



PRIMERS IN GENDER AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE #4

Gender Responsive E-governance: Exploring the Transformative Potential

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4. GENDER RESPONSIVE E-GOVERNANCE: EXPLORING THE TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL

A valuable opportunity exists to fulfil UNDP's mandate for gender equality and women's empowerment through e-governance programming. This primer highlights some of the key gender-related issues regarding e-governance in the context of UNDP's Democratic Governance work, presents entry points for continued programming on gender and e-governance, and makes recommendations for closing the existing gender gap in specific e-governance interventions prepared by UNDP practitioners and its partners.

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Contents

1

2

3

4

Acknowledgements	2
Acronyms and definitions	3
Introduction	5
Mandates for UNDP work on ICT, gender and e-governance	7
The track record on gender and e-governance in UNDP programming	9
Key gender issues for e-governance	12
Design of e-governance policies and strategies	13
Delivery of basic e-services	15
E-participation and networking	16
Access to ICTs	17
Access to information via ICTs	19
Entry for programming on gender and e-governance	21
Policy design and implementation	21
E-service delivery	22
E-participation and networking	23
Access to ICTs	23
Access to information via ICTs	23
Resources	25
Boxes and Figures	
Box 1. Gender equality considerations within the legal framework	14
Box 2. Connecting communities in Armenia and Bulgaria	15
Box 3. Bridging gender gaps using ICT networks in the Arab Region	16
Box 4. Access to ICTs for e-governance: People First Network in the Solomon Islands	18
Box 5. The Sustainable Development Network of Honduras	20

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The other four primers in the Primers in Gender and Democratic Governance Series are:

- Quick Entry Points to Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality in Democratic Governance Clusters
- Gender Equality and Justice Programming: Equitable Access to Justice for Women
- Electoral Financing to Advance Women's Political Participation: A Guide for UNDP Support
- Corruption, Accountability, and Gender: Understanding the Connections

These resources are framed by the human rights-based approach to development, which now informs the work of the UN development system (see the Quick Entry Points primer for a discussion of the approach and what it means for gender equality). UNDP intends for these primers to contribute to the empowerment of women and the advancement of gender equality through democratic governance. We encourage colleagues to continue to share their experiences and ideas through dgp-net@groups.undp.org, the electronic discussion network serving UNDP democratic governance practitioners and ictd-net@groups.undp.org, the cross-practice network of ICT for development practitioners at UNDP.

Acronyms and Definitions

Gender

The social attributes associated with being male and female and the relationships between women, men, girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men. These attributes and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization. They are context- and time-specific and changeable. Gender is part of the broader socio-cultural context. Other important criteria for socio-cultural analysis include class, race, poverty level, ethnic group and age (UN/OSAGI, n.d.). The concept of gender also includes the expectations about the characteristics, aptitudes and likely behaviours of both women and men (femininity and masculinity). The concept of gender, applied to social analysis, reveals how women's subordination (or men's domination) is socially constructed. As such, the subordination can be changed or ended. It is not biologically predetermined nor is it fixed forever (UNESCO, 2003).

Gender relations

The social relationships between men, women, girls and boys, which shape how power is distributed between women, men, girls and boys and how that power translates into different positions in society. Gender relations vary depending on other social relations, such as class, race, ethnicity, etc. They will greatly impact how an individual man or woman experiences processes and institutions such as trials and courts and how they interact with other individuals within those institutions.

Gender mainstreaming

"The process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action,

including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetrated. The ultimate goal of this strategy is to achieve gender equality" (UN/ECOSOC, 1997).

Gender equality

The equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests,

ACRONYMS

BDP	Bureau for Development Policy
CEDAW	The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CO	Country Office
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DGG	Democratic Governance Group
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ICTDAR	Information Communication Technologies for Development in the Arab Region
MDGs	The Millennium Development Goals
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PAR	Public Administration Reform
PFnet	People First Network, Solomon Islands
RDS	Red de Desarrollo Sostenible de Honduras
SDNP	Sustainable Development Networking Programme
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WSIS	World Summit on Information Society

needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men (UN/ OSAGI n.d.).

Gender equity

The process of being fair to men and women. To ensure fairness, measures must often be put in place to compensate for the historical and social disadvantages that prevent women and men from operating on a level playing field. Equity is a means—equality is the result (UNESCO, 2003).

Gender analysis

The collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated information. Men and women perform different roles in societies and within institutions, such as police forces and courts. These differing roles lead to women and men having different experiences, knowledge, talents and needs. Gender analysis explores these differences so that policies, programmes and projects can identify and meet the different needs of men and women. Gender analysis also facilitates the strategic use of the distinct knowledge and skills possessed by women and men, which can greatly improve the long-term sustainability of interventions (UNESCO, 2003).

Gender neutrality

An assumption that development interventions will benefit men and women equally, leading to a failure to analyse and plan for the social relationships between men

and women and how those relationships will impact programming.

Gender justice

“The protection and promotion of civil, political, economic and social rights on the basis of gender equality. It necessitates taking a gender perspective on the rights themselves, as well as the assessment of access and obstacles to the enjoyment of these rights for women, men, girls and boys and adopting gender-sensitive strategies for protecting and promoting them” (Spees, 2004). Much of the broader gender justice agenda falls outside the scope of UNDP Access to Justice programming. However, increasing women’s access to justice, be it formal or informal, hinges on removing economic, political and social barriers to participation, as articulated by the gender justice agenda (UNIFEM & ILAC, 2004).

Gender-based violence (GBV)

A generic term used to describe any harmful act perpetrated against an individual against his or her will based on his or her socially defined identity as male or female (UN, 2005). The UN General Assembly defined violence against women in the 1993 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private” (UN, 1993).

