



Unit 18: Community, ICTs and Gender

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1. About this document

This material is part of the course package created for TRICALCAR project. For information on TRICALCAR, please consult the introductory module or, www.wilac.net/tricalcar/. This material was originally developed in Spanish for the TRICALCAR project.

The author of this unit is the Programme for Women's Networking Support (PARM LAC-APC) with support from ICT Policy Monitor Project in Latin America and the Caribbean¹.

1.1 Intellectual Property Information

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1.2 Degree of difficulty

The degree of difficulty of this unit is “basic”.

2. Introduction

A Peruvian journalist recounts that one of the peasant communities displaced by internal war in the Ayacucho region returning to its native town, decided to hold a meeting in order to debate about the organisation of their future life in the region after many years of absence. Since the region now had electricity, they decided to acquire a satellite antenna. The community did not want to remain out of the information and communication circuits any longer. They felt that in order to work towards their own economical, political, social and economic development, access to information and communication was a central key that would open the doors to new exchanges and knowledges, to new ways of insertion into the world and the markets, and would render visible and manifest the experiences, efforts and expertises of the local community.

1. This unit is the result of a collaborative work through a mailing list established for this purpose. Dafne Plou (PARM LAC Coordinator) was mainly in charge of wording. And, with support from their organisation, Valeria Betancourt (ICT Policy Monitor in LAC), Lilian Chamorro and Olga Paz (Colnodo), Erika Smith (LaNeta), Cris Ojeda (TAU Node) collaborated in the design and construction of this guide.

The development achieved in recent years by the information and communication technologies (ICTs) has opened important possibilities of making visible the contribution of the communities and its social organisations. This development has also allowed that communities exert the communication as an unalienable right requiring a variety of information sources and means of communication, as well as a democratic and transparent management of communication policies. These technological advancements have facilitated the creation of a global network of communication that transcends the national frontiers and influence state policies, private attitudes and individual and collective behaviour.

Important considerations:



- Means of Communication including Internet have evolved into expression centres and into channels of the collective conversation currently held in our society.
- In these spaces, information deemed important for the society is generated and transmitted. It is also in this domain that the movements of public opinion articulate, strengthen and nourish themselves and replace, at present, political organisations.
- Changes introduced by the ICTs are observed not only in the economical, social and cultural environments, but they play a fundamental role in the way people interact with society, and in the generation of new ways of constructing subjectivity.

For this reason, it is essential that the media adequately represent the variety of images and discourses generated by society, including communities and their social organisations, since they must also exert their right to participate in this global conversation.

An additional quality of these advancements is that massive means of communication and information, in addition to maintaining its character as a public service, have come to occupy spaces previously occupied by social institutions such as the church, school and even the family.



To think about:

- Communication media, especially television, have a great influence in the shaping of behaviours, attitudes and ways of interpreting reality.
- The role of the information media has been increasingly important in the construction of democracy and building of civil society hence it is fundamental that their contents express a plurality and diversity of voices, images and words that indicate respect for equity principles of gender, ethnicity, race, culture and social condition.

People working on the technical aspects of services and networking for communications should not ignore this reality. The comprehension of the impact of the services they offer and of the networks they implement will allow the implementation of viable and sustainable projects in the communities.



Things to remember:

- It is fundamental to have the support of those who benefit from the technology, to talk with them, to know about their needs and expectations.
- People must have a clear understanding of the advantages of technology in order to guarantee a better capitalisation of resources and satisfaction of the community needs.

We must not forget that technology is a tool, and as such, it must have a clear usefulness that allows to capitalise on the scientific knowledge in a practical way. It would not be possible to benefit from the advantages of this instrument if we disregard its advantages, possibilities and effects. In this chapter we strive to present a general view on the effects of Information and Communication Technologies, ICTs, in our society and how digital gap can be increased or decreased through them.

We will notice how the employment of new technologies has generated development processes, and we will analyse concrete examples of different technical and political aspects that must be considered in order to attain favourable conditions for technology access.

