achieved in the shape of paragraph 12 of the DoP. It states:

> "We affirm that 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 their full participation on the basis on (sic) equality in all spheres of society and in all decision-making processes. To this end, we should mainstream a gender equality perspective and use ICTs as a tool to that end."

But the principle of gender mainstreaming was not applied in the overall WSIS process, which means that the negotiations were characterized by a gender-blind and, hence, a male-centred approach. It consequently did not openly examine what kinds of groups of men and women would be affected in which ways by the political issues and how they were negotiated. It similarly did not define the issues and overall agenda on the basis of gender-equality considerations. Thus gender was addressed peripherally in terms of specific support actions for girls and women. Here, two traditional areas of feminist intervention were reflected in particular. Firstly, in terms of content, a balanced and diverse portrayal of women and men in the media was called for in the AP (para. C9.24), and additional content provisions referred to health information (AP para. C7.18). Secondly, special measures for women and girls as well as gender perspectives were mentioned in terms of education and ICT education (DoP para. 4.29, AP paras. C8.23 h and C4.11 g), and in terms of training and jobs as well as career development with respect to ICTs (AP paras. C.4.11, C6.13, C7.19 a, c and d).

Also, the need to monitor developments and to devise gender-sensitive indicators was acknowledged (AP E.28 a and d). Most glaringly absent were explicit commitments to gender-sensitive infrastructure development, the issue that had constituted a focus of the more recent feminist ICT policy interventions as explained above. Also, there were no references to the promotion of communications and information networks that benefit women or of content transmitting values such as women's rights, peace, respect and non-discrimination, which had constituted long-standing media and ICT concerns. These omissions are all the more alarming with reference to the comparatively new field of e-democracy and its potential.

The second WSIS phase leading up to the Tunis summit event and its two documents, the Tunis Commitment (TC)[15] and the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society,[16] did not bring any progress in terms of gender politics. The WSIS Gender Caucus, which by then had merged with the NGO Gender Strategies Working Group, worked hard to safeguard the commitments

[15] WSIS-05/TUNIS/DOC/7-E, http://www.itu.int/wsis/docs2/tunis/off/7.pdf
[16] WSIS-05/TUNIS/DOC/6(Rev.1)-E, http://www.itu.int/wsis/docs2/tunis/off/6rev1.pdf

achieved in the first phase and to expand them into the two main fields of political contestation of the second phase, Internet governance and financing mechanisms to bridge the digital divide. The limited results are telling. Again, a strong general commitment to gender equality had to be fought for until the last second and was won in the end. Paragraph 23 of the TC reads:

> "We recognise that a gender divide exists as part of the digital divide in society and we reaffirm our commitment to women's empowerment and to a gender equality perspective, so that we can overcome this divide. We further acknowledge that the full participation of women in the Information Society is necessary to ensure the inclusiveness and respect for human rights within the Information Society. We encourage all stakeholders to support women's participation in decision-making processes and to contribute to shaping all spheres of the Information Society at international, regional and national levels."

In addition to this commitment, a total of only four more references to women could be achieved. One further reference to the digital divide between men and women can be found in the TC (para. 13), and three implementation and follow-up measures were laid out in the Tunis Agenda. The latter encompass ICT capacity building for women (para. 90.c), ICT science and technology training and education for girls and women to bring them into decision-making (para. 90.d), and the development of gender-disaggregated indicators to measure the digital divide (para. 114.d). Regarding Internet governance, the call to include a provision for a significant number of women in the respective bodies and fora was not heeded. And regarding financial mechanisms to bridge the digital divide, all suggestions for provisions concerning gender budgeting and earmarking funds for gender equality measures were ignored as well. The message could not be clearer that the two strong normative paragraphs of WSIS on gender equality exist far removed from concrete and effective implementation directives.

While the feminist consensus has been that ICTs can have the effect of minimizing and overcoming social divides and injustices, if they are designed, implemented and monitored to do so, WSIS has arguably not laid the foundations for these developments. Far-reaching, structural transformations would be required to achieve these goals, and this is where WSIS has failed. Most centrally, the neo-liberal economic policy paradigm could not be successfully challenged. Left to market forces, however, ICTs are very likely to deepen existing social divides and injustices, most importantly South-North divides and divides between men and women, but also divides among a growing number of women who are likely to get poorer and a shrinking number of women who are likely to get richer.

The fundamental tension at the root of the mass media that we found encapsulated in the struggle over freedom of expression remains unresolved. It possibly even appears intensified: the tension between media and ICTs as commercial enterprises, on the one hand, and media and ICTs as potential public resources and infrastructure or public service providers, on the other. If regulation forcing media and ICTs in the direction of functioning as gender-sensitive public resources and public service providers is absent, market and profit considerations will prevail over democratizing, balancing and developmental concerns. Women have most to lose in this scenario.

Going one step further, it needs to be considered that ICTs are not just one media business among many that has been driven by the neo-liberal economic policy paradigm and has generated its impact within it. The ICT sector has, in fact, been the enabler and the motor of global neo-liberal economics, because ICTs allow the split-second coordination of production, distribution and consumption patterns as well as of financial markets and services around the globe. The central problem here is two-fold. Firstly, the neo-liberal economic framework, which has dominated development cooperation between North and South for many years and which is now also increasingly taking its toll in the Northern region, appears to be a framework that is not suited to achieve broader redistributions of wealth and sustainable development. Hence any attempt to make this approach, or projects within this approach, gender-sensitive seems like a lost cause at best and even dangerous at worst. This may also be true for the promise to get more women into the ICT-related economy, which has been held out by WSIS, as mentioned above. Secondly, in this setup, it is insufficient to address ICTs solely as information, communication and entertainment media in the classical sense. This is where feminist analyses and interventions need to depart from more traditional approaches and break new grounds.

Summary and Conclusions

Three prime feminist areas of concern with media and ICTs stand out in the declarations and reviews I sketched: firstly content, secondly education, training, jobs and decision-making, and thirdly infrastructure and access.

Concerning media and ICT content, the recurring demands have been to:

- get rid of stereotyped depictions of men and women and of pornography;
- have positive, diverse and plentiful portrayals of women;
- have a broad dissemination of information about women's rights; and
- have a general orientation of the media and ICTs towards values such as peace, respect and non-discrimination.

Concerning education, training and career development, the prime issues have been to:

- educate girls and women in the use of media and ICTs;
- train more women in the mass communication sector; and
- bring women into decision-making positions in the respective business and governmental institutions.

And concerning infrastructure, the most pressing concerns have been to:

- provide all women with access to the media and ICTs they wish to use; and
- develop communications and information networks that benefit women.

Quite obviously, all of these demands are demands for guided development and regulation in the area of media and ICTs, based on the principle of equality between the genders. The demands draw on an understanding of media and ICTs as public resources or public service

providers, which is in tension with the growing market and profit orientation of media and ICTs. What has become increasingly evident over the last decades is that these demands have not been met, and that the new ICTs in particular have proved to be a double-edged sword that has not only opened new possibilities for women but played a central role in their increased marginalization, both in media-related terms and in overall economic terms.

It is hence imperative that we pay more, not less, attention to the central developments in the media and ICT sectors, and that we come up with more adequate approaches, frameworks, demands and coalitions, reflecting the new qualities and status of media and ICTs in the so-called information society. Possibly, political engagement in this area needs to be more clearly directed at transnational businesses and their political support structures. Regarding content, this engagement needs to be undertaken from the point of view of both audiences and producers of content. With respect to employment and business structures, it needs to be elaborated from the vantage point of workers, but also of owners and consumers. And concerning the public sphere and its infrastructure, this engagement needs to be shaped by citizens, in the broadest sense of the term.

In all of these contexts, stronger links with non-feminists might be attempted, which suggest themselves at this point in time because numerous individuals and groups beyond the feminist community have recently problematized media and ICT issues and have also begun to develop alternative visions that counter central aspects of the neo-liberal approach to markets. Many of these individuals and groups have come together in the context of WSIS, and it would be worthwhile for feminists to engage with and be part of the newly emerging networks post-WSIS in order to profit from the new critiques and visions and infuse them with gender-sensitive considerations.

As far as content is concerned, alternative business models have, for instance, been proposed by the Copyleft and Creative Commons initiatives. These resonate particularly strongly with the free and open source software community as well as educational, research and artistic communities interested in fighting the dominant intellectual property rights regimes and promoting a rich public domain, characterized by free and equitable access to art and knowledge and easy involvement in processes of art and knowledge production and dissemination. To engender these approaches would mean to establish women as vital and cherished producers of art and knowledge in equal partnership with men, which would inevitably also transform the kinds of art and knowledge produced. Such transformative potential would also be vital to counter the tide of unidirectional content flow from North to South.

Regarding employment and business structures, a lot of consciousness-raising about unacceptable working conditions caused by transnational companies and their increasingly outsourced production, distribution and service chains has been undertaken for some time, for instance by new social movements and organizations critical of "globalization". To make them gender-conscious would involve pointing out that jobs are stratified in all sectors, including the media and ICT-related ones, in a manner that systematically discriminates against women in terms of job choice and possibilities of entry, on-the-job treatment, retention and careers, remuneration and work-life balance. The goal would be to end the exploitation of

large groups of women as cheap labour force by companies and nations and to transform all jobs into healthy opportunities to earn a living. This goal should be reinforced by concerted consumer choices favouring employee-friendly companies and the promotion of successful employee-friendly business models and owners.

Regarding the public sphere and its infrastructure, specifically with regard to the Internet, new models have emerged of how a public goods approach could enable new models of financing infrastructure expansion and better infrastructure distribution. One idea is to tax already connected constituencies for the added value they will reap from being able to reach out farther to previously unconnected constituencies. This approach would shift the financial burden of new connections from those without connections to those already privileged by connections. To engender these models would mean pointing out that women as the majority of the poor and underserviced need to be brought into the public sphere and have a lot to contribute to it. Other recent initiatives and ideas concerned with the public sphere tackle such diverse issues as self-expression through communication rights and access to governmental information in campaigns for freedom of information acts. All of these campaigns need to be engendered to make them more responsive to the particular stakes that women have in these issues.

In sum, many facets of the media and ICT problematics that have spurred feminist demands, voiced throughout the decades and unresolved up until now, have recently come to be approached in many different ways and aspects by heterogeneous political actors, in a by and large gender-unconscious way. It seems to be well worth the effort to try and link up with these new actors to jointly develop more gender-conscious critiques and gender-equitable models and visions that can answer longstanding feminist concerns in innovative and expanded ways.

Chapter 1.2

Civil Society and Feminist Engagement at WSIS: Some Reflections

–Anita Gurumurthy and Parminder Jeet Singh

The points raised through this paper are intended to flag the dilemmas and challenges as well as potential spaces for feminist advocacy in the WSIS process. The paper attempts to bring together a historical overview of the developments that led to the WSIS, civil society engagement in the WSIS processes and feminist advocacy in the context of WSIS, examining how Southern feminist agendas need to be evolved.

Part 1: WSIS and Civil Society

The idea of WSIS was conceived in the days when some paradigmatic breakthroughs in ICTs prophesied far-reaching changes to social and economic life. ITU, the international body of government and private players in the telecommunication sector, saw an enhanced role for telecommunications, and for itself, in the new world order, and in 1996 proposed WSIS.

The US had earlier proposed the concept of a global information infrastructure (1993), and Europe took a somewhat more socio-political view of the changes that ICTs were bringing to our world and spoke of an emerging information society (1995).

However, these visions proposed by ITU, the US and Europe were mostly technology-centred and private-sector driven conceptions. The emerging institutional setting of the information society was decidedly neoliberal. The private sector was to drive the information society, and the public sector would play an enabling regulatory role, crafting the right conditions for the triumph of the market. Taking forward this spirit, in the year 2000, the G-8 countries adopted the Okinawa Charter on Global Information Society. The charter extolled ICTs as "one of the most potent forces in shaping the 21st century".[17]

[17] http://www.g8.fr/evian/english/navigation/g8_documents/archives_from_previous_summits/okinawa_summit_-_2000/okinawa_charter_on_global_information_society.html

Co-option of Development Agenda into a Market-led Vision of the Information Society

The Okinawa Charter also spoke of international cooperation for development, and announced the setting up of a Digital Opportunity Task (DOT) Force with a wider stakeholder participation, including from developing countries. Some countries like India at this time were already making significant strides in IT, and most developing countries looked at IT as a huge economic opportunity, in terms of export and job creation that was made possible with little capital investment. Some of these countries also got on to the emerging North-driven information society bandwagon. The development sector in developing countries, however, kept completely distant from this new development discourse.

Three active non-government partners in the DOT Force alliance got together to bring out a report on the role of ICTs in development activity, an area which had begun to be called ICT4D or ICT for Development. This report, called the Digital Opportunities Initiative (DOI) report, was authored by Accenture, the world's top private consulting firm, Markle Foundation (a non-profit in the US) and UNDP. With neat private sector efficiency, the report developed some key concepts of what came to be known as ICT4D, and notably, these concepts form the basic framework of ICT4D thinking even today. At a practical level, the framework has been very useful, and contributed considerably to developing and popularizing a vision for using ICTs for development. However, the development view that the DOI report projected was understandably pro-market and saw development mostly in terms of dominant economic growth paradigms. Even as an enabler of social development in sectors like health, education and governance, the private sector seemed to be entrusted with the leading role.

Most development activity has traditionally been associated with public efforts for social and physical infrastructure building, but the DOI report came in strongly with its faith in market mechanisms – stating categorically that "those initiatives that employ a business model were most likely to succeed."[18] The vocabulary of 'business models' thus entered development discourse through ICT4D. Governmental responsibility with regard to basic development infrastructure has been the historical norm in the South, though the Washington Consensus had begun to challenge this with prescriptions of user fees, notions of community's financial stake, and public-private partnerships. Within governments, multi-lateral bodies and civil society, these neoliberal approaches to development practice were often contested, and a complex development debate still rages over these. However, in the case of ICT4D, there was no such resistance owing to the peculiar conditions of its conception, marked by the non-engagement of development ministries of government and of civil society actors in development arena. ICT4D was born congenitally pro-market, somewhat suspicious of 'governmental interferences' and ideologically distanced from traditional development actors.

So, in this environment, when the UN General Assembly in 2000 considered the ITU recommendation for a WSIS, it left it to the ITU to take on the central role in organizing such a summit. It is worth noting that the ITU calls itself "an international organization within the UN system where governments and private sector coordinate global telecom networks and

[18] See DOI report at http://www.opt-init.org/framework/pages/contents.html

services",[19] professedly having nothing to do with development. Meanwhile, since it was the time of the historical UN Millennium Declaration, the UN General Assembly gave WSIS the mandate to explore ICT opportunities in achieving the development priorities of the Millennium Declaration, although there was no clear articulation of what process and substance was involved here. The DOT Force initiative had given way to a more 'representative and legitimate' successor in the form of a UN body, the UN ICT Task Force. The Task Force and its advisory body were dominated by representatives of IT multinationals and other private sector players. Thus, in the emerging global discourse on the information society, the default setting was the private sector. Perhaps, to justify such strong private sector presence in UN processes, the WSIS was officially mandated to be a multi-stakeholder process, where both private sector and civil society were given an official role.

Meanwhile, the UNDP and some other multilateral and bilateral donors had adopted the DOI framework as their ICT4D policy guide. Southern governments still had little or no ICT4D vision and their ICT4D activity, if any, continued to be looked after by IT and telecom ministries which were anxious to make the best of the unprecedented economic opportunities in IT exports and IT jobs. They were happy to endorse the pro-market DOI ICT4D framework for their ICT4D activities, including of e-governance. It is under these circumstances that WSIS-Phase 1 was held at Geneva.

Communication Rights Framework in WSIS

There is another historical stream that met the WSIS, albeit not in a planned manner nor even as something expected by the organizers. Around the time that the ITU came up with its proposal for a WSIS, UNESCO, which had been in the thick of controversy on the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO), also proposed a Conference on Information and Communication for Development in 1998. It is not clear why UNESCO's proposal was not accepted and the ITU's was, neither is it known why UNESCO was not centrally involved as a co-organizer of the WSIS with the ITU, an idea that did come up. Informal reports also suggest that the ITU refused to share the WSIS.[20] UNESCO was already in the bad books of some countries of the North on NWICO. Apparently, socio-cultural agendas were not favoured by those who were driven by the vision of a market-led globalized information society.

Civil society was invited to participate officially in the WSIS processes, as part of WSIS's much-hyped multi-stakeholder approach – said to be a first for a world summit. However, civil society refused to conform to the mould of being invited to "contribute their hands-on experience"[21] and insisted on broadening the agenda to bring in issues that the official organizers appeared not too eager to address. Partly, the WSIS was trapped in its own rhetoric. Since the passing of the ITU's WSIS proposal through the UN processes had added significant socio-developmental visions to it, these statements provided the spaces for civil society to put up some questions on basic socio-cultural issues.[22] The efforts of civil society succeeded, to some extent, in shifting

[19] See the ITU website, http://www.itu.int/
[20] "Will the real WSIS please stand up?", Siochru, S.O, 2004, http://www.crisinfo.org/content/view/full/246/
[21] "Global Media Governance, Reflections from the WSIS experience", Burch, S., 2004, http://www.worldsummit2003.de/download_en/Gazette-paper-final.rtf
[22] Siochru, S.O., 2004, op cit.

the narrow technology and market focus of WSIS to a broader knowledge and communication processes-based orientation. This shift needs to be noted as the first important realignment of WSIS and the IS debate.

This realignment is reflected in the evolution of the WSIS documents. One early text of the DoP described the information society as, "a new and higher form of social organization where highly developed ICT networks and ubiquitous access to information… improve quality of life and alleviate poverty and hunger."[23] Things were markedly better by the time the DoP was adopted. The final DoP spoke of "our common desire and commitment to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented information society, where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life", thus denoting a significant shift in information society discourse.

The primacy of the social and political nature of knowledge and communication processes, and an affirmation of a people-centred vision of information society emphasizing cultural diversity as against grandiose globalized notions of one information society, were key principles that civil society organizations (CSOs) advocated. The WSIS DoP (Geneva phase), at least in its opening paragraphs, is generally positive on these counts. However, as we move on to the AP, the language loses some of the social vision and reverts to a greater market- and technology-orientation. For example, the all-important issue of the actual role of the new technology paradigms in the different sectors of development is covered in a single section – "ICT applications: benefits in all aspects of life". And this section, taking a narrow applications-based view of the role of new technologies, is divided perfunctorily into sections on e-health, e-employment, e-environment and e-agriculture. However, progressive elements like open access (to content) and open source software were given some recognition in the AP and issues like "support to media based in local communities" and protecting and promoting cultural diversity in the information society were underlined.

The success of civil society interventions in the first phase of the WSIS was not limited to getting socio-political issues, and some elements of a communication rights framework, into the WSIS processes. A good part of civil society's success lay beyond influencing inter-governmental processes, in using the WSIS civil society forums for getting a wide range of non-government and non-market actors in the area of communication rights, Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), privacy, ICT4D and community media together on a single platform.

The engagement among these players, which were not always without intense contestations, gave birth to a broader civil society vision of the information society. A little before the Geneva summit, civil society disassociated itself from the official WSIS process and came up with an alternative declaration which articulated this vision.[24] This first struggle by civil society in the WSIS, to give a greater social and rights-based underpinning to the emerging notion of the information society, was dominated by CSOs from the North with limited participation from Southern civil society.

[23] "Whose Information Society? A Civil society Perspective on the WSIS", Buckley, S., 2004, http://www.ssrc.org/programs/itic/publications/knowledge_report/memos/buckleymemo2.pdf

[24] The Civil Society Declaration is available at http://www.itu.int/wsis/documents/doc_single-en-1179.asp

Absence of Southern Perspectives in WSIS

In relation to the WSIS, the context and concerns of the South have remained insufficiently represented. The far-reaching development possibilities opened up by the new ICTs needed to be articulated and placed within the WSIS discourse in a manner that proceeds from real needs and the developmental context in countries of the South. As mentioned earlier, Southern governments remained too preoccupied with the economic promise of ICTs and thus failed in leading and directing WSIS towards a discourse built on Southern priorities rooted in the imperatives of equity and social justice. Though the alternative civil society declaration of the Geneva phase[25] and some discussions in civil society processes did speak of issues of sustainable development, the engagement on these issues was rather superficial and hence the political implications of making pro-development choices in the ICT arena remained to be highlighted.

The first phase of WSIS firmly located communication rights issues in global discourse. In the second phase, there was an imperative to anchor within the WSIS discourse the significant opportunities for development that ICTs provide for structural and institutional transformation in developing countries. Although a beginning was made in this direction, this major re-alignment did not really take place even in the second phase.

The Start of a New Information Society Discourse

It was widely expected that the second phase of WSIS, called the Tunis phase,[26] would bring development issues in better focus. The Geneva phase did the easier part of recognizing claims of various stakeholders, through progressive language in its outcome documents. Discussions on the contentious issues – financing of ICT4D and issues of implementation of WSIS ideals and goals – were left to the Tunis phase.

The countries of the North, who had seen WSIS mostly as a platform for the propagation of a new ICT-powered globalization, grew visibly impatient as claims for equity and social justice began to take centre-stage in the Tunis phase. According to Paula Chakravartty,

> "Although the Communication Rights and Human Rights campaigns were committed to a more expansive vision of the right to communication– rights which include access to the infrastructure and content – Northern state delegates, led most aggressively by the US, strategically separated the narrow definition of the right to communicate from other areas like financing, access to affordable telecommunications and ICTs …."[27]

WSIS thus furthered a "neoliberal model of justice",[28] accommodating claims of recognition without giving any quarter to claims of redistribution. The absence of strong political

[25] "Shaping Information Societies for Human Needs", Civil Society Declaration to the World Summit on the Information Society. http://www.itu.int/wsis/docs/geneva/civil-society-declaration.pdf
[26] The second phase of WSIS was held in Tunis in November 2005.
[27] Chakravartty, P., "Who Speaks for the Governed?: World Summit on Information Society, Civil Society and the Limits of `Multi-stakeholderism`" in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 21 January 2006.
[28] ibid.

engagement at the WSIS by either the civil society or the governments of the South was felt most starkly in these areas concerning development paradigms based on information society opportunities.

As the Tunis phase struggled with the 'financing issue' and the 'implementation issue', the 'win-win' conceptions of a global information society broke down, even among governments. Many developing countries challenged dominant conceptions of ICT diffusion, asserting that the private sector driven model was unlikely to deliver the information society opportunities for developing countries. They also called for a strong and continued global engagement with the information society phenomena, in their developmental context. However, governments of North had begun, by this time, to withdraw from these debates and refused to commit any new funding for ICT4D, or even to recognize ICT4D as entailing financing requirements at a level different from other developmental funding. They were also not very keen on extending the WSIS structures, in any meaningful manner, into implementation and follow-up phases. The civil society declaration after the Tunis phase[29] observed that:

> "The summit was expected to identify and articulate new development possibilities and paradigms being made possible in the Information Society, and to evolve public policy options for enabling and realizing these opportunities. Overall, it is impossible not to conclude that WSIS has failed to live up to these expectations. The Tunis phase in particular, which was presented as the "summit of solutions", did not provide concrete achievements to meaningfully address development priorities."

However, WSIS may need to be judged more from the processes that it has set into motion than what it has achieved substantively. The WSIS outcome documents have a much broader socio-political vision and make greater references to some paradigmatic and structural aspects of the impact of the new ICTs than the earlier dominant frameworks on ICT4D that seek to articulate a pragmatic and efficiency-based discourse, that is essentially neoliberal.[30]

From a Southern perspective, it also needs to be mentioned that while the old has been challenged, the new is yet to be created. And this is the most important task today for civil society from the South. It requires bringing to the table specific development realities, histories, contexts and experiences from the South, a task that cannot be accomplished adequately by a North-dominated global civil society engaged with the WSIS.

Part 2: WSIS and Feminist Engagements

Against the above backdrop of the WSIS process and the engagement of various actors in the WSIS arena, this part will examine the gender equality agenda within WSIS, and attempt to lay out the specific parameters for feminist advocacy.

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[29] "Much more could have been achieved", Civil Society Statement on the World Summit on the Information Society, 18 December 2005. http://www.itu.int/wsis/docs2/tunis/contributions/co13.pdf

[30] Singh, P.J. and Gurumurthy, A., "Framing a Global Information Society Discourse", *Economic and Political Weekly,* 11 March 2006.

The Context of Feminist Advocacy at WSIS

Gender equality advocates have pointed to the changing political economy landscape of their engagement in the UN process, tracing shifts in the ideological underpinnings that have informed the development discourse within the UN process. Ewa Charkiewicz[31] points to the following developments:

- The shifts in the underlying ideologies informing the notion of development – from social justice frameworks to neoliberal frameworks over the decade of the 1990s;
- The consequent emergence of a feminist vocabulary that increasingly resorted to making a business case for gender equity through arguments for the integration of women, based on cost-benefit calculations and efficiencies to be gained by the integration of women; and a valourization of this approach as against the social justice approach.
- A reorganization of feminist engagement – from movements-based forms to NGOs-based ones, necessitated by funding guidelines and UN access rules and a shift towards a model that de-linked the social movement from the grassroots.

In the context of the WSIS, one might add to the above points, the increasing unilateralism of the US, and the greater institutionalization of the multi-stakeholder negotiating format in global governance processes, as signifying the transforming landscape of global negotiations. Given the increasing legitimization of neoliberal thought, civil society and feminist advocacy in the WSIS process have had to reconcile with cooptation into a collective space that privileges a pro-market approach to the extent that only those stances that are amenable to conversions in economic terms are validated. Thus, pursuing social justice frameworks is seen by many as a tactical error if substantial outcomes have to be gained, and what is good for the poor has necessarily to be argued as good for business interests.[32]

Perspectives on poverty, development and women's interests at WSIS have been researched and articulated by private consulting firms, a process that has thrown up complex questions on conflict of interests (many such consulting firms also espouse business interests) and legitimacy. WSIS also embodies the increasing marginalization in the global policy arena of local and national movements and organizations. Even before the WSIS, the global arena has been marked by a division of labour between organizations focused on national and local work, and international NGOs, the latter obviously having greater access to and even greater legitimacy within the UN process. At WSIS, this division has been acute with a marked absence of local and national entities as they do not have the ability to garner resources to be at the right place, at the right time.

[31] "Beyond Good and Evil: Notes on Global Feminist Advocacy", Charkiewicz, E., 2004, in *Women in Action*, http://www.isiswomen.org/pub/wia/wia2-04/ewa.htm

[32] At WSIS, civil society has argued for public investments in communication infrastructure from the perspective that as more people join the network, the value of the network goes up for all existing users. The assertion of communication rights in itself seems to be inadequate for advocating public effort in this direction.

Multi-stakeholderism – Towards Participation or Exclusion?

Multi-stakeholderism within the WSIS is often seen as a cooptation of the gender equality agenda into neoliberal formulations, the result of which is the marginalization of the debate on the origins, location, and the social, ecological and political contexts of the IS, and an unquestioning acceptance of the neoliberal policy discourse on ICT. Within this changing context of feminist advocacy, gender mainstreaming acquires distorted meanings, and sometimes ends up as the disaggregation of the term "people" into "men and women" in the language of discourse, as if the exclusion of women at the negotiating table can be offset by a recourse to semantic jugglery. The WSIS documents are full of examples of such a formula-based approach.

Strategic interventions in such global negotiations end up as realpolitik stances that may do little to change the causalities of gender inequity in the debate, gravitating towards the lowest common denominator that will not be rejected by other stakeholders. Susanna George articulates this trend in her analysis of the Geneva phase: "The multistakeholder platform …where NGOs were supposed to enact their "progressive" advocacy, was intrinsically flawed, with the unquestioned presence of the private sector, the multinational corporations, at the negotiating table. Yet, we were seen as being uncooperative when we said that the multi-stakeholder platform was an uneven playing field. Ultimately, civil society as an entity preferred to hold its peace in favour of the "collective" process, which produced a pro-market, pro-neoliberal policy declaration."[33] The WSIS process suggests a paradox that is intrinsic to lobbying for gender justice in global policy negotiations. Within the fluidity of the process, politics and pragmatism require to be balanced continuously – multiple interests have to be addressed, permanent alliances may not be possible, relationships of convenience may need to be built and bargains have to be struck.

The politics of process seem to have overtaken the politics of resistance in the context of the WSIS. The paucity of substantive positions has been conspicuous and has been one of the reasons that "process" issues – of visibility, legitimacy, and the like – have almost completely displaced issue-based politics and alliances. As Anriette Esterhuysen points out, "Most importantly, the consensus model has made it very difficult for participants in the civil society space to produce content that can inform, influence and critique the official WSIS discourse in a substantial way."[34]

The nascency of feminist vocabulary in both analytical frameworks and alternative conceptions in the WSIS debates, combined with the preoccupation with process politics, has seen an ambivalence in the positions of gender advocates at the WSIS. On broader principles, the consensus has not been difficult. But, in the Tunis phase, where political contestations were more intense, feminist advocacy did not come up with clear positions on the issues of financing, Internet governance and WSIS follow-up, and pro-South positions that implicate the majority

[33] "Mainstreaming Gender as Strategy; A Critique from a Reluctant Gender Advocate", George, S., 2004, http://www.isiswomen.org/pub/wia/wia2-04/susanna.htm

[34] "Multi-stakeholder participation and ICT policy processes", Esterhuysen, A., 2005, http://www.apc.org/english/news/index.shtml?x=31497

of women were not articulated well enough as issues for gender-based advocacy. The issues of public finance discussed in prepcom 2[35] (of the Tunis phase) were not seen by many gender advocates as being greatly pertinent to the discourse of gender equality.

The wisdom available in the cutting edge work of Southern feminists on gender and trade or gender and sustainable development analyses lacks parallels in the information society debates. This has meant that feminist issues in the debates around ICTs have not been sufficiently democratized. Practice and theory have not merged in the advocacy space. One could therefore ask, in context of the WSIS, where are the movements that have engaged with the ICTs and development discourse, and where are the concepts in ICT4D that can act as building blocks of women's movements?

The absence of informed advocacy does not imply lack of visibility of the South *per se*. Rather, in the context of WSIS, the affinities of ICT4D to neoliberalization of development have seen a showcasing of many initiatives in the South as 'women's empowerment' projects, most of which valourize technology- and market-led models.

The Road Ahead

Southern feminism requires fresh strategizing to position gender equality and women's empowerment within emergent development and rights discourses. Perspectives need to be placed within social justice frameworks, clearly articulating alternatives so that a politics of resistance can be reclaimed. Yet within the current political arena, the legitimacy or clarity of positions alone is not sufficient.

The politics of pragmatism introduces great complexities into feminist advocacy from the South. However, there is not much choice other than to engage at global platforms. Much as Southern feminists are outraged with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) discourse – their restriction to indicators that are quantifiable; their omission of important goals and targets such as violence against women and sexual and reproductive rights; and their silence on the context and institutional environment in which they are to be met. The broad consensus is that spaces in global governance have to be appropriated, even as we might have to learn how to deal with working 'from the inside' and 'from the outside'.

Anriette Esterhuysen's article, cited earlier,[36] captures this succinctly. "Given the absence of traditional development actors in the ICT4D policy space, many of us working in ICT for social change (in developing countries) having to tackle multiple issue areas and maintain relationships with our governments in which conflict and consensus has to be managed very carefully…. Having to tackle multiple issues and manage these complex relationships leaves us battling to find the time, and to build the knowledge needed to impact effectively on policy, which is why working with others, be they from the academic community, international human rights organizations, or the private sector, is so important."

[35] Preparatory committee.
[36] Anriette Esterhuysen, A., 2005, op cit.

In the ICT4D space, as argued earlier, multi-stakeholderism coming from neoliberal ideologies is a shrill reality. This calls for both a critical stocktaking of what this means to feminism, and deriving from this a strategizing of 'common interest' based alignments with diverse civil society actors, governments, and private sector entities. Feminists in the South have continued to manage the contradictions in such positioning – working from 'inside' and 'outside' – supporting their governments in global platforms and many times opposing them back home. For example, in the context of WSIS, the wider geopolitical issues of how outsourcing exacerbates the unequal relation between capital and labour have to be balanced with the needs for creating greater employment opportunities for women in the South. Not all civil society actors of the North can appreciate the issues involved if a CSO from the South supports its official delegation's position that advocates placing restrictions on national governments (of the North) from regulating outsourcing in favour of local labour.

It is important to articulate our concerns at both levels – as rights issues and as development issues. The issue of open source is an IPR issue, but from a development perspective it signifies the building blocks of a soft IT infrastructure for development activity that is equally affordable, customizable to local situations and encourages domestic IT industry.

Open content paradigms in the WSIS discourse have been limited to advocating open access to scientific information and journals, neglecting an equally important issue of free and adequate access to digital content to meet development needs of the marginalized. The latter is omitted in the Geneva Plan of Action, while open access to scientific information is mentioned, reflecting the absence of advocacy around the open content paradigm from a development perspective.

Open telecom networks in the context of development not only meet the need for community media but, more importantly, constitute a significant opportunity for empowering engagements of rural populations with institutions of governance, market, development delivery, etc. These networks thus need to be conceived from a broader structural and institutional perspective for transformation of the development landscape, and not merely as technology networks supporting communication and information access.

These and other such information society paradigms are the building blocks of a new structural and institutional architecture for development and hold tremendous promise for redefining gender relations and women's empowerment.