“Gender is defined as the social attributes associated with being male and female and the relationships between women, men, girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men.”

Introduction

E-governance refers to the use of old and new technologies to enhance government efficiency, transparency, accountability, and service and information delivery, as well as fostering citizen participation in democratic processes via ICT networks and networking. E-governance thus includes three core components: e-administration, e-services and e-participation.

The concept of governance has evolved to cover not just public sector management of efficient services and an enabling environment for development, but also the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms. This shift towards what is now known as “democratic governance” is partly the result of globalization. The latter in turn has been spearheaded since the early 1990s by the rapid development and widespread use of new Information and Communications Technology (ICT).

Developing countries have not been able to harness the potential of ICTs at the same speed as industrialized nations. Issues of access to ICTs and investment in ICT infrastructure, among others, have limited the uptake in such countries. As a result, many of the initial ICT for Development programmes and initiatives focused on access, complemented in many cases by support for local capacity building.

By the end of the millennium, national governments had started to complement their development agendas with strategies and policies to foster the use of ICT within governments (national, state and local). This led to the emergence of e-governance as a key and dedicated area of ICT for Development.



It is essential to emphasize, however, that ICTs are not gender-neutral—they are not accessed, managed and controlled by all men and women equally. As a result, men and women experience different benefits

“ICTs are not gender-neutral—they are not accessed, managed and controlled by all men and women equally.”

and effects of ICTs at all levels, a point highlighted by many studies on ICTs and gender since the early 1990s (Hakfin, 2006; UNDP-APDIP, 2007).

A quick review of the existing literature shows that this is a relatively new area that remains to be explored in much more detail. This primer builds on this extensive body of work on ICTs and gender, but focuses on key gender issues related to e-governance within the context of UNDP's work on democratic governance. These key issues are: (1) policy-making processes

for e-governance planning; (2) delivery of basic services and public information via ICTs; and (3) empowerment of stakeholders, particularly women, to use ICT networks to engage with governments over governance processes.

The primer has four sections: Section 1 is an overview of the intersection between ICT, gender and e-governance and UNDP's mandate in regards to this field; Section 2 presents the work UNDP has done to date in integrating these areas; Section 3 builds on the previous sections and highlights key gender considerations for e-governance programming, including major obstacles; and Section 4 presents entry points for continued programming on gender and e-governance, and makes recommendations for closing the existing gender gap in specific e-governance interventions.

All in all, this primer is designed to contribute to the broader discussion of gender and e-governance and facilitate gender-responsive e-governance programming by UNDP practitioners and their partners.





Mandates for UNDP Work on ICT, Gender and E-governance

ICT for Development emerged as a new area of work in the mid-1990s at a time when the potential of new technologies was starting to be better understood. However, development programming in this field tended to focus on the provision of access to ICTs rather than on deploying innovative technologies to help address traditional development gaps and challenges.

This narrow interpretation of ICT for development as pertaining to access to ICTs later made it into the eighth MDG, which calls for making technologies available to all.¹

UNDP follows a two-pronged approach to working on ICT for Development: (1) ICT for the poor; and (2) e-governance. One of the key concerns in both of these areas is ensuring that women and other marginal-

“One of the key concerns of UNDP ICT for Development programmes is ensuring that women and other marginalized groups have the access and capacity to use new technologies.”

ized groups have the access and capacity to use new technologies.

UNDP defines ICTs to include both new and “old” technologies, and does not limit it to the use of the Internet or personal computers. Many older technologies, such as the telephone and radio, are more accessible to the poorest sectors of the population and are regaining importance largely due to the gradual convergence of old and new ICTs.

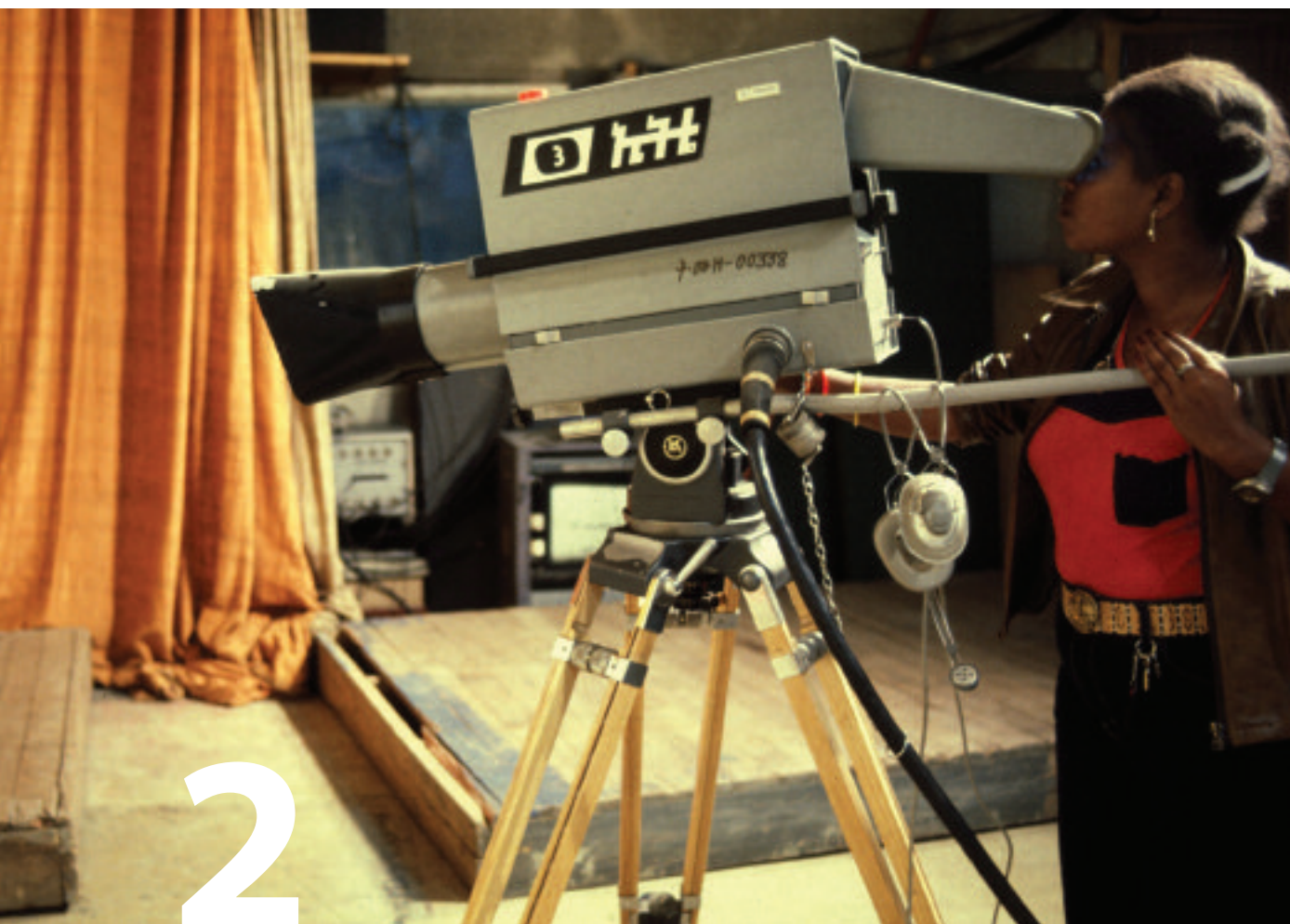
UNDP’s e-governance strategy was adopted after a major review of its extensive partic-