Finally, the concept of gender will be considered, and it will be analysed how, based on this concept, societies have defined and assigned specific roles even in the technological environment deneutralising its meaning. It is underlined the importance of the use of gender perspective and its implications in the analysis of relationships inside the communities, and between communities and ICTs, in order to stimulate equity and fairness of opportunities between men and women and among all community members.

3. Inclusion in the information and knowledge society

With the influence of ICTs and the growth of the 'information' and 'knowledge' society, knowledge and information have been determinant factors in our economical, social and cultural life. Therefore, control of information production and diffusion has also become vital.

Social, political and economical changes produced by the new information and communication technologies have generated transformations on the notion of development. In few years span Internet has evolved into a powerful communication medium which not only encompasses the contents of traditional media, but has also promoted the generation of new means/media and networks of communications for the social and community organisations allowing the expression of alternative voices often silenced by the big communication consortia and the official press.

Development strategists are considering the idea that developing countries utilise ICTs as a means of preventing marginalisation and as a potential channel of generating new opportunities of economical growth and expanding democracy range.

The access to ICTs is still limited by traditional boundaries which results in unequal access known as "digital divide/gap" or "digital exclusion". This division is characterised by high levels of access to technologies including Internet in some developed countries, whereas in developing countries this access is limited by inadequate infrastructure due to lack of investments or resources, by unaffordable connectivity costs for the majority of the population, by illiteracy and low educational levels. The access to technologies can be also tampered by lack of training of the population in access, use and development of ICTs due to narrow conceptions of technology that prevents or ignores the insertion of ICTs in the educational and communicational system with universal character, and hinders a democratic appropriation on the side of the population hence deepening exclusion.

The model is also repeated within countries, creating gaps that prevent people's access to ICTs for geographical, ethnic, cultural, economic or social reasons. Many individuals, communities and social organisations in the developing world continue to be marginalised, which results in exclusion from the emerging global system built around information and knowledge.

The strengthening of democracy depends on a recovery of the public sphere and an active citizen participation in the definition and implementation of public policies that make knowledge accessible to

all citizens and adequately counter the social, political, cultural and economic factors that hinder their access.

It is imperative that the states and civil society promote effective mechanisms and tools that facilitate people's active and informed participation in the design of policies and measures in order to position its priorities with respect to access and use of ICTs in the public agenda.

The strategies and action plans for the information society must conceive ICTs beyond the telecommunications and the Internet, and recognise their potential as tools that contribute to human development. The use and application of ICTs will only have positive impact on communities and social organisations when the countries challenge and overcome the existing inequalities in the distribution of assets, wealth and access to resources, including those concerning information systems and communication.

4. Exercise 1

What is the place of ICTs in the life of communities?

Discuss in small groups or with the whole group (depending on the number of participants) the following questions:

1. Are the new technologies of information and communication influencing community life? In what way? Consider the kind of influence in the personal life, social life and the life of the community and organisations. Build a list of modalities, situations and substantial changes in the life of the community.
2. How do the media (including the Internet) affect the image that society has of the communities and social organisations? What images do we construct? What alternative images can we offer on the basis of equality of opportunity and fairness, civil rights, social inclusion?

Share experiences and views, discuss and agree on recommendations to achieve the appropriation of ICTs by communities and their organisations in order to work for equal opportunity and fairness in the exercise of the right to communicate and strengthen development of the community using ICTs.

5. What is the contribution of information and knowledge technologies to the development of communities?

In the late 80's and early 90, new initiatives in the field of communications broke into Latin American society: thousands of small community radio stations gave birth to a movement that in a few years

would spread throughout the region giving rise to substantial changes in radio programming and formats including commercial radio broadcasting. The lowering of the transmission equipment prices as well as the democratizing force of social movements gave impetus to this movement allowing the access of neighbourhoods and popular sectors to new communication tools that favored local development and the integration of the demands and interests of communities on the public agenda.

The community radios became spaces where the neighbourhood organisation and the work for the local population benefit were encouraged. They created an area to debate openly on the rights of the people, to exchange views on the priorities of the community, and from these spaces they appealed to the authorities, who ceased to appear distant and unattainable and had to begin answering questions posed by the media, having as audience the entire population.