Feminists from the South need to look at ways by which gender analyses can bring the debates on sustainable development, the political economy of globalization, the intellectual property regime, and on global governance together with information society issues, to connect the local and national with the global. A recent submission from India at World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)[37] asserted that "the primary rationale for Intellectual Property (IP) protection is, first and foremost, to promote societal development by encouraging technological innovation and that the legal monopoly granted to IP owners is an exceptional

[37] Posting on 'Bytes for All' mailing list, 16 April 2005.

departure… to be calibrated by each country, in the light of its own circumstances, taking into account the overall costs and benefits of such protection". Such progressive positions need to be claimed by civil society advocates at WSIS in their lobbying for open source software. It is noteworthy here that on this issue, and its IPR implications, the Indian government delegation at the WSIS, whose members are mostly from the telecom and IT ministry, and therefore oriented more to markets than to development, takes a much more muted position.

Conclusion

The first part of this essay asserted how partly owing to WSIS, a chasm has already emerged in what has been regarded as a consensual model of the information society. We also noted that an alternative, more progressive, conception of the information society is yet to be built. And that in this process, civil society from the South will need to play a major role.

The agenda for gender activists, especially from the South, should be to engage with the emerging debates and articulate sharply the feminist standpoints with respect to the information society. Such an engagement does come with its challenges.

Firstly, the information society area is very amorphous, and does not lend itself to easy 'owning up' by any strand of existing feminist engagements. Information society developments are still interpreted in techno-deterministic ways, and the recognition of the social and political landscape of this emergent society, and its lines of contestations, is yet to happen. This is partly because the information society phenomenon defies easy characterization; it is not about health, not about trade, not about livelihood, not about power of the state or about citizenship – it is not about any of them; it is about all of them. Feminists need to engage in this new arena, and build capacities for such engagement.

Secondly, advocacy and activism at global platforms in the past decade has required feminists to work painstakingly in identifying allies and partners, and in recognizing adversaries, in different areas of their engagement. However, the information society phenomenon brings in major upheavals in the nature of the game. For example, feminist struggles on censorship and surveillance have been directed mostly at the State, but Internet technologies have seen private companies becoming censors of content and, increasingly, the violators of privacy. And while State regulation was the main culprit in strangulating fair competition and denying a level playing field in the telcom arena, this role is now increasingly being taken over by multinational corporations and industry conglomerates that set *de facto* regulation in many areas concerning the new ICTs. Understanding emerging developments and re-aligning strategies in this context is imperative, but the rapidly transmutating information society landscape requires thinking on the feet to capture spaces and evolve strategic positions.

Thirdly, the emergence of an information society puts us in times of great ferment and provides spaces for a new social organization. Relationships between the State, private sector and civil society, organizations of economic activity and social relationships are being redefined. There are new opportunities here to construct a more gender equal social structure, even as feminists will need to fight entrenched interests. For instance, telecentres constitute new institutional

mechanisms for development delivery, and in these spaces that are still evolving, women can make their claims much more easily provided they engage early enough. e-Governance is yet another example that can potentially alter citizen-State engagements, and here again, women's voice, agency and citizenship can find new avenues for assertion.

From a Southern viewpoint, feminists need to develop analytical frameworks that look at how gender justice and social and economic justice coalesce in the information society debates. Women's movements need to acknowledge the inadequate theorization about the connections of gender to the "third site" of women's subordination – women's status as members of subordinate classes, castes, races, nations and so on.[38] The WSIS was a flashpoint where this weak link played out; challenges were rife in the attempts not only to secure parity with men, but as members of oppressed classes, nationalities, and races. The WSIS has been characterized by ambivalences of women's groups in understanding social and economic injustice at one level, and of proponents of social/economic justice to move beyond tokenism in engendering their perspectives, and an intersecting complexity in the tension between human rights and social justice issues. These tensions continue well beyond the WSIS negotiations and signal the difficulties in the practical politics that make it difficult to bring multiple agenda for justice together in a coherent framework through which the global women's movement can define itself unequivocally.

[38] Sen, G., "Neolibs, Neocons and Gender Justice: Lessons from Global Negotiations", UNRISD, Occasional Paper 9, September 2005. http://www.unrisd.org/unrisd/website/document.nsf/(httpPublications)/15E6EA635E8A955BC12570B500357029?OpenDocument

Chapter 1.3

WSIS: Some Reflections on Emerging Discourses and Frameworks

– Radhika Lal

The world in which we live is being rapidly transformed in no small part because of the increased integration of economies and societies underpinned by the new ICTs. The challenges and opportunities unleashed as a consequence have been diverse in their scope and impact. The two phases of the WSIS provided a global forum to learn, to focus attention and find solutions and explore new approaches to address critical challenges relating to the information society emerging in our midst. WSIS was unique in opening up the space to engage on the social and development dimensions of ICT and to reflect on the advances and gaps in emerging discourses and frameworks.[39]

It should be noted that even as much learning took place and new spaces were opened up for multi-stakeholder engagement and problem solving, in many ways the issues raised therein only touched the surface and have also only slowly begun to filter down to the larger development community. The form that debates took and the issues that were raised at WSIS reflected both the power of the emerging information society as well as its somewhat marginal status in broader development discourses.

For some development decision-makers and activists struggling for social justice and gender equity in the developing South, engaging in such policy spaces to have a voice in shaping the emerging information society often appeared to be of little value. To them, ICT did not appear to empower or to provide solutions to development's pressing problems. Rather, the relatively high cost of access, the steepness of the learning curve and inequities in access to ICT itself were viewed as symptoms of ICT's biased character as cyber cities emerged and then co-existed with slums and shantytowns. Technology provided instruments for control rather than liberation. The 'World Wide Web' was sometimes viewed as a 'World Wide Wait' rather than a destruction of the importance of space and time in the emerging global economy, increasingly integrated by ICTs. Awareness-raising efforts in the lead up to WSIS had to confront perceptions that social movements do not need to focus on policy issues and the nature of the

[39] Gender equity activists have been active in global policy debates and fora, providing gender analysis of issues at stake, advocating for greater representation and participation by women and actively building alliances with other ICT4D activists. This note does not attempt to provide an analysis of various IT policy issues at stake from a gender vantage point but focuses on selected issues with the objective of providing a rationale to engage on ICT4D policy issues and form broad-based development and inclusion-enhancing alliances.

transformations being ushered in to determine how these technologies might be deployed for the greater good.

However, as the debates in the context of WSIS helped to elucidate: the nature of the information society is not pre-given nor is its pace, even as the latter is a function of income or development. It also depends upon the choices that we make as societies. It depends both on how we frame information society issues in the context of development and how we view development in the age of the information society.

The Emerging Information Society

WSIS was about the emerging information society. The concept is problematic in many ways because of a kind of technological determinism or *de facto* increased "informational content" that it seems to imply. Nevertheless it is useful in pointing to the social dimension and to some of the more systematic changes that are being ushered in on account of the *transformative* potential of the new ICTs.

Not surprisingly, radically different perceptions pervade society about the nature of technology, its importance, and the transformations unleashed by it. These were visible not just in the debates at WSIS but also in the absence of particular voices therein. The way that some issues were framed was often seen as alien and technical to those on the outside. However, in addition, there is also a perception divide that influences the importance with which the so-called digital divide and emerging information society are viewed. Some view ICT as a social infrastructure similar to energy and transportation networks and as best left to technical specialists. Others recognize ICT's social content but see it as being either inherently enabling/libratory or being inherently controlling. [40]

However, some of the debates at WSIS and at the national level bring home the fact that whether these technologies will be democratizing or controlling, enabling of development or creators of islands of prosperity is not pre-given but socially determined. For example, the form taken by the Internet, in particular, is not inherently expansive or open. As its particular history suggests, its openness depended upon the choices made about the protocols and accessibility of its foundational applications.[41] This not only permitted a wide variety of types of devices to connect to the emerging global network, but allowed it to be built from the margins. Choices made allowed for a multiplicity of content and voices to emerge and flourish. But there are new issues emerging and how they are resolved will determine whether the Internet will remain an open and diverse space or not. Given the emerging importance of the Internet, this will also have implications for the possibilities for openness and contestation in societies.[42]

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[40] For the former, see Sola Pool, Ithiel de (*Technologies of Freedom*, 1983). Sola Pool's work has been challenged by Social Shaping of Technology, deconstructionists and political economists. See http://qcpages.qc.edu/mediastudies/ff/pdf_icravetv.pdf for discussion in a case study context.

[41] The openness of the Internet can be located in the use of "open source" (O'Reilly, Tim http://www.xml.com/pub/a/1999/10/tokyo.html), "open standards" and "interoperability" (Tarjanne, Pekka http://www.lirne.net/resources/tr/chapter04.pdf).

[42] Reflected to some extent by the high level of involvement at WSIS of constituencies concerned with issues relating to the governance of the Internet.

However, debates at WSIS and at the national level bring home the fact that whether these technologies will be democratizing or controlling, enabling of development or creators of islands of prosperity is not pre-given but socially determined. For example, the form taken by the Internet, in particular, is not inherently expansive or open. As its particular history suggests, its openness is reflective of the choices made about protocols and the accessibility of its foundational applications.

While this potential exists, its realization is a not a foregone conclusion. The extent of pornography can overwhelm empowering representations, the organizing and networking potentials of ICT can remain un-utilized, women's access can remain limited and development needs can continue to be unaddressed. The basic issue of ICTs 'for what' and 'for whom' is what matters most. The question of who has rights and the capacities to participate and contribute knowledge and shape the use of the technologies has emerged as critical.

Tackling Digital and Perception Divides

Civil society and women's groups were active in WSIS particularly on rights and equity issues, innovative approaches to fostering access and financing, and governance of the Internet. Missing, however, as indicated earlier, was the participation of many in the 'development community' who did not see the issues arising therein as development issues.

Such a wider involvement is necessary if we are to move from a technology to a social-use focus; if we are to move from an infrastructure to a mainstreaming focus; and if we are to emphasize the importance of broad-based e-literacy and capacity development without which democratic and broad-based access – particularly by women – will be impossible.

As some of the WSIS debates made clear, it is our collective interventions, and the nature and scope of the relevant financing structures and regulatory/policy frameworks that we will advocate for, that will determine the pace and type of transformations that can be brought about. It will determine:

- *Whose interests will be served*: whether the public interest and the interests of the grass roots and the marginalized will be served or whether the breadth of access and the nature of ICT use will be limited by whether it makes money or furthers consumption and exchange.
- *Who will have access and use ICTs*: whether access will remain largely in the cities and technology parks or whether the foundations for equitable access, which are inherent, will be realized through the combined activities of the private sector, public provisioning and/or financing of infrastructure and info-structure and community-driven advocacy and implementation processes.
- *When will we have access*: whether the potential of ICT to permit increased access to and creation of public information, services and knowledge will be harnessed in a timely fashion or if the question of whether the poor will be served will depend upon the pace at which market opportunities appear and are recognized.
- *Whose security concerns will be addressed*: whether privacy and confidentiality will

be ensured while acknowledging the public interest dimensions of security or whether surveillance and control will be enhanced by the State and, in some instances, by the private sector interested in mapping our every move to identify potential market opportunities.

- *Whose voices will be heard and whose contributions will count:* whether it will be used to strengthen the already heavily concentrated ownership of media or be used to challenge and increase the diversity of sources of news, information and knowledge.

Given the current limitations in the access to and real use of these technologies, and the social divide that exists on technology issues and in accessing them, much of the focus of mainstream policy discussions to date has been on infrastructure-related dimensions and on the need to bridge the so-called digital divide.

However, the learning process unleashed by the Summit helped to slowly shift the focus from a generic "digital divide" discourse to an exploration and assessment of the changing mix of public and private roles and responsibilities and emerging technology and organizational innovations. It was increasingly acknowledged that access to ICT has expanded dramatically through the expanding role of the private sector and foundations laid by public utilities. However, a variety of network gaps have emerged and that many communities remain under-served even as options exist to connect and empower them at relatively affordable costs. In part, this can be seen to be the result of a lack of regulatory openness and exploration of financing and network development models that would allow for either new actors or new approaches to be tried out even as it has become clear that viable options exist.

In other ways too there has been a transformation of the discourse about access so as to encompass a number of different dimensions and to put in motion what some would call an integrated "open platform" set of issues. Many of the voices from women's groups, activists from the South and also those of civil society that were raised in the WSIS context, stressed the need to explicitly focus on approaches that would not only help to make access to ICT more affordable, but would also ensure that the "openness" that has characterized the Internet in its founding years would be maintained. The dimensions of openness in question related to the software fundamentals in terms of code and standards (open source and open standards), which have worked to ensure greater accessibility, adaptability/localization and cost effectiveness. They also included open content which determines the depth of the public domain as well as the affordability and accessibility of the content that is available there and that can be freely disseminated. A third type of "openness" which is much newer and which, in fact, has come into its own in the WSIS context is the notion of open access.

The open access focus is different from the way it has been conventionally taken up in the context of encouraging private sector competition in local telephony. Here, it emerged in the context of the financing discussions and the need to consider approaches involving public investment or public-private partnership models. These models could be deployed to put in place basic infrastructure to bridge major network infrastructure gaps (which would otherwise limit access and increase costs) and make such infrastructure accessible on a non-discriminatory and affordable basis not only to the private sector but also to the community-driven initiatives.

As indicated earlier, the emerging development discourse at WSIS has also seen openings in the discussion of implementation that have gone beyond the traditional public and private sectors to explore a role for the third sector – i.e. community-based networks and hybrid models that can address the so-called last mile or last inch that otherwise keeps communities un-connected. In many cases, including in India, the problem is no longer a general lack of infrastructure – you have fibre optic lines running within a few kilometres of every village – but the lack of connections to it. There is also a paucity of openings for those who would be glad to find ways to connect even if it did not earn them a profit because it was important for addressing their development needs.

Development in the South in the Age of ICT

At WSIS, while progress was made in highlighting the importance of ICT4D, in many ways this remained at a very general level, perhaps because an engagement and dialogue with the broader development community was missing.

Development dimensions were raised mostly in the context of the finance question (around the demand for and role of a digital solidarity fund), in the discourse of the digital divide and the umbrella focus of the MDGs. In the wake of WSIS, it has become clear that if development is to be enhanced then it is important to move beyond access-centred and even beyond the "open platform" issues – open source, content and access – raised by stakeholders from both the North and the South to enrich these through a consideration of development concerns. This is evident in national-level discourses and subtle differences in the way that issues are framed – for example, the right to information and free speech. For many, this is a question not only of combating censorship and surveillance but also strengthening the public's right to development information. Digital opportunities for the South include not just efficiency and entrepreneurial gains but also a potential reconfiguration of how development interventions take place. Demands are emerging for the need to move beyond a pilot syndrome to embrace up-scaling, citizen-centred and broad-based use of ICT.

Further, it has also become clear that if ICTs are to be put at the service of development there needs to be a focus on ICTs in the context of the development sectors and other development summits. This involves the need for fora to facilitate dialogue between the ICT and other development communities. Many of the more traditional development constituencies do not engage with ICTs seeing this as a 'technology issue' or a 'technical issue,' and as having nothing to do with 'development'. While this will likely change over time, the lack of engagement has implications for the effectiveness and impact of the way ICT is sought to be integrated by ICT4D practitioners in the absence of such engagement. In far too many ICT for poverty reduction conferences one often finds that there are no participants who work on microcredit, health, or education but IT people talking about IT for poverty reduction. To some extent, despite the diversity of the groups at WSIS, this trend also seems to have continued in WSIS. It is also likely to be reflected in the lack of linkages between the wider policy processes and national ICT and poverty reduction strategies in the wake of WSIS, unless explicit attempts are made to link the different development agendas.

Concluding from an Empowerment Perspective

There is the need to engage with the discourses prevalent within civil society itself. This involves a different set of issues for those inside and those outside the ICT4D sphere, so to speak.

The dimension of the transformative and potentially empowering character of ICTs has been picked up by discourses about the economic but not the social transformation. Whereas the phenomena of outsourcing is increasingly being used to positively refashion a division of labour and to favourably position the South in the global economy and knowledge society (call centres and sweatshops, notwithstanding) this perspective of empowerment rather than a discourse of exclusion and marginalization has yet to be broadly adopted in the social movements which remain suspicious. This is ironic because civil society actors have been early pioneers and appropriators of ICTs and have been working to realize the promise of the information society and ICTs. Perhaps this recent pessimism has to do with suspicion of technology itself in light of recent technology-driven transformations such as the green revolution, the hype of the dot com phenomena and surveillance tendencies which have been heightened by the use of ICTs. However, the point remains that if civil society does not engage we will end up with the realization of the fears that haunt our development imaginations: electronic stock exchanges before effective public distribution systems; electronic tax collection and provision of drivers licenses before ICT-enabled low cost banking, provision of social services and rural credit; and increased surveillance and control before privacy and new freedoms.

Further, there is the need to address the divide that sometimes exists between CSOs active at the grass-roots and policy levels. Even as the creativeness and potential of the grassroots needs to be embraced, there also needs to be a shift from a pure grass-roots perspective that many civil society actors in the development sector are more comfortable with, to consider scale and focus on how to shape the development of the technologies themselves. Unless we all embrace the broader sets of public interest, public domain, public goods kind of issues, it could be argued that we will not be able to adequately create the space for the grass-roots. Neither will we be able to address the gender dimensions of ICT nor adopt a gender empowerment perspective.

WSIS served as a space to bring the broader development, rights-based agendas, inclusion and governance dimensions to the fore. It provided an opportunity to begin the process of opening up the debate to non-State and non-IT sector actors to think through new approaches and models for the governance of the Internet and financing and provisioning of ICT. It also opened up the debate on the broader issue of how we can use ICT to serve development and secure a more open and development rich information society. It is up to us to take up this opportunity, occupy this space and take the movement forward.

Part 2

Gender Perspectives on ICT4D

Chapter 2.1

The Right to Information and the Information Society

– *Nikhil Dey*

(Editor's Note: Nikhil Dey is part of a grass-roots movement, Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan,[1] which has used the instrument of the 'right to information' to obtain rightful entitlements for poor peasants and daily wage labour in parts of North India. The article below is a first person narration, as delivered at the seminar, of some of the experiences of this movement. Though the movement has not used new ICTs, the connection between poverty and development and the political nature of 'information' are brought out powerfully in the following description. This narrative serves as an important contribution to shaping development perspectives on new ICTs and on the 'information society'.)

Although the right to information movement has spread far and wide, and there are many facets to it, I will concentrate largely on our experiences from central Rajasthan.[2] These are actually the collective experiences of a lot of poor, mostly illiterate, men and women from central Rajasthan. These grass-roots experiences convey very important lessons about the perspectives of a campaign or movement, including those on gender, as they are shaped by the composition and ideology of its constituents.

There are four issues that I would like to explore. What I talk about here will be less on what we conventionally define as 'technology', especially within the context of something like IT. I will however try and look at a lot of our struggles in 'technological' terms. What happens if one gets into the politics of technology, or if one looks at technology as a political tool? I will also try to look at many aspects of the right to information movement and how they relate to politics themselves.

The first point that I would like to highlight is the link between information and the political objective towards which one is working. We have been conscious of this link from the beginning, and that is why we describe ourselves as a non-party 'political' organization. Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) is not a funded organization. We are not a registered NGO, and we see the basic processes that we are involved in as being political processes. Therefore the use of information in our activities, as I will point out and show, is critically linked to the political

[1] Collective for the empowerment of daily wage or casual workers and peasants.
[2] A drought-prone state of India.

issues that we have been working for and the political processes that we have engaged with. Such a political perspective helps identify and add value to the particular information being used. It is only then that such information becomes useful and relevant. The political context of 'information' is determined by which side one is coming from and for whose purpose the information will be used.

The second question that I would like to highlight is the whole business of what is truth. In struggles and in campaigns, one is constantly confronted with contrary versions of the truth. From the very beginning, when we have been trying to engage with the government and the establishment, we would come back with the same answer, over and over again, "but that is your version". It is in the fighting of this, "your version", that we (the people of that area, a lot of them being women) determined that a 'version' is something that has to be established. There is information that we hold – all of us, no matter where we are. Such information is not given a value, it is not established, and it is not legitimized; and to be able to legitimize it, one has to go through a certain process. What we did realize in our organization was that government records were 'legitimized'. So to legitimize people's information and to counter the legitimacy of government records as being over-riding, one had to go through this process. That is where the roots of the right to information movement in this region actually lie.

The third issue that I would like to speak about is regarding the communication of that information. Again, one gets information, one even establishes it as being something that is legitimate and therefore as having a certain value, but until it is effectively communicated far and wide, it is of limited use. The mode by which one communicates and legitimizes information is also a technology. I will, for instance, dwell a little later on the whole mode of public hearings or *'jan sunvai'*. A colleague of ours actually described it as the 'technology' of *'jan sunvai'*. Now, most of us perhaps would not ourselves describe it as that. But the use of such 'technologies' and such modes also need to be studied.

The fourth point that I would like to look at here is the opportunity provided by the right to information as it was shaped by the above perspectives. During the initial years, a lot of people would ask us,

> "What is 'right to information'? You are an organization of peasants and workers; why is this issue important to you? This is completely an academic issue. It is related to the freedom of expression, and is basically an issue for the educated elite. Yes, it may be important in that context, but what importance does it have for people who don't have food, who don't have water and who don't have shelter?"

As a matter of fact, it is in survival and livelihood issues where the right to information is most critical. In taking up this issue and defining it for themselves, the poor have redefined the paradigms of the right to information issue itself. In many ways, the Indian example is being looked at and shown around the world as being different, because it is a campaign where the whole paradigm of the issue has been defined by the poor. Therefore it differs in its whole texture from the way in which the 'right to information' has been defined in many other places

around the world as more of an academic issue – often by experts, sometimes even by information technologists. My argument is that we actually need to get out of that mode and be able to show how these issues can be defined and shaped in ways that are far more meaningful to ordinary people. This depends on taking control of the issue and defining it from our own perspective. If the MKSS movement had not grabbed that opportunity to define the 'right to information' in our own terms, someone else would have been defining it for us. In fact, it would not have been useful to us the way it is today. Similarly, it is a challenge for the women's movement to be able to grab the many opportunities that exist and use them, and define issues from women's perspective.

The area where MKSS works is a drought prone area. Many of the men in that area migrate, so in the MKSS itself, as one can also see in any MKSS meeting, there are up to 65-75 percent women. There are large-scale public works in this area for employment generation, where both contractors and the government employ people in huge numbers. However, these people never received the minimum wages required to be paid to them for their work. They were being paid half the statutory minimum wage, and to cut a very long story short, when these people would say, "Give us our wages", they would be told, "No, you cannot get minimum wages". When they would refuse to take no for an answer, they would be told, "Well, you haven't worked enough." Then the workers would ask, "Show us how you say we haven't worked enough. We have worked from morning till evening. We worked eight hours a day." The reply to that would be "That is in the records." Then people would ask, "Well then, show us the records." To this, the predictable reply would be, "No, you can't see the records because they are accounts and they are secret documents!"

So the people said, "We want to see those records because until we see those records and expose their contents, we will always be considered liars and those who are custodians of this information will always hold the high moral ground." Soon the people started to demand, "Give us photocopies of the bills, of the vouchers and of the muster rolls of the public works in our areas."

When people were able to extract the first set of information from the government records, through largely illegitimate or informal means of practically stealing it from somewhere, or getting access to it from some friends in the administration, or by using different kinds of local pressure, and it was placed before everyone, the 'truth' became very obvious. Those who had been called liars all along were the ones who were telling the truth, and those who were the custodians of the information were, in fact, the liars. The information exposed those who had filled in dead people's names in muster rolls, those who had filled in information about buildings that do not exist, those who were called *sahabs* (masters) were now exposed as 'thieves'. As soon as this information came out, the concerned officials, who had habitually abused people, were on the run. They had all along not responded to demands for information or action, but the exercise of the 'right to the information' by people tilted the balance of power. So, for the people themselves, information became a very, very powerful tool linked to their political struggles.

These developments, which I have described in a few sentences, took place over a five-year period and established for people – illiterate people – the importance of documents. It also

shattered the myth that illiterate people cannot understand official documents. I know of several people who have come to us with land records insisting we look at them. It took us two days to understand those records. They didn't know how to read a single word, but they could tell us things like "on the third page, on the fourth line, is where that transaction is recorded". Because they understand the power of that piece of paper – they have been going around for years with that particular document – they understand that the piece of land can never be theirs until they also have the supporting papers. They have seen other people reading these documents many times, and they know exactly what is written and where it appears in that document.

Now I will describe some processes that can be considered 'technical processes' or 'technologies' concerning information. MKSS is an organization that believes in the importance of methods of mobilization and agitation; through repeated attempts at pushing our own version of truth forward, we kept going back to the administration. However, we realized that we were going to the very same people to ask for justice who had denied us justice in the first place. Therefore, even though one went through *dharnas* (protest) and hunger strikes and rallies – which we still do and which are still very important – we found over and over again that we were meeting a set of people who had no sympathy with our particular cause. It was during this whole process of searching for the most appropriate platform to seek justice that the mode of 'public hearing' was thought of. We realized that this is a mode which is democratic and goes to the people themselves; where one takes the information and places it before the people and legitimizes it through that process.

When we managed to extract the required records, these records were placed before the people and a democratic mode of public hearing was used. We asked the 'adversaries' (people who were accused of having pilfered money, or those who were the custodians of the information) to also come and speak at the public platform. Whether or not they had the courage to face that platform is a different matter, but they were invited to come. The '*jan sunvai*' or public hearing is a very important mode of communicating information, of establishing that information, and of legitimizing that information. As a result of the very first set of public hearings that took place in 1994, there was dramatic change in the attitude of complacence that had prevailed till then. All we did at these public hearings was read out records and say to people,

> "This is what the records of development works in your area say. You come and declare what is true and what is not. You come and say whether the work was good and well done or not done. It is up to you; the burden is on you."

As a result of the revelations, there was immediate action, although the government boycotted those public hearings. With the first set of public hearings itself action began. The administration could not avoid the impact of those public hearings. They had to suspend erring officials and they had to start paying wages to people whom they had not rightfully paid for several years.

But what was this 'public hearing'? If one looks at it carefully, it was just another version of a public audit. Audits are things that we look at as very 'technical' processes. It is a process where

a set of people sits down with accounts and records and goes through them in a methodical manner. But what is the origin of the term audit? It comes from the act of saying out things aloud, and goes back to the word 'auditory'. In our area, the public audit began actually with people reading out what was done from records of public works or saying out aloud what was done and people acknowledging if it was done or raising objections to what was not done. The public audit or public hearing served to demystify a technological or a technical process that has been mystified over years.

To further illustrate socio-technical processes associated with 'information', I would like to give a few examples of how people's own information has been stored for years. If someone asked me what work I did four years ago, I am unlikely to remember. But if one asks an illiterate woman in Rajasthan, four years ago on a drought relief site, where she worked or for how many days she was paid, nine out of 10 women would be able to tell exactly what they did. Women often tell us, "You actually write and copy and you are nothing more than a copier; but we store it originally in our brains, and so, we actually assimilate that. It is knowledge and not just a copy of something."

People's own knowledge and information became very powerfully established and legitimized, through this 'technique' of public hearing because it was evident that they were actually speaking the truth – that their memories were true and that there are in fact many different modes of storing information, and converting it to knowledge.

There is a very powerful story from a public hearing in a place called Janawad (in Rajasthan) of a woman, Gopi, who had not been paid wages. At the time we met her, her husband had died. She told us how, earlier, when she and her husband both went to work, they decided that when they returned from work everyday, they would take a piece of soot from their *chullah*[3] and make a marking on their mud wall. They had 116 such markings to note the number of days that they had gone to work. Often, people do not get paid what they are supposed to be paid because the contractor cheats them on the number of days they had worked. So, now this was to be their record of the number of days they worked, and every time they put mud plaster over the wall, that little patch with markings never got plastered because that was the record they wanted to save. This is an example of different ways people have handled important information and kept records, and such examples came out very powerfully during the public hearings.

There is another example based on the evidence contained in little diaries maintained by masons, who were employed at the public works. The masons' diaries had notes of how many bags of cement, how many vehicles came in and out and how many stone trolleys were used – exact information in very minute detail, including the dates. These diaries became very important and useful.

So, these various modes of people's own information emerged. Similarly, a number of other simple but creative suggestions came out in the course of this movement. In development

[3] Earthen stove.

works, for instance, it was most important to identify the works that did not exist at all. Many ghost works had started appearing – in Janawad panchayat,[4] for instance, over a period of five years, 42 works existed only on paper! Hospitals, check dams, school buildings, roads existed only on paper. Records were complete, but there was nothing on the ground. So people demanded that the complete information about different public works be painted on the walls of public buildings. Since writing would get washed off, the names and financial details of all the works that were executed in a particular panchayat over a period of five years needed to be painted on an outside wall of the panchayat building.

The instructions for painting these records on walls of public buildings constituted the first order that came out of the right to information movement in Rajasthan in 1997. It, however, took up to the year 2000 to get implemented all over the state. You and I can describe this (with our technology proclivities) as a 'Web' (as in World Wide Web) wall, because it is really a wall where anyone can come and read the information. Then, if one wants to examine more details and more records, one uses the right to information to ask for photocopies of the records. At least the possibilities of non-existent 'ghost works' were dramatically curtailed through this tool.

We also need to develop other 'technologies' such as demand for photographs before a public work begins, as well as during and after the work. In our experience with other movements and campaigns, we have found many other examples of such 'people's information technologies' that have emerged from their daily struggles.

Finally, I would like to present four slogans of the MKSS movement to illustrate how perspectives on information, its power, the connection of 'information' to basic issues of survival, the processes around information, the importance of owning these processes, and using this 'ownership' to claim 'our' place in our social context, including the rights as an equal citizen of the country, evolved in the movement from the people themselves.

Women of MKSS first said that they wanted government records because it was 'our' money and 'our' records. This first slogan was actually coined by a woman called Sushila, along with a group of women in Jawaja and Bhim (areas in Rajasthan). It became a very powerful slogan, now popularly used across the country in similar movements.

This first slogan was: *"Hamara paisa, hamara hisab"* (our money – our accounts).

Around the same time came the slogan, *"Hum jaanegey hum jeeyenge"* (the right to know, the right to live) linking information with the right to live. So, information is not an academic issue, but is primarily linked to basic life issues and survival.

The third slogan began a paradigm shift towards issues of policy. It is important not only to know how the money (public funds) has been spent, but also where has it been spent and for what –*"Yeh paise hamare aapkey, nahi kisi key baap key!"* (this money is yours and mine, not

[4] Local government at the village level in India.

anyone's feudal property). So the shift from money to the decisions related to the money being mine and ours, and how it should be spent.

Then, it moved to looking at the institutions that spend it. "*Yeh panchayat hamari aap ki, nahi kisi key baap ki!*" (this panchayat is yours and mine and not anyone's feudal fiefdom)

Then the women said, "*Yeh desh hamara aapka, nahi kisikey baap ka!*" (the entire country is actually yours and mine and doesn't belong to any party or any particular person).

Finally, for a just and equitable world information society we would need to assert –"*Yeh duniya hamarey aapki, nahi kisi key baap ki!*" (the whole universe actually needs to be defined by ourselves and it is no one else's to define).

It is in this bottom-up manner, rooted in people's real struggles, that real perspectives from the poor and the excluded, as well as from women, need to be arrived at. Then alone can they be called people's perspectives – on the use of ITs and on the concept of an 'information society'.

Chapter 2.2

Expanding Women's Capacities through Access to ICTs: An Overview from Sri Lanka

–Leelangi Wanasundera

Enabling women to enhance their capacities using new ICTs[5] requires the recognition of the differential impact of ICT policies, programmes and projects on women and men and that a gender neutral approach could deprive girls and women of the potential benefits of ICTs, exacerbating existing gender inequalities. The Tokyo Declaration[6] of the Asia-Pacific Regional Conference for WSIS states that:

> "Unequal power relations and other social and cultural aspects have contributed to differential access, participation and status for men and women in the region. In this regard, more attention should be given to overcoming these constraints and ensuring that women can equally benefit from the increased use of ICTs for empowerment and full participation in shaping political, economic and social development."

To ensure that both women and men have equal access to and control of ICTs, among others, gender issues should be incorporated into macro policies and gender barriers taken into consideration at the programme and project level.

For the purpose of this paper, expanding women's capacities using new ICTs will be looked at from two broad perspectives; first, within the formal system of education and second, through the space provided by public and NGO sector initiatives that aim to diffuse the technology throughout the country.

The paper first presents an overview of ICT policies and strategies in Sri Lanka and examines whether gender issues are addressed. It then looks at the education sector, commenting on current policies and initiatives taken to incorporate ICTs into the school and university curricula. Using examples from two different models that are currently being used by the government and an NGO to reach the grassroots, it then discusses the extent to which these initiatives

[5] Information and communication technologies are defined as "technologies that facilitate communication and the processing and transmission of information by electronic means" (Marker, K., McNamara, K. and Wallace, L. (2002). *The Significance of Information and Communication Technologies for Poverty Reduction*. London: DIFID, 2002, p.4).
[6] WSIS Asia-Pacific Regional Conference, January 2003, The Tokyo Declaration. http://www.unescap.org/icstd/documents/declaration.pdf.

contribute to enhancing women's capacities through access to information and knowledge. The paper concludes with an identification of the various issues involved.

ICT Policy

Sri Lanka recognized the need to use new ICTs for economic and social development when it first formulated the National Computer Policy in 1983. Attempts made at implementation were not successful however , and two decades later, despite the robust growth of mobile telephony, telecommunications infrastructure has not expanded significantly into semi-urban and rural areas, where the majority of girls and women live. A recent survey showed that 10 percent of Sri Lanka's population is computer literate, while only 3 percent could use e-mail and the Internet, and that these users were predominantly urban-based and concentrated in the Greater Colombo area.[7] Twenty years of armed conflict, political and social instability, slow economic growth and resource constraints have impacted ICT penetration.

New ICTs have the potential to benefit women but at the same time they also have the potential to marginalize them in the knowledge-based economy if gender issues are not addressed. Digital technologies are looked upon as an enabler to overcome poverty, improve welfare and empower women. The government then has a crucial role in ensuring that women are able to access the benefits of ICTs.