ipatory experience with practitioners in the countries and regions that it serves. This strategy aims to:

- Increase the efficiency, transparency and accountability of national institutions;
- Enhance access to information and improve the delivery of basic services to the overall population, in particular the poor; and
- Enhance citizen participation, in particular the participation of the poor, women and youth, in democratic processes and policy-making.

At the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, participants reflected on the issue of ICTs and gender, and the two topics were addressed in formal conference documents and in non-governmental forums. Likewise, at the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) in 2003 and 2005, women explicitly addressed the issue of the use of ICTs for governance and their involvement in such forms of governance. However, both of these events demonstrated the need for more work, particularly in the areas of policy, capacity development and governance mechanisms, to help catalyse social and political change in this field (Oxfam, 2005).²





The Track Record on Gender and E-governance in UNDP Programming

In 2004, UNDP's Democratic Governance Group conducted a gender mapping of its service lines, in what was to be the first of several steps to fully mainstream gender in the practice of democratic governance.

This was followed in 2005 by a more in-depth review of DGG advisory services, an intensive electronic discussion on the 1,300-member global governance electronic knowledge network, and a learning day on gender equality for DGG practitioners.

The review concluded that there has been considerable progress in the area of main-

streaming gender equality considerations into governance programming. It found that DGG advisors were well able to assist the efforts of UNDP Country Offices (CO) to increase the numbers of women in elections, parliaments and the public service, as well as to disseminate lessons learned and experiences garnered across the globe. DGG advisors were also increasingly able

to support efforts to challenge structural discrimination seen in, for example, national and local resource allocation trends and access to citizenship rights, including access to justice.

To expand UNDP's contribution to e-governance programmes, an extensive mapping was completed at the end of 2005 of all related programmes supported by the organization and its partners.³ The exercise uncovered 195 ongoing projects in 100 countries and revealed that **the demand for support covers five key areas of UNDP's e-governance programmes: (1) access to ICTs; (2) e-administration; (3) e-service delivery; (4) access to information via ICTs; and (5) e-participation via ICT networks and networking.** These areas are now part of DGG Cluster I: Fostering Inclusive Participation.

This review of projects also suggested that e-governance initiatives take two different forms: (1) direct intervention, as stand-alone programmes that have clear e-governance and ICT-related outputs and outcomes; and (2) indirect intervention, as a component of larger democratic governance programmes. Historically speaking, the former has led the way in introducing e-governance programming into CO portfolios. But once this has occurred, the indirect form seems to take precedence, which is a good indicator as to the degree that e-governance can be mainstreamed into more traditional areas of UNDP democratic governance work.

Even so, UNDP is still supporting projects that are, for example, almost exclusively focused on e-administration. However, at the same time, these e-administration projects are seemingly disconnected from broader



and/or related policies and programmes on Public Administration Reform (PAR): a logical partnership. By the same token, many PAR initiatives are lacking in e-governance components that could explicitly improve both public administration and service delivery. Initial results from new and ongoing e-governance mapping exercises indicate that this is now changing and interactions between the various service lines and clusters are increasing. In a handful of countries, using ICT as the entry point for broader democratic governance programming has been instrumental in getting such programmes off the ground.

E-governance activities are not limited to government institutions alone. For example, parliaments and electoral processes (including independent electoral bodies) are not government entities *per se* but part of broader democratic governance processes. The same can be said about human rights commissions and anti-corruption commissions, for example, for which ICT can be used to ensure transparent and accountable processes and to facilitate active stakeholder participation. It is thus not surprising to find UNDP already supporting ICT initiatives in these areas.

All in all, important challenges remain in integrating gender equality considerations into e-governance. Perhaps the most critical challenge identified by UNDP is the absence of programmes grounded in rigorous gender analysis. In many cases, data exists to keep track of who is using specific government services provided through e-governance solutions, but analysis is not carried out to track the gendered consumption patterns of such services. Understanding usage patterns would help reallocate resources based on demand.

