

# **Recasting the Beijing Platform for Action through the Information Society Lens**

**- A Conceptual and Action Framework**

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## Acronyms

ACTA	Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement
APC	Association for Progressive Communications

BPfA	Beijing Platform for Action
B2B	Business to Business
B2C	Business to Consumer
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women.
CEE/CIS	Central and Eastern Europe/ Commonwealth of Independent States
DA	Development Agenda
e-CF	e-Community Forum
ESCAP	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
GMMP	Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP)
ICANN	The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ICTD	Information and Communication Technologies for Development
ITfC	IT for Change
MM	Mahiti Manthana
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NREGA	National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
NREGP	National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme
NREGS	National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme
NWICO	New World Information and Communication Order
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSS	Open Source Software
PC4D	People's Communications for Development
RAWA	Revolutionary Women's Association of Afghanistan
RTI	Right to Information
SHG	Self-Help Group
TRP	Television Rating Point
WSIS	World Summit on the Information Society
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
VAW	Violence against Women
VKB	Village Knowledge Broker
WSIS	World Summit on Information Society
WTO	World Trade Organisation
WIPO	World Intellectual Property Organisation

# Recasting the Beijing Platform for Action through the Information Society Lens

## - A Conceptual and Action Framework

### 1. Background

This document aims to use the powerful lens of the 'information society' to define the emerging priorities for analysis and action towards gender justice. Section J about Women and Media in the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) of the Fourth World Conference on Women does require reframing in the light of the epochal techno-social developments characterising this historical juncture, But in fact, the new technological paradigm and the rapid changes that we are witness to also demands a revisiting of our fundamental conceptions about society and economy that inform any analysis and action towards the goal of gender equality.

This document offers a conceptual framework that takes from Section J the critical concerns articulated around issues of *Media* and *Access to Technology*, but it also goes a step further to flag two more issues for women's empowerment (not grasped by Section J) that the information society casts its long shadow on – *Violence Against Women*, that the BPfA addressed as a central concern and *Access to Knowledge*, which at the time of Beijing, was not anticipated would transform so profoundly the very basis of power in society. In including these two additional dimensions, the document explores the new context of self-expression and social relationships vis-a-vis digital reality and the centrality of knowledge ownership and sharing paradigms to the new social and economic order.

This document has been written for the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and its regional review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. While it is therefore tailored to speak to the overall trends as they have evolved in the past few years owing to new information and communication technologies (ICTs), in what is essentially a very diverse region, it is also a document geared towards identifying the way forward for women's empowerment and gender equality. Therefore, it will lay out the critical challenges facing the gender equality project as well as identify the empowering possibilities in the information society context making recommendations for policy action.

### 2. Introduction – The Information Society Lens

The Beijing document refers to women's access to technologies in Section J. Strategic objective J1 emphasises the need to 'increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in

and through the media and new technologies of communication.<sup>1</sup> From the Beijing Platform for Action of the World Women's Conference in 1995 to the Geneva Declaration of Principles of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in 2003, it became increasingly clear that these new media and technologies are of central significance as a force shaping a new social and institutional order. As the production as well as media technologies characterising the present global paradigm, digital technologies determine the constitutive logic of contemporary times. This logic, that permeates all institutions, consists in the oppositional proclivities of ICTs to democratise as well as centralise resources and power. ICTs increasingly shape the global 'everyday', as the DNA of what is emerging as the socio-technical paradigm of the information society. Thus, WSIS made reference to the notion of the 'information society', and the Geneva Declaration (WSIS 2003: A2)<sup>2</sup> explicitly mentions the potential of information and communication technology to promote 'gender equality and empowerment of women'. From Beijing to Geneva, the semantics had changed.

How ICTs redefine individual freedoms, how they reshape the public sphere, how they comprise new social and economic infrastructure, and how they become the architecture of a new information and knowledge paradigm, have emerged as crucial questions. Para A12 of the WSIS Geneva Declaration reflects these profound, although subtle, complexities:

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 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.

While Beijing did not go as far as identifying new ICTs as determinants of a new technological paradigm shaping reality, WSIS thus did. Yet, the transformative possibilities of this new social paradigm for women's empowerment and more significantly, the challenges for gender equality unravelling in and through the 'information society' context, were not clearly articulated by the WSIS. These possibilities are much clearer now.

## 2.1 ICTs and the Empowerment of Women

ICTs have redefined the opportunity structure for women's empowerment and gender equality in many ways.

- **Harbingers of new freedoms:** The empowering use of ICTs enables new 'states of being and doing' (Sen 1985: 204) and, in this, heralds a new paradigm of freedoms. The Internet enables women across geographies to connect and engender collective identities; it offers spaces for their self expression, exploration of identity and action that transgress geographic, social and cultural

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1 <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/media.htm>

2 <http://www.itu.int/wsis/docs/geneva/official/dop.html>

boundaries. For women, ICTs mediate a new social image and provide opportunities for assuming new social roles, breaking out of traditional orthodoxies, as software engineers, knowledge workers, 'infomediaries', telecentre operators and social entrepreneurs. The symbolic dimensions of such new roles challenge entrenched gender inequalities in existing institutions and contribute significantly to shifts in local gender norms.

- **Reshaping the public sphere:** The emerging public sphere creates new meanings of citizenship through avenues for voice, agency and participation. Very evidently, ICTs are not just tools; they are in fact a new grammar, of both a new language, and a new social reality. New media, in their seamlessness, also allow subversion of oppressive and hegemonic structures. Online media platforms and community media are radical spaces especially for marginalised women to build communities, forge alliances and challenge mainstream discourses, institutions and practices. Community generated digital information systems, including, geographic information systems, have been used for new representations and legitimizations of local reality for making citizenship claims from the state.
- **Providing new social and economic infrastructure:** For development, ICTs can be seen as system integrators, revolutionising localised systems that address various development goals. As system building blocks, ICTs comprise a new social and economic infrastructure through which institutions and systems (eg. health, livelihoods and education) can reinvent themselves. ICTs allow development processes and structures to be adopt a decentralised design, and expand institutional capabilities for accountability. These attributes of ICTs expand the democratic potential of development endeavour through new modes for participation and citizenship of women and agenda-setting possibilities in public services and governance processes.
- **Architects of new information and knowledge paradigms:** New technologies have completely reconfigured information and knowledge architectures. ICTs can break the barriers to learning and knowledge imposed by literacy and print technology-based systems, and affirm alternative constructions of reality beyond the written word. For a majority of poor women, most of who are also illiterate, digital media can offer a new platform for information and learning, peer to peer networking, and collaborative knowledge production. The public domain that ICTs facilitate is critical for democratising gender related perspectives and concerns.

These pathways to empowerment in the emancipatory and democratising potential of ICTs are however locked in with the totalising proclivities of ICTs. The centralising tendencies of new ICTs have given a new

lease of life to the hegemony of capitalist forces in the 'network society' (Castells 1996). Notably, it has also been observed that it is the propensities of new technologies that triggered the recent financial crisis, within a context of weak regulation of capital markets. The network society is predicated upon the dominant ideology of 'informational capitalism', which frames the architecture of inclusion and exclusion, pushing the already powerless further to the 'peripheries'. 'Membership' in the emerging social paradigm is increasingly a function of access to digital spaces. In this shift of power, the threat of exclusion for the socially marginalised is very real.

The tendency of the ICT paradigm to centralise power is also evident in state-citizen relationships. ICTs are also deployed to centralise state power through surveillance and controls on citizen freedoms. Fundamentalist forces in the region, like for instance in South Asia, have in fact used ICTs very effectively for mobilisation and violence.(Shaheed 2009). As instruments of control, ICTs thus endanger women's freedoms and bodily integrity, even as they represent empowering possibilities.

Section J must now be recast to reflect the new context. The Beijing plus 15 review process is also an excellent opportunity to look at what the information society means for the very notion of women's empowerment. We know enough now to articulate the gender power shifts that are part of the wider paradigm shift that new technologies are defining. This expands the scope of our analysis, necessitating an examination of what ICTs mean and how these meanings impact development, equity, social justice and progressive social change.

*The document examines four critical themes, using the information society framework to unpack the empowerment context for women, flagging opportunities and challenges, and imperatives for action. The first theme on media revisits the core concern of Section J and its transformed landscape, the second constructs the access to technology debate from the vantage of its economic and socio-political significance and the citizenship of women in the information society, the third reinterprets the violence against women discourse in relation to the emerging 'hybrid' realities and the fourth argues the centrality of the new knowledge paradigm for gender equality. The concluding section on recommendations attempts to address the policy and legal frameworks needed to grapple with the complex realities that confront the gender equality agenda.*

## 3. Revisiting Section J of the Beijing Platform of Action

### 3.1. Media in the Information Society Context

Since the Beijing Platform for Action was adopted, the communications and media landscape has been undergoing tremendous changes. The corporatisation of media and the concentration of media ownership has continued. Television channels dedicated to news, lifestyle, history or geography have burgeoned. Online newspapers and other Internet-enabled routes of accessing information have gained in popularity. In this complex and rapidly mutating context, empowering possibilities are juxtaposed with new challenges. While community media has had a remarkable trajectory, often owing to new digital technologies, new media forms (blogs, online forums, etc.) have revolutionised and democratised media production methods and content. At the same time, the globalising and homogenising character of ICT platforms pose a threat to the very possibilities for greater legitimacy for voices from the peripheries and progressive gender discourse.

