

Theme 2 Discussion Summary

**ICT potential for women in developing countries**

Opening statement: [http://www.ifrtd.gn.apc.org/new/gender\\_gat/week2.htm](http://www.ifrtd.gn.apc.org/new/gender_gat/week2.htm)

Forum home page: [http://www.ifrtd.gn.apc.org/new/gender\\_gat/index.htm](http://www.ifrtd.gn.apc.org/new/gender_gat/index.htm)

Focus session dates: 30 May – 6 June 2005

Moderator: Eric Britton, The Commons, Paris

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**Mainstreaming gender into the transport sector: A Virtual Forum**

**Program summary:**

In May & June 2005 IFRTD and GATNET hosted a virtual discussion on gender and transport issues for the development sector. The discussion was designed to share lessons learned and to exchange new ideas and information. The discussion feeds into a Round Table on Gender and Transport to be held on 11th July in Boston, USA.

The discussion took place over 4 weeks with a new discussion theme each week. Volunteers from the GATNET community moderated the discussion and posted summaries on this website. Please click on the themes as set out on the home page at [http://www.ifrtd.gn.apc.org/new/gender\\_gat/index.htm](http://www.ifrtd.gn.apc.org/new/gender_gat/index.htm) for the summaries and more information.

GATNET is an ongoing email discussion list and anyone with an interest in the issues is welcome to participate .. [click here](#) to find out how you can join

## 1. Executive Summary:

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Our exchanges over these last weeks, together with the various sources and past experiences tapped and cited, have made it crystal clear that the potential for ICT as a social and economic development tool in the developing countries, including the very poorest, is considerable.

1. Moreover the evidence suggests that we have here a group of technologies and applications that do and could offer some special opportunities to women in particular. (That said we recognize that this is a very delicate matter that requires real thoughtfulness and for reasons that will be developed a bit below).
2. The triple focus on ICT (in all its multiple variants), women, and developing countries and regions is what is most critical. The link to or interactions with matters of physical transport or mobility are also useful, but it is inevitable that in the real world in which everything touches and influences everything else often such discussions and projects will spill across these specific frontiers into yet other areas of daily life.
3. Sufficient experience has been accumulated in projects and demonstrations over the last decade that there is no need to start from the beginning. Indeed, one of the challenges of any future programs or initiatives in this area is in fact to build on this past experience, good and bad.
4. This suggests (a) the importance of creating and (at least as important) supporting programs aimed at facilitating effective international networking, experience exchange and peer support, (b) to take place over a period of not just days or months but at least a decade and possibly more. (*Task*: Update our inventory of and working links to all related past, present and planned programs which together constitute the critical foundation for anything that might be planned or done next along these lines.)
5. To support these goals we need robust networking programs which are multiple, world wide, comprehensive and wide open. The word robust in this context means that any such “program thrust” should not be cantoned within a single individual host organization, but rather have multiple nodes and be run by multiple actors on a thoroughly open and interactive basis. Thus when any given sponsor runs out of energy, ideas or funding, the entire cooperative effort nonetheless continues. (We call this kind of organization an “invisible college”, and as you will note it contrasts markedly with more bureaucratic or conventional institution-based ways of doing things).
6. In conclusion: I very much hope that we will not let our collaboration on this important project fade out here as if either we have learned nothing of importance or have completed our work. This preliminary probe should be studied, considered and built on as a priority.

## 2. Introduction and Overview:

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*Discussion topic:* “How ICT (can) play a catalytic role in the support of integrating gender into transport projects for women in developing nations”

- ? Does ICT offer potential for meaningful life quality improvements for women and children in these contexts?
- ? Is the ICT family of technologies and applications an area of life in which women in the developing world may have some kind of relative advantage?
- ? And if so, can we put our fingers on it and then find ways to favor and exploit?
- ? What should we do with this knowledge once this session has closed its doors?