Policy is another important area where gender equality considerations have largely been ignored. Policy advice has tended to be either gender-neutral or focused on women's empowerment. The main assumption here has been that ICTs are either neutral or that they somehow address gender gaps on their own. This was the case regardless of whether women or men were providing policy advice across focus areas as diverse as aid coordination, regional planning and decentralization, budget oversight, employment or minority rights.

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Key Gender Issues for E-governance

Understanding gender roles and responsibilities from the very start is important to ensure that e-governance programmes and policies do not perpetuate existing gender gaps in government services and institutions.

Women face real barriers to using ICT, and the delivery of e-services (the availability of electronically-supplied public services, such as land records and civil documents) does not take into account these critical

gender gaps and women's basic needs. For example, current e-governance programmes might prioritize e-passports over the issuance of birth certificates, even though they are required in many countries to enroll

children in public schools. Therefore, the latter type of an e-governance programme will have a greater development impact for poor women and girls than the former.

One concrete way to address these issues is to guarantee that e-governance initiatives actually “listen” to citizens’ needs, engage them in identifying priorities and decisions, and make them part of both policy design and programme implementation. This means assessing the different socio-economic and information needs of men and women from the very outset, including the unique ways in which men and women organize, mobilize and even network at local, national, and international levels.

In all, **there are five key areas of e-governance in which gender equality can be fostered. They are: (1) design of e-governance policies and strategies; (2) delivery of basic e-services; (3) e-participation of citizens and more specifically of marginalized groups, women and youth; (4) access to ICTs; and (5) access to public information via ICTs.** It should be noted that issues 1 and 4 are not unique to e-governance but are much broader and relevant to ICT for Development and public policy-making as a whole.

Design of e-governance policies and strategies

WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY ISSUES ARE OFTEN EXCLUDED FROM E-GOVERNANCE POLICY AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

Current evidence indicates that most national e-governance strategies and policies are designed on a “supply driven” basis, with little to no inputs from non-State stakeholders. Furthermore, most of these strategies are focused to a large extent on e-administration, with a handful focusing on e-services—let alone delivery of basic services for the poor and marginalized. Not surprisingly then, most e-governance strategies tend to be gender-neutral and do not explicitly address equality issues or women’s concerns.

Reports from some regions confirm that women are often not represented in committees that devise policies and strategies at either a local or national level, and when they do participate, they are outnumbered by men who dominate the agenda. What is more, gender equality issues are rarely considered a priority. For example, a 2005 report from Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States found that national plans setting the “direction, speed and

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BOX 1. GENDER EQUALITY CONSIDERATIONS WITHIN THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The legal framework required to promote e-governance policies and programmes is not gender-neutral. The questions below demonstrate some of the gendered dimensions of information and technology that policy makers should be considering when reviewing or devising legal frameworks for e-governance.

- **Restrictions on the free flow and exchange of information.** What types of public information do men and women have access to? What other sources of information exist for different groups of men and women?
- **Censoring the content of radio, television broadcasts and information available on the Internet.** What content is censored? Is the content exploitative to men or women? Will censorship of the content impact on their access to health or other services?
- **Regulation of the licensing of ICTs, subscription services, and/or the types of technologies available (for example, satellite dish).** How does this impact on formal or informal alternatives that men and/or women use to participate in policy and political processes? Will regulation affect men and women in the same way?
- **Regulations concerning privacy, security and confidentiality in access and use of ICTs for information sharing.** Will the regulations impact on the rights of women or men to enjoy their civil and political freedom?
- **Governments or political organizations promoting their agendas through ownership and control of ICTs.** Will control over ICTs further impoverish women or men, given their different starting points in terms of access to resources?

priority areas for the process of implementing ICTs into all parts of society” did not include gender considerations.

Fortunately, there are some examples which provide models for change. In Albania, a local women’s organization was asked to comment on the gender components of the draft National ICT Strategy, which included a large e-governance component. Gender experts were involved in different stages of the strategy’s development.

UNDP’s e-governance strategy has a pro-poor focus which aims at fostering the delivery of basic e-services and information to the most vulnerable populations. This is complemented by an emphasis on e-participation, particularly at the local level. It thus provides fertile ground to introduce gender issues in the policy agenda and involve more women’s networks in policy discussions and decision-making processes to address concrete gender issues.

On a more specific level, the legal framework for effectively implementing e-governance policies and programmes has critical implications for citizens’ relations to governments, freedom of access to information, participation in governance processes, and human rights (see Box 1).

“ Gender analysis is a critical first step to ascertain how responsive government services are to the needs and priorities of men and women in different social and economic strata.”

Delivery of basic e-services

E-GOVERNANCE HAS THE POTENTIAL TO MAKE IT EASIER FOR GOVERNMENTS TO DELIVER SERVICES EFFECTIVELY WHILE ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY

One of the key goals of any e-governance strategy is to provide services on both a more cost-effective basis and on a larger scale. While governments initially focus on their own internal business processes, they eventually start to offer a wide variety of services that citizens can access with relative ease. The issue here is the way in which services are prioritized and subsequently deployed.

Gender analysis is a critical first step to ascertain how responsive government services are to the needs and priorities of men and women in different social and economic strata. Such analysis should examine budgets and resources allocated along gender lines to basic services. For example, women in a family will usually prioritize education and health services and have less interest in obtaining a passport online. The question then is whether ICTs enhance their opportunity to access such services, removing most entry barriers that currently exist. Collecting disaggregated data on women and men's different access to basic services, and the degree to which they benefit from these services, is critical in identifying needs and gaps in service delivery. This analysis should then form the basis of resource allocation so that services are delivered where they are most needed and at a scale to meet this need.

