# Proposal for an Asia Research Program on Gender and Citizenship in the Information Society

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**IT for Change**

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## A. Introduction: Why a Feminist Lens on Citizenship in the Information Society?

*This is a proposal for a research program titled 'Gender and Citizenship in the Information Society' that aims to understand the gendered context of the emerging techno-social paradigm. By exploring how social realities mediated by technology open up spaces as well as pose challenges for women, especially marginalised women, and how the concept of citizenship can be useful in understanding and addressing the new context, the proposed program seeks to build a theoretical framework as well as broad directions for policy.*

The Internet and linked information and communications technologies (ICTs) are changing the nature of social organisation, and the very notion of community. Nancy Fraser[1] refers to four such communities that do not necessarily map into one another - the imagined community, or nation; the political (or civic) community, or citizenry; the communications community, or public; and the community of fate, or the set of stakeholders affected by various developments. From a feminist perspective, the emerging public sphere has disrupted traditional gender orders and in the far-reaching society-wide changes that we are witness to, transformation to gender relations is a central reality. For instance, Fatema Mernissi points to how the strategic issue mobilizing the Arab World today is al-fitna raqmiya (digital chaos), or the destruction of space frontiers by new technologies that have destroyed the hudud, the space frontier which divided the private arena assigned to women and the public one where adult males exercised their authority[2]. While emerging configurations of the public-private seem to open up opportunities for challenging unequal gender orders, this moment of flux is not without challenges for women's empowerment. In its opportunities and challenges, the changing public sphere is not only characterised by the exclusions arising out of unequal and stratified access of individuals and groups to digital technologies, but also by the imbalances inherent in the very nature of the emerging digital environment, being shaped by the existing power structures constituting the political economy of digital spaces. **Thus, in the wider techno-social context that is having a transformatory impact on gender relations, the opportunities and challenges for women's empowerment will need to be grasped in a nuanced way, juxtaposing the analysis of gender relations with the broader questions of participation and power.**

While explorations of the ICT phenomenon in relation to gender comprise an emerging body of work, for feminist scholars in gender and development, especially from the South, the domain of 'information society studies' has been removed from the political field of their enquiry, and ICTs are seen mostly as a category of analysis of globalization studies.

The field of ICTs and Development is important to feminist interdisciplinary exposition for many reasons. It is not only because the pervasive socio-political phenomenon of the information society manifests in changing social institutions, creating new fault-lines in social hierarchies, but also since global aid agencies, nation states and civil society organisations have in their own ways sought to appropriate the ICT context in visualizing and determining development and social change. The assumptions about the realm of gender, development and ICTs require closer and rigorous examination, going back to the basics of development as a contested terrain (answering

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1  Fraser, Nancy. (2007): "Transnationalising the Public Sphere: On the Legitimacy and Efficacy of Public Opinion in a Post-Westphalian World". Theory, Culture & Society, 24(4), pp. 7-30.

2  Mernissi, Fatema (2005): "Digital Scheherazade - The Rise of Women as Key Players in the Arab Gulf Communication Strategies", Excerpts from the longer English manuscript, Rabat, September 2005. Available online http://www.mernissi.net/books/articles/digital_scheherazade.html, accessed on 16 Dec 2009.

questions about whose information society and what kind of information society) and to gender justice as a radical, political project.

The various threads of enquiry on gender and ICTs – conceptual work on cyber-feminism, research in the area of work, labour and the IT industry, scholarship on the changing political economy of media and studies of women as beneficiaries of grassroots ICTs and Development (ICTD) projects - have no doubt made significant contributions to feminist discourse, but they have more or less remained disparate strands, in a domain that is still nascent in its theoretical exposition on gender, development and ICTs.

There is a need hence to build a more cogent theoretical framework to grasp and interpret the shifting development canvas and changing gender orders in relation to the emerging information society. Such a theoretical canopy will need inter-disciplinary work that can provide concepts not only for analysis, but also for action. The structural discontinuity marked by the advent of new ICTs therefore requires new analytical tools no doubt, but the imperative is also to discern directions for policy and practice. From a gender perspective, this calls for conceptual tools to undertake gender analysis with respect to the macro, meso and micro context of the institutional changes characterising the contemporary techno-social paradigm. These tools need to be adequate to develop a coherent framework that brings together concepts to unpack both the power shifts intrinsic to new technology mediated social structures and processes, and the gendered facets of such processes and of the power shifts. Such a framework should be able to explain the nature of access that women, especially marginalised women, have to the emerging techno-social spaces as well as the nature of control they exercise in these spaces.