*Host and references:*

- ? Home page for Virtual Forum: [http://www.ifrtd.gn.apc.org/new/gender\\_gat/index.htm](http://www.ifrtd.gn.apc.org/new/gender_gat/index.htm)
- ? Messages to date:  
[http://www.dgroups.org/groups/worldbank/GATNET/index.cfm?op=main&cat\\_id=6893](http://www.dgroups.org/groups/worldbank/GATNET/index.cfm?op=main&cat_id=6893)
- ? Background on US TRB Women’s Issues in Transportation conference:  
[http://www.ifrtd.gn.apc.org/new/gender\\_gat/table.htm](http://www.ifrtd.gn.apc.org/new/gender_gat/table.htm)
- ? Interface from Kyoto Challenge: <http://kyotocities.org> (Click Gender link on menu)
- ? Reading & references: <http://www.ecoplan.org/kyoto/challenge/gender.htm#read>

*Message summary:*

Over the week some twenty messages came in on this topic. This from a total of 89 registered members of the group. A collection of the discussions is available in a 22 page document at [http://www.dgroups.org/groups/worldbank/GATNET/index.cfm?op=dsp\\_resource\\_details&resource\\_id=18794&cat\\_id=6895](http://www.dgroups.org/groups/worldbank/GATNET/index.cfm?op=dsp_resource_details&resource_id=18794&cat_id=6895). (Below you will find some selected extracts from these communications intended to give you a feel for the variety and content of the exchanges.)

*Parallel session:*

However in addition we were able to create an overlap with another parallel virtual discussion that was taking under the auspices of the International Institute for Sustainable Development in their ‘Forum to Explore Links Between Information Society and Sustainable Development Policy Development’ which was taking place at [http://www.iisd.org/networks/issd\\_eforum.asp](http://www.iisd.org/networks/issd_eforum.asp).

Note: This summary is intended to be read in parallel with the fine summaries of the other three themes, prepared by Jeff Turner (Theme 1: [Role of transport in the Millennium](#) ); Nite Tanzarn (3: [Examining policy gaps](#)); and Mamoeketsi Ntho (4. [Gendered Time Poverty](#)) and attempts not to duplicate the information and views set out there.

### 3. What do we mean by “ICTs”?

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**Services:** ICTs include classic telecom *services* such as telephone, fax, and mobile telephone. Services used together with computer hardware and software form the basis for a range of other services, including email, direct file transfer, and internet. As we look to new media, we must keep a close eye as well on new uses of radio and television, which in many developing countries are already extensively available and as yet underexploited as development tools.

**Technologies** -- include a broad array ranging from ‘old’ technologies such as TV and radio (broadcast and ham) to ‘new’ ones such as cellular mobile; while *networks* may be comprised of copper or fibre optic cable, wireless or cellular mobile links, and satellite links.

**Applications** -- include videoconferencing, teleworking, distance learning, management information systems, stock taking. Thus services as basic as telephones are at issue, as well as applications as complex as “telemetry”, for example, to remotely monitor water conditions as part of a flood forecasting system. Indeed, many services and applications can be made available as soon as telephone service is provided: the same type of technologies that are used to transmit voice can also transmit fax, data, and digitally compressed video.

The importance of ICTs is not the technology as such, but its enabling function in access to knowledge, information and communications: increasingly important elements in today’s economic and social interaction.

**Users:** These discussions have looked at two main user groups:

**Outer ring/support function** The universe of those individuals and groups in various places around the world who are studying, advising on and working actively to improve the lot of those to whom this project is devoted. And for this group – composed of individuals who are not all in one place but who to the contrary are widely spread out over the world map and separated by considerable distances -- the ICT thesis has to do with finding and putting into practice better ways for us to develop our knowledge and understanding of the issues, to share this information efficiently and in as broad a manner as possible, to get the messages out to other groups, the media, possibly concerned organizations, agencies and groups (including the private sector and technology and financing sources). Within this context, specific applications that we need to know more about and put to work when and as appropriate include: email; newsgroups and e-fora; group work collaboration tools; internet access and tools, IP voice (both one-to-one and group), mobile telephony, SMS, videoconferencing (again both one-to-one and group conferencing).

**Focus/Users in the field.** This is the core focus. Coverage in terms of technologies and applications are as extensive as we can sensibly make it. Certainly such IT tools as village internet, mobile phones, and applications areas including things like telemedicine, teliagnosis, telework, education, economic news bulletins, weather forecasts, prices, etc. The stuff of the daily lives of the two billion women with whom we should be doing more to build their and their children’s futures. Not to forget the “old media” such as radio, television and POTS (plain old telephone services), which also have roles to play in the field.

