



Crucial Intersections: Exploring Gender in ICT

By Aramanzan Madanda, PhD

aramadanda@yahoo.co.uk

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Why gender in ICT and why ICT in
gender?

Gender

- **Socially constructed**

- Differences
 - Attributes (feminine, masculine),
 - Status (power)
 - Roles
 - Responsibilities
 - Potentialities
 - access to and control over resources and benefits (Ssali , Ahikire and Madanda 2007).
- Gender is about relations (production, power, symbolic, emotional) between men and women

Reflection:

- How does the understanding of gender as socially constructed through actions of socialization agents influence the design of your ICT initiatives?
- How is your ICT work linked to addressing gender relations (production, power, symbolism and emotionalism?)

ICT

- Defined broadly as:
- technologies that provide an enabling environment for physical infrastructural and services development for generation, transmission, processing, storing & disseminating information in all forms, including voice, text, data, graphics and video (ROU 2003).
- Traditional & modern technologies: radio, TV, telephones & computers

Both ICT and Gender are...

- **contextual**
- socially constructed
- dynamic concepts
- all culturally embedded - an underlying concept in the definition of gender and ICT is culture

What does culture entail?

- Knowledge
- Beliefs
- Behavior
- Symbolic thought
- Social learning
- Shared attitudes
- Values
- Goals
- Practices

Both ICT and Gender....

- gender and technology are processes; shaped or acted out, in interaction
- gender and technology change along with the societies they are part of
- ICT is part of a cultural process, it can catalyse development for the better or for the worse depending on a given social/gender context.

A Few Points to Note About the New Era of ICT

Some Points

- Patriarchalism is the founding structure of all contemporary society and is characterized by authority of males over females and children in a family unit.
 - **male power is being challenged by ICT e.g. at family level – how?**
 - **ICT is challenging the foundations of patriarchy such as in organization of society, production, politics, consumption, law and culture – how?**

Some Points

- Transformation of women's [and men's] work – the new economy increasingly requires skills that were confined to the private domain of relational work – e.g. in management and processing of information and people
- Transformation of women's [and men's] consciousness]

Some Points

- Technological changes in the reproduction of human beings
- Surge in women's struggles and power
Internet – mobilization – power with
- Weakening of model of the family based on a stable exercise of authority/domination by an adult male head
- Defence of women against male violence – anti rape campaigns, counseling and online reporting and support systems

Some Points

- Role of Internet/ICT in shaping fertility issues – spread of global ideas.
- Divorce, cohabitation, marriage and extra-marital fertility
- Economic independence of women/girls reinforced by the Internet (ICT), some women have opted out of patriarchal relationships
- Spread of ideas of other family arrangements, FHH, Lesbian/Gay; single person households

Some Points

- Globalisation, enhanced by the Internet – affected women's labour force. Employment of young unskilled women in electronics industry especially in Asia.
- Under conditions of patriarchy, women seek to make compatible work and family, which is made possible by ICT especially the Internet
- Ideology of patriachalism legitimising domination has been undermined

Some Negative Aspects of ICT

- Extension of patriarchy – enhanced control
- Invasion of privacy through stalking, and surveillance
- Discrimination in incomes and levels of earning
- Promoting individualism (loss of social support) and less family friendly ways of working
- Exploitation of especially young women – nature of jobs, trafficking, etc.

Examining the Impact

The Role of ICT in Social Economic Change and Women's Empowerment

Aim

- To examine the potential role of ICT in supporting and advancing gender equality and women's empowerment.

Social Change

- Aims at examining from a gender perspective :
 - how an ICT intervention affects changes in an individual, organization and community, including other broader social contexts” (APC-WNSP 2005
- Perspective involves:
 - focusing on a dynamic relationship between ICT initiatives and the way individuals, organisations and communities operate;
- Explores the relationship between ICT initiatives and the broader social, political, cultural and economic contexts and understanding how these factors affect the initiative and vice versa;
- Involves a gender analysis of the different impacts of activities on women and men taking into account: power relations, class, race, ethnicity, age and location .

Links: ICT, Gender & Social Change

- Underlying aspect is **culture**
- Culture represents:
 - Knowledge
 - Beliefs
 - Behavior
 - Symbolic thought
 - Social learning
 - Shared attitudes
 - Values
 - Goals
 - Practices
- Social constructionist view:
- both gender and technology are processes; shaped or acted out, in interaction
- Social change is a process too
- both gender and technology change along with the societies they are part of

ICT is part of a cultural process, it can catalyse development for the better or for the worse depending on a given social/gender context.