This proposal for a research program posits the notion of 'citizenship' as a conceptual lens to understand the way gender power works and can potentially shift on the macro-meso-micro continuum of the emerging information society context. **The lens of citizenship seems appropriate for two reasons – it enables a study of the changing context of the rights, entitlements and agency of marginalised women as a social category in the emerging social relationships architecture effected by new technologies; it also provides an entry point to interpret the contemporary through 'social' theories rather than only 'economic' ones that have held sway over the analysis of ICTs and development.** The deployment of market frameworks rather than a social-analytical approach to knowledge has dominated much of the literature in ICTD, and alternate frameworks that move beyond economic matrices alone are much needed for a nuanced analysis of the transformatory context and the potential of new technologies for gender equality.

Building on the existing body of work on gender and development and the existing scholarship on gender and new technologies, this program will explore the way the emerging techno-social paradigm is lending new meanings to, and being shaped by new meanings of, citizenship. The citizenship lens – described later in this document in some detail - will be used to study different information society sites, to capture the changing order of social relationships and structures from the standpoint of socially disadvantaged women, exploring how their citizenship is being contested, expanded and transformed.

This terrain of enquiry is exploratory and will need many points of entry that connect development and gender discourse to the changing content of the private-public divide, democracy, participation, public interest, capitalism, transnationalism, governance, citizenship, freedoms and rights. The rest of this document will attempt to capture some dimensions of the citizenship lens as a tentative

framework, and present some analytical threads that set an indicative direction for research, in a domain that is in the making.

**The overall objectives of the proposed research program are as follows:**

**•To understand how the emerging techno-social paradigm shaped by new information and communication technologies recasts the citizenship of women, particularly, marginalised women.**
**•To explore how technological affordances[3] interact with the social and institutional environment to shape women's citizenship.**
**•To propose ways forward for practice and policy in relation to information and communication domains that place women's citizenship at the centre.**
**•To build a network of researchers and scholars engaged in policy research and advocacy on information society and gender issues in the Asia region.**

The next section will outline the structural elements of the information society paradigm and introduce the conceptual lens of citizenship in some detail. It will also illustrate how the structural shifts can be interpreted through the lens of citizenship, explicating some broad areas of analysis that are representative of the directions this program will take.


## B. Structural Changes of the Information Society

The basic assumption of this program is that information society changes represent a significant power shift; a changing context of institutional rules, structures and processes wherein social relationships are realigning. The many dimensions of digital reality shape the social, the economic, the political and the subjective. They produce new spatialities and temporalities that alter social relationships, dislocating notions of private and public and reordering membership in communities - generating new solidarities, as well as new exclusions.

As online and offline experiences become extensions of one another, a range of overlapping new possibilities for social and political participation emerge in the current context. As Benkler asserts, these are however shaped through the institutional ecology of the digital environment, which he characterises as a "battle over the institutional ecology of the digital environment". **Essentially, the canvas of change in this emerging institutional ecology is the tension between authoritarian and democratic forces; the tendencies for control and consolidation versus those for the democratisation of information-communication arenas. Through the power of global capital, hegemonies of language, content, software and applications controlling information flows on the Internet are entrenched and sustained. But, as Benkler argues, the potential for gains in terms of autonomy, democracy, justice, and a critical culture, can materialise depending on the social practices and institutional arrangements of the particular social context[4].**

The transformatory content in the information society is contained in the alternative spaces or counter-hegemonic forces in the digital ecology. Despite the control by corporate and statist forces over the digital environment, in each of its layers, there have been countervailing forces. At the

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3   The concept of technology "affordances" offers a useful middle ground between determinist and social constructivist perspectives.
4   Benkler, Yochai (2006): "The Wealth of Networks - How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom ". New Haven and London : Yale University Press .

physical layer, the development of wireless devices that allow user-owned networks; at the logical layer, the use of open standard-setting processes and free software; and at the content layer, cultural movements like creative commons suggest movement towards non-competitive, collaborative, shared, commons-based practices and cultures.[5] **The emerging techno-social order thus represents a field that is contested. It is also in a dialectic with the legislative-policy and economic environment of the arenas of information and communication. Examining the current trajectory and potential relevance of the digital environment for development and gender equality is thus a significant question for policy and practice.**

The structural changes marking the information society paradigm will be analysed through the lens of citizenship, and more specifically, through the lens of gender and citizenship, in the subsequent sections.