Within a few years, community radios adopted information and communication technologies in their daily work, and to communicate with their audience and similar radio networks, through the use of computers, the exchange of audio and music files, e-mail, information agencies transmitting over the Internet, websites with radio broadcasting audio, and satellite interconnection. Thus community radios increased their strength and presence as media, and also their local integration.

In the late 90's a new movement began to emerge in Latin America and Caribbean. The movement was this time directly connected to the neighborhood and community appropriation of ICTs and surged from the community telecentres. Some of these telecentres began their task linked to a community radio station or a public entity, such as the popular libraries and schools or health centres.

Others emerged as independent projects, as the result of the efforts of groups or social organisations, whose main objective was to foster a strategic use of ICTs to promote citizen participation in the discussion of community projects and local government policies and to encourage work networking of various social organisations with similar purposes in a region and its interconnection with a larger national or international movement.

The work so far is being assessed, but there are obstacles to successfully integrate the lower-income populations and economically disadvantaged areas, because the investments on infrastructure and ICTs services are insufficient due to the tendency in the market policies to ignore the regions that are not profitable. The funds for the development of telecommunications are still emerging organisations in most countries and have shown inability to cope with the entire problem through appropriate solutions

The fact that at present the penetration of mobile phones is high does not mean that there is real access to ICTs and their full services, but it is an opportunity to explore. There are some relatively successful experiences that have sought to stimulate demand for ICTs services by installing telecentres and Internet cafes, but results to date are not consistent and have not considered or incorporated the development needs of the various social groups or their communities.

While in neighbourhoods and communities there exist social networks that link organisations and groups, the introduction of ICTs in their work opens the prospect of making a differential use of these tools in order to make visible the community on the Internet: its daily life and efforts, as well as its

projects and needs. In addition, ICTs enable access to information, especially from governments and, to knowledge, from access to papers, databases, search engines, images and audio. Through this access, organisations have ample opportunities to plan actions and projects and make informed decisions.

When we talk about information and communication technologies for development we make reference to the differential use of ICTs resulting in a strategic use, and not to the entertainment aspect sole. In its wider sense, ICTs have these primary objectives:

- Bring ICTs into the organisations to be a tool of information and communication, and also as a means of knowledge generation.
- Democratise knowledge so that people effectively appropriate these technologies.
- Stimulate collective use of ICTs.
- Strengthen collective concurrence and communication.
- Have people participate in the creation of inclusive communication alternatives in their societies.
- Foster effectiveness of people and organisations in dealing with relevant issues
- Fight for the democratisation of the media and access to knowledge.

If we make strategic use of ICTs, they can also:

- Contribute to the construction of information societies more inclusive, and act as development producers through the identification and generation of innovative solutions and possibilities for future development and replication / adaptation.
- Improve the ability to achieve development goals.
- Promote inclusion, providing access to knowledge and provision of services to underserved groups or regions lacking adequate services, particularly rural areas.

The Latin American societies are experiencing a moment in which the people and their social organisations find new ways of exercising democracy and citizenship, building forms of non-representative participation and extra-parliamentary: movements, citizen assemblies, neighbourhood groups, grassroots organisations, which question State action, demanding more participation and attention to the needs and rights of the people.

Civil society calls for the use of communication tools which can be appropriated, including among them ICTs for socio-economic development, to express their ideas and to exercise the right of resistance to abuses, human rights violations, lack of justice and equity, and so on. In this sense, ICTs provide the means and opportunities to democratise communications and create public opinion in the process of discussion of ideas, beliefs and knowledge.

When community networks begin to be supported by computer networks, they evolve into new partnerships in the digital age, using the Internet as a tool for communication and development. They connect the neighbourhood, the people, the city and their organisations, without abandoning the local essence, but expanding it globally through interaction with other communities and the world.

What do the new citizen networks obtain with the use of ICTs? In what sense can they benefit from this strategic use of ICTs?