APC Model: Learning for Change

- The Model Aims to Examine how an ICT intervention affects changes in an individual, organization and community including other broader social contexts from a gender perspective

Values & Practices of Learning for Change

- Self and Social Change
- Gender Analysis
- Learning by Doing Linked to Action
- Participatory
- Critical Reflection
- Sensitive to bias
- Context Sensitive

Value 1: Self & Social Change

- This focuses on understanding the dynamic relationship between an ICT initiative on both self & social change
- Self is used to mean: individuals, organizations & communities involved in an ICT Initiative
- Learning for Change also considers the relationship between an ICT initiative & the broader social, cultural and economic contexts

Value 2: Gender Analysis (GA)

- GA involves a systematic assessment of the different impacts of ICT initiatives on women & men
- GA asserts that power relations in class, race, ethnicity, age & geographical location interact with gender producing complex & hidden inequalities that affect social change
- GA also looks into how ICTs are used to maintain or bring about social change through: **Disaggregating data by sex; analyzing GDOL; understanding gender disparities of access & Control over resources**

Value 3: Learning by Doing Linked to Action

- Change springs from learning by doing which is linked to action that emphasizes the importance of using what was learned

Value 4: Participatory

- Emphasizes engaging with groups involved – the target of the ICT initiatives
- Process should involve all stakeholders, be transparent & ensure accountability

Value 5: Critical Reflection

- It is important to reflect thoroughly on an ICT initiative, its advances and mishaps. Constantly review information gained

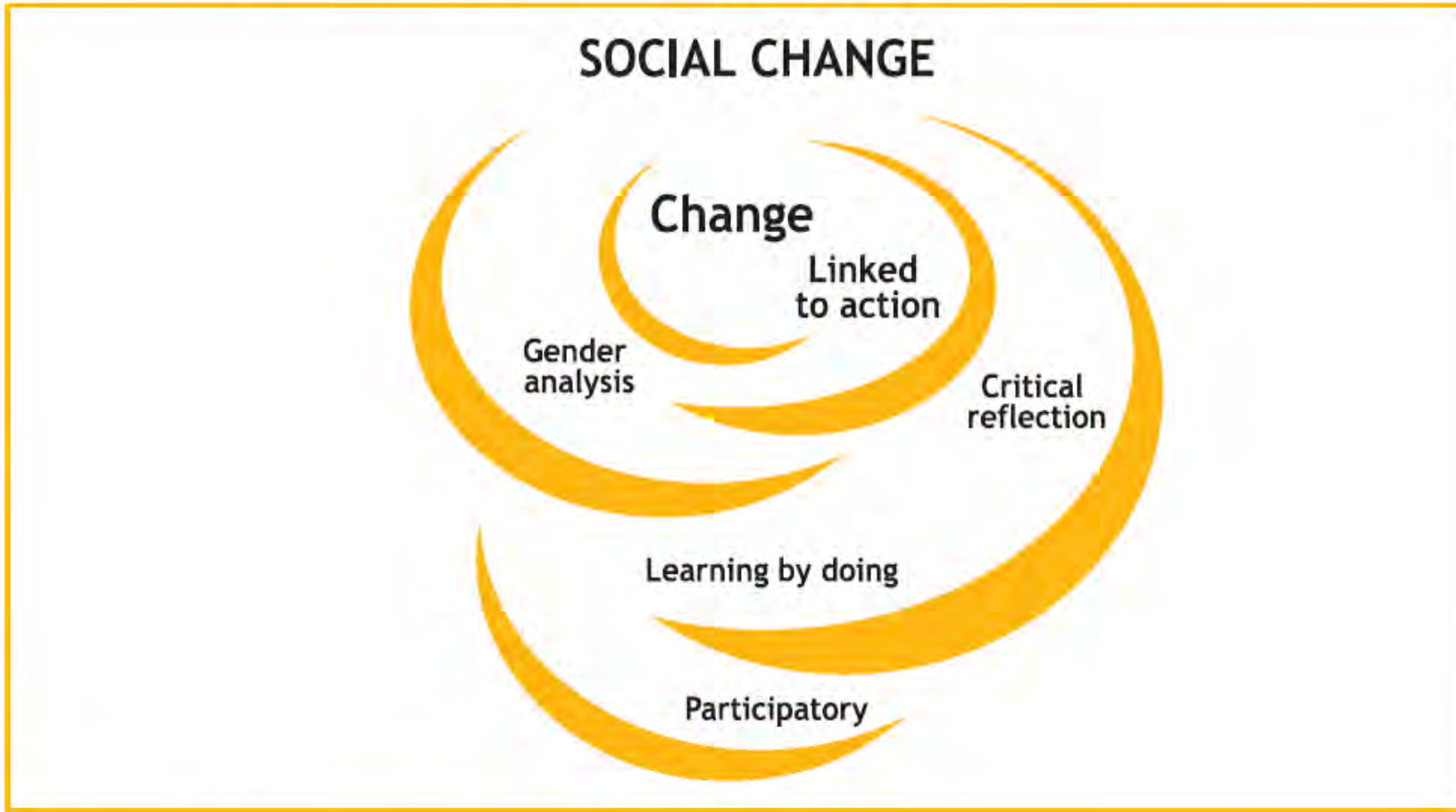
Value 6: Sensitive to Bias

- Recognize that each player comes in with some bias which may affect outcomes
- There is need for an open atmosphere of trust and sincerity

