EGM/ICT/2002/EP.3
29 November 2002

United Nations
Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW)
Expert Group Meeting on
"Information and communication technologies
and their impact on and use as an instrument
for the advancement and empowerment of women"
Seoul, Republic of Korea
11 to 14 November 2002

From access to appropriation: Women and ICT policies in Latin American and the Caribbean

Prepared by

Gloria Bonder *

* The views expressed in this paper, which has been reproduced as received, are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

INTRODUCTION

Access to information, to knowledge and the interaction between cultures and social groups have never been so within the reach of humanity, nor as valued as in the last decades. The continuous innovation and global spreading of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) appear like a fundamental resource in order to reach these goals and inaugurate a change of era known as **Information Society** or **Knowledge Society**.

However, in its current phase of development, we must clearly differentiate the potentialities (informative, educational, cultural, political, economic, etc.) offered by these technologies, from their manifestations and actual impact on the various contexts and social groups.

This type of analysis is still at a beginning stage in the LAC Region. Therefore, the understanding of the role currently played by these technologies in our societies is usually based on impressions, "good wishes" and, in the best of cases, on some partial studies. This already poses a first problem at the time of evaluating the current situation in terms of access, appropriation, uses and differential impacts of ICTs in the Region and, based on this information, suggesting and implementing effective strategies and policies to ensure full gender equality in this field.

For that reason, giving priority to **investigation for action** is**,** in our opinion, a fundamental challenge in this phase of ICT expansion in Latin America. This will provide us with reliable data to get round two equally false beliefs: on the one hand the idealization of their capability for transforming economy, culture, political life and for leveling all sorts of disparities, including gender; and on the other hand their *"demonization"* due to their alleged negative influence on the cultures, the subjectivities and the lifestyles of the LAC societies.

In the meantime, we share Burch's belief that "Information technology obviously will not solve the world's problems. But wisely deployed and developed, it has proven to be a powerful tool for advancing social causes. One of the social groups that has been most dynamic in using this technology innovatively for social progress, is the women's movement; and in many aspects, the South has exerted leadership in this process" [1]

In this document we will present basic information on the expansion of ICTs in the Region, stating the major gaps. We will also present the results of some studies, and of a recent electronic consultation, which give evidence of the progress, obstacles and recommendations for policies and programs that strengthen gender equality in and through ICTs.

[1] Burch, Sally (1997): *Latin American Women Take on the Internet*, (http://www.apcwomen.org/netsupport/articles/art-01.html)

LATIN AMERICA: CONFLICTING TRANSITIONS TOWARDS THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

Connectivity is an unavoidable, though insufficient, indicator in order to evaluate the participation of the Region and each of its countries in this new socioeconomic and cultural paradigm which impels the intensive use of the new information and communication technologies.

In this respect, the situation in Latin America offers noticeable lights and shades.

From a comparative point of view with the developed countries, and in particular with the United States, the differences in number of hosts, number of users and number of PCs per inhabitant are substantial, as shown in Charts 1, 2 and 3.

The percentage of people connected to Internet in LAC was, according to different sources, about 4-6% in the first semester of 2001[2], with 28% in Europe and 41.05% in Canada and the United States over the same period.

Within the Region there are noticeable differences between the countries. In Chile 20% of the population are Internet users, in Argentina 10% and in Brazil 7,74%. However, Mexico -which has the same population density as these countries, registers just 3.38% of Internet users. In comparison, Bolivia registers 0.36% and Paraguay 0,98%. (Chart 3).

From the economic point of view, although their contribution to World GDP amounts to 7%, only 1% participate in electronic world trade (Hilbert, 2001ª)[3]

Although this *"fixed picture"* reflects the sharpest angles of inequity, it fails to show that, unlike other regions in the world, LAC has had the fastest expansion of Internet in the past years. With respect to 1999, the number of hosts grew by 30% in Europe, 61% in Asia, 74% in North America, but 136% in Latin America. (Hilbert, 2001ª).

From this we might conclude that there is a technological revolution in progress that will achieve, with the passing of time, a balance between some people's advantages and other people's disadvantages.

However, this data is not enough for us to speculate about the future. Nothing is said regarding the digital gaps between geographical regions within each country, between generations, ethnic groups and gender.

[2] The pace of expansion of ICT users is vertiginous, particularly in some Latin American countries. (http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/statistics.)

[3] Hilbert, Martin (2001): *Latin America on its path into the digital age: where are we?*, Santiago de Chile, Division of Production, Productivity and Management , Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) June.

We know that connectivity is mainly an urban phenomenon, that there is a deep segmentation among users according to social class[4], evident digital gaps according to educational level and the quality of the education received[5], and a very significant prevalence of young users[6].

However, we lack of reliable data regarding gender differences. The available reports mention only an average of about 38% of women among the LAC Web users[7], but there is no information that compares variables such as sex, age, social class, place of residence, educational level, etc.

This poses a great obstacle at the time of planning policies and programs oriented to women and/or to balancing gender differences in this field.

Another important consideration regarding the possibilities of Latin American countries to be integrated in the Information Society is to remember that this "global" tendency has taken place along with one of the most critical historical stages in the economic and social scenarios since the 70s. The scandalous growth of poverty and of the levels of social inequity, together with the weakness of the national states and the lack of public investment in strategic sectors for human development, such as education or health; together with other alarming signs such as the lack of transparency of the state administration of budgets for social programs and purchase of technological infrastructure, the concentration of multimedia in the hands of transnational corporations, and the absence of regulations regarding the rates of telecommunication services, do not allow us to be very optimistic, at least in the short term.

Furthermore, the achievements obtained so far could be lost as a consequence of the deterioration of the life conditions of big sectors of the population, for example the middle class. Also, as **ECLAC**[8] points out, the digital gap between the countries in the Region and between the Region and the developed world could grow.

"The fact that a significant number of countries in the region show degrees of connectivity higher than expected according to the income level per inhabitant, and that

[4] According to Emarketers' estimations, 18.1% of the richest 15% of Latin American population was connected at the beginning of 2000, while only 2.7% of the total Latin American population was connected. It is expected that by 2004, 68.9% of the richest 15% of Latin American population of 14 or over will be connected, while only 10% of the total Latin American population of 14 or over will be. (Hilbert, 2001)

[5] A study carried out in Uruguay in 1998 shows that people with tertiary education prevail among the ones who have ever been connected to Internet: *"two thirds of university students use the Internet for e-mail and searches, which goes down to 41% and 30% for secondary and primary education respectively."* (Sutz, 2002)

[6] In Brazil, 15.8% of Internet users is between 14 and 9 years old, 11.3% between 20 and 35 years old, 5.6% between 36 and 45 and users over 46 amount only to 3%. These differences increase in the case of personal computers: 27, 19, 13.7 and 6.3% respectively.