## C. Understanding the Information Society through the Conceptual Framework of Citizenship

### C1 How do we understand the concept of citizenship?

The notion of citizenship is seen to have three inter-related dimensions: political participation, rights and obligations, and membership in a political community (Cohen, 1999)[6]. While both human rights and citizenship are notions anchored in the philosophical traditions of equality, and are indeed connected, there are important conceptual distinctions between them. Human rights have been used by minority groups to demand changes in national constitutions and constitutional rights while citizenship rights have provided an inspiration to the international human rights regime to entertain new domains of rights. In the contemporary context, citizenship has assumed significance for struggles (especially by feminists), of recognition and redistribution, and the assertion of rights and specific claims in particular contexts, and thus the notion has been stretched to include political rights and issues of identity, and more recently, protection from environmental and security threats.[7]

While human rights provide an universalist frame of reference, citizenship, extending into multi-layered categories - moral, legal, identity-based, participatory and cosmopolitan - is located within a more particularist frame, and is conceptually coherent with the empowerment and active participation of individual citizens in the context of a specific political community[8]. Further, a definition of citizenship in terms of social practices should help us to understand the dynamic nature of the notion. As Turner elucidates, the concept of social practice is intended to pinpoint to idea of citizenship as a genuinely sociological, as distinct from a legal or political, notion. Secondly, this definition of citizenship places the concept squarely in the debate about inequality, power differences and social class, because citizenship is inevitably and necessarily bound up with the problem of the unequal distribution of resources in the society."[9]

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5   Ibid
6   Cohen, J. L. (1999): "Changing Paradigms of Citizenship and the Exclusiveness of the Demos", International Sociology, 14(3), pp. 245-268.
7   Basok, Tanya, Ilcan, Suzan, Noonan, Jeff. (2006): "Citizenship, Human Rights, and Social Justice", Citizenship Studies, 10(3), pp. 267-73.
8   Kiwan, Dina. (2005): "Human Rights and Citizenship: An Unjustifiable Conflation?", Journal of Philosophy of Education, 39(1), pp. 37-50.
9   Turner, Bryan S. (1993): "Contemporary Problems in the Theory of Citizenship," in Bryan S. Turner (ed.) Citizenship and Social Theory. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Citizenship, as an instrument for social justice and equity, becomes important to feminist analysis and intervention. First and foremost, as Gita Sen[10] elaborates, feminist politics is about completing the grand project of democracy and of citizenship. **Citizenship, she argues, is to be defined not in its narrow sense as the right to vote, but in the sense feminists have been defining and redefining it to mean entitlements, rights, responsibilities and agency.** In the present context, when social structures are in a flux, and a new social order is formative, struggles for gender justice and the expansion of women's citizenship, become significant.

Secondly, the once subversive idea of human rights is now increasingly coopted to lend legitimacy to the practices of powerful global economic actors with an emphasis on individualism and limited government, corresponding to civil and political freedoms, and offered as a justification for withdrawing welfare and social entitlements from the poor.[11] Given that such cooption of the human rights framework shapes policy processes for inclusion and their implementation adversely, it may be more useful to use the concept of citizenship, which provides a more adequate framework for conceptualising change that addresses the rights of the marginalised. Citizenship, as a concept, can accommodate notions and methods of participation, representation and power sharing, through which the promise of equality may be made effective, that are radically different from existing ones.