Value 7: Context Sensitive

- Each ICT initiative enters into a unique social, cultural, economic and political reality
- There is need to be sensitive to each unique reality and seek to understand its dynamics and how these affect an ICT initiative
- Recognize that there are realities that the ICT initiative may be unable to reach

APC Learning for Change Model



“GEM Reference: The Betel Chew Ritual” [Wood, Peregrine]

Important Note

- ICT initiatives bring about quantitative and qualitative changes
- Quantitative changes are those that can be measured numerically but do not tell an entire story
- Qualitative changes may not be measured numerically. E.g. a woman's sense of personal empowerment, more self confidence or self esteem derived from use of an ICT, manifestations of changes in organizational and household relationships.

“Seeing” the Process of Women’s Empowerment

- It is important to ask whether an ICT Initiative is merely disseminating information on gender issues, or whether it is contributing to the process of women’s empowerment.
- Can we assume that women “are automatically empowered by being better informed and taking part in an ICT project? How could we tell?
- How could we tell when gender problems are embedded in complex patriarchal systems?

What to take Note of

- The complex nature of patriarchy that promotes male privilege means that interventions may not just be handed down
- Women's advancement involves a process of empowerment by which women achieve increased control over public decision making

What to note

- Women's empowerment is a route to changing laws that discriminate against them, and a way to achieve an equitable gender division of labour & allocation of resources
- Male domination of decision making is for serving their interests where women do most of the work and men collect most of the rewards
- It would be a mistake for women to expect male leaders to suddenly “realize” the value of gender equality and “give” women an equal share of the pie. **“Power is never given, it has to be taken”**

A Lens for Looking into Women's Empowerment

- Sara Longwe provides a five “level” framework for seeing the process of women's empowerment as a form of women's action by which a gender issue can be confronted.
- The levels are: Welfare, Access, Conscientisation, Mobilization, Control

Welfare

- *Welfare* is defined as the lowest level at which a development intervention may hope to close a gender gap.
- By welfare is meant an improvement in socio-economic status, such as improved nutritional status, shelter, or income. If an intervention is confined to this welfare level, then we are talking about women being **given** these benefits, rather than producing or acquiring such benefits for themselves.
- This is the **zero level** of empowerment, where women are passive recipients of benefits.

Access

- *Access* is defined as the first level of empowerment, since women improve their own status, relative to men, by their own work and organization arising from increased **access** to resources.
- E.g. women farmers may improve their production and general welfare by increased access to water, to land, to the market, to skills training, or to information. The important element here is women's own action to increase their access.

Conscientization

- *Conscientization* is a process by which women realize that their lack of status & welfare, relative to men, is not due to their own lack of ability, organization or effort.
- It involves the *realization* that women's relative lack of access to resources arises from discriminatory practices & rules that give priority access and control to men.
- Conscientization is concerned with a collective urge to action to remove the discriminatory practices.
- This is where there is a potential for strategies of improved information and communication, as a means for enabling conscientization, but driven by women's own need to understand the underlying causes of their problems, & to identify strategies for action