The ICT policies that have been prepared over the last two decades in Sri Lanka, including the current policy, recognize the need to reduce urban-rural disparities but do not make an explicit reference to addressing gender issues. The current policy – The ICT Roadmap: e-Sri Lanka – envisions taking the benefits of new ICTs to the people and to all areas of the country and using ICTs as a leverage for development, alleviating poverty, achieving a higher standard of living and changing the way in which the government works. The policy has recognized that specific mechanisms are required to take the growth in Colombo/South-west to other parts of the country. The ICT human resource capacity building strategies envisage increasing the number of skilled ICT professionals, creating opportunities for English and ICT literacy for citizens through distance and e-learning, establishing centres of excellence to build local capacity and knowledge and promoting skills development. e-Society strategies *inter alia* aim at raising awareness within civil society about the benefits of ICTs, helping CSOs become more involved in decision/policy making, and developing multi-stakeholder partnerships in ICT4D. These policies and strategies too have not incorporated gender. For example, over 600 Chief Innovation Officers (CIOs) are to be trained to drive the implementation of e-Sri Lanka. Given the paucity of women at higher levels of programme and policy implementation in the ICT sector,[8] a pro-active strategy should have been adopted to ensure that a substantial number of women are among the 600 CIOs that are to be trained. This, however, has not been considered.

[7] The survey, conducted by the Department of Census and Statistics in 2004, covered 11,000 households in all but two districts of the country and all members between five to 69 years in the household were interviewed. The data however have not been disaggregated by sex.

[8] Wanasundera, Leelangi (2002). Gender dimensions of information and communication technology: an overview. Colombo: University of Colombo and CENWOR. Samaranayake, V. K. (2004). Information and communications technology for poverty reduction. In *Human Development in a Knowledge-Based Society: The Sri Lankan Scene,* edited by de S. Indraratne, A. D. V. , Colombo: Sri Lanka Economic Association, pp. 161-181.

The government is also pursing the achievement of the UN MDGs by 2015. The goals cover poverty reduction, universal primary education, gender equality, maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, environmental sustainability and global partnerships for development. Targets for gender equality in Goal 3 are expressed in terms of eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education, which Sri Lanka has already achieved. But all the other goals too have gender dimensions, which have not been sufficiently highlighted. Target 18 of Goal 8, which refers to the use of ICTs, states, "In cooperation with the private sector make available the benefits of new technologies especially information and communications technology." However, the indicators of Target 18 measure only infrastructure development.[9] Availability of infrastructure facilities does not ensure access, and and indicators to measure usage should have been included, especially because ICTs can be used as a lever for the achievement of other MDGs[10] and for women's empowerment.

Unless a specific gender analysis is conducted before developing policy, and gender equity is explicitly stated as an objective, such gender-neutral policies could translate into gender discriminatory action when the policy is implemented. The lack of gender mainstreaming in ICT policy, however, is not surprising given the lack of gender mainstreaming in many other areas.

Education

One the most important factors in enhancing the capacity of women and girls to access the benefits of digital technologies is education. By all indicators, in Sri Lanka, girls have equal access to education from primary to tertiary levels, retention rates for girls at both the primary and junior secondary levels are higher than for boys and the gender gap in literacy levels is minimal.[11] Educational opportunity to all socio-economic groups has been extended with the establishment of a network of schools spread throughout the country. Gender equality in access to general education was achieved in the 1960s.

Yet despite positive achievements in basic education, disparities in the provision,[12] utilization and outcomes of education have emerged, persisted and widened. Overall literacy and enrolment rates have stagnated in the 1980s and 1990s, 18 percent of students drop out after the eighth year, the majority of whom are from impoverished districts and conflict-affected areas. This cohort of students, both girls and boys, then has no opportunity to study computer science. High repetition rates and low pass rates at ordinary and advanced levels in the national examinations have accompanied the decline in educational standards.[13] Sex disaggregated data show that more girls than boys fail in mathematics and consequently are unable to enter

[9] National Council for the Economic Development of Sri Lanka (2005). Millennium Development Goals country report sponsored by the UN, Colombo.
[10] Official documents of the World Summit on the Information Society, Geneva 2003.
[11] These achievements were brought about by the change of the medium of instruction from English to local languages, and the provision of a social welfare package comprising free education, availability of free health services and food at subsidized rates.
[12] Sri Lanka spends only 2.8 percent of its gross domestic product on education compared with the 3.5 percent average in Asia.
[13] Only 40 percent of Ordinary Level students qualify to proceed to the Advanced Level, 50 percent fail in Mathematics, and 70 percent fail in English.

the science stream at the advanced level, limiting their access to graduate level computer science courses at universities. Further, science education at A Level is available only in about 6 percent of the island's 10,000 schools and the majority of these 600 schools are in urban locations.[14] The lack of facilities places the vast majority of students, mainly from non-urban areas, at a disadvantage in studying science- and technology-related subjects and limits their prospects of accessing remunerative employment. However, under projects funded by multilateral agencies, attention has now been refocused on equity and attempts are being made to reduce disparities in access to science, technology and improving English language skills through educational reforms and modernization.

IT Education in Schools

Several initiatives have been taken to introduce IT in primary and secondary education since 1983 but it was not until recently that such initiatives were undertaken on a wide scale. Awareness raising programmes are being conducted along with the equipping of schools with the necessary hardware and the training of teachers. ICTs are also being applied in educational administration.

A five-year plan is in place for IT development in the school system. Among the innovations are 'science/maths corners' in primary classes where ICT concepts will be introduced through special learning packages. In Grades 6-9, activity and science rooms will be set up with computers and CD packs in all *Navodaya*[15] and national schools.[16] The targeted equipping of 15 percent of all primary schools with ICT laboratories within the next few years under the e-Sri Lanka programme, undertaken with concessional loans from multilateral agencies, will complement the educational modernization project.

Strong recommendations were made by the Educational Reforms Committee for the incorporation of ICT as a subject into the school curriculum[17] While this recommendation is to be implemented, a General Information Technology examination was introduced for students in Grade 12, that is the first year of the Advanced Level in 2005.[18] This is an optional examination.

Research in Sri Lanka[19] as well as elsewhere suggests that the process of socialization of girls and teacher attitudes that promote stereotypical behaviour among girls and boys result in girls being channelled into 'appropriate' and 'feminine' areas of study. Girls themselves have

[14] Jayaweera, Swarna. (2004). Education and human development. In *Human Development in a Knowledge-Based Society : The Sri Lankan Scene,* edited by de S. Indraratne, A. D. V. , Colombo: Sri Lanka Economic Association, pp. 93-121.

[15] Selected schools in administrative divisions are to be developed into centres of excellence.

[16] A limited number of schools that meet specified criteria.

[17] The six-year strategic plan from 2002 to 2007 developed based on the National Policy on Information Technology in School Education also proposes IT literacy programmes with exposure to computer education from junior secondary level and as a subject at the two national examinations.

[18] It will be interesting to see how many girls opted for this subject after the examination results are available.

[19] Gunawardena, Chandra *et al.* (2004). A study of child rearing practices and gender role socialization prevalent in selected communities in Sri Lanka – A pilot study. Paper presented at the Ninth National Convention on Women's Studies 20-23 March 2004, Colombo, CENWOR and Jayaweera, Swarna and Sanmugam, Thana (2002). Graduate employment in Sri Lanka in the 1990s. Colombo: CENWOR.

internalized gender roles and tend to select subjects that are consistent with their nurturing and servicing roles while boys take on technical subjects.[20] This process of selection makes girls continue with conventional courses at higher secondary and tertiary levels and excludes them from acquiring skills in technology. However, changes are now taking place. An ongoing study by the Centre for Women's Research (CENWOR)[21] shows that parental attitudes to girls taking up technology courses are changing but that more awareness is required among parents and girls on the importance of acquiring new skills. Thus, the integration of technology at an early age into education would be particularly advantageous to girls as it would dispel the perception that technology is for boys, and will weaken gender role stereotyping.

Further, it is expected that teacher attitudes that constrain the study of technology by girls would change with the ongoing teacher-training programme. All teachers, irrespective of their subject specialization, are to be trained in IT and this programme will benefit mostly women who comprise about 69 percent of the total teaching cadre in government schools. IT has been introduced into teacher education programmes conducted by the 17 National Colleges of Education that provide in-service and pre-service training. Enhancing the capacity of female teachers to use IT would immediately increase the number of women who could access information, who could act as mentors and role models to schoolgirls.

While IT training would make teachers appreciative of the usefulness of the technology, more dividends could be reaped by accompanying such training with gender sensitization programmes that would contribute to changing their attitudes about the study of technology-related disciplines by girls.

Despite these positive developments, there is the danger that lack of facilities in all the schools could disadvantage girls as well as boys on the periphery. Equity considerations demand alternative solutions to the challenge of reaching all.

IT Education at the Tertiary Level

Several State universities offer professional courses in IT for internal and external students. Computer science departments have been set up in two universities since 1985. Two other universities and the Open University currently produce graduates in computer science and computer engineering. Students following physical science courses in the general stream have the option of studying computer science as a subject. Intakes have been increased and those who are not successful in gaining entry into the university through a very competitive examination could follow an external degree course offered by the University of Colombo's School of Computing. Private universities that have been established in the country with affiliation to overseas universities also conduct degree level courses.

Three State and two private universities offer post-graduate level computer and engineering studies. In addition students following other disciplines are also able to study ICT-related subjects. However, very few students follow post-graduate level computer studies.

[20] Ibid.

[21] ICT and Gender in Sri Lanka: A Regional study sponsored by the Institute of Social Studies Trust (ongoing).

Women have equality in access to university education. The 25-year period 1976-2000[22] has seen an increase of women in all the academic streams at universities. However, while the number of women in such fields as law, social sciences, humanities and education has recorded substantial increases despite high rates of unemployment among graduates of these disciplines, the engineering course recorded only a marginal increase over the same time period. This low intake reflects the trends in schools where 70 percent of the girls who qualified to enter university selected Arts subjects while 70 percent of the boys who qualified selected Physical Science courses. Thus, despite gender equality in access to education, subject selection and poor performance disadvantage women in gaining entry into IT and engineering courses.

When strict entry requirements are relaxed enrolment rates of girls in IT have increased, as was the case of the Bachelor of Information Technology external degree offered by the University of Colombo's School of Computing. But other factors such as the lack of facilities, lack of transport, late evening classes and high cost of access have acted as constraints leading to high drop-out rates among girls.

The democratization of educational opportunities with the introduction of free education and the introduction of national languages benefited girls more than boys as seen by overall enrolment rates. However, studies have shown that there is socio-economic differentiation in access to areas of study that leads to remunerative job opportunities and that women were the most disadvantaged by their low participation in technological education.

The imperative of enhancing women's capacities to participate in the new information economy is shown by the expected growth of the IT sector. Human resource projections show that approximately 20,000 ICT professionals and a host of other workers will be required by the year 2010.[23] However, it is unlikely that the requirement for professionals (both women and men) will be met at current enrolment rates. Women's representation in IT education, especially at higher levels of the profession, is also not likely to improve dramatically for some time, given all the constraints to their participation. The human resource development component of the e-Sri Lanka Road Map unfortunately does not recognize the role of women to 'drive' its implementation. The other government agencies such as the Ministry of Women's Affairs also do not have any special island-wide programmes to enhance the capacities of a greater number of women in this field.

Reaching the Grass-roots

There is evidence from around the world that ICTs provide a space for women to share knowledge and a space to overcome isolation, marginalization and improve their well being. Also many of the women who use new ICTs feel empowered. The Beijing process demonstrated the power of the Internet to mobilize women across the globe. Sri Lankan women, too, were a part of the process and this gave rise to an appreciation of the possibilities of using the Internet for women's empowerment.

[22] University Grants Commission (2002). University statistics. Colombo UGC, 2003.
[23] Wattegama, Chanuka (2002). Call for a national IT agenda. *Daily News*, 3 January 2002.

Unlike young women who now have a greater opportunity to use new ICTs to give them the ability to enhance their capacity so that they can enter the world of work on a more equal footing with men and use these technologies creatively, older women and those who drop out of school tend to be marginalized in accessing ICTs. As large numbers do not have access to education and training to use digital technologies, programmes and projects are being developed to reach these un-connected communities to provide them with the opportunity to benefit from ICTs.

The major thrust of the Sri Lankan government and the Information and Communication Technology Agency (ICTA)[24] to extend connectivity and access to rural areas is through a network of *Nana Salas* that comprise *Rural Knowledge Centres,*[25] e-Libraries, and Distance and e-Learning Centres [26] implemented under the e-Sri Lanka initiative. The *Nana Sala* programme aims to "address current infrastructure deficiencies in rural areas." The *Nana Sala* Rural Knowledge Centres follow the entrepreneurial or commercial model and the e-libraries, a community-model.

The aim of the Rural Knowledge Centre programme is to establish multi-service community information centres which provide access to the Internet, e-mail, telephone, fax, and photocopy facilities. Computer training classes and other ICT services are also to be provided. These centres will also act as "hubs of local, national and global information resources to provide a catalytic effect for the rural communities in poverty reduction, social and economic development and peace building while aiming to provide these services in a long-term, sustainable manner".[27] While the target for the first phase is to set up 100 centres in *Grama Niladhari* Divisions,[28] in the Southern, Northern and Eastern regions with little or no access to ICT, the number of such centres is to be increased to 1,000 by 2007.[29]

The business model that has been adopted for establishing and operating the Knowledge Centres enables sole proprietors, joint ventures and community-based organizations (CBOs) to bid for the operation of the centre. The operators could bid with or without the assistance of pre-selected supporting institutions.[30] Selection is based on identified criteria for which points are allocated.[31] Development objectives are not a focus although bidders having development experience and community support score a maximum of five and 15 points respectively out of 100 points.

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[24] The apex government agency for implementation of the e-Sri Lanka programme.
[25] Earlier known as *Vishwa Gnana Kendra.*
[26] Tsunami camp computer kiosks were also set up in the aftermath of the disaster.
[27] Personal communication 2005 Information and Communication Technology Agency (ICTA) (2004). ICT opportunities in Sri Lanka. http:// www.icta.lk
[28] Lowest administrative unit.
[29] ICTA (2004). ICT opportunities in Sri Lanka. http:// www.icta.lk
– ICT human resource development.
– A national development initiative e-Sri Lanka.
– Information infrastructure. http://209.10.53.13/insidepages/programmes/(bk)vgk.asp
– (2005) Personal communication.
[30] Eight Support Institutions have been selected representing both the private sector and the civil society to provide managerial, technical and logistical support.
[31] These include the location of the centre, suitability of the building, the business plan, which carry a total of 65 points. Experience in development activities and support from the community has been allocated 20 points.

The establishment of Knowledge Centres was preceded by a survey to ascertain the information and communication needs of communities, communication patterns and the ability of individuals and communities to pay for information and communication services. Both men and women were included in the survey as respondents. However, gender issues have not been identified. Consequently, the model pays no attention to ensuring the full participation of women in the programme either as operators or as users.[32]

The ICTA provides infrastructure facilities, training to operators and has devised a free voucher system to encourage the community to use the resources of the centre. Content is also being made available in agriculture, small and medium industry, education, etc. However, there is little or no information that is relevant to women. The e-library is a smaller version of the Rural Knowledge Centre but follows a community model as some services are provided free of charge. They are to be located mainly in places of worship – temples and churches – and will have telephones and computers with high speed Internet access. Computer-based training media in Sinhala, Tamil and English will be available for use offline. There is also a large e-library of books and periodicals for the use of students of all ages. IT-trained clergy will manage the centre and they will also act as instructors. The sustainability of the centre is to be ensured by charging for some of the services. Fifty of these centres have already been established while a total of 800 e-libraries are expected to be operational throughout the country within the next few years.

Several NGOs too have programmes to extend ICTs to rural areas but most of these programmes are limited in outreach. However, Sarvodaya, a NGO which has an extensive village network, is pilot testing a different model – *Vishwa Gammana* (the virtual village) – to integrate ICTs with the development of the rural community, and to identify socio-anthropological issues in relation to the adoption of ICTs in a rural context.

For several years, Sarvodaya[33] has been operating telecentres at the district level with linkages to the information centres established in 12,000 of its villages. The telecentre programme identifies appropriate and sustainable mechanisms for increasing ICT reach to the rural communities. This project also attempts to identify the best last-mile connectivity options using wireless technology. While most other ICT projects remain largely insensitive to socio-cultural dimensions, this project attempts to take social, cultural, gender, religious and economic factors into consideration in developing ICT-based services.

The virtual village includes a tele-hut using Wireless Fidelity (WiFi) technology,[34] five village access points (VAPs)[35] and mobile access modes (MAMs).[36] Gender issues have been considered

[32] As at the time of writing, of the 50 Rural Knowledge Centres that had been established, three were owned by women and another five jointly by husband and wife teams.
[33] Sarvodaya, Sri Lanka. (2004). Sri Lanka virtual villages: a socio-anthropological and technological study on the "last-mile" Colombo: (unpublished) p 23.
[34] The tele-hut will be equipped with ICT equipment and have networking facilities. A wireless network will be set up within the village from the tele-hut and five broadcasting nodes will be set up to cover five distant places in the villages. The tele-hut will be connected to the existing telecentre in the district.
[35] VAPs are static IT points located at specific spots for agricultural information, multimedia technology, information for microentrepreneurs, educational information and promotion of religious activity.
[36] MAM will reach potential village customers such as entrepreneurs, farmers, community leaders.

in the project. The project team includes 'gender specialists' who interact with the project team members and the community. Gender issues have been identified through a baseline survey carried out in the village. The project recognizes inequitable gender relations and has provision for conducting gender sensitization programmes, leadership training and capacity building for women. Gender-specific content is also being developed. The project recognizes that the village is not a homogenous entity. It accordingly documents the responses of diverse community groups to ICTs, attitudinal changes, ICT-enabled economic and social transformation, and makes on-course adjustments as required.

Sarvodaya has obtained community participation at all stages of the project. Village elders, leaders of CBOs, most of who are women, and community institutions such as schools, the agricultural extension offices and *ayurvedic*[37] doctors have been consulted through regular discussion since the project's inception to give it community ownership. Village-centred activities have also been undertaken to give the IT hub more visibility. The community has agreed to take ownership of the project when Sarvodaya withdraws at the end of the project period.

Mobilization programmes are being conducted as part of project activities and information circles are being set up around issues such as income generation, education and health. Usage is increasing and there are reports of new computer-aided income generating activities that have been started. However, few women and girls use the tele-hut and despite attention to gender issues during project formulation, the patriarchal structure of the village is reflected with the male leadership in the village assuming a prominent role.

Theoretically, women have equal access to the Rural Knowledge Centres, e-libraries and the *Vishwa Gammana.* But ground realities are different. Which model will enable poor and low-income women and girls to access information at these centres? Which model will make it possible for these women to own a facility, either individually or as a group?

The main factors that impinge on women's ownership of a facility are the lack of entrepreneurial ability, availability of assets, and capital. Location, opening hours, content and computer reticence brought about by the socialization process also hinder girls and women from accessing these centres.

Location is one of the key factors that has a bearing on women's use of the facility. The inappropriate location of a tele-hut in one *Vishwa Gammana* has resulted in low usage by women; and shifting it to a more gender-friendly location is now being planned. It is possible that setting up of e-libraries in places of worship will impact women's use. The location of projects, by and large, displays the lack of gender sensitivity as several centres have been located in places that are mostly patronized by men. While a substantial amount of content is available, very little attention has been paid to developing content that women require.

[37] A traditional medicine system.

In case of ownership of knowledge centres, it is unlikely that many women would be able to bid successfully for operating such centres given the lower participation of women in entrepreneurial activities. This is evidenced by the fact that only 6 percent of the current operators are women. As the e-libraries are in places of religious worship and the clergy are all males, there are no women in charge.

Given that the outreach programmes are still in their early stages of operation and that no data are yet available, it is difficult to identify the number of women who use these centres, their information-seeking behaviour and the extent to which they have been able to enhance their capacities.

Important Issues

Government interventions are most important in providing access and connectivity and enhancing the capabilities of the people to use new ICTs. The Sri Lankan government has recognized the need to spread technology to all parts of the country and the initiatives that are being taken reflect its commitment to narrow the urban-rural digital divide. However, there is no acknowledgement of gender inequalities and, consequently, ICT policies have been formulated in gender-neutral terms. Given the traditional disadvantages that women face, the question arises as to whether ICTs should not be used to address such social issues. While there is evidence to show that girls and women are increasingly accessing the benefits of new ICTs it is also seen that in the absence of pro-active and gender-sensitive measures women and girls could be marginalized. Engendering policy and adopting proactive strategies in programmes to ensure women's access to ICTs is therefore essential if existing inequalities are not to be exacerbated.

The government policy of introducing IT into the general school curriculum from the primary level, enhancing IT literacy and using IT for teaching and learning will benefit girls, as there is no overt discrimination in the access of girls to general or to technical education at this level. However, the current university enrolment in science and technology fields reflects the disadvantages brought about by inequitable distribution of educational facilities, the poor performance of girls in science and mathematics, and skewed subject selection even when educational choices are available. The concentration of women at the bottom of the hierarchy in the ICT sector is one of the outcomes of these disadvantages. Therefore, the introduction of IT into the educational system has to be accompanied by the elimination of gender role stereotypes in school textbooks and classroom practices and provision of career counselling along with the active encouragement of girls to enter the ICT sector.

The current outreach models that are being implemented by the government follow the dominant market-driven model and emphasize the achievement of financial sustainability by providing communication and information services to rural and semi-urban communities. While there is no denying the importance of financial sustainability, the real issue of sustainability rests not only on its availability but also on its usefulness and the ability of individual women (and men) to demand the kind of information that is required for their empowerment.

In its present form, this model may, in fact, increase the gender digital divide although the aim of the e-Sri Lanka programme is to take "the dividends of ICTs to every village, every citizen…." The aim of the *Nana Sala* should not only be to provide ICTs to communities but also, and more importantly, to build the capacity of women and men to articulate their information needs and empower them to access and use information to enhance their capacities. The model should have built-in strategies and innovative programmes to minimize gender inequalities. Such an approach requires a careful analysis of community dynamics and prevalent gender inequalities.

The NGO community model outlined above, which takes gender into account in project design, too, is showing signs of women being marginalized. Inappropriate location of one facility has resulted in very few women using the service. In the other facility, which is in a better location, women's usage is at par with men's. Leadership mostly remains with men.

Based on these observations[38] the question is: what kind of model would enable women to access ICTs that would enable them to enhance their capacity and empower them? Women's participation and ownership are required if they are to use ICTs to overcome disadvantages. What is needed is affirmative action and strategies to include women as owners and as users. It also requires 'champions' who will act as intermediaries in taking IT to women – the capacity of women's groups should be enhanced to take on this role. The Ministry of Women's Affairs and the National Committee on Women should be stakeholders and have a role in policy bodies. Women's groups should advocate strongly for gender-sensitive ICT policy, programmes and projects.

[38] It should be noted that no in-depth study of the *Nana Sala* and the Virtual Village project of Sarvodaya has been made and that the issues identified are based on ground level observations and anecdotal evidence.

Chapter 2.3

Using ICTs to Bridge the Digital Divide

–Usha Vyasulu Reddi and Rukmini Vemraju

Current literature on the use of ICTs to address core issues of development swings like the pendulum – either to excessive optimism and support or to extreme cynicism and critique. At one level, there is misplaced hype and hope that the technologies promise solutions for development problems and issues. At another level, are the findings from the field which show great variance in results.

One can look at the issue from a variety of perspectives. What is important is that while the technologies offer us the opportunities to adopt, adapt, and use them in appropriate ways, it is the conditions of use that determine the success and failure in meeting developmental goals.

Two cross-cutting issues dominate global development agenda today. The critical importance of gender and the inclusion of women and girls in the process of development is one such theme. The second relates to the importance of using ICTs to accelerate the development process. Do the two come together and, if so, how? These are the questions that this paper will address. We will examine several cases of good practice to identify the 'principles of good practice' and then apply such principles to project design and implementation so as to assess critical points where attention is necessary but often forgotten.

We use the term communication instead of ICTs. This is because communication is a broader concept and consists of a whole set of concepts, processes and evaluation methodologies. ICTs are a subset of communication and are essentially tools that are used by communicators to address specific needs.

Unpacking the Concepts

Our Understanding of Core Development Issues

In his book *Development as Freedom,* Amartya Sen (1999)[39] argues that in individual freedom lies the capacity for political participation, economic development and social progress. The

[39] Sen, Amartya (1999). *Development as Freedom*. New York: Alfred A Knopf.

goal of all development is the enabling of the exercise of such a freedom—the freedom to make a choice, and consequently, the empowering of the individual so that he or she is able to make the choices that determine quality of life. It is within this context of development as it is perceived today that we place this discussion and debate.

Our Understanding of Gender Issues

That gender, as an issue, is a cross cutting theme in all global development concerns and debates is an accepted fact. The two historic meetings at the beginning of the 21st century, the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, and the Millennium Summit of the United Nations recognized this as they did the key interim objective of achieving gender parity in primary and secondary school enrolment by 2005.

What is important to recognize is that gender issues must be and are situated within a broader context of human rights –"rights to, rights within, and rights through" in all areas of human endeavour. The pathways to achieving such rights are many, but there are inter-linkages both within the female life cycle and in social relationships that must be explored and addressed in a holistic fashion.

Our Definitions of Communication, the ICTs and the Digital Divide

The potential use of communication to meet the challenges of development started with the pioneering studies in the 1950s and early 1960s. Lerner's[40] pioneering study that showed the link between communication and modernization of individuals in Turkey was followed by a large number of studies in the early 1960s, and an equal number of projects where the role of communication was tested in developmental settings.

Much of the experimentation in the first two decades of development – the 1950s and 1960s – focused on trying to understand the relationship between the two aspects. However, outcomes from the field often yielded contradictory results much at odds with planners' expectations and have consequently added to the debate on effective use. The conflicting results did not challenge the general link between communication and development; they did, however, give rise to the more action-oriented 'development support communication' perspective.

Development support communication essentially refers to the use of communication to support the development process, either at a national, location- or project-specific level. Specifically, it is the integration of communication (and in today's parlance) the use of ICTs as part of the planning, design, development, delivery, and evaluation of developmental projects. This could mean large scale experimentation as in Mexico's Telesecundaria,[41] Brazil's Telecurso 2000,[42] and India's Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE) and post-SITE endeavours.

[40] Lerner, Daniel (1958). *The Passing of Traditional Society. Modernizing the Middle East*. New York: The Free Press.
[41] Calderoni, Jose (1998) "Telesecundaria: Using TV to Bring Education to Rural Mexico" *Education and Technology Notes Series*, Vol 3 No. 2 , pp. 1-10. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EDUCATION/Resources/278200-1099079877269/547664-1099079947580/Telesecundaria_using_TV_Mexico_EN98.pdf
[42] http://www.iadb.org/sds/doc/Edu&Tech13.pdf

It could also mean small-scale experimentation and use as in community radio initiatives across the globe or in the current use of multipurpose telecentres located in remote villages.[43] Despite several decades of such support, the debate about ICT use in development continues because supporting research in media and development has not yielded any conclusive results about the relationship between the two.

Information and Communication Technologies

ICTs appear to have a significant impact upon the economic, political, and social systems existing today. Many see them as the main drivers of contemporary society and some people even have the expectation that these technologies will effectively terminate a social structure based on inequality.

The use of ICTs, in its true meaning, refers to the systematic application of collective human rationality to the solution of problems by asserting control over nature and over human processes of all kinds. What is included are not simply machines but the collection of transferred attitudes and values, institutions, social and political structures, new management patterns, new training and human resource deployment requirements as well as various other inputs which are required sometimes simply for the use of the technologies.

What is clearly evident in the current global scenario is that the new developments have already increased the substantial potential for control of information by the existing dominant actors. The disparity between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' has been exacerbated rather than reduced by these patterns of control. The growing disparity was studied in the 1970s by Tichenor and others[44] who called it the "knowledge gap" between those with access to knowledge and those without. Today, it continues to be hotly debated and is called the growing 'digital divide'.

The Digital Divide

Hamelink (1986)[45] and many others since have argued that often the perceived notion of the information society is that it is decentralized, with greater access to information for all segments of the population, and a shift of power structures away from the governing elite to the masses, and proponents of the new technologies point to the ways in which the new technologies could encourage and foment the process of democratization of societies. Perhaps, similar shifts took place in earlier social revolutions. However, there is no indication that such transformations will take place in the present circumstances unless there is a paradigm shift in the way in which the technologies are deployed and used.

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[43] See http://www.idrc.ca for the Acacia Project initiatives in Africa. See also Walker, David, and Latchem, Colin (2001) Perspectives on Distance Education: Telecentres: Case studies and key issues (Management* Operations * Applications* Evaluation) Vancouver: The Commonwealth of Learning.

[44] Tichenor, P.J., Donahue, G.A. and Olien, C.N. (1970). "Mass Media Flow and the Differential Growth of Knowledge" *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol 34, 1970; pp. 159-70. Shingi, Prakash M., Kaur, Gurinder and Rai, Ravi P. (1982) Television and the Knowledge Gap Hypothesis. Ahmedabad: Indian Institute of Management.

[45] Hamelink, Cees (1983). *Cultural Autonomy in Global Communications*. New York: Longmans.

Twenty years since these discussions took place, the debate still continues. Technological changes and their use for development have grown exponentially since. But the questions remain, and the focus has shifted away from a perception of the beneficiary as the poor, passive and unwilling recipient of innovations to seeing beneficiaries as active participants and users. As we explore case studies where the use of ICT4D has failed or worked, we will examine the all important issue of the varying conditions of their application.

Factors Impinging upon ICT Use in Development

Current literature on barriers to the use of ICTs for developmental purposes, especially among women and girls, draws attention to issues of access and control, content, delivery methods, project implementation, and patterns of management in design and deployment of technology and content. Technology is most often not the issue, as various technological options are available today, and also, given the current rate of growth in telecommunications in most parts of the world, availability of IT infrastructure to even the remotest regions is no longer a distant dream. What has made today's technology different is the coming together of the satellite and the computer and the convergence between traditional and new media through a process of digitalization and the consequent driving down of costs of technology.

However, there are a number of important issues that affect successful application of ICT4D, some of which are discussed below. The discussion is presented in the form of some myths of and some lessons from current ICT4D practice.

For whom are the technologies meant?

The first myth is an uncritical acceptance that today's ICTs enable us to transcend barriers of reach and provide access. For whom, one might ask! And if teledensity data are any indicators, it is the already advantaged sections who are reaping benefits of connectivity. For technologies to reach out to the marginalized, there has to be access and not merely reach.

The reach of any medium is not the same as access. Figures that indicate 100 percent reach of radio mean only that the signal reaches all areas, not that all the potential listeners have access to the medium. The fact that there is a public telephone at a Community Learning Centre or a television in a public location does not necessarily mean there is access, for example, if a woman has to walk 4 kilometres to use it or if it is in cultures that do not encourage use of public spaces by women.

In addition to physical and socio-cultural factors, poverty, illiteracy, time, mobility and relevance are key factors influencing access of women to technology. It is when these concerns have been addressed such as in the Grameen Phone initiative of Bangladesh[46] or in the Secondary School Education Project in Pakistan[47] that women have made use of new technologies for purposes like livelihood and education.

[46] See http://www.telecommons.com/villagephone/gbfamily.html for a detailed description.
[47] See http://www.col.org/forum/PCFpapers/haquer.pdf for details.

It is our argument, therefore, that for ICTs to work to address developmental issues for women and girls, they have to be situated, physically and socially, in such a way as to enhance, rather than limit access to those for whom they are intended.

Who Owns the Technology?

A second myth about technologies is that it is necessary to be computer literate in order to use today's ICTs – which is why ownership and control of technology remains with the implementing agency rather than with the beneficiary. There is enough evidence emerging out of experience to show that this myth has no basis in reality.

When ownership and control over technology has been transferred to the potential beneficiaries, dramatic results have emerged. In 1986, Subhadra Belbase reported that when women develop their own video materials on issues of water pollution, health and sanitation, women's own abilities to identify their needs, articulate their concerns, and to suggest local solutions and even to speak up to government functionaries grew, and self confidence and empowerment resulted.[48]

Similar results among women have been reported in many other initiative like Deccan Development Society,[49] the Commonwealth of Learning Literacy (COLLIT) India Project[50] Personal visit and evaluation reports of the project also reported in http://www.col.org/Consultancies/04Literacy.htm, the Kutch Mahila Vikas Samiti, Gujarat,[51] 'phone ladies' of Bangladesh's Grameen project, Community Radio project of Budhikote, Karnataka and at Sitakund in Bangladesh.[52] These outcomes are especially significant because in all of these cases it was illiterate and semi-literate women (definitely not media literate) who used technology to address their own and their community needs.

It is, therefore, our argument that ownership and control of the means and content of communication bring involvement and commitment. They enable women to use the technologies to give voice to their own needs and to create their own materials. When ownership and control is transferred to the women, the likelihood of change is greater, and when technology is demystified, ICTs can break down barriers.

Who Determines and Creates the Content?

Yet another misconception about ICTs is that content is readily available, and if not, that it is easy to develop. There are two aspects of content development that merit special attention. First: relevant, timely, local, gender-sensitive and gender-friendly content may simply not be

[48] Belbase, Subhadra (1988) "Development Communication, A Nepali Experience" in *Rethinking Development Communication* edited by Jayaweera, Neville and Anumugama, Sarath, Singapore: AMIC, pp. 208-226.
[49] See http://www.ddsindia.com/www/default.asp
[50] Personal visit and evaluation reports of the project also reported in http://www.col.org/Consultancies/04Literacy.htm
[51] See http://www.vub.ac.be/apps/board/koccc/messages/181.html
[52] Slater, Don and Tacchi, Jo. 2004 RESEARCH: ICT Innovations for Poverty Reduction New Delhi: UNESCO. p. 91. http://www.unesco.org/webworld

available. Our experience shows that content takes time and costs money to produce. Second: there is the issue of who determines what is relevant, timely and local? Unless it is the beneficiary herself, there is little or no chance of ready use of the content.