In this rapidly changing environment, to what extent have the concerns regarding women's representation in the media, as expressed in section J of the Beijing PfA, been addressed? Figures are hard to come by, but the evidence that does exist makes clear that despite progress, the picture remains a bleak one. In 2005, the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) sought to explore changes in the content of news – the people who appear, the issues that are covered, and the stories these tell about who and what is important. (GMMP 2005)<sup>3</sup>. The GMMP also looked at who reported or presented the news. Overall, the study found, women's perspectives continued to be largely absent from media channels. While women's presence as news subjects, too, has started to increase, it remains fairly marginal. In fact, women are central to the news in only 10% of the stories worldwide. Where women are central to news items, this is 'often in conventionally stereotyped ways - as celebrities, victims of crime, or in clearly “woman-centred” stories that are usually marginal to the main news agenda' (GMMP 2005, 74). The region reflects global patterns in that women continue to figure predominantly in stories on the 'soft' end of the news spectrum. Thus, even where business and the economy are concerned, women are almost thrice as likely to figure in stories on consumer issues or poverty, than they do in items on economic strategy or the rural economy. Also, even on issues that dramatically affect women, the male voice continues to predominate. For example, in stories on gender-based violence, 64% of all news subjects worldwide are male.

Why has there been so little change, in terms of women's representation and participation in the media, since

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3 Global Media Monitoring Project (2005). All data is about one monitoring day: 16 Feb 2005. Groups in 76 countries submitted usable data. In total 12,893 news stories were analysed on television, radio and in newspapers. These news items included 25,671 news sources - persons who are interviewed or whom the news is about. The stories were reported and (in the case of television and radio) presented by 14,273 news personnel. Altogether 39,944 people - including news sources, presenters and reporters – were covered in the 2005 GMMP.

the Beijing Platform for Action was agreed upon in 1995, and is there no reason for hope? To address these issues, it would be useful to characterise media-related transformations in the IS along two trajectories. One, is the deployment of the global reach provided by new ICTs for a rapid intensification of the consolidation and homogenisation of media. This has provided the necessary platform for 'constructing' and controlling new global 'realities' conducive to the interests of dominant global players. The second trajectory, which can, for analytical purposes, be posited in opposition to the first one, comprises the endless possibilities that open up with the capability of new ICTs to remove most constraints on old media paradigms; the capabilities for one-to-many and asynchronous communication, which make it possible for almost anyone to build a media space for herself through the content she can create and the relationships she can build. Women's representation in and contributions to media have to be located against this dramatically altered backdrop.

### **3.1.1. Macro Media Consolidation – Globalisation's Reality TV**

In a globalising world, 'the story telling capacities of broadcasting industries have grown enormously to become the main media consumed, talked about and used as a cultural practice, sources of information and labour tools across the planet' (Chakravartty and Sarikakis 2006, 21). Thus, while issues of content and representation have been at the fore of women's media activism, the material aspects of broadcasting and media, embodying the larger techno-economic conditions, cannot be seen in isolation from content related issues. Developments relating to infrastructure, technology, ownership and regulation deeply impact the shape that media content will take.

At the heart of the ICT-induced transformations of the media landscape lies the overtaking – almost complete replacement, in fact – of the social and political by the economic in this arena. As Paula Chakravartty and Katharine Sarikakis (2006, 3) have pointed out, 'the changes experienced in media landscapes are facilitated by *de facto* structural changes in the mode of production and terms of international trade. In this context, discourses about 'public interest, communication and cultural rights' find themselves pitted against a 'market-led normative framework for the shaping of communications' (Chakravartty and Sarikakis 2006, 82) that, backed by powerful corporate and other interests, has managed to gain a position of unmistakable (even if perhaps not undisputed) dominance. The earlier public service paradigm of media – shaped by political and normative, rather than economic considerations – is, by and large, non-existent. This shift is reflected in a relocation of debates surrounding entertainment and media in the global governance system, which now more commonly take place in the World Trade Organization, as part of Intellectual Property agreements, rather than in agencies such as UNESCO that have traditionally been their locus.

As stated in the first section, new ICTs define an arena of struggle between democratising and totalising forces. Of the most dramatic developments in the media space, the appropriation of ICTs by dominant forces to construct a reality that consolidates their interests is most significant. However, the wider context of

change is also marked by contestation, with a proliferation of people's media. Social transformation in this scenario therefore depends on the specific policies to mould the contours of change in the information society; something that has been argued in the elucidation by Castells and Himanen (2004) on the Finnish information society model, for instance.

### **Box 1: Women and Newsmaking in India**

Nupur Basu points to the changes in the overall context of news and newsmaking in India (also mirroring broad trends valid for the region), especially with respect to TV:

*“In the last one and half decades the number of women that have come into television in India and the new media areas is heartening. Unlike the slow entry of women in the print world, women in TV were a much sought-after entity and the floodgates opened up to employ them. In mainstream channels, senior women journalists did bring a lot of focus on development, human rights, malnutrition, health and gender issues. However, of late, the dumbing down of the media with its sensational coverage has resulted in less and less space on these subjects and therefore less impact by these women journos. There is a need to refocus energies on the real issues. Despite the proliferation of the media - over 300 channels - the quality leaves a lot to be desired. The emphasis has shifted wholly and solely to entertainment and reality, and even earlier mainstream channels, like news channels, are dumbing down with infotainment, in search of TRPs [Television Rating Points].”*

Email interview with Nupur Basu, 29 April 2009

The lowering of the cost of entry into media spaces, through less expensive and more flexible radio technologies and TV broadcast technologies, instead of creating a strong public sphere with a diversity of views and robust debate has enabled the entrenching of economic interests motivated by global capital, in turn fueling even higher degrees of consolidation of media. Relaxation of media regulations – such as on cross-media ownership, public service, etc. – has accompanied the complete shift of media to a pure business paradigm. Media is thus embedded in and reproduces the impulse of informational or digital capitalism, with its inherent globalism, strongly constraining impact on national and local political action, and lack of accountability to the local community . And as Box 1 illustrates, the impact of these changes on women is direct.

Also, the growing convergence of ICT and broadcast as well as print media takes these developments to radical limits. ICTs, unlike media, are somehow taken to be an arena which is inherently 'private', and increasingly 'business', to be 'protected' from any socio-political 'constraints' on their explosive innovativeness. This is due to an early entrenchment of market-fundamentalist ideology in the ICTs arena, helped by and concomitant with its highly global nature, more than any other sector. Corporate monopolies

of an unprecedented kind hold power in this arena. (Google, for example, holds 90-95 percent of search engine space. Social networking sites like YouTube and Facebook are joining the rank of such monopolistic transnational companies to create a completely new online media paradigm, also shaping a new socialising environment.)

While the Internet was essentially developed as an instrument of sharing information among equals, its egalitarian character is greatly under stress due to recent developments. Infrastructure-owning companies propose to charge levy for faster relay of content, thus creating what has been called a multi-tier Internet. There is a real threat that the Internet is likely to be very different from what we know it to be, where the website of a women's collective is as accessible as that of a giant trans-national. This issue is the subject of what has been called as the Network Neutrality debate. With few paid 'channels' dominating the Internet, its convergence with the multi-channel DTH TV, to present a single global media platform, which will be open and participatory only in name, may be imminent. Women have a very high stake in preserving the openness of the Internet as a key possibility for building an emancipatory media platform.

### **3.1.2. Media Regulation – Framing New Rules for a New Game**

As before, the question of regulation is a complicated one in the emerging media context. The diversity of social, cultural and political contexts in the region reflect in media content – with state censorship frequently playing a critical role mediating political issues (see Box 2). In response, the media industry often seems to adopt self-regulation with respect to politically sensitive content. However, newsmaking seems to clearly follow market logic, in 'packaging' women and gender issues, where self-regulation based on ethical codes and social change commitments is not evident.

In fact, a major characteristic of these new media spaces, is that the media now are more or less free from any regulation or any other possible positive and moderating influence which can direct them towards important social goals – which is the burden of much of the actionable parts of section J of the Beijing PfA. A good example of this is the complete paralysis of the governance and regulatory systems *vis-a-vis* the huge global online porn industry. The revenue/ turnover of the porn industry exceeds that of many of the major IT monopolies put together<sup>4</sup>. Such an explosive growth of the industry obviously has strong gender implications (discussed in some detail in the later section on violence).

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4 [http://www.familysafemedia.com/pornography\\_statistics.html](http://www.familysafemedia.com/pornography_statistics.html)

## **Box 2: Women and News in Malaysia**

While women make up the majority of journalists in Malaysia, they are under-represented in senior management. The reliance on advertising revenue has led to a disregard for many women's concerns. For example, one journalist told her management that she found a highly sexist advert on the newspaper's front cover problematic. The advert was for a competition and showed the picture of a car, with two scantily clad models draped over the bonnet, and the caption "Which one would you take home? The car, of course!". She was told she was being over-sensitive, though she did have space to discuss the issue in her column. Likewise, when the issue of advertisers' responsibility came up during discussions on a potential media council, civil society and journalists groups were told that this was an out-of-bounds area.

Discussions in all forums on issues pertaining to religion, particularly to do with Islam, are severely restricted, both formally and informally. Since Independence, in common with many Muslim-majority states, Islamic law has been restricted primarily to family law, with women's groups arguing that many provisions are detrimental to the rights of women. Other matters of controversy include conversion (forced and voluntary, the rights of children and spouses in marriages where one party converts to Islam, etc.) and increasingly, the role of Islam in legislation (whether Malaysia is an Islamic state). All these touch on the rights of women and the rights of religious minorities in Malaysia.