[7] This figure appears in the reports from Jupiter Communication and coincides with the survey carried out by MORI-USA from Princeton, based on interviews to 10.395 people in cities of over 50 thousand people in 11 Latin American countries.

[8] ECLAC (2002): *Digital gap in Latin America could grow*, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) ,March, 2002, www.eclac.cl

the gap that separates them from the leading countries in the field of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has to some extent been reduced, does not guarantee that in the next few years they will be automatically incorporated in to the digital era".

Unless additional efforts are made on the part of the State, the private sector and the civil society in order to prevent that the economic cycle in the Region completely determines the investment in infrastructure and technological capacities, it is highly probable that e-gaps will continue to grow.

Therefore, ECLAC[9] recommends carrying out a **systemic strategy** that "articulates promotion of technological capacities in all the countries, support to transformation of the productive structures, development of national and regional productive networks and setting up a quality infrastructure."

That means not only bringing ICT infrastructure within the reach of all, and in particular the most postponed social groups, but also fostering more powerful actions such as:

- strengthening the national systems of research and technological innovation
- supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (MSEs) producing technology
- involving the private sector in new technologies which contribute to development processes (e.g. biotechnology)
- participating in initiatives oriented to ensure universal access to ICT.

Finally, ECLAC suggests fostering **regional cooperation**, for the development, consolidation and commercialization of high technology products and services.

This general frame offers new **"entry points"** for the integration of women, not only as ICT users, but also as researchers, producers, workers, educators, project managers and in many other positions from which they can contribute, through the new technologies, to the "economic growth with equity" as needed in the LAC Region.

What progress is being made in terms of regulations, policies and programs in the Region in order to expand and optimize the use of ICTs in different areas of national and regional development?

Charts 4 and 5 show an overview of the progress that some countries are making and how ICT policy is being dealt with in the latest regional meetings.

A particularly interesting and at the same time disturbing question is the confirmation that gender equality still has very limited presence in these meetings, or continues to be added in the recommendations in a very weak way, and in some cases even using a widely criticized perspective as is referring to women as a discriminated or minority group along with other groups in the same situation. (Chart 5)

[9] ECLAC (2000): *Latin America and the Caribbean in the transition to Knowledge Society* , Document prepared by the secretariat of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) for the Regional Meeting on Information Technology for Development (Florianópolis, Santa Catarina, Brazil, 20-21 June 2000).

This corroborates the persistent lack of consideration of gender perspective in regional meetings dealing with ICT policies, in spite of the continuous presence of gender issues in the media, the proliferation of women NGOs, of Women Studies in almost all Latin American Universities, and the numerous international recommendations in this respect approved by most of the governments[10].

On the other hand it shows the importance for gender practitioners and researchers of analyzing the general debates which are taking place around ICTs in LAC and worldwide, the prevailing paradigms, the ideological orientations, as well as the actors and power relations at stake. We will thus be able to advance with much more information toward a mainstreaming gender equality in ICTs, instead of repeating the same old formula *"add gender and stir the field"* which so little has achieved so far in many other areas.

What is the position within this context of women researchers and/or activists who work for gender equality in and through ICTs in LAC?
What information do they manage, what problems do they detect, what solutions do they propose?

In order to answer these questions we recently carried out an electronic consultation, which we will comment on in the following section.

[10] *"…The incorporation of ICTs into Central America are not focused on promoting gender equality or on increasing opportunities for women…"* (Gomez, Ricardo and Juliana Martinez (2001): *Internet...Why? And what for?,* IDRC/Fundacion Acceso, Costa Rica, March. (www.acceso.or.cr/pppp))

MAKING ROOM TO WOMEN´S VOICES

For the preparation of this document, an electronic consultation was carried out among Latin American researchers, educators and activists involved in projects on / with women / gender and ICT[11]. [12]

We wanted to learn more about the current situation of women/ gender and ICTs in the Region, identify new experiences in practice, recognize their needs and demands and consider the strategic orientations they propose for increasing and strengthening gender fair projects and policies.

- ✓ All of them show high appraisal of the opportunities that ICTs offer to women as a means of exchanging information, and building and participating in national, regional and international networks.

- ✓ According to some of them, the use of ICTs has brought about a spectacular progress in terms of organization, articulation of demands, legitimacy, knowledge building , and creation of alliances among women NGOs over the last decade.

- ✓ They highlighted the coordination of women NGOs around the preparation for World Conferences such as the ones in Beijing, Durban and the Social Forum in Porto Alegre; their follow-up as well as the continuous actions of advocacy and networking around significant topics such as poverty, sexual and reproductive health, women's rights, etc. at national and regional levels.

  Experiences like community telecenters[13] (http://www.tele-centros.org/) thoroughly spread in almost all Latin American countries[14] were presented as positive examples of democratization of the Internet, motivation for women participation and leadership in these areas, stimulation of the social uses of the Internet, and active and informed inclusion of marginalized sectors.

---

[11] A set of 20 questions was sent to women from different Latin American countries who are recognized for their expertise in this field. Obviously, this group does not stand for all women experts and organizations involved in ICT projects in the Region. We got back 12 responses from Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, Brazil, Ecuador, Colombia, Costa Rica and Mexico. Most of the opinions and suggestions were very useful for the preparation of this document. In particular we want to recognize the contributions of Dafne Plou (Argentina), Magaly Pasarello (Brasil), Alicia Richiero (Uruguay), Graciela Selaimen (Brasil), Gloria Careaga Perez (Mexico), Carmen Colazzo (Paraguay), Juliana Abella (Uruguay), Giovanna Tipan Barrera (Ecuador),

[12] In the last months two international electronic forums were held by DAW and INSTRAW. It is important to notice that very few Latin American specialists participated in both of them. This situation can be attributed to language (both were developed in English) and lack of information

[13] The **Somos@telecentros** Virtual Community is part of the **TELELAC** (Latin American and Caribbean Telecenter Network) Project coordinated by **Chasquinet Foundation** (Quito, Ecuador) and supported by the **International Development Research Centre** (IRDC, Canada). There are other similar projects in Central America such as Proyecto LINCOS and SISCOM in Costa Rica

[14] This network consists of a rapidly growing community of 350 telecenters throughout LAC, committed to fulfilling the potential contribution that telecenters can make to digital inclusion strategies throughout the region.

