# INSTRAW

## COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH PROJECT ON GENDER AND ICTS

**OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH:**

- Determine the constituents of enabling/disabling environments for access and use of ICTs by women;

- Gain a better understanding of how women and men are involved in ICTs, particularly in the developing countries and to promote adequate policies and regulation of the ICT sector;

- Propose ways in which ICTs can better serve as an important tool for women's empowerment.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

**1. On-line Virtual Seminars: F**our virtual seminars held during an eight-week period from June to September 2002, organized as an email-based discussion. Three hundred and twenty five (325) participants from more than 50 countries around the world subscribed to the Seminar discussion, with a total of 184 contributions.

**2. Background Papers** for each seminar **(**may be accessed at INSTRAW's website: www.un-instraw.org):
**a)** "Are ICTs Gender Neutral? A gender analysis of six case studies of multi-donor ICT projects" by Nancy Hafkin;
**b)** "Cyberfeminist Technological Practices: Exploring possibilities for a women-centered design of technological environments" by Radhika Gajjala;
**c)** "Engendering Management and Regulation of ICTs" by Anita Anand and Mahesh Uppal;
**d)** "Empowering Women for Public Policy Advocacy: Looking Behind the Internet to Enable Citizen Information Systems" by Juliana Martínez and Katherine Reilly;
**e)** "The Use of Information and Communication Technologies as a Tool to Bridge the Gender Digital Gap: A Case on the Use of a Locally-developed CD-ROM by Rural Women in Uganda" by Rita Mijumbi.

**CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. **Understanding and measuring the gender digital divide is the first step forward**. In this regard, it is recommended that:

- data on women's participation in the knowledge society, including participation in technical education at all levels and access and participation in technological research and industry development, should be systematically collected at the national level;

- data on women's interaction with ICTs, including access to PCs, wireless and other technologies, access to Internet, quantity of women-specific technology projects, available support for teleworking for women, etc., should be also collected at national levels;

- governments, international organizations and NGOs should place priority on systematic data collection which should be integrated into national data collection systems;

- good practices for promoting the use of ICTs by women should be collected and gender-sensitive indicators aimed at measuring the enabling environments should be developed, including those related to the socio-economic status of women, basic ICT infrastructure, level of knowledge society, and so forth.

2. **Research and research-based analysis on the links between women and ICTs is sine qua non for successful lobbying and appropriate policy-making on gender and ICTs.** In this regard, research and analysis should:

- evaluate the benefits of ICTs to all users;

- explore how and if women are using ICTs as effectively as men in addressing gender biases in the medium, media and society;

- identify the kinds of technologies that women want, how they want to use them and how women could contribute to the development of women-appropriate technologies and ICT applications.

3. **Addressing inequalities in access to ICTs is important but is not a sufficient condition for women's empowerment through ICTS. Access strategies for women are useful only when paired with appropriate content.** In addressing content and quality of information available through ICTs:

- women and their organizations must make clear what their information needs are, through the identification of gaps in the public information systems, among others;

- governments should provide clear, comprehensive and accurate information on relevant public issues through ICTs.

- Information available through ICTs should be provided in formats, languages and visual designs appropriate to women's needs.

4. **Development cooperation and projects aimed at the transfer and diffusion of ICTs are a powerful tool in bridging the gender digital divide**. However, it is important to bear in mind that:

- before embarking on gender, the feasibility of applying ICTs in certain areas and projects should be established.

- beneficiaries should be involved in project design;

- as the participation of women project planners is not in itself a guarantee of gender awareness, a gender perspective should be ensured through its integration into the project proposal guidelines;

- ICT projects should tackle capacity-building issues and subjects, with direct application to women's daily lives and working environment.

- projects in technical fields (including meetings and technical training) should focus on the participation of women as well as men. Because the pool of eligible women in these areas, especially in Africa, is small, corrective measures may need to be taken to include women.

- follow up is important, to assess the continuing use and usefulness of a technology or project.

5. **Substantial intervention in regulatory and policy-making practices is required**. Actions are recommended to ensure that:

- gender sensitization and training of regulatory staff is provided;

- education, training and content issues that take gender into consideration are worked into regulation and policy;

- regulators take action to guarantee that public funds are targeted to address the concerns of women;

- regulation is based on an understanding of the key long-term issues, such as: providing connectivity and adequate information to all groups, ensuring equal possibilities for ICT education; consumer protection, and so forth.

- active intervention by women and women's organizations in policy making through lobbying to policy-makers and regulators is exercised, particularly on issues such as tariffs and universal service.

- gender-differentiated results of policy are made visible, including documenting evidence and case studies to show that projects which take gender into account are more successful than those which do not,

- findings are disseminated in ways that are interesting and comprehensible to others, including the use of narratives and stories with a personal dimension.