Sisters in Islam, a women's NGO, is not given air time on any of the television or radio networks in the Media Prima group, which controls all non-state free-to-air television broadcasts (this was an informal communication to a member of Sisters in Islam). Private radio and television stations are often more wary of communications with a political content (including, for example, refusal to air an advertisement by Amnesty International) than the State-owned networks, due to an extensive culture of self-censorship.

Randhawa, Sonia (April, 2009): Email communication to authors.

However, policy attention to connections between sex trade and ICTs is an issue that runs up against huge vested interests, where free expression and anti-censorship advocates as well as transnational businesses find themselves on the same side of the table in their preference for no regulation. Perhaps a good instance of this is in the fact that a 2004 report on 'The consequences of the sex industry in the European Union' of the European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities<sup>5</sup>, which came up with well researched facts, *inter alia*, on sexist portrayals on the Internet, was not taken up for any action. The Report had proposed clear points of action to safeguard the interests of women. Even as ICTs enable more and more women to assert their voice through online public spaces, they also enable dominant and hegemonic masculinities to be reasserted in multiple ways, including in online pornography easily accessible to private individuals with greater anonymity. Seventy percent of the £252 million that European Internet users spent on the net during 2001 went to various porn sites (SA Månsson et al. cited in Eriksson 2004). Policy debates must account for the fact that the channels of communication for sex trade and pornography increasingly converge on the Internet, and this has specific implications for vulnerable women.

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5 <http://www.genderit.org/en/index.shtml?w=r&x=91331>

Apart from their unprecedented monopolistic power, trans-national media companies promote what they call self-governance frameworks, which are a smart mix of consumer feedback and co-design, to suit business interests, indulging in preemptive tactics against any regulatory moves. (See Box 3). Private governance regimes are the norm in the ICT space, ranging from industry groups taking major decisions on technology standards, to quasi-regulatory bodies like The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) which manages the logical infrastructure – the domain name system and root zone file – of the Internet. Conceptions of techno-neutrality dominate the governance discourse - where the ostensible neutrality of privatised governance is seen to reflect a win-win situation, offering 'more for everyone' - and are employed to sustain the domination of transnational business in all these spaces.

Such desocialising of media space through technocratisation and marketisation poses very significant problems for gender advocates. There are not many ways left for gender advocates to influence media, which has emerged as the necessary and primary support structure for a globalised marketisation of more and more aspects of social and economic life, characterized as neoliberal ideology by its critics. For women this represents a huge loss in terms of strategies for a fair and empowering representation through media.

### **Box 3: The Contradictions of Self-regulation by Transnational Media Corporates**

Google today runs a massive global private content regulation system in adhoc arrangements with government officials, often acting under no legislative framework, and through self-appointed cultural experts for different parts of the world. (When confronted with the illegitimacy of such an arrangement, the Google representative at the UN Internet Governance Forum in Rio de Janeiro in 2007 shot back, 'would you rather prefer governments do such regulation?!') Facebook is coming out with a bill of 'rights and responsibility' which it calls 'a new approach that will allow all users to have a voice in shaping the policies that govern the Facebook service'. Such measures that coopt the community of users / consumers to frame the rules governing online behaviour hijack what essentially are international and national legal and public policy issues, in the name of a new citizenship.

Recently, it was revealed that Facebook obstructed private messages that it 'suspected' of promoting IPR violation. On being questioned, the company said that it has a right to do so, the 'right' to censor personal communication that even in the context of sovereign powers has been highly contested. More recently some women's groups launched a signature campaign to protest Google's policy to restrict ads for abortion related information and services in certain countries. Such privatised regulatory paradigms not only imply gate-keeping and policing of the new information paradigm, but they also raise critical questions about the legitimacy of corporate entities to adjudicate matters of global and national public policy and law.

### **3.1.3 Micro Media Resurgence - The Transformative Opportunity for Community and Bottom-up Media**

ICTs have had a much more positive impact in terms of energising local community media and opening

myriad new possibilities for what has been called as citizen's media, through peer-to-peer networks. These two developments and an innovative mix of the two, provide much potential to challenge the negative proclivities of macro media transformations mentioned above. However, it will be a mistake to presume that the availability of new ICTs would in itself be enough to take these possibilities to their best potential for gender sensitive media, which is empowering to women.

For over a decade, women's community radio initiatives in the Asia-Pacific region have signalled the enormous relevance of the medium not only for making gender debates public, but also in creating spaces for conflict resolution and peace processes (eg. in Philippines and Fiji), local development including post-disaster reconstruction (eg. Nepal and Indonesia), and debates on poverty and food security (eg. India)<sup>6</sup>. Women have also used video to further their human rights and tell their stories in repressive regimes (Kee 2005a)

Contrary to the dichotomy implicit in stylized arguments favouring 'old' rather than 'new' (ICT) media, the digital revolution has made community video less esoteric and more accessible. Digital technologies render the entire chain of activities from recording to editing and transmission cheaper and more flexible, easily undertaken by non-technical persons, as compared to the old analogue radio and video technologies. This has enabled many women's organisations and grassroots groups to take to audio and visual communications for protest, lobbying, advocacy and community building and solidarity. Within this larger scenario, the absence of suitable policy frameworks to build on this momentum to harness the power of grassroots action for gender justice is a glaring gap (See Box 4).

The work of many organisations espousing progressive gender agenda (in India for example<sup>7</sup>), has shown the remarkable potential of digital tools for new forms of such content that dislocate conventional ideas to create new generations of audio-visual material. Such community radio and video initiatives bridge the literacy barrier, enable collectives of women to shape personal narratives into social critiques with a new legitimacy, create messages for building a shared identity, produce alternative 'truths' challenging official versions and mobilise collective opinion and action through innovative interplay with new ICTs, like MMS<sup>8</sup>.

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6 The work of AMARC demonstrates this deep impact of women's community radio.

7 In projects such as Video Volunteers and Mahiti Manthana and in the work of NGOs such as Deccan Development Society and ANANDI.

8 Recently the media, especially mobile phones were used to share images of abuse of a Pakistani woman in the Swat region.

#### **Box 4: The Changing Media Scene in Pakistan**

While women are actively using the Internet to network, communicate and disseminate information, one of the biggest issues in Pakistan is that the religious right uses the Internet much more proactively and effectively than those in the progressive camps. Right-wing militants have effectively used the radio for over a decade in the now troubled Swat area. However, the media is increasingly playing a role in mobilizing the people. In the 2008 election period, the media provided comprehensive coverage and played a large role in mobilizing women voters as well as preventing rigging from taking place. Similarly, during the lawyers' long march, the media had a large role to play in keeping the issue at the forefront.

Yet, mass media still focusses on women in the domestic sphere, portraying them as perfect housekeepers, wives or mothers. This simply reinforces the stereotypes under the patriarchal system. On the reverse side, women are also being portrayed as sex symbols in advertisements in order to increase sales. On a more positive note, there has been an increase in the number of female anchors/hosts on television and radio and journalists which allows more women to share their ideas and perspectives with a larger audience. Women seem less afraid to express their political, economic and social views in the media.

An important policy issue is that the media is not regulated at all, with the result that certain television channels have been involved in some irresponsible reporting in which facts were not verified. Media has a great impact on public opinion but biased talk shows can be detrimental in terms of supporting a specific political party and promoting its agenda. Women's groups need to explore the entertainment media as a means of reaching youth through videos, Facebook and blogs, amongst whatever else might be a possibility. Various communities have cropped up online (especially on Facebook) to raise awareness with regards to issues such as women's rights and promoting anti-terrorism campaigns. A recent example of one such group created by women is "Unite Pakistan- Say no to extremism". These communities have also been used to mobilize civil society and are particularly targeted at the youth. This has positively affected women's participation in rallies.

More recently, the media reported extensively the case of Chand Bibi, a woman from Swat (an area in Pakistan that is now under the control of the Taliban militants), and the news was circulated on the Internet (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TOOdhZreO88>). The Supreme Court of Pakistan also took suo moto notice of the incident. Similarly, another incident from Balochistan province was also extensively covered by the mainstream media that involved honour killing. These are particularly relevant because they are cases from remote areas of where previously these incidents have gone unreported. However, this has had little impact on accountability of the government.

Chaudary et al. (2009): email communication with the authors.

The very fact that digital technologies facilitate a hybridisation of communication modes – opens up new media forms which are highly flexible in the possibilities they offer. For instance, sharing audio and video on the Internet can have powerful and empowering effects, evident in mainstream spaces like Youtube, but also increasingly noticeable in local community spaces. Such a rich context of audio-visual content at grassroots levels sets the context of appropriation of the Internet by communities, and for social purposes. If supported by the right policies, such empowering use of the Internet will remove the tyranny of local media licensing regimes that is often recognised as the single most important deterrent to a vibrant all-pervasive audio-visual

community media, which can provide a very useful space for the empowerment of marginalised women.

More than individual access, the collective appropriation by marginalized women of community radio or community video promote critical and collective pedagogies, legitimize alternate knowledge, breach public-private divides and thus have significant liberatory potential. Women's groups have been able to address complex issues like inter-community dialogue (in riot-affected areas like Ahmedabad in India)<sup>9</sup> and debates involving the wider community about patriarchal norms and traditions through 'community viewing and discussion' of local videos. Inter-generational solidarity among grassroots women is also possible to realise through new media initiatives. Younger women who find new media spaces and technologies more enticing and less intimidating are working with women leaders in the community from older generations, using technologies to further the struggles for advancing gender equality<sup>10</sup>.