Together with community radio stations, telecenters have become important resources for building a sense of community identity and increasing citizen consciousness and participation in defense of people's rights and interests.

The use of the Internet by rural and indigenous groups and communities for the commercialization of handmade products and other experiences aimed to revalue and disseminating their original cultures were mentioned as relevant achievements. [15] [16]

The work carried out by APC in the Region and the GEM[17] project in particular were seen as an important step forward in order to produce knowledge on projects in progress, learn about "goods practices" and thus improve the planning, implementation and evaluation of new projects.

- ✓ From the political-institutional point of view, the Brazilian participants highlighted the value of associative projects between NGOs and the government in the creation of telecenters and other related projects. As an example they mentioned the cooperation between the government of San Pablo and RITS[18] who manage over 100 free and public access telecenters in that city, from which they are beginning to produce content for ICT educational projects in communities with high level of violence.

- ✓ While most of them admit that transnational corporations and their economic interests are the most powerful factors affecting the creation and spreading of the new technologies, they insist on the fact that Latin American social movements and women NGOs in particular are starting to appropriate ICTs for participatory and organizational purposes. In doing so they are generating a **new political culture** along with alternative content on the web.

[15] One of these cases is the *Centro de Mujeres Comunicadoras Mayas de Ecuador* (Center of Mayan Women Communicators of Ecuador) who commercialize their handicrafts through Internet, and select information and resources for the improvement of their craft techniques.

[16] Another example is the ECUANEX Project: Red de Comunicación Electrónica para Comunidades Indígenas de la Amazonía Ecuatoriana (Electronic Communication Network for the Indigenous Communities in Ecuadorian Amazon) http://www.redes-comunitarias.apc.org/ecuanex_project/index.html

[17] **GEM** (Gender Evaluation Methodology) is a guide to integrating gender analysis into evaluations of initiatives that use Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for social change. The **APC** (Association Progressive Communication) **WNSP** (Women's Networking Support Programs) supports women networking for social change including training, participatory research, policy and advocacy in gender and information technology, information facilitation, and regional program support. They strive to challenge the inequities faced by women, especially in the south. http://www.apcwomen.org .

GEM is being used in Latin America by the following organizations: Tester Profiles, Women´s Network, AMARC LAC - Ecuador y Bolivia (www.amarc.org/alc/servicios.htm), Rede Mulher de Educacao - Brazil (www.redemulher.org.br), Modemmujer - México (www.modemmujer.org) Telecenters: BarrioNet - Ecuador (www.barrionet.org), Neighborhood Electronic Communications Network - Ecuador (www.infodesarrollo.org/proyectos.html?x=1121), Neighborhood Information Units, ATI/Colnodo - Colombia (www.uib.colnodo.apc.org) Coordinator for Latin America: Dafne Sabanes Plou.

[18] Rede de Informacoes Para o Terceiro Setor, www.rits.org.br .

"Today, social movements, groups and individuals publish thousands of bulletins, dossiers, documents, newsletters, magazines and even newspapers on the Internet. People who may not be able to print their newsletter or magazine are able to post it on the web, and most of these publications have become good alternatives sources of information to the mainstream media. In addition, there are independent and community radio stations broadcasting on the web and TV initiatives that use the web casting to transmit their images and information" [19]

- ✓ In their view the prevailing problems are:

1. Lack of statistical information and qualitative research on women and ICTs and on gender differences in access, uses and production of these technologies.

2. Persistence of connectivity problems due to lack of infrastructure , high costs of equipment and telecommunications, concentration of resources in urban centers and economic and educational shortcomings of the most marginal populations, and particularly women.

3. Lack of acknowledgement on the part of governments of gender inequities in all the social areas and particularly in the technological and scientific fields, and the consequent absence of gender fair public policies.

4. Need to advance, both at the theoretical and at the strategic levels, from the initial focus on access to the technologies on the part of women, toward the creation of conditions and resources that favor their appropriation of this tool to meet their needs and those of their communities.

5. Concern for the penetration of values, models and aspirations representing an hegemonic cultural model which excludes the cultural diversity of LAC.

6. Concern for the lack of awareness and still weak commitment of the women's movement and NGOs in the struggle for ICTs as a fundamental tool for political and cultural transformation.
   It is widely admitted that the ICT field is one of last areas influenced by a gender perspective, which explains that gender activists, researchers and educators involved in this field are still very few and they have not yet achieved a coordination of efforts that enables a stronger incidence on national and regional policies.

7. Educational programs fostering the use of ICTs among women, particularly girls and young women, are highly instrumental and not gender sensitive. There is a need to develop educational projects that stimulate critical and creative skills and that encourage greater participation of women in the design and production of new technologies.

8. Difficulties in order to efficiently administer the immense flow of information that the Internet offers. This requires an educational and cultural capital that many women lack, and that cannot be provided through mere access to computers. Intelligent and selective connection demands much more time than

[19] Plou, Dafne (2002) **:** FORUM: Gender and the Digital Divide Media and Gender, Monitor 10 WACC. http://www.wacc.org.uk/publications/mgm/11/digitaldivide.html

women usually have due to their family and work duties. *"It is a third -or even a fourth- work day."*

9. Certain resistance on the part of women and NGOs to the use of technological tools other than the e-mail.
   The lack of infrastructure and technological skills, along with other educational and cultural factors, are preventing women from becoming producers of new contents and of formats that are attractive and powerful from the communicational point of view. "I believe that women organizations could develop more interactive sites rather than just electronic ones, as is the case of most of the NGOs websites"

Recommended Strategies

1. To consider ICTs as an essential tool for increasing gender equality while actively engaging in fostering social and economic development in LAC.

2. To focus the debate and the political activism in/for ICTs within a frame of human rights and human development.
   For many participants, women involvement in programs and policies would gain force, impact and social relevance if they associated ICTs with the struggle against poverty, unemployment, violence, racism, discrimination and the consolidation of democracy and economic growth.