Thirdly, in the contemporary context, citizenship itself is a concept that has had to be reinterpreted. Economic globalization, privatization and deregulation, the rise of the international human rights regime in terms of its influence in national contexts, and the growth of information and communications technologies have in many ways transformed the meaning of citizenship. The increasingly diffused nature of the addressee of rights, claims and entitlements renders the study of information society developments in specific contexts from the vantage of marginalised women's social citizenship important both to development practice and policy aimed at greater gender equality.

**The proposed research program will examine different sites of change, shaped by, and interacting with, digital technologies. These sites located across the overlapping realms of the post-national, national, sub-national/local and online spaces of the information society, will be studied for understanding how techno-social factors shape marginalised women's citizenship; whether and how women participate in these spaces and what the role of the broader institutional context is, and can be, in promoting their equal social membership in these spaces.**

## C2. Citizenship and the Information Society – Opportunities and Challenges

The previous section on the propensities of the information society paradigm has to be the starting point for interpreting citizenship in the information society context. **It is in the exploration of the tension between formal notions of citizenship associated with boundedness of the nation state, and the conception of citizenship as a normative project or an aspiration for equitable social membership contained in the promise of an emerging egalitarian techno-social order that change, or the potential for change, in the present social relationships architecture can be mapped.** Such a mapping would explore the complexities in the emerging discourse around inclusion, participation and social citizenship of the marginalised, also identifying the factors that mediate and shape inclusion and exclusion.

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10  Sen, Gita (2006): 'Feminist politics in a fundamentalist world', Minerva, vol.30, pp.16-18.
11  Evans, Tony (2001): "Citizenship and Human Rights in the Age of Globalization". Alternatives: Social Transformation and Humane Governance, 26(1).

The promise of new technologies for shaping an equitable  social membership structure is rather evident in many contemporary developments:

•With respect to national and sub-national spaces in the Latin American region, new technologies have been seen to play a decisive role during the time of citizenship regime shift, increasing capacity for mobilization among indigenous groups. Where the extent of technology development in rural areas was sufficient, indigenous movements were able to take control of this technology to increase the capacity of their movements to pose a strong challenge to the state; conversely, where the extent of rural technology diffusion was stunted, indigenous mobilization was less successful[12].

•Arjun Appadurai's work on Mumbai-based urban activist movements[13] draws attention to the emancipatory possibilities that 'globalisation from below' presents in the potential for new technologies to 'deepen democracy' and facilitate 'cross-border activism' through transnational advocacy networks. According to Appadurai, these transnational advocacy networks provide new horizontal modes for articulating the democratic politics of the local. Such potential of techno-social processes and spaces suggests orientations of citizenship in global, post-national terms beyond the territorial boundaries of the nation state.

•The information society has not only heralded sub-national sites of citizenship constituted in localized forms of transnational politics, but also sub-national networks that signal a new geography of politics[14].

•At national levels, changes to governance systems through use of ICTs (e-governance) have often meant  new levels of  public information transparency, and new modes of state-citizen interactions, which portend changes to the level of involvement of marginalised groups  in national and local level politics.

•In the online environment, one finds a multiplicity of communities with many forms of governance. Such multiple identities and 'community mobility' can be seen as making possible  a participant-citizen actively engaged in political life[15].

**However, the emerging architecture of social relationships must also be problematised through a deeper interrogation of the categories of inclusion, participation and social membership. The emancipatory changes are themselves interlocked with a host of factors that determine how power is distributed, reproduced, and contested in the present social relationships constellation wrought by new technologies.** Some illustrative examples of  this complexity are outlined below:

•The   political counter-power of resistance movements on the Internet faces an ever greater asymmetry that is due to the fact that the powers that be not only control  traditional resources like financial power, but also some very unique new ones. These concern the control that corporates have over the emerging techno-social architecture,with unprecedented totalising possibilities on a

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12 Green-Barber, Lindsay (2008). "Indigenous Peoples, Technological Globalization, and Social Mobilization". *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the MPSA Annual National Conference, Palmer House Hotel, Hilton, Chicago, IL*, Apr 03. Available online http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p267575_index.html, accessed on 16 Dec 2009.
13 Appadurai Arjun (2002) "Deep democracy: urban governmentality and the horizon of politics". Public Culture 14(1):21–47
14 Sassen, Sasken (2003): "Towards Post-national and Denationalized Citizenship" in Isin, Engin F. & Turne, Bryan S. (ed.), *Handbook of Citizenship Studies*. Sage Publications Ltd.
15 Hartzog, Paul & Scholz, Trebor (undated): "Towards a critique of the social web". Re-public. Available online http://www.re-public.gr/en/?p=201, accessed on 16 Dec 2009.

global scale, coupled with theimmunities from public interest regulation due to the vacuum at the global level in terms of any political oversight of this architecture.

