1. Gender Equality Issues in ICT Project

This section provides a list of ICT issues that are useful for task managers to focus on during project preparation. It notes key ICT concerns and provides a checklist to help the user identify relevant gender equality issues.

ICT aspect	Gender equality issue
Network modernization	• The proposed modernization will provide infrastructure that is affordable to most women.
Network architecture	• Equipment and service providers can offer cost-effective and appropriate solutions for the majority of women.
Network deployment	• Choices of network infrastructure can be made that cater for the majority, focusing on universal access to ICTs instead of an expensive high-capacity specialized access. • Affordable wireless alternatives can ensure low-cost access. • Women need to be included in the training when new technologies are implemented. • The location of infrastructure will facilitate access for women.
Infrastructure	• Infrastructure needs to be developed throughout the country in areas where many women live. • Provisions need to be made for high-technology applications in areas where many women live outside of the capital and major cities. • Gender awareness is essential in planning and implementing infrastructure because social, economic, and/or cultural constraints may restrict women from accessing ICTs even when they are available in their communities.
Technology choice	• Affordability of service is a key issue to women. If technology choices are limited this can restrict new entrants from the market and limit the introduction of technologies that might bring down costs (for example, many developing countries ban Wi-Fi Internet1[1] and VOIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol) telephony. • Limiting the choice of mobile standards (for example, GSM, CDMA) can prevent fragmentation of markets during the initial stages; however, continued insistence on such standards can block the entry of mobile technologies that are cheap and effective for underserved areas. • Assessments need to be undertaken to determine appropriate technology choices: who will use the technology and for what purpose. • It is important to promote and support user-friendly technology, particularly in the context of low literacy levels.

ICT aspect	Gender equality issue
Sector liberalization	• Opening the telecoms and ICT sector to competition can bring in needed investment and force down end-user prices to make access more affordable, notably to women (however, monopoly system operators understandably dispute this fact).
Tariff policy	• High customs duties on mobile telephones and computer equipment, as well as high prices for telephone service, are deterrents to women users (this includes both import duties and taxes on computer equipment and pricing schemes for communication services). • Many countries are rebalancing international and domestic tariffs to eliminate existing subsidies, most frequently on local service. This rebalancing has meant higher rates for local calls in many places, which hit the poor women the hardest, Although it is expected that competition will lower prices in the long run, in the interim many users cannot afford local service. Among the ways to compensate for rebalancing costs are tariffs based on forward-looking costs and regional (rural versus urban) tariffs.
Regulation	• Regulators do not set policy but rather help in its implementation. Regulation is a vital area for advocates of gender equality in ICTs because it produces a set of rules for market behavior: "who can provide what service and under what conditions." Regulation also sets the framework for achieving desirable outcomes established by national policy, particularly in the two areas of the greatest interest to ICTs and the empowerment of women (universal access and affordable services). Gender proponents need to focus on regulation.
Independent regulators	• An independent regulator can compel profit-driven private sector players to meet social and gender-policy objectives such as universal access (see below). • In return for granting licenses, regulators can compel service providers to offer service to underserved areas where women predominate. • Because regulators have the authority to set service priorities, gender-equality advocates need to lobby to ensure that service to poor women in rural areas is a priority. • Regulators can provide funds for research, development, and testing of ICTs that will serve women. • Those that secure licenses, particularly for cellular phones, are often required to fulfill community service obligations. Elements that promote gender equality could be written into these obligations.
Regulatory frameworks	• Regulatory frameworks can permit the resale of mobile phone services, which are often profitable businesses for women to establish.

ICT aspect	Gender equality issue
	• Regulatory frameworks can reduce licensing fees, spectrum prices, and interconnection charges that can make ICTs more accessible to women.
Licensing1[2]	• If fees for telecommunications, Internet service providers (ISPs), and mobile service licenses are high, these costs will be passed on to users, limiting affordability to women and the poor. High fees increase the cost of telephone and ICT services, discouraging women-owned communications businesses (including telecenters, phone-fax-Internet shops and mobile telephones). • A certain number of telecommunications licenses need to be allocated to women-owned businesses or businesses with women in management positions. • A gender equality licensing policy could waive license fees for communications businesses run by women entrepreneurs or businesses that provide services to underserved areas, particularly where women are concentrated. • Fees could be reduced for operators with gender-equity and pro-handicapped employment policies. • Licenses can obligate providers to offer discounted service to certain customers, such as poor women in rural areas. • Licensing procedures need to be transparent so that women applicants can have ready access to the information. • License awards can contain conditions that promote gender analysis and mainstreaming for that company.
Universal access	• Universal access concerns the establishment of telecommunications development funds and other programs that are funded by carrier fees and other revenues collected by regulators and used to facilitate the expansion of access to the underserved. Because telecoms development funds reflect important policy and set the rules for implementation of ICT projects in underserved areas, they deserve great attention from gender advocates. • Develop gender-aware universal access policies that stress public access points as an alternative to more capital-intensive choices (one line per home) and ensure that the locations of public access points are gender-sensitive (not in bars or auto shops).
Universal service obligations	• Universal service is a specific obligation that regulators require of operators in return for licenses. Under universal service obligations, regulators can mandate the provision of telecenters in underserved areas. Telecenter plans need to take into account the different needs of men and women in the concerned communities. • Gender advocates could lobby to incorporate gender-based issues into universal service rules. In most places