3. To motivate, through educational programs and other means, women appropriation of ICTs towards increasing their citizen identity and their active participation in the political and economic life of their communities. "Women are understanding that in the current informatic society, quick access to relevant information is essential for an effective intervention, in order to participate in the decisions, propose viable alternatives and establish priorities, with the purpose of influencing the different spheres of their society." [20]

4. To establish alliances between government, civil society, business and international organisms to implement effective and sustainable ICT policies and programs that contribute to gender equality and social equity.

5. To sensitize women in political positions, both in the executive and in parliament, on the gender dimensions of the new technologies so that they support laws , regulations and projects that address women needs and avoid sexist biases.

[20] Plou, Dafne (2002): *Derechos en Internet, ¿Por qué involucrarnos?,* www.apc.org

FIRST STEPS ON A LONG ROAD: WOMEN NGOs AND THEIR USE OF ICTs

Latin American women organizations have focused their efforts mainly on the "*democratization*" of connectivity.

Most of the projects carried out by NGOs have been very specific and short-termed . There have also been some experimental programs developed by local governments, connecting a reduced number of groups and organizations[21].

They have typically offered access and training with the aim of encouraging the use of ICTs for making alliances, mobilizing politically, obtaining information, and achieving community or institutional presence.

As we have already mentioned, little is known about the impact of these initiatives in the long term, beyond some dazzling achievements mentioned in some meetings and in informal exchanges and presented without enough supporting evidence.

But parallel to this, are women organizations actually using ICTs for their own institutional development and for gaining visibility and influence on society?

We will mention three studies that show how this process has been carried out, their results and limitations.

1. INSTRAW Women and CMC Report[22]

The study covered 133 organizations devoted to the advancement of women in 23 Latin American and Caribbean countries. Most of them were NGOs but 12% were governmental, the majority operated at national level, more than 10% were regional and a quarter were local organizations, some of them even grassroots groups. The working hypothesis was that many of those organizations had access to the hardware, had an account with a network and often had received training in computer communications. However, they did not apply this technology to its full potential due to the lack a "*telematic culture*". According to INSTRAW, in order to acquire this kind of culture, a motivational and gender sensitive training has to be provided, rather than a technical and intimidating one.

1) **The conclusions showed some interesting points for reflection:** Access to the Internet did not present difficulties for the majority of the organizations surveyed.
2) Possession of equipment was not a problem for most of them.
3) Training was widespread among organizations with online access, but the proportion of the staff that received it was low. 53% of the trainees received only half a day of training, which influenced their effective use of the tool. Training was

[21] Another line of action promoted by governments consists of providing schools with computers with online access in order to induce technological literacy and the use of this tool as part of the educational process. Unfortunately there has been no coordination between these programs and the initiatives of social organizations, which are many times focused on the same target, for example young people from poor areas.

[22] INSTRAW Women and CMC Report, 1996

mostly carried out by the access provider, but gender sensitive training was not widely available.
4) Women were the primary users of CMC, even in mixed-gender organizations.
5) When it came to the available online tools, organizations seemed to be aware of only a few of them. "They are living in a mansion but using only a couple of rooms".
6) Web pages or the use of electronic lists was still infrequent.
7) The greatest obstacle for the full use of CMC was lack of information about how computing can help the organization achieve its goals.

2. Analysis of access and uses of the Internet by NGOs developing projects supported by the Program on Women and Leadership (PROLEAD) of IADB[23].

It was observed that although all the organizations had enough computers, even latest generation ones, they were only used for writing documents, e-mail and -to a minor extent- for searching for information on the Internet.

Although many of the organizations expressed interest in having their own website, they limited their potential to an institutional presence in cyberspace.

A different angle for analysis, and a particularly interesting one, has to do with the use that women organizations make of the public information available on the Internet for advocacy actions and policy proposals. In other words, the way in which ICT mediates in the relations between civil society and the state and how women NGOs can take advantage of this.

3. The study by Martinez and Reilly *"Looking Behind the Internet: Empowering Women for Public Policy Advocacy in Central America"*[24], carried out in Costa Rica and Nicaragua, deals precisely with detecting to what extent the needs for public information required by women organizations for their political work are satisfactorily met by the Internet.

The first findings show the existence of important obstacles for access to this information due to:

- a political culture which is disrespectful of the right of civil society to information
- complexity of the public information available on the Internet (mainly in terms of language)
- limited knowledge of the effective ways of using public information for advocacy, lobbying, policy proposals, etc.

[23] Bonder, Gloria (2000): Analysis of the survey carried out by PROLEAD/BID "Access and uses of technology by women organizations participating in the PROLEAD Program"

[24] Martinez Juliana and Reilly Katherine (2002): *Looking Behind the Internet: Empowering Women for Public Policy Advocacy in Central America*, UN/INSTRAW Virtual Seminar Series on Gender and ICTs, Seminar Four: ICTs as Tools for Bridging the Digital Gender Gap and Women's Empowerment, 2-14 September, 2002.

Among their conclusions they highlight that “the lack of public information makes it harder for women to promote policy changes”.

Their recommendations insist on exploring “the interface between public policy and social movement” and the role that ICTs should play in this arena and in the design of political agendas and advocacy strategies.

Within that frame, the first step for women organizations is “to design advocacy strategies to claim the right to access to public information” and in doing so “to define what kind of information they need, how they need it to be presented and what technical means will support it, etc.”

Although not much has been achieved so far, studies as the ones mentioned above can prevent us from insisting on carrying out the same kind of project and make us more sensitive to what is needed at this particular stage.

BUILDING NEW HORIZONS BY ARTICULATING INFORMATION AND IMAGINATION

The debate on ICT policies in the LAC Region has only recently begun and it is moving slowly.

This is not surprising if we consider that the spreading of ICTs in the Region is a phenomenon that has vertiginously developed since the 90s, within a frame of democratization of political institutions initiated in the 80s, liberalization of the economy, opening of the markets, deregulation and privatization of the telecommunication services during the 90s.

The fiscal urgency and the precarious conditions of telecommunication in the hands of the state, "justified" the adoption of privatization policies that, in most of the countries, ended up protecting the interests of the transnational corporations solely.

"Because privatization was carried out in response to fiscal emergency, regulatory agencies were not created until later when contracts had already been signed and commitments made, all of which further limited the agency's ability to act"

Therefore, the need for passing laws and establishing regulations and entities that were responsible, effective and autonomous regarding ICTs, has been delayed or underestimated.

This aspect, among others, makes that the transition to an information and knowledge-based society raises a number of important questions for the Region.