An appropriate use of ICTs can bring to communities:



- Potential for further integration and development of the local character into broader processes.
- Access to information and knowledge for well-informed planning.
- Access to the authorities.
- Planning collective political action.
- People and organisations not only receive information, but can reprocess, recreate, and disseminate it among other civic networks.
- Individuals and organisations build identity through the use of ICTs.
- ICTs help recreate the public sphere.

Furthermore, the strategic use of ICT favours transforming processes in the work of organisations, which promote horizontality for decision-making, participation, transparency and democratisation, and that are displayed in:

- Internal management (communication, information, management).
- Development of interrelationships and exchanges.
- Creation, and dissemination of contents.
- Administration and management of information processes within the organisation.
- Generation of knowledge.
- Spreading of attitudes, positioning, participation and campaign promotion.

But what about the need for access to appropriate infrastructure that promotes these strategic uses and appropriation by communities? What technical, licensing, connectivity and cost issues should we take into account? The models of community-based networks seek to expose these shortcomings and propose alternative solutions to exploit the potential of wireless and other low-cost technologies.



Some of the solutions or alternative models propose, inter alia:

- Horizontal licensing
- Establishing parameters for the operation / deployment of wireless technologies
- Incorporating open access approaches to the deployment of infrastructure (including shared infrastructure) and ICT services
- Horizontal networks
- Bandwidth sharing
- Differentiated connection costs
- Adopting comprehensive approaches to networks, such as network management and ownership models that can be complementary and compete on fair market environments

However, work has to be done in public policies of the information and communication technologies that take into account community development, making possible the following:

- Deployment of wireless networks sharing bandwidth and connecting as many local actors as possible.
- Setting diverse and multiple points of access to low-cost local telephony such as VoIP. Implementation of e-government initiatives as channels for the provision of local services.
- The installation of telecentres as centres for capacity building and person to person support services.
- Exploring combinations of ICTs, such as radio, video, telephony and connectivity to achieve goals of community development and to produce contents relevant to the communities and social groups.
- Incorporating development goals as a central axis, in order to benefit from other local and community initiatives.
- The fulfilment of the goals and objectives agreed upon approval of funds for the development of telecommunications in each of the countries involved.

Thus, by combining low-cost information and communication technologies with the opening in the regulation and in the approaches of public policies and with community-based development models, we could impact the local community as follows:

- Stimulating and tapping into the local capacity and ability for business management.

- Improving the social and economic networking of local actors, with the possibility of boosting their political relationing.
- Generating jobs directly and indirectly. Directly, for example, through the development and provision of local services for local needs and demands (including demands for training). Indirectly, for example, opening new opportunities with the adequate provision of ICT services.
- Strengthening community self-management and bolstering the efforts of local development.
- Expanding the scope and improving the provision and transparency of government services.
- Contributing to maintain revenues from the community for the community.
- Opening opportunities for growth in the market by offering low-cost alternatives (and not costly, as mobile telephony).
- By combining and enhancing the use of public and community resources.
- Providing opportunities to share bandwidth and cost.
- Enhancing the involvement of youth and women in the community, thus generating responsibilities for the management, administration, operation and maintenance of the network.
- Giving opportunities for the network to play a role of service provider for local governments.

However, individuals, communities and social organisations must take into account that, despite communication, social, political or economical advances achieved through ICTs, these are not the solution to everything. They will have to take care not to deepen the digital divide (hence overlapping previous social and economic gaps), and to keep away from being considered as mere technology-consumers or spectators in this whole process. They should be put in as actors able to innovate, to create knowledge and enhance their action with the use of ICT, reformulating the relationship with the government, state officials and telecommunication service companies to be more involved in decision-making and impact on development of ICTs and its use by the population.

5. In search of equal opportunities in the information and knowledge society.

"I feel bad when my children scold me and don't let me come close to the computer, as if I were to break it"; "It seems that the only thing I am good for around computers is dust them", "I feel that nobody wants to teach me about computers, and when they do, they have no patience." It is common to hear these complaints in workshops introducing information and communication technologies addressed to women over 40. Why do children have to scold their moms? In a similar situation, would they scold their fathers? Would they show impatience? Are fathers and sons not required to keep their computers clean?

