

Need Analysis: the ICT and Gender Issues¹

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Abstract: *The fact remains that the increase and diversification of the information and communications technologies, have continued to usher in a new era in human development. Often mainstream views depict that such technologies have only technical rather than social implications. Their position is based on the notion that the remarkable affirmative transformations introduced by these ICT technologies have not touched all levels of societies. To some extent such views are accurate. This may be attributed to the fact that the existing power relations and structures in societies often determine the levels of benefits groups or classes in a given society enjoys. In view of this, we argue that ICT's projects or technologies are often not gender neutral. The vital questions as suggested by Gurumurthy are; Who benefits from ICTs? Who is dictating the course of ICTs? Is it possible to harness ICTs to serve the larger goals of equality and justice? And is there any hidden costs in terms of human development should such technology be made available without gender equality? Is it compulsory for any research on 'need analysis on ICT' to pay a special attention to gender issues in a given community? The last question provoked much interest in this study and it is the cornerstone of this paper. Indeed, the above views made it unavoidable necessary to critically examine ICT and gender issues in relation to the Orang Asli of West Malaysia. In addition, this article explores ICTs and gender relations in giving voices to Orang Asli women.*

Keyword: *Voice, Need Analysis, Gender Issues, Gender equality, Orang Asli.*

I. Introduction

Gender Planning and Implementation

According to Moser (1993), "If policy is about what to do, then planning is about how to do it, the organization of implementation is about what is actually done" (p.6). In one of her earliest work, Moser (1993) maintains, gender planning requires to meet both the practical and strategic needs of women. Moser noted that these needs are hardly met in most countries including those in advanced economies. Practical gender needs (PGN)²; that is 'needs' related to the women, men and children play in society. Activities which address the practical needs of women include a) reducing their domestic workload; b) increasing their incomes, among others. (OXFAM; 1995:41). Unlike the strategic gender needs, PGN does not address the subordinate position of women in society, and therefore, they are not directly linked with women's empowerment.

Howard (cited in Cook, 1995) illustrates further by pointing out that women's practical needs are possible to be served through programmes. For instance, by providing them training in modern forms of agriculture, communication³, and other current technologies to enhance their socioeconomic well-being as well as socio-cultural equality. While meeting women's practical needs are necessary conditions for equal and sustainable development, it is worth to highlight that the subordinate position of women in the society and empowerment are not directly addressed under the practical gender needs, but strategic gender needs. Meaning to say, when programmes or policies failed to address the subordinate position of women in the society, the process will be less than satisfactory. This is because policy or programme for women issues, concerns with what should be done about gender issues (such as subordination). As Moser stressed, "policy-making is the process of social and political decision-making about how to allocate resources for the needs and interests of society, concluding in the formulation of a policy strategy" (1993:6).

¹ This project includes three other pillars. These are social capital, political structure and decision making process and natural resource use.

² Practical gender needs (PGN) are the needs that women identify within their socially accepted roles in a society. Practical needs do not challenge the gender division of labour or women's subordinate position in society, although rising out of them. Practical gender needs are a response to immediate perceived necessity, identified within a specific context. They are practical in nature and are often concerned with inadequacies in living conditions such as water provision, health care and employment. Strategic gender needs (SGN) are the needs women identify because of their subordinate position to men in their society. Strategic gender needs vary according to specific contexts. They relate to the gender division of labour, power and control and may include such issues as legal rights, domestic violence, equal wages and women's control over their bodies. Meeting strategic gender needs helps women to achieve greater equality. It also changes existing roles and therefore challenges women's subordinate position.

³ We added communication into Howard's work because at that time gender and ICTs are not as common as today.

Thus, Howard (1995) emphasises that women's strategic needs must also be addressed. These include, changing laws to allow women to own lands under their own names, be equal participants in development programmes and projects that will be sustained in any significant way. Although Howard or Moser did not equate ICT with gender equality, free access to, liberalization of attitudes towards, however, utilization of ICT within communities (especially those at the peripheral⁴ of societies) will encourage political awareness and socio-economic growth for women as well as men. As ICT continues to evolve as an inevitable necessity rather than a luxury goods in everyday activities, the knowledge and acquisition of such skill should be made a compulsory part of gender strategic needs for all communities.