If adults and children have different learning styles, women learners are also different. Much has been written about the collaborative nature of their learning, and in many learning contexts, the interactive and participatory involvement of learners appears to contribute to success.

Content development strategies must match the learners' learning processes and include partnership in the process of learning. However, very often, there is a mismatch between expectations of the project managers and the learning styles of the target beneficiaries. When it comes to addressing the needs of women and girls, it is also necessary to ensure a gender-sensitive programme design, in the choice of delivery media and social mobilization and participatory processes. Warr[53] described the principles on which the Basic Functional Education Programme at the Allama Iqbal Open University in Pakistan was based. It was learner-centred (knowledge relevant to village learners presented from their perspective, of practical value and with a multidisciplinary approach). It had a multiple media approach to minimize dependence on the written word, used a variety of presentation techniques, related new ideas to their own circumstances, and enabled collaborative learning and an application of what they had learnt. Finally, materials should create a dialogue, rather than be didactic and must enable feedback from the learners.[54]

The results from the Project in Radio Education and Adult Literacy (PREAL)[55] and the evaluation of the Jhabua Development Communication Project (JDCP),[56] where there was little success, underscore the importance of learner-developed materials, in contrast to successful interventions such as Budikote, and the COLLIT India project.

It can therefore be concluded that relevant, appropriate and problem-solving content is critical. Such content has to be developed either by the women themselves or in partnership with them; otherwise it will not be used because it is not rooted in their ground realities.

What Determines Media Choice?

Project managers in many ICT-based efforts have yet to determine what the most appropriate medium to deliver knowledge is. Glitz surrounding the big media such as television has often blurred the reality of high start up, high operational costs with, possibly, little or no visible results over time. What we do know is that as important as the choice of the primary or master medium is, the recognition that content delivered over the medium needs strong back-up support in the field at the ground level.

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[53] Warr, D. (1992). *Distance Teaching in the Village*. Cambridge: International Extension College.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Dighe, Anita and Reddi, Usha. "Use of Communication Technologies in Open Learning, Non-formal, Adult and Community Education", Plenary Paper presented at the Pan Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning, Brunei 1-5 March 1999. See http://www.col.org/forum/dighe/htm
[56] Ibid.

We can draw upon many experiences from across the globe to emphasize the importance of appropriate media choice. Looking at worldwide attempts to harness ICTs, one comes across a kaleidoscope of activities – including, very large national efforts such as Mexico's *Telesecundaria*,[57] and India's SITE.

Contexts that determined the need for large-scale broadcast initiatives (where scale can be defined in terms of the size of geographic and population groups to be covered or the complexity of operations) and the choice of technologies by different countries have been very much bound by national realities. Yet they often follow a familiar pattern.

Mexico's need to fill the void created by a paucity of teachers in rural areas and the urgency to provide educational access and opportunity to students in far flung rural areas was the context in which Mexico chose to use educational television in the *Telesecundaria* Project, while India needed to supplement and support its ground-level efforts through the use of broadcasting to reach the un-reached.

These countries followed and used the latest technology of the day to transcend barriers of distance, poor infrastructure, lack of schools and colleges and illiteracy. Each made major investments in creating national and international technology grids, enabling the development and delivery of content. Both these countries made investments in content development and in ground support mechanisms such as extension and health workers in the field.

While these projects are running fairly successfully, they have faced similar issues and challenges. The struggle has always been to reduce the rigidity imposed by a synchronous model with an in-built rigidity because of radio and television scheduling, and to create a pedagogically sound balance between the visual power of televised images versus local relevance and regional needs and demands.

Similarly, these projects have had to address the issues of centralized planning and deployment versus local relevance and regional needs and demands. All of them have had to face continuously daunting challenges of access, equity and interactivity and have been, to some extent, overtaken by technological developments emerging out of the digital revolution. Even with decreasing costs of technology, the upgradation and replacement of obsolete equipments has been a constant headache. As a consequence, all large-scale efforts have been seeking the use of digital technologies to enhance access and quality for their learners while promoting interactivity between the learners and the teachers and among learners at lower costs.

Media choice has remained a problematic issue and the tug of war between big media efforts, such as television at a national level, and small media such as community radio has continued.

[57] Calderoni, Jose (1998) "Telesecundaria: Using TV to Bring Education to Rural Mexico", Education and Technology Notes Series, Vol 3 No. 2 pp. 1-10 (http://wbln0018.worldbank.org/.../ 1635F1703FE053B385256754006D8C3F/$FILE/ telesecundaria.pdf (retrieved, 03 January 2005); Farrell, Glen (2003) "An Overview of Developments and Trends in the Application of Information and Communication Technologies in Education" in Farrell, Glen and Wachholz, Cédric (2003). *Meta-survey on the Use of Technologies in Education in Asia and the Pacific*. UNESCO, Bangkok p.13 (http://www.unescobkk.org/index.php?id=1807).

Developments in digital technologies (especially computer- and Internet-based) promising personalized learning at a localized and individual level have added a new dimension that has further complicated the issue.

However, it is noteworthy that there is a degree of "appropriateness" in the pattern of ICT usage in the developing countries that stands, as Farrell[58] reports "in contrast to that seen in North America and Western Europe where the tendency to adopt the "latest and greatest" of the newer technologies is rampant."

In the final analysis, the choice of medium should be based on issues of reach and access, the purpose of the initiative, the nature of the community to be reached, cultural acceptability and usability, and local relevance. In short, the chosen medium should have 'fitness for purpose'. For immediate use, it should be a familiar and friendly medium which engages with women, not requiring too many additional skills to master and must be backed up by an adequate follow-up on the ground, best done by people from the beneficiary community itself. In the long term, however, technology must be demystified so that women can break down any preconceived fears that they may have against unfamiliar technology. In this respect, it is the technology end that needs to be addressed rather than the women.

How Should ICT-based Projects be Managed?

Undoubtedly, ICTs have influenced development discourse and policies in most countries. Countries that have formulated national IT policies have tended to provide support to ICT use for development. As a result, even though there may be no legislation or clear-cut policy for deploying ICT4D, the general commitment to support efforts has often been translated into providing funding for them. However, an enabling policy does not automatically ensure that gender-specific and -sensitive initiatives would be specifically supported and funded. Unless there is a firm and specific government commitment, even the allocated funds may not be released on time or other government department may not provide support. Further, in the absence of gender-segregated data, it is difficult to propose, promote and sustain gender-specific initiatives.

Even the best-intentioned effort can fail, if project management is not given importance in any technology driven effort. At present, there is a dissonance between project management styles in vogue and the kind of management that ICT-based initiatives require.

Technology-based interventions are inherently different from the conventional ones. Technologies are not merely hardware, but also the associated set of operational and management practices. Technology-based systems, by their very nature, must remain open, flexible, innovative and responsive to yield results. Policy, regulations and management practices need to be revisited and revised so as to enable speedy response to address the special needs of ICT based systems.

[58] Farrell, Glen in Farrell and Wachholz, op. cit., p. 267.

In several countries of the Asian region, regulatory mechanisms control what technologies can be used, and what content is delivered over these technologies. Policy frameworks also tend toward greater centralization and control over the technologies. Such regulatory practices run in direct conflict with the development potential of these technologies.

Most initiatives designed and implemented by governments as part of a broad educational agenda reflect the 'conventionalism' of existing institutions; they are mostly burdened with hierarchical and bureaucratic systems of administration. Models of project management where projects or initiatives are implemented centrally fail to adequately take local needs into consideration. While economies of scale make large projects and initiatives attractive, the solutions need to be location, problem, time, and people specific. The politics of monopoly and central control do not favour decentralization, which can provide the needed autonomy for effective local implementation.

Conversely, local solutions when up-scaled, even to meet regional needs, also often fail. Sometimes, a project that worked in one part of the country will not succeed in another. Thus, when one looks for specific requirements at a micro level, it may not get adequately reflected on a national dimension, which is the problem with planning large-scale projects. Similarly, the transformations that are possible in small well-organized local and problem-specific situations may not be possible, when either the technology or the content is up-scaled to meet the needs of a wider population.

For ICT use to be successful, patterns of management and administration have to be decentralized, innovative, flexible, and responsive. Since what works in one place may not work in another, different approaches may be needed for different locations.

How are Projects Sustained?

Sustainability is an important but complex issue for ICT projects. As long as there is donor support and funding, planning for sustainability is rarely part of a project design. There is always an underlying assumption in government-funded projects that they will never be closed down, and that funding support will never cease. Further, the process of planning, deploying, and implementing ICT-based initiatives is time consuming and a long-term activity. It cannot be hurried, nor can such a process be time-bound. It requires investments of various kinds from national governments and implementing agencies –human, financial, technical – and there is often a mismatch between timelines for projects and actual implementation in the field.

The nature of ICT-based projects and initiatives is that they have high start-up and operational costs, for content development, hardware and software obsolescence. Unless sustainability is built into the project design and a business plan worked out right at the beginning, there will be diminishing returns in terms of success. The concern of donor agencies for visible returns on investment in terms of quantifiable data is often not appreciated enough by implementing agencies – and most of them are not willing to release information of this kind (as it may be seen to jeopardize future support).

Even where sustainability seems to be built-in through a plan, and efforts are made to continue the project after external funding support ceases, quality and effectiveness may suffer, as in the case of Internet Radio in Sri Lanka[59] where the effort is struggling to maintain the same level of services when faced with a resource crunch. Similar problems of sustainability have been found in the COLLIT India Project in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, India, one year after donor funding ceased.[60] In this project, a comment made by one of the project members reveals her frustration of unmet expectations—she felt that in the execution of the project, everyone involved with the project had benefited, except the illiterate women who were the targeted beneficiaries.[61]

A business or sustainability plan, therefore, is a must for ICT-based interventions for them to succeed in the long run.

What Research and Evaluation is Needed?

From information, we gain knowledge, and from knowledge we deduce insights. For this, we need to create a body of knowledge, not just about what worked, but also about what did not. This is one critical component that is generally missing from projects that seek to deploy ICT4D.

Most ICT projects are notoriously lax in recording and publishing the lessons learned. Publicly available material about these projects – case studies and best practices – are mostly glossy descriptions of how wonderful and successful the projects have been. But the question is: if they were indeed so successful, why have they failed to achieve any verifiable development targets?

It is only if a credible body of information about ICT projects is built that others engaged in research and practice can learn from peer experience and save valuable time and effort. Such a body of information is not only about the final copies of the research reports, which most often will be filed away, but a running documentation in the form of a diary, of efforts at defining concepts, identifying problems and stumbling blocks, describing successful as well as failed efforts, and critical self analysis.

There should also be a record of different kinds of research activities carried out. For instance, management criteria for proposals, contracts, study plans, documentation, mapping, budgets and cost accounting, logistics, project decision points, sampling plans, staff training and evaluation, field control methods, material preparation and pretesting, data processing and management, project monitoring and report preparation. All of these form important historical documentation that could describe success or identify causes of failure. In most of these areas we have very little information.

[59] http://www.unesco.org/webworld/highlights/ internet_radio_130599.html
[60] Personal visit to project locations by author when evaluating the project one year after external funding support was withdrawn. Implementing agencies were struggling to maintain services.
[61] Ibid.

Evaluation should be a part of the project design, and should feed into the intervention for timely mid-course corrections. Documentation of the processes is as important as the final evaluation, if we are to understand the issues in successful applications of ICTs for better development.

Some Core Principles of Good Practice

The earlier section raised and addressed a variety of questions that are important in the interplay between ICTs and development, especially in the context of marginalized communities in developing countries. From the foregoing discussion, some core principles of good practice that are especially important can be identified.

Small is Beautiful

Without adequate and ongoing ground support, large ICT-based experiments such as television have failed to yield expected results. Their very 'bigness' mitigates against tangible results and big interventions have serious problems of management, implementation and quick response, especially as they are often designed and developed in a conventional top-down style. For results to emerge, ICTs interventions have to be small and locally relevant and responsive. For this, one can look at the Pondicherry Infovillage effort[62] and the community radio efforts in Nepal, Sri Lanka[63] and the Philippines.[64] One might argue that it is difficult to upscale such initiatives – but all of these interventions are pointing to the importance of being small, flexible and locally responsive.

Situate ICTs in Congenial Physical and Social Environments

There is enough research evidence to show that a gender-friendly and gender-sensitive environment is a precondition for use of ICTs by women. Physically congenial environments and timings are essential for women who have multiple roles to play in society. If the woman cannot come to the medium, the medium must reach out to her wherever she is, and whenever she wants and can find the time for it. Socially acceptable environments are equally important, especially in cultures where the use of public spaces by women is frowned upon.

Place /Transfer Ownership and Control to the Community

Most success stories have emerged from situations where there is community involvement, ownership and participation in the process of decision-making – whether in the management and use of technology or in the creation of relevant content. There is enough evidence from research on existing interventions to establish that community ownership and control is a critical element of good practice.

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[62] See http://www.apdip.net/projects/2003/in/Indiastudy.pdf

[63] Reddi, Usha and Sinha, Vineeta (2003). "Country studies on Nepal and Sri Lanka in Farrell, Glen and Wachholz, Cédric op. cit. pp. 258 and 263.

[64] http://www.i4donline.net/aug04/tambuli.asp

Involve Community in Content Development

The user is often the best judge of individual and community needs. ICT project beneficiaries need to share the process of content development and, very often, are the best resource for relevant content.

Basing Media Selection on Fitness to Purpose

The availability of technology is NOT what determines its use. Appropriateness is based on the simple principle of 'fitness to purpose' and is determined by patterns of access and availability, not merely on reach or on what is available.

Incorporate Flexibility and Responsiveness in Management

Unconventionality is the very nature of new ICTs. Therefore conventional methods of management will not work. It is necessary to incorporate a flexible, decentralized and responsive mode of management.

Build Sustainability as in a Business Model Right at the Beginning

The question of what happens when donor funding stops should be answered upfront and sustainability should be built in as part of design itself.

Incorporate Evaluation as an Integral Part of Project Design

Evaluation should be part of project design, should be ongoing and should feed into the intervention for timely mid-course corrections. Documentation of the processes is as important as the final evaluation, if we are to understand the benefits of ICTs better.

Conclusion

While these principles, as discussed above, have emerged globally as those that take ICTs a step closer to the goals of community development, the fact remains that 'success stories' in ICT4D have essentially been in the project mode. Issues of replicability, scalability and sustainability are extremely complex especially in developing countries and that too while addressing marginalized and socially-disadvantaged groups like women.

We have consciously avoided the use of the term 'best practices', which appears to favour one way of doing things to the exclusion of others and we recognize that good practice is both a dynamic and relative concept. Problems of infrastructure, scanty resources and other known barriers will not disappear in a hurry. What these principles of good practices can do is to provide a framework in which the critical points of attention do not get by-passed or overshadowed by short-term project goals.

Chapter 2.4

Empowering Communities through IT: Multi-stakeholder Approaches and the Akshaya Experiment

–Aruna Sundararajan

ICTs are widely acknowledged to be amongst the primary drivers of growth and progress in societies. They are also increasingly considered as potent tools for development; enabling poor and disadvantaged communities to leapfrog traditional barriers of access, embrace new livelihood opportunities, and participate effectively in governance. However, despite their significant transformational potential, the actual impact of ICTs has often been to accentuate, rather than reduce, disparities between the well-off and the poor.

Much of the recent debate on ICTs in development has tended to focus on the limitations of the actual impact of ICTs as compared to their enormous potential. If we are to harness ICTs effectively in the service of the disempowered, we need to go beyond this debate and move towards identifying practical ways of bridging this gap. There clearly exists a growing divide between those who possess the means to harness the new technologies and those who could benefit from them but lack the means to do so. If ICTs are to serve as genuine tools of development, ways must be found of making them accessible to all. Marginalized groups must also be equipped with requisite capacities and 'know-how' to meaningfully exploit these technologies and, at the same time, services and knowledge currently delivered through ICTs need to be redesigned to make them meaningful and relevant to the poor.

While global access to ICTs, particularly the Internet, has expanded in recent years, an overwhelming majority of the poor continue to be excluded from their purview. Current trends point to a widening, rather than narrowing, of the technology and knowledge gap. These trends also reveal the limitations and shortcomings of existing policies and approaches. Key issues in ICT4D are therefore: How new technologies can be disseminated in ways that ensure they reach the poorest of the poor? What alternate approaches and strategies should policy makers and planners pursue to create equitable access and requisite 'know-how'? What are relevant content models that take into account the interests of all the stakeholders, and not just those involved in provisioning the technology? What could be the ingredients of a multi- stakeholder and proactive model that addresses these objectives?

Multi-stakeholder Approaches: Some Challenges

The basic ingredient would be ubiquitous public access networks. While roads and railways have long been considered as public goods and mandated to be provided by the State, the creation of telecommunications infrastructure has been largely market-driven, albeit with a universal service obligation. While countries such as Korea have been able to build Internet and telecommunications infrastructure as a national priority, poor telecommunications regulation has actively inhibited its growth in many developing countries. An oft-cited reason for low telecommunications coverage is high costs. However, India, through the success of the STD-PCO model, has demonstrated that cheap and accessible telecommunications can be provided even in backward rural areas. This has also been demonstrated through diverse telecentre models that currently provide cheap Internet and computer access in most urban centres.

Examples of ICT deployment demonstrate that while access is indeed a critical prerequisite, the provision of access by itself may not suffice. Where ICTs, particularly the Internet, have been widely and mainly used as an advocacy and dissemination tool among marginalized groups, including women, greater access in and of itself can be hugely empowering. However, the enormous service delivery and productivity enhancing capabilities of ICTs remain, as yet, largely untapped in the service of the poor. If therefore, we are to move beyond the current paradigm (of ICTs and the Internet as largely advocacy and dissemination tools) to a new paradigm (of ICTs as tools of economic and social empowerment), substantial re-engineering of service delivery models is essential.

Information and services that are currently delivered through ICTs and the Internet are largely irrelevant to the daily lives of the poor, whose primary requirements are mostly localized and contextual information relevant to their daily sustenance. The poor need access to local networks of knowledge and expertise relating to agriculture, health care, education, environment, market access, government entitlements or credit. Providing these services in areas where ICT infrastructure and capacities is largely absent requires a redesigning of service and technology paradigms. Such new service delivery models need to be built around local resources, skills and content, and involve the reworking of existing incentive structures in order to facilitate new investments in ICTs. These models cannot, for the most part, be built centrally, but require decentralized collaborative efforts by diverse stakeholders including the community, service sectors and ICT infrastructure providers. The lack of established institutional and market structures adds an important dimension to the challenge.

Models of ICT4D that have had an impact underscore the critical importance of addressing the basic prerequisites of access, capacity and content holistically, that is as integral parts of an interconnected ecosystem, rather than as independent variables that can be addressed in isolation. A key question then is: how can we ensure that such holistic solutions are designed and implemented, that they are demand driven and that they address real needs of local communities? Development practice has long recognized the role and importance of community participation and ownership in the design and implementation of meaningful interventions. A key challenge in deploying ICT4D has been to transcend the traditional 'beneficiary-oriented' approach and to structure interventions around the capabilities, priorities

and requirements of disadvantaged communities. A particular difficulty in ICT-driven development programmes is the near-complete lack of basic knowledge and unfamiliarity with the technologies and tools amongst the poor.

Development interventions that have evolved in response to ground requirements, been multi-stakeholder and community-led, and pursued inclusive and participative approaches have shown to be far more sustainable than others that have been superimposed from above. Although these insights are well documented, they are yet to be fully integrated into many large ICT4D projects and programmes, which have tended to focus on the technology rather than on the capacity building and empowerment aspects of ICTs. ICT4D policy makers and planners therefore face two types of challenges. The first relates to creating ICT infrastructure, capacities and new paradigms of service delivery that can meet the needs of the poor, in locales that face deprivations. The second is to create these infrastructures and capacities through inclusive and participatory models that are essential not only to optimize impact, but to ensure their long-term sustainability. It is important to recognize that the two are integrally linked and that the outcomes of ICT interventions would depend as much on the inclusiveness of the process, as on the infrastructure and services created.

In recent years, there have been an increasing number of innovative ICT4D experiments that have attempted to evolve new multi-stakeholder models. What insights do these projects offer in terms of designing explicitly pro-poor and inclusive approaches and what have been some of the challenges and dilemmas in their design and implementation? How have these projects differed from conventional models, and what has been their impact? How have these projects attempted to involve the community, and how critical has this been to the anticipated outcomes? This article proposes to explore some of these issues in the context of a case study of an ICT4D project, called *Akshaya* in Kerala[65] that has attempted to deploy a multi- stakeholder and participative approach for bringing about ICT-enabled empowerment in underdeveloped communities.

About the Akshaya Experiment

Akshaya was launched by the Government of Kerala and the district panchayat[66] of Malappuram in Northern Kerala, as an integrated project to bridge the digital divide, and to tackle the chronic problems of unemployment and backward social development. With a population of 3 million, roughly 10 percent of the state, Malappuram is Kerala's most populous district, with a physically diverse terrain ranging from coastal backwaters on the west to the hilly tribal areas of the east. The district has a predominantly Muslim population, amounting to 70 percent of the total. Although agriculture is the mainstay of the district, economic stagnation and lack of employment opportunities, particularly for the educated youth, have been key challenges. Malappuram's economy has, since the 1970s, been dependent on remittances from migrants to the Middle East, and about 30-40 percent of families are estimated to have at least one person employed in the Gulf, largely as construction and other semi-skilled labour. The declining employment opportunities for unskilled labour and progressive indigenization of the work

[65] A state in south India.
[66] Local government system in India.

force in the Gulf compelled the district administration to look for alternate sources of employment. Malappuram also has a poorly developed communication infrastructure, with families paying disproportionately high communication costs compared to the rest of the state. Despite its poor social and economic indices, Malappuram has played a leading role in the state's successful literacy and planning campaigns of the past and is hailed for its high social and political cohesiveness.

It was in this context of a stagnant economy and declining employment scenario, as well as the growing realization that skill upgradation and modern ICT skills were a prerequisite for employability and livelihoods, that the district panchayat of Malappuram decided to launch an ambitious ICT and Internet programme, aimed at training 100,000 youth over a period of two years. However, two immediate problems that the panchayat came up against were a shortage of training institutions and Internet access centres (the few that existed were concentrated in the five urban centres, with almost none in the rural areas), and the high cost of training. Most of these training institutions focused on programming skills, rather than more general IT skills. The training was invariably conducted in English, which excluded most rural youth from its purview. Discussions between the panchayat and private training companies revealed that few were willing to open new centres in rural areas, or to lower costs. Most existing telecommunication providers were also unwilling to venture to remote areas, where the prospects of Internet utilization were perceived to be poor.

It was at this stage that the district panchayat approached the Kerala State IT Mission, the IT implementation wing of the state government, to assist them. An initial solution proposed to set up 100 publicly-funded community training and Internet centres. However, it was soon apparent that the panchayats[67] lacked the capacity to manage these centres. Even if the management of these centres were to be outsourced, the lack of a business plan to sustain these centres on completion of training emerged as a serious issue. It also became increasingly apparent in the discussions that issues of access, capacity and content were inextricably linked, and were all equally important, for ensuring viability. After several rounds of discussion, a plan was finally evolved. Initially conceived as a modest training intervention, Akshaya evolved into an ambitious and comprehensive initiative to bridge the digital divide by simultaneously addressing the three critical issues of access, capacity and content. The final solution that was proposed envisaged a three-tier strategy – the establishment of a district-wide telecentre network for access, a massive e-literacy programme to train one person in each family in basic ICT skills, and a public content programme in the local language. The entrepreneur-driven telecentres, called Akshaya centres, were to play a dual role as training centres in the first phase and as integrated communication and service delivery hubs in the second.

Given the paucity of appropriate IT training material that the general public could use, it was decided to develop a 15-day training package in the local language that would comprise the basics of computers and the Internet to enable users to handle PCs and simple software tools easily, and to browse the Internet for accessing popular information sites such as news, employment portals, government entitlements, and e-commerce services. The Centre for the Development of Information Technology (C-DIT), a state government undertaking, was

[67] Under every district panchayat there are many village-level panchayats.

entrusted with this task, and a series of pilot runs were undertaken amongst prospective users including women's groups, panchayat members, community workers, technologists and media and communication experts to ensure that the content was meaningful, culturally appropriate and could be easily assimilated by even the most untrained person. A noteworthy aspect was that the cost of training could be dramatically reduced from the original price of approximately Rs[68] 1,000 to about Rs 140 per individual at the end of this process.

A basic principle adopted early on in the project was equity of access. A geographic mapping and 100 percent household survey was carried out across the district to identify prospective locations that were equidistant and could be conveniently accessed by the community, with one kiosk servicing every 1,000-1,250 families or one for every 2-3 kilometres. The list of prospective locations was widely publicized and suggestions were invited to ensure that these locations were convenient. A list of 600 prospective locations in the district was finally identified (conforming to the desired goal of one kiosk per 1,000 families) and the panchayat was notified and applications invited from the public. Preference was given to educated, unemployed youth, women entrepreneurs and persons with a background/training in ICTs. Awareness camps were widely held during this period to induce entrepreneurs to come forward to take up the task of setting up the telecentres in their respective villages. These camps received overwhelming response, and a total of over 1,200 applications were received. Selection Committees, comprising a panchayat representative, and bank and local industry officials, selected the telecentre operator. Local banks agreed to finance the telecentres without collateral obligations. Once the entrepreneurs were selected and the loans organized, the procurement of over 3,000-4,000 machines at one time proved to be a major challenge. The IT mission organized a special three-day IT fair, where major hardware vendors and assemblers were given an opportunity to interact and sell directly to the entrepreneurs. The procurement was followed by a public Memorandum of Understanding being signed between the 650 entrepreneurs and 100 panchayat heads, where the entrepreneurs signed service-level agreements specifying the standard of training and services that they would offer.

A unique three-way Public-Private Partnership (PPP) and financing model was worked out in such a way that the community, the individual who underwent training and the kiosk owners shared the costs. The kiosk owners were to meet the costs of equipment, while the cost of training was shared between the panchayat and the trainee (the three-tier panchayats contributed Rs 120 and the balance Rs 20 was paid by the trainee) thereby making this among the cheapest ICT training programmes in the world. Each telecentre or kiosk was also assigned a social advocacy role – of ensuring that all families assigned to the centre underwent training. A typical kiosk had five machines, while larger centres had 10 PCs. At the end of the training period the kiosk owner recouped 60-70 percent of the initial capital.

To popularize the training programme, a large public mobilization campaign was launched particularly amongst backward and disadvantaged groups, including women, and coastal and tribal communities. Several panchayats and entrepreneurs launched door-to-door campaigns to ensure that all families were covered. Since kiosk owners were remunerated based on the number of families trained, they were amongst the most enthusiastic advocates of the

[68] Rs 45 approximately equals US $ 1.

campaign. There was also a mechanism of community oversight, since the payment to the kiosk owner was given only on certification of satisfactory completion of the training by the local ward member and an independent community observer. At the height of the campaign, many centres stayed open all night, and the campaign itself resembled a popular family fair, with street plays, songs and colourful marches.

In all, over 5,80,000 persons in Malappuram district were trained over nine months, around 65 percent of whom were women. Fishermen, taxi drivers, petty tradesmen, government employees, teachers, social workers and tribals were amongst those trained. While the majority of trainees were in the age group of 25-40 years, there were significantly older people who participated enthusiastically.

While the e-literacy campaign proved to be hugely popular, the creation of Internet access proved more difficult. Although, initially, public and private service providers had agreed to extend connectivity, most subsequently backed out. It was therefore decided to go in for public bids and the contract was finally awarded to a relatively unknown company that had done pioneering work for the army in providing wireless radio access. Given the extreme diversity in terrain, and the inaccessibility of remote areas in the hilly parts of the district, it was decided to go in for a combination of hybrid technologies such as Wireless-in-Local Loop (WiLL), Wireless Internet Protocol in Local Loop (WiPLL), and WiFi.

Akshaya's path-breaking contribution was, particularly, the development of a new ICT-based service delivery and content paradigm. Six key areas of content – agriculture, education, health, environment, laws and e-governance – were identified. Expert public committees were then set up to identify the types of content, as well as a set of common standards and formats in which these were to be presented. The recommendations of the committees were publicized and feedback solicited from community leaders, content and domain experts. These standards were then given to content development teams for developing in the local language. The effort was to identify locally relevant and useful content that most reflected local needs and priorities. In the health sector, for instance, local health care institutions in the district were mapped for the first time and details of facilities, institution-wise, collated into an electronic database. Public health information on common health problems in the district, a list of institutions and the level of facilities available, simple preventive measures, and information for mothers on nutrition, the importance of vaccination, etc., were presented in attractive, layperson's language. Similarly, in agriculture, information was collected on various aspects including general agricultural information pertaining to the district, cropping patterns, infrastructure, research, local technologies, credit institutions, best practices and frequently asked questions. Content CDs were distributed to each Akshaya centre at a nominal cost. Efforts were also made to actively associate and educate local service providers in each of these sectors on the potential opportunities and benefits of utilizing the Akshaya centres to disseminate and popularize their products and services.

Local self-governments and communities have been enthusiastic users of e-services. For example, the district panchayat has utilized the services of the centres and their ICT-trained personnel to launch an e-learning programme for high school students called *Vijayabheri,* targeted at improving science and maths learning. Other significant community applications

that have been developed or are underway include a panchayat-sponsored health mapping programme (where health data relating to over 30,000 people from three panchayats was collected into a database for public health planning); an e-enabled agricultural information and services programme for local farmers; a community-based educational programme for school children; and skills development for women. Akshaya centres have also emerged as popular retail outlets while the centres themselves have proved to be popular meeting points for youth and women.

Key Outcomes of the Akshaya Experiment

The key outcomes of the project have been that, at the end of two years, 650 telecentres were set up across the district, 650,000 people trained in the basics of computers and the Internet, and a major programme launched for generating local language content. The project has generated 2,100 direct jobs in IT, and approximately the equivalent of another 1,500 indirectly. The project has also catalyzed a growing number of IT-based small and medium enterprises (SMEs), ranging from small outsourcing units, financial and e-commerce intermediaries, accounting firms and so on.

Around 400 Akshaya centres now function as local communication and service delivery hubs, dispensing a range of Internet and computer services, including data processing, accounting, e-commerce, e-governance, chat and browsing. Besides web browsing, e-mail and chat which are extremely popular, particularly amongst youth and families who have members in the Gulf, e-payments of utility bills, data processing and accounting have also emerged as other popular services. Large numbers of people, who were trained as part of the e-literacy programme, now use ICT tools at these centres for undertaking quotidian tasks.

While the costs of connectivity and content were publicly funded, the telecentre costs were funded by entrepreneurs from savings and loans, and the costs of training shared between the community/Local Self-Government Institutions (LSGIs) and the trainees. The business model of the project is similarly built around a strong, collaborative partnership between the LSGIs, the entrepreneurs and the community. A noteworthy impact of the project has been the close and organic links that the project has been able to foster between diverse groups of stakeholders, particularly between the entrepreneurs, the community user groups and the panchayats. An unanticipated outcome was the emergence of a number of entrepreneurs as community animators as a result of the implementation of the e-literacy campaign; and the consequent increase in their self-esteem and standing in the community.

Lessons Learnt

What is so distinctive about Akshaya, and what lessons does it offer in designing and implementing meaningful pro-poor ICT interventions?

Three distinctive ingredients comprise the core of the Akshaya model: inclusive access, an innovative multi-stakeholder partnership, and the creation of a new ICT enterprise and service delivery paradigm. A central element in the Akshaya model is that equity of access was an

explicit design objective of the project from inception. Despite the fact that various cost-effective public access models have been successfully demonstrated in developing countries, public policy initiatives have been largely inadequate and ineffective in this area. If ICTs are to make any developmental impact, this is an area that needs urgent redressal. In Akshaya, the spatial planning and location of the Akshaya centres to ensure equity of access to all parts of the district was one of the founding principles of the project.

The challenges of poverty and development are widely acknowledged to be multi-dimensional and interlinked. A majority of ICT4D strategies that are uni-dimensional and that ignore the multifaceted nature of the challenges involved have proved less than effective in solving the problems of development. Akshaya marks an integrated attempt to address the three issues of access, content and capacity holistically, viewing all three as equally significant in tackling the challenge of ICT4D. Conventional technologically-driven solutions have tended to focus exclusively on the supply side issues of ICTs, such as access or connectivity. However, innumerable examples have shown that supply side constraints represent only one part of the problem (usually the easier to resolve). Issues such as lack of capacities amongst the poor to absorb ICTs or absence of relevant content on the demand side have largely tended to be overlooked, with the consequent underutilization of infrastructural capacities. The mass e-literacy campaign, which is a singular feature of Akshaya, aimed primarily at capacity building amongst the poor, played a key role in creating and sustaining demand for ICTs.

A remarkable feature of Akshaya has thus been its innovative multi-layered architecture comprising three crucial ingredients: the basic provision of equitable access, a unique three way public-private community financing and business model, and a massive and unprecedented total capacity building campaign.

A common critique of technological solutions is that they are often top-down and therefore fail to address the genuine problems of the poor. A key distinction is that Akshaya actually evolved as a grass-roots response to the genuine needs of a community, rather than as a project designed by experts. Strong community involvement and leadership ensured local acceptability and ownership, which was a prerequisite for sustaining a mass e-literacy campaign of such magnitude.

