Cinderella or Cyberella: Empowering Women in the Knowledge Society

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Cinderella

♦ Works in the basement of the knowledge society (if she works in it at all)
  ♦ little opportunity to reap its benefits.
  ♦ waits for "her prince" to decide the benefits she will receive.
Fluent in the uses of technology

Comfortable using and designing computer, technology and communication equipment, software, and in working in virtual spaces

Devises innovative uses for technologies across problems and subjects

Finds information and knowledge to improve her life and expand choices

Active knowledge creator and disseminator

More than a user, designs information and knowledge systems to improve all aspects of her life.
Phases of gender and ICT inclusion (Sue Rosser)

- First stage: absence of women’s concerns and presence from the IT sector not noted
- Second stage: women’s issues and concerns “added on” to existing structures and designs, but seen as problems, anomalies and deviance from ICT norms
- Third stage: Women seen as workers, users and designers of ICTs
- Final stage: full inclusion of women in all these aspects
What do we know about women and information technology worldwide?

- Few statistics available globally to cover the situation of women and information technology
### Female Internet users as % of total Internet users, 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States 1a</td>
<td>51</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hongkong, China 1</td>
<td>49</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thailand 1b</td>
<td>49</td>
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<tr>
<td>Iceland 1a</td>
<td>49</td>
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<tr>
<td>Australia 2a</td>
<td>48</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sweden 1</td>
<td>48</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chile 1b</td>
<td>47</td>
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<tr>
<td>Singapore 1b</td>
<td>47</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Zealand 2a</td>
<td>46</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>46</td>
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<tr>
<td>Korea (Rep.)</td>
<td>45</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
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<td>Denmark</td>
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<tr>
<td>Czech Republic 3</td>
<td>45</td>
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<tr>
<td>Taiwan, China 2a</td>
<td>44</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spain 1</td>
<td>43</td>
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<tr>
<td>Norway 2a</td>
<td>43</td>
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<tr>
<td>Austria 2a</td>
<td>43</td>
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<tr>
<td>Argentina 1b</td>
<td>43</td>
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<tr>
<td>United Kingdom 2a</td>
<td>43</td>
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<tr>
<td>Luxembourg 1a</td>
<td>42</td>
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<tr>
<td>Venezuela 1</td>
<td>42</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brazil 2a</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland 3</td>
<td>42</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mexico 3</td>
<td>42</td>
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<tr>
<td>Israel 2a</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Little data on female Internet use in developing countries

- Data available on only one African country – South Africa
- Only five Latin American countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico and Venezuela)
- No Middle East countries, except Israel
- Many Asian countries, but weighted towards wealthy countries, no India
- Available data reflects the global digital divide.
Relationship between Internet penetration and proportion female Internet users

Source: ITU, World Telecommunication Indicators 2004 and selected national sources
Women in the Information Society

- Gender divide more pronounced in developing countries
- Even countries with high infostates have gender inequalities in use
- The gender divide and the overall digital divide do NOT move in tandem.
- Disputes argument that you don’t have to take care of gender; it will take care of itself.
Where is most attention going?

- Women in the IT industry and ICT-enabled businesses
- Women in science and technology education
- Comparative access of men/women to Internet
- Women using ICTs for advocacy, political empowerment
Intersections with globalization

- ICT-enabled remote service jobs: CBSS, BPO, ITES, outsourcing
- Issues in women and call centre employment
- Global spread of remote service jobs
Where are the challenges?

- Women and ICT4D
- ICTs for poverty reduction for poor women in the informal sector in developing countries
- ICTs for women’s improved health, well being, income
- ICTs applied to existing businesses and enterprises (vs ICT-enabled businesses)
ICT4D-Muhammad Yunus, Nobel Peace Prize Winner, 2006

♦ Grameen VillagePhone brings focus on poor rural women gaining empowerment through ICTs as small-scale entrepreneurs
Why single out women?

- Myth of gender neutral technology-built it and everyone will benefit!
- Evidence that gender blind does not produce gender neutrality
- Growing attention to gender/women and development, but . . .
- Lack of awareness of women’s/gender issues in ICT
Constraints to girls and women access, use of IT

- Little access at home- high costs, gendered access
- Public access the normal mode- gendered cultural, time and cost barriers
- Education
- Language
- Geographical location
- Disposable time
More constraints . . .

- Limited mobility
- Lack of appropriate content
- Technophobia
- Gender socialization about technology
- Losing out, even in classrooms
Policy-level constraints

- Absence of women from IT policy
- Belief that IT (and all technology) is gender neutral
- Policy makers lack of knowledge of gender aspects of technical issues
- Gender advocates’ unawareness of IT issues
Gender issues in technical IT policy

- Network modernization
- Network architecture
- Network deployment
- Infrastructure
- Technology choice
- Sector liberalization
- Tariff policy
- R&D, innovation
- Learning and training systems
- Building technological capacity
Silver bullet or latest problem for women?

- Increase in accessibility and quantity of pornography
- Tool to facilitate trafficking
- Associated with increased domestic violence and assertions of patriarchy
- But ICTs can contribute much to the process of realizing human capabilities, potential, freedom, as basic components of development (Amartya Sen).
Thank you

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