The Internet itself is a vehicle for protest and radical action allowing feminist activists a space to express themselves through various ways including blogs, especially in contexts where there are cultural and political constraints on women. The feminist movement has not only gained enormously because of the Internet but also forged new alliances with other social movements. While this urgent need for coalition-building to engender progressive global justice agenda is indeed clear, the fragmentation and segmentation of the media – and the context of the material culture that 'packages' gender within which media is embedded and regenerates in turn – is having a deleterious effect on the public sphere. This is a threat to democratic practices and processes fundamental to gender justice. (The numbers of TV channels in South Asia for instance are mind boggling, which, owing to new possibilities provided by digital technologies, are increasingly segmented by social classes and consumer demo/psycho-graphics).

Gender and development debates tend to therefore run the risk of being crowded out in the practices of mainstream media industry and are often framed by a minority of women who have access to new media and its more sophisticated tools. For example, community radio is indeed highly relevant for sub-national gender discourse but not many grassroots women in these initiatives may be able to upload local language content on the Internet, or even if they did, to find audiences who can advance their agenda and interests so easily. Again, mobile phones that allow for Internet connectivity may be accessible to women only from a certain class. While texting may indeed be a powerful platform for social protest as the region has witnessed (in countries like Philippines and India there have been instances of popular mobilisation for political action because of mobile phone based texting), it is at best only a catalysing tool that can be appropriated for, but not substitute, social organising and mobilisation towards gender equality agenda. Structural changes related to gender and development require a media environment and practices that derive from a systemic and

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9 <http://southasia.oneworld.net/fromthegrassroots/videos-help-foster-communal-harmony/>

10 This has been the experience of the authors in the experience of IT for Change in the Mahiti Manthana project. It is also borne out in the experience of other community radio and video initiatives in the region.

institutional response to the new media opportunity. The risks associated with the emerging media ecology of the exclusion of the poorest women make mediation by public policy and local feminist actors a paramount priority.

While digital tools have revolutionised community radio and video, the rapidly changing realm of new communications technologies and the potential of the Internet as a convergent platform for myriad forms of interaction and action are not easy to coopt for feminist ends in the absence of public policy instruments which promote such convergence, making the technological architecture available and also encouraging local content production and the inclusion of marginalised women. Brazil for instance has a publicly funded network of telecentres where youth not only come together to create online sub-cultures, but also find ways to participate as citizens in local governance processes (Bonder, 2007).

Some feminist media activists are also concerned about how the new media discourse also tends to eclipse the value of and public funding to support, oral traditions and 'older' media in the region. For instance, in the context of Fiji and its public sector telecom monopoly, initiatives by women's groups to take radio across the difficult geography of the islands has been enormously pertinent (de Vela and Ofreneo 2007). While this concern is valid in a region with stark poverty and illiteracy among women, which also boasts of a very long history and rich culture of oral traditions, the task on hand is not only to preserve the value of these practices but to design policy and programme interventions that utilise the very propensities of new media for reclaiming and legitimising local and subaltern cultures. Gender activists must work to argue not only the inclusion of women into new media structures, but also articulate and assert alternatives to current arrangements. This requires a fresh and creative approach to media structures, processes and governance. More recently, action-research projects like in Cambodia on community-owned networks<sup>11</sup> (as against big telecom companies) have shown the way for technological and media models that are not just 'used' but also 'controlled' by the local community and emphasise women's empowerment and participation, with potential for system-wide change. Unfortunately, the notion of 'business model' and its inherent individualism, associated with new ICTs has stymied the possibilities for the convergence of local connectivity networks and local telecentres with local community media practices. Such convergent community media models comprising old and new ICTs portend exciting possibilities for change from below.

### **3.2. Access to Technology for Social and Economic Empowerment**

ICTs are emerging not only as a principal technology of production and therefore economic participation, but also as the key means of formal and informal social interactions, building new social spaces and transforming institutions. Access to ICTs therefore is key to economic, social and political participation

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<sup>11</sup> Like iREACH in Cambodia

today, in the emergent information society paradigm. In most development literature, the relative sterility of the term 'access' *vis-a-vis* a more empowering notion of 'participation' is stressed upon. Section J of BPfA also spoke of both access and participation. In the last decade and a half much more has been recognised and understood about how ICTs mediate access to and participation in various areas of economic, social and political activity, and also about what is access for and what participation in ICTs itself means.

### **3.2.1 Women and the Economy: The Emerging Information Society Context**

Information society analysis about economic concerns of women has related on the one hand to new employment opportunities and the social conditions of such employment and, on the other hand, to the 'opportunity' for market extension to hitherto under-served areas. We will examine both these areas in this section.

#### ***Work and Employment in the IT Sector***

Most governments in the Asia-Pacific region have taken the single-track approach of 'plugging in' to the promise of the global information economy with focus on job creation in the IT and ITES<sup>12</sup> sectors, inspired the 'success' stories of a few countries. As has been widely reported, these sectors have indeed opened up new employment opportunities for many women with relatively high levels of education, in several countries of the Asia Pacific. In India, for example, the very limited opportunities that existed in the formal sector until recently have often meant that middle class women preferred to stay at home, as full-time housewives, rather than take up low-paid low-skills job that conferred little status. Jobs in the ITES sector now provide a respectable alternative.

Assessments of such opportunities indicate that they have been a mixed bag. Especially in the ITES sector, women are often relegated to the lower echelons, carrying out repetitive work with few avenues for personal development or promotion. Moreover, such jobs are highly 'footloose', making them vulnerable to technological changes and global economic recession or transformations. But although IT and ITES sector employment may also be highly stressful, many women highlight the positive aspects of their jobs. They report having learned new skills, from communication skills to technical competency, that have increased their confidence. Working night shifts and living alone in cities, they reshape and remake their lives and re-territorialise spaces (Mitter and Ng 2005, 16). Where they gain control over an income for the first time, a new-found freedom and autonomy is frequently experienced, often accompanied by a greater decision making power in their households (Fuller and Narasimhan 2008). In contradiction to the long-standing 'feminisation of labour' thesis, in some instances a more equal division in labour in the workplace has even been reported to challenge the gendered hierarchy of skills (Ng and Mitter 2005; Saloma-Akpedonu 2005).

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<sup>12</sup> IT-enabled services

It is important to keep in mind, however, that only a small number of highly educated Asia Pacific women are affected by these developments. Moreover, while the Asian share in the Business to Business (B2B) and Business to Consumer (B2C) trade in digitised information has grown from 5% in 2000 to 12% in 2005, participation in such trade remains limited to a handful of countries: India, Malaysia, China and the Philippines (Mitter 2005). The question thus remains in what ways ICTs can contribute to improving the lives of the many poor and marginalised women that live in the Asia Pacific region.

The opportunities that ICTs may provide to small and medium enterprises have been trumpeted widely. In China, women have been reported to initiate 25% of new business start-ups while in Japan, four of five small business owners are said to be female (UNCTAD 2002). Many more women run their businesses in the semi-legal spaces of the informal sector. ICTs, it has been argued, have the potential to allow these women entrepreneurs to access to information that is crucial to develop their enterprises, link producers to global markets, provide business women with new opportunities for skill-building and development, and create possibilities for self-employment (Gurumurthy 2003). But although success stories do exist (mostly facilitated by an intermediary, such as an NGO), the current information society architecture has prevented such promises from materialising on a large scale. As poor women and their businesses are located at the fringes of the network society, they all too often get caught between the difficult policy choices that their governments in such environments have to make. Most importantly, without the necessary e-business skills, and marketing and distribution capacities, e-commerce initiatives are unlikely to be successful even where women do have access to ICTs; without these vital skills and routes to acquire them, their fragile businesses may very well not be able to survive the overwhelming competition that these very same channels, where they become available, tend to unleash.

### ***ICTs for Market Extension: Will the win-win mantra deliver?***

ICTs undoubtedly facilitate market integration and extension. However, the dominant models of market extension built on win-win propositions are assumed to be gainful for everyone. Strategies are proposed for women to integrate into these extended markets, which are often quite unrealistic, ignoring important issues of capacity and power relationships. Very few instances of women workers at the community level really gaining from such ICT based market extension exist. Most of these successes, like in the case of Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India, has involved NGO and CBO intermediaries with long standing presence in the community, who have invested considerable organisational work in building these linkages and sustaining them in a manner that is empowering to women workers.

What is necessary to understand is that markets are notorious for exacerbating inequalities, and are also likely to facilitate exploitation, when players with very unequal power are brought face to face in new

market spaces without adequate protection for the weaker players. This phenomenon is well known in WTO negotiations, and universally recognised. The obvious and extremely significant question here is: how can vulnerable and marginalised communities and women simply be 'integrated' into markets dominated by big corporate players without any attention to the needed measures for their protection, capacity building and collective market power? The role of policy, government agencies and non-profit and community based groups is important in this regard. Public sector initiatives (like eKrishi, a project of the Government of Kerala) through which a new ICT ecology to organise farm producers, including women producers, and enable them to market their produce is sought to be institutionalised are best practices to be studied and built upon. The interests of marginalised women in the new ICT based market systems need to be pro-actively protected, and that requires new ICTD models with policy frameworks which take a balanced approach to the respective roles of governments, markets, NGOs and CBOs, and a more participatory and bottom up approach to promoting women's economic interests in the emerging information society paradigm.

### **3.2.2 ICTs and Socio-political Participation**

As ICTs become a basic social skill- a language, rather than a tool of communication - it is becoming as necessary as literacy has been for social participation. Some countries have begun to take a universalistic citizenship and rights based approach to providing ICT skills, irrespective of the purpose for which they will be used. This issue will be discussed in greater detail in a subsequent section, whereas this section looks at the kind of socio-political activity that ICTs can support.