There are examples of efforts to use ICTs to support gender equality and alleviate poverty. In India, for example, UNDP is

supporting the government in pilot programmes that integrate e-service delivery, local governance, rural livelihoods and women's empowerment.⁴ These pilots aim to improve the speed, convenience and efficiency of public service delivery, by enabling online access for poor women and men to information, such as land records and various other government services.

An example from Armenia and Bulgaria demonstrates UNDP's capacity to work with partners to foster e-service delivery and start engaging local communities in the identification of e-governance priorities (see Box 2).

BOX 2. CONNECTING COMMUNITIES IN ARMENIA AND BULGARIA

In **Armenia**, the UNDP CO helped the government establish ICT access centres in the sub-regions of the country, placing these in municipal buildings to give the community easy access. Project staff addressed different social and political concerns that were raised—for example, they met with local authorities to explain that community access to municipal documents was not a threat. The project helped to decentralize access to information, and therefore to some powers and authority, from the central to the local level. However, the opportunity to expand access was missed. While data about community use of the centres was collected, it was not analysed to monitor whether people disadvantaged by gender, age, location, income and other factors were making use of the services. Any gender or other barriers to access could have been addressed through additional interventions if this information had been gathered.

In **Bulgaria**, UNDP supported the establishment of Internet access points for citizens through tele-centres, universities, rural areas, and employment centres. Most of the multi-purpose community centres were located in remote or economically disadvantaged areas to improve service delivery to the poor. Clients have included small entrepreneurs, farmers, the unemployed, students, teachers, NGOs and ordinary citizens. Interventions were consciously aimed at empowering both women and men to ensure equality of access and participation. Here, too, there is a need for more data, based on the findings of gender analysis, on how such programmes specifically empower women and men.⁵

E-participation and networking

ONE OF THE KEY AIMS OF E-GOVERNANCE IS TO PROMOTE THE PARTICIPATION OF MEN AND WOMEN IN DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES VIA BOTH ICT NETWORKS AND NETWORKING WITH GOVERNMENTS

Increasing the number of women and poor people in local governance so that they can voice their priorities in terms of public service delivery is fundamental to achieving real results for e-governance programmes. The ability of citizens and stakeholders to

influence policies and the allocation of resources in accordance with their needs is likely to increase if they are better able to interact with governments through the various interactive channels that ICTs, old and new, now offer.

It is also important to understand how gendered roles may affect participation in local governance, such as shaping opportunities for men and women to establish alternative or community-based ICT networking systems that are built on existing human networks. This is an essential point, as the tendency is usually to build parallel ICT networks that end up competing with the former.

The prevailing social and political context is an important determinant of opportunities to network via ICTs. Political will is essential to kick-start any e-participation process. But this is not just a top-down process. Bottom-up networking aimed at collective action by the people can, for example, draw local governments' attention to specific issues raised by communities, particularly during election campaigns.

Political stability may influence, for example, whether people feel safe travelling to Internet cafes, community centres or other sites where ICTs are available. Even in politically safe environments, an important consideration is men and women's physical safety and freedom of movement to locations where ICTs are available. Networking opportunities for women may be enhanced, for example, when public security officials are trained to be gender-sensitive in maintaining law and order and facilitating women's access to services. Women may be constrained from using public access centres if other users are downloading offensive content.

BOX 3. BRIDGING GENDER GAPS USING ICT NETWORKS IN THE ARAB REGION

The Programme on Information Communication Technologies for Development in the Arab Region (ICTDAR) promotes the use of ICTs to increase government accountability, lower costs of delivering services, support better procurement, improve efficiency, and promote more participatory democracy. The initiative includes support to e-government services to help Arab States address major challenges they currently face in economic development, labour, and population (e-Government at Arab Sharing Portal e-gov@ASP).

A dedicated service was established to support the rights of women and children through access to information (ICTDAR - WRCATI). This aims to develop the capacity of women to access knowledge through the use of ICT, to network more effectively, and to access income-generating opportunities. The initiative also aims to bring legal information in a full package to poor women through websites and CDs, answering questions and providing information about family courts, for example, while taking into account issues such as the low literacy levels of many women. In Yemen, for example, a local NGO working on women's human rights and leadership training is using the resources provided by WRCATI. Given that women's literacy rates are among the lowest in the region, facilitators are on-hand to enable the women to access information about their rights to property, custody, and other areas. Women participating in this initiative are thereby prepared with the legal knowledge they need to be able to voice their priorities to government on service delivery related to these issues.

Other than socially determined gender roles and expectations, other factors may likewise encourage or deter women and men from public participation. For instance, the portrayal of men and women in the media or the discrimination against members of particular ethnic groups.

Access to ICTs

WOMEN ARE MORE LIKELY TO HAVE LIMITED ACCESS TO ICTs AND MIGHT CONFRONT LOWER LEVELS OF CONNECTIVITY

Without the physical access to ICT networks and the capacity to make effective use of them, citizens and community organizations cannot use ICTs to strengthen their potential to engage in broader democratic processes. UNDP programmes have supported connectivity and access by helping to establish multi-purpose community centres, investing in networking technologies, and developing capacity to use ICTs at different levels.

Gender differences affect the opportunities and challenges in connectivity and access. For example, additional investment in women's literacy may be required to address literacy barriers that hinder their basic access to ICTs. Women may also need more training in the use of software applications. Inflexible working hours for men in the formal sector and the double burden of housework and wage-work for women may limit their access to ICTs. In addition, the majority of the poor will face transportation costs and will be less likely than others to invest in ICT access, unless the content is relevant to their situation and context.