- What possibilities do Latin American countries have of carrying out this transition, when their current structural conditions are based on deep socioeconomic inequalities, low levels of state investment in technology infrastructure and services, and very poor regulations?

- How can they ensure that the economic benefits of these technologies do not remain in the hands of a small number of corporations and people with more economic and cultural resources?

- What type of laws, regulations and regulatory entities should be created in order to ensure genuine competition among network service providers while committing them to support universal access to this service?

- How can the cultural and linguistic diversity of Latin America and the Caribbean be integrated and highlighted on the global net?

- How can we foster local production of technologies competitive in the global market?

- How can we support the democratization of ICTs, as well as their contribution to the processes of democratization of society and its institutions? (e-governance, for example)

These complex questions will probably remain open for discussion for some time. However, they do not prevent some sectors from giving answers which, although partial, show, at least, a promising direction.

Charts 4 and 5 show the "general" recommendations from recent regional meetings. To conclude this point we will review the agenda proposed by ECLAC to achieve greater efficiency and equity in this transition phase of ICTs in the Region[25].

A) To counteract the adverse effects of the structural reforms (economic, financial and in all sectors of the state) enforced over the last decades by:
   - creating, reforming and putting into action strong and independent regulatory entities, that ensure new ways of "regulated competition" and defend the interests of the consumers.
   - promoting models of social organization of production that protect consumers' well-being and propitiate an efficient assignment of resources[26].

B) To straighten the market flaws by implementing an integrated policy of productive and technological development together with measures ensuring the training of qualified human resources and the generation of "social capital" as well as the expansion and improvement of the productive industry within regional cooperation.

C) To reinforce the efforts for technological innovation, production and dissemination by enlarging the national budget for research and development and dissemination of technology and generating incentives that stimulate private investment in these areas.

D) To encourage greater efficiency and equity in the transition toward the Knowledge Society by:
   - providing telecommunication services at lower costs and of easy accessibility to the digital nets
   - ensuring access of low-income sectors

Although we share many of these concepts, it is again noticeable that in this Regional Agenda no reference is made to gender. This confirms that the **general concern for ICT policies and the debates on gender issues seem to run along parallel roads.**
Except for some specific references to gender equality as a particular issue, most of the documents produced by mainstream organisms overlook almost completely gender inequalities and the solutions which are being proposed by the women's / feminist movement and the national and regional organizations working in this field.

[25] ECLAC (2000), op.cit.

[26] It is interesting it highlight that ICT issue is almost always addressed from the "software" side, without taking into account anther problem of vital importance: the low participation of Latin America and the Caribbean in the trade of "ICT hardware". East Asian developing countries export almost 40% of world ICT goods, while the share of the region in international ICT trade is extremely low (4.3%). Most of it comes from Mexico and it should also be mentioned that Costa Rica's high "ICT-orientation" which is apparently changing the productive and trade structure of the country.

But this dissociation is not the exclusive responsibility of those who deal with the more general policies. Also, the women and / or gender organizations tend to operate in an "autistic way". That is to say, they focus with the same exclusivity on the questions directly related with women inequality and / in ICTs. Eventually they may highlight more forcefully the obstacles faced by certain groups with greater disadvantages (the poor, the indigenous, the rural, the black) and suggest repairing measures to be adopted.

It is not frequent either that in order to define "gender" proposals they take into account the socioeconomic and political context, the institutional frames, the different actors and power relations at stake.

That might explain that in spite of the enormous effort toward sensitizing political decision-makers, corporations and other sectors, many of these attempts are limited to declarations of good purposes and moral imperatives, losing force and legitimacy.

As it has already happened in other arenas, our impression is that in order to carry out significant advances in ICT policies based on gender equality, systematic strategic planning is an essential requirement. It has to be based on reliable information, articulating gender demands and proposals for ICTs with the openings and restrictions presented by the current socioeconomic, political, scientific and technological context, at national , regional and international levels..

Some of the elements that may contribute to take firmer steps in a field that is full of opportunities and as well as risks are:

- Wide range and contextualized proposals, based on information, with clear short and long term objectives, open to dialogue and negotiation with different power groups.

- Alternative plans for different scenarios, carried out by organizations and networks with experience in advocacy and wide knowledge of ICT debates and advancements.

For the time being, no advances with this conception are perceived. As we have already mentioned, the most important change in the last decade is the growth in number and type of women and organizations using the Internet for exchange of information, organization, education, advocacy and development of projects (which are sometimes considered policies, although they are not).

Among the technological tools and formats, the most widely used are:
- E-mailing lists (permanent and occasional)
- Electronic bulletins: www.mujeresdeempresa.com, repem@chasque.apc.org
- Electronic Journals: www.isis.cl
- Information services: Modemmujer (Mexico) www.modemmujer.org
- Data Banks: www.mei.com.ar (on women in politics)
- Web sites
- Radio: Radio FIRE http://www.fire.or.cr/
- Electronic networks: Red Feminista Latinoamericana y del Caribe contra la Violencia Doméstica y Sexual, REPEM, Isis Internacional.

As regards policy recommendations, most of the documents elaborated by women NGOs agree on the same points:

- Research of ICT women users and workers in the telecommunication and information industry
- Compliance with their work rights
- Measures to avoid the discrimination of women in terms of wages, benefits and recognition of their work
- Public policies ensuring universal access to ICTs
- Lower costs of access and use to overcome the digital gap
- Participation of women groups in the decisions concerning the design, use and spreading of technological systems.

Can we move forward?

It seems to us that in order to discuss future actions, it would be useful to bear in mind which are the fundamental conceptions, principles, objectives and actions that are being used and implemented for engendering ICT policies. We are including an outline which summarizes in our opinion some of fundamental points of the theoretical and strategic discussion around this topic.

Its aim is not to show an "evolutionary progress" from one conception to the next, neither does it imply a judgment of value of any of the strategies proposed. Its sole purpose is to enrich the elaboration of new proposals by taking advantage of what has been achieved so far.