The most significant outcome has been a bringing together of the community in a virtual networking, where people are empowered, enabled and induced to collaborate on common projects for social and economic advancement. It has opened windows to the world outside – windows of learning, of communication, and of opportunity. Akshaya has unleashed the communities' entrepreneurial energies, particularly among traditionally disadvantaged groups. One of the most striking impacts of Akshaya has been the visible self-confidence and access to opportunities among women, diminishing their historical social exclusion and allowing them to participate in social and economic transactions using gender-neutral venues and platforms provided by the Internet. In a community where women were rarely seen or heard, it is heartening to see them now going to the Akshaya centres on their own, seeking learning, self-expression and services. Akshaya thus seems set to emerge as an engine of social transformation in one of the most backward districts of the country.

What of the Future, and is Akshaya Sustainable?

Akshaya, in its first phase, has been carried forward on a wave of popular enthusiasm, powered by the novelty-appeal of technology, and the intense levels of incubation services provided by the project managers. Governmental and community handholding will have to continue for quite some more time, given the complexity and magnitude of the transition that is being attempted. In Akshaya, the stakeholders are not just a few entrepreneurs but the entire community, including its poorest and most marginalized groups; and the project has to demonstrate lasting economic benefits to these stakeholders if it is to be sustainable in the long run.

Out of the 630 centres that were originally set up, around 400 continue to operate viably, these are the ones which are able to innovate and adapt to the changing environment. The financial and technological models and frameworks underpinning Akshaya may have to evolve and undergo modification in response to the changing environment and the compulsions of economic viability, but the legacy of the project is likely to endure, demonstrating how a community-driven, inclusive model of ICT dissemination can bring about rapid and real social and economic transformation.

Chapter 2.5

Gender Issues in the Indian Software Outsourcing Industry

–Carol Upadhya

The major resource required by the software and services outsourcing (or IT, Information Technology) industry in India is a steady supply of highly educated technical labour or 'knowledge workers'.[69] Due to high attrition levels and the difficulty of attracting well-qualified employees, software companies have put in place employee-friendly Human Resources (HR) policies, which include gender-neutral and even women-friendly policies. The industry is considered to provide a good avenue for the employment of women, who have conventionally not opted for technical occupations; and computer programming is a more attractive option for female graduate engineers than many 'old economy' jobs. As a result, a large number of women have entered this field and now constitute about one-fourth of the workforce.

While IT companies make strong claims about equality of opportunity, our study of the IT workforce has revealed that the objective conditions of work in the software industry present greater obstacles to women than men, and that official policies of gender neutrality tend to obfuscate these gender issues. This paper explores some of the reasons for the marginalization of women in the software industry, and highlights the gap between the ideology of equal opportunity and the actuality of the gendering of software work.[70]

[69] The software and services industry is often referred to generically as the 'IT (Information Technology) industry', although technically 'IT' would include hardware as well as software. Following common usage, the terms 'IT' and 'software' have been used interchangeably in this paper to refer to this industry.

[70] This paper is based on a sociological study of the Indian IT/ ITES workforce in Bangalore and abroad. The study focuses primarily on software engineers, who constitute a new kind of global technical workforce (often referred to as 'knowledge workers'), in that they are highly educated, well paid, and internationally mobile. Most Indian software companies are global workplaces that operate through dispersed and virtual systems of organization and communication on projects outsourced primarily by companies in the West. One aim of the study is to explore the ways in which sociality, culture and identity among software engineers are being reshaped by the nature of the work and the workplace in the software outsourcing industry, including changes in gender relations. The study was carried out by A.R. Vasavi and myself, along with a research team, at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore, funded by the Indo-Dutch Programme for Alternatives in Development. Much of the data collected are yet to be analyzed, hence this paper is based more on our impressions gathered over one-and-a-half years of fieldwork and preliminary analysis of data.

Work in the Software Outsourcing Industry

The most important resource or input required for the software production and services industry is the availability of a flexible pool of educated technical labour. The current NASSCOM[71] figure for employment in the IT industry in Bangalore is about 150,000 (plus about 50,000 workers in the IT Enabled Services, or ITES sector), and close to one million in the country as a whole. Generally, software companies prefer to recruit engineering graduates, of which India churns out large numbers each year (about 350,000).[72] The southern states of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh have the highest number of engineering colleges, contributing to the growth of Bangalore as India's IT capital.

Gender issues in the software industry need to be understood within the context of the distinctive work culture and management systems that have developed in this sector, as well as the labour market and demographics of the workforce. First, there is a high degree of fluidity of employment in the IT job market. On the supply side, software engineers change jobs frequently to pursue better salaries or positions, and companies must compete to attract good quality personnel during boom periods. On the demand side, there is insecurity of employment, especially during economic downturns. There is also a high level of spatial mobility in this industry: employees are liable to be shifted between different centres or sent abroad frequently for 'on-site' assignments. As a result of these factors, IT employees tend to be highly itinerant, unable to put down roots in one place at least during the early years of their careers. The workforce itself is quite young (the majority being less than 30, with a median age of about 27), in tune with the recent origin and rapid growth of the industry. This means that a large proportion of IT professionals are young unmarried men and women, whose single status enhances the 'flexibility' of the workforce. As they grow older and get married, IT workers (especially women) look for more stability in their jobs, creating a potential source of conflict with their employers.

Second, Indian IT companies follow 'global' systems of management that espouse 'democratic' and 'open' work cultures and claim to have less hierarchical or 'flat' structures. Teamwork is crucial and stress is given to individual self-management. Under these new management systems, control over work is achieved through indirect or 'normative' techniques and flexible structures rather than direct methods of coercion and hierarchical control. Productivity depends on the internalization of company goals and work ethics by employees, and discipline is enforced as much by peer pressure by team members as by managers. These management techniques result in the individualization of work and impose an enhanced sense of personal responsibility on the employee to complete work given, regardless of whatever obstacles s/he may face.[73]

Third, individualization of work is linked to the notoriously long working hours that have become a key feature of the 'culture' of the Indian software industry: 10-12 hours is an average

[71] National Association of Software and Service Companies.
[72] NASSCOM. 2004. *Strategic Review 2004*. New Delhi: NASSCOM.
[73] Upadhya, Carol. 2005. Culture incorporated: control over work and workers in the Indian software outsourcing industry. Paper presented to international conference on New Global Workforces and Virtual Workplaces: Connections, Culture, and Control, National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore, 12-13 August 2005.

workday, while employees often work up to 14 hours, or even stay overnight in the office and work on weekends, when faced with a project deadline. It is taken for granted that employees will stay in the office at least till 7 or 8 in the evening (although often they come in only at 9.30 or 10 am). In part, this is due to the time difference between India and the client site, such that conference calls tend to take place in the evening when the working day in the US begins. These extended working hours are legitimized by the common policy of 'flexi-time', which in theory gives the employee freedom to choose his or her working hours but in practice means that they have to work as long as necessary to finish the task at hand. Although most companies have some sort of flexi-time policy, they also usually have 'core hours' during which everyone has to be in the office, which contributes to the extended working hours. In addition, even when there is no real work pressure, engineers tend to stay late in the office, either due to peer pressure or to their desire to show the boss that they are working hard.

The long working hours typical of the IT industry are also an outcome of the structure of outsourcing projects. Project estimates are usually made in terms of man-days based on an eight-hour day, but because the number of days required is usually underestimated (for various reasons), engineers are required to work much longer hours in order to meet the deadlines, which are rarely flexible. While most HR managers acknowledge that these long working hours lead to high stress levels and burnout and contribute to the high attrition rates, and a few companies have taken measures to limit working hours, it is clear that this pattern of overwork benefits the industry.

The effects of these management practices and policies on women are discussed in the following sections.

Women in the Software Industry and HR Policies

Women are under-represented in the Indian software industry, constituting about 23 percent of the IT workforce (NASSCOM 2004).[74] The major determinant of the adverse gender ratio appears to be the availability of female graduate engineers. In India as whole, only about 3.6 percent of women students at the graduate and post-graduate levels are enrolled in engineering courses.[75] The southern states have seen a rise in numbers of women opting for engineering: in Karnataka, 16 to 21 percent of students of engineering colleges are female.[76] As more and more women are taking engineering degrees, the gender ratio in the pool of potential IT hires is likely to increase; still, there are many factors that continue to inhibit girls from taking up science and technology courses.[77] Within engineering and science streams, computer science is considered to be a good option for girls because it leads to office-based work and is not associated with shop floor or dirty outdoor jobs, as are other engineering specializations.

[74] NASSCOM. 2004. *Strategic Review 2004*. New Delhi: NASSCOM.
This figure tallies with our own data collected from individual companies, whose gender ratios range from 15 to 30 percent. Most reported having about 20 percent women among software engineers.
[75] Government of Karnataka. 2004. Report of the Taskforce on Higher Education; Shaping Education in Karnataka. Bangalore: Department of Higher Education, Government of Karnataka. p 184.
[76] Ibid, p 189.
[77] While IT companies generally prefer engineering graduates, they also sometimes hire those with computer science degrees such as Master's in Computer Applications, which may have a higher proportion of women.

While women's preference for computer science courses reproduces the existing pattern of gendering in science and technology education and occupations, information technology-related professions appear to provide good opportunities for women to break into technology fields. However, there appear to be processes of exclusion operating even at the entry point of the IT industry. Software companies maintain that their hiring and promotion practices are gender neutral and that the proportion of women (ranging from 15 to 25 percent) reflects the proportion of women graduating from engineering colleges. But there is some evidence that married women with children are discriminated against at the hiring stage: an HR manager at a multinational software centre said that during the job interview they ask such women how they will manage their domestic responsibilities, whether there is a support system at home, and so on.

Some managers claim that they have been trying to improve the gender ratio in their workforces by formulating 'woman-friendly' policies, such as options for part-time work or working from home, provision of crèche, and so on. All companies allow three months' paid maternity leave as mandated by law, with an option for a further three months' unpaid leave. Several companies have instituted special programmes or organizations aimed at mentoring women and addressing their specific issues. Despite these efforts, women face certain barriers in the software industry that tend to inhibit their career advancement. This is reflected in the fact that women tend to be concentrated in the lower level jobs such as programming and testing, and underrepresented in higher level and managerial jobs such as architecture, consulting and project management.[78] The reasons for this are discussed below.

Obstacles to Career Growth

A major set of constraints to career growth for women is related to the work culture of software companies, which tends to put women engineers at a disadvantage when it comes to appraisals and promotions.

First, due to social and family reasons, many women are unwilling or unable to put in as many hours as their male counterparts. Unmarried women are less likely to be able to stay in the office till late night, unless there is a pressing need, because they may face objections from their parents or social disapproval. Many software engineers are young, unmarried men who come from outside Bangalore and share rented accommodation with a few other bachelors, and since they have no incentive to go home they prefer to stay back late in the office where they find a social life. Women rarely take part in this kind of informal socializing at the workplace, and in fact, the men might resent women's presence in the office after hours. Also, women need to reach home safely (although companies usually arrange for drops in the night). Thus while male engineers often stay late in the office to impress the boss, to complete work, or just to hang out, women are less likely to be free to do so.

[78] Another study also found significant "clustering" of women professionals at the lower end of the job hierarchy, "leading to feminization of certain service activities." Rothboeck, S., Vijayabaskar, M. and Gayathri, V. 2001. *Labour in the New Economy; The Case of the Indian Software Labour Market.* New Delhi: ILO p. 67.

Second, married women face additional constraints from their domestic responsibilities (from which married men usually escape) that require them to leave office at a reasonable hour. Finding an adequate support system for children is a major issue for women: apart from long working hours, many spend at least two hours commuting between home and office, which means leaving children for 10 to 12 hours a day. A senior woman executive acknowledged that the long hours typical of software companies are most stressful for women, especially those with young children.

Because of these constraints, when there is work pressure or an urgent deadline to meet, women are often faulted by their male colleagues for being unavailable or not pulling their weight in the team: the perceived unwillingness of women to put in the required work in such a high pressure job produces resentment and a tendency to marginalize women.[79] This also puts women at a disadvantage at the time of appraisal or assignment of work, because they are seen as less dedicated. Men in all-male teams have been known to protest when there is talk of recruiting a female engineer, which they believe would not only lower the performance rating of the team but would also spoil the working atmosphere of male camaraderie and general informality (in which off-colour jokes, for instance, are permitted). The system of control through peer pressure within the team can be turned against women, who in any case are in a minority, putting subtle pressure on them and marginalizing them when they do not come up to the expectations of other team members. For instance, the allotment of work within the team is done by the team leader through a process of negotiation with the engineers: women may be given less responsible tasks because they are perceived as unable or unwilling to handle more difficult or time consuming jobs.

Another impediment to career growth for women is the requirement for frequent travel and short- or long-term on-site assignments. While unmarried women usually accept on-site assignments eagerly, and one finds quite a few women working abroad along with their male colleagues without much difficulty, married women prefer not to take up these assignments due to domestic or social pressures. While an engineer cannot be forced by the company to go on-site, it does affect one's career growth to consistently refuse such assignments.

The pressure of travel and the long hours that are ubiquitous in software development lead more women to opt for jobs in testing or 'quality assurance' or other such low-end jobs, rather than in software development itself. These jobs are usually paid less and offer fewer channels for growth, yet women often prefer them because they tend to have regular hours with little chance of being sent abroad. This pattern of self-selection tends to push women towards the bottom of the heap in terms of status and earning power, and is producing a pattern of gendering of work in the IT industry. Although one does find many women tech leads, architects, and even senior managers in the industry, the proportion of women steadily declines the higher up the ladder one goes. Due to the same constraints, women engineers tend to stay in the same company for longer periods than men – their mobility is usually constrained by the husband's career and other domestic issues. Given that job-hopping is a primary means of career advancement in the IT industry, this puts yet another impediment on women's upward mobility.

[79] Data from one study indicate that women indeed put in fewer hours than their male counterparts (Rothboeck, *et al* 2001: 45), but this could be an artefact of the differential distribution of men and women in different types of work.

Childbearing and childcare pose major problems for women in the IT industry. Most companies give three month's maternity leave with the option of an additional three months' unpaid leave, and some offer women the option of returning to work after maternity leave on a part-time or consultancy basis, or may allow them to work from home for a year or more. Some companies even allow women to take leave without pay for a year. However, such measures provide only temporary respite to the problem of juggling childrearing with work. Even though some companies provide crèches, we found that most women do not avail of them. They prefer to make their own arrangements for childcare at home or at a private crèche – often because of the long distances they have to travel to work. Young IT couples employ various strategies to manage their domestic situation, from heavy dependence on servants and crèches, to inviting one or the other set of parents to live with them. Some couples even leave their children with grandparents in India when they are working abroad. But making and maintaining these arrangements often only add to the stress on women. Because of these difficulties, many women postpone having children until they feel they are more 'settled', and many others leave employment after they have children, unable to cope with the pressure.

Interruptions in women's careers due to childbearing have particularly adverse effects on their growth, given the rapid changes in technology and the need to keep abreast of new developments. Women often find it difficult to make up for the loss of experience and learning during their maternity leave. A 29-year-old female software engineer working in a multinational, who was expecting at the time of interview, said that she is planning to take six months' leave (including three months without pay) and then return to work. She agreed that this decision would affect her career growth:

> "Yes, it surely affects it. Taking a gap all of a sudden will affect your career. Promotions are due in April. When they draw objectives for the new role, what will they be able to do with me? If it is a long-term project, it is okay. But we only have short-term projects. There will be performance review in January. I am planning to go back only in November or December. How can they assess my performance if I have worked only for a month? I surely will have forgotten many things when I go back. There will be another round of training. One year will be wasted. But it is the same with all women. I am not an exception."

She also said that her recent refusal to take up an on-site assignment, due to family pressures, had cost her a promotion.

Yet another factor that affects women's careers is the husband's career. According to HR managers, the main reason that men leave their jobs is because they have a better offers, whereas women usually leave when they get married, when they have children, or because of the husband moving. When both husband and wife work in the IT industry, the husband's job usually takes priority in case of transfer or overseas assignment, which means that the wife must forego opportunities or else they have to live apart. But managers portray this asymmetry as a matter of personal choice:

> "The career is more important for men than it is for women. After completing engineering, many women get married and go abroad to join their husband. Every other day, I get requests from women engineers for transfers. They would want a transfer to Delhi, Cochin, etc., because their husbands have gotten a job there. They tell me if we don't transfer them, they would quit. Man's career is more important for our society. Wherever the husband gets the job, the wife should follow."

'Gender Neutrality' and Individualization of Responsibility

Although some managers acknowledge these structural and social constraints on women's careers in IT, they maintain the stance of gender neutrality. But by arguing that they do not distinguish between men and women in selection or promotions, they are able throw responsibility for stagnation or failure back onto the individual employee. In her narrative about the problems that women face in the IT industry, a senior manager in a large software services company acknowledged that men have faster career growth and outlined the constraints on women's mobility, but she went on to attribute these problems to inadequacies in women themselves, especially their lack of ambition:

> "Although there are some women who are ambitious, men are always more aggressive. Women don't push themselves forward as much as men do. It is a negative point for women. Men want to go ahead in the race more than women want to."

Another manager in the same company argued that it was because women tend to quit their jobs after they get married that fewer women reach the project manager level. But another informant acknowledged that women had slower career growth due to internal reasons:

> "Women don't move up. If you see two people – one man, another woman – with eight years of experience, you would see that the man would have gotten promoted faster than the woman. Moving up the ladder is very stressful."

Although managers tend to blame women themselves for this pattern, at least one senior manager admitted that women are sometimes discriminated against on the basis of gender, which puts a barrier on upward mobility:

> "When there are constraints for women, especially when they have small kids, managers hesitate to give difficult projects for them. If the project requires lots of efforts and time, managers might prefer men over such women … When managers prefer men for difficult projects, women lose out on opportunities. Only if you get tough ones, you will prove your worth. If you don't get them, how do you prove your abilities?"

These quotes illustrate the kind of discursive gymnastics that managers in the software industry perform in order to reconcile their image of having highly enlightened and woman-friendly HR policies and management practices, with the fact that there are many aspects of work that hinder full and successful participation by women. While the structural factors that operate to create gender discrimination are sometimes recognized, more often the blame is placed on individuals or on society at large. As a result, IT companies do not see a role for themselves in creating a more conducive working atmosphere for women (and men), despite their claims to being 'responsible corporate citizens'.

Interpersonal Relations, Networking, and Gender at the Workplace

Workplaces reflect the norms and structures of the larger society, which cannot be entirely erased by enlightened management practices, training programmes, and the like. Despite the fact that male and female engineers apparently work easily together in teams, social interaction in software companies, as in other workplaces, is gendered. This tends to work against the interests of women, who are unable to network and fit into male-dominated social groups in the same way as men, and may also adversely affect the performance of women managers.

An important feature of the work culture of the IT industry (or of any industry) is the operation of informal knowledge networks and social networks, participation in which is important for success. As a senior woman manager said:

> "Networking is a major issue among women. As soon as they finish work, they go home. There is so much work at home that she will not be able to stay back in the office for a cup of coffee or be able to go out with men colleagues for beer, dinner, etc. So she misses out on a lot of informal information flows. She would not know what's happening in the industry, what's the inside story. Women are usually not into the gossip circles."

Women may be excluded from informal networks not only because of their own inability to participate, but also because male colleagues may be uncomfortable interacting with women on par with other men:

> "When women enter IT companies, they are mentally prepared to be in the minority. Networking among women workers is also very strong. But guys have a problem and don't know how to deal with women. They find it difficult to develop good working relationships when they are cross-gender."

Despite the several obstacles to career mobility mentioned above, a number of women have moved into management positions in software companies and are leading teams, projects or groups consisting of both male and female engineers. But women managers face their own set of problems. While most men deny that they have difficulty reporting to a woman boss, gender does sometimes become an issue. One HR manager reported that many engineers

were "not used to reporting to a lady boss" and have difficulty even working with female colleagues. When this comment was put to a senior woman manager, her response was:

> "One thing is for sure, we feel that there is lot of ego among men. In some cases I too have seen that. They are not very comfortable reporting to me. Of course it's all in our hands to manage it. If you are authoritarian, people don't listen to you. The current generation does not expect authoritative bosses, they want participative management."

Although software companies value informality in the workplace, cross-gender interactions tend to be more formal, which affects the functioning of women managers:

> "Informality of relationship is very rare across gender. When there is a lady boss, there is a clear gap between her and the rest of the team. Ladies also miss out parties after office."

Software companies emphasize informal, non-hierarchical management systems based on networks and teams, which depend on the development of interpersonal relationships and 'team spirit' rather than bureaucratic structures. But by maintaining the official line of 'gender neutrality', they fail to acknowledge that gender continues to be the primary determining factor in social relationships and so may become an obstacle to the smooth functioning of teams as well as effective management by women.

Sexual Harassment

A major indicator of the nature of gender relations in the workplace is the incidence of sexual harassment. Most HR managers of software companies deny that sexual harassment is a major issue. Nonetheless, most of the larger companies have set up committees and procedures to handle such cases in accordance with the Supreme Court directives on sexual harassment at the workplace. Despite this, complaints usually end up in grievance committees, which have no set norms for punishing offenders. One executive said, "If it is a one-off case and the accused is really repentant, we let him go. We give punishments depending on the level of misbehaviour." In this company, punishments for sexual harassment have ranged from termination to a simple apology; an offender may not be given on-site assignments, or his promotions held up, or it might adversely affect his appraisal. In many cases, the complaint never makes it to any committee – it is hushed up, the accuser is paid off, and the offender (usually a manager or someone senior to the complaining woman) remains in his position.

At least one of the software majors has initiated an anti-sexual harassment programme, through which they try to create sensitivity on the issue through activities such as a special orientation session for women to inform them about their rights and the avenues for redress. The coordinator of this initiative said that only after four years of the functioning of this programme are women starting to come forward with complaints:

> "It has not happened overnight. It has taken a long time for women to break social barriers and come out with complaints. Earlier retaliation and confidentiality issues were inhibiting women from coming out with their complaints in the open."

Their committee has handled a number of cases, from "simple cases to complicated and extreme cases". Complaints ranged from keeping objectionable pictures on the desktop, to calling for dates, sending obscene matter over e-mails, and so on. But she maintained that the situation is "not alarming" and that what is needed is to create awareness about what is inappropriate behaviour and to spread the message that harassment is punishable. This is because "many times it is innocent – he assumes that the girl likes him". Other managers also argued that such behaviour is usually due to ignorance or immaturity:

> "Though there is no sexual harassment in the strictest sense of the term here, techies show immaturity as they are very young. They could be using objectionable wallpapers or screensavers without realizing that this would create a hostile environment for fellow employee; 90 percent of these cases are unintentional to start with."

Contradicting himself, this HR manager then admitted that most offenders are senior managers (harassing their subordinates) rather than software engineers, implying that the offenders are not all that young.

Although industry spokespersons deny that sexual harassment is a major issue, the Labour Commissioner's office has received a number of complaints from IT employees. However, the Labour Department does not have the power to act on such complaints, unless it is a police case, nor does it conduct inspections of IT companies to see whether they have established committees to handle sexual harassment cases. In any case, the IT industry is exempt from the Industrial Standing Orders, in which the Supreme Court guidelines are incorporated. In short, there is no regulatory framework in place to force companies to take the problem of sexual harassment seriously. While this issue is, of course, not specific to the IT industry, the government has a 'hands off' policy towards this sector in general, which means that such cases are even less likely to find redress. Industry spokespersons argue that the industry itself should evolve a common code of 'best practices' that would provide a framework for dealing with this issue, but at present it is up to individual companies to establish and enforce a policy on sexual harassment.

Concluding Remarks

The software outsourcing industry in India claims to provide an employee-friendly and gender-neutral working environment, and software engineering as a profession has attracted many women who, for the first time, are coming into technical and managerial careers in large numbers. Software companies pride themselves on their enlightened HR policies and global management practices, and make strong claims about equality of opportunity and meritocracy. Yet the reality is somewhat different from the image that has been created: the working

conditions and management systems in this industry present greater obstacles to women than men in terms of entry, retention and career growth. Long working hours, a high pressure work atmosphere structured by unreasonable deadlines, and the need to travel abroad, are factors that force many women to drop out of the industry or to stagnate in lower-end jobs. The stress in the management system on informal networking and teamwork also tends to exclude women, due to the predominance of men in the industry and the reproduction of gendered social relations in the workplace.

HR managers and corporate leaders fail to recognize that although they might treat women employees on par with men and even provide special facilities to cater to their needs, women still live in a gendered society and highly unequal domestic situations. While software companies may be 'global' workplaces that attempt to divorce themselves from the larger society, relationships at work continue to be shaped by the conflictual and asymmetrical gender relations that prevail more broadly within the Indian middle class. In clinging to the principles of meritocracy and gender neutrality, and in attributing responsibility for failure and success in a career to individual choice and ability, these companies abdicate any responsibility for countering gender inequalities in the workplace. While a balanced view must recognize that the software industry has provided new employment opportunities to women, and that IT work is clearly not the more exploitative form of work available, it nonetheless is necessary not to uncritically accept the image that the software industry has created for itself.

The problems faced by female software engineers stem from a larger issue that affects both men and women in the software industry: the profitability of software companies depends on extracting the maximum work out of employees (in terms of hours of work), and companies are not answerable to the state or to unions for their labour practices. Through their intensive image-building exercises, the large companies (especially Indian software services companies) can claim to have very enlightened HR policies while at the same time engaging in what can only be called super-exploitation of labour. The immunity that the software industry enjoys from most forms of government regulation extends even to issues such as sexual harassment. The industry's mantra is that it should be self-regulating on all fronts by developing models and codes of 'best practices' that can be voluntarily adopted by companies. But it remains to be seen whether the industry will, of its own accord, address not only gender issues in the workplace, but also labour issues such as overwork or use of contract labour, or broader social issues such as reservations or affirmative action in the private sector.

Part 3

Women and Media in the Information Society

Local Media and Women's Identity Articulation
– *Tasneem Ahmar*

Community Media and Women: Transforming Silence into Speech
– *Vinod Pavarala, Kanchan K. Malik and Janardhan Rao Cheeli*

Diversity as Casualty: Gender in the Time of Media Globalization
– *Ammu Joseph*

Chapter 3.1

Local Media and Women's Identity Articulation

–Tasneem Ahmar

Although radio listenership in Pakistan was steadily diminishing till a decade ago, the arrival of private FM channels in the mid 1990s changed this trend and provided a considerable boost to broadcasting. Currently there are numerous private radio stations operating throughout the country attracting mostly the younger generation with their heavy focus on entertainment and music-based programming. However, one must acknowledge the initiatives of some channels that are airing programmes aimed towards providing an alternative to programmes that usually portray women in stereotypical ways.

Generally, issue-based programmes have failed to capture the attention of the young and the casual listeners of FM channels. However, these programmes in Urdu (which claim to be high quality, non-sexist and rights-based) can be said to have given women a chance to express themselves through case studies, oral testimonies and greater visibility. These programmes cover a whole variety of themes, including HIV/AIDS, trafficking, prostitution, drug abuse and reproductive health. These issues are considered taboo in a conservative society like Pakistan, despite the pressing urgency for an open discussion aimed towards empowering women and sensitizing men.

This paper focuses on *if and how* FM radio channels can be effective instruments in putting forward the true face of Pakistani women's empowerment and looks at the issue of local media and women's identity articulation through these questions:

- What are the scope and limitations of these channels, given the fact that they are urban-based?
- Who and what determines their policies with special reference to commercialism versus professionalism?
- What is their scorecard vis-à-vis Pakistani women's portrayal and representation?
- Do these channels reinforce the stereotypical images of women?
- What feedback mechanism do they have to gauge listeners' responses and examine any attitudinal changes?
- Are there any initiatives to increase the access of the general public, especially women, to these programmes through the Internet or women's listening groups?

For a considerable period of time, radio was a pampered government department in Pakistan. There were ample funds which were made readily available whenever required, leading to rapid expansion. Soon new and well-equipped transmitting stations, broadcasting houses and receiving centres were established throughout the country. However, the mid-1960s saw the advent of television which gained immense and immediate public popularity. Although radio had an edge over television – it was still cheaply available, did not need electricity to operate, had such an extensive reach, and the programmes were available in many languages – it did fall prey to the more effective and glamorous medium of television in most parts of the country. Thus, radio was almost reduced to a poor cousin of television and it is no surprise that today it receives only 2.43 percent of the total national advertising expenditure (as opposed to almost 50 percent for television).

The changes in Pakistan's media scenario are interesting to note. According to one analysis,[1] in the past few years, "Pakistan has moved from being a low media-consuming nation to one with active and interactive media consumers." Here are some examples of how far the country has moved:

- From one channel to an average of 40.
- From one movie a week to about 15 a day.
- From three dramas a week to about three a day, on every Pakistani channel.
- From one music programme a week to 24-hour music channels.
- From mass broadcast to niche broadcast (Discovery, National Geographic, BBC Food, Star Movies, Comedy Channel, Sailing, etc.).
- From the news at 9 pm to a 24-hour news channel.
- From one major newspaper and two or three magazine to a countless number of publications.
- From morning papers only to afternoon and evening papers.
- From e-mail to Internet broadcast.

For nearly 20 years, radio, in this context the Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation, the one and only State-owned channel, has been gradually losing audiences in the country to television, initially in the urban areas and subsequently in the rural areas as well. For the most part, radio is either listened to by people who do not have access to television, or are on the move, or those who do not have access to print media because of lack of literacy. But even then, it enjoys a sizable listener base. According to one estimate, radio had an audience base of 23 million in 2002, 18 million adults and 5 million children. Radio is still very cost-effective and influential, especially in the rural areas where almost 65 percent of the population lives. It is still an ideal medium for programming and advertising and is exclusively aimed at the non-literate rural heartland. According to some reports, while music rules the official radio with 48 percent of airtime, religious programmes stand second with 12.5 percent, and news and current affairs account for 11 percent. Women, children and labour-related programmes, all combined are allocated a measly 5 percent, whereas rural and farm-based programmes account for 10

[1] From "Media Houses: The Right Place and the Right Time", September-October 2004.

percent, others include sports, drama/features, publicity campaigns and science, technology and health. This then has been the pattern of the official radio station for decades. No significant change has been introduced to change the programming pattern or the content. Little wonder then that radio lost its popularity almost totally in the urban areas.

The introduction of FM radio in Pakistan in the 1990s gave a new face to this medium and opened up new avenues for it to reengineer itself. The private radio channel FM 100, transmitting from three major cities, has built up a sizable listenership of around 2 million people. The public-sector FM 101 channel, owned by the Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation, has similarly done well and is estimated to command nearly one-third of the share in FM radio audiences. The FM radio market in the country is all set for a complete new turn due to a number of licenses issued by the regulatory authority in 2002-2003 for establishing private FM radio stations in various cities. Today, there are more than four dozen FM channels all across Pakistan, airing programmes that are a mix of entertainment, information and education. A new radio culture is emerging. Urban Pakistan is once again becoming addicted to radio as a medium. There is not a vehicle, be it a car, a bus or a truck, that does not tune into an FM channel of its choice. This has given a definite boost to the music industry in Pakistan and has revived the days when one would eagerly wait for the top 10 charts. But is this all that these FM channels are meant to do? The challenge faced by these channels is in achieving a balance between commercialism and public service broadcasting, and many channels are caught in this rather tough decision of how much entertainment is justified when there is so much social misery, injustice and inequality.

The Uks Radio Project

A new breed of radio programmes, such as the Uks Radio Project, is exploring and experimenting with the use of FM radio to address commitment to social issues. This is the first women's radio project in Pakistan. It started with a programme called *Meri Awaz Sunno* (Listen to My Voice), and is now producing commissioned issue-based programmes that include a 10-programme series on 'Poverty, Peace and Justice', 'HIV/AIDS', and 'Women and MDGs'. The project has explored themes like honour killing (*karo kari*) through a group of women radio producers, and is thus trying to bring the voices and concerns of a majority of Pakistani women to the air waves.

The project is an initiative of Uks, which is a research, resource and publication centre dedicated to the cause of gender equality and women's development. The centre has worked over the years to improve the coverage and participation of women in Pakistani media. The word 'Uks' is an Urdu term meaning 'reflection'. At Uks, a team of professional media persons and research staff aims to promote the reflection of a neutral, balanced and unbiased approach to women and women's issues within and through the media. This includes:

- Creating awareness among people, policy makers and other government agencies that women's rights are human rights.
- Media and gender sensitization through monitoring, advocacy and mobilization on various issues.

- Creating awareness regarding important development issues.
- Analysing and debating State policies in development areas.
- Exploring media messages affecting gender and women's empowerment; how these messages are created and distributed, with a special focus on the messages regarding women's status in society.
- Examining how various social, economic, health and political issues can be dealt with effectively through an understanding of the gender bias among media persons, from commercial, popular or art cinema, stage dramas, radio and television commercial spots, print media and graffiti.
- Providing gender sensitization training and awareness to media persons.
- Promoting a neutral, unbiased and balanced attitude towards women in media.
- Finding out to what extent the media submit to the use of derogatory or offensive language while reporting on women.
- Investigating the causes of sexist and derogatory image portrayal, and analyzing structural, cultural and attitudinal factors.
- Helping the development of alternative concepts, approaches and language uses while dealing with women.
- Generating data essential for evaluation and correction of press policies.
- Providing a resource material base with a data bank on issues relating to women and/in media.
- Bringing out women's potential and helping them utilize it to meet their needs.

The centre has the support of many journalists, human rights and women's rights activists, academics, and other like-minded groups.

