

Engendering ICT Statistics

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I have been asked to focus my discussion on three issues:¹

1. Discuss the importance of differentiating ICT statistics by gender;
2. Identify the challenges involved in collecting such data; and
3. Discuss the current state of play.

Why collect sex-disaggregated statistics?

Before answering the first question I would like to suggest that for clarity we think in terms of statistics differentiated by sex, that is male and female, and not gender. Gender refers to relations between women and men and I submit that we are no way near analyzing this within the field of telecommunications.

Now to tackle the question: Why collect sex-disaggregated statistic? Given the time constraints I will give one reason: so that we can understand more about access to, and use of, ICTs. If the focus of development planning is to reduce poverty and inequality, and information and communication technologies are tools to this end, then it is logical that data which will reveal the scope and intensity of the digital divide between women and men will enable us to better plan and respond to development challenges.

One of the basic issues in ICTs is **access** and access, as you know, is linked to infrastructure and cost. Alternatively, a lack of access is linked to lack of infrastructure and relatively speaking, high costs and low incomes. Thus, the issue of access is linked to questions of development and poverty, as well as women and men's positions within households, communities and the labour market. Measuring access within a given society necessarily requires the identification of whether, and the extent to which, access differs for women and men.

If we also ask questions that go into why differences and similarities exist, then we will reveal specificities about the roles of women and men in society.

Challenges

In this moment and despite international and national commitments, there is a paucity of sex-disaggregated data on the Information Society. This scarcity is reflective of several realities, some

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of which I will highlight here. Situating this discussion within the larger context of data collection is key to appreciating where we are and the opportunities that exist for the future:

- As you know, the collection of data on access to, and use of, ICTs is new and emerging and many countries do not collect national ICT statistics in a consistent and regular manner;
- Sex disaggregated statistics on women's activities across all sectors are not in abundant supply so what we see, or don't see, in the ICT sector is reflective of the lack in the collection and analyses of data differentiated according to sex and the gender blindness in the field as a whole;
- The majority of countries do not have official household surveys, which is arguably the best method through which to collect sex-disaggregated data;
- Reliability and comparability is a problem (as is the case in other sectors); and
- Given the sensitive, political and politically correct layers embedded in gender issues, serious discussions on methodology often evolve into a laundry list of categories which are also important but eventually become too expensive to implement.

State of play

Current sex disaggregated data, mostly collected through household surveys, focus on documenting and analyzing access to, and use and knowledge of, ICTs by women and men. Highly specialized ICT surveys can be expanded to document frequency of use, location of access, types of activities, and purposes of use. In my opinion, household surveys, conducted through national statistical agencies, offer the best solution to documenting the gendered digital divide. Household surveys have the potential to lay the foundation for a more complete, gender sensitive, database on ICTs.

ITU's sex disaggregated data and gender sensitive indicators project

What is the ITU doing in this area? We are mandated to assume a leadership role in the development of gender sensitive indicators and the collection of sex disaggregated data. Further, the *WSIS Plan of Action* notes that “gender-specific indicators on ICT use and needs should be developed, and measurable performance indicators should be identified to assess the impact of funded ICT projects on the lives of women and girls.”

As my Colleagues have noted, the ITU collects data on the number of female Internet users. In addition, we collect statistics on the numbers of male and female telecommunication staff within Member-States. This data has the potential to be an important indicator of gender equality in the IT sector. However, further disaggregated is necessary. We need to go beyond the numbers of women and men employed to documenting the posts they hold and analyzing changes over time. This type of exercise has implications for Members who would like to address historical disadvantage experienced by certain groups.

Over the last months we have embarked on a project, in partnership with Orbicom, that aims to compile and analyse quantitative and qualitative gender-sensitive information from national and international sources. A team of experts is in the process of collecting and analysing relevant sex disaggregated data on access to, and use of, ICTs from national and international sources, including the ITU. Data permitting, we hope to construct a comprehensive database, on a country-by-country and time series basis. Information from both developed and developing countries are included.

This is ground breaking exercise of which I am particularly proud. Given that there are packets of information, both public and private, which have not been systematically tapped, thorough research has been conducted to collect existing sex disaggregated data. The data is in the process of being assessed and validated. Those data that are usable will be incorporated into a database that will feed further analysis on the gendered digital divide. Further, data that is comparable across countries will enable international benchmarking.

In terms of the qualitative element of this global project, field work by academics and researchers, case studies and anecdotal evidence will also be collected and analysed against the background of available quantitative information. Thus, this approach enables an assessment of the impacts of ICTs on the working and social lives of women and men in developing and developed countries.

Reliable data is a critical element in the mapping of the digital divide in general and the gendered digital divide more specifically. It is hope that this sex-disaggregated statistics and gender-sensitive indicators project will be the foundation for a definitive database of sex disaggregated statistics internationally. The results of the project will be made available at WSIS in Tunis.

I thank you for listening and welcome your questions.