GENDER APPROACHES TO ICT POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

PROBLEM DEFINITION	PERSPECTIVE	GOALS	MEASURES / ACTIONS	ETHICAL / POLITICAL PRINCIPLES
- Unequal access and participation of women in ICTs as users, students, teachers, workers and professionals. Explanations: - Lack of economic resources, education and infrastructure. - Cultural values and gender discrimination patterns in society and institutions.	- "Deficit model" Women seen as a group in social and economic disadvantage. **Compensatory Strategy**	- Promotion of equal opportunities for all women in terms of access to ICTs as well as participation in educational programs and technology industries.	- Community based projects (telecenters or similar). - Educational and training programs, scholarships, public campaigns, provision of equipment and other incentives. - Networking.	- Women's Rights - Equal opportunities - Gender justice - Integration of women in the development and modernization of economy and culture: being part of the global society
- Gender "nature" and characteristics of ICTs: focus on contents, formats, uses, impacts, regulations, etc. - ICTs as a field of power relations. - Devaluation / invisibility of women's needs, knowledge, skills and technological culture. - Homogenization vs. diversity.	- "Difference model" (Valorization of women's cultures, values and visions in / for ICTs) **Critical Strategy**	- Integration of women's needs, "ways of knowing" and relating with information and communication in educational, research and innovation projects. - Generation of new contents, formats, tools, etc. - Deconstruction of technology discourses and dominant practices.	- Emphasis on research and academic debates, cyber-feminist theories and innovative experiences. - Women- friendly training and educational projects. - Promotion of critical analysis of power / gender relations in contents, tools, and ICT policies.	- Inclusivity - Diversity - Empowerment - KEYS for improving the quality and social uses of ICTs
- How to change gender / power relations in and through ICTs. - Information / Knowledge Society: meanings, power and impacts on gender equality and human development.	**Transformative strategy**	- Mainstreaming gender analysis, planning and evaluation in ICT policies, programs and projects at national, regional and international levels. - Addressing all dimensions of ICTs (access, uses, appropriation, production, management, ownership, regulation, policies, etc.)	- : Collection and dissemination of statistics and elaboration of gender indicators in ICTs. - (Interdisciplinary) research of gender relations in all dimensions of ICTs. - Lobbying and continuous dialogue among researchers, policy makers, women groups, corporate sector. - Networking and collaborative projects at regional and international levels.	- Long term transformational strategies. - Building a new social paradigm: a gender fair Knowledge Society.

			- Continuous evaluation of policies and programs. - Development of gender sensitive science and technology education at all levels of the educational system. - Promotion of equal participation of women and men at all levels of the technology industry. - Assertive action and other measures to remove subtle obstacles preventing women professional development in S&T.	

CHARTS

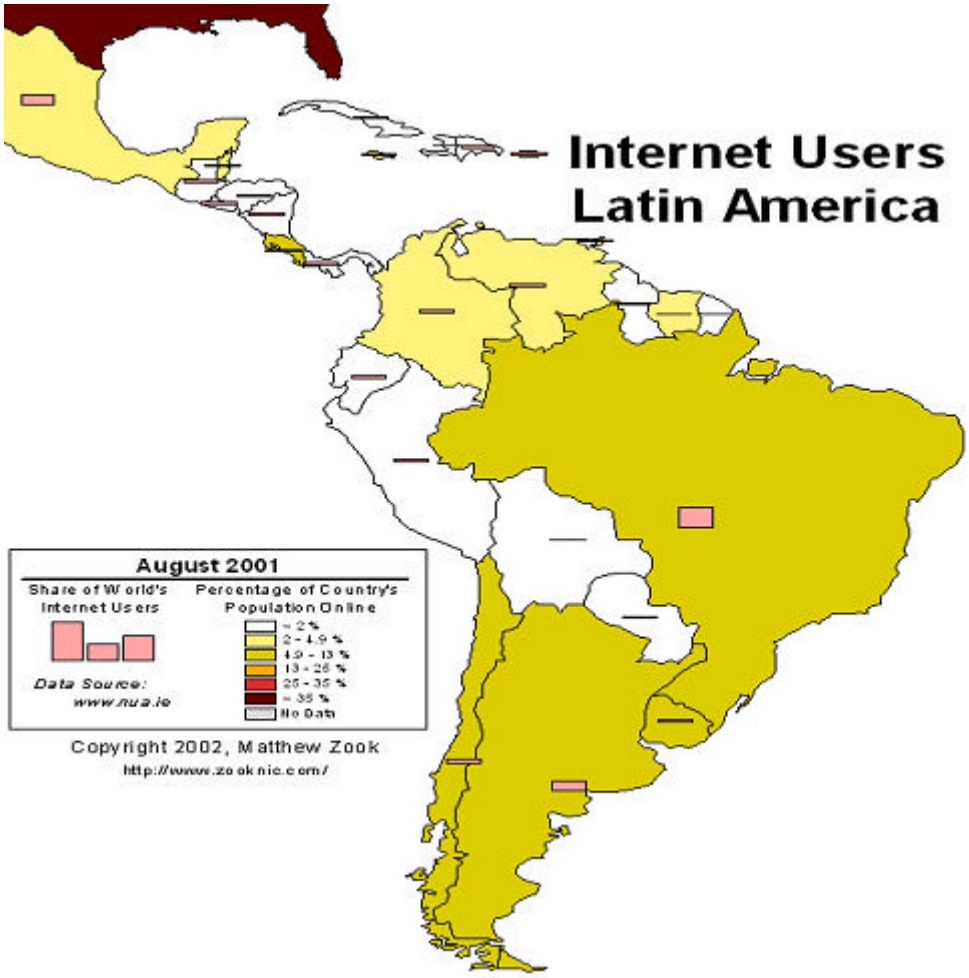
1_

USERS CONNECTED TO THE INTERNET IN THE WORLD (March/01)

World total	*407.1 million*
Africa	3.11 million
Asia/Pacific	104.88 million
Europe	113.14 million
Middle East	2.40 million
Canada and USA	167.12 million
Latin America	16.45 million

Source: http://www.nua.ie/surveys/how_many_online/index.html

2_ MAP


Internet Users
Latin America
August 2001
Share of World's Internet Users
Percentage of Country's Population Online
< 2 %
2 - 4.9 %
4.9 - 13 %
13 - 25 %
25 - 35 %
> 35 %
No Data
Data Source:
www.nua.ie
Copyright 2002, Matthew Zook
http://www.zooknic.com/

3_ INDICATORS

Data compilation on the Information Society situation in Latin America and the Caribbean