Equal access by women and men to ICTs outside the home, such as at Internet cafes



or other similar venues, may depend on their freedom of movement; men in many communities traditionally enjoy more freedom. For women especially, the presence of safe and welcoming community-based locations is often a major factor in determining access. The presence of reputable civil society and community organizations has been found to contribute significantly to improving access for women and other marginalised groups.

The main issues to consider when setting up ICTs are infrastructure, types of ICTs, cost and capacity.

- **Infrastructure:** Poor or remote areas may lack electricity to connect to ICTs, and television and radio signals may not reach all people across a country. Connectivity and access may be determined by how far people have to travel,

“ Gender differences affect the opportunities and challenges in connectivity and access. For example, additional investment in women’s literacy may be required to address literacy barriers that hinder their basic access to ICTs. Women may also need more training in the use of software applications.”

and this, in turn, depends on factors such as the quality and proximity of roads and the availability of safe, reliable and affordable transportation. However, while infrastructure is a pre-requisite, it must not be the end goal of a programme intervention. Rather, it is a means to achieving other goals, such as basic service delivery and networking.

- **Types of ICTs:** Within the home or community, the types of ICTs available—televisions, radios, mobile phones, computers, etc.—and who is entitled to use them, may depend on who controls the household income. The belief still prevails in most contexts that men are primarily responsible for a family’s income.

BOX 4. ACCESS TO ICTS FOR E-GOVERNANCE: PEOPLE FIRST NETWORK IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

The Solomon Islands consists of roughly 850 islands, mostly under-developed, spread out over a wide area of the Pacific. The country has come through a period of ethnic unrest, and the economy is in near-total collapse. Currently, the only two means of communication with the outside world for most remote locations are short-wave radios and satellite telephones. When short-wave radios are used for voice communication, they often require hours of queuing and retrials, sometimes in vain, and at a cost that is still too high for rural people living in a predominantly non-cash and subsistence economy. Confidentiality is impossible. Satellite telephones, when available, are far beyond the financial reach of the majority of the population, regardless of the destination called.

People First Network (PFnet) promotes rural development and peace building by enabling affordable and sustainable rural connectivity and facilitating information exchange between stakeholders and communities across the Solomon Islands.⁶ With support from UNDP and the UN system, it has established a growing rural communications system based on wireless e-mail networking, in the HF band, which enjoys full community ownership. The PFnet community e-mail stations are the only link with the outside world, providing the participating communities with access to health, public services and education, and enabling essential contact with family and professional peers.

PFnet pays particular attention to gender equity and democratic governance, helping women, especially disadvantaged rural women, to network, access services relevant to them and connect with women’s groups. It also develops the capacity of many other development partners to network as well, especially to and from rural areas. A network of rural community e-mail stations is located on remote islands across the country, usually hosted in provincial clinics, schools, or other accessible and secure public facilities. The full community ownership of the system promotes community access to information that is appropriate to the local culture.

- **Costs of ICTs:** Women and men, the poor and people in remote areas may not have sufficient income to purchase new technologies and the accompanying costs such as subscription to the Internet or cell phone services. Women, especially, are likely to have less income than men. However, it is worth noting that the cost of ICTs is dropping dramatically in real terms, while the type of technologies are more powerful than ever before and can have global reach.
- **Capacity:** The extent to which equal educational and training opportunities are available to women and men vary in different societies. Addressing illiteracy is an important step to building people's capacity to use ICTs, as well as the provision of training to build people's, especially women's, typing skills and ability to use different software. Since the content of the web is still predominantly in English and other non-local languages, another important consideration is whether men and women have opportunities to learn other languages, or whether content can be developed in local languages. Funding and support from government and civil society organizations (CSOs) is vital for achieving equal opportunities in the access and use of ICTs.

Access to information via ICTs

GOVERNMENTS NOT ONLY NEED TO PROVIDE MORE INFORMATION, THEY ALSO MUST ENSURE THAT INFORMATION IS PRESENTED IN A RANGE OF FORMATS APPROPRIATE FOR MEN AND WOMEN

UNDP programmes have supported the use of ICTs to provide fast and relatively inexpensive methods of disseminating and exchanging information. Areas of support have included alternative ICT-based media outlets, content development in local languages, protection of public domain information, and laws on the right to information, including digital information.

However, due to fact that women and men have different needs *vis á vis* public information and services, the content and mode of communicating public information should be tailored to empower both men and women, and poor men and women in particular, to access their rights and services. For example, women and men may be more disposed to access information via ICTs when they see themselves and their issues represented in different media outlets. For women to become empowered, they may need to see more role models in the media, in the form of female broadcasters, webmasters, commentators or invited guests who can address key issues of gender equality.

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Furthermore, ICTs have provided new and open channels for the emergence of independent media outlets that can provide pro-poor and gender equality and women's rights-related information to local communities. Providing content in local languages is an important first step to making the potential benefits of ICTs more visible to people; in particular, to encourage citizens

to be active participants in governance and development policy. In addition, the content itself needs to be analysed from a gender perspective. Presentation also has gender implications—information and issues must be presented in a manner that is readily understood and easy to use by men and women, and the poor.

BOX 5. THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT NETWORK OF HONDURAS

Red de Desarrollo Sostenible de Honduras (RDS) was established in 1994 with support from UNDP. It sees itself as “the information system of civil society”, putting people who have information in touch with those who need it, and people with needs in touch with resources. RDS gained local and international recognition when its networks enabled the State and civil society to respond much more quickly in the aftermath of 1998's Hurricane Mitch, and enabled information from external agencies to reach local actors. Its numbers soared thereafter. By the early part of this decade, the NGO provided e-mail services and Internet access to 449 organizations throughout the 18 Honduran provinces, of which 60 percent were NGOs (Hijab, 2001).