Indeed, the increasing and diversification of the information and communications technologies, have ushered in a new era—one that can be described as an infinite knowledge and ever evolving. Often mainstream proponents view this technology purely on technical rather than its social implications. What is more, in many instances, the remarkable affirmative transformations introduced by these technologies (ICT) have not been evenly distributed evenly in societies that lays claim to social-cultural equality. This is reflected in Holmes' statement "past ways of doing things may have been more restrictive for women" (2009: 12), partly because existing power relations and structures in societies determine the level of benefits groups or classes in any given society enjoys. This is more common in issues related to gender relations. One could argue that ICT's projects or technologies are not invariable gender neutral. This view is strongly supported by Gurumurthy (2004). The author argues:

The ICT arena is characterised by the strategic control exercised by powerful corporations and nations – monopolies built upon the intellectual property regime, increasing surveillance of the Internet and an undermining of its democratic substance, and exploitation of the powerless by capitalist imperialism, sexism and racism. Within the ICT arena women have relatively little ownership of and influence on the decision-making processes, being underrepresented in the private sector and government bodies which control this arena.

To critically explore the issue of gender and ICT, Gurumurthy pause to ask: Who benefits from ICTs? Who is dictating the course of ICTs? Is it possible to harness ICT's to serve the larger goals of equality and justice? Framing and judicious responses to these questions, Gurumurthy argued it is fundamental and central to the issue of gender and women's equal right to access, use and shape ICTs. Accordingly, Gurumurthy maintains;

ICTs have brought employment gains for both women and men. However, patterns of gender segregation are being reproduced in the information economy where men hold the majority of high-skilled, high value-added jobs, whereas women are concentrated in the low-skilled, lower value-added jobs. Work in call-centres perpetuate the devaluation of women's labour, and organisations in the information technology sector, as elsewhere, reward behaviour that is considered masculine.

In spite of plenty job opportunities created for women in ICT and related sectors at the job place, they have difficulties to access higher echelon of occupational ladder. This sheds light on the importance of incorporating gender dimension in ICT development as reflected in the notion of Moser and Howard - gender strategic needs. It can be seen that addressing the gender dimensions of the information society will efficiently integrate gender perspectives into national ICT policies and strategies, provide content relevant to women, promote women's economic participation in the information economy, and may regulate violence against women and children connected to pornography on the Internet (see also The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS December 2003). Some of the listed benefits of ICT for women include the followings:

- E-commerce initiatives that link women artisans directly to global markets through the Internet to market and production information
- E-governance programmes by using ICTs to make government services more accessible to citizens by providing them electronically,
- Besides radio, health educators may communicate information related to women's sexual and reproductive health
- Information sharing and dialogues etc. (WSIS 2003).

Before we proceed further in this intellectual journey, it is essential to re-echo the central issue (or question) in this article - Is it necessary for researchers on ICT to undertake need analysis in relation to gender issues? As mentioned earlier in this paper, myopic views and misinterpretations to this question made it unavoidable necessary to critically examine ICT and gender issues in relation to the Orang Asli of Malaysia. Furthermore, we will attempt a critical exploration of ICT as a tool and a process of women's empowerment especially in regards to 'voice'.

⁴ Especially the indigenous communities like the ones used in this study.

Making sense of Gender and ICT Needs Analysis

‘NO, WOMAN is not our brother; through indolence and deceit we have made of her a being apart, unknown, having no weapon other than her sex, which not only means constant warfare but unfair warfare – adoring or hating, but never a straight friend, a being in a legion with esprit de corps and freemasonry – the defiant gestures of the eternal little slave (de Beauvoir 1949:60).’

Taken literally, the above quotation evidently the ideological differences between male and female’s “world” but one that exceeds the power of control completely to the male species of the mother earth. Beyond literal interpretation, Simone argued that;

Many men would still subscribe to these words of Laforgue; many think that there will always be ‘strife and dispute’, as Montaigne put it, and that fraternity will never be possible. The fact is that today neither men nor women are satisfied with each other (de Beauvoir, 1949).

Holmes (2009), writing on gender and everyday life, observed that;

Feminists were demanding better lives for women. They wanted women to have better education, better job with better pay, more control over whether or when to have children etc. Certainly, there have been many positive changes for women since Victorian times, and especially in the last half of the twentieth century. .. But many of these gains have not been widely enjoyed or have slipped away (2009:94)

Despite changes of women advancement, Walby (1997 cited in Holmes), pointed out that women continued to be at disadvantage within what remains a male-dominated society. During our fieldwork in the four Orang Asli’s settlements, it is not difficult to discover that these communities are purely agrarian and their lifestyle is generally simple. However, male dominance is evident. In this setting, a drastic shift in the direction of gender equality in their lifestyle will amount to misinterpretation of social realities. Hence, it is unshiftable to continue to stream along the notion that ICT is gender impartial (see Holmes in page 2 of this text).