In 2003, with the launch of *Meri Awaz Sunno,* a collaboration with Internews, a US-based media organization, the centre reached an important landmark. The programme, a 15-minute, bi-weekly in Urdu, is the first radio programme in Pakistan for women and by women. The launch of the programme was extensively covered by national newspapers and hailed as a pioneering effort in the realm of radio and broadcasting. This was the first time an all-female team of radio producers had ventured into producing serious, issue-based and totally non-commercial programmes. Each week was a challenge; each day was a learning experience. The editorial meetings had much to worry about, from non-availability of research material to the non-cooperation of government departments in parting with information. It took considerable effort and persuasion skills to convince people (generally men) that Uks meant business, that *Meri Awaz Sunno* was not the ordinary, run-of-the-mill radio programme. Gradually, the programme started to be noticed and acknowledged. Uks' programmes were being aired by many FM channels. One of them increased the programme duration from 15 to 30 minutes by inviting the producers to go live after the programme was aired to discuss the contents with a guest or take calls and respond to letters and e-mail. This was a big success.

Covering the Public Forums

Uks, in collaboration with The Asia Foundation, also produced a series of 10 radio programmes *Ghurbat, Amn aur Insaf* (Poverty, Peace and Justice) under its project, Supporting Democratic Development in Pakistan. Based on the issues of democracy and good governance, and on

capturing the public forums held by The Asia Foundation in various parts of Pakistan, these programmes are non-commercial and dedicated to public interest broadcasting.

As Qudsia Mehmood, Uks' radio producer and coordinator, puts it:

> "I got to work throughout the length and the breadth of the country including Noushehro Feroz, Shikarpur, Hyderabad, Karachi, Mitthi, Mansehra and Lahore. My most memorable experience was in Naushehro Feroz's public forum where people were amazed to learn that a woman had travelled alone from Islamabad to record the forum's proceedings. The social welfare officer acknowledged my initiative on stage as well. Upon learning of my intent to record a story on *karo kari* (honour killings) in Shikarpur, most people warned me of the hazards involved in such an undertaking and expressed concerns over my safety. Similarly, in Shikarpur, a woman journalist travelling on her own surprised most people. All these experiences provided much needed encouragement. Not only did these programmes boost my self-confidence but they also helped me explore the culture, traditions, and living conditions prevailing in different parts of the country. I got to listen to people's problems and project them through my radio programme. The project was not without its challenges. When I went to Mitthi in Thar to participate in a public forum, I was greatly disturbed by the absence of women. Similarly, the inter-provincial forum held in Lahore was marred by low attendance in general. All these factors complicated the process of putting the programme together. I found that forums which employed interactive theatre to educate the audience on poverty, peace and justice, were an interesting and unusual experience. Personally I think that poverty, peace and justice are the most pressing issues faced by our country and cannot be solved through a few forums. Such efforts need to be sustained in future as well."

The primary objective of the programme was dissemination of information on poverty, peace and justice. The production team looked into the desired impact of the public forum, reviewed the audience's reaction with a critical eye, and analyzed its strengths and weaknesses. In a way, the producers were a third entity in the communication process initiated by the forums and were able to pick up issues which might have been otherwise missed.

The programmes are not entertainment-oriented, but Uks' radio team has tried to bring in some colour by including on-location folk music and natural sound bytes, thus trying to make these thought-provoking programmes more stimulating. Traditions, customs and prevailing lifestyles in different parts of the country were captured in the programme's various segments. The team of producers travelled all across Pakistan, from Pishin to Nowshera, and from Quetta to Mithi, covering a number of public forums, and capturing stories which are truly representative of Pakistan. Another producer, Asif Faruqui, recollects his experience:

"It was quite a unique experience for me to cover the public forums organized by The Asia Foundation at various far reaching areas of the country. I travelled to Malir to witness the first of many public forums I attended during the last four weeks. I am sure most people are familiar with Malir as just another district of Karachi and do not associate anything interesting or noteworthy with it. But when I reached there and met people, it turned out to be a very different story.

I did not know the meanings of word Malir before the journey. It means 'the valley of gardens'. But the Malir as I saw was no 'Malir' in the literal sense of the word. During the public forum and interactive theatre, I was told that most of Malir's once rich gardens have dried up for lack of water. The farmers have been left without work, and poverty has struck the towns of Malir really very badly. All this came up for discussion at the public forum. Some of the statements made by the illiterate farmers were eye-opening. In my view the fact that people spoke their hearts out was the beauty of these forums.

Travel to the distant border town of Shakargarh was another experience I will never forget. I cannot forget the tears I saw in the eyes of Chaudhary Muhammad Ashraf of village Bheri. He was young and 'rich' by the standards of Bheri village but frequent migrations had worn him out physically and mentally. His village was on the border between India and Pakistan and has been vacated whenever diplomatic and military tensions between the two countries rose.

The level of political awareness amongst the people of Pashin, a small town in Balochistan, really amazed me. The kind of discussion I heard in that backward area of our country was something I never expected. Young men and women not only knew the problems of our country and society but they came up with enlightened insight into the solutions too.

After attending the public forums, I now have more faith in our people than ever before. I think poverty and illiteracy have not dampened the souls and hearts of our people. They can think and they understand, and have awareness of their issues and problems. All they need is support from within the community to rise and raise their voice for their rights."

Unique in many ways, this programme has been welcomed by some FM radio channels in the country who agreed to broadcast them as a public service messages (others are too entertainment-focused to even consider the airing of any kind of serious programme). As mentioned earlier, the FM radio channels are a good option for awareness-raising on women's issues, but they have their own limitations, the foremost being the total takeover by commercial programmes to earn good revenues. Most of the time, these are thorough music-based programmes with some information and a few slots for features and stories. Some channels are also available online, thus broadening the horizon and impact of the programmes.

The channels that play Uks' programmes have given excellent feedback. According to Baseer Naved of Mast FM103, these programmes, especially the 15-minute series on 'Poverty, Peace and Justice', have been so well received by the public that they had to increase the time to one hour in order to include live discussions on the issue of the day. Dr Shahjehan Syed of FM107, campus radio, Peshawar claims:

> "Through these thought-provoking programmes, we have been able to bring women's issues on our agenda and now we hope that they will be taken up by concerned authorities."

Assessing the Uks Radio Project

Uks believes that its radio project has not only had a social impact but has greatly empowered its all-woman team.

The project is an attempt to rectify conditions arising from the abysmally low percentage of women journalists in the country, which stands at a mere 3 percent, as well as to infuse a culture of investigative reporting, largely missing from local journalistic traditions. Women who have not ventured out of their homes due to socio-cultural pressures compounded by religious fundamentalism, claustrophobic existence and restricted movements find relief in these programmes that give them a chance to express themselves and at times provides a platform to amplify women's voices and concerns.

The programmes have brought to light the hitherto unaddressed gender perspectives on different social issues such as HIV/AIDS, reproductive health, prostitution, human trafficking, etc. Research into such challenging topics has added to the team's individual learning and heightened their own levels of awareness. The programmes take up many issues that are of interest to women in Pakistan, including those that are important but unconventional and which in a conservative society like Pakistan are considered taboo topics despite the pressing urgency for an open discussion.

Uks' radio programme makes use of different segments to provide a developmental perspective on issues. These vary from studio-based interviews, locational stories, and oral testimonies to vox-pops (public voices). The productions have tried to challenge stereotypical perceptions of various issues. That such issues are covered by an all-woman team (barring a few exceptions) is in itself unique and points to mindset change concerning gender roles in Pakistani society. The radio project provides an alternative to other women's programmes, which usually portray women in stereotypical ways.

Despite the challenges of working in the field (particularly regarding programmes dealing with the red light area in Lahore or human trafficking in the South of the country), as well as the various constraints faced by women journalists, the team comes up with programmes that are novel in their concepts and thoroughly professional in their handling of sensitive issues.

Another highlight of the radio project is the team's proficiency in working in different capacities. The team successfully handles many different aspects of broadcast journalism from concept creation to scriptwriting, presenting, research, editing and the handling of all technical features. The producers come from diverse backgrounds and have considerable experience in journalism.

Although issues pertaining to poverty, peace and justice have been discussed, analyzed and presented at length in the media, the project has looked at these issues from a human angle rather than reducing them to mere facts and figures. Vast topics like poverty, peace and justice have been narrowed down into concrete stories and issues. While the team has been meticulous in its research and analysis, no feature, story, discussion or interview was considered complete without a human interest angle, making for a well-rounded study of the issue at hand.

The team also provides in-house trainings to the producers of upcoming radio stations to enable them to do gender-sensitive reporting.

Uks is now the only NGO in Pakistan that owns its own production house. The production facility also complements its efforts in fostering awareness-raising in the print media as well. One of the major reasons for stereotypical and derogatory projection of women in Pakistani media is the under-representation of women in the media as journalists and broadcasters. By training a team of women journalists and with an all-woman production house, Uks has contributed in its own way to rectifying the under-representation of women in mainstream media.

The project has also made a conscious effort to include a male producer and sensitize him on different issues. For example, he was encouraged to give more weightage and prominence to women's views by reversing the order in which views were presented with women's voices appearing first followed by male voices.

The Way Forward

Radio has been an effective instrument in bringing together women from varied backgrounds. More high-quality, gender-sensitive, rights-based programmes in Urdu and other languages must be produced to help achieve the following:

- **Linking communications through the networking of FM channels**
  There is a need to bring the FM channels closer to each other through a networking system. Uks has already proposed its willingness to act as a focal point where gender-based radio reports could be produced and then lifted by many FM channels across Pakistan. This will bring down the cost of producing individual programmes and also bring the FMs closer to each other.

- **Empowering women and sensitizing men towards a gender-sensitive society**
  Radio is a very powerful medium and can play an important role in shaping gender identities. It can be utilized to counter the tendency of most media outlets to create a stereotypical gender ideology by projecting women's role only in the reproductive

sphere. There should be more radio programmes based on women successfully performing multiple roles as mothers and wives, as workers and as managers of their community.

- **Giving voices to case studies, oral testimonies of struggles and the achievements of women**
  This should be encouraged by FM channels and more programmes on gender equality and equity should be produced and aired. This would help develop a sensitive attitude towards the issue of women's development. It would also work towards their rights as well as the broader struggle for social justice. By portraying the stories of rural women, these programmes would be putting forward the true face of women's empowerment.

Women's radio programmes are here to stay. These programmes are giving a voice to millions of silent women to be heard as individuals who have their own identity. The sooner that FM channels acknowledge this the better would be their impact on society.

Chapter 3.2

Community Media and Women: Transforming Silence into Speech

–Vinod Pavarala, Kanchan K. Malik and Janardhan Rao Cheeli

Participatory communication for development envisages, among other things, democratized and decentralized media systems as key agents of empowerment for those who have traditionally been socially, culturally, economically and politically marginalized. Feminist activists and women's movements have argued that the conventional ideology of male superiority and the control of productive resources by men have affected women's options and opportunities for a better life. "Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women" is one of the core MDGs stated in the Millennium Declaration adopted by all 189-member states of the UN General Assembly in 2000. This paper, through case studies of ongoing experiments with community media by civil society organizations in India, attempts to reflect on women's involvement at various stages of the project, their participation in the programmes and enhancement in their capabilities to communicate and develop messages. Some of the questions to which answers were sought from field experiences include:

- Are women engaging actively in critical reception of community radio and participatory video programmes?
- To what extent is women's participation discernible in the various stages of the initiative? Do women's issues and indigenous ideas get transformed into radio programmes? What is the media competency among women?
- Have community-driven media initiatives helped in creating new mediated discourses that amplify the voices and concerns of marginalized rural women and serve as a platform for expression of alternative development strategies?
- How and to what extent are women in grass-roots communication creating avenues for democratic communication and fostering social change? What role is communication playing in activating women's alternatives to support their social struggles?

The paper begins by examining the intersections of development frameworks and feminist theorizing, and how they have been influenced by debates and critiques of globalization. The two main feminist development frameworks – WID and GAD – have stirred gender mainstreaming practices, many of which address issues of regional and cultural differences. This part also discusses how the recent approaches to development have moved away from their preoccupation with top-down economic growth and towards social and participatory

development practices that are more inclusive. The aim of these approaches seems to be enlargement of people's choices and human capabilities.

The two powerful movements, of gender and of participation, have generated major implications for the role of communication in transforming the rhetoric of local level development into reality. The relationship, intersections, paradoxes and synergies among the discourses originating in development, communication and feminist scholarships offer insights into a new agenda for empowerment of women, which is discussed in part two of the paper. The theoretical and conceptual framework derived from these discussions is then applied to examine gender as an analytical category in the following case studies of community radio and participatory video initiatives at the grass-roots level from different states of India:

- Community radio project of Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan (KMVS), Gujarat
- Community radio project of Alternative for India Development (AID), Daltongunj, Jharkhand
- Community radio and participatory video projects of Deccan Development Society (DDS), Pastapur, Andhra Pradesh
- Community radio project of Voices, at Budhikote, Karnataka
- Participatory video project of Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), Ahmedabad, Gujarat.

Gender and Participatory Development

"Look at the world through women's eyes," proclaimed a poster at the venue of the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in September 1995. In the context of development, this is an indispensable tenet even today, as it calls for redefining the existing approaches to development and making them gender responsive. The 'Beijing Declaration' as well as the 'Platform for Action' [2] and the 'Outcome Document' adopted by the UN General Assembly Session on Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the 21st century, have identified several critical areas that must be addressed for achieving the advancement and empowerment of women. These include:

- Unequal access to education and training.
- Violence against women.
- Violation of the rights of the girl child.
- Inequality in access to economic resources.
- Inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision-making at all levels.
- Inequality in women's access to and participation in all communication systems, especially in the media.

Although, in the past decades, the status of women has improved in some important respects, there still exist major barriers of inequality that hinder women's participation in decision-making

[2] Toronto Platform For Action (1995). "International Symposium on Women and the Media: Access to Expression and Decision-Making", Final Declaration, UNESCO.

processes, their access to key resources and the sharing of power. A sustained effort by feminist activists and theorists, women's movements and poor women's grass-roots organizations to mainstream gender in development discourses is playing a crucial role in challenging oppressive structures of patriarchy, introducing alternative practices and redefining the goals of development.[3]

Until the end of the 1960s, the role of women in development projects of modernization was limited to being recipients of welfare and development messages. They were considered reproducers while men, identified as producers, were given access to information, training, technology, credit and decision-making. Around the mid-1970s, women started getting increased attention globally through the WID project.[4] WID sought to provide greater visibility to the role of women in development and several agencies worked to secure the benefits of modernization for them by integrating women into the mainstream of economic development.[5]

The WID approach was criticized by feminist theorists for subscribing to the dominant modernization and Marxist models and failing to question structures of patriarchy that limited women's access to resources and power.[6] These theories, preoccupied with economic growth, failed to acknowledge that the factors determining women's status might be culturally-specific and related to traditional work roles. The mid-1980s thus saw the GAD approach questioning the prevailing socio-cultural, economic and political structures that generated and underpinned the disadvantageous status of women relative to men. The focus of this empowerment agenda was not on women alone, but on relationships between women and men. An urgent need to redefine socially-constructed gender patterns in the three spheres – economy, home and the community – and to redress power imbalances in gender relations was articulated by women's movements.

During the past two decades, concepts like 'participation', 'community-based action', 'empowerment' and their varied interpretations have also been transforming the discourses, frameworks and practices of development.[7] In the context of globalization and resurgence of grass-roots movements, conventional development strategies are giving way to more

[3] Abbot, Dina (1997). "Who Else Will Support Us? How Poor Women Organize the Unorganizable in India," In *Community Development Journal*, Vol. 32, No. 3, July. SinghaRoy, D.K (2001). (ed.) *Social Development and the Empowerment of Marginalized Groups: Perspectives and Strategies*, New Delhi: Sage Publications.

[4] Blumberg, Rae Lesser (1989) Toward a Feminist Theory of Development, In Wallace, Ruth A. (ed) *Feminism and Sociological Theory.* Newbury Park/London: Sage Publications. Melkote, S.R. and Steeves, H.L. (2001). *Communication for Development in the Third World*: *Theory and Practice for empowerment*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.

[5] Bhasin, Kamla (2000). *Understanding Gender*, New Delhi: Kali for Women. Humble, Morag (1998). "Assessing PRA for implementing Gender and Development" In Guijt, Irene and Meera Kaul Shah (eds.), *The Myth of Community: Gender Issues in Participatory Development*, London: Intermediate Technology Publications.

[6] Humble, Morag (1998). "Assessing PRA for implementing Gender and Development" In Guijt, Irene and Meera Kaul Shah (eds.), *The Myth of Community: Gender Issues in Participatory Development*, London: Intermediate Technology Publications. Melkote, S.R. and Steeves, H.L. (2001). *Communication for Development in the Third World*: *Theory and Practice for Empowerment*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.

[7] Chambers, Robert (1997). *Whose reality counts? Putting the first last*, London: Commonwealth Secretariat. Guijt, Irene and Meera Kaul Shah (1998). "Waking up to power, conflict and process," In Guijt, Irene and Meera Kaul Shah (eds.), *The Myth of Community: Gender Issues in Participatory Development*, London: Intermediate Technology Publications. Parpart, Jane L., M. Patricia Connelly, and V. Eudine Barriteau (2000). "Feminism and Development: Theoretical Perspectives," In *Theoretical Perspectives On Gender And Development*, Ottawa, Canada: International Development Research Centre.

participatory approaches that are recognizing the involvement of those who have suffered systematic and systemic inequalities and deprivations as 'partners' in development. This paradigmatic shift towards participatory development appears to offer prospects of giving everyone who has a stake a voice and a choice. In reality, the legacy of a highly unequal and hierarchical society, the embedded notions of gender and power and the ideology of male superiority affects women's options to intervene in discussions or participate in any decision-making process.[8]

Martha C. Nussbaum[9] defends a liberal feminist position, even as she displays sensitivity to cultural differences and religious liberty, when she stresses that there should be an ethical consensus around ideas of human dignity. She maintains that it is the prerogative of people to sustain a religious view or any cultural outlook that gives their life meaning, but respecting the freedom of religion should not grant a select number of religious leaders "limitless license to perpetuate human misery".[10] In her book *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach,* she lists various "central human capabilities" that members of any particular culture ought to possess, that is, "what a person is in a position to do and be". She identifies 10 of these capabilities as essential to human dignity – those that ascertain the "threshold level of capabilities beneath which truly human functioning is not available".

Gender, Media and Participatory Development

The two powerful movements of gender and of participation discussed in the previous sections are seeking to appropriate communication avenues, and specifically media, for the advancement and empowerment of women especially at the grass-roots level. In this section we seek to contextualize the use of democratized communication spaces and community media by women for identity articulation and as counter-hegemony to the patriarchal structures of the media as well as the negative forces of media globalization.[11] There is an increasing consensus amongst communication and feminist scholars and organizations that media and new technologies of communication, informed by a gender perspective, have an immense potential to strategically promote agendas that advance the status of women in society and support women's empowerment.

Women's media concerns and the role communication technologies can play in enhancing gender equality and equity have been debated in several international conventions of women working in the information and communication sector. Pilar Riano[12] argues that feminist scholars and media campaigners have, in the last two decades, raised issues of lack of women's representation in communication channels including news and current affairs and of sexist portrayal of women in mainstream media. They have also highlighted the disadvantageous position of women with respect to access and control of communication technologies. Feminist

[8] Cornwall, Andrea (2000). "Making a Difference? Gender and Participatory Development," University of Sussex: Institute of Development Studies, Discussion Paper 378.
[9] Nussbaum (2005) Date: 06/02/2005: http://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/mag/2005/02/06/stories/2005020600490300.htm
[10] Nussbaum, Martha. (2000). *Women and Human Development: the Capabilities Approach*. Cambridge University Press.
[11] Pavarala, Vinod and Malik, Kanchan K. (2002). "Civil Society Responses to Media Globalization: A Study of Community Radio Initiatives in India," *Social Action*, vol.52, no.1, January-March 2002, pp 74-88.
[12] Riano, P. (ed.) (1994). *Women in Grassroots Communication*. USA/UK/India: Sage Publications.

works in communication studies have confirmed that women's role as "communicative subjects and producers of communication" is still being disregarded in mainstream media. She further indicates that all these demands for women's equity in representation and against negative portrayal have not been met with far-reaching changes in communication policy or the structures of media industries. The situation has worsened due to the unrestricted operations of transnational media enterprises.

But Riano and a growing school of scholars and practitioners feel that the gender specialists attending international conferences and focusing on publications and presentations have ignored the contribution being made to democratization of communication by women's social movements. These movements are involved in building new communication alternatives for change at the grass-roots level.[13] A significant contribution is being made to the gender and communication movement by the growing numbers of coalitions at the grass-roots level that are constructing democratic "we" spaces for women to develop their own narratives, "voice their concerns, name who they are, share and build projects of change."[14] Women, through interpersonal communication networks and as bare-foot journalists, independent film makers, alternative press owners, community radio reporters, process video producers, radical song writers, people's theatre activists, communication facilitators and participatory researchers are organizing themselves across differences or around the commonalities of gender, class, caste and culture as subjects of struggle and transformation.[15]

Riano provides a typology of women's participation in communication based on various analytical frameworks that address the relationship among women, participation and communication. This typology (See Table 1) identifies the principles and approaches of four basic frameworks, that is, development communication (women as subjects of information); participatory communication (women as participants); alternative communication (women as subjects of change); and feminist communication (women as producers of meaning). Riano clarifies that all these types of communication have been used by women's groups to achieve their development goals. Development communication and, to some extent, participatory communication frameworks seek consent and support and are adopted by the State and development institutions. Alternative communication and feminist communication identify with social movements and respond to the logic of social projects that seek out shared reality and new culture for all aspects of life.

Riano's typology takes into account distinct interpretations of 'participation' and the differences in 'perceptions of women', 'goals', 'societal contexts' and conceptions of 'empowerment' that distinguish each of the four frameworks and introduce us to the message development processes in the four types of communication. This typology offers researchers a reference framework to connect the observations, experiences and responses emerging in the field to

[13] Nair, K. and White, S. (1987). "Participation is the key to Development Communication," in Media and Development, 3. Riano, P. (ed.) (1994). *Women in Grassroots Communication*. USA/UK/India: Sage Publications.Kidd, D. (1992). "Alternate Media, Critical Consciousness And Action: The Beginnings Of A Conversation About Women And Grassroots Media," Unpublished manuscript. Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, Canada.Guijt, Irene and Meera Kaul Shah (1998). "Waking up to power, conflict and process," In Guijt, Irene andMeera Kaul Shah (eds.), *The Myth of Community: Gender Issues* in Participatory Development, London: IntermediateTechnology Publications.
[14] Riano, P. (ed.) (1994). *Women in Grassroots Communication*. USA/UK/India: Sage Publications.
[15] Ibid.

Table 1. *Typology of Women, Participation and Communication**

Type	Perception of Women	Objectives	Societal Context	Empowerment	Communication Process
Development Communication	As subjects of information originating from outside the control of the community	To encourage women to change certain key practices, elicit active support, mobilize community	National/international development projects; development-support communication agenda, extension work, social marketing	Little scope for strategies aimed at empowering people to control the programmes; through acquiring information	One way; people do not use communication equipment or formulate messages, media act as loudspeakers to reinforce project messages
Participatory Communication	As participants in development, leading to self-reliance	To enable women to take control of their own lives, develop confidence through learning, encourage socio-cultural change, influence public policies	Critique of diffusionist and one-way models of development, participatory approaches to development, policy-making	Process through which individuals acquire knowledge, and skills to take control of their lives, capacity to benefit from involvement	Interface of top-down and bottom-up information flow; participatory message development
Alternative Communication	As subjects of struggle and change	To support social struggles, awaken women's consciousness to their subordination, advocate and defend rights, promote group reflection and popular communication	Development of alternatives to commercial media and to one-way communication system, social movements	Developing individual and collective capacities to struggle for rights and impact change	Multidimensional, cyclical flow of messages, alternative communication strategies based on community access to media production and decision-making
Feminist Communication	As producers of meaning	To speak about gender, race, class and other oppressions, negotiate fair representations and equal participation, build identity, produce alternative meanings	Feminist politics and advocacy; formation of independent women's communication networks, grass-roots communication alternatives	Involves the transformation of women as social subjects of struggle and as active producers of meaning, breaking silence	Communication as exchange, networks of meanings and development of messages as a project of naming their own experiences and identities

*Adapted from Riano, 1994a.

the discourses originating in development, communication and feminist scholarship with a view to evaluate gender as an analytical dimension in grass-roots communication initiatives.

Community Media for Empowerment: the Gender Dimension

Gender is a significant dimension in community radio and participatory video initiatives launched by community-based organizations that seek to deploy communication technologies for social change, in general, and empowerment of women, in particular. Three of the five community media initiatives discussed here carry out their developmental activities through women-only self-help groups. Women in these organizations use community media to talk about their issues and concerns and to augment their own developmental activities. Community media help build the capacities of discursive interaction of women and also their media competencies. Equipped with the confidence that their voices and lived experiences would not be disregarded, more and more women are participating in producing programmes that are locally relevant and gender sensitive.

The DDS, an NGO working with poor, rural, *dalit*[16] women in the Pastapur area of Medak district of Andhra Pradesh, set up a community radio station over a decade ago with assistance from UNESCO. A couple of young *dalit* women from the area produce programmes and manage the station. As their request for a license to broadcast has not yet been acceded, the DDS women take the audiotapes of their programmes for narrowcasting in the villages. DDS started its participatory video initiative in 1998 by training about 10 non-literate and poor women. These women are now producing programmes pertaining to local problems and indigenous farming practices, which would never have been accommodated in the mainstream media. The video women of Pastapur have traveled to Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka and shared their technological aptitudes, farming practices and other concerns with NGOs and marginalized women there.

The KMVS in Gujarat operates on a different model of community radio from that of the above initiative. The organization built on its long presence in the area of doing development work with women and trained some of them to be community reporters for a radio programme. In 1999 the group started airing a 30-minute programme made by them in the Kutchi language on All India Radio's[17] Bhuj station by purchasing a commercial slot and they are still on air with new innovative programming like *Kutch Log Ji Bani* (The Voice of Kutch, henceforth abbreviated as KLJB). Broadly modeled after the KMVS project, *Chala Ho Gaon Mein* (Let's go to the Village) is a community radio programme supported by the National Foundation for India and produced by community representatives of the NGO, AID.[18] The programme is broadcast once a week on All India Radio, Daltonganj, in the Palamau district of Jharkhand. The Bangalore-based media advocacy group, Voices, started an audio production centre, *Namma Dhwani* (Our Voice) in 2001 at Budikote in the Kolar district of Karnataka and has been narrowcasting programmes made by rural men and women trained in the basics of radio production.

[16] Castes considered as lowest in the traditional social hierarchy in India.
[17] India's National Public Service Broadcaster.
[18] Pavarala, Vinod (2003). "Building Solidarities: A Case of Community Radio in Jharkhand," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 31 May.

SEWA, as the name suggests, is an organization that works with poor self-employed women in the unorganized labour sector. SEWA has its headquarters in Ahmedabad and operates through cooperatives and *sangathans* (collectives) at the village level. SEWA trained about 20 women to start the video initiative in 1984. It is aimed at building communication capacities of women that help enhance their self-esteem and produce programmes that would benefit other women in their community so that they can be self-employed. Presented here are some of our findings based on comprehensive case studies of these initiatives and an analysis of the responses collected by us through focus group discussions and interviews with women engaged in community media production and reception.

Reception of the Programmes

KMVS and AID community radio programmes are aired through the local All India Radio station on fixed days and at a particular time. The habit of group listening by men with friends or neighbours, as well as the domestic division of labour, ensures that women are rarely able to get an environment conducive for listening to radio at home. As a result, many women said that they were not able to listen to the community radio broadcast attentively and during the focus group discussions it was obvious that this has not only affected their ability to recall the content of the programme, but it has also rendered them incapable of stating any benefits from the programmes. Women wish to be regular radio listeners and do listen to radio "when men are not around", the preferences of programmes being *bhajans*[19] and folk songs. Women confess that they do not listen attentively to community radio programmes, "*roti banate hue sunte hain*" (we listen while we cook) and even if they do listen, they forget what was said, "*yaad nahin rahata,*" (we forget) some attributing it to the fact that they are uneducated. One woman said that they would start listening only when there is some benefit to the village.

There are exceptions to the above cases among women who are keenly involved in *mahila mandal* or *sangathan* (women's collectives) activities or those who have participated either in the programmes or in the panchayats (local self-governing bodies). Many women interviewed for the study felt that women's groups or collectives in the village provide a more conducive environment for reception of radio and also for video. A woman in a SEWA village frankly stated that for suitable reception of the programmes produced by the video women, two TV sets must be used, otherwise the physical spaces are monopolized by men. The cultural constraints on women make it almost impossible for them to sit in the midst of all the men and watch the programme attentively. In DDS villages, the supervisors of the women *sanghams* (self-help groups) carry audiotapes of programmes produced by their women and play it on cassette players in the monthly meeting. This listening session is followed by discussions and the feedback is carried back to the radio committee which then takes necessary action to produce new content and improve programming.

Women in the village of Raipally (DDS) find those programmes useful that give information specific to their agricultural needs and about indigenous knowledge systems, health and hygiene, food security, gender justice and the narrative traditions of song and drama.

[19] Devotional songs.

> "We are illiterate and poor people. We cannot follow writing material. We thought it is better to listen to these programmes and learn more about issues that affect our lives so intimately."

At Rajhara village (AID), Sonamati, an articulate middle-aged woman, who was involved in *van samitis* (forest protection committees), was enthusiastic about the role of the radio programme in various development efforts in the region. She represents for us the potential for building the participation of women in radio production where there is some amount of prior mobilization and conscientization of women. Listenership among women also seems to be tied to their participation in programme production – in discussions, drama, folk songs, etc. Older women seemed alienated from the radio programme while younger women in Jharkhand demonstrated high recall and insisted that the community radio programme has many benefits. Most women identified with the language as it gave them a feeling that programmes were their own and as it talked about their daily problems and issues.

Degree of Participation in Programme Production

Perhaps, the one aspect that all community media initiatives can boast of is their team of community radio reporters and video makers. Significant capacity building efforts have enhanced the abilities of these rural women who have negligible exposure to media production prior to their involvement in these projects. 'General' Narsamma of Pastapur village in Medak District of Andhra Pradesh and Mangala Gowri of Budikote in Kolar District of Karnataka are young, rural women, matriculate, and belonging to poor daily-wage earner families. Over the years, they have joined *sanghams/sanghas* (self-help groups) and have been trained in radio production as part of the community radio initiatives by these groups. Shy and hesitant once upon a time, today they proficiently manage audio studios in their villages along with a few other women and volunteers, and produce programmes in the local dialect that they feel would "benefit their community". 'General' and Mangala carry out programme planning, and recording, and doing voiceovers, mixing, editing and production of programmes.[20]

Vijayaben, a middle-aged woman with formal education till class four, who covers the Mohaldi and Abdasa talukas for the KMVS community radio programme explains how she had attended workshops on conscientization, confidence-building and technical training and also one on the art of seeking *mahiti* (information) and community participation. She and her fellow reporters are aware that theirs is a *bhagidari wala radio* (participatory radio) and that they have to go to the people unlike All India Radio that asks people to come to its studio for recordings all the time. Most KMVS reporters, whether it is an unmarried Muslim or Patel woman or a housewife from a conservative family, had never dreamt of working, as it was not the common practice in their communities. Now, they are not afraid even to question *sarkari* (government) officials. Shilwanti Biranchi, the dynamic reporter at Bhalmanda village in Jharkhand, says that she made her own family members participate in plays and other programmes for *Chala Ho Gaon Mein* before others could be convinced that it was not only useful, but could also be fun. Surendra Thakur, the AID reporter for Harsangra village, among others, narrated his experiences with mobilizing women's participation in radio plays:

[20] Kumar, Kanchan (2004). "Community Radio Waiting to go On Air," In *Grassroots* Vol 5, No. 2, February.

> "Recording a radio drama involves a lot of practice and rehearsals. Some plays require women to play the roles of wives. They would say 'how can we become some strange man's wife' and hesitate to come forward to take on such roles. So we persuaded women members (*didi log*) of our own group to take the lead and show the other women that there is nothing wrong. Gradually some women started feeling that if this programme is being made for the good of our village, then they too should participate."

Many women felt that participation could be further enhanced in programme production if the amount of woman-centred programming on issues such as, dowry, child marriage, literacy, reproductive health, etc., was increased and women other than the reporters were given opportunities to participate in discussions. Twenty one-year-old Sanjukta Devi, who is an active member of the self-help group in village Cheri (AID), states,

> "We women were earlier very inhibited. When the men used to sit outside for discussions, we used to sit inside. Today, after this programme, we feel we too have a voice and are confident to come out of the house to even take part in processions."

Management, Control and Ownership

P.V. Satheesh, Director, DDS, says,

> "For us, a community radio is total control of the communities over the radio. And that includes everything, it includes the language, it includes the format, it includes the expression and entire sequence of what will come there."

He recalls the answer that the women gave when they rejected the offer of a slot on All India Radio to air their programmes. They said,

> "Look, that is a kind of a continuous chain of broadcast and within that they will give us a particular position. And we don't know what comes before that and what comes after that. Like for example, we are all talking about organic agriculture and may be there is a pesticide advertisement before that and then our organic agriculture comes, after that somebody from an agricultural university may give a talk about hybrid seeds. So, we don't want our programmes to be positioned in a radio channel where that positioning may be very awkward for us."

He quotes Chilukapalli Anasuyamma from Pastapur, a 30-year-old single non-literate *dalit* woman, when asked to suggest what we could do with our own radio,

> "In our *sanghams* (village associations of *dalit* women), we are carrying on a number of tasks that used to be done by men. Our men are doing a

number of tasks which were only being preserved for women. This way we have been able to erase the boundaries between man's work and woman's work.

The mainstream radio is still steeped in traditional gender roles. If we depend on it, we have to go back in time. All that we have done in our *sanghams* will come to a nought. If we have our own radio it can help us continue this progress we have made on gender issues."

