

Women and ICTs in South Asia: Exclusion or Empowerment?

Concept Note

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have been advertised as catalysts of economic growth and human development and more and more they are being treated as indicators thereof. The benefits of ICT utilization are distributed unevenly though. Rural areas are often disadvantaged in terms of e.g. mobile network coverage or internet access. Widespread illiteracy and lack of English proficiency in the subcontinent is yet another obstacle to effective use of ICTs.

Literacy and other factors influencing access to and effective use of ICTs have significant gender dimensions. With a gender gap in education of 25 percentage points, South Asia sets a sad global record (Mahboob ul Haq Human Development Centre 2008). Previous research has shown how gender inequalities in these and other areas of human development lead to an exclusion of women and girls from benefits offered by the use of ICTs. This is in contrast to the emphasis put on ICTs' potential for narrowing gender gaps and empowering women. This discourse is represented by the much-acclaimed Grameen Village Phone project initiated in Bangladesh where women become grassroots entrepreneurs by providing mobile phone services to other villagers.

The panel continues the engagement with gender dimensions of the ICTs and development nexus that SDPI initiated during the Tenth SDC. It wants to engage with the various discourses on ICTs and development from the grassroots level via policy-makers in the global South to donors, and analyze their impact and usefulness for women's empowerment in South Asia.

Panel organisers Dr. Karin Astrid Siegmann (Visiting Fellow SDPI, Islamabad), siegmann@iss.nl
and, Ms Nazima Shaheen (Project Coordinator SDPI, Islamabad), nazima@sdpi.org