Newsletter

September 2011

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eLAC2015

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ICT and gender

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Newsletter
eLAC nº 16
September
2011

Information and communications technologies: essential tools for achieving gender equality

UN-WOMEN
Andean Sub-Regional Office

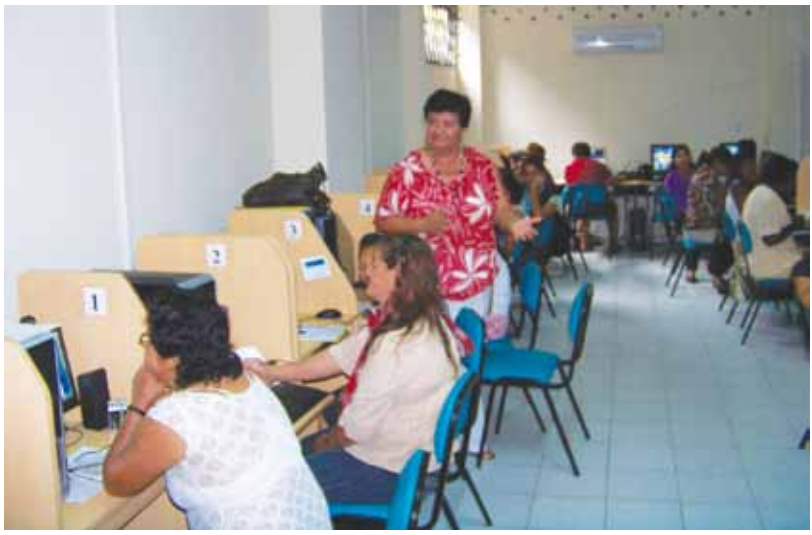
Gender-based discrimination happens in a broad array of spheres (work, education, access to health care and political participation, among others) and does profound damage to societies as a whole.

Patriarchal, unequal societies thwart the potential of men and women alike. In this androcentric system, differentiating between men and women has become second nature, relegating women to a position of subordination and discrimination and wasting the enormous potential of about half of the world's population.

Worldwide, less than one in five members of parliament is a woman. Women's participation in the workforce was estimated at 52.6% in 2008 while that of men stood at 77.5%. On average, for the 121 countries on which relevant information is available, women hold 29% of the jobs in research. In higher education, women predominate in some scientific fields, such as the biological and social sciences, but there has been less progress in engineering.

The challenge of building a social model based on gender equality should for now go hand in hand with targeted efforts to expand women's access to and use of information and communications technologies (ICT) as a way to democratize information, communications and the participation of women in the generation of knowledge.

ICT enable women to play an active role in development, support and dissemination networks. They also provide women with access to new jobs and professions, to participation in interactive learning and teleinformation initiatives and to knowledge and information for empowerment and for improving their lives. These technologies help women take their place in the public space of the information society, creating resources, contributing ideas and opinions and capitalizing on their own inventiveness and creativity.
To help narrow the inequity gap and promote women's access to ICT, between February 2008 and February 2010 UN-Women Andean Sub-Regional Office provided support for basic ICT training for women leaders in rural areas of



Ecuador, both to empower their relationships and to bring them into the knowledge society. The women participating in the programme lost their fear of computers and technology and learned how to use e-mail, thus broadening their opportunities for communicating and fostering greater contact with women living far away. Opportunities for learning increased as well; ICT enable women to take online courses and write about their own experiences.

Isolation and fragmentation work against the cause of those who are committed to gender equity. For those who are working to help overcome the problems arising from gender inequality, there is no replacement for women's access to knowledge and ICT. For women, such access is crucial for changing their lives, owning their destiny and participating in development.

As Michelle Bachelet, Executive Director of UN-Women and United Nations Under-Secretary-General, explained during the fifty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, women must be encouraged to gain equal access to ICT training and education as well as the new employment and entrepreneurial opportunities generated by these technologies. Women are challenging gender stereotypes about ICT users and demanding the right to participate in ICT research and development. They are also using ICT to build awareness—and as recent events have shown so vividly—joining with others to reshape history.

For an information society with gender equity

Dafne Sabanes Plou

Association for Progressive Communications, women's network support programme

Argentina celebrates Children's Day every August. This year it was interesting to see how information and communications technologies took over toystore windows and advertisements for gifts. There was no shortage of video games and consoles, broad selections of Wii games and DVDs with favourite movies, CDs with the latest teen hits, netbooks for children, MP3 and MP4 players and mobile phones of all kinds, shapes and memories. Toy cars, dolls and puzzles were rendered obsolete by this invasion of technology.