Although the radio reporters of Bhuj and the community radio representatives of Palamau have negotiated with the contemporary State policy for airing their programmes, their voices harmonize with those in Budhikote and Pastapur for demanding a radio of their own. All of them believe that to deploy radio as a tool of empowerment, the participation of people is not enough. The ownership, control and management of the radio station must be in the hands of the community for it to function as an autonomous media space, open to the need for self-expression by the socially and culturally marginalized sections of society, especially women. The media unit of KMVS that wholly handles its community radio production, though centralized at Bhuj headquarters, aims at being a training ground for community radio reporters to equip them to start media activity for *sangathans* in their respective villages. The DDS Community Media Trust has eight radio and video women as trustees and its preamble reads that it was formed, "in fulfilment of the wishes of thousands of women from DDS *sanghams* who wish to have their unrecognized voices heard and recognized by the world outside." SEWA's video initiative is now a cooperative with women as the controlling executives.

Addressing Women's Issues and Forging Solidarities

Identifying KMVS community radio broadcasts as the only programmes that talk of their problems, most women respondents in the villages of Kutch had a good recollection of issues like water, panchayat, literacy, alcoholism, mid-day meal, problem of doctors, mid-wife, etc., taken up in KLJB. Everyone mentioned *pardafash*, the investigative journalism segment of KLJB, and were all praise for its efforts to expose corrupt practices of the officials. Says P.V. Satheesh,

"DDS recognizes that people have more knowledge than we have credited them with, and more appropriate technologies than we can think of. Therefore, the DDS programmes have evolved into three principles: gender justice, environmental-soundness and people's knowledge."

According to 'General', the programming content of the station seeks to serve the information, education and cultural needs of the women in the region and includes themes like agricultural needs of semi-arid regions, public health and hygiene, environmental and ecological issues, biodiversity and food security, and local/indigenous knowledge systems and local cultures, with emphasis on the narrative traditions of song and drama.

The DDS video experiment was launched to train women to communicate their problems, raise their issues and find solutions through video. Women have not only been making films

for themselves, but also for some mainstream television channels such as Doordarshan and Eenadu TV. Shakuntala (DDS) explains,

> "This is our video. We make programmes on our lives and on issues affecting our lives – agriculture, animal husbandry, health, playschools, etc."

DDS women, using video as an alternative to the writing medium, made a comparative study between BT and non-BT cotton[21] grown in their Telangana area. This video was widely acclaimed and was dubbed in English and French. Non-literate women are thus recognizing the potential of video as an alternative tool for research and documentation.

Mollamma, a *dalit* video woman (DDS), recalls,

> "When we started using the video, the men folk at home and in the village laughed at us. But when we started playing back our finished programmes and they were aired on Doordarshan and ETV, they started recognizing our potentials and respecting us. Today when we go to field for shooting, men come forward to facilitate our work by carrying the tripod and other accessories."

Kavita, another video woman, adds,

> "If we are shooting and go home late in the night, our men now look after the kids, feed them, and put them to bed."

Humnapur Laxmamma, a senior video woman, narrates her experience at the Patel's (upper cast landlord) residence to elucidate the change in status that she perceived after being trained as a media producer,

> "One day we decided to make a video on the Dassara festival rituals. We contacted the local Patel and asked him if we could shoot the Dassara rituals at his house. To our surprise, he instantly welcomed the proposition. We were taken into the *puja* room for shooting. You see, generally we *dalits* would not have access even into the main entrance of the houses of upper caste people. When we were shooting, the Patel was watching some TV programme, and the TV's audio was disturbing audio recording of prayer rituals. On bringing this to his notice, he immediately switched off the TV set and extended his cooperation for shooting whatever we wanted."

The community media projects have also contributed in creating awareness about social problems that perpetuate women's subordination to men. The tradition of *tilak/dahej* (dowry) is quite deeply rooted in the culture of the Jharkhand region and it is unrealistic to expect that

[21] BT cotton is a variety of cotton that is genetically modified to make it pest resistant.

the AID radio programme would make a dent in this practice so soon. However, it is apparent that the programme has managed to put the issue so firmly on the agenda and that people are at least discussing the problem. Thirty-year-old Kamoda Devi, the only literate woman in the focus group we assembled in Bhalmanda village (AID), hoped that the programme would make a difference,

> "If I take dowry for my son now, I will realize the problem later when my son has a daughter and he has to give dowry. So it is important to stop this practice. If this can be done through the programme, it will be good for society."

Adolescent girls at the Nawadih village (AID) also condemned the practice as a blot on society and hoped that the radio programme can address the issue. Many people during focus group discussions demonstrated considerable recall of major issues such as alcoholism, dowry problem, superstition, bribery, literacy and child marriage on which programmes had been made. The fact that many came up with an inventory of additional issues, on which radio programmes should be made, shows that people have tremendous faith in the medium to solve their problems. At village Cheri (AID), 19-year-old Chintamani said confidently that the *Chala Ho Gaon Mein* programme was already beginning to make a difference in the thinking of women about the need for collective action,

> "Prior to the radio programme, we girls were never even allowed to go outside the home, leave alone participate in meetings. After this programme started, we got together and formed a young women's group. Now we all sing together, attend meetings, and discuss issues. A lot of change has come in our attitudes."

Surendra Thakur, one of the community reporters, offered an example of a specific outcome of *Chala Ho Gaon Mein* in the area of gender equity:

> "Before this radio programme started, people used to send only their sons to school and make their daughters work at home. However, after this programme started talking about treating sons and daughters equally, many parents came forward and, with our help, enrolled their daughters in school."

The Video SEWA team produces programmes for the overall development of women, says Manjulaben, a video woman,

> "We make programmes on agriculture, animal husbandry, savings, insurance, embroidery, watershed development, drinking water, and labour issues related to women."

Nelamben Dave, Coordinator, Video SEWA project, explains,

> "Before women came to SEWA, their capacities were low. They would not even utter the names of their husbands. Basic video training, self-evaluation and the confidence that they could also speak, be seen, and heard on video transformed their image of themselves and today they are a picture of self-worth."

Conclusion

Community media initiatives, such as those discussed here, perceive women as producers and contributors of media content and not solely as 'consumers'. Community media thus encourage greater involvement of women in the technical, decision-making, and agenda-setting activities and have the potential to promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media. The programmes of community radio and participatory video production have enabled women to radically change accepted 'media languages' by providing them with a space and a process for expressing ideas and issues linked to their unique experiences. Women are central to development and women's media production competencies help them develop their capacities as socio-political actors and spearhead popular movements. They help in activating women's alternatives for fostering social change by building capacities of discursive interaction for collective action. For women media producers, the first tough task is to adequately address the concerns of their own village/community and have a *"pahchan"* (identity) that imparts faith in other women, highlights the potential of the medium to bring about *sudhar* (improvement) and prompts them to participate in media activities.

Community radio may be seen as providing an arena outside the State apparatus to women that may be used as a potent instrument for democratic deliberations and negotiations. For those who have traditionally been unacknowledged and silenced, socially and culturally, the opportunity to have one's voice heard can be a very strong experience of self-worth. In Bell Hooks'[22] words:

> "Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes life and new growth possible. It is that act of speech of "talking back", that is no mere gesture of empty words that is the expression of our movement from object to subject – the liberated voice."

[22] Hooks, Bell (1989). *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black,* Boston, MA: South End Press. p 9.

Chapter 3.3

Diversity as Casualty: Gender in the Time of Media Globalization

–Ammu Joseph

On a recent visit to Kerala, I was intrigued to see conspicuous red daubs on many women's faces, at the place where the parting of the hair met the forehead. The alien adornment was evident not only in cities like Thiruvananthapuram and Kochi but even in small, far-flung hamlets in the rural areas of Vamanapuram and Idukki districts. Queries about the genesis of a cosmetic practice that is certainly not indigenous to the state brought forth shy smiles and whispered confessions: "Serials". Thanks to popular television soap operas, particularly the "K" serials[23] and their clones, broadcast across the length and breadth of India (and beyond) via the satellite-cable route, the *sindoor*[24] had arrived in Kerala.

The cross-country and cross-channel success of the "K" serials is attributed to the fact that their producers – Balaji Telefilms – have 'cracked the formula' for television success in India – the family drama. According to Shobha Kapoor, Managing Director of Balaji Telefilms and mother of Ekta Kapoor, the young and enormously successful woman behind the "K" factor, "All the channels want a programmer who reaches out to women. They're the ones watching soaps. The men watch sports or news." As media critic Shohini Ghosh explains, "The 'Indianness' of Balaji Telefilms serials is something that all channels want to identify with. They no longer want to be branded promoters of Western culture."[25]

The question is, of course, what brand of "Indianness," what aspect of "Indian" culture and what image of "Indian" women are being promoted through these serials. The spread of the *sindoor* is only a symbol of the cultural homogenization at work. Critics are equally concerned about the underlying politics of these family dramas.

[23] The "K serials" is the umbrella term now commonly used to refer to a number of popular prime-time family sagas in India with names beginning with K (*Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi, Kahaani Ghar Ghar Ki, Kabhii Sautan Kabhii Saheli, Koi Apna Sa, Kutumb, Kkusum, Kasauti, Kalash*, etc.), produced by Balaji Telefilms and aired on several, competing private entertainment channels (Sony, Star Plus, Zee, etc.).

[24] The application of the traditional *kumkum* (vermillion powder) in the parting of the hair by married women is a customary practice in some Hindu communities, particularly in northern and eastern India; the enlarged smear that has now become fashionable, courtesy of Hindi television serials, is not part of traditional culture in the southern states, in contrast to the familiar dot/*bindi/pottu* (in various shapes, sizes and colours) worn in the middle of the forehead, which is more ubiquitous.

[25] Walia, Nona. (2001) "What's Common to Prime Time TV?" *The Times of India*, 8 September 2001.

According to feminist historian Uma Chakravarti, who keeps a close watch on television, the serials are clearly situated in the India of economic liberalization and globalization: "the architecture (of the serials) suggests a corporate household with global aspirations – the boys go abroad, sign international deals. The women go shopping." The characters belong almost exclusively to the upper class, with people from the lower classes rarely making an appearance, even as domestic help. The few characters originally from the middle classes – usually daughters-in-law – are soon engulfed by the upper-class environment in which they find themselves.[26]

Conspicuous by their absence in the serials are economically independent working women and single women. The most popular female characters in these family sagas are celebrated as submissive, self-sacrificing paragons of virtue. Indeed, a 2002 study[27] found that the domestic space provided the backdrop for much of the drama. With the women protagonists spending 80 percent of their time confined to the kitchen, living, dining and bed rooms, the serials reassert the traditional view that a woman's place is in the home. Female characters enter the professional space only when they have to save their spouses or families from the clutches of rivals. Further, while the men in the serials are modern in their attire, the women usually dress more conservatively, complete with traditional symbols of marriage like the *bindi, mangalsutra* and *sindoor*. Women are also repeatedly shown restoring the core values of the family, which seem to be always under threat.[28]

It is significant that the most hyped and hailed soaps of the new millennium seem less likely to promote gender equality and equity within families and society than the serials of yester year such as those broadcast in the 1980s by the sole national broadcaster, Doordarshan.[29] Even after the advent of private channels in the 1990s, the story lines of several prime time and afternoon satellite TV serials[30] featured women who did not fit comfortably into the traditional roles of wife, mother and homemaker. Not only were career women among the protagonists in these earlier soaps, but they also dealt with issues such as divorce, extra-marital relationships, sexual harassment, rape and abortion.[31] Although there are a few TV series, even today, that showcase contemporary women with goals and aspirations, jobs and lives beyond the confines of home and family,[32] the soaps that have taken audiences by storm are awash with homebound female characters who are either manipulative and malevolent or docile and dutiful.

Many critics believe that regressive attitudes and practices are finding fresh life in new, attractive forms thanks to this immensely popular but controversial genre of audio-visual entertainment

[26] Shah, Amrita. (2003) "The Curse of the K Women." *The Indian Express*, 28 November 2003.
[27] "Towards Empowerment?" by the Centre for Advocacy and Research (India), Asmita (Nepal), the Centre for Development Journalism and Communication, and Proshika (Bangladesh), 2002.
[28] Sehgal, Rashmi. (2003). "Behind Closed Doors: Women on Primetime TV," InfoChange News and Features, December.
[29] Dhanraj, Deepa. (1994) "A Critical Focus," in Joseph, Ammu and Sharma, Kalpana. Eds, *Whose News? The Media and Women's Issues*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
[30] Some examples: *Saans, Tara, Hasratein, Dard* on Star Plus, Zee and Doordarshan.
[31] Joseph, Ammu.(2002) "Working, Watching and Waiting: Women and Issues of Access, Participation and Decision-Making in the Media in India," UN EGM, November 2002, http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/media2002/reports/EP4Joseph.PDF
[32] Some examples: *Jassi Jaissi Koi Nahin, Khoi Dil Mein Hain, Yeh Meri Life Hai, Kkuch Kehna Hai Mujhko, Saaksshi* on Sony.

brought into millions of homes via television. According to Chakravarti, "The formula is to reconsolidate the larger traditional ideology within which women must play certain roles."[33]

If single, working women are missing from the "K" serials, they were centre-stage in a recent cover story in the fortnightly newsmagazine, *India Today,* on "The Rape Nightmare."[34] Spurred by a series of high profile rape cases in Delhi and Mumbai, the article focussed almost exclusively on the experiences and views of young, urban, professional women. The central argument of the story proposed a link between the rising incidence of rape in cities and the fact that more women are now single, independent, working and living on their own, suggesting that sexual assault is part of "the backlash against the ongoing shift in gender power". According to the piece, "Rape, always the dark side of the moon, has acquired a far more vicious dimension now, when it is used to punish urban women, as the gap between the aspiration of the have-nots and the reality of the haves widens."[35]

A tenuous connection was drawn between statistics indicating women's greater mobility and spending power, on the one hand, and their liberation, on the other – and, then, between their crossing of traditional boundaries and losing the "protective umbrella of the family". This, it was argued, leads to anonymity and thence to being viewed and treated as "fair game" and an "easy lay". This theme was so strong throughout the piece that even some of the women activists interviewed, who are undoubtedly aware of the multiple dimensions of gender-based violence, including rape, were quoted only on this aspect of the subject.

The analysis ignored the fact that, through the ages, rape has been a major tool of women's oppression, as well as a customary instrument of power over women and the families and communities to which they belong. Nor did it take into account the fact that rape is as common in rural areas and small towns as in big cities and affects women – directly and indirectly – across boundaries of caste, class, creed, age, occupation, marital status and virtually every other social feature. Nor, indeed, the fact that rape also occurs within homes and families.

The *India Today* article, with its selective exploration of the subject, was of a piece with current trends in the media, which seem increasingly preoccupied with the lives of the bold and the beautiful, the rich and the famous, and the pampered and the powerful. Coverage of rape (and other forms of violence against women) in the "mainstream" media today typically involves long spells of routine reports regularly, if randomly, culled from police handouts, interrupted by occasional, brief periods of intensive and extensive coverage, usually catalyzed by one or more cases that happen to grab the imagination of the media and the public – generally in that order.[36]

These two examples of gender in the Indian media help illuminate some of the characteristics of the media in the age of globalization described by a number of scholars. While critiques of

[33] Shah, Amrita. (2003) "The Curse of the K Women." *The Indian Express*, 28 November 2003.
[34] Bamzai, Kaveree, Doshi, Anjali, *et al.* (2005) "The Rape Nightmare." *India Today*, 30 May 2005.
[35] Ibid.
[36] For more details on the subject see "When Violence is not News," Joseph, Ammu, *India Together*, December 2004. http://www.indiatogether.org/2004/dec/ajo-medviol.htm

globalization in this part of the world are generally based on the established realities of the North-South, West-East, First World-Third World divide, there are indications that, in reality, the various trends encapsulated in the hold-all term "globalization" operate simultaneously at multiple levels and in different directions. This certainly appears to be the case with globalization as it is manifested in the media.

The past couple of decades have witnessed dramatic transformations of media systems and structures, at both the global and the national levels. The effects of globalization on the media and the consequent globalization of the media have contributed significantly to these changes. According to media critics Edward S. Herman and Robert W. McChesney, the central features of "media globalization" include "larger cross-border flows of media outputs, the growth of media TNCs[37] and the tendency toward centralization of media control, and the spread and intensification of commercialization."[38] This complex phenomenon has resulted, above all, in the "implantation of the commercial model of communication, its extension to broadcasting and the 'new media,' and its gradual intensification under the force of competition and bottom-line pressures."[39] The internal logic of this model, based on private ownership and reliant on advertiser support, "tends to erode the public sphere and to create a 'culture of entertainment' that is incompatible with a democratic order. Media outputs are commodified and are designed to serve market ends, not citizenship needs."[40]

Media economist Manfred Kops provides further insights into the impact of globalization on the media. He describes globalization, in economic terms, as "the (special) expansion of markets, the transformation of small, local, regional, or national markets into supra-national, preferably worldwide markets." Accordingly, media globalization takes place when the media reach beyond national borders and continental boundaries into new and larger markets – a process driven by new technologies as well as institutional and political changes. While, at one level, the expansion of "media markets" can benefit the consumer, at another level the "economic peculiarities" of the media give rise to trends that are problematic for the citizen.[41]

Take, for example, two trends flowing from the fact that media products are "non-rivalling goods" (that is, once a first copy exists, the product can be supplied to additional users at no additional cost). Therefore, the typical product (a publication, a programme) must go out to the largest possible audience to become financially viable and, eventually, profitable. The resulting impetus to increase the reach of media products generally leads to two developments that are inimical to the role of the media as an essential element of democratic societies: concentration of media ownership and dominance of "mainstream," formulaic content.[42]

Among the routine outcomes of media concentration are higher prices and/or lower quality. However, concentration of ownership poses even graver threats. For instance, economic power

[37] Trans National Corporations.
[38] Herman, Edward S. and McChesney, Robert (1998). *The Global Media: The New Missionaries of Corporate Capitalism*, Cassell, London, 1997 and Madhyam Books, India, 1998.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Kops, Manfred (2005) "The Cultural Challenge to Globalization," Institute for Broadcasting Economics, University of Cologne, Germany. Paper presented at the Asia Media Summit, Kuala Lumpur, May 2005.
[42] Ibid.

can be turned into political power, enabling media companies to manipulate the public by conveying biased information and unbalanced opinions, and/or promoting particular ideologies and values.[43]

At another level, globalization intensifies the inherent tendency of the media to produce and supply "more of the same". When media markets expand, larger audiences are generated mainly for programmes that were already popular in smaller markets, such as sports, movies, soap operas and pop music. In contrast, programmes meant for more specific audiences have few takers in the wider, globalized market. In the domestic arena, this trend leads to the substitution of local content with regional content and regional content with national content. As a result local and "minority" audiences – including women – have less access to media content that fulfils their interests and needs, and less opportunity to articulate their concerns and perspectives through the media. On the international stage, it substitutes the national content of small nations with the national content of large nations. Consequently the former have little chance to put forward their news and views and the latter dominate public discourse at the regional and global levels.[44]

Thus, if cost efficiency is the primary positive feature of media globalization, diversity is its main casualty: diversity in media companies and outlets, diversity in the variety of media products available to address the interests, needs and concerns of varied audiences, and diversity in the images and voices represented in the media.

Given this context, it is not surprising that the promise of the 'information superhighway', the mantra of 'convergence' and, above all, the rise of the Internet and the World Wide Web as an ostensibly free, global medium led to considerable optimism in the 1990s. Analysts then suggested that computer-aided communication would undermine the monopoly power of the media giants and usher in a new era of more democratic communication. Much of that initial euphoria has since been dissipated. Media baron Rupert Murdoch's April 2005 speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors[45] underlines the fact that global media firms are increasingly incorporating the "new media" into their empires and thereby reducing the egalitarian potential of the technology. As Media Watch Global president Ignacio Ramonet has observed, "The advent of the Internet and electronic communications has allowed globalization to take place, because these technologies do not transport only messages any longer, but they transport merchandise."[46]

Despite the ever more influential role played by the media in virtually all aspects of social, cultural, economic and political life, the public in most countries has no jurisdiction over the media and little say in the content they produce and distribute. However, civil society in different parts of the world has been attempting to remedy that situation since the 1990s through a variety of initiatives seeking to de-commercialize the media and broaden their democratic

[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Murdoch, Rupert. (2005)."The challenges of the online world," Rupert Murdoch, Washington DC, 13 April; http://www.icae.org.uy/eng/VOICES%20RISING%20123.htm
[46] Toro, Maria Suarez. (2005)."Women are looking for their 'J' spot," New York, March 2005; http://www.womensmediapool.org

potential. Among the strategies being employed in this process are research, information dissemination (for example, through public hearings), efforts to apply existing anti-monopoly laws to the media and pass new laws curtailing ownership, attempts to reinvigorate existing public broadcast systems, as well as to launch and operate non-commercial media, including community radio and television.

The question is how gender fits into this picture. This is relatively uncharted territory. According to media scholar Carolyn M. Byerly,[47] the growing movements for media reform across the world have so far failed to provide a gender analysis of the problems associated with media globalization and conglomeration. At the same time, feminist scholars, journalists, activists and popular leaders have been slow to join these movements, engage with the many, complex issues concerning the media and democracy, and offer a gendered perspective on these. As a result, "Media conglomeration today, which has no shortage of critiques, lacks a feminist analysis, even though gender is a deeply imbedded aspect of the phenomenon… it is essential for women to develop a solid cross-cultural gender analysis of media conglomeration if we are to find a way out of the present deadlock."[48]

A. Beale and A. Van Den Bosch (1998) are among those who are beginning to identify ways for feminist scholarship to be involved in political change leading to media reform.[49] They suggest that feminist research can expand the normally narrow parameters of policy analysis and intervention to identify how women will be benefited or harmed by media policy.[50] Byerly believes these activities should complement and support the call for media reform now beginning to emerge in women's movements in various places. She suggests that "the absence of gender-specific language and concerns signals an underlying problem in the (media reform) movement and provides a compelling reason for a parallel feminist movement to articulate what women need from a more democratic media system."

This concern was echoed in the final report of the Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on Women and the Media convened by the United Nations ahead of the 47th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). The document called attention to the fact that the far-reaching changes brought about by recent transformations in the global media system have "implications for women's access to the media and information as users, for women's participation in media and communication structures, and for the portrayal of women and their perspectives in media content." [51]

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[47] Byerly, Carolyn M. "Women and Media Concentration," in Rush, R.R., Oukrup, E. C. and Creedon, P. J. (Eds.), *Seeking Equity for Women in Journalism and Mass Communication: A 30-Year Update*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates (forthcoming); URL for presentation titled "A Feminist Perspective on Media Conglomeration" based on excerpts from the chapter: http://www.nwmindia.org/about_us/centres/feminist_analysis_media_conglomeration.htm

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Beale, Alison and Van Den Bosch, Annette (Eds.). (1998). *Ghosts in the Machine: Women and Cultural Policy in Canada and Australia.* Toronto: Garamond Press.

[51] The UN EGM met in Beirut in November 2002 and the CSW in New York in March 2003; URL leading to documents relating to the EGM, including the final report: http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/media2002 (see especially the background paper, "Women, Media and Democratic Society: In Pursuit of Rights and Freedoms" by Margaret Gallagher, for an overview of the global situation: http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/media2002/reports/BP1Gallagher.PDF, and for documents relating to the CSW, including the agreed conclusions: http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw47

As the report put it, "The status of women, on the one hand, and the state of the media, on the other, are increasingly taken as key indices of the democratization and development of a society. However, these two debates – about women's rights and about communication systems – tend to be carried out in parallel, and are almost never inter-connected at the international or even the national level. Women's concerns about media access, communication rights and freedom of expression are rarely taken into account in wider debates about free speech, media control and communication structures. An essential and urgent step in the pursuit of women's advancement in and through the media must be an insistence on the centrality of gender issues as part and parcel of efforts to establish free and democratic media structures in society today."[52]

The UN EGM report also highlighted areas of concern vis-à-vis the media and new ICTs, pointing out that "…the patterns of gender segregation that are well known in the established media industries are already being reproduced in the field of ICTs…"[53] In addition, the content of ICTs, especially in the commercial domain, is marked by masculinist rhetoric and a set of representations which are frequently sexualized and often sexist: "…it is estimated that at least 10 percent of sales via the Internet are of a sexual nature – much of it pornographic…" Gender and media scholar Rosalind Gill flagged similar issues at the CSW: "(The) new information and media saturated world…offers opportunities, but also poses dangers. …the danger is that without urgent and radical intervention the new media age or information society will simply exacerbate existing inequalities, produce new divisions and exclusions relating to access to new technologies, concentrate power in the hands of an ever smaller group of commercial organizations, and produce 'market-led' content that is at best stereotypical and at worst highly sexualized and/or culturally insensitive."[54]

According to Byerly, "The first step in the process of developing a gender analysis of media globalization and conglomeration is to explore how women figure in both macro- and micro-level realms of media organizations. The macro-level is associated with relations of power between men and women in media industries in terms of investment, executive-level decision-making and employment. The micro-level is associated with media content, particularly the representation of women as subjects and coverage of issues relevant to women's lives."[55]

The Indian examples at the beginning of this paper – one from the entertainment media and the other from the news media – concern the micro-level of media content.[56] I believe they serve to illustrate several aspects of the media globalization syndrome as seen in the Indian

[52] Ibid.

[53] "Participation and Access of Women to the Media, and the Impact of Media on and its Use as an Instrument for the Advancement and Empowerment of Women – Report of the Expert Group Meeting," United Nations. 2002; http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/media2002/index.html

[54] "Participation and Access of Women to the Media, and the Impact of Media on and its Use as an Instrument for the Advancement and Empowerment of Women," Panel I at 47th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, Rosalind Gill, United Nations, 2003; http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw47/Panel-Gill.PDF

[55] Byerly, Carolyn M. "Women and Media Concentration," in Rush, R.R., Oukrup, E. C. and Creedon, P. J. Eds, *Seeking Equity for Women in Journalism and Mass Communication: A 30-Year Update*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates (forthcoming); URL for presentation titled "A Feminist Perspective on Media Conglomeration" based on excerpts from the chapter: http://www.nwmindia.org/about_us/centres/feminist_analysis_media_conglomeration.htm

[56] For more details on content see *Whose News? The Media and Women's Issues,* Joseph, A. and Sharma, K. Eds, Sage, New Delhi, 1994 and 2006 (second edition).

media, some complementing and others contradicting each other. If the "K" serials represent a clearly regressive trend, the obviously well-intentioned *India Today* piece perpetuates stereotypes and illusions of a different kind, which are all too common in the media today and are often assumed to represent progress in the portrayal of women and coverage of gender-related issues.

The examples can also prompt thinking on the increasingly complex factors operating at the macro-level today since the producer of the "K" serials and the writers of the *India Today* story are all female.[57] As activist-actress Shabana Azmi said in an interview, "What worries me is that so many women are coming into television as directors and writers and there is still no change (in the stereotyping of women in popular television serials). This is because they are coming with a different agenda, propelled not by women's empowerment but by market forces."[58]

Almost all the tendencies and trends that are part of the media globalization syndrome are perceptible in the Indian media context today: the beginnings of media concentration, the growing supremacy of the profit motive, the erosion of the public service role of the media, the misuse of market power, the conversion of economic power into political power, the propagation of particular ideologies and values (and the devaluation of others), the predominance of "mainstream" content, the increase in content that represents "more of the same", the neglect of the interests and concerns of individuals, communities and groups considered dispensable by the market, the absence of "minority" views from public debates and discussions, the decline in public discourse in terms of both seriousness and diversity, and so on.

Take media concentration, for example. Diversity has traditionally marked both the ownership patterns and organizational forms of the country's media – thanks, perhaps, to the linguistic and socio-cultural heterogeneity of Indian society. However, recent evidence suggests movement in the direction of concentration.

Unfortunately, progressive sections of civil society in India, which are vocal and vigorous on a wide range of important issues, are surprisingly inactive on the media front (while conservative forces functioning as moral police are often vociferous about various aspects of media content). This is despite the fact that, in today's world, the mass media are increasingly playing the role once played by family, community, religion and formal education: not only disseminating information and knowledge, but also shaping values and norms, moulding attitudes and behaviour, and influencing the very process of living.

At a time when media reform movements led by citizens are gathering strength in different parts of the world, media activism in India, such as it is, tends to be largely restricted to critiques of content in the "mainstream" media (usually by media professionals or academics), and the

[57] For more details on women in media see *Women in Journalism: Making News*, Joseph, Ammu. The Media Foundation/Konark, 2000 (updated paperback edition with new introduction and annexures out in 2005) and the website of the Network of Women in Media, India: http://www.nwmindia.org

[58] Rajaiah, Ratna. (2002). "From Actress to Activist". *The Hindu*, 8 February 2002.

creation and promotion of "alternative" media (generally by NGOs).[59] Valuable as these efforts are, they are clearly no substitute for citizens' engagement with the media, especially at the present time, when the media landscape is in a state of flux and far-reaching media policies are in the process of being formulated.

The Indian women's movement, too, tends to ignore or dismiss the mainstream media at one level while using and criticizing it at another. It is small comfort to know that this is often the case in the global arena as well. The absence of official discussion on Section J (Women and Media) of the Platform for Action emerging from the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) before and during the Beijing + 10 review meeting preceding the 49th Session of the CSW in March 2005 was a sign of the neglect of media in the international women's rights agenda. Gender-media activists were shocked and distressed to find that the media as an issue was omitted from the formal programmes of the two meetings, despite the fact that the negative impact of globalization on women was a major concern at both. As Maria Suarez Toro of Feminist International Radio Endeavour pointed out, "Common sense would tell anyone that, in order to tackle globalization's negative trends, they need to tackle media." [60]

"At the very moment that advocates of women's rights are reaching the conclusion that the key to gender equality is changing attitudes and mindsets, the most powerful tool for achieving this sea change has fallen off the agenda," noted an editorial headlined 'Ignoring the media is a big mistake' in the daily newspaper brought out by the women's media pool during the review process and the CSW session.[61] According to Suarez Toro, those who fight for gender equality are quick to "use the media as an instrument but fail to see it as an issue". She stressed the need for feminist media professionals and activists "to negotiate with the feminist movement to position 'women and media' and to remain conscious about globalization and how it plays into the issue, heightens it or makes it invisible".[62] As the edit pointed out, "Institutions that are not changed cannot become agents of change. Just as gender has to be mainstreamed in government it has to be mainstreamed in the media. There are no quick fixes; no short cuts."

Formidable and daunting as such a task may be, especially in the current media environment, there are at least two positive developments that can help kick-start the process: the growing presence of women in the media and the emergence of a movement of women in the media at the national and international levels. As Suarez Toro noted, over the past decade many of these women "have joined hands and pens, microphones and computers, voices and ears, to form and expand networks and media monitoring bodies at every international forum where the issue is discussed and policies adopted, in order to influence those agendas"[63] – whether at the Beijing + 5 evaluation, the WSIS or even at the Beijing + 10 review. The Global Media Monitoring Project – the third and latest of which was conducted across approximately 100

[59] Joseph, Ammu (2005). "Media Matter, Citizens Care: The Who, What, When, Where, Why, How and Buts of Citizens' Engagement with the Media," UNESCO: Paris; URL for Citizens' Media Dialogue; http://www.wiredet.com/cmd/
[60] Toro, Maria Suarez. (2005). "Women are looking for their 'J' spot," New York; http://www.womensmediapool.org
[61] For details of women's media activism during the Beijing + 10 review meeting and the 49th session of the Commission on the Status of Women see http://www.womensmediapool.org/
[62] Toro, Maria Suarez. (2005). "Women are looking for their 'J' spot," New York; http://www.womensmediapool.org
[63] Ibid.

countries in February 2005 – is another important example of international cooperation and collaboration since 1995 "to promote the fair and balanced representation of women and men in news media worldwide".[64]

At the same time, Suarez Toro pointed out, "The challenges are also mounting. One of these is the growing concentration of media in the hands of less than 10 corporations" at the global level. She also highlighted the fact that there has been an overwhelming trend towards the commercialization of information over the past decade. According to Katerina Anfossi, a Latin American communicator, the "homogenization that comes with concentration has never been favourable to women … women are about diversity".[65]

Acknowledging that there had been little progress in the transformation of media content vis-à-vis women since the Beijing conference, the UN EGM report noted, "The problem of women's portrayal in the media is…deeply rooted in power imbalances both within media institutions and in the wider society. Real, sustainable, positive change requires a social and political transformation in which women's rights – especially their right to information and communication – are truly understood, respected and implemented both in society at large and by the media."[66]

This does seem like a tall order, especially in the context of media globalization and the attendant commercialization of significant sections of the media. However, the combination of frustration and determination experienced by those concerned about gender representations in the media across the world have given rise to at least three categories of approaches to dealing with the problem, as outlined in the EGM report.

The first of these involves interaction and dialogue between media practitioners, researchers, activists, audiences and advertisers, aimed at fostering change from within. This strategy is based on the following premises:

- gender equality is intrinsic to the freedom of expression and information;
- rights come with responsibilities and the media, therefore, have an obligation to ensure equal voice to women and men, and to serve the information needs of both;
- gender awareness results in better media practice; and
- it situates the promotion of gender equality and gender consciousness in the media within the broader framework of human rights and democratic values, on the one hand, and quality and professionalism, on the other.

The second approach entails working with media consumers to promote media literacy and critical media skills among audiences, and to engage the general public in critique and debate around media practices, with a special focus on gender.

[64] For details see http://www.wacc.org.uk and http://www.globalmediamonitoring.org
[65] Toro, Maria Suarez. (2005). "Women are looking for their 'J' spot," New York, http://www.womensmediapool.org
[66] Ibid.