ICT aspect	Gender equality issue
	this has not yet happened. • Demands could include that service to underserved areas be delivered to reflect the male-female distribution in the population and that priority be given to disadvantaged women such as single mothers, widows, and handicapped women. Service providers could be mandated to offer telephone subsidies or price packages targeted at rural women, the handicapped, and aged.
Radio frequency spectrum	• This issue also involves fees and licenses. Lower fees will encourage applicants to provide services to new markets, including women. Licenses need to be equally and transparently distributed, so that women-owned business and businesses that serve women have a chance to secure licenses. In several African countries where the government maintains a monopoly on radio frequencies, public-private access to radio frequency is still an issue. In a number of places, women-run community radio stations have obtained licenses.
Research and development and innovation	• Incentives could be directed at encouraging women to engage in ICT research and innovation. • Tools and software need to be developed using local languages. • Research and development of technologies for the illiterate and neo-literate need to be encouraged. • Research efforts and programs that promote women innovators could be subsidized • Scholarships and grant programs for women in science and technology could be created. • Technology programs will promote and accept women's participation. • Technical programs at universities could be created and supported by providing grants or scholarships for women students and researchers.
Systems for learning and training	• Women need to have equal access to technical training. • Programs need to be supported to train women in technical and management programs, and to provide internships.
Software and applications	• Women will have a say in what applications are being promoted to ensure that they are usable and accessible to many women. Policies need to support open source software and operating systems that can make software available to communities with limited budgets.
Building technological capacity	• Opportunities will be extended to women as well as men. Mechanisms need to be provided to encourage women to enter these fields. Female teachers will act as role models for young girls. • Training opportunities need to be available not only for technology professionals but for non-professionals to use

ICT aspect	Gender equality issue
	ICTs.
ICT industry development and labor policies	• Encouragement and incentives need to be given to encourage women to enter all segments of the ICT labor force, not just the assembly-line positions they have dominated in the past. • Enabling policy can encourage the establishment of teleworking that has provided jobs for many women.
ICT business development and e-commerce	• Enabling legislation for e-commerce will encourage women entrepreneurs. • Small ICT-related businesses that can be owned by women and women's groups need to be encouraged. • Telecenters can provide economic opportunities for women and need to be promoted as business opportunities for women owners. • A number of telecommunications licenses need to be allocated to women-owned businesses • Carriers could be obligated to do a certain percentage of business with women-owned businesses. • Training programs could be promoted to establish ICT-related business opportunities (for example, e-commerce, telecenters, and wireless company ownership)..
E-government	• Women can benefit from e-government services, such as on-line access to land and voter registration and license applications, particularly when they would normally have to travel to the capital city to obtain these services.

[1] Wireless fidelity (Wi-Fi) is a network standard rapidly gaining in popularity in developed countries that creates wireless local area networks in homes, offices and, increasingly, restaurants, hotels and airports at speeds faster than advanced mobile-phone networks. Wi-Fi LANs can be accessed with a relatively inexpensive network card.

[2] This section owes a heavy debt to Sonia Jorge, Gender Perspectives in Telecommunications Policy: A curriculum proposal. ITU: Geneva, 2000.

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2. Gender and ICT Policy

(What Development Practitioners Need to Know about Gender, ICT and Policy)

This section lists nine main points for task managers to consider when engendering ICTs. It also provides a simplified table of gender aspects in ICT policy. The goals enumerated in this table can also be applied for engendering projects funded by multi-lateral agencies.

- ICT policies in most countries focus on competition and investment policy, technology regulation, and rural access. There is hardly any mention of gender concerns in the ICT policies formulated by most countries .