In a study on telecommuting (work remotely using ICTs) it was observed that women who engage in this type of work cannot do it fully because, since they work from their homes, they are expected to perform also many other chores, in addition to caring for children, sick or elderly in the family. Another observation was that their computers are not considered as a working tool by the family, but they suffer the "invasion" of children and adults who do not respect the women's work schedules or the importance of the task to fulfil. The same does not hold true when the teleworker is male. In this case, his task is rarely interrupted, and his computer is hardly ever turned on without permission.

When participating in the laying of a wireless community network, a young female engineer noted that her co-workers took especial precautions every time she had to climb a pole or realise a connection. This situation was very uncomfortable. But it was most uncomfortable when a colleague furtively asked her: "Can you cook?"

Technology has been traditionally related to the world and knowledge of men, and women's access to education in science and technology has been limited, as well as the jobs that involve knowledge in these fields. When women find jobs in these areas, they are commonly assigned lower-ranking positions on the production line, or positions not directly related to the development of knowledge, tools or technical applications. Why is it that in other fields of knowledge, such as social sciences, literature, medicine, legal science, women have already reached equity and recognition, while their insertion in the field of technology, with fair and equal opportunity is still difficult? There are social and cultural issues settled with great force in our societies, based on beliefs, stereotypes and prejudices that continue establishing barriers for women to fully enter into the world of generation and development of technology. These social and cultural issues have their root in the way men and women are socialised, influencing our perspective of what is expected of us in fulfilling our roles, in order to strengthen our "masculinity" or "femininity", according to the expectations of the society to which we belong. The society requires that we define gender adhering to traditional beliefs and to descriptions of the roles males and females are expected to play. These roles must fit the expected moulds so that nobody is confused or judged as a "weirdo".

It is interesting to take a look every now and then to prejudices or gender stereotypes that we still foster, there away, cornered somewhere in the back of our minds, that crop up in the least expected moment and dismantles any speech that we believed progressive. While, for example, the mass media applaud behaviors regarded as "transgressive" and make us believe society is moving to great strides in its openness, there are still strong concepts that continue to bolster the traditional images associated to women and men, although their exterior has been modernised.

At this stage it is interesting to distinguish between the concepts of *sex* and *gender*, and certainly the participants to the workshop will contribute to the definition:



Sex: the biological characteristics that distinguish us as men or as women, which are part of people's nature, according to the forms and functions of the sexual organs.



Gender: a social and cultural condition, historically constructed, from which the *ought-to-be* of every woman and man is built. Roles, attitudes, values and symbols that are imposed on each sex in the socialisation process and that make sexes as opposite by nature. You are born with one sex and learn different behaviors according to the dominant culture.

Are we socially and culturally so strongly defined that these mandates are those which take precedence when we make key decisions in life, even about the family future, profession or work?

In a workshop with young women who were about to finish their studies as engineers or licensed on systems and telecommunications, there was a great anxiety about what the group saw as incompatible: the professional development and the possibility of starting a family. Many still felt that they were expected to fulfil their role as mothers and wives, putting off their careers. Or, that if they decide to work outside the home, their performance should be perfect, both at work or at home. And if only dedicated to their profession, they must find with the comment "women who engage in science and technology are not "sexy", they do not attract men." Is it true that women's professional success puts their partners down? Why is it that boys cannot share the tasks and responsibilities of everyday home and family? What role plays the prevailing culture in these situations?

An investigation made by the Spanish branch of Amnesty International on the contents of video games accessed both on the Internet and Internet cafes by thousands of children, adolescents and adults around the world, showed that human rights violation, as well as violence against women are a common topic in these games. This violence is evident in the derogatory or demeaning treatment towards them, as in the scenes of violent sex that swarm on the websites. These contents repeat the stereotyped images of women as mere objects, whether to sell products as to attract navigators to a site. What does this reveal about relations between men and women in our society? What does this tell us about the messages and images that are prevalent in the media, including the Internet?