South America

Country	Population (2001) 1	GDP *per capita* 2 (US$ thousands)	Teledensity 3 (telephone lines per 100 inhabitants) (2001)	Internet Services Providers 4 (2000)	Internet Users	Internet Users % of population 5	Ranking in the Information Society Index (2001) 6
Argentina	37.4 millions	7.46 (2001)	21,3 lines	33	3.88 millions (July 2001)	10.38	31
Bolivia	8.3 millions	2.6 (2000)	6,17	9	78 thousand (Dec. 1999)	0.98	-
Brazil	174.74 millions	2.93 (2001)	18,18	50	13.62 millions (May 2002) 7	7.74	45
Chile	15.33 millions	10.1 (2000)	22,12	7	3.1 millions (Dec. 2001)	20.02	33
Colombia	40.35 millions	6.2	16,91	18	1.15 thousand (Dec. 2001)	2.81	46
Ecuador	13.18 millions	2.9	10,0	13	328 thousand (Dec. 2001)	2.44	43
French Guyana	177.5 thousand	6.0	28,26	2	2 thousand (Dec. 1999)	1.16	-
Guyana	177.5 thousand	6.0	7,94	3	95 thousand (Dec. 1999)	13.61	-
Paraguay	15.73 millions	4.7	5,54	4	20 thousand (Dec. 1999)	0.36	-
Peru	27.4 millions	4.5	6,37	10	3 millions (Dec. 2001)	10.73	49
Suriname	434 thousand	3.4	18,06	2	14.5 thousand (Dec. 2001)	3.32	-
Uruguay	3.36 millions	9.3	27,84	7	95 thousand (Dec. 2001)	13.61	-
Venezuela	24 millions	6.2	10,78	16	95 thousand (Dec. 2001)	13.61	39

Central America

Country	Population (2001)	GDP *per capita* (US$ thousands)	Teledensity (telephone lines per 100 inhabitants) (2001)	Internet Services Providers (2000)	Internet Users	Internet Users % of population	Ranking in the Information Society Index (2001)
Belize	256.0 thousand	3.2	14,93	2	18 thousand	6.84	-
Costa Rica	3.77 millions	6.7	24,94	3	384 thousand (Dec. 2001)	10.1	36
El Salvador	6.23 millions	4.0	9,08	4	40 thousand	0.65	-
Guatemala	12.97 millions	3.7	5,71	5	200 mi (Dec. 2001)	1.5	-
Honduras	6.40 millions	2.7	4,60	8	40 thousand (Dec. 1999)	0.64	-
Mexico	101.88 millions	9.1	12,47	51	3.5 millions (Dec. 2001)	3.38	42
Nicaragua	4.91 millions	2.7	3,13 (estimate)	3	20 thousand	-	-
Panama	2.84 millions	6.0	16,45	6	45 thousand (1999)	1.6	37

Caribbean

Country	Population (2001)	GDP *per capita* (US$ thousands)	Teledensity (telephone lines per 100 inhabitants) (2001)	Internet Services Providers (2000)	Internet Users	Internet Users % of population	Ranking in the Information Society Index (2001)
Antigua & Barbuda	68 thousand	8.2 (1999)	49,94	16	5 thousand (Dec. 2000)	7.52	-
Aruba	70 thousand	28.0	37,16	-	24 thousand (Dec. 2001)	34.07	-
Bahamas	298 thousand	15.0	37,58	19	16.9 thousand	5.62	-
Barbados	275 thousand	14.5	43,74	19	6 thousand (Dec. 1999)	2.19	-
Ilhas Caiman	35 thousand	24.5	-	16	-	-	-
Cuba	11.18 millions	1.7	4,36	4	120 thousand (Dec. 2001)	1.7	-
Dominica	71 thousand	4.0	29,42	16	2 il (Dec. 2001)	2.8	-
República Dominicana	8.56 millions	5.7	-	24	186 thousand (Dec. 2001)	2.13	-
Granada	89 thousand	4.4	-	14	5.2 thousand	5.83	-
Guadalupe	431 thousand	9.0 (1997)	44,93	3	4 thousand (Dec. 2001)	0.94	-
Haiti	7 millions	1.8	0,89	3	30 thousand (Dec. 2001)	0.42	-
Jamaica	2,6 millions	3.7	19,86	21	100 thousand (Dec. 2001)	3.73	-
Martinica	418.4 thousand	11.0 (1997)	43,44	2	5 thousand (Dec. 1999)	1.21	-

Puerto Rico	3.93 millions	10.0	33,19	76	600 thousand (Dec. 2001)	15.16	-
St. Kittis and Nevis	38.7 thousand	7.0	56,87	16	2 thousand (Dec. 1999)	5.15	-
Stª. Lúcia	158.1 thousand	4.5	31,34	15	3 thousand	1.92	-
St. Vincent and the Grenadines	115.9 thousand	2.8	-	15	3.5 thousand (Dec. 2000)	3.03	-
Trinidad & Tobago	1.16 thousand	9.5	23,1	17	120 thousand (Dec. 2001)	10.31	-
Virgin Islands	122.2 thousand	15.0	56,96	50	12 thousand (Dec. 1999)	9.92	-

4_ LEGISLATION, POLICIES AND NATIONAL PROGRAMS ON GENDER

COUNTRIES	LAWS, REGULATIONS AND POLICIES
ARGENTINA	• Decree 554/97 - June 18, 1997 Declares of national interest the access of all Argentine citizens to the Internet. Creates a Secretariat of Communications for the application of a strategic plan for the development of the Internet in Argentina. • Freedom of Expression Decree 1279/97 – December 1, 1997 Beholds the constitutional right to free speech over the Internet. • Access for All Decree 1018/98 for the creation of the program "argentin@internet.todos" - September 1, 1998 Creates a program for the development of telematic communications "argentin@internet.todos" whose main goal is the promotion of universal access to the Internet and information technologies. • Decree 1335/99 – November 11, 1999 Declares of national interest the project: "An e-mail address for each Argentine citizen", within the frame of the Program "argentin@internet.todos", designed to provide a free e-mail account for each Argentine citizen and to all legally registered organizations.
BARBADOS	• Edu Tech 2000 Program All primary and secondary schools will receive ICT equipment over the next few years.
BELIZE	• Internet for Schools Program (1995) Provides free Internet access to all high schools and universities
BOLIVIA	• Telecommunications Law N° 1632 – July 5, 1995 The Telecommunications Law of the Republic of Bolivia establishes the norms to regulate the public services and telecommunications activities witch include the transmission, emission and reception, through a Public or Private Net, of signals, symbols, text, images, voice, sounds, data or information of any nature.
BRAZIL	• Green Paper of the Program of the Information Society - August 2000 (GOV) A preliminary version of the Green Paper of the Program of the Information Society (SocInfo) was submitted on August 9th to the Minister of Science and Technology, Ronaldo Sardenberg. The Green Paper contains the objectives of implementation of the SocInfo program and was designed by the Ad hoc acting Group for the Program, composed by representatives of MCT, of the private sector and academia. • Information Society Program. (GOV) The objectives of The Information Society Program are: - to articulate, coordinate and foster the development and sure / safe? use of advanced computing, communication and information services and their applications in society, through research, Brazilian development and teaching, accelerating the availability of new services and application on the Internet; - to provide subsidies for the definition of a national strategy to conceive and stimulate the appropriate insertion of the Brazilian society into the Information Society.
CHILE	• Information and Communications Technologies Government Unit (UTIC) • The Information and Communications Technologies Government Unit (UTIC) was created by the Committee of Ministries for the Modernization of the Public Sector, in September 1997. This Unit acts as an advisory body of the Modernization Committee. Its mission is the coordination, promotion, advise and dissemination of