RDS discussion lists enabled NGOs to share experience in specific areas such as external debt, government transparency and efforts to eliminate corruption, as well as reconstruction, gender, the environment and others. NGOs particularly value the ability to access information and to connect to other local and international organizations over their pilot projects.

RDS not only provides affordable services, it also adds value in training and in the preparation of content. In the early days, women were more familiar with the technology than men, having first used it as secretaries, and seven of the ten RDS trainers at the time were women. RDS also works with craftspeople, most of whom are women, to enable them to sell their products through the Web. The project also involves improving production processes to ensure product competitiveness in foreign markets.

For example, UNDP supported a multi-stakeholder consultation organized by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting in India, which provided input to a revised policy on media content. The outcome was that the revised policy enabled CSOs to devise content and broadcast socially-relevant programmes for local consumption. The UNDP CO subsequently used community radio as a central element in their social mobilization and decentralization programmes.⁷ Another excellent example of providing training, developing local content and networking comes from Honduras, as shown in Box 5.

Close to thirty developing countries have passed Freedom of Information Laws, which is a first step in enhancing public access to government and public records and information. However, in terms of implementation of such laws, the key concern is to ensure that access to these resources is both simple and free for citizens and stakeholders in general, and women and marginalized groups in particular. In terms of content, Freedom of Information Laws should also include free access to all digital data and resources produced by governments.



4

Entry Points for Programming on Gender and E-governance

This section presents a series of entry points for engendering e-governance programming in UNDP. It centres on the five key areas of e-governance highlighted in the previous sections. As already mentioned, these areas present different challenges for men and women that need to be openly addressed through both an ICT and gender equality lens.

Policy design and implementation

- **Increasing the presence and active participation of women in policy planning committees for national e-governance strategies and programmes** is the first step towards

creating a gender-responsive policy environment. This can be complemented by also having women involved in the formulation of national-level ICT for Development strategies which could also be linked to poverty reduction and other development plans.

- **Ensure that male and female participants in the policy process understand how gender roles and relations impact on e-governance**, and that they have the necessary capacity and information to participate in these policy discussions.
- **Strengthen the capacity of UNDP partners and the organization itself** to acquire the skills necessary for understanding the different impacts of e-governance on women and men. Educate them on international and national commitments to gender equality, particularly the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the MDGs, and the WSIS Action Plan for the promotion of the information society in developing countries.
- **Link public administration reform strategies and programmes to e-government strategies**, and ensure that they engage women and men stakeholders and civil servants in their design and implementation.
- **Monitor e-governance policies** (through customized ICT tools and solutions) to assess their impact on women and men and their equal access to opportunities and resources, as well as the impact on poor and disadvantaged groups more broadly. This can also include the production of sex-disaggregated data for policy options.
- **Monitor women and men's recruitment to government institutions at national and local levels** and across a range of program areas, in terms of both their numbers and the positions they hold. ICTs can be used to track gender equality in appointments, promotions, study tours, and assignment of responsibility, among other things.

E-service delivery

- **Foster the involvement of different groups of men and women in the selection of priority public services** and in the provision of feedback on their quality, including whether or not such services respond to women and men's actual needs.



- **Prioritize e-services that address the specific needs of women** and are more responsive to gender equality issues. This is particularly relevant for local service delivery, as women, stakeholders and communities usually have much closer contact with local government authorities than other levels of government and often have better opportunities to express their needs and concerns at the local level.
- **Track access to government services through dedicated ICT solutions** to ensure that the introduction of e-governance programmes does not perpetuate gender-based discrimination.
- **Conduct a gender analysis when formulating e-justice initiatives** to assist partners in understanding how women can be barred from access to both formal and informal systems of justice and how e-justice can help address this.
- **Support the design and establishment of legal databases and a gender analysis of their implications** that can be made available to judges, lawyers, ombudsperson offices, the media and citizens, and updated as legislation changes.

- **Support parliamentary committees to become networked and promote gender equality and women's empowerment across different areas of their work**—budgets, law reform, security sectors—and to track implementation in key areas, for example, access to land, labour rights and access to justice.
- **Build and strengthen innovative partnerships with CSOs and small enterprises run by women** to bring basic public services to underserved areas.

E-participation and networking

- **Encourage community participation, especially by women, in prioritizing critical needs and gaps** to increase the effectiveness and transparency of e-governance priorities.
- **Use new and old ICTs to enhance existing networks or help create new ones**, in particular those that represent women and/or promote gender equality. Avoid building “parallel” ICT networks that could end up undermining existing human networks and organizations.
- **Use new and old technologies to strengthen existing channels of interaction between citizens and governments** (local governments in particular) to tackle gender inequality issues. To the same end, build new channels of interaction that can facilitate a greater role for women and gender advocates in local governance processes.
- **Establish e-voting systems with multi-lingual and voice-driven interfaces to attract new voters to the polls**, and to make it possible for poor, illiterate women and men to vote in national and local elections.
- **Establish networks, websites, and other electronic means to link parliamentarians to national and local constituents** engaged in the struggle for gender equality—and support networks of citizens to mobilize and increase the numbers of those who engage with their elected representatives.

Access to ICTs

- **Develop local capacity and ICT skills, especially among women and the poor.** This should also include raising awareness among women and men about the potential opportunities ICTs can create, in particular their role in helping citizens to participate in governance processes and to access information.
- **Identify and deploy affordable state-of-the-art technologies for women and other disadvantaged groups**, such as cell phones, smart phones and PDAs, that allow for mobile use and access to services and public information.
- **Promote the shared use of ICTs among women and other vulnerable groups to foster their increased access to ICT networks.** This should not be limited to tele-centres or public kiosks but should also include mobile devices that can be customized for multi-user access.
- **Support the deployment of open networks in rural and poor areas** that can facilitate access and reduce costs while promoting women's ownership and participation in them. Such networks could be community-owned and thus sustainable from their deployment.
- **Promote the use of technologies that use local languages** and thus facilitate the flow of gender-related information among local communities. Alternatively, support technologies that use multimedia interfaces that do not require advanced IT or literacy skills for their usage.

