Chapter 11
Gender and ICT Policy

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ABSTRACT

This chapter is devoted to discussion of ICT and gender policy. It explores the need for gender consideration in ICT policy, gender issues in ICT policy, adoption of gender perspective in ICT policies, challenges for the adoption of a gender perspective in the formulation and implementation of ICT policies, case studies of gender and ICT policies in Asia, Africa, Europe, Latin America and Caribbean and Australia, gender approaches to ICT policies and programs, guidelines for policy-making and regulatory agencies. It was concluded that various national government have started addressing gender issues in their policies. Recommendation was given that policy makers should ensure that Gender considerations are truly included in national ICT policy.

INTRODUCTION

In the last decades, information and communication technology (ICT) has become a Powerful and widespread communications platform, particularly given the convergence of existing communications media with new communication technologies. ICTs can be used to increase access to employment, education or health services; strengthen political participation; improve transparency; provide a platform for diverse voices; and cross-cultural knowledge exchange. The social, political and economic changes wrought by ICTs have prompted certain shifts in development thinking. Development strategists now see, as recognized for example in the United Nation Millennium Declaration, the need to adapt ICTs as a way to avoid further marginalization, and also as a potential force for creating new economic growth opportunities and for pushing democratic boundaries (Genderit.org, n.d.)

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According to Marcelle (2000) ICTs have enormous potential to benefit girls and women in terms of enhanced income: generation opportunities, employment, and improved quality of life, but because technologies are not gender neutral, it is important to advocate for ICT strategies to reduce and manage the potential for ICTs to create economic and social exclusion and reinforce existing social disparities.

Bonder (2002) states that access to information, to knowledge and the interaction between cultures and social groups have never been so within the reach of humanity or as valued as in the last decades. The continuous innovation and global spreading of ICTs appears like a fundamental resources which has goals to attain which will inaugurate a change of era known as information society.

Subramaman & Saxena (2005) have reported that the development of ICT has been termed as ICT revolution due to its transforming potential affecting all dimensions of human civilization of our times which is unprecedented and the ultimate aim of the information society is the empowerment and development of all its citizens through equal access to and use of information. With the growth of infrastructure and access, ICTs are beginning to permeate even the most isolated regions. Access or lack of access to a medium that in some places has become a principal means of expression, economic survival, and decision making is vital for women. (ARC WNSP, 2005).

ICTs can be used to close gender gap by creating new jobs for impoverished women. Women, for instance, have been at the forefront of the village phone movement, selling airtime to rural people too poor to own their own phones. ICTs can also be used to enhance basic literacy and education for women and girls, provide job training and prepare women for careers in the ICT sector as well as to ensure health and safety (International Telecommunication Union, 2009).

ICTs are already being used by women's organizations to communicate their own agendas and perspectives in order to effect women's empowerment and social change. However, women also need to be involved in the policy processes that define access to and use of these ICTs. (Radloff, 2005)

While there is recognition of the potential of ICT as a tool for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women, a "gender divide" has also been identified, manifested in the lower numbers of women accessing and using ICT compared with men.

Unless this gender divide is specifically addressed, there is a risk that ICT may aggravate existing inequalities between women and men and create new forms of inequality. .If, however, the gender dimensions of ICT—in terms of access and use, capacity-building opportunities, employment and potential for empowerment—are explicitly identified and addressed, ICT can be a powerful catalyst for political and social empowerment of women, and the promotion of gender equality (United Nations, 2005)

Gender equality aspects need to be fully incorporated in all works which relate to ICT at national, regional and global levels, including in the development of policies and regulatory frameworks, projects and research and data collection. A basic starting point for incorporating gender perspectives in ICT initiatives is the use of gender analysis to ascertain the needs and priorities of both women and men and the manner in which policy-making, planning and other activities can really support equitable access, use and benefits, including employment opportunities (United Nations, 2005)

This chapter dwells on the need for gender consideration in ICT policies, gender issues in ICT policy, adoption of gender perspective in ICT policies, challenges for adopting gender perspective in formulation and implementation of ICT policies, case studies of gender issues in ICT policies of countries from different continents, gender approaches to ICT policies and programs