	strategies related to the use, incorporation and projections of the information and communication technologies in the State. • Presidential Commission of New Information and Communications Technologies Created on June 3, 1998 this Commission depends on the Ministry of Economy, and acts as an advisory unit to the President. Its goal is to promote public and private actions for the development of the information infrastructure in Chile. • Presidential Commission: Proposals to promote information Technologies in Chile – January 20, 1999 This document presents recommendations to accelerate the development of information technologies and digital nets in the country. It's goals are to promote universal access to knowledge and information; to develop new competitive skills and to modernize the state and its relation with civil society. • Supreme Decree Nº 187 – May 4, 1999 Stipulates new charges for telephone services in order to increase the use of local phone calls for the Internet. • Fund for the Development of Telecommunications The Fund for the Development of Telecommunications is being used to help develop community telecenters as part of a project for providing free Internet access to all Chilean communities by 2006.
COLOMBIA	• Connectivity Agenda: Jump into Internet – February 9, 2000 The Connectivity Schedule aims at achieving massive use of Information Technologies in Colombia, modernizing the public and government institutions, and simplifying access to information following the orientation established in the National Plan of Development 1998 – 2000.
HONDURAS	• General Law of the telecommunications area, Decree 185-95 December 5, 1995
JAMAICA	• Computing Strategic Plan
MEXICO	• National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Computing (INEGI) – General Direction of Computing Policy (DGPI) The mission of the INEGI is to provide public access Statistic and Geographic Information, to promote the use of computing to contribute to social well-being, economic growth, democratic development and strengthening of the Mexican Society. The DGPI is in charge of computing development. It's website offers information about computing policy of the country and related regulations • ISOC - Mexico. (NGO) The main purpose of the Internet Society of Mexico is to extend the development and the availability of the Internet, its technologies and applications, and to train organizations, professionals and individuals to collaborate and innovate in their own fields of actions.
PERU	• Telecommunications Law - April 28, 1993 This Law establishes a general framework for the regulation of the Telecommunications Area in Peru and declares its development a public need. • General Regulation of the Telecommunications Law – February 18, 1994 This Regulation establishes the general procedures for the delivery of Telecommunication Services, in accordance with the Telecommunications Law. • Peruvian Scientific Net Promotes public Internet centres.
URUGUAY	• Uruguay en Red.
VENEZUELA	• ISOC - Venezuela. (NGO) Since 1999, the Internet Society of Venezuela is acting as a coordinator of activities focused on the promotion and support of technologies, as well as the availability and development of the Internet in Venezuela.

5-

The InfoEthics 2000

Itacurucá Declaration
October 27, 2000

Under the auspices of UNESCO and Government of Brazil in Itacurucá, Río de Janeiro State, October 26-27, 2000

Recommendations

- Adoption of special policies and actions aiming at bridging the digital gap.
- Strengthening of the laws concerning digital information, with a particular focus on the requirements for the development of education, science and culture, within an ethical framework for the Information Society.
- Generation of local and national contents for public use to foster education, science and culture.
- Creation of a regional information space for public use to advance in the development and integration of Latin American and Caribbean societies, increasing their visibility in the global Information Society.
- Creation of a regional program on the Information Society.

First Latin American and Caribbean Workshop on Information and Communication Technologies
Margarita Island, Venezuela
November 28, 2000

Recommendations

- Identification and implementation of regional programs aimed at the integration of Latin American and Caribbean countries into the Information Society:

  → Regional Educational Connectivity Program – Internet in the School.

  → Program of Application of Information Technologies in the Health Sector in Latin America and the Caribbean.

  → Regional Electronic Government Program.

  → Regional Electronic Commerce Program.

INTERNATIONAL FORUM

Latin American and Caribbean in the Information Society
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
September 26-28, 2002

The **United Nations** (represented by the UN ICT Task Force and UNESCO) and the **Brazilian Government** (represented by the Ministry for Science and Technology) will promote a high-level technical meeting to discuss priorities for Latin American and Caribbean countries related to the Information Society.

GENDER AND/OR WOMEN´S INTERESTS AND NEEDS WERE INCLUDED IN SPECIFIC PARAGRAPHS ONLY BY SOME SUB REGIONS AND USING DIFFERENT THEORETICAL AND POLITICAL INTERPRETATIONS:

MERCOSUR SUB-REGION:

Public policies must guarantee equality of opportunities in the Information Society, doing away with social barriers, in particular gender, intergeneration, ethnic and different abilities ones.

CARIBBEAN SUB-REGION:

In the context of universal access policies, special attention and resources are requested for the integration of marginalized groups such as: the disabled, children, women, indigenous groups and the elderly to ensure the participation of all.

ANDES SUB-REGION:

Active inclusion of all the actors in the democratization processes through communication and information: indigenous, poor, women, young.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Association for Progressive Communications, Internet and ICT for Social Change. <http//www.apcwomen.org/gem/icts.htm>

Burch, Sally and Leon, Irene . "Directions for Women's Advocacy on ICT: Putting New Technologies on the Gender Agenda". Networking for Change: The APCWNSP´s First 8 Years. APCWNSP, Philippines, 2000. p.31.

Malcolm, Shirley M., "Knowledge, Technology & Development: A Gendered Perspective" <www.wigsat.org/malcom. html>

Menezes, Claudio (2001): *La UNESCO y el Desarrollo de la Sociedad de la Información en América Latina y el Caribe*. Uruguay, Montevideo, August, 2001