A third, emerging approach views the right to communicate as an essential element in the consolidation of democracy and an indispensable aspect of citizen participation in public life. It also perceives information as a public good to which all citizens are entitled. This approach involves moving from a media-centric focus on production and content to one that acknowledges the centrality of citizenship in matters relating to the media and communication, and takes into account the different ways in which citizens, including women, receive and make meaning from media messages. Here the stress is on cooperation between women's groups and other CSOs to promote gender-sensitivity in both media practice and communications studies, as well as to foster among citizens more awareness of the media as well as of people's right to information and communication.

As the EGM report pointed out, these relatively new and complementary approaches have a number of common features. They introduce a wider perspective to the question of representation and portrayal in media content. They locate the issue within the framework of democratization, human rights and equality rights. They seek to establish that gender is not exclusively a women's issue, particularly since the construction of femininity and masculinity are closely linked and the ways in which men are portrayed place expectations and limitations on them that are also not compatible with gender equality. And they attempt to promote change through a range of actors – both female and male – from within and outside the media. While the first approach highlights the importance of gender consciousness for better journalism and attempts to involve media professionals of both sexes in the effort to improve content through greater diversity of images, voices and perspectives, the others focus more on empowering citizens to push the media towards the same end.

Much work lies ahead in the South Asian context vis-à-vis gender and the media. Clearly a systematic, sustained and effective effort to bring about positive change would necessarily include a wide range of parallel and ongoing interventions. Among the first steps in the process could be the following initiatives, conceived in the context of the mainstream news media but possibly adaptable to the entertainment media, community media, and new media:

- Conducting an inventory of material relating to different aspects of gender and media in the national and regional contexts, with a view to setting up a clearing house for a variety of resources on gender/media matters.
- Conducting a baseline survey of the news media to generate credible information and analyses that can be used to strengthen initiatives using one or more of the three possible approaches to gender/media activism outlined above.
- Conducting audience research to assess the responses of women and men to the gender aspects of the news they consume.
- Conducting a gender audit of laws, policies, programmes, regulatory bodies and other institutions relating to the media.
- Developing a gender analysis of media globalization in the national and regional contexts, taking into account the impact of media with global, regional and national reach both within various countries and across the region.
- Incorporating gender awareness in media/journalism education.
- Collecting, evaluating and disseminating "best practices" from the region that can serve as role models.

The rationale for such activism is effectively summed up in the following two quotations from African gender/media activists:

> "What, in the end, could be more central to free speech than that every segment of society should have a voice?" [67]

> "When every voice counts we can stop counting the voices."[68]

[67] Athalia Molokomme, High Court Judge, Botswana, Head, Gender Unit of the Southern African Development Community and Deputy Chair, Gender Links, South Africa.
[68] Colleen Lowe Morna, Executive Director, Gender Links, South Africa, and Chair, Gender & Media Network of Southern Africa.

Part 4

Reflections on the Seminar

Part I: *Gita Sen*
Part II: *Nivedita Menon*

Chapter 4.1

Reflections on the Seminar – I

–Gita Sen

I would like to begin my comments by stating that these are disparate and somewhat disjointed remarks reflecting on a number of the issues that have come up during the two days of this conference. I want to start by putting in a caveat about the women's movement since an important issue in the context of this seminar is about the place and role of women's movements in the information society. We know there is much discussion about who is and is not part of the women's movement, what it consists of, whether it is one or multiple movements, and so on. Nonetheless I am not going to engage here with these questions. I am simply going to keep talking about 'the' women's movement, assuming that you have a sense of the amorphous 'something' or 'some things' that I am talking about. The women's movement is a part of the larger space in which we struggle to transform our world, and those who inhabit this space have certain characteristics that are important for us to recognize as we try to move forward in this discussion.

We, in the women's movement, tend to have fairly strong Luddite tendencies. On the one hand, we don't like technology or the idea of technology. This is odd because, in our personal and collective lives, we actually like technology a fair amount and we use it all the time and quite effectively! But often we don't like the concept, the idea of technology. In that sense, we have a very old, Luddite notion of technology that is filled with deep suspicion of what it might and might not do. This may be quite reasonable given the ambiguities of what technology has been and has meant for women through history. But it certainly colours our inherent approach and it colours what one might call our 'default position'.

Having said this, I want to argue that we need to recognize that we are living through a new industrial revolution and it is really about the nature and implications of that revolution that we are arguing, due to which we have as much ambivalence and confusion about technology as we do today. This is not just simply technological change, with a small 't', as has been said a million times in the last two days of the seminar. It is something that touches upon so many different aspects that we do not quite know how each of these pieces of the larger puzzle of the new industrial revolution fit together.

In this context I want to plant my remarks very firmly on the ground of something that gets too easily and quickly dismissed in some discussions in the women's movement as non-

transformative – the simple importance of being able to earn an income, make a livelihood and survive. There is a real problem if we counterpose the ability to make an income and improve one's livelihood against some notion of a larger or more transformative social vision. In some sense, I firmly believe that the former is very much a part of and has to be part of that larger transformation. If we counterpose them, I believe, we are doing not just ourselves, but the large masses of poor women – about whom we speak all the time – a great deal of disservice. I just want to say very firmly that issues of livelihood, of survival, of work and its implications, and how those get transformed, are very much a part of what we ought to be looking at.

Another important theme in our discussions has been the talk about the media and its control. The irony is that at one and the same time, we are living in a world where media control is increasingly centralized, yet there has been an expansion and explosion of communication that has democratically transformative potential; both currently live cheek by jowl with each other. What are the implications of this? I think we need to pay more attention in the particular context of what is happening to media in this country. As someone who regularly interacts with and keeps track of what goes on in the United States and US politics, I am struck by the transformation of the democratic potential of that society (which is IT-rich beyond any other) through media control. Systematic centralization and control of different channels of mass communication by corporate and anti-secular interests has completely transformed what is considered to be knowledge. This really alerts us to the need to pay a great deal of attention to similar tendencies in our own context. The way in which mainstream media represent women, I think, leads to some bigger questions that we have to address and deal with. While talking about the democratizing potential of the Internet, the baby is in the bath water right now. How do we hold the 'baby' of open and easy communication while chucking the 'bath water' of centralized and privatized control and distortion of mass information?

Let me say that I want to strongly endorse the point that was made about the insufficient distinction between and clarification of 'information' and 'knowledge'. I am trying to avoid saying 'information versus knowledge' because I believe that information is part of knowledge but, clearly, it is not all there is to knowledge. Information tends to be treated not just as something out there, but also in terms of something given to us that we consume, whereas knowledge tends to involve creative processes and interaction. But we need to more strongly theorize what this separation means and I think there is still a level of confusion in this area.

Partly because this distinction has not been clarified sufficiently, I am not clear, at this point, on what is the exact nature of the digital divide that we keep speaking about. Is it in terms of access to information? Is it in terms of access to the technology that enables access to information? Is it in terms of production of information? Is it in terms of production of knowledge? Or, is it all of these things? But, each one of these things means something quite different and I think at various points in the discussion over these past two days, it has been sort of like the five blind men (or women) and the elephant. One's analysis and description depended on which of the above one was talking about, but that wasn't always clear; and many speakers did not seem to acknowledge that the elephant may have other parts! Is the nature of the digital divide sufficiently captured by the South-North dichotomy? We know it is not. Is it captured by rich versus poor? We know it is not. Rural versus urban? Probably not. How does gender play out in each one of these divides? We are not completely sure. I think

that at the end of these two days I am left with more questions than possible answers to these issues and I think that it probably derives from some basic conceptual clarity that we need to begin working towards.

Another set of issues has to do with this business of WSIS: what is it all about? I just want to revisit the questions I had brought up earlier, raise further questions and, in doing that, also address the issue about whether we can sidestep UN conferences.

My first question is whether it is necessary to engage? It is clearly in this area that there are a great number of questions. Can we just sidestep UN conferences and their processes? Can we just not look at them? Can we forget that they exist? Do they matter? My perspective is that there are important governance issues around information that may well determine what is available to us and what is not in the not-too-distant future. The Chinese, for example, know well from the way in which the State controls the Internet what they can and cannot do. Is this type of control something that could happen on a global level, or at national levels? The content of the discussion of Internet governance at WSIS could well be the key. Second is the question of financing. Where will it come from, and who will bear the cost? Does governance have something to do with the cost? The third is, who will fight for open source, open content, open access and where, if we disengage from the WSIS space?

Given these questions, is it actually possible to engage in a meaningful way? There was debate in the seminar about whether this is a space that has, for the first time, allowed corporations to become fully legitimate partners in a UN process. Be that as it may, a major gap in our discussions was that e-commerce did not come up at all when we were talking about Internet governance. Yet, a very large proportion of what is happening over the Internet is e-commerce, and therefore, a great deal of the engagement with how it will be governed, what will happen to it, etc., is linked to questions of e-commerce, of which we hardly know about or have spoken at all in this discussion. Clearly, however, this is where there is an enormous amount of interest in relation to where the Internet goes, and how it will be shaped in the future.

So this shaping of the terrain of the debate – the scope, the content, what is included or excluded – is, whether we like it or not, something that is happening in the processes of the UN conference. The question of 'do we engage because it is happening?' is not a question of 'do we engage because the UN or the North is engaging in it?', but really whether we can afford not to engage. Some might be of the opinion that you can afford not to and you do not have to engage because, in fact, you are not going to be able to do anything. Well, perhaps that is true, although I am not highly convinced that it is. I think that many of the issues of cost and access that we, particularly as women, tend to have a great deal of concern about are not sufficiently addressed. If they are going to be addressed at that level, then I hope that someone is present to raise the questions in the right way.

Having said that we cannot afford not to engage, the question is what exactly is the feminist perspective on this and is it different from a general perspective of marginality and marginalization? One way of looking at the feminist perspective is, of course, to say that it involves the three 'Os'– open source, open content and open access – and to make sure that

women are not marginalized from these three Os. Another might be to go back and say, what is gender-specific about the whole process? Does it tell us something? Does it have any connections to the very old issue of social and biological reproduction, the 'care economy' as feminist economists have named it? Does it have something to do with women as workers? What about the business of media, pornography and control? What is a feminist perspective on the right to knowledge, access and information? And what does it say in terms of its content about women's rights? Is the language of rights part of this process? It seems to me that in the two days of the seminar, we have been using terms like women, feminist, and so on, back and forth in fairly muddy ways because I think we are not completely clear about the nature of each of these perspectives.

I think IT has thrown into sharp relief many of the women's movements' fault lines and stress points. Let me say something at this point on what I earlier called the 'default settings'. When we are unsure about what a gender perspective may be on something, we tend to fall back on 'marginalization' – this is our standard default line. When we are unsure of what it is that is going on, we say, "Oh, women are marginalized", "left out of processes", "kept back", etc. I think that we really need to move out of this default setting if we are to grapple much more seriously with the meaning of IT and the meaning of a gender perspective on IT.

One could argue that the first industrial revolution was about steam-engines and factories and had a great deal to do with how women engaged with labour processes and production processes outside the home. The second industrial revolution was about biology and chemistry and had a great deal to do with reproduction, both biological and human, and the entire birth control revolution. How do we describe what the third industrial revolution – the current one that is about information – is doing to women and to gender relations in society? Well, it is doing some revolutionary things. One that immediately comes to mind is the transformation of space and geography, which no longer delimit the way in which we interact. But at the same time, in doing that, it has also transformed the meaning of personhood – of who we are, how we identify ourselves, who we see ourselves as part of, and what are these communities and spaces that we speak about. What does it mean then, if, as a movement, we are to engage with it? Just as the thesis of marginalization would not have got us very far in understanding the previous two revolutions, we need to move beyond the default setting of marginalization to really grapple with these questions and understand what this might mean.

A second default setting is that when we, in the women's movement, are unsure about how power works and about the capillaries of power, we tend to fall back on known and familiar polarities - middle-class versus poor, South versus North, and so on. I refer to the discussion raised earlier relating to women's experiences in these new IT work spaces. I think that we do ourselves a disservice if we move into thinking that it is just a bunch of middle-class notions to imagine that the young women workers in these spaces may actually like being there. Talking with women workers in these spaces reveals great ambivalences about how they think about their work and how they identify themselves, just as is true for garment workers working in export processing zones and those working in the global assemble line. One's views often depend on what one's alternatives are. As feminists, the one thing that we do know is that over and over and over again, when women are asked, "Would you go back to your previous situation within the family and the home?" the response is almost always "NO". Despite everything else.

So there is something about the personal transformation taking place in these work spaces that is important for us to understand because it is about the transformation of subjectivity, identity and personality. I have moved in my own earlier default position, which was that Export Processing Zones = bad! Multinational Corporations = exploitation! I believe this was far too simplistic and similarly, I think that it would be far too simplistic a reading in the context of ICTs as well. A gender perspective requires us to move out of these kinds of default settings in our analysis and to really understand the nature of power.

Finally, I want to reflect for a moment on the nature of campaigning via the Internet as someone who has been engaged for almost a decade in a variety of ways in global campaigns. Global campaigns are the ones in which feminists have engaged and which lend themselves very strongly and quickly to large groups of people coming together. This is where I see IT to have been both powerful and fruitful. However, we also know what can happen with communication via the Internet. It is full of trust and carried out very informally – we shoot off mails to people we have never met simply because somebody else sent us an e-mail saying "this is a good person". Now, in some of the campaigns that I have been engaged in, particularly the campaign around reproductive and sexual health and rights, we have learned that we cannot behave so naively any more, as these are all spaces which are now far more untrustworthy. We have to establish subsets within subsets of whom we can trust. We need to be conscious of how information gets put out. There is the business of the information that people put out; there is the business of the disinformation that people put out; and there is the business of the spins around campaigns. It has given a whole new meaning to the idea of campaigning via the Internet.

But even if we learn to campaign at a more sophisticated level, what happens to the personal warmth, the direct communication and personal interaction that we associate with movements, with campaigning, and with meeting each other? In the women's movement, in particular, the songs and the laughter and the sitting together have been the glue or the cement that makes it possible for people to hold together in difficult times. Can the new IT tools and campaigning be brought together with the old ways of building movement solidarity in a manner that might actually allow for us to use both and still survive? I do not know if I have the answer to this because increasingly, at one level, you have the individualized campaigners who are part of these larger global campaigns, but yet, where are their sensibilities? Where are their default positions when push comes to shove and a decision has to be taken immediately? What is it that they will go for? What is their tactile sense of movement? This, I believe, is a huge challenge that the Internet poses for the women's movement today as it does for all social movements.

Chapter 4.2

Reflections on the Seminar – II

–Nivedita Menon

My presentation will be a series of reflections on the proceedings of the conference, since I have never independently given serious thought to issues related to the dizzying advance of ICTs over the last decade in India. I take this conference as an opportunity to learn and to think about some of these issues and their relevance to feminist thought and practice.

In the first part of my presentation, I will outline some of the themes that I think are relevant for the women's movement to reflect upon; mainly the Indian women's movement but perhaps also South Asian women's movements more generally. In the second part, I would like to take up more centrally what for me has been the most interesting debate here – that is, the question of Internet governance.

As I think we all know, there is really no debate in the Indian women's movement on new media and ICTs. It is not an issue for discussion. There are, of course, many other non-issues – disability is a serious one. Another issue there has been silence on until very recently is hetero-normativity. So, there are several non-issues for the women's movement and there are reasons for why this is so. But I think we should recognize that there is a qualitative difference between silence on issues of this sort and silence on ICTs and new media, which is not merely another 'issue'. It seems to me that we need to recognize that new media and ICTs represent a new 'language'.

If you believe, as I do, that language does not merely describe reality, which exists out there independently of one's language, but that it is language which constructs reality – that the language in which we inscribe ourselves actually makes available the world to us – then we have to also realize that this language produced by the new media has already re-inscribed the world in which we live. Of course, here I use language in the broadest possible sense, not simply language through which you verbalize, but language meaning any mode of communication. This new language is one the women's movement cannot afford to be ignorant of. We must engage with it so that it can act as the medium of our struggle and transformation.

As far as the Indian women's movement and feminist scholarship is concerned, there is a limited discussion that centres on the area of jobs in the IT sector. Issues such as the nature of the workspace, the nature of the work itself, the essentially masculinist nature of the work in India's

IT sector and how women figure as workers, I think have been fairly well discussed by feminist scholars. However, even here, there has not been much thinking on two other aspects – that of women as users and women as producers in this sector.

Apart from jobs in the IT sector, another aspect that has been considered to some extent more recently is that of information as power – the knowledge-as-power dimension. It seems to me that these two issues practically exhaust the discussion around the ICTs/ new media in the women's movement.

Within this discussion, an older debate is also continuously rehearsed - about whether there is something specific to a women's perspective in this field or is it simply that women have to be recognized as part of a general condition of marginality. Here I must note the limits of the kind of research that explores whether women's employment in the IT sector transforms their status at home, the sexual division of labour or patriarchy itself. I assume that, in a highly inequitable world, we should expect that access to e-services will be gendered, caste-d and class-ed. Of course we need to struggle against it. However, I don't think the endless detailing and bemoaning of this is particularly useful theoretically.

I now move now to an aspect that has not been addressed in the women's movement and by feminist scholarship more generally – the unique nature of the new media. It is not just another technology. When one doesn't recognize this – that it is a whole new language that is reconstituting our world – it tends to be considered as one more luxury item like colour television. I wonder if it is very useful to think about the new media as simply one more luxury good embodied in the computer, rather than as an alternative language through which we can redefine agenda. I am certainly not suggesting that it is empowering in and of itself. I don't know if anyone argues that ICT is empowering in itself, and if they do, we certainly have to be very suspicious of such claims. We need to recognize that the role of media and new media has to be seen in the context of prior political activism in which this technology was able to deepen the struggle.

There was a plaintive question from the floor – how can we make our news (those relating to feminist struggles) sexier? Why it is that mainstream media never reports our news? There is really no way to win that game because, very literally, the way to make our news more 'sexy' is to have women in the nude. That is what Manipuri women had to do, they had to march militantly in the nude, in order to draw the attention of the media to the atrocities of the Indian armed forces. It is so literal. It is as literal and as crude as that. Over the past decade, the mainstream media has succeeded in producing an image of the public sphere in such a way that any idea of a movement has been obliterated. The public space consists entirely of 'stars'. The *Narmada Bachao Andolan* (Save the Narmada Campaign[1]) for the media is only a few individuals, not the hundreds of thousands of people in the movement. Or, for example, take the campaign to stop the felling of trees that is going on right now in Bangalore. At least a 100 people must be involved; people are on night shifts from 3 to 6 am to sit on top of trees to stop them from being felled overnight. But for the *Deccan Herald* there is no campaign; its reportage

[1] A very strong grass-roots movement in India against large-scale dislocation of people because of a big dam project on the river Narmada.

consisted of a single photograph of a well-known actress cutely hugging a tree. Or else, for the media to be interested, there must be violence or scandals.

In this context where the mainstream media will not consider our issues as sexy, I think it is a big mistake to try and 'be sexy', to try and win on their terms. It is here that I find very exciting the staratégies the Internet offers of simply rendering irrelevant the mainstream media. This is not something which has happened only in Korea,[2] which is the example that was used in a presentation at this seminar – in fact, it can happen here; it has happened here. Remember at the height of the Kargil crisis, solidarity and peace movements across the India-Pakistan border were in continuous touch over the Internet. This unique capacity of the new media to flow through and to render old structures of power irrelevant should be taken very seriously.

Of course, there are oppressive potentialities in the new media. We need to consider whether there is something to its very uniqueness which could render it oppressive. The issue of the 'tyranny of technology' is a question arising from an older feminist engagement with science, and I think that troubling question, addressing the conditions of knowledge production, is something that we need to re-engage on.

Another issue which has not been addressed, or I think has been wrongly addressed, is that of pornography and censorship. The anxieties of control – of how to control both technology and sexuality – come together in this domain. How do we censor pornography on the Internet? Someone here mentioned the well-known incident in which a schoolboy and a girl from the same school had sex, and then the boy passed around graphic images by Multimedia Messaging Service. The first reaction of the authorities was to consider a ban on mobile phones in schools. This was the immediate reaction – "we have to ban mobile phones in schools". There was also a round of arrests of everybody from the boy concerned to various other people, including the Chief Executive Officer of baazi.com, the Internet site on which the images ended up being sold. But in all of this, the whole question of the desiring female subject is completely obscured. Women are never thought of as actively sexual or interestedly watching porn. This is the kind of discourse which an older feminist debate on pornography problematized, a debate on whether pornography is simply violence on women, or whether pornography is potentially a space of desire. I think the Internet does open up unexpected new dimensions of desire and subjectivity.

It is in this context of control that I would like to move into the second part of my presentation, which is the fascinating debate over WSIS, and 'Internet governance'. The term 'governance' is located very firmly in the neo-liberalization agenda. We cannot simply use it as a term which is equivalent to administration or government or something like that. The concept of 'governance' or 'good government' has been made popular by the World Bank since 1992. Indeed, bad governance is regarded as one of the root causes of all evil within our societies. Major donors and international financial institutions are increasingly basing their aid and loans on the condition that reforms that ensure 'good governance' are undertaken. Thus at a superficial level, the concept sounds like it covers all possible aspects of democracy, indeed, as if it is a synonym for democracy.

[2] Referring to a very successful political campaign in Korea, during the Presidential elections in 2002, that used SMS.

The concept of governance has passed so thoroughly into common usage that it is now claimed, as the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) does, that it is "as old as human civilization".[3] Governance, its website tells us, can be used in several contexts such as: "corporate governance, international governance, national governance and local governance". It is important to note that, in this understanding, government is only one of the actors in governance. Indeed, the concept of governance is meant to take us away from the old model of 'government' as something carried on by the State, and to make CSOs (which have come to be understood as NGOs) responsible for health, education, water and so on. Development agencies should aim to fund these organizations rather than the State, despite (or maybe because of) their lack of accountability to anyone apart from their funders.

A well-known dissection of the concept of governance has been that of John Harriss,[4] who demonstrates that 'governance' is a crucial part of the vocabulary of the post-Washington consensus, which rejects the analytical agenda of State versus market in favour of the idea that the two must complement each other. Governance as a concept, in his understanding is a powerful tool for the refashioning of the agenda of corporate globalization, in the face of the recognition that structural adjustment will not succeed without "a human face". Thus, while the use of the term is generally intended to suggest an expansion of democracy, Harriss argues that it is not simply an innocent descriptive term.

Armed with his insight, we stumble across the term 'corporate social responsibility' (CSR), which is part of something called 'corporate governance'. What is 'corporate social responsibility'? The website of Development Gateway[5] is illuminating on this. Development Gateway says about CSR:

> "Corporate social responsibility has emerged quite recently from being just an ethical commitment into a new approach to achieving business objectives worldwide."

'Social responsibility' to achieve business objectives worldwide! This kind of frank admission of interest certainly helps us figure out what is going on, but clearly the frankness also comes from a position of absolute control over the world situation on every front.

Let us consider what the experience of 'governance' has been on the environment front. Thomas Linzey,[6] in a hard-hitting lecture on environment laws, has shown how all the concern expressed by governments and corporations for the environment has resulted in regulatory mechanisms that in fact enable continued exploitation of natural resources treated as property, but in a regulated and "sustainable" way. The frame of governance that has been erected under the name of protecting the environment, in fact, protects the ability of certain people and

[3] http://www.unescap.org/huset/gg/governance.htm
[4] Harriss, John. Depoliticizing Development. The World Bank and Social Capital Left Word Books, New Delhi, 2001.
[5] Development Gateway describes itself as an "independent not-for-profit organization". It adds, though, that it was conceived by World Bank President James Wolfensohn and initially developed in the World Bank in 2001. "Independent" then, from what exactly?
[6] Linzey, Thomas Alan. Sins of the Fathers: How Corporations use the Constitution and Environmental Law to Plunder Communities and Nature ". Text of lecture available at http://www.ratical.org/corporations/TAL030404.htm

corporations to create projects and carry them out. "When a regulatory agency writes a permit for the emission of pollution into the air, it legalizes that pollution. When an agency writes a strip-mining permit, it legalizes that mining…. In regulating, we have given up something tangible – our right to make critical decisions to build the kind of future that we want for our communities. We have traded it in for a right to regulate." The "right to know" is crucial, but knowing is not deciding, he adds.

He shows how corporations, in the US, which are among the most powerful in the world, by acquiring the status of "persons", are protected and enabled by the Constitution of the United States of America against individuals and communities challenging their absolute control over natural resources. In fact, corporations have used environmental regulations to drive smaller firms out of business, through the cost of complying with environmental regulations. The regulatory regime that is central to all projects of governance is geared to ensure the continued exploitation of the environment at a sustainable rate, while serving the purpose of eliminating competition.

Looking at, for example, the statement from the international conference on "Biodiversity: Science and Governance", organized by the UNESCO and the French government, we cannot fail to be reminded of Linzey's critique. The statement notes the need for the "improved management of ecosystems", urging Governments

> "to take all necessary actions, including capacity building, needed to realize the 2010 biodiversity target, consistent with their sustainable development goals", [and calls for] "the launch of an international multi-stakeholder consultative process guided by a balanced multi-stakeholder steering committee."

The stakeholders would, of course, include giant corporations along with local communities as if they were equally responsible both for consuming the environment as well for protecting it. There is thus a systematic occlusion of social conflict and class relations.

John Harriss suggests that it is only where powerful class and mass movements have been successful in transforming power structures that 'decentralization', 'transparency', 'social capital', 'trust' and other such notions associated with "governance" have any meaning. Outside of the context of such movements, the use of these notions in fact has the effect of "de-politicizing development." This also squares with Linzey's prescription to build a "people's movement" that will refuse to be straitjacketed by the regulatory regime that is merely the framework for continued and planned exploitation of the environment. This movement will have to organize millions of communities across the United States to challenge corporations and to take back the constitution to present a concrete alternative to ecological disaster and social injustice, rather than simply be content with planned and regulated "sustainable development".

In India such an understanding is evident in spokespersons of movements like the Right to Information campaign. Aruna Roy and Nikhil Dey,[7] for example, are very clear that there is a

[7] Aruna Roy and Nikhil Dey work with the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), a grassroots movement in North India.

critical difference between NGOs advocating the subcontracting of governance responsibilities to themselves, and on the other hand, movement groups such as theirs laying claim to the State itself and to the right to participate in its decision-making process. However, they too, use the term 'governance' as if it were interchangeable with simply 'government', when in their understanding there is a clear critique of the World Bank notion of 'governance'.

I am entirely persuaded by this kind of critique of the concept of governance, and therefore have a serious aversion to the term 'gender sensitivity'. In keeping with the objectives of 'governance', the term is the equivalent of regulatory regimes for the environment. It de-politicizes feminist critique, both of patriarchy as well as of development and of corporate globalization. Feminism is harmlessly transformed by the term into 'women's empowerment' – an ally of the project of governance and reducing citizens (a term with a history of democratic politics) to stakeholders (a term from the corporate world). The existing system of unequal and exploitative property relations and social injustice is not to be merely 'sensitized' to gender while keeping it intact. Feminism as critique requires transformative politics.

At the same time, unlike the other critics of governance, I am seriously skeptical of the potential of the State to be an ally in an agenda of radical transformation. I will come back to this at the end of my presentation.

Similarly, the notion of civil society has a whole history in political theory which we do not have the time to go into, but today civil society has come to be used as a catch phrase for all that's good and democratic. But civil society, as pointed out by many political theorists, includes the underworld, it includes multinational corporations and, of course, it includes political movements. So to use these terms 'civil society' and 'governance' and so on without locating them in the frameworks within which they emerge is a little problematic.

In general, I am wary radical transformative movements such as women's movements have the potential to be, ending up institutionalizing themselves through the State and the law. My sympathies tend to lie with subversive political movements that productively use the dark spaces and ambiguities which are not lit up by legality. I have my reservations about translating every possible subversive force into a language recognizable by something called global civil society and representable in UN forums. I was alarmed, for example, to hear the phrase 'Communication Rights'. To be ensured by whom? Why does everything have to be translated into the language of rights? The language of rights has a particular history – it is 400 years old – and the world since then is radically transformed, why are we using these terms so un-problematically?

In short, I do believe that the women's movement needs to politically, intellectually and theoretically engage with the new media and ICTs in general and with the new spaces these open up. So I do not actually subscribe to the dystopic view that many feminists have of technology. My question is: when we do engage with the new media and ICTs, do we need to do so within the paradigms and frameworks set by nation-states and global civil society? It seems to me that WSIS kinds of agendas are doing precisely that. That is, I think we need to put politics back into ICTs (I am rather uncomfortable with the acronym ICTs; I prefer 'new media').

We need to transplant new media back into the struggle framework, and out of the 'development versus neo-liberal framework'. In our current critiques of neo-liberalism, we tend to forget our older critiques of the nation-state led capitalist development paradigm. Within this limited framework that merely replaces 'neo-liberal' with 'development', ICT4D holds no terrors for the establishment.

There was once a way in which we talked about not only 'alternative' development strategies but alternatives to development; and I am afraid that is lost somewhere.

I think we need to ask, and this is an old feminist debate after all, is our goal to try and make ourselves worthy of this existing world by increasing access, by educating ourselves, and so on, or should we ask more fundamental and critical questions about this world? Should we not insist on nothing less than the possibility of other worlds? Should we not be using the potential of new media to question this world itself, rather than simply saying, "How do we become good, well-behaved, well-informed participants in it?"

About the Authors

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Tasneem Ahmar is the Director of Uks Research Centre. She is actively involved in designing and organizing seminars, conferences and workshops, conducting research studies, and writing reports on various development issues. She also provides training in gender sensitization. As the executive producer of the Uks Radio Project, she leads a team of four women radio journalists who produce Urdu language radio programmes based on women's and social issues as part of Uks' advocacy campaign. Tasneem has participated in several national and international seminars and conferences in and outside Pakistan and has written a number of research papers and articles as well as investigative reports for the English press in Pakistan.

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Aruna Sundararajan has over two decades of experience working with the Indian Government as part of the Indian Administrative Service. As Secretary of the Department of Information Technology, for the Government of Kerala, in South India, she was involved in the formulation of ICT policies and frameworks including the implementation of multi-sectoral ICT programmes, focusing on community development, capacity building, entrepreneurship and e-governance. She has overseen the design and execution of flagship ICT4D projects including the IT@School project, which attempts to induct IT into the school curriculum across Kerala, and the unique Akshaya project, one of the largest rural community e-learning and entrepreneurship initiatives of its kind in developing countries, under which 0.6 million rural people have been imparted basic computer literacy. This project was recently awarded the prestigious Golden NICA Award. Currently, Aruna is heading the Global e-Schools & Communities initiative, an endeavour of

the UN ICT Task Force to support the use of ICTs for education and development in India. The initiative focuses on the creative deployment of ICTs for achieving the MDGs.

Mridula Swamy

Mridula Swamy is a graduate from American University with a Masters degree in International Development, specializing in gender and development policy. Working as a Research Associate at IT for Change, she is engaged in a policy research initiative for the UNDP on engendering ICT policies in the Asia Pacific region. She is a part of the WSIS Gender Caucus-IDRC project as the author of the chapter on *Women's Empowerment in the Information Society of South Asia*. In Mahithi Manthana, an ongoing field-level project undertaken by IT for Change along with Mahila Samakhya, Karnataka, she is engaged in the quantitative and qualitative research aspects. She is also involved in a project to localize a handbook on women's empowerment through ICT-based enterprise activities in partnership with the University of Manchester, UK.

Carol Upadhya

Carol Upadhya is a social anthropologist. She is currently a Visiting Associate Fellow in the School of Social Sciences at the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), Bangalore. Earlier she was Reader in Sociology at the Department of Post-Graduate Studies and Research at SNDT Women's University in Mumbai. Her work has focused on the social and cultural transformations brought about by economic development in India. She has also written on theoretical issues in anthropology and the history of anthropology/ sociology in India, and recently completed a research project on land rights in Jharkhand. For the past two years she has been researching various aspects of the IT industry and IT workforce in Bangalore. Her current project, being carried out with Dr A.R. Vasavi at NIAS, is entitled *Indian IT Professionals in India and The Netherlands: Work, Culture, and Transnationalism,* and is funded by the Indo-Dutch Programme for Alternatives in Development.

Rukmini Vemraju

Rukmini Vemraju, Programme Officer, Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia, Commonwealth of Learning, has a background in communication and educational technology and about 20 years of diverse experience in the field of communication spanning advertising, creative writing, educational product development design, research and project management. Her current projects include working with community-based organizations to develop local capacities to generate development-oriented content using ICTs, particularly using audio and video. ICT applications for open and distance education like teleconferencing is another interest area. Formerly, she was Professor and Head of Research at TALEEM Research Foundation, Ahmedabad (India) a literary, scientific educational society and trust engaged in social science, media and educational technology research. She has a Masters in Communication and Journalism from Osmania University, Hyderabad, India and is a keen learner of Indian languages. Currently, Rukmini is engaged in working with ICT and development with a special focus on women and technology.

Leelangi Wanasundera

Leelangi Wanasundera is a board member of the Centre for Women's Research, Sri Lanka. She has previously worked as Head Information and Communication Division, Centre for Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific in Dhaka, Bangladesh and has been working on gender issues in ICT and other women's issues.

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Gender in the Information Society

Emerging issues

The information society has largely been driven and shaped by a techno-deterministic vision that obscures its gendered context. It is therefore imperative that the emerging landscape of the information society is anchored within the broader framework of gender equality, especially given its vast public policy implications. This exercise requires gender equality advocates to recognize the urgency of grappling with the nuances of information society developments and steer the discourse to ensure gender-just outcomes.

This publication features a series of papers that represent an early exploration of the challenges and opportunities for actors committed to gender equality in the information society. It is meant to open up the debates that can pave the way for a sustained engagement of gender activists with one of the most powerful contemporary social phenomena.

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