A study on the use of mobile phones has recorded several women who said they had been harassed, persecuted and stalked by their boyfriends, husbands or companions through the cellphone. The persistent and inquisitive calls and text messages that should be answered without delay became control elements which ended up thwarting women's freedom and privacy. The use of ICTs to track and

monitor business, banks and airports has become usual today, but by intervening personal relationships, this practice can reproduce violent relationships that exist in other spheres. Undoubtedly, there are still identities, roles and gender issues that influence social relationships, defining inequitable relations and opportunities for men and women, even in the area of the ICTs.



Consider these issues:

Gender identity: a sense of belonging to the male or the female gender and that determines the way in which we see our relation to other people and how society sees us.

Gender roles: behaviors learned in a society, community or social group, which makes its members perceive tasks and responsibilities as masculine or feminine, and to prioritise or appreciate them differently.

Gender relations: relations between women and men marked by the sexual division of labor and an unequal exercise of power that discriminates against women as inferior.

What is the relevance of all these concepts when we talk about technology? The perception of technology as a cultural product claims that technology is not neutral, and that there are cultural processes in the relationship between gender and technology that must be modified.

5.1 Exercise 2

What is sex and what is gender?

Objective: To recognise what is sex and what is gender

Methodology:

This is an individual exercise, so each one will develop it personally.

From the following phrases **can you recognise what is sex and what is gender?**

Think about your everyday life and your environment to answer:

- 1.- Women give birth to their children, men do not...
- 2.- Girls are sensitive, boys are rude...
- 3.- Among illiterate people worldwide 2 / 3 parts are women and 1 / 3 are men...

- 4.- Women can breastfeed infants, men can bottle feed them....
- 5.- In ancient Egypt, men stayed home and wove; women handled the affairs of the family. Women inherited property and men do not...
- 6.- 70% of the world's poor are women...
- 7.- The voice of the males changes at puberty, that of women do not change...
- 8.- A study of 224 cultures revealed that in 5 of them men were responsible for cooking and in 36, women built their own homes...
- 9.- From global income women earn 1 / 10 and men 9 / 10...
- 10.- Mothers love caring for their babies, fathers not so much...

What were your responses?

Does any of the questions and answers surprised you? Why?

Source: Gender and Journalism. Kathrin Gotman. FES. 2001.

5.2 Exercise 3

Are there gender roles?

This exercise can be done in two groups: one for women and another for men, inviting women to think about the roles of men and men on the roles of women. Then take the findings to the plenary and comment on them by pointing out those aspects which indicate traditional expectations, and those setting the changes in relation to existing models in the past.

These exercises allow us to observe that:

- The concept of gender is not only about women, but refers to social characteristics of both men and women.
- Gender is not synonymous with women. Men also have gender characteristics, gender roles.
- Gender refers to the social constructs that are changing and dynamic, not static.

*Source: A Guide for literacy in gender and development. Murguialday Clara, (ed.).
NGOD Coordinator of the Basque Autonomous Community. Bilbao, Spain.*

At this stage it is interesting to look at the relationship between men and women in our communities. Are they fair? Do they validate discrimination? Are there really power relations that subordinate women? How do these relations affect the access of women and men to technology? Is it possible to detect processes and situations with a differentiated look? How do we begin to work toward equity?

It is essential to use gender perspectives in this analysis, since they allow us to analyze gender relations and the inequalities between men and women that arise in them, considering that these inequalities are not natural or immutable and can be modified:

- The gender perspective helps visualise inequities and undervaluations between men and women in all fields.
- It warns us on discrimination and inequalities.
- It inspires changes in social relations in order to achieve equal opportunity.
- This perspective provides elements that contribute to changing relations between both genders, and to build a just society with fair relations between women and men.

Why is it important to apply a gender perspective when working in community development?

There are several reasons:

- Commitment to human rights.
- Dedication to fairness and justice.
- Using human resources effectively.
- Achieving gender equity and justice in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities between women and men.
- Achieving gender equality: equal treatment for women and men in law and State policies, access to resources and services

The roles and gender relations socially and culturally constructed determine:

- How women and men participate in the development of their communities.
- The way in which both are involved in the definition and construction of the information and knowledge society.