As pointed out earlier, mainstream views of technology such as ICT often take it to be a technical tool that society can use, but not something that in itself is influenced by the society. This position is partially acknowledged by Brown and Czerniewicz (2007). According to these authors, research findings about gender differences and ICT access and use are complex and contradictory. This complexity arises as a result of insufficient analysis and examination of gender needs and usage of ICT. Despite the assumed narrowing gender gap in ICT usage (see Rice and Katz, 2003; Pejout, 2004; Wasserman and Richmond-Abbott, 2005; Gunn, 2003; Enoch and Soker, 2006, 2007), a detail analysis in the pattern of ICT usage for learning between gender by Brown and Czerniewicz (2007) established that:

That rather than a digital divide, our findings suggest a digital differentiation with growing and differing patterns of usage of ICTs for learning between male and female students. These differences appear to be context-dependent (particular types of activities and across different language groups) and more noticeable in the science disciplines. This suggests that gender and ICT use cannot be isolated and need to be considered in tandem with individuals’ “life histories” and specific clusters of circumstances.

However, it must be pointed that these studies fail to examine ICT needs assessment practices. Also, these mainstreams often ignore the differential influences of technology on the various sections of society, in turn leads technologies like ICT often portrayed as gender neutral. Perhaps, it is reasonable to assume that it is gender neutral given patriarchy forces are entrenched with “creative power”⁵. Thus, of those outside this creative power are unceremoniously integrated into the existing system with little or no contemplation of their choices. Minas (2000: 2) epitomized this one-sided representation of human society like this: “society is, in a word, sexist. It systematically favours men over women, and it engineers and maintains structures to ensure that men receive better treatment in both private and public life”.

Although there are several philosophical debates on gender and ICT, in this article, the discussion focuses on two approaches propounded by Marxist and Eco-feminist. According to Vogel (1983 cited in Melani and Greenhill, 2005), a Marxist’s position that every form of class society creates its own form of archetypal family and maintains the oppression of women at its centre. In traditional² family structures, Marxist argued that women serve to care for the next and current generation of workers at minimal cost to society or the state. Although alternative family forms⁶ are observable in the wake of current economic development, the Orang Asli (our case study in this paper) still practices the traditional model.

In Vogel (1983), Marxists argues that the imposition of this model as the ‘true’ or proper family unit has implications for the formation and socialization of all women’s identity. Although Marxists did not directly make reference to ICT and women, it is very likely that the family responsibilities and the isolation, may

⁵ According to Minas (2000:2), *Demi* has its Greek root in *demos* (man/person) and *ourgos* (worker). In Plato’s philosophy, *demiourgos* acquired connotations of creative, spiritual power as well. And Minas argued that word retains this meaning today. And feminist could well perceive themselves as *demiurges*—less power

⁶ For example, the same sex families

directly impact on their utilization of ICT when it is fully operational in these locations. In fact, during our data collection, when we enquired about the absence of female in our meetings, one of the elderly statesman politely explained: “Women have lots of work to attend to in the house and community... well there are children to attend to, food to cook and other activities that are numerous to recall here” (Elder1). Sometimes during our field-work, we wondered if these domestic chores and other reproductive activities would constraint women from fully utilizing the ICT’s products.

Likewise, the Eco-feminist approach argues that technology, like science, is part of the masculine project of the domination and control of women and nature. In buttressing the Marxist views, the masculinisation argument is a consequence of gender division of labour and the historical and cultural views. Given the fact that technology often reflects the male power as well as capitalist domination under the eco-feminist approach (see Wood 2000), the centrepiece of the mainstream depicts ICT as gender neutral is challenged. Furthermore, empirical evidence in this area has revealed that most women from the lower economic class⁷ are excluded from the benefits of ICT. Because base on our observation in field, it is apparent that about 95% female adult members of these communities were pre-occupied with numerous chores ranging from child-care to domestic chores. Once, these works are completed, these women walk to the surrounding forest and river beds in search fruits, vegetable, roots, fish or other food for their family. This data is concurrent with the elder 1’s statement. These numerous tasks in many instances hardly provide space and time for these women to attend our meeting or participate in our workshops and training.

