

ICT for Women’s Empowerment: The Big Picture

ICTs represent critical tools and an infrastructure that are increasingly shaping our world, understandings, interactions and structures of society. They can also enable efforts toward realizing inclusive, equitable and just development. At the center of this is the empowerment of women and gender equality, where ICTs can play a catalytic role.

The evidence for this is seen within and across many spheres:

Expanding Economic Opportunities through increased access to markets and related information, new or enhanced forms of income generation and new forms of financial, business and agricultural services that women would otherwise not receive.

UN Women supports a women’s Farmer Information Systems in Eastern Africa, and “Homenet”, a network for women informal workers in the Philippines.

Promoting Women’s Political Participation through new mechanisms for engaging constituencies and campaigning by women politicians, new channels for advocacy by women’s groups, tools to monitor elections and government commitments and hold political actors accountable.

UN Women supports a broad based online consultation on gender in the new constitution in Nigeria, and iKnow Politics, a global network of women politicians.

Supporting Social Welfare through service delivery in the health care sector, increased educational opportunities, possibilities for environmental and natural resource management, and channels for cultural expression.

Enhancing Safety by provision of - or connecting women to - services, mapping and monitoring incidences of violence and safety concerns and using social media to change attitudes about harmful practices towards women.

UN Women supports MediCapt, a mobile technology to collect and transmit forensic evidence in VAW crimes, SafeScaping with GIS technology by adolescent girls in Guatemala, and the UNITE crowdsourcing campaign.

Building Connections, Community and Movements by supporting mobilization, providing access to information and knowledge, amplifying voice and communicating alternative views.

Gains are not Automatic

There are risks that inequalities and negative attitude and practices towards women are reproduced online, that new threats emerge, or that women are simply left behind. We must collectively ensure that approaches to expansion of the information society put women’s needs – and women themselves – at its center.

Facts & Figures

- Women’s access gap to mobile and the internet ranges from 16-40% (ITU, Intel, mWomen)
- Women in decision-making in ICT sector ranges from 10-15% (ITU)
- Women in STI fields are already low and decreasing. (WISAT)
- In Europe, pay gap in S&T ranges from 17-38% (EU Gender and ICT Report)
- Gender reflected in only around 1/3 of National Broadband Strategies (ITU)

Benefits to Women

Participants of a UN Women digital literacy initiative in Ecuador indicated that the training brought them new skills and knowledge that helped them to become driving forces in their communities.

A UN Women/CISCO Networking Academy (CCNA) project trained women in ICT skills for employment. In Morocco, 60% of the students gained access to the job market within three months after graduation. 53% stated that the main reason for their selection was the CCNA training.

In a mWomen study of women in low and middle income countries, women indicated they received considerable benefits from mobile phone ownership including a sense of safety (93%), independence (85%) and increase in income and professional opportunities (41%).

Call to Action: Accelerate, Invest, Scale

What is required to realize opportunities and mitigate threats?

Strategies and Policies: Integration of gender into national, regional and global ICT strategies, policies including in implementation plans, data collection and monitoring.

Access: Build the requisite infrastructure addressing issues of quality (speed), affordability and openness, convenience and safety of access points.

Capacity Building: Develop women's skills to use technology and navigate services, consume and develop content and engage in channels for participation.

Content & Applications: Ensure availability of content and applications that meet women's specific needs and ways of engaging with technology.

Production and Decision-Making: Reach parity of women as active producers, owners and high level decision makers within the public and private ICT sector, including academia.

Economic and Socio-Cultural Issues: Combat stereotypes about women's abilities to use and develop technology, as well as recognize and address other gender barriers (e.g. access to resources) that bar women from full participation in society in general, and as a result, the information society.

Stakeholders: Engage government, women's groups, academia, private sector, the UN system and individuals to advance this agenda through persistent attention, action and investment.

UN Women's Work

UN Women supports ICT for gender equality and women's empowerment and the above approach through the following:

Global Advocacy and Partnerships

- Advocacy on gender and ICT for Development at Intergovernmental fora such as the World Summit on the Information Society and the Commission on the Status of Women.
- Formation of the Women, ICT and Development (WICTAD) global coalition and participation in the Broadband Commission Gender Working Group.
- Women's Empowerment Principles Technology Sector Road Map and partnerships with the private sector, e.g. Microsoft and UN Women Imagine Cup Gender Award.

Policy including promotion of: integration of gender in national and sectoral e-strategies and policies; gender sensitization of policy makers and regulators; integration of ICT into gender strategies and plans and capacity building of gender advocates.

Trust Funds and Programming including supporting innovative ICT applications through the Fund for Gender Equality and the Ending Violence Against Women Trust Fund, as well as through major global programmes such as Safe Cities and Rural Livelihoods and programming at the national level across all areas of work.

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Global Commitments

"Globally, there are substantial differences in participation in, access to and use of media and information and communications technologies, their content and production. A focus on the gender dimensions of information and communications technologies is essential for preventing and combating an adverse impact of the digital revolution on gender equality... ICT also can become central tools for women's empowerment and the promotion of gender equality. Efforts are therefore necessary to increase women's access to and participation in ... ICT, including their decision - making processes and new opportunities created through ICT."

Commission on the Status of Women

"We affirm that development of ICT 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."

World Summit on the Information Society