•Social media may offer an array of communication possibilities and provide platforms for voicing citizens' opinions, but they do so without filling a significant institutional gap vis-a-vis a new connected global society. In the absence of a political agora, the freedom of expression promoted by such spaces is peculiar for its lack in terms of participation in political decision making[16]. So while new technologies may provide spaces to expand individual freedoms, they seem to do little to build a democratic discourse for constructing alternative, emancipatory social structures. The rhetoric around 'information democracy' may thus conflate the categories of individual and citizen, recasting participation as self-propelled individual communication rather than a political engagement in the context of a political community with shared destiny.

•In the formal governance spaces sought to be re-engineered through e-governance, new technologies seem to be deployed towards techno-managerial ends rather than for systemic transformation through new information and communication architectures. The recasting of the citizen as consumer in these frameworks nullifies the paradigmatic opportunity for equity and social justice through innovations in democratic governance.

•Sites of citizenship constructed through new technologies must also account also for the political economy of global governance itself in current conjuncture. Solidarities associated with emerging post-national communities may not necessarily portend the advent of a global citizenship for marginalised groups. The idea of 'international citizen' has been critiqued for a hegemony of civil and political rights, and a neo-liberal recasting of economic and social claims as aspirations rather than universal human rights[17]. In the vacuum left by the state as the main political actor in global politics, the conditions of globalization seem to consolidate the interests of the powerful. As Shafir and Brysk's[18] point out, the effectiveness of human rights in a globalizing era will continue to depend on their transformation into citizenship, that is, the formation of and membership in a global political community with its own solidarity, institutions, and corresponding capacity to offer security and social justice.

•Alongside an political-institutional vacuum at the global level that renders the claims-making by marginalised groups ineffective, is the fact that rule-setting in the present context is a task assumed by international and transnational organisations lacking in democratic credentials. For instance, Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), the technical non-profit body that governs the Internet's naming system, signed an Affirmation of Commitments (AoC) with the US Government's Department of Commerce recently that even as it may have, to some extent, eased the unilateral control of the US government over the organisation, does not imply a democratisation of the governance of the global public resource that the Internet represents. Dominated as it is by large businesses, in particular US-based ones, ICANN, despite its public interest claims, has been increasingly criticised for its apathy to non-commercial users, while its accountability to the larger public still on the periphery of the the emerging techno-social paradigm is almost non-existent.

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16 Zachariadis, Dimitrios (undated): "Public information belongs to the public". Re-public. Available online http://www.re-public.gr/en/?p=314, accessed on 16 Dec 2009.

17 Tony, Evans (2000): "Citizenship and Human Rights in the Age of Globalization". Alternatives: Global, Local, Political , Oct-Dec 2000, 25(4), pp. 415-438

18 Brysk, Alison, and Gershon Shafir (2004): "Globalization and the Citizenship Gap" in Brysk, Alison, and Gershon Shafir (ed). *People Out of Place: Globalization, Human Rights, and the Citizenship Gap*. London: Taylor & Francis Inc.

The above discussion amplifies the dynamic and non-linear nature of the emerging social order and the challenges inherent in the realisation of an equitable social membership for the marginalised. A gender analysis of these complex trends presented in the next section explicates some possible analytical openings for the proposed research program.

## D. Women's Citizenship in the Information Society

The digital environment, as described earlier, underlies a capitalist and also statist consolidation, but it also privileges values such as collaboration, and institutional forms and mores that promote greater openness and inclusion. What is at one level "a capitalist transformation may also be characterized as a democratic transition,"[19] and it is in this realm of possibilities and challenges that the critical  link between gender and women's citizenship on the one hand and the affordances[20] of the digital environment and  its legal, economic and social trajectories, on the other, can be plotted.