Mobilization

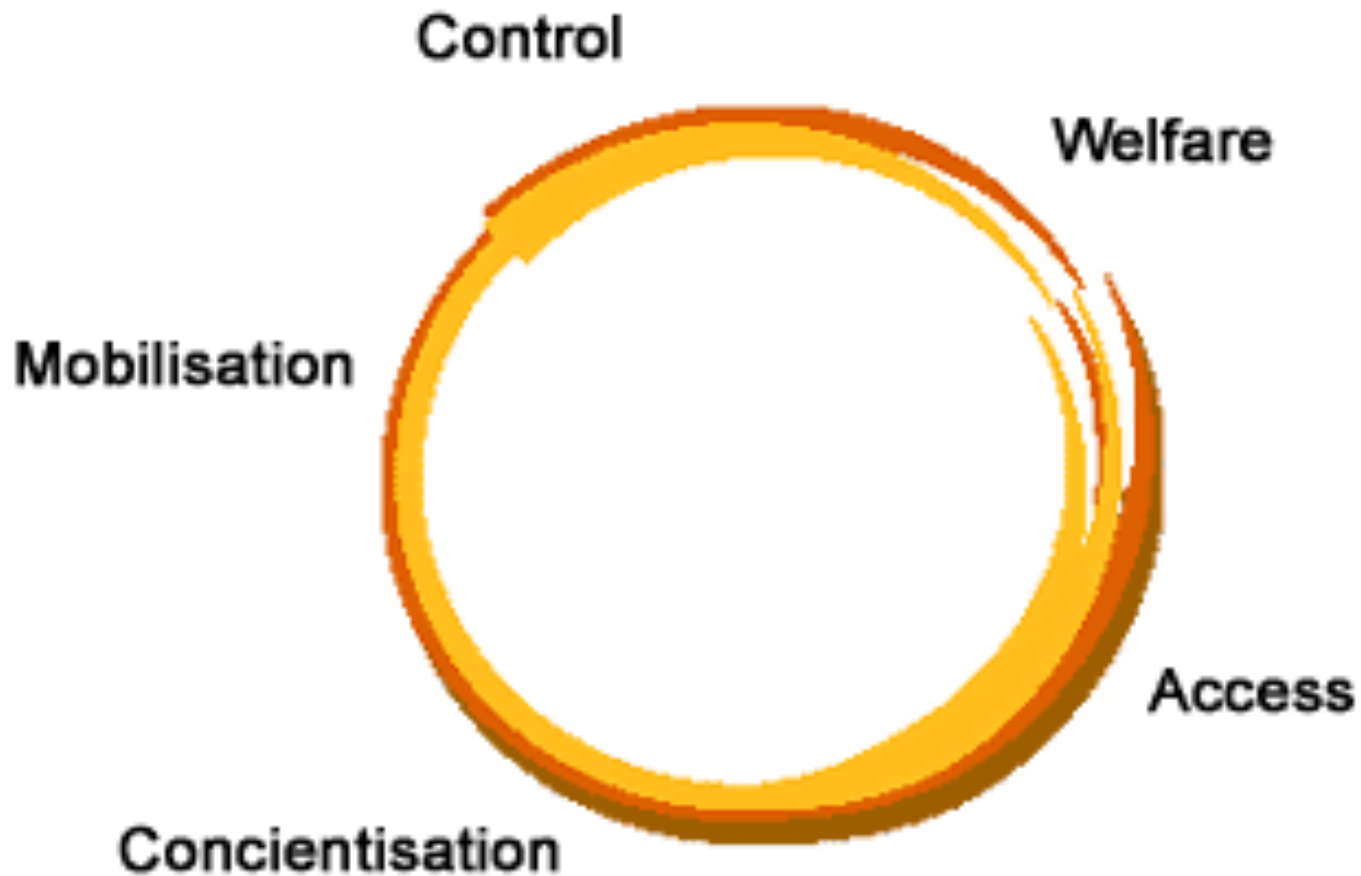
- *Mobilization* is the action level which complements conscientization.
- It involves women's coming together for the recognition and analysis of problems, the identification of strategies to overcome discriminatory practices, and collective action to remove these practices.
- Here communication may not be merely concerned with the mobilization of the group, but also to connect up with the larger women's movement, to learn from the successes of women's similar strategic action elsewhere, and to link up with the wider struggle

Control

- *Control* is the level that is reached when women have taken action so that there is gender equality in decision making over access to resources, so that women achieve direct control over their access to resources.

Sara Longwe's

Women's empowerment cycle



Discussion

- Drawing on Sara Longwe's Women's Empowerment framework and previous discussions:
 1. What is the potential and role of ICT for gender equality and the empowerment of women?.
 2. Which "level" of the empowerment of women does your initiative address?
 3. How can the women's empowerment/gender equality potential of your ICT initiative be improved?

Why gender in ICT?

*Potential role of ICT for gender
equality and social change*

Risks of ignoring gender in ICT4D

Why gender in ICT?

- so that different needs of women and men are addressed equally
- ICT has a potential for mass transformation, but risks excluding women if their needs are ignored
- In developing countries most women are in the deepest part of the digital divide further removed from the information age than the men whose poverty they share

Why gender in ICT?

- ICTs are catalysts for women's political and social empowerment and their growth a powerful force in advancing gender equality
- If women are to benefit and contribute more to ICT, efforts must counter the almost global situation where women are largely excluded
- If gender analysis is ignored, there could be missed opportunities for women and ICTs risk reinforcing women's discrimination and disempowerment

Why gender in ICT?

- ICTs have a potential of transforming rural areas where the poor especially majority of women live in developing countries
- ICT bears a huge potential to address gender inequality and promote social change thru:
 - educational and employment opportunities,
 - providing virtual spaces for women's reach to the outer world
 - opportunities of expanded exposure

Why gender in ICT?

- if not appropriated for promotion of negative masculinities and patriarchy, control and subordination, ICT can help level the ground for equality.
- The contrary can be increased inequalities, escalation of GBV and abuse of technology that could enhance the suffering of humanity.

- End