From our perspective, technology should be made for human and not human for technology. The more recent critiques point to the dangers of putting technology ahead of people and of an uncritical acceptance of modern technology as something that works everywhere and provides immediate solutions to development challenges. The gendered approach argues that technology is not neutral, but depends on culture. This report takes this gendered/“technology as culture” approach as outlined above. Gurumurthy (2004) argues that we cannot overlook the fact that gender power operates within institutions in many insidious ways. Hence, women’s empowerment in the information society requires a constant examination of how gender relations as a dynamic cultural process are being negotiated and contested, in relation to the technology environment.

It must be noted a vast majority of the world population has yet to be reached by the internet or ICT in general. Therefore, what is the rationale in exploring the gender dimension as this paper pursues rather than advocate for universal coverage? The understanding here is, it is vital for gender inclusion and understanding at the very beginning of Need Analysis of ICT for the Orang Asli, rather than after the internalization which places men as the custodian of the technology and women as the observers. In many instances during the developmental and implementation period of many projects, the emphasis is often on male members rather than the female members of such communities (See World Bank 2004). In fact, during our fieldwork we observed that the limited ICT facilities available in these localities are mostly owned and operated by the male members of these communities. As Gurumurthy (2004) noted, the underside of history is full of examples of women negotiating their spaces in private and public domains. Moreover, the female members of these communities in which this study is exploring cannot afford to be on the underside while the male the *au fait*. This is because ICTs carries strong possibilities for empowerment of the excluded (see Gurumurthy 2004). Gurumurthy pointed out that the ICT technologies have some unique dimensions.

Methodology

As part of the qualitative method used in this study, direct observation presented us with a key advantage as it enhances the quality of data we gathered in the field. This is because respondents were oblivious of our data gathering as we observed them in their natural setting. Having said that, they willingly accepted our presence in their environment. In fact, from the commencement of the data collection in their settlement in May 2011, they were briefed in advance of our activities and the purpose of the research tagged “Need Analysis and ICT” in their community. Employing the direct observation and spending time with the Orang Asli to some extent can minimise errors, simply because we relied on pure observation in respondents’ natural setting. Other techniques such as focus group, interviews and questionnaires (quantitative methods) were employed in collecting information. For the purpose of this article, we concentrate only on data gathered from observation and interview techniques (qualitative method). Most of the questions posed during the interviews were semi-structured and open-ended research questions.

As discussed in the aforementioned empirical work, the usage of ICT is not gendered neutral. In addition, the understanding of social realities varies and differs between genders. This is often true when different sexes are schooled or socialized in different understanding of male/female activities or roles in their communities. This article used a non-probability sampling to select our respondents. This research population

⁷ In the discussion of gender and technology, it must be remembered that women have multiple identities – for example of class, ethnicity, caste, race, age – and that these interplay with gender to define women’s access to technology (Gurumurthy, 2004)

are the men and women of Semai and Temiar ethnic groups of the Orang Asli located in Kelantan and Pahang states of Malaysia. These settlements include Pos Gob and Pos Balar at Gua Musang, Kelantan as well as Lenjang and Sindrup at Kuala Lipis, Pahang. The choice for this group is based on the remoteness of the location as part of the University Malaysia Sarawak research and development in ICT⁸.

Women and the Orang Asli Society

The total population of Malaysia is currently approximately 27 million and the Orang Asli make up only 0.7% of this population (Colin Nicholas, 2011⁹). The Orang Asli, according to Lim (1997), are the indigenous minority people of Peninsular Malaysia. Lim noted that they are the descendants of Pleistocene-era inhabitants of the peninsula, that is, long before the establishment of Malay kingdoms. The Orang Asli population grew from 54,033 in 1969 to 92,529 in 1994 at the rate of 2.3 per cent yearly (Lim 1997 cited in Nicholas and Baer 2006). The above population figure has since increased. The Orang Asli are not a homogeneous group. Their diversity is seen through their cultures, norms, beliefs, and languages yet, the binding element as we noted during our fieldwork is their holistic relationship—interdependency and intermarriage within the various ethnic groups. Through intermarriage, for example, this unique people have found means to acknowledge the important roles (reproductive and productive) women play in their communities. According to Chupil and Josep (2003):

The involvement of women in the matters concerning the community is beginning to be accepted by the Orang Asli community. There are villagers led by the women to claim the rights of the Orang Asli and to speak about their opinions to the local authority. The women began to realise that they need to have the confidence and are aware too that they have to take action and work hand-in-hand with the men in finding suitable solutions

This milestone accredited to women in the Orang Asli's settlements is by no means a small feat. It is foreseeable that women's greater involvement in ICT would strengthen and enhance their empowerment.