It is not only important that more women access ICTs, but it is equally critical to examine what empowering purposes do they use such access for, and the opportunities for such empowerment available for women. We have already discussed how ICT based networks are used by women's groups as a new kind of subaltern media. Many women's organisations have begun to incorporate ICTs to enhance organisational efficiency and effectiveness, in line with all other sectors. Since most countries in the UNESCAP are developing countries, it is important to see what role ICTs play in development. ICTs, as explained earlier, are a 'constitutive technology' and provide the building blocks for the communitization of development activity - making participation a real possibility through more open and proactive information sharing by public institutions, and for the validation of voices of women.

### **Box 5: Data on Access: What Does It Reveal?**

Statistical data on infostates and women's access, analysed by Huyer et. al (2005), reveal the following:

The relationship between the gender divide and the overall digital divide is tenuous – and so the gender divide cannot be expected simplistically to improve with overall improvements in diffusion or ‘infostate’. For instance, Thailand has a penetration rate of only about 7 percent for 2003, but about 52 percent of Internet users are female. In neighbouring Malaysia, the picture is a very different one: the Internet penetration rate is about 28 percent, but only 33 percent of Internet users are women. In Nepal, where penetration rates are abysmally low, women make up only about 16 percent of users. In Iran and Kiribate too, Internet penetration rates are less than 5 percent, yet women make up around 50 percent of users.

In countries with low Internet penetration rates, Internet usage is often confined to a very small, largely urban elite. Women tend to have fairly equal status with men in these circles, which can be quite global and cosmopolitan.

The wider socio-economic contexts is reflected in patterns of access. Mongolia is one of the Asian countries with higher female tertiary level enrolment rates for women than men. That may influence the high percentage of women using the Internet. In the Philippines, the operative language is English, so content is accessible and women are very active in both politics and economic life. Iran has a high rate of female tertiary education and a well-connected (electronically and by other means) upper class. Thailand also has many women in tertiary level education and strong policies encouraging women in science and technology” (146).

“By the beginning of 2004, the estimated number of Internet users in China was 79.5 million, an increase of 11.5 million or 16.9% over a 6-month period, and 34.5% over a 12-month period. The number of Internet users skyrocketed from the estimated 620,000 Internet users in October 1997. The gender divide was large in the late ‘90s, but closed gradually until women accounted for about 40% of Internet users early in 2002. However, since then, and despite the continuous booming of the Internet, the gender gap persists and the 20 percentage points separating women from men remain stable” (p. 164).

Huyer et. Al (2005).

Most development practice aspires towards community empowerment and ownership, and ICTs provide new structural possibilities in this regard. They enable bottom-up organising through peer-to-peer networking; new community media, as discussed earlier; and empowering access to and participation in institutions of governance. Through digital media and computing, women have created community-generated information and knowledge systems which are used for a wide range of empowering outcomes - from managing natural resources<sup>13</sup>, to engaging with and even challenging public institutions and local governance systems.

However, most public services and development delivery projects are increasingly redefined within the e-governance umbrella, which avows a marketisation of development approach (See Box 6). The methods and approaches underpinning philanthro-capitalism of the ICTD sector give rise to many contradictions in

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<sup>13</sup> Women of Tillonia in India for example, have used GIS for water management.

projects for women's empowerment (Edwards 2008). The “blending” of social and economic goals in enterprise models on the ground - for instance, in telecentre projects that seek to give public and development information to disadvantaged populations while also marketing services and products for 'sustainability' of the 'business' – invariably compromise social goals pushing entrepreneurial instincts towards survival rather than altruism. Many of these projects are also corporate marketing strategies with no real benefit for poor women (Gurumurthy and Singh 2009).

**Box 6: Common Service Centres in India**

Common Service Centre (CSC) scheme aims to build a new ICT based rural infrastructure across India, which is to be used to deliver governance and commercial services. The CSC scheme however remains stuck with an ‘identity crisis’ in being unable to spell out clearly whether it is primarily a governance services outreach plan or a general rural IT infrastructure plan. As a rural infrastructure plan it has been guided by current policy emphasis on using public-private partnerships wherever feasible. Accordingly, it seeks corporate partners with an interest in rural markets who can benefit from such an infrastructure and therefore may be ready to bear part of its cost. Governance services outreach however follows a very different logic. These are especially designed to prioritize the needs of disadvantaged sections. Corporate partners defraying the cost of laying rural infrastructure are obviously aiming mostly at prosperous rural sections. A simplistic conflation of two very different set of objectives and approaches into a common rural service delivery infrastructure is unlikely to serve the interests of the disadvantaged sections.

Development services most required by the disadvantaged people have much lower than average revenue potential and higher than average resource requirements, for instance *vis-à-vis* the intermediary agent’s time. A poor, illiterate woman is unlikely to be able to pay much to get information regarding government assistance that she may be eligible for. At the same time she is likely to require considerable support to access this information. The incentive that an intermediary, who sees service delivery only as a commercial business, will have in serving her as compared to a rich farmer looking for, say, insurance services or farm inputs, is not obvious.

Some classes of services that can easily be modularized, such as bill payments and government certificates, may be appropriate for effective delivery even under corporate- managed CSCs. It is also possible that entitlement applications can be provided and received, with clear acknowledgment, at these centers. Beyond such elementary services, it is difficult to see how such centers can facilitate community level governance activity, which is a much larger and more complex domain. A joint study by the government agency National Informatics Centre and Stanford University of many rural telecentre and governance initiatives concluded that local governance services and other entitlements should not be subcontracted to private players.

Reproduced from Singh, 2009

The creation and deployment of IT infrastructure by governments requires a rethinking; Much of public sector effort for ICT diffusion is guided by 'business model' approaches – a legacy bequeathed partly by the overall marketisation of development and governance discourse in the past decade, more pronounced in ICTD on account of the presence of powerful transnationals in this arena and by WSIS, in its emphasis on markets and efficiency. In fact the marketisation of ICTD distorts the knowledge gathering process in this

area, which in these early years of its evolution, is most necessary for learning about pathways empowering for women in relation to the information society. For instance, in the Central and Eastern Europe/Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS) region, research on women's ICT use and access is primarily produced by private actors for internal purposes and driven by profit motives<sup>14</sup>. This phenomenon in fact is by and large true for the entire region.

The inadequate attention to public finance models and push for private-public models works against marginalised women and their community organisations by privileging corporate profits over community access to and control over local information and knowledge processes. (It should however be noted that telecom sector deregulation did pave the way for more rapid and wider diffusion of telephony in the region.)

### **3.2.3 What does Access to ICTs mean? – Taking a Citizenship Approach**

In order to be able to realise the empowering possibilities discussed above, women obviously need access to ICTs and participation in shaping them. What does such access and participation mean? The dominant paradigm around ICTs has been to see it as a marketable service, the assumption being that since people can see its enormous value, they will be ready to pay for it. However, there are strong philosophical and pragmatic arguments supporting a public goods approach to ICTs. It cannot be taken for granted that marginalised people have the money for new services, however useful. It is widely known that as public services are privatised, women lose out most.

Business model based access strategies have largely failed all across developing countries to provide any meaningful empowering access to ICTs for the marginalised sections. Price for online access is too high, and relevant uses unclear, or at least not sufficient to develop new practices and habits, whether collectively in the community or individually. The considerable lag between adoption of new technologies in organisational or community systems and emergence of proof of their 'productivity' has been spoken of as the 'productivity paradox' in relation to the use of computers in business in the early '90s in the US. Such a systemic albeit delayed impact is as or more true for poorly resourced marginalised communities. It is therefore paradoxical that marginalised communities are expected to adopt a 'pay for services' model. But this has been the orthodoxy of the dominant ICTs for development (ICTD) discourse and practice.

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14 UNDP/UNIFEM (2004).

### **Box 7: Technology policies – Moving from Simple Access to Genuine Participation**

There is often a debate about whether mobiles or the Internet is the right technology for the poor. And since the penetration of mobile telephony is increasing greatly, this 'fact' is often used to claim the superiority of access through mobiles rather than the Internet. However, this dichotomy is false. Everyone prefers a cheaper, smaller and easier to handle hand device. The issue here is more about the 'openness' of the technology architecture. The Internet is open, while mobiles are not.

A systemic use of mobiles for an open and collaborative information society ecology will require significant policy interventions to change some basic architectural elements of the dominant mobile telephony model. While it is possible, and desirable for mobile telephony to become one aspect of an open and 'equalizing' Internet ecology, its present architecture often subverts such possibilities.

In dominant mobile telephony models, the network is entirely proprietary, the content is network-locked and the network is not agnostic to different digital content providers. The mobile platform is also biased against user- and community-generated content. (The Internet, on the other hand, is open and neutral to all users, and its basic network platform is non-proprietary.) Clearly, women's appropriation of information society possibilities and their participation as producers and innovators of knowledge and technology presupposes freedoms in the institutional ecology of ICTs. These key freedoms are enshrined in what is often called an open ICT eco-system – open software, open hardware, open content, open networks and open spectrum - the connections of which to the empowering potential of new publics is an important issue to explore.

A typical policy deadlock is usually seen in relation to investments in technology. While it is true that a new layer of funding is required for Internet access and community networking initiatives, oftentimes, this is seen to be in competition with limited government funding for other public/social services, and underemphasized in relation to other 'core' public services. Rideout and Reddick (2005) argue how a mature community communications infrastructure takes several years to develop - just as meaningful results from investments in health and education do - and therefore, there is no way other than to look at sustaining community access to technologies and networks through long term government funding. Financing policy regimes comprise a very critical gender issue, and for marginalised women, their equal citizenship in the information society implies public funding support for technology diffusion and appropriation.