Of course, Children's Day is for girls, too. Anyone who might have thought that technology is neutral was proven wrong, at least insofar as presentation goes: pink, pearly, neon and animal print cell phones for girls, and even pen drives decorated with Swarovski crystals for older ones. So, the soft, fashion look is for girls. There was no lack of punk, heavy metal and animé designs for boys, reinforcing the idea that "hard" science is a guy thing.

When given the opportunity, boys and girls alike go online, access information, play and create their own content. They write or record their own voice and images in socially imposed environments that mirror the patterns society clings to as it advances technologically while holding on to established gender roles. So, entry into the information society is coloured by symbolic and cultural issues that feed the childhood imaginary and cement dissimilar attitudes and appropriations. For boys, there are games and applications requiring skill, creativity, cunning and concentration. Girls are left with the feeling that technology is just another adornment.

While working with digitally native teenage girls and young women in ICT appropriation workshops, I was not surprised to see the number and kind of technological devices they own and use with ease. And I could not but think of the potential for real development that the information society holds for women. Will this generation of girls continue to be eager and sure of themselves but not venture into science and technology careers because they still think that this would mean being trapped in a masculine field that will never be theirs? Will their job opportunities be confined to the lower rungs of the technology ladder, underutilizing their skills and competencies? Will they still be paid less than their male peers while performing the same tasks as systems engineers, just because they are women?

When the "Shaping Information Societies for Human Needs" declaration was issued to the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society in 2003 there was no question that people, social organizations, governments and companies should frame, build and consolidate a people-centred information society in which "everyone can freely create, access, use, share and disseminate information and knowledge," with equal opportunities and equity to "achieve their full potential."

Going beyond the supply of consumer technology with colours, formats and contents dictated by the predominant cultural model with its differentiated uses for girls and boys, gender equality must be seen as a prime ingredient for the fair, equitable and non-discriminatory information society we want. If we are to achieve this we must work for essential cultural changes so that technology appropriation takes place in a framework of equal access to contents and knowledge. And we must work for public and business policies that take seriously women's new roles in today's society. These roles should also be reflected in equitable opportunities and possibilities in the field of technology.

"We see the potential of ICT for rearranging family communication networks"

Migrant women have been the main focus of a programme set up by Fundación REDES (headquartered in La Paz, Plurinational State of Bolivia) to train them in the use of information and communications technologies. In 2010 alone, more than 800 women received training in different areas.

Can you describe the work that Fundación REDES is doing on the use of ICT for development?

Since 2002 REDES has been working in Bolivia to promote the use of ICT in development there. In 2008 REDES broadened its scope of action to include the integrated construction of the information society, advocating the social ownership of knowledge and harnessing the potential of new technologies, the Internet and mobile telephones for human and sustainable development.

In 2008 and 2009 we worked with the Growing for a Better Tomorrow Foundation (CREPUM) in Cochabamba to train more than 840 low-income women on how to cope with issues like family disintegration, family regroupment, psychological support, microentrepreneurship and the management of intrafamily conflict. Between November 2009 and April 2010 there were training workshops in basic office automation equipment, Internet searches, chat services for family communication and the use of social networks. More than 150 international migrant women in the cities of La Paz, Cochabamba and Santa Cruz took part.

What is the idea behind ICT courses for migrant women? What are the issues?

Mothers and women who are temporarily in charge of families with members who have migrated overseas face an array of problems when family members go away to Spain in search of a better life. Their families gradually disintegrate. Girls, boys and teenagers become psychologically unstable, with high levels of social vulnerability involving the use of alcohol and controlled substances resulting from unsupervised spending of family remittances. Other problems include unwanted pregnancies, gang membership and intrafamily violence.

We see the potential for ICT to rearrange family communication networks and make affordable communication between family members living in different countries more readily available. In 2010 a call from Bolivia to Spain cost an average of one dollar per 90 seconds of talk time. That can buy two hours of talk or chat time on Skype. Unfortunately, women's low level of education and their unfamiliarity with computers and with how to navigate the Internet were keeping them from using its potential. They were spending too much on communicating by telephone, and the communication gap with family members was growing wider.