Definitionally, women's citizenship in the information society assumes their access to, and a central role in, the 'network' society, which in itself is gendered. A lot of evidence has been gathered that cultural norms, women's comparative lack of resources and ownership of media, and the marginalisation of women's interests in infrastructure and technology policies combine to construct new exclusions. **But mapping women's citizenship in the community constellation of contemporary times is not only about a study of  women's access to new technologies; it is about politicization and radicalization of the access discourse so that the core feminist question about power, justice and equity can be addressed in its full implications. From search engines and their non-transparent architecture, and the entrenched gender biases of ostensibly open and collaborative platforms like the wikipedia, to the increasing oligopolistic corporatization of the Internet, there exist multiple vantages of enquiry about new technologies, gender and women's citizenship.** The social locations of women, and their class, caste, race, age and ethnic identities are important in this examination.

While a multiplicity of entry points exist that can explore, nuance, validate or problematise the gender and citizenship framework being suggested here, some such issues that can trigger possible directions of enquiry through a research program like this are presented below. This sub-section juxtaposes the possibilities with the complexities in relation to the citizenship of  women, casting the information society debate in gendered terms. These are some indicative areas intended to identify illustrative categories that by no means exhaust the possible angles of inquiry.

## D1. Themes of Enquiry

Theme 1. Local resistance, global solidarities and "denationalisation of citizenship"[21]
The information society opportunity can enable an assertion by women of their claims, rights and entitlements through localised practices of citizenship in relation to their embedded realities, often shaped in reference to forces that are national or global. For example, from 2002 onwards, the feminist movement in Costa Rica strategically used digital technologies  in order to resist the Free Trade Agreement between the United States of America and the Central America and Dominican

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19  Gurumurthy, Anita (2009): "Employment of ICT - Towards Effective Realisation of MDGs". Paper presented at the Commission on Social, Ethical and Legal Issues – WITFOR, 27 Aug, pp. 3.

20  The concept of technology "affordances" offers a useful middle ground between determinist and social constructivist perspectives.

21  Sassen, Sasken (2003): "Towards Post-national and Denationalized Citizenship" in Isin, Engin F. & Turne, Bryan S. (ed.), *Handbook of Citizenship Studies*. Sage Publications Ltd.

Republic (CAFTA) to make their proposals and concerns visible. In Costa Rica, the Internet became a virtual meeting point where content was uploaded by academics and downloaded, printed and distributed in communities; where podcasts of rural women stating their ideas were uploaded by local organizations and broadcast through radio channels and women's leadership and the collective use of technology resulted in a huge mobilization around, and democratization of, the issues at stake, even if the referendum against CAFTA was lost by a narrow margin[22].

This example not only illuminates the power of new technologies for social mobilization and action, but it also denotes, in the current context of economic globalization and a realignment in the relationships between the state, citizen and the market, a denationalisation of citizenship, often with negative implications for the citizenship rights of marginalised women. While new technologies seem to provide a bedrock for community and solidarity and for the politicization of agenda, the contextual economic and political factors impinging upon sub-national, local levels, clearly seem to intercept the realization of rights. How do techno-social platforms redefine the struggles and solidarities for women's citizenship and how do they interact with the political economy of specific local contexts hence become important issues.

Theme 2. New freedoms and the neo-liberal feminine subject
While online spaces provide new freedoms and possibilities for women constrained by social norms, a critical feminist standpoint is needed to unpack the structures and hegemonic masculinities shaping women's membership and participation in the sites of social membership made possible by new technologies. As Gill[23] observes astutely, the dominant figure of the autonomous, active, desiring subject in the new media context is part of the construction of the neo-liberal feminine subject, a resexualisation of women's bodies that in its supposed subjectification, has turned out to be objectification in new and even more pernicious guise. Not only is the economic logic of the network society of serious concern, but the less visible and powerful grids that determine the 'emancipation' in these sites require to be framed and interrogated. The freedoms of the emerging context may therefore need to be unpacked.