#### 4. Excerpts from discussions

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The following excerpts are offered here to help the reader get a feel for the scope and content of the exchanges. There are not cited by author, since this level of detail is available at [http://www.dgroups.org/groups/worldbank/GATNET/index.cfm?op=dsp\\_resource\\_details&resource\\_id=18794&cat\\_id=6895](http://www.dgroups.org/groups/worldbank/GATNET/index.cfm?op=dsp_resource_details&resource_id=18794&cat_id=6895). Have a look. I think they make a fascinating and most challenging read.

- ? Women's limited mobility and the security that limit women to have autonomous movement has large implication on their empowerment. That is why I am interested in transport issues. I am interested in what makes women not to move or have difficulty in moving, and the implication of such difficulties on the opportunities and choices that women have.
- ? If we were to do something to improve the situation of gender and transport with the help of ICT, we should look into networking through any of the new-generation tools that we've now grown used to. I think all of us can get into this easily.
- ? I do think that ICTs can play a catalytic role in the integration of gender within the transport sector.
- ? ICT is gendered, or is it? Technology development is supposed to be a value-free field but are the producers of ICT as objective as the discipline itself is assumed to be? Do they define women and men in stereotypical ways that support notions of male dominance and female inferiority? Are the ICTs responsive to women as well as men's needs? I believe that the answer to these questions is yes and no. If we assume that ICTs respond more to men than women's needs, how do we ensure net gains for women and mitigate against their web loss?
- ? So how do we make ICTs responsive to women and men's needs? There are of course no easy answers to this. This is a question I have dwelled on for some time. How do you make the computer, internet, phone etc. more sensitive to women's needs?
- ? The common argument that technology developments that are not informed by gender analysis are likely to intensify inequalities between women and men does not necessarily hold true here. If we take another argument that one way of empowering women is through improving their efficiency, then ICTs are well positioned to contribute to this (this is of course contingent on access).
- ? Ensuring that participation is available to the widest possible base in gender planning activities is crucial. In terms of a best practice member based organisation we can look to SEWA ([www.sewa.org](http://www.sewa.org)) as to how relevant technology is to poor women.

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- ? Another common argument is that scientific research focuses more on what technologies can do rather on how the people, women and men alike, benefit from them.
- ? I would like to call attention to simple phones or mobile phones rather than internet and other communication technologies. In this part of the world, the diffusion of mobile phones are amazing. The coverage of mobile phone services and the number of people who has mobile phones is large even in the provinces.
- ? Noting the difficulties that women have in getting physically mobile, then the next best option is to get them access information sources (such as fisheries extension center, in our case) at home by phone. In our research, if there is only one phone in the house, it is the woman in the house who use the phone.
- ? Here women cement their social network through use of phones. However, it has also been found that women would call the center if they have met someone there once. If they have not yet met anyone, they dare not call. So, our lessons learned was that mobile phones cannot be the same as actually meeting someone. We still need physical contact before ICTs can be effectively used.
- ? In order to contribute further to the knowledge of gender and transport issues with the help of ICT (and for that matter in all topics), we should always have the reflex to give feedback in one way or the other about what we have produced as a result of all the information we have gathered. Should there be a database specifically looking to address this issue (the "database for products of people who have searched all over the net and have arrived at conclusions")? It could be an idea.
- ? ICTS are important tools in facilitating access. Access to information. And access to social, economic and "empowerment " networks. In general, ICTS foster social, economic and spatial integration and mitigate isolation in much the same way as transport does.
- ? Could it be possible that women have a better disposition to the use of ICTs than men? I see cybercafés and telephone centers popping up in rural centers in developing countries...what is the typical gender profile of users? And for purposes are women using them as compared to men? Are there any gendered constraints to use? And a wider policy question to which we need to gather evidence.....What types of "gendered" access needs can be optimised via ICTs interventions as compared to transport?
- ? ICTs are critical for change - in terms of maternal mortality reduction, ICTS can be used to summon transport or to make easier the link between moving from a slow transport form to a faster transport form. Communities can be taught how to use ICTs and contribute to the better mapping of problems which get bypassed in traditional paper based systems of information aggregation.