The workshops helped lower the cost of international communication. Families became able to exchange information on legal formalities such as regularizing documents, regrouping families or connecting with human rights organizations in Spain. They rebuilt interpersonal and family communication networks and thus became able to compare life plans and worldviews in different societies.

Is there a clear digital divide concerning ICT and women?

Yes. Experience has shown us that there is a triple divide. One is generational, arising out of differences in age and

literacy rates among women heads of household. It was often necessary to tailor individual sessions to make women familiar with the alphabet, reinforce recognition of letters, numbers and symbols on the keyboard and focus on losing their fear of computers.

The second divide is a knowledge gap. Computers are devices that are far removed from the daily culture of women who head families with members who have migrated. There was fear of breaking the equipment, and guilt over potential repair costs. These women were not used to have access to information in keeping with their needs. Discovering the potential of personalized searches for information was empowering and led them to search for information on trades for which they felt interest or affinity. For example, on the first day of training in navigating the Internet, one of the participants (who said she would soon be leaving for Spain) downloaded road maps showing how to get from La Paz to Cochabamba and Santa Cruz, along with the air route from Santa Cruz to Lima and from Lima to Spain. She printed them out and took them with her.

The third divide is the gender gap. The traditional roles of mothering and housework become social barriers that keep women in many marginal areas from going to cybercafés and computer centres. Adult women are not often seen in such places. The digital divide thus becomes a communication, information and knowledge gap.

How did the course work?

Three workshop cycles were held at the same time, in La Paz, Cochabamba and Santa Cruz. Each cycle lasted 8 days, with 24 hours of classroom training and 8 hours of guidance and practice outside the classroom. An average of 46 women registered for each course, and nearly 100% completed it. We taught how to use Windows and Microsoft Word, how to navigate the Internet and how to use e-mail, Messenger and video calling.

What teaching methodology did you use for the course?

The training sessions used a combination of formal and alternative teaching techniques encouraging participation, stressing the exchange of experience and knowledge and fostering communication and the collective building of knowledge.

Within each course, the time was divided among explanation, development and use of new skills with guidance from male and female facilitators. Each participant had a computer connected to the Internet. Use was mediated by the facilitators by means of a remote desktop to control handling of the Windows environment on all of the network-configured equipment at key points in the course.

While the workshops were on how to use software packages, the Internet and communications tools, educational orientation focused on their daily use for interpersonal and networked communication. So we stressed hands-on practice during the course and voluntary practice outside it.

Do you think Bolivia's experience could be replicated?

It was a most valuable experience. We think that it would be useful for many women affected by international migration, and for women heads of household in marginal or periurban areas in many countries in Latin America.

Did you track the course outcomes?

Yes. After the courses, new requests came in to train other women, organized and not. The flood of new requests led Fundación REDES to open a small training centre in early 2011 with seven new computers. Many of the women who received training are now voluntarily guiding others attending the courses.

Olga Paz Martínez,
Administrative and Project Coordinator at COLNODO in Colombia:

"Training telecentre operators as technology leaders in their social environment is an ongoing task"

COLNODO is a Colombian organization that works to facilitate the exchange of experience and information among community-based organizations through electronic networks. As part of its mission it has provided information and communications technology training to women leaders, and it has trained telecentre managers in gender mainstreaming.

What has COLNODO done concerning ICT and their appropriation by women?

We have taken action on at least three fronts. First, to build women's capacity for ICT use by means of on-site training workshops. We are working on this project in partnership with several non-profit organizations throughout the country that belong to the National Telecentre Network. In 2010 we trained more than 15,000 women throughout Colombia, including women of African descent, indigenous women, women heads of household, women microentrepreneurs, and women with disabilities. The training process poses several challenges because it is best to mainstream gender, tailor contents and resources to women's needs, use inclusive language and stress participative methodologies and less rigid teaching methods.

Second, we work with the Feminist Tech Exchange (FTX) to target women who are leaders in their communities and organizations. Through FTX we have trained some 50 women for appropriating Web 2.0 tools, turning them from recipients of information into generators of their own knowledge products based on their own experience, discourse and approach to communication.

The third front has to do with actions at different levels. On one level, we invite partner organizations to take action in support of the social use of ICT by women and to mainstream gender in their projects. In 2009, for example, we provided three of our partner organizations with guidance in implementing the Gender Evaluation Methodology (GEM) at public ICT access centres. The goal is for the organizations participating in this process to continue to incorporate

the gender approach and seek alternatives for enhancing women's work.