It is therefore important to take a citizenship approach to ICTs. Like education, ICT provide basic skills and possibilities for equitable economic and social engagement. There are some countries where many governance services are increasingly shifting online – this single consideration is enough for policy regimes to take ICTs as a citizenship issue. Many recent EU documents, officially adopted by the parliament, have been veering towards such an approach. One such document compares ICTs provision to ensuring education for all, which is a human right recognised as far back as in 1948.

## **4. Beyond Section J – New Challenges in the Information Society Era**

This section will bring to the discussion two issues that women's rights activists cannot afford to ignore in the mutations wrought by technology on our social structures and institutions. These are - Violence against Women, and its reconstitution in the new spatialities of the information society; and the changing architecture of knowledge.

### **4.1. The Information Society Context and Violence against Women**

The information society paradigm incorporates slippages between the private and the public that have come to fundamentally reconfigure spatialities of our social transactions and communications. For example, what may be considered private and interpersonal communication on the Internet invariably occurs on platforms that are public (such as chat rooms, face-book). These slippages between the private and public can be transformatory; they allow for new kinds of publics to assemble momentarily, and in this emerging 'public' sphere, we see new forms of association and protest. Sms based public protest and campaigns online are indicative of this. (One example is where the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Sexual Slavery by Japan launched a worldwide campaign in 2005 to collect signatures from one million people to apply international pressure in demand for accountability and reparation.)

The realignment of the public-private spatialities also determines the ways in which new technologies mediate and reshape dominant taxonomies and identity categories of gender and sexuality. Digital spaces reconstruct relationships through new subjectivities that lie outside of dominant gender orders. However, even as online spaces open up spaces for self-exploration and self-expression, they also reproduce dominant power relationships.

This may be examined through two lenses. One, by looking at 'digital personhood'<sup>15</sup> and the ways in which the integrity and dignity of persons in online public spaces (elists, egroups, social networking sites etc) and incursions on their privacy are, at the very core, gendered. The second lens is the creation of normative structures in emerging spaces - the processes through which normative behaviour and structures are being constructed online and the question of who is creating and moulding these normative behaviours and structures. This thread of enquiry can unpack the paternalism and patriarchal controls prevalent in digital spaces, and help rearticulate ever-present notions of modesty, shame, and honour that subordinate women in these new spaces.

Violence in digital spaces arises in the ways digital personhood maybe violated and in the very definition of

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<sup>15</sup> Recently, German law defined online privacy in terms of 'digital personhood'.

the space itself and through the normative axes that mediate gender power online. Given that digital reality is intrinsic to the world we live in, wider lenses to understand the phenomenon of ICTs and how they construct new social relationships, and how current control over ICTs (by the market, state, community elite) can influence negatively or positively women's appropriation of these structures for their empowerment are needed.

Social and cultural norms regarding women's status, local patriarchies, conceptions of honour and family consent have a profound influence over women's access to and engagement with ICTs. Ideologies of the state define the boundaries of emancipation, through constructions of morality. For example, gender norms can get recast in policy constructions that define what kind of access is appropriate for women. The subversive potential of ICTs also threatens status quo, giving rise to moral panic and so, states exercise control and in fact use technology to curtail rights, rather than secure them for women.

Stanley (1995) argues that any technological advancement, even early agricultural ones, have profound impact on gendered relationships, and especially in the ways in which the roles of gendered individuals in relationship to the technologies have been perceived. For example, when the world became dependent on writing technologies, women were not included in any of the technologies that have enabled their participation, representation, and accurate portrayal of diversity of experience. Thus, the very creation of the new technologies is heavily geared towards its users as predominantly men, and so it is very likely that women are often the victims of the violence that men can reap through the use of technologies. For instance, the video game industry is built around and entrenched in the discourse of hegemonic masculinity.

#### **4.1.1. Violence in Digital Spaces and through Abuse of Technology**

One of our most immediate concerns emerge from the physical, sexual, mental, and emotional violation of women, in digital spaces, and through the abuse of technology<sup>16</sup>. These are discussed below.

One of the central ways in which ICTs are implicated in the violence against women is through the the ability of abusers to use it to further victimise women and girls. New video and computer-based technologies and their capabilities - undetected surveillance, such as spy software which allows remote tracking of keystrokes made on a computer; eavesdropping on wireless transmissions via mobile phones; e-mail tampering, such as intercepting or redirecting e-mail; hidden GPS tracking devices and many more - have been used by abusers for cyber-stalking (Huyer et al. 2005). Increasingly, mobile phones are being used to circulate private sexual

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<sup>16</sup> One of the more extreme examples is incidents of suicide by victims of online harassment that have been recorded in Kerala, in South India recently.

images of women through MMS. Younger people are also at risk because of new mobile phone trends like sexting.

Donna Hughes' (2002) paper details the various forms of new technologies that have been used to sexually exploit women. They include: digital video disks that enable greater interactivity between users and the images; newsgroups for the exchange of information on how to locate and sexually exploit women; websites as a popular medium of distribution and marketing of pornographic materials and, to a lesser extent, sex workers; chat rooms as spaces for child sexual abuse; file transfer protocol (FTP) as a technological application for exchanging materials on child pornography; peer-to-peer networks and file swapping programmes that enable dissemination and exchange of pornographic materials; and live video chats which can facilitate human trafficking for sexual purposes. In short, pornography is varied in kind and medium, and can be ubiquitous and easily accessible to those who are connected to the Internet and other forms of digital technology (Kee 2005b)

While what constitutes pornography may be extremely contested, the power of the pornography industry is incontestable. As the Report to the European Parliament by the Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities (2004) argues:

The production of pornography is now a multibillion activity which exists worldwide and in many different forms. It is a well-known fact that this part of the industry has been one of the most powerful forces in the development of the Internet because of the porn-consumer's demands for discretion and security when paying for material. The most frequently used [search words are related to sex and pornography..... Companies active in the porn industry also attempt to capture market shares by selling their products via the mobile phone networks.....](#) For many mobile telephony operators, however, the 3G networks and licences for them have become a costly business and the majority of European operators are therefore seeking to finance their activities by providing pornographic material by means of agreements with porn producers. (Eriksson 2004)

The Internet has increased extreme pornographic material, including increased child pornography and violence and a demand for “new” materials, leading to the growing presence of more violent, rougher and degrading images (Huyer et al 2005). The Internet also allows the porn industry to bypass national laws on sexual exploitation and violence. Servers located in countries with fewer restrictions have a global reach and can serve countries with more restrictive legal environments.

There seems to be no concrete data on the significant links between trafficking and ICTs, except as communication devices, but ICTs have become an integral part to the phenomenon of trafficking. ICTs are seen as contributing to an increase in sex trafficking in various ways: perpetrators can disguise their identities to make connections with targets, a common strategy with paedophiles; advertising with promises

for help with travel, living and visa arrangements have increased; the “identification” of women to be sent to clients is possible; and mail order brides and prostitution tours have become increasingly common (Huyer et al 2005). The connections between pornography and trafficking need to be explored anew; the issue here is not so much the vulnerability of individual women but the power, reach and consolidation of trafficking networks. Who are the women being harmed by pornographic images and are they different from the women being moved out of their contexts by the trafficking industry? The exploration of these material and social dimensions is necessary in understanding 'harm' and the collective rights of women.

#### **4.1.2 Moving Forward on the Debates around Policy and Regulation**

Since states have indeed employed the discourse of pornography and harm towards women (often coupled with child pornography) to justify policing and censorship of digital spaces, without actually engaging with the issue on a deeper level (Kee, 2005b), women's rights advocates have promoted interventions that address this issue by arguing for self-regulation by industry and education of women for self-protection and creation of counter-discourse.

Initiatives led by women's groups for mitigating risks online through tools for self-protection ( for example, the BC Rural Women's Network sponsored Online Safety Toolkit) and Campaigns such as Take Back The Tech initiated by APC WNSP help visibilise and address the violence connection with ICTs. The adequacy of these measures will need to be examined in light of the fundamental shifts to the content discourse in the digital era. Indeed, the power of entertainment media has been such that increasingly entertainment embodies the sexualisation of consumption and the degradation of women's sexuality through mainstream media. Further, and as argued earlier in the section on media, global corporate power has come to mediate what is deemed global public interest where industry self-regulation has meant the blatant assertion of capitalist ideologies. Even while evading national legal regimes by using ICTs to expand market share, corporates have arrogated to themselves the impunity to violate the human rights of their clients, in agreements with authoritarian nation states. (For instance, Google's sharing of private data with Chinese authorities in 2008 was widely condemned). Thus, in the assertions for industry self-regulation, women's rights advocates may find themselves on the same side as market fundamentalists!

Further, from the point of view of women from developing countries two things are critical. Absence of global policy frameworks governing the Internet results in global public policy issues being relegated within the current dispensation to 'technical spaces', where the social discourse of technology and gender and the collective rights of women does not find legitimacy. Further, in these spaces, government intervention is invariably seen as anathema and as a threat to individual rights. For instance in 2005, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) approved .xxx as a global top level domain for sexually explicit materials. In the discussions raised about this case, many ICT policy advocates and experts

stated that with or without .xxx, pornography will continue to exist and flourish on the internet, and centred their concerns around the undue government intervention and influence on a supposedly independent body (Kee 2005b). Women's rights advocates have been at the periphery of these spaces.