Access to information via ICTs

- **Promote the production and dissemination of local content in local languages by local people, in particular by women and the poor.** Local content should highlight specific women's empowerment issues and existing gender inequalities.
- **Assist in the creation of new media outlets to disseminate information on key development concerns** through a range of broadcasting and

“While e-governance is certainly not a panacea, it does offer women and men innovative ways to address inequality and become participants in governance processes.”

electronic means; use the same interactive channels to capture and disseminate gender-related issues.

- **Support the national ombudsperson, human rights offices or anti-corruption commissions to use ICTs to better monitor and disseminate gender-related issues and information.** These networks can also be used by women and men to share issues through, for example, provincial offices connected via ICT networks and supported by local community organizations.
- **Assist parliamentarians and their aides in using ICTs to track budget expenditures by gender** and to access information from countries where gender budgeting has been used. They could also use the Internet and other tools to develop gender-sensitive legislative agendas.
- **Use ICTs to monitor the impacts of downsizing and other government reforms on women, men and the poor of all ages**, so that where these reforms are detrimental, alternatives can be proposed as quickly as possible. Women's organizations can use ICTs to monitor these changes and demand accountability.
- **Support the implementation of freedom of information laws that promote easy access to information for women and marginalized**

groups and that provide the secure access and requisite privacy measures for women and these groups to make effective use of the public facilities providing this information.



If there is one key message in this study, it is that gender analysis must be conducted at every stage of the programming process in order to identify actual or potential gender-based discrimination and to ensure that gender equality considerations are addressed throughout interventions. Gender will only be mainstreamed into all programming areas when UNDP and its partners directly address issues of gender equality in their work.

While e-governance is certainly not a panacea, it does offer women and men innovative ways to address inequality and become participants in governance processes. E-governance can provide new approaches and solutions to specific governance challenges while unleashing new ways of fostering development and promoting democratic governance. Nevertheless, its transformative potential can only be fully realized once specific gender inequalities are clearly identified and addressed. E-governance alone cannot make gender equality a reality.

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Endnotes

1. ICTs are mentioned in the eighth Millennium Development Goal on developing global partnerships for development, which calls for global partnerships to be formed with the private sector to help provide all people with access to the benefits of new technologies. However, ICTs in general, and e-governance in particular, are also critical for the achievement of other MDGs, such as gender equality and women's empowerment.
2. "Gender and ICTs for Development: A global sourcebook" published by KIT and OXFAM in 2005 provides a good account of the appearance and "disappearance" of gender in policy formulation efforts of the G8 ICT "Dot Force", the UN ICT Task Force and the WSIS. The report also includes examples from UNDP contributions to programmes in Asia and the Caribbean.
3. View the full report, "Report on Mapping UNDP's e-Governance Projects: e-Governance & Access to Information via ICT", Democratic Governance Group (DGG), Bureau for Development Policy (BDP), prepared by Valentina Azzarello. 2005. <http://sdnhq.undp.org/e-gov/mapping/UNDP-egovernance-mapping-report.pdf>.
4. Report from UNDP India Country Office in 2004.
5. Information in this box was gathered from UNDP Armenia during a March 2006 mission by one of this report's contributors, and from reports submitted by UNDP Bulgaria in 2004.
6. See <http://www.peoplefirst.net.sb>.
7. Report from UNDP India Country Office in 2004.



PHOTOGRAPHS

Cover: Gujarati woman speaks on her mobile phone, India. (Illustration from photograph provided courtesy of the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA))

Page 2: Accountant Zewditu Mulu works on the records of the Wagera District Council, Ethiopia. (Adam Rogers/UNCDF)

Page 5: A street merchant sells phone cards in Dili, East Timor. (Adam Rogers/UNCDF)

Page 6: A man speaks on his cell phone as he eats lunch at the Otavalo market, Ecuador. (Alison Clayson/UNESCO)

Page 7: Women proofread Kabul Weekly, the first independent Afghan newspaper supported by the association Aina, UNESCO and Reporters sans frontières, Afghanistan. (Manoocher/UNESCO)

Page 8: Young woman listens to the radio in front of a phone-card kiosk in Koutiala, Mali. (Serge Daniel/UNESCO)

Page 9: A woman works a video camera at the Mass Media Education Centre in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. (Dominique Roger/UNESCO)

Page 10: An Internet café on the main street in Louang Prabang offers fresh fruit shakes along with Internet access, Laos. (Alison Clayson, UNESCO/WWAP)

Page 12: Women take an active part in community decision-making in Niger. (Adam Rogers/UNCDF)

Page 17: Students surround United Nations Volunteer Jenan Shafiqin during computer training in Safawi, Jordan. (Bill Lyon/UNDP)

Page 21: Manhica Multimedia Community Centre, Mozambique. (Sergio Santimano/UNESCO)

Page 22: Women and children participate in computer training at the Dushanbe-based Women Centre, established under the Women Education Project, Tajikistan. (Gennadiy Ratushenko/The World Bank)

“UNDP’s e-governance strategy has a pro-poor focus which aims at fostering the delivery of basic e-services and information to the most vulnerable populations. This is complemented by an emphasis on e-participation, particularly at the local level. It thus provides fertile ground to introduce gender issues in the policy agenda and involve more women’s networks in policy discussions and decision-making processes to address concrete gender issues affecting the achievement of gender equality.”



PRIMERS IN GENDER AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

Gender Responsive E-governance: Exploring the Transformative Potential



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