What actions are you taking to train telecentre managers from a gender perspective? How do you train these workers?

A person who runs an ICT centre plays a key role because he or she acts as an information and knowledge intermediary. That's why we call them local ICT managers. Training them as such and as technology leaders in their social environment is an ongoing task. As an example, male and female telecentre managers were involved in the entire process of implementing GEM. They became aware of the need to plan their daily work to include strategies for bringing women into the telecentre, getting them to use ICT and tracking what they are using this technology for.

Why is it important to teach and encourage this approach among telecentre managers?

Because encouraging women to go to telecentres and use ICT does not happen spontaneously. And that is not just true for women. It happens with persons with disabilities, older persons, agricultural labourers and ethnic populations. They often see no reason at all to go near a computer. Self-exclusion is real. The factors behind it include fear of damaging the equipment, lack of available time, fear of being made fun of and unfamiliarity with what technology tools can be used for. That's why it is important to provide ICT centre managers with guidance on issues that seem obvious but aren't, like how to advertise their centres, what schedules are most likely to encourage participation in each community, how to make learning fun and how to apply participatory methodologies. All of this should be geared towards eliminating barriers and encouraging ICT use by women and other groups on the far side of the digital divide.

How long has this project been running? How many workers have been trained? Will training be ongoing, or is this a one-time initiative?

Building the capacities of people who run ICT centres is a commitment, so there is a permanent strategy behind our projects. Ensuring continuity between one initiative and another is always a challenge. But, for example, at the National Academy for ICT Managers, which has been operating since 2007, we have provided more than 2300 local ICT managers with training through a variety of courses.

In addition to mainstreaming gender in training, COLNODO is working to strengthen ICT as a tool for combating violence against women and girls. How can ICT be used for this? What does the project entail, and what are its outcomes so far?

ICT can help fight gender-based violence in several ways. They can be used for awareness campaigns and network-building, and to disseminate research and generate opinion on the many risks that we women face when we use ICT and are often not aware of. The Internet can be used to harass and stalk us, draw us into a human trafficking network or manipulate our name and image to discredit us. These are just some of the many actions that are hard to control and for which there are no clear regulations.

The project called "Strengthening women's strategic use of ICT to combat violence against women and girls" has enabled us to build competencies among women in social leadership roles. We have done this through FTX. I am delighted to see that women community activists are starting to produce videos, put together their own printed materials and integrate ICT in their daily work. It is exciting to watch one of the women leaders we have trained as she thinks about ways to leverage what she has learned, looks for a training venue and invites other women to get involved. This multiplier potential is of great value to us.

Looking at the outcomes of these initiatives, can it be said that ICT are a tool that could help narrow the gender gap? To this end, what basic tools should women have access to? What inequalities between men and women can ICT help reduce?

Gender gaps exist and go beyond ICT use. Indeed, gender gaps affect social use of ICT. A woman with a triple workload (between her job or occupation, her life at home and her role as a community leader, for example) is a woman who is less likely to learn how to use or appropriate ICT. She is too busy. And ICT have exacerbated many kinds of aggression against women, such as human trafficking, the marketing of images depicting women as a sexual object, pornography and a host of other practices. Obviously, the use of ICT makes a big difference: when a woman creatively appropriates these tools she finds possibilities that were previously not available to her. After ICT, we see women participating in networks, taking online courses, producing contents and accessing knowledge products. All of this enhances their role as social activists.

I think that expanding the horizon of opportunities is the biggest gender gap that ICT help to narrow. It's not just about teaching basic ICT use. It's warning about risks, showing different ways to use the technology, asking women to provide support by passing their knowledge on to other women in their immediate environment. It's inviting them to participate in networks, take the technology and use it to meet personal and collective needs.

Zoraida Franco, president and CEO of the Association of Women in Technology (AMTI):

"Including women in ICT can make a big difference in narrowing the digital divide"

How and when did AMTI start? What place does it seek to occupy in society?

A group of professional women working closely with these technologies held a meeting in January 2010. We were interested in doing something together. We are businesswomen and entrepreneurs working in this field. We live in Chile, although some of us are not Chileans, so we decided that our headquarters would be in Santiago.