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- ? ICTs can be used to retrieve local information and local progress. ICTs must be considered as a transport form and their use integrated into transport planning. Fragmented information which causes the needs of local communities to be by-passed is no longer acceptable - it is now simply evidence of poor professional practices. We ought to be loading our information into click map retrievable technologies so that each project does not have to go out and establish yet another data base on any given locality.
- ? This study (in Uganda) shows that ICTs can be beneficial to women if: i) they are aware of the opportunities inherent in them; ii) they have access to them; iii) they are targeted at them – it was apparent that the SMS were targeting men, just like most agro-based technologies do. Further, that where mobility is limited, access to ICTs is crucial. In addition that women's position relative to men in society as regards resources, opportunities and voice, amongst others, influences the uptake of ICTs, its application and adaptation.
- ? No donor has yet set up a systematic locality based gender data bank for Africa. Such a facility which updated materials and ensured that older materials were archived and retrievable would be invaluable in setting up operational projects.
- ? ICT's role is also critical in the greater participation of women in transport policy, decision-making and practice. Networks need to be developed to support to the greater participation of women. Developing such support networks to enable women to participate in decision making can be much encouraged and assisted by access to modern means of communication.
- ? It is now possible for local women to play an active part in international discussion about local agendas and opportunities: virtual contact enables the shifting of many of the old mobility constraints.
- ? In order to facilitate greater women's participation in transport policy, decision-making and practice, I think there is a need to resource such communication and knowledge networks in this area.
- ? I think there is a need for more of a 'central' database of projects, activities, indicators, etc. on gender and transport. This database can bring researchers, practitioners, and different (other) sectors together to exchange information, toolkits (or develop such toolkits), and eliminate research topics that have already been done; hence focusing and devoting more resources on new issues.
- ? The type of ICT is also important: at this moment in time, as Kyoko's example from Thailand shows, mobile phones are making a huge difference to people's lives, including the lives of poor women and men. There is a lot more work to be done before the internet can have a similar impact. Greater and better access to the internet is something we should advocate for.

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- ? In the meantime, we should not let presumptions of internet access exclude and disadvantage people, who are likely to be the more disadvantaged anyway. At this moment in time as several communications studies have shown (see for example <http://www.transport-links.org/trsp%2Dkda/index.htm>) the "internet is simply not enough".
- ? We must not lose sight of the fact that a number of us do not have access to high speed, broadband links. How to deal with this? Well, the first thing is to try to find devices that will also perform on lower speed systems.
- ? I am really concerned that we use the technology to escape the old territorial boundaries on membership and ownership and use of information. These are distributed technologies and they should be better integrated into more participative more distributed gender planning.
  1. Whatever we come up with should offer (a) efficient access to (b) as wide a range of networks and "databases" as make sense and are likely to relate to the topics of our shared interest.
  2. Should be as simple as possible and avoid "reinventing the wheel" (including coming up with a worse wheel than one that is already out there)
  3. Hold down human management time and hand-holding to an absolute minimum.
  4. It has to be free.
  5. And work for people with dial-up access.
  6. Avoid any form of centralization and oversight (implicit or explicit) that might hold back the development and energy of all the various dynamic parts.
  7. Be thoroughly consistent with Open Society thinking and practice.<sup>1</sup>
  8. Be entirely independent of the will or even the cooperation of those who create the individual databases that are thus scanned and "integrated" (with a careful eye to intellectual property where that may be part of the puzzle).
  9. Have a structure in which there is a thoroughly collective "ownership", such that when anybody or any part runs out of steam or time (which they will), the entire structure continues to sail happily and usefully along.

## **Annex A: A Personal Afterword**

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As your moderator, I would like to take this opportunity to share with you in closing a very personal thought based on my readings and observations concerning social organization and how sometimes new technologies can combine with specific social groups in somewhat surprising ways. Let me share with you two historic examples, among many:

In the middle of the nineteenth century my Irish ancestors driven out of their home country by famine migrated to the United States and settled mainly in Boston and New York. Illiterate or close to it, what did they do to gain their place in this rapidly industrializing society? They stepped into and came to dominate for many years two new “professions” which were just opening up at the time and which they, as the latest immigrants were more willing to move to than others who had already made their life choices. So they became firemen and policemen: new and fast growing careers in their host cities. And once they got their feet in the door, they made sure that other Irish were going to have privileged access to these new jobs.

