

UNITED NATIONS
INTER-AGENCY NETWORK ON WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY

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WORLD BANK GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT GROUP



ICT & GENDER EQUALITY

Why are gender equality issues important in the ICT sector?

Women and men have different needs and constraints when accessing and using **Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)**. In many societies, women's and men's access to and use of technology are rooted in behavioral, cultural, and religious traditions:

- Cultural and social attitudes are often unfavorable to women's participation in the fields of science and technology, which limits their opportunities in the area of ICT.
- Women are often financially dependent on men or do not have control over economic resources, which makes accessing ICT services more difficult.
- Allocation of resources for education and training often favors boys and men.
- In some societies, women's seclusion from the public arena makes access to community telecenters difficult.

Unless explicit measures are taken to address the constraints women face, ICT may increase gender disparities and their impact will be reduced.

Gender-responsive ICT can make technologies, from telephones to computers, available to more people and offer ways for both women and men to access information and markets, and participate in new income earning activities. When policies and

programs recognize the different constraints women and men face, ICT can help reduce gender inequalities by reducing women's and girls' time demands, increasing their access to income-generating activities, and allowing them to benefit from technological advances.

Issues to consider

- Are there gender differences in access to ICT?
- How does the use of ICT affect men and women differently? How can ICT be used to reduce gender inequalities?
- Are both men and women included in ICT decision making? Are gender issues considered when setting national ICT priorities?

What is the World Bank doing?

To raise awareness of gender and ICT issues, the World Bank started the **Gender and the Digital Divide Seminar Series** in 2000. Through

this program, practitioners, policy-makers, and academics are invited to discuss the impact of ICT on gender relations, and the ways ICT can be used to overcome gender inequalities.

The Information for Development

Program (infoDev), a multi-donor grant facility, recently completed a study to help integrate gender in its ICT programs. The study, "Lessons on ICT and Gender in Developing Countries: A Review of Current Literature and the infoDev Portfolio," is available at www.infodev.org.

Equitable access to information and Communication technologies can be an important tool for empowering women

The Global ICT and the Gender & Development Group are conducting a comprehensive study, "Engendering ICTs: A World Bank Initiative on Gender and ICT for Development," to help Bank staff and others responsible for ICT policies and programs around the world to incorporate gender considerations into their work.

The Agricultural Knowledge and Information Systems and Gender in Rural Development Thematic Groups have jointly commissioned a review of rural development projects to help integrate ICT in rural information provision, especially for women farmers and rural entrepreneurs.

Examples of gender-responsive interventions:

- **Cell-phone network** made available to female microentrepreneurs in southern

India has helped promote direct sales of their products in the city.

- **Training in computer networking,** entrepreneurship and management is being provided to women in Ethiopia through a partnership between Cisco Systems, Inc and UNECA.
- **Customized software** is being designed by the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) to help poor, illiterate women in northern India establish and operate micro-enterprises in areas such as crafts, dairy, incense production, and salt.
- **A CD-Rom** developed by the International Women's Tribune Center for rural women in Uganda that teaches them about new ways of earning income using the local languages and many visuals.