Given the work of Chupil and Josep, we would expect an increase in women's participation in decision making levels and voices outside their home space from 2003 to present. Unfortunately, these patterns were not observed during our fieldwork in the Orang Asli's settlements, especially at Pos Gob. Women were hardly seen when we met the communities at the balai raya (community hall). At Pos Lenjang our respondents mentioned of the existing of female penghulu among few Orang Asli's settlements. However, throughout our fieldwork activities we did not come across any female penghulu in all the villages that we visited. This implies that the notion of women's greater involvement in the community matters appears to be decreasing rather than increasing. The possible explanation for once women had important responsibilities and functions but, are now 'labelled' as "male-only" could be because these alien gender roles were adopted as a consequence of Orang Asli came into contact with male-dominated cultures during the last few centuries. Baer et al. (2006) argued that it is the stealthy, relentless erosion of Orang Asli life in general, and the life of Orang Asli women in particular, provides a true account of the problems of Orang Asli life today.

This stereotypical depiction of women as second to their male counterparts reinforces the disempowerment status in the society. By ignoring their position in their society as 'fundamental to the survival and continue the existence of the Orang Asli' allow the popular assumption that it's a 'man's world' to protuberance them. The full potential of Orang Asli women's empowerment could only be realised when they can independently take decisions without recourse to men as masters.

In fact, since the 1975 UN conference on women, the world has come to recognize officially women as vital development partners in the world economy. From (gender cluster) this "need analysis and the ICT", we hope to promote and advocate gender equality in both roles and usage of ICT. In so doing, we embrace the fundamental proposition of Moser (1993) on gender planning and gender strategic needs.

Potential Benefits of ICT: Does Gender Matter in The Orang Asli Communities?

ICT has the potential to empower women as well as given them 'voice', or right to be heard. Currently, issues relating to Orang Asli are directly tabled and discussed within and among the male members of their communities. During our data collection (at Pos Lanjang) and in many instances too, we observed the presence of women in our meetings. Some of them even voiced out their opinions. However, such voice is diminutive and is hardly a representative of the women in the village (s). On one occasion, a respondent (a Penghulu in Pos Lanjang) was asked whether women in the kampong have a formal institute to discuss their needs. He responded "No!". Raising his hands and eyebrows in a gesture that appear to be saying; "women have no business being

⁸ With the launching of the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) by Dr Mahathir Mohamad, (1981-2003), circa 1996, the management of the University Malaysia Sarawak aiming to contribute towards the wellbeing of rural communities through ICT embarked on various researches to ensure remote rural areas were not left out of the MSC project.

⁹ The estimation was put forward by Colin Nicholas acceptance speech on the UNDP's award for the activities of COAC on 27th October 2011.

here at the meeting”. According to him, women are free to see him to discuss their needs individually but not collectively. Given the reserved nature of female Orang Asli, the existing channel in discussing women matter with the Penghulu has its disadvantage. On the other hand, it is argued that the launching of ICT will provide women a means to voice out their needs and to interact with other women in the community and elsewhere. Therefore, the collective voice can be enhanced through this powerful tool regardless of their educational level or even socio-economic position in their communities and families. Fundamentally, a collective voice enhance groups’ demands, the possibility of being included in the state’s policy or programmes.

The major benefit of ICT to the Orang Asli women lies not only in its ability to empower them and making their voice heard beyond their communal domain. In deed, the ICT provides not only a platform for collective voice; it also allows women to access to a vast array of valuable and relevant resources, which can be beneficial in their communities. This ranges from health information on childbirth and rearing, nutrition to e-commerce to market their handicrafts and art, and others. In this context, ICT provides a much larger support than any community head or even the service midwives can provide. In addition, we observed that Orang Asli have amazing skills in producing handicrafts. However, given the existing logistic and mobility problems, they rely totally on middle traders to buy their products, at give away prices. With the establishment of telecentre in their villagers, ICT provides them a channel to market their products to both local and international markets. The effectiveness of ICT application, according to Leilua (2003), depends on the needs of communities and how communities can use the technology strategies to meet those needs.