Secondly, while most developed countries are now defining the basic rights framework for Internet use and governance, developing countries are still grappling with the basic access and ICT infrastructure issues. This means that what is decided in decision making spaces in the North around issues that are necessarily global - like The Council of Europe's Convention on Cybercrime - set international standards. While this Convention addresses child pornography and exploitation, it does not grapple with trafficking, which is an important issue for women's rights in the Asia Pacific and CIS regions. Adopting standards from the North also precludes debates around what may essentially be at the core of gender concerns for the South, and possibilities for a more nuanced and progressive discourse to be built around policy and regulation that allows interests of marginalised women to be heard by policy.

National laws to address women's freedoms and rights in a changing information society context invariably require a revisiting of national legal frameworks. This is a significant arena for women's rights activists. Violations of women's personhood in digital spaces and through the abuse of technology need a fresh response. Harking back old forms of content control, and paternalistic attitudes to women's sexuality and right to freedom from violence invariably recast women's rights in the language of protection - in the same vein as child protection in online space - denying their independent agency. The emerging transnational reality requires policy frameworks at global and national levels that recognise and legitimise free expression and protects the collective right of women not to be exploited.

## **4.2 Women and the New Knowledge Paradigm**

The information society is characterised by a knowledge economy where knowledge is the key resource and factor of production and a central basis of allocation of resources in the society – its political economy. Path-breaking analysis of gift and care economies by feminists points to the gender based exploitation of political-economic structures. As knowledge is increasingly privatised, commodified and commercialised, what kind of knowledge gets valued and what does not is a key gender issue, (on the lines similar to those in debates around labour.)

At present, ICT systems are the means of commodification and commercialisation of knowledge, and their governance systems represent a primary arena where political dominance is exercised, and economic advantages built. Thus, for example, women may contribute their experience and knowledge as subjects of market research (often masquerading as an ICTD project), and software developers in Bangalore sweat it out

to write the code, but the real appropriation of value goes to the share holders of ICT corporates in Silicon Valley, raising important and basic issues about who creates value and who makes money out of it. The kind of mundane things for which patents are available today is quite astonishing, and acquiring and using patents depends more on the capacity to leverage and appropriate patent regimes, which is increasingly a very expensive proposition, rather than innovativeness and inherent value of production of any knowledge. These new IP regimes are thus becoming the principal instrument for further entrenching existing political and economic dominations in the emerging information society paradigm.

The fault-lines can be seen more easily at the global geo-political stage. Developing countries have brought in the development agenda at the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) seeking to introduce issues of access to knowledge as equally basic to knowledge governance regimes as that of IP. Recently, WIPO highlighted the need of deepening the public domain as a part of its Development Agenda (DA). One of the major DA-related demands of developing countries is free access to publicly funded research in the North. Paradoxically, however, many developing countries are bringing in national legislations to proprietise and commercialise their own publicly funded research – a paradox that speaks to the complexity of the processes of knowledge appropriation, and the host of varied interests involved. Meanwhile, finding the environment inside WIPO not conducive to the urgent imperative felt by the Northern countries to entrench exploitative IP regimes, they have taken the route of secretly negotiated multilateral treaties among themselves, which then, given the global nature of our economic and technical paradigms, will become the default global regime. These countries are right now negotiating what is called the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA), which apparently seeks to extend IP enforcement capabilities across state borders, directly impinging on citizens' lives and rights in quite an unprecedented manner. Expectedly, some of the most controversial parts of ACTA relate to the new ICTs, *vis-a-vis* their trans-border reach.

Such stringent cross-border IP enforcements, built over unfair IP regimes, can be severely damaging to public interest and the interest of marginalised groups like women, who as consumers in many countries in the Asia Pacific enjoy progressive copyright and IP regimes. Four out of five best rated countries with citizen friendly IP regimes, by a recent citizen's report, are in the region and these include India, South Korea, China and Indonesia<sup>17</sup>. In fact it is important to note that US also figures among the top five in consumer friendly IP regimes at home; what is instructive of the complex role of IP regimes in new global economic systems is the fact that strong corporate lobbies are able to push the US government to take a different view in global forums. (Note the opposite tendencies of many developing countries, mentioned above, to seek liberal IP regimes outside while strengthening them within their borders.)

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17 From Consumer International's IP WatchList, a survey conducted of the copyright laws and enforcement practices of 16 countries.

As these global and national regimes, and the corresponding social and economic systems, percolate down to local communities - for instance, the likely far-reaching impact of the attempts to commercialize publicly funded knowledge – gender advocates need to understand their nature and implications for women's interest. They need to struggle to preserve the public domain, as well as protect their own knowledge from misappropriation. Some civil society initiatives like the creative commons seek to build alternative regimes, and some governments like in the state of Kerala in India have taken innovative steps to include such alternatives into their laws, seeking special status for community and traditional local knowledge. The location of women in these emerging socio-economic systems is important to analyse.

Current debates on IP tend to over-emphasise theories based on innovation, but some types of information in the public domain such as essential legal information or about entitlements may not fit comfortably in such theories. Marginalised women's access to information and knowledge and communication – radicalised as it is in the new information society paradigm – requires new public domain frameworks, that challenge dominant IP regimes, creating and nurturing which can in turn shape the future of the Internet. Women's interest in preserving and 'deepening' the public domain may parallel analysis of their role in gift and care economies.

The Internet, which was developed for free sharing of knowledge, and thus as a possible means of an extensive and deep global public domain, and whose underlying technologies are mostly collaboratively produced and non-IP, is now increasingly being made into a global infrastructure for control and commercialization of knowledge. While the Internet's openness is threatened by imminent tiering on the one hand, and the dominance of a few proprietary applications like Google and Facebook on the other, pure and unmediated peer-to-peer exchanges, the original intention of the Internet, are increasingly criminalized as likely sites of IP violation. Such global practices of knowledge commercialization, and control on knowledge processes, is also leading to acts of serious cultural appropriation and exclusion (The Sarai Programme 2005).

Developing countries have been increasingly concerned with the loss of the public domain exacerbating the digital divide (Greenleaf et al 2005). And for women from developing countries, the absence of protection for indigenous knowledge – 'a freeing up of access to indigenous culture' within the wider context of the corporatisation of the Internet – is only likely to portend exploitation (Bowrey cited in Greenleaf et al 2005).

One vital area for policy is in relation to local knowledge. Even as they legitimize subaltern knowledge, information society paradigms require a serious rethinking about knowledge creation, sharing and ownership. Intimately linked to the question of women's knowledge are the issues of public domain and

knowledge commons, mechanisms for protecting local communities' and women's rights to create and share knowledge openly and freely, access public information and knowledge that concerns their basic needs and rights, and to be free from corporate poaching of indigenous knowledge practices.

The vision of women's empowerment needs to be cognizant of the emerging era of collaborative innovation. Open Source Software (OSS) is the leading example of this trend, but the Open Source development model based on collaboration, community and the shared ownership of knowledge is rapidly expanding to other areas like content (Wikipedia), medicine (Open Source Drug Discovery), scientific publishing (Public Library of Science) and other areas of society. The 'old' questions of commons as above and beyond 'property'; or knowledge as above and beyond monetary economies; are significant to technology governance and its connectedness to intellectual property regimes.

## **5. Locating Women in the Information Society - A New Context for Action**

Most of the action points in Section J in the BPfA proceed from the following:

1. a firm understanding of media as a social space and not merely an economic commodity, and thus requiring close social and political oversight.
2. recognition of national governments as the key levers of political - regulatory as well as interventionist and persuasive power, and of their central role in ensuring social objectives such as women's empowerment and gender equality.

Given the information society context, and the transformative influence of new technologies, it may be necessary to revisit these assumptions. Rather than just bringing in new methods and technology to media, new ICTs have brought in a whole new ideology of marketisation with a prescription for a hands-off approach to regulation. Any social or political control other than that exercised through consumer choice is anathema. New ICTs are also essentially a global paradigm, which further reduces the leverage that national governments may have vis a vis them.

In this context, it may be needed to strategise on how to bring social concerns expressed in various media ethics and regulations to new ICTs, while understanding the greatly transformed context in which they have to be applied, and often re-assessed. This is no doubt a difficult proposition in the present context, but women's groups and women's machineries need to start doing the necessary homework - including cutting edge research to present policy and programmatic options. The dominant ideologies shaping new ICTs

cannot be allowed to sweep the media space, as emancipatory technologies are integrated into media paradigms. Much original research and theoretical framework building is required to understand and interpret this interface of media and ICTs in the context of women's interests. What kinds of social and political oversight is required over the new emerging forms of media and how is it possible to exercise it? What players are key in this regard?

The question of key players brings two issues to the fore. One is that fora of technical governance are today strong mediators of the kind of issues we have discussed above. Unfortunately, women's groups are almost entirely absent from these fora, which are often guilty of deliberate technical obfuscation of key social matters. Women need to understand the politics of technology, develop gendered perspectives on key issues, and engage directly with these fora at national and global levels.

It is also important to realise that even more than all other issues, ICT related issues are highly global, and much of the possibilities of necessary social and political leverage for protecting women's interests may need to be explored simultaneously at the global levels. This makes it very important that regional and global bodies concerned with protecting women's citizenship rights take an even more active role in the new situation. Even in cases, where actual power can be exercised at national or sub-national levels, such is the rapidity of change that these levels mostly find themselves overwhelmed and completely dominated by theoretical and policy frameworks developed globally.