Theme 3. The emerging public sphere, public discourse and gender
While the Internet seems to generate a politics of presence and privilege the recognition of specific forms and experiences of exclusion and difference, say for instance in web 2.0 tools, whether this does enrich deliberative democracies, gendering public debate, is an important but under-theorised area. As the axis distinguishing the public and private is shifting, the public seems to be witness to a loss of a multiplicity of perspectives, marking a massive private consumption in public that attests for an a-political public sphere where difference gets suppressed. Participants in this emerging public seem to be 'captives' of the subjectivity of their own personal experience, which remains private even if it is multiplied. So, while at one level a massive homogenising global public sphere is being further strengthened, the multiple counter publics are now 'public spheres of choice', aligning along class, ethnic, gender and such boundaries, causing a narrow, inbreeding social discourse and deeper exclusions that strike at the very root of political deliberation and a negotiation around differences across social categories. However, a thorough assessment of how despite the banality of some practices that represent private consumption in public, gender politics may be re-articulated radically with changes to the asymmetries separating the private from the public and the feminine from the masculine, is needed.[24]

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22 Salas, Margarita. "The Internet and Citizenship - Applying a Gender Lens". IGF 2009 Meeting. Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, 18 Nov 2009.; http://www.itforchange.net/media/Gender_and_Citizenship_workshop-MargaritaSalas-IGF2009.pdf ; accessed on 20th December 2009.
23 Gill, Rosalind (2003): "From Sexual Objectification to Sexual Subjectification: The Resexualisation of Women's Bodies in the Media". Feminist Media Studies, 3 (1). pp. 100-106. London: Taylor & Francis Inc.

In relation to the local public sphere, community media (radio and video) can promote critical and collective pedagogies, legitimize alternate knowledge, and bring gender debates into the public sphere. The local public however, can by no means be fetishised. For women, local patriarchies can be hardest to negotiate, given their embeddedness in local culture and their stakes in the community and family. An exploration of local digital media in its relevance for gendering public discourse and the role of regulatory policy frameworks and local cultures in influencing outcomes for women's citizenship are significant areas of inquiry.

Theme 4. New Paradigms of Local Governance and Participatory Development

Through greater transparency and openness of information, ICT systems enable communities to access public information, as well as to contest the same, to monitor the accountability of public services. Engagement with ICT systems at the local governance level provide the meso-institutional learning ground for marginalised women to access policy and governance spaces beyond their immediate geographies. Public information is more accessible in the new ecology, and also potentially, co-constructed by communities. These spaces for structural changes in the relationship between the community and the state have the potential for a dramatic realignment of power relationships between poor marginalised women and development institutions, and are of much relevance to processes of local development and their redefinition from the perspective of women's realities and hence, a useful area of study.

Theme 5. Technology Governance and Gender Politics

As the Internet and related ICTs build the spatial and temporal architecture of a new digital world, the governance of these technologies is a key political issue. As of now, it is unclear  how a viable global governance order will pan out in relation to ICTs, notably, the Internet. In the meanwhile, powerful countries, such as the OECD group[25], makes policies that then set the default standards for developing countries, since the ICT context is inextricably global. This burgeoning global democratic deficit itself is a key issue for citizenship claims of marginalised women. Gender justice is linked directly to governance questions about content on the Internet, social networking spaces, technical architecture issues like network neutrality and the global information architecture as represented in the politics of search engines. Not only are online spaces gendered but how gender gets positioned in the discourse on global technology governance can have far-reaching consequences for women's citizenship in the emerging public sphere, including in relation to the 'local'. Conversely, it would also be instructive to look at the substance of a democratised local public and  the  implications such local publics will have for the normative principles underlying global governance, from a feminist standpoint.


# D2. Policy Analysis

Reimagining an alternative politics of the information society also requires an inquiry into the institutional ecology. Public policies in relation to ICTs and development – as analysed earlier – have a strong influence in shaping outcomes in specific contexts in the digital environment. Also, public policies have an important influence on gender orders in society. While not a guarantee for access to substantive citizenship, evolving policies are a vital resource, an anchor for considering citizenship as a process, rather than a status or a set of rights[26].  Hence in applying the citizenship lens to interpret gender in the information society, policy analysis becomes vital.