A full integration of women, with equality and fairness is possible if we take into account the gender dimensions of the information society, and if we analyse within this perspective technology, development and implementation of policies and the design of telecommunications programmes that bring ICTs into the communities.

All men and women are responsible for promoting the goals of gender equality and equal opportunities in the field of ICTs for development. We know that to achieve this goal, teaching theoretical content is not enough, but the challenge is:

- Generating on each individual and each community lasting postures towards equal opportunity

and equity between women and men.

- Modification of behaviors. Since gender issues are social and cultural constructs, we can work to change stereotypes, aiming to a growing awareness of the population, and changing ways of relating between women and men.
- Produce messages from the perspective of equity.
- Conceptualise new values that leave behind all forms of discrimination and aim to real changes leading towards the end of power relationships and the building of a democracy also effective in gender relations in the community.

5.3 Exercise 4

Analyzing our relationship with ICTs from a gender perspective

This exercise provides an opportunity to analyse situations involving ICTs applying a gender perspective. It is recommended that each instance is analyzed by a group of participants, responding to the questions. Then there will be a plenary discussion.

Example 1:

In a neighbourhood telecentre, the majority of attendees are male adolescents who attend daily to do some homework, chat and play web games. The few girls, usually sit and look at what boys do, rarely using the computers. The place does not have good lighting and heavy rock can be heard most of the time. Two male instructors are in charge of orientation and training, but fail to capture the interest of the girls. In the telecentre, there is only one woman employee: the cleaning lady. Is it that female teenagers are "afraid" of technology? What changes should be made to ensure that girls participate equitably in the training and telecentre activities?



Example 2:

A father decided to buy a computer to use at home, with the goal of having their children learn how to use various programs having in mind their future employment. He decided that his two sons attend a training course taught at a secondary school nearby. His only daughter protested because she wanted to attend, but his father did not accept her arguments. The girl ended up arguing with his father and quarreling with her brothers, who made fun of her interest in computers. She locked herself in her room

weeping with frustration. What arguments could there be to prevent the girl from taking the course as well? Is it that learning technology is not for women? What kind of intervention should be done in order to achieve equal opportunities for men and women in learning technology, at home, at school and in the community?

Example 3:

The mayoress of a small town decided to establish a computer centre and electronic communications within the local school, open to the general public during school hours, which would charge a modest fee for the courses and services. She thought that this would provide greater opportunities for students and will strengthen the opportunities for computer learning and Internet access in the village, which also had a telecentre in the commercial street.

A few months later, evaluating the attendance and participation of the public at the school centre, she was surprised to see that 65% of the attendees were women older than 35. What might have influenced that so many women attended the school centre instead of the telecentre in the shopping mall? What type of intervention is needed to ensure equal opportunities for men and women in access to technology, at home, at school and in the community?

6. Conclusions

Understanding the relationship between technology and the community is vitally important in order to conduct successful projects and maximise the use of technological tools in the attainment of the greatest benefit for the target population.

The five main points to remember in this unit can be summarised as follows:

- The poor infrastructure, high cost, lack of training in the use and appropriation of technology, deepen the digital gap in developing countries, and cut off a significant percentage of the population from the knowledge society.
- The introduction of ICTs makes communities visible by publicising their daily lives, their efforts, projects and needs. In addition, ICTs allow access to information and knowledge.
- Proper use of ICTs provides opportunities for the democratisation of communications and the creation of public opinion in the debate of ideas, beliefs and knowledge.
- The use of low-cost information and communication technologies, combined with regulations, adequate public policies and community-based development models, help provide the greatest

benefits to individuals, organisations and their communities, and facilitates the strategic use of ICTs.

- It is important to consider identity, roles, and gender relations, so as to identify the existing cultural forms of discrimination and to work towards achieving greater equity between men and women regarding the access to knowledge and resources using ICTs, and the benefits derived from full participation and equal opportunities in the information and knowledge society.

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