PRIMERS IN GENDER AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE **#4**

Gender Responsive E-governance: Exploring the Transformative Potential

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4. GENDER RESPONSIVE E-GOVERNANCE: EXPLORING THE TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL

A valuable opportunity exists to fulfil UNDP's mandate for gender equality and women's empowerment through e-governance programming. This primer highlights some of the key gender-related issues regarding e-governance in the context of UNDP's Democratic Governance work, presents entry points for continued programming on gender and e-governance, and makes recommendations for closing the existing gender gap in specific e-governance interventions prepared by UNDP practitioners and its partners.

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Gender

The social attributes associated with being male and female and the relationships between women, men, girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men. These attributes and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization. They are context- and time-specific and changeable. Gender is part of the broader socio-cultural context. Other important criteria for socio-cultural analysis include class, race, poverty level, ethnic group and age (UN/OSAGI, n.d.). The concept of gender also includes the expectations about the characteristics, aptitudes and likely behaviours of both women and men (femininity and masculinity). The concept of gender, applied to social analysis, reveals how women's subordination (or men's domination) is socially constructed. As such, the subordination can be changed or ended. It is not biologically predetermined nor is it fixed forever (UNESCO, 2003).

Gender relations

The social relationships between men, women, girls and boys, which shape how power is distributed between women, men, girls and boys and how that power translates into different positions in society. Gender relations vary depending on other social relations, such as class, race, ethnicity, etc. They will greatly impact how an individual man or woman experiences processes and institutions such as trials and courts and how they interact with other individuals within those institutions.

Gender mainstreaming

"The process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetrated. The ultimate goal of this strategy is to achieve gender equality" (UN/ECOSOC, 1997).

Gender equality

The equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests,

ACRONYMS

BDP	Bureau for Development Policy
CEDAW	The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CO	Country Office
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DGG	Democratic Governance Group
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ICTDAR	Information Communication Technologies for Development in the Arab Region
MDGs	The Millennium Development Goals
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PAR	Public Administration Reform
PFnet	People First Network, Solomon Islands
RDS	Red de Desarrollo Sostenible de Honduras
SDNP	Sustainable Development Networking Programme
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WSIS	World Summit on Information Society

needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men (UN/ OSAGI n.d.).

Gender equity

The process of being fair to men and women. To ensure fairness, measures must often be put in place to compensate for the historical and social disadvantages that prevent women and men from operating on a level playing field. Equity is a means—equality is the result (UNESCO, 2003).

Gender analysis

The collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated information. Men and women perform different roles in societies and within institutions, such as police forces and courts. These differing roles lead to women and men having different experiences, knowledge, talents and needs. Gender analysis explores these differences so that policies, programmes and projects can identify and meet the different needs of men and women. Gender analysis also facilitates the strategic use of the distinct knowledge and skills possessed by women and men, which can greatly improve the long-term sustainability of interventions (UNESCO, 2003).

Gender neutrality

An assumption that development interventions will benefit men and women equally, leading to a failure to analyse and plan for the social relationships between men and women and how those relationships will impact programming.

Gender justice

"The protection and promotion of civil, political, economic and social rights on the basis of gender equality. It necessitates taking a gender perspective on the rights themselves, as well as the assessment of access and obstacles to the enjoyment of these rights for women, men, girls and boys and adopting gender-sensitive strategies for protecting and promoting them" (Spees, 2004). Much of the broader gender justice agenda falls outside the scope of UNDP Access to Justice programming. However, increasing women's access to justice, be it formal or informal, hinges on removing economic, political and social barriers to participation, as articulated by the gender justice agenda (UNIFEM & ILAC, 2004).

Gender-based violence (GBV)

A generic term used to describe any harmful act perpetrated against an individual against his or her will based on his or her socially defined identity as male or female (UN, 2005). The UN General Assembly defined violence against women in the 1993 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private" (UN, 1993).

> "Gender is defined as the social attributes associated with being male and female and the relationships between women, men, girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men."

Introduction

E-governance refers to the use of old and new technologies to enhance government efficiency, transparency, accountability, and service and information delivery, as well as fostering citizen participation in democratic processes via ICT networks and networking. E-governance thus includes three core components: e-administration, e-services and e-participation.

The concept of governance has evolved to cover not just public sector management of efficient services and an enabling environment for development, but also the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms. This shift towards what is now known as "democratic governance" is partly the result of globalization. The latter in turn has been spearheaded since the early 1990s by the rapid development and widespread use of new Information and Communications Technology (ICT).

Developing countries have not been able to harness the potential of ICTs at the same speed as industrialized nations. Issues of access to ICTs and investment in ICT infrastructure, among others, have limited the uptake in such countries. As a result, many of the initial ICT for Development programmes and initiatives focused on access, complemented in many cases by support for local capacity building.

By the end of the millennium, national governments had started to complement their development agendas with strategies and policies to foster the use of ICT within governments (national, state and local). This led to the emergence of e-governance as a key and dedicated area of ICT for Development.

It is essential to emphasize, however, that ICTs are not gender-neutral—they are not accessed, managed and controlled by all men and women equally. As a result, men and women experience different benefits

> *ICTs are not gender-neutral—they are not accessed, managed and controlled by all men and women equally.*

and effects of ICTs at all levels, a point highlighted by many studies on ICTs and gender since the early 1990s (Hakfin, 2006; UNDP-APDIP, 2007).

A quick review of the existing literature shows that this is a relatively new area that remains to be explored in much more detail. This primer builds on this extensive body of work on ICTs and gender, but focuses on key gender issues related to e-governance within the context of UNDP's work on democratic governance. These key issues are: (1) policy-making processes

for e-governance planning; (2) delivery of basic services and public information via ICTs; and (3) empowerment of stakeholders, particularly women, to use ICT networks to engage with governments over governance processes.

The primer has four sections: Section 1 is an overview of the intersection between ICT, gender and e-governance and UNDP's mandate in regards to this field; Section 2 presents the work UNDP has done to date in integrating these areas; Section 3 builds on the previous sections and highlights key gender considerations for e-governance programming, including major obstacles; and Section 4 presents entry points for continued programming on gender and e-governance, and makes recommendations for closing the existing gender gap in specific e-governance interventions.

All in all, this primer is designed to contribute to the broader discussion of gender and e-governance and facilitate gender-responsive e-governance programming by