A gender perspective on the information society consists in understanding the deep-seated changes that ICTs unleash in social relations and institutions. Within such an understanding, a new framework for action that addresses the challenges to gender equality and maximises the new opportunities for women's empowerment must be built.

Recognising that national governments are critical actors in the ICT and media space this document makes the following recommendations.

## **5.1 ICTs, Development and Women's Empowerment**

### ***5.1.1 A shift from ICT policies to information society policies is needed to address the wider social and gender dimensions of the information society***

- Governments need to recognise that ICTs are not just an economic sector; the media related aspects of ICTs have a strong bearing on issues of culture, democracy, development and social transformation. ICT policies cannot be entirely dictated by technocratic and economic concerns. ICTs need to be seen in their larger social role, and therefore an 'information society' framework, instead of an 'ICT' framework provides a good starting point in the emergent context.

- A separate information society machinery is needed to be developed within governments to highlight the myriad and very significant social aspects of ICT led changes. It may be noted that the European Union (EU) and many European countries have set up new institutional frameworks and empowered Commissions to address the changing techno-social context. Among developing countries, South Africa has also done so.
- At national levels, the ICT ministry or department needs to delimit its purview to technical and infrastructural responsibilities, while the ministry for women should deal with substantive information society issues concerning gender.

***5.1.2 A capabilities and citizenship approach to ICT provisioning is imperative for the inclusion of marginalised women in the emerging information society paradigm.***

- ICTs are not just about connectivity, but a whole ecology of methods and practices, which together provide the context of new opportunities for women's empowerment. To be able to develop such an ecology, the provision of infrastructure as a public utility is non-negotiable, but it is also only the first step. Hardware, software, content, applications and skill building are equally important requirements.
- A capability approach requires new community level systems and development practices to be designed for maximising the ICT ecology. For these systems to yield sustained benefits, ICTD projects must move out of purely business and entrepreneurial models, and invest in building and strengthening local institutions and development processes.
- While IT sector employment opportunities, training and literacy skills are vital for women to participate equally in the information society, special initiatives on ecommerce that provide wide ranging institutional support to women producers (particularly small producers) and artisans to compete in global markets is much needed.

***5.1.3 ICT systems need to be integrated with local development action plans not only for greater efficiency but also to promote women's rights and participation in development and local governance***

- A major roadblock at the community level preventing poor women's access to information of various kinds – about livelihoods, entitlements, public services - is owing to information gate-keeping by local level male elite and information brokers who mediate women's access to public information. ICT-enabled transparency of institutions, complemented by community monitoring and action by women's groups, can have radically transformative impacts for women's right to livelihood, health, employment, etc.
- The Right to Information Act in many countries in Asia is being seen as an institutional remedy for the inclusion of the marginalised. In this regard, ICT systems create a 'push' for putting information

in the public domain.

- Strengthening efforts towards greater decentralisation of governance using ICTs, and use of ICTs to build the capacities of women representatives in local governance are important areas of women's empowerment.
- Local ICT infrastructure like publicly supported telecentres can be critical for women to access information on rights and for accessing justice systems. In fact in Mongolia, IT kiosks have been used to allow women in remote communities to file complaints directly to Family Courts. It is to be noted that while public information infrastructure can make a huge difference to the lives of marginalised women, privatised ICT approaches will not have the incentive to address the information needs of the poorest women. This calls for a need to revisit the adequacy of the innumerable private sector initiatives in ushering in real empowerment.

#### ***5.1.4 A citizenship approach to ICTs also means a new orientation to technology governance.***

- ICTs, unlike typical economic goods are anti-rivalrous in nature; the more one consumes them, more is available to all. In the absence of due regulation, the extraordinary scalability of ICTs promotes monopolies. However, a different paradigm of technical governance, promoted through public policy, can as easily ensure that most digital applications are community owned, without stifling innovation, perhaps encouraging it even more.
- Open ICT models – open software, open hardware, open content, open search engines, open wireless spectrum and open connectivity models – are by definition more participatory, while closed proprietary systems tend to consolidate market power. While open models may be better for all citizens, they are especially favourable to those whom markets do not privilege.
- For grassroots and small enterprises run by women and women's collectives, Open Source Software is cost-saving. In fact, the adoption of open source software in the public sector is increasingly finding favour in many countries.

#### ***5.1.5 Women's ministries and departments need to be proactively engaged with emerging issues in the information society.***

- Expertise in technology governance areas is crucial in these early times of policy formulation. The significance of open ICT paradigms for development is necessary to understand.
- Also needed is active engagement with line departments - education, health, agriculture - to shape emerging ICT policies and programmes and to prevent their technocratisation.

#### ***1.6 Feminist research in the ICTD area to examine the efficacy of present initiatives for ICT access and capacity development and their financing models in effecting women's empowerment is critical. Research***

*to study best practices and propose innovative models to harness the systemic opportunities that ICTs provide for women's empowerment is also needed.*

## **5.2 Media and Women's Empowerment in the Information Society**

*5.2.1 Women's empowerment and gender equality need a robust public sphere where multiple voices can be heard. The unprecedented concentration of media ownership and the threat posed by the simultaneous fragmentation of the public sphere in the emerging information society call for a strong role for media policies and regulation that is guided by public interest.*

- The convergence of technologies, and of ICT and media spaces, needs to be addressed in a manner that keeps citizen interests foremost.
- Grassroots community media projects need to be supported, and women's groups provided the support and incentives for local media/ content production.
- Public service broadcast continues to plan a key social role; however, in the new context it can and needs to be made much more participatory and bottom-up, with new ICT possibilities that allow marginalised women to create, share and broadcast knowledge.

*5.2.2 Women's ministries need to recognise the momentousness of the changes in the media space.*

- Departments and machineries addressing gender equality and women's empowerment need to build the necessary expertise and engage actively with the institutional changes accompanying the information society. This includes an insight into the possibilities for convergent media platforms and for community media endeavour.
- Expertise and involvement in technology governance areas is imperative to be able to intervene in policy- and law-making.

## **5.3 ICTs and Violence against Women**

*5.3.1 Policies and law need to keep pace with the threat of violence against women in digital spaces. Measures to address violence against women in digital spaces need to recognise both women's 'public', political rights as well as 'private', individual rights.*

- In the name of protection, ICT access cannot be cast as a dangerous proposition. As much as the appropriation of new ICTs and membership in the emerging public sphere is fraught with risks and dangers, it is in fact the very basis of expansion of capabilities for women's citizenship in the emerging social order. Therefore, measures to address digital dangers need to emphasise online safety and security in an empowering rather than alarmist way.
- Concerns about online violence bring to the fore the question of what is violence and who decides

this. The subjectivity of the woman victim becomes central to resolving what may be seen as violence. While the state should be able to prosecute those engaged in violence against women, state power to undertake surveillance in general, without adequate basis, is likely to infringe on women's privacy. The state's duty to intervene and prosecute violence when it happens online should not become an excuse for surveillance over the Internet.

- In many countries cybercrimes are dealt with in policy mostly in their relationship to trade and the economy (except for child pornography and child protection, which have emerged as critical themes in national policies). The IT Act in many countries concerns itself primarily with issues of commerce and governance, and discussions of cybercrime focus on individuals in their role as users and consumers. In the legislation of many countries, an attack against the image or private life of a person is still not viewed as a form of cybercrime.<sup>18</sup> Chat room abuse or cyber stalking do not have provisions under which these crimes can be reported.

### ***5.3.2 Policies need to be cognizant of both negative and positive rights of women.***

- While ICTs need to be used to promote women's positive rights, corresponding measures for governance reform and information transparency, are also likely to put out private information in the public domain. It is important therefore that such efforts are geared to protecting women's privacy, and the ICT architecture is designed appropriately.

### ***5.3.3 Awareness programmes for the police, judges and lawyers is necessary to promote their understanding of the emerging issues in the information society.***

- Typically, state actors are less exposed to debates around technology, and this creates a vacuum that is readily filled by 'technical experts' who exercise enormous power in mediating between the state and the citizen, often without a gender perspective. Training of state actors must enable progressive discourse around gender and not reinforce tendencies for moral policing.

### ***5.3.4 Addressing violence against women means not just remedial but also preventive actions.***

- Institutional support structures like helplines are needed to be put in place for women to seek help and support in relation to cyber-stalking and other forms of violence and abuse in relation to ICTs.
- ICTs must also be used for institutional innovations in gender justice. For example, electronic FIRs could be directed to an NGO women's helpdesk for preliminary screening, followed by e-counselling on next steps and then facilitation to take the case forward.<sup>19</sup>

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18 <http://www.genderit.org/en/index.shtml?apc=a--e96159-1>

19 Kalyani Menon-Sen (2009): Email communication with the authors

## **5.4 Gender Justice in the Emerging Knowledge Paradigm**

***5.4.1 Public policy needs to protect women's knowledge in the digital era, where dominant intellectual property regimes threaten the 'commons'.***

- Preserving and nurturing the public domain is a priority to address the risks posed by new knowledge paradigms to women's traditional knowledge. National intellectual property regimes should be revisited to represent the best interests of marginalised sections, and not just follow a global race-to-the bottom towards more stringent IP regimes. Developing frameworks for protecting local, traditional and informal knowledge from wrongful appropriation, and providing support for its free sharing in the best interests of local communities is imperative.
- Publicly funded research and knowledge should especially be ensured to remain in the public domain.
- Support for community generated knowledge creation and sharing through new ICTs, and its integration into local development activities is necessary.

***5.4.2 Women's machineries, in recognition of the key role of knowledge processes in the emergent information society paradigm, must develop appropriate expertise and engagement with concerned actors.***

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