Because we have been fortunate enough to travel and see the professional possibilities that women in Europe, the United States and even Africa have, we agreed on the lack of opportunities for women in science and technology in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. We set out to do some in-depth research and contacted several well-known institutions and organizations. This process did indeed reveal the lack of an organization advocating the incorporation and dynamic involvement of women in all levels of the technology business. Having identified this need, we decided to create an association of women in technology. We did so, setting up AMTI in June 2010. Although it is headquartered in Santiago, its goal is to work throughout the region in a spirit of total inclusion and cooperation with as many institutions as possible.

What are the association's main goals?

Raise the profile of women in the technology industry in Latin America and the Caribbean, focusing on these areas: ICT; e-technologies (hardware and firmware); technologies in the fields of medicine, ophthalmology, kinesiology, odontology, nutrition and food; biotechnology; genetic technology; technology for graphic and industrial design; green technologies (ecotechnologies); technologies for industry, agriculture, aquaculture, mining, construction, aeronautics, forestry, and veterinary medicine, as well as naval technology and technology support services.

We also encourage more women to enter the field by providing training and empowerment, generating the requisite knowledge and seeking opportunities for job, legal and professional betterment. The objective is for women to increasingly participate in technology, in increasingly relevant roles.

AMTI seeks to inspire new generations and active professional women alike to follow the example of other successful women and dare to seize opportunities at all levels, as businesswomen or as women entrepreneurs, professionals, researchers and providers of specialized services.

How do you raise the profile of women in ICT fields?

We believe that mechanisms for cooperating with institutions that have been doing serious research for some time will enable us to identify areas of ICT where women are making inroads. We are working on the assumption that women's participation in ICT is far broader and deeper than it is thought, if we take into consideration the fact that there are many "superusers" of business information systems who are often unaware of how relevant their role is.

We feel it is especially important to encourage women to participate in this area, using as many communications tools and dissemination media (particularly, social and professional networks) as possible.

What is AMTI's main achievement since start-up, and what is the biggest challenge it has faced?

Our main achievement was our biggest challenge, too. It was getting ourselves together and setting up the organization legally. Once that was accomplished, our knowledge and expertise in ICT and complementary services led us to create a space for communication and research. We wanted to raise the profile of the valuable work being done by so many women, both those we have met along the way and those we think are contributing in their own daily space.

With this broad goal in mind, we entered into a cooperation agreement with the established, well-known Centre for Women's Entrepreneurial Studies at Chile's Universidad del Desarrollo.

Right now you are preparing the first VIWO survey. What does the survey consist of, and what is it for?

To obtain reliable, measurable data we agreed to work with the Centre for Women's Entrepreneurial Studies to take advantage of the extensive and cross-cutting nature of ICT and design a survey-type Web-based instrument. This would allow us to reach the greatest possible number of women throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. Respondents log in and answer questions geared towards identifying the areas of action and interests of women in technology, in the broadest sense.

The responses for Chile will be processed by Universidad del Desarrollo experts and published in printed form by the Center of Entrepreneurial Studies of Women. The university has committed to include the findings in several other publications.

When will the survey findings be ready? What do you expect from them?

We plan to publish the results by December 2011. Universidad del Desarrollo will have print publication rights within Chile. The findings will appear in Global Entrepreneurship Monitor publications, as well as in a specialized publication. AMTI will post the findings on its Web page and disseminate relevant findings across its collaboration networks.

How can women be empowered so that ICT use can help to narrow the gender gap? How can ICT help to bridge that gap?

We believe that empowering women to use ICT—and especially for participating in developing these technologies—requires making women aware of the personal and professional power that these tools can give them. Empowerment can come through inspiration and through work to change the female imaginary concerning how difficult it is to incorporate women into ICT. Many of us who chose that path and had to take the long way around can guide those who are just starting out and show them the shortcuts.

Disseminating and enhancing the participation of professional women in ICT use is one of the prime objectives of AMTI, which is already working on a study to pinpoint areas of interest for Latin American women in this sphere.

Can including women more broadly in the ICT field, and their appropriation of this technology, help narrow the region's digital divide? How?

Including women in ICT can make an enormous difference in decreasing the digital divide between the countries of Latin America and developed countries. When a woman is educated she becomes a natural replicator in her immediate environment.

By focusing on incorporating ICT into women's lives, especially for mothers and for women in vulnerable sectors, we will take a giant step towards development. ICT, unlike many other technologies, have the advantage of being cross-cutting and of being a powerful tool for training and for management in a wide range of activities.