- ICTs have a major development role to play by enhancing service delivery, improving governance, and increasing opportunities for poor communities. Women can benefit from ICT policies that encourage growth in the sector, provided these policies remain gender neutral. Gender-sensitivity among those working in regulatory agencies and multilateral initiations helps ensure that gender-neutral policies do not become gender-blind during implementation.

- To enhance gender equality in the appropriation of ICTs, the most crucial policy changes need not be ICT policy. Engendering policy as a precondition to addressing key gender issues should be seen in the specific context of a country, the degree of development of the ICT sector, and the targeted concern.

- To promote labor-market participation, engendering efforts will be worthwhile in countries where the ICT sector is a significant employer.

- National industrial and labor policies can have a great impact on the labor market across all sectors of the labor market, including ICT sector. Similarly, education policies can have a significant impact on preparedness to enter the labor market. Gender sensitization of policymakers in these domains is important to take advantage of opportunities that arise from growth of the ICT industry.

- Women's participation in the labor market is influenced by corporate hiring policies of ICT companies. Efforts should be made to ensure that industry associations are aware of gender-friendly work practices and of companies that have performed well with high levels of women workers.

- Instead of defining ideal goals in all spheres of policy, gender analysis can look for specific policy impediments that need to be removed.

- ICTs include a broad range of services such as electronic media, telephones, computers, and the Internet. The use of some services such as telephones, radio, and television spreads quickly as a means of communication and entertainment. These services should not be neglected in any discussion of policy engendering. The use of computer networking for information and knowledge exchange is slow and needs preparation within the community.

Factoring Gender Aspects in ICT Policy Issues

ICT/Education/Labor policy component	Gender aspect
General	• Sensitize policymakers to gender issues, and sensitize gender advocates to ICT issues. • Establish gender units within a ministry, department, or regulatory agency. Revise regulations/circulars/procedures of all departments to remove gender bias. • Develop and establish systems to gather gender statistics. • Mandate participation of women in watchdog institutions.

	• Provide incentives for developing e-commerce platforms that serve women owned enterprises. • Provide tax breaks, subsidies, and funding assistance to develop technologies for the illiterate and neo-literate.
Infrastructure	• Deploy infrastructure throughout the country in the areas where women are predominate. • Ensure the selected locations are convenient for women. • Encourage women to own and manage these facilities in equal proportions to men. • Gather data on women's use and obtain feedback from women regardless of their level of use.
Regulatory frameworks	• Reduce licensing fees, spectrum prices, and interconnection charges and introduce affordable tariffs in rural and urban areas. • Impose universal service obligations on telecom operators. • Develop and deploy technologies that can promote penetration of telephone and Internet access in rural areas. • Provide incentives to develop and deploy technologies such as WiLL/ corDECT. • Factor convenience of women in location choices. Introduce incentives to encourage ownership by women of telephones, cellular phones, community radios, and Internet kiosks. • Gather data on women's use and obtain feedback from women even if their use is low.
Engendered labor policies	• Promote equal hiring opportunities for women and men. • Ensure there is no wage disparity among genders. • Undertake campaigns to attract women professionals to technical and management positions. • Provide nondiscriminatory working conditions, employee privileges, and flexible timing. • Impose tough measures to deal with sexual harassment at the workplace. • Institute commissions that are empowered to swiftly redress complaints of discrimination.
Engendered education policy	• Ensure equal access to training opportunities. • Provide gender-awareness training for all. • Institute technical and management programs to train women professionals and establish internship programs with educational institutions. • Provide free education, subsidized fees, and reserved quotas in technical education for girls. • Establish scholarships and grants for women in science and technology.

	• Create training programs to establish ICT-related business such as e-commerce, telecenters, and public call offices.
Licensing	• Establish incentives to encourage ownership by women of all types of communication services: telephones, cellular phones, community radios, and Internet kiosks. • Promote a gender equality licensing policy that would allocate a certain number of telecommunications licenses to women-owned businesses and waive license fees for communications businesses run by women entrepreneurs or those that provide services to under served areas. Licenses can obligate providers to discount prices for service to certain customers such as poor women in rural areas. • Institute licensing procedures that are transparent so that women applicants can have ready access to the information. Many countries do not permit community radios, but when run by women's groups these radio stations have proved effective in involving women in the affairs of the community.
E-government	• Ensure that women can benefit from e-government services, especially those that deliver health and education information. Women can profit from online availability of services that would otherwise require travel to the capital city.