More than half a century later tens of thousands of so-called White Russians migrated to, among other places, Paris, in search of safety and a place in their new society. At the time one of the fastest growing sources of employment in the city was as taxi drivers. So within a very few years the taxi trade was heavily dominated by Russians who quickly became French, and it was only fifty years later in the seventies when the last of those drivers retired.

What’s the meaning of this in our present context?

Well, it is my perception upon reviewing the evidence that women in the developing countries in this new century are, like those Irishmen and Russians before them, “new arrivals” on the social and work scene in their villages and countries. For about fifteen years now we have come to understand that one of the principle pillars of economic and social development lies in the education of young girls and women. And by doing so we are creating candidates, instruments even, not only for instrumentalizing changes in their own lives but also far more broadly.

In most pre-industrial societies, the roles are firmly fixed, and as change gradually starts to take hold, it seems that the dominant pattern is all too often that the males are the ones who are most resilient to change, to new ways of doing things.

And that is where we have now our opportunity with ICT et al. Let’s seize it.

? Should you wish to swap thoughts about how to take this ahead, I invite you to get in touch. If you give me a phone number and a good time to call, I will do just that. With, believe it, ICT. Eric Britton. [Eric.Britton@ecoplan.org](mailto:Eric.Britton@ecoplan.org). Tel: Europe: +331 4326 1323. North America: +1 (310) 601-8468 Skype: ericbritton

## Annex B: Reading and references

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This clearly incomplete preliminary listing of sources is proposed as a starting place, to be developed for and, one would hope, by the group over the months ahead - so your suggestions are ever welcome. And while not all of these references specifically target transport or women specifically, almost all have much to offer on our topic. So if you do not know them, they can serve you as a valuable tool to getting a feel for the landscape out there. (Links are clickable)

### ICT in the Hands of the Poor:

- o [UNESCO Program Home page](#)
- ? [Empowering resource poor women to use ICTs](#), India
- ? [eNRICH: National Informatics Centre of India](#)
- ? [Grameen Tele-center](#), Bangladesh
- ? [Jakan Community Multimedia Centre](#), Bhutan
- ? [Kothmale Internet Radio Station](#), Sri Lanka
- ? [Information Village Research Project \(IVRP\)](#), Pondicherry, India
- ? [Reflect and ICTs](#), Uganda, Burundi and India.
- ? [Simputer](#)
- ? [Smart Village Project](#), India
- ? [TARAAHAT](#)
- ? [Uva Community Radio \(UCR\)](#), Sri Lanka

### Some Other references:

- ? [Africa Pages - Margaret Grieco](#)
- ? [Association for Progressive Communications \(APC\)](#)
- ? [CYBER HOST: -The Budalangi Village Women Post Office Project](#), 2001
- ? [Bridging the Digital Divide](#), numerous references to women's needs, uses.
- ? ["Controlling the runaway horse: How will poor people gain access to crucial information and communication technologies"](#) By Uday Mohan
- ? [GEM - Gender Evaluation Methodology for Intent and ICTs](#)
- ? [Gender, new communication technologies and decentralised regional development planning](#), Margaret Grieco, Len Holmes and Jeff Turner, 1998
- ? [Grameen Phone: The Village Phone program ICT for the social empowerment of the rural poor](#)
- ? [Inclusion in the Transport Sector - World Bank](#)
- ? [ICTs as Tools of Sustainable Development in the Cotahuasi Basin, Peru](#)
- ? [The Internet and Poverty: real help or real hype?](#), Panos Foundation, 2003
- ? [One info centre in one village](#), 2004
- ? [Nabana: Empowering Women. Change Initiatives. Baduria, India](#)
- ? [Poverty Alleviation and Information/communications Technologies](#), 2000
- ? [Rural Knowledge Centres-ICT for Poverty Eradication](#), 2002
- ? [Supporting Women's Use of Information Technologies for Sustainable Development](#), 1997
- ? [Women and Information and Communication Technologies \(ICTs\)](#), 1999
- ? [Women Take the ICT Leap](#), Video on Gender and Rural Development 2005
- ? World Bank/Poverty Net on: ["Information and Communication Technologies"](#), 2005