Martin Hilbert,
Doctor of Economic and Social Sciences
and Economic Affairs Officer of ECLAC:

In his article "Digital gender divide or technologically empowered women in developing countries? A typical case of lies, damned lies, and statistics" published in the magazine Women's Studies International Forum, Dr. Hilbert refutes the idea that women use information and communications technologies less than men because their tastes are different. Instead, he argues that less use by women is actually the result of discrimination in access to education and employment. What is more, when they are on an equal footing with men, women use ITC more.

"ICT might be the most tangible tool we have right now to fight gender discrimination"

Why do we need a study on the digital gender divide in developing countries?

The discussion about women's access to and use of digital Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in developing countries has been inconclusive so far. Some claim that women are rather technophobic and that men are much better users of digital tools. The pervasive and persistent stereotype is that women are at a natural disadvantage to benefit from the digital revolution because they are less tech savvy, they are afraid of technology, and because the technology is not built for their needs and intuition. If this were the case, the increasing socio-economic importance of ICT would add a new dimension to the already existing vicious circle between the traditional and long-standing discrimination of women in fields like employment, income, education and health, and women's chances to improve on this situation in the digital age.

On the contrary, others argue that women enthusiastically embrace digital communication. Digital technologies have proven to be practical and tangible tools for women to improve their living conditions. ICT can help women to gain employment (for example through telework or newly created information jobs), obtain cost-effective health services and education (such as through online courses or software-based literacy programs) and to increase their income (such as through e-business channels and online transactions). This would imply a virtuous circle, whereas women could

fight their current disadvantages in society by exploiting new digital opportunities.

It all comes down to the question if being a woman is a factor that positively or negatively correlates with the usage of ICT. Does a certain type of gender hinder or favor the participation in the digital age?

What data and what countries does the study cover? What is the time period of analysis?

We analyze data sets from 12 Latin American and 13 African countries from 2005-08. This is believed to be the most extensive empirical study in this field so far. Both databases are the products of the initial seed funding of Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC), which has been the driving force behind the creation of important statistics throughout the developing world for decades. In Latin America, IDRC has cooperated since 2002 with United Nations ECLAC to operate OSILAC. During the last decade, OSILAC has successfully worked with National Statistics Offices all over the region to include ICT indicators in existing household surveys. Given the large samples of official household surveys, this data is very robust. In Africa, IDRC is cooperating with the Research ICT Africa Network (http://www.researchictafrica.net), which has conducted their own household and individual user surveys of ICT access and usage between 2007 and 2008.

The study talks about misleading statistics on ICT and women. What does that mean? Why is this still the case?

When we look at the mere usage statistics, it is a fact that more men use ICT than women. For example, in Mexico in 2007, 24 % of the men used the Internet, while only 20 % of the women did. In Honduras, 26 % of the men used mobile phones, while only 23 % of the women did. This is the main reason while people are quick to conclude that being a woman is harmful in the digital age. However, the key question is if it's really the mere fact of difference in sex that makes this difference, or are there what we call "confounding variables"? Often the confounder is easy to spot. For example, if somebody would realize that children's ICT usage is positively correlated to the size of their shoes, most people would become suspicious. They would be quick to notice that age, and therefore education and literacy skills, might confound this relation. There is no reason to believe that the shoe size of children with the same level of schooling would make any significant difference. Often it is not as easy. But the cure remains the same: as soon as there is a suspicion of confounding variables, it is wise to control for them and to compare subjects on the same level of such variables. In this case it turns out that the confounding variable are the usual and longstanding factors of discrimination that women suffer: it is a fact that women have less employment, receive less income (even for the same work), and end up receiving less education. When controlling for these variables, that is, when comparing men and women with the same level of employment, same level of income, and same level of education, women turn out to be more active users of digital tools than men. Continuing with our examples, 41% of all Mexican women that attend an educational establishment use the Internet, but only 39% of all men that do so. In Honduras, 48% of all women that actively work use a mobile phone, while only 41% of all working men do so.

In the study you hold that ICT represent "a concrete and tangible opportunity to tackle longstanding challenges of gender inequalities in developing countries." Why? What kinds of inequalities can ICT help to decrease? How?

We showed that ICT per se does not have anything on them that might keep women and girls from using it in developing countries. Notwithstanding, women continue to be discriminated in many other aspects of social life, including employment, literacy and income. These inequalities also throw their shadows on ICT usage. However, once having access to ICT, this vicious circle can be turned into a virtuous circle, whereas the identified positive attitudes of women toward ICT enable them to circumvent and fight existing inequalities. Given that being a woman is very useful when living in the digital age, if they could be provided with these technologies, they could access employment, increase their income and improve access to education and health. This might be the most tangible tool we have right now to fight gender discrimination. It is also a proactive tool: women can bootstrap themselves out of discrimination.