As noted above the major benefit of ICT to the Orang Asli women lies in its ability to empower them and making their voice heard beyond their communal domain. Fundamentally, their collective voices enhance chances of their needs being included in the policy making of both the state and central governments. The enthusiasm shown by our female respondents (male as well) indicates their keenness towards the establishment of tele-centre in their community.

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II. Conclusion

With the shift towards a ‘knowledge society’, the role of interactive communication technologies (ICTs) such as email and the Internet in sustainable community and economic development is increasingly important (see Mansell and Wehn, 1998). The effective use of ICTs in community development projects has been argued to have many potentially empowering benefits and effects, such as greater inclusion, cooperation, participation and well-being (see also Milio, 1996; Scott et al., Diamond and Smith, 1997; Simpson et al, 2001). These potential and empowering benefits will not be fully materialized if women (Orang Asli women) are marginalized in the entire process of ICT in their communities. Auspiciously, this study has revealed that an utter inclusive rather than exclusive of the different gender needs is important for successful implementation and management of the telecentre in the Orang Asli’s communities. Such inclusiveness will ensure women’s voice is heard and the empowerment goals of telecentre achieved by both the women and men of the four Pos we studied.

Building on lessons learnt from eBario¹⁰ initiatives, commissioned the Needs Analysis Project on ICT and Orang Asli in February 2011 (see ISITI-CoERI¹¹ biannual Newsletter). The working framework adopted a holistic approach towards the implementation of ICT among rural and remote areas of Malaysia. In essence, the project aims to foster community engagement towards the goals of ICT. Here, holistic approach seeks to understand the people’s behaviour or acceptance to change or technology. This is because people’s behaviour or acceptance of new change is influenced by adherence to a particular socio-cultural inheritance. Therefore, in-depth understanding of the people’s cultural characteristics is vital towards introducing and sustaining a new technology. Employing a holistic approach equally indicates that no section or faction of the community is irrelevant. Therefore, the existing of gender cluster is as essential (if not more) as other clusters in the project. It is even more indispensable given that women constitute almost half of the population who are visibly involved in both the productive and reproductive activities of their communities.

In keeping with the interpretive social sciences, interactions and beliefs of people create reality—a reality which is a product of social processes. Through this process and learning curves, an in-depth understanding of the working framework or structure of both women and men is required. Thus, regardless of the many shortcomings that we experienced, we were able to establish (to a certain degree) how the men and women of the Orang Asil manage their practical affairs in their everyday life. We have observed that female respondents are the CEOs of their home affairs and sometimes beyond their home domain (productive activities). Women were assumed to possess a higher social competence (person orientation) than men. Besides,

¹⁰ Created in 1999

¹¹ Institute of Social Informatics and Technological Innovation-Centre of Excellence for Rural Information

being the primary educators and mothering, many female respondents were enthusiastic about their children's development and future well-being in the ever advancing ICT world.

Our study noted with keen interest that educating women in these Pos on the use and management of the telecentre in their locations is particularly valuable as a strategic investment in human resource. Such edification will significantly impact not only on their development, but also on that of their families and communities. In addition, it will act as a catalyst in virtually every dimension of development and poverty alleviation in their villages; with outcomes such as reduced fertility, reduced infant mortality, improved child survival, better family health, increased educational attainment, higher productivity, and general improvement in their economic situation. Educating these women in the know-how of ICT will provide individuals with the capabilities in understanding their lives and social environment as well as equipping them with problem solving skills.

Basically, when people manage their practical affairs in everyday life, there is a tendency to treat social knowledge as a pragmatic accomplishment. Such accomplishment can be translated into proper management of community amenities which the ICT project aims to provide in the form of a telecentre. This is plausibly understandable. For example, in India, a 50 per cent quota for women in village councils is adopted, research shows that these women make decisions with better outcomes for communities when in charge with the budget decision (The Star, March 2011). In relation to the ICT development in the rural areas, its sustainability is very important, and women have a greater role and commitments towards the continuity and function as well. This is clearly illustrated in our fieldwork when our communities were asked 'whom would you suggest to attend ICT training in your family'. While men delegated such opportunity to children, women, on the other hand, appointed themselves. In sum, it is apparent that the socio-culture or the power relations between men and women are transversal. Hence, the importance and necessity of putting gender relations at the centre of this need analysis community development project of ICT. More importantly, it is crucial to understand the specific dynamics on which women and men have a preference. Significantly it is vital to put strategies in place to increase their clout and achieve empowerment.

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