So, how to bring women closer to ICT and make these technologies more readily available to them?

The data do unfortunately not tell us what to do, they simply tell us that our current outlook on the problem might be ill-focused. Now is the time to rethink policies. Our data indicate that women's access to ICT can be fostered anywhere, at home, at work or at public access centers. Actually, data from Brazil confirms that women use the Internet more than men at communal access centers and also at commercial public access center. Therefore, public access, especially when combined with special provisions for women (for example a lady discount, or ladies discount time-slots), might turn out to be very useful. Once policy makers realize that women are starting into the digital age in a unfavorable condition, but that they could make the biggest contributions to an Information Society, there are many ways women could be helped to create a positive dynamic that attacks one of the Millennium Development Goals that the world is still having serious problems with: gender equality and the empowerment of women.

News briefs

The search for the 100 outstanding telecentre women managers

Telecentre.org and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) have organized The Global Search for 100 Outstanding Telecentre Women Managers 2011 to highlight the work being done by women who manage or work at community technology centres and their contribution to empowerment and digital literacy among underprivileged populations. The search is part of the Telecentre Women: Digital Literacy Campaign being carried out in Latin America, Europe, Asia-Pacific, Eurasia and North Africa.
Telecentre.org is a global network of people and organizations dedicated to support and promote telecentres (also known as infocentres or community technology centres) in their effort to disseminate technology among underprivileged and low-income segments of the population, providing them with tools for improving their lives. Founded in 2005, Telecentre.org has a presence in 70 countries and represents some 80,000 community telecentres.
Nominations are open to all and may be submitted through telecentre-comunidad.ning.com. The search is on for 10 women (to be chosen by a jury and by popular vote) whose work in community telecentres has had a positive impact on their communities. Their stories, work and testimonials will be featured in a book on 100 outstanding women telecentre managers and operators to be published after the contest.

Onlne course for women entrepreneurs

The e-Chance 2.0 project, an initiative supported by the European Union, has launched an Internet course targeting women entrepreneurs seeking basic knowledge of how to use Web 2.0-based technologies to the benefit of their businesses and enterprises. The course is free, following registration at www.e-chance2.eu; it covers topics such as starting and managing a business, communication, marketing and networking. It also teaches how to use blogs, wikis, social networks and open-content software.
The end goal is for women seeking to move their businesses or initiatives forward to be able to leverage the resources available on the Internet, step up use of Web 2.0 technologies and ensure that their undertakings are lasting, efficient and profitable.

Women use social networks more than men

As explained at the event More women in ICT: a source of opportunities for society, the economy and companies held in September 2001 at Universidad de Alicante in Spain, a major difference between how men and women relate to information and communications technologies is how they use them. While women use more social networks and communications tools, men use the Net more for tasks like creating Web sites or looking for work.
This coincides with a study published in August of this year by the Pew Internet & American Life Project in Washington D.C. According to the study, 89% of women aged 18 to 29 who use the Internet are active users of social networks, unlike men, for whom the percentage is 60%.
At the same event, Spain's Minister of Health, Leire Pajín, pointed out that very few women go into technology-related careers. Only 18% of the students enrolled in computer science schools are women; for engineering schools the figure is 27%. According to Lourdes Muñoz, a member of parliament and of Spain's Congressional Commission on Equality, the reasons are the same as those that are at the root of gender differences in other areas of society: women, who bear a heavier burden in the family, have less time to use new technologies requiring a learning period to get the most out of them. The lack of free time is the reason why women use computers less than men.

@LIS2 (Alliance for the Information Society, phase 2) is a European Commission programme that supports the development of a sustainable, competitive, innovative and inclusive information society and co finances three projects: ECLAC @LIS2, RedClara and Regulatel.

ECLAC @LIS2, executed by ECLAC, seeks to continue to promote and, at the same time, improve and expand the dialogue and experiences on the information society in Latin America, as well as strengthen political, technical and social ties between the region and Europe in this area.

The present material was prepared with financial support from the European Union. Its content is the exclusive responsibility of ECLAC and should in no case be considered to reflect the official opinion of the European Union. The opinions expressed in this publication are the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the organizations involved.

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