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24 Kambouri, Nelly & Hatzopoulos, Pavlos (undated): "The banality of blogging or how does the web affect the public-private dichotomy". Re-public. Available http://www.re-public.gr/en/?p=165#more-165, accessed on 16 Dec 2009.

25  An OECD Ministerial was recently held in Seoul on the theme Future of the Internet Economy with the avowed purpose of making Internet policies.

The deployment of a depoliticized version of women's empowerment into precepts and practices of development has been central in the way ICTs have been integrated into development. In ICTD theory and practice, as also in feminist interrogation of contemporary ICT and development paradigms, the narrative of 'use' crowds out any discussion around the 'appropriation' of ICT, which would entail an interrogation of the structural aspects conditioning use and women's role in the shaping of technologies. Similarly, e-governance discourse, in its affinities to privatization and efficiency, constructs elite versions of democracy, negating both the structural aspects of marginalization and the propensity of ICT systems for structural changes towards inclusive citizenship and accountable governance.

What we find therefore in public policy in relation to ICTs and development is the principle of utilitarianism. Policies at the national level seem to trail knowledge that legitimises a free market approach to ICT diffusion. A larger institutional analysis of the limits of the market and the ethical basis of ICT diffusion are both ignored in policy-making[27]. At best, gender issues in ICT policies seem to be limited to women's access to IT education and to jobs in the IT and ITES sectors. These policy trends can be egregious to women's citizenship, in its broader and deeper sense. Research in the African context based on analysis of policy documents and project implementation shows how economic approaches to ICTs, including by UN agencies, pose a threat to the potential of the political and advocacy role of ICTs as effective means of civil society participation for women.[28]

Women's appropriation of information society possibilities and their participation as producers and innovators of knowledge and technology presupposes that ' the institutional ecology of ICTs promotes 'technology freedoms' rather than controls and constraints. These key freedoms are enshrined in what is often called an open ICT eco-system - open software, open hardware, open content, open networks and open spectrum - the connections of which to the empowering potential of new publics is an important issue to explore. Financing policy regimes, too, comprise a very critical gender issue, and for marginalised women, their equal citizenship in the information society implies public funding support for technology diffusion and appropriation.

**How policy conditions do and can influence outcomes for women's citizenship is an important element of the analysis concerning gender and technological affordances. Therefore one of the aims of this program is to not only critique existing policy perspectives shaping women's participation in the arena of ICTs and development, no doubt identifying best practices that are more an exception than the rule, but also to propose policy frameworks for gender equal outcomes.**

## E. Key Research Questions

Some indicative, key research questions proposed by this program to build a theoretical framework on gender and citizenship in the information society are as follows:

1.How does the trans-local nature of the public sphere being shaped by new information and communications technologies change meanings of citizenship for marginalised women?

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26  Field, Ann-Marie (2007): "Counter-Hegemonic Citizenship: LGBT Communities and the Politics of Hate Crimes in Canada".  Citizenship Studies, 11(3) July, pp. 247-262.

27 An interesting case in point is of the policy process in ICTs in School Education in India.

28 Asiedu, Christobel (2006): "Information Communication Technologies, and Gender and Development in Africa". *Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, Montreal Convention Center, Montreal, Quebec, Canada*, Aug 10. Available online http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p103091_index.html, accessed on 17 Dec 2009.

2.Within national and sub-national contexts, how do new technologies mediate women's substantive citizenship? How do citizenship practices, leveraging new technologies, challenge and redefine boundaries of women's formal citizenship in local contexts? How do new technologies enhance institutional accountability as well as the participation of marginalised women in local governance?

3.How do women renegotiate gender and challenge local power structures by creating and shaping local publics using digital media?

4.What are the conceptual tools that enable us to understand how inclusion and participation on the Internet is gendered? For instance, how do we understand hegemonic masculinities in relation to the public sphere shaped by the Internet, particularly from the standpoint of marginalised women? How do we unpack and interpret the openness and/or publicness of the basic architecture of the Internet from a feminist perspective?

5. How do current regimes governing online spaces - content on the Internet, social networking sites, search engines etc. influence gender related outcomes? How do women's rights and citizenship get framed on the local-global information society continuum?

6.How do national policy frameworks shape technology appropriation by women for their social and political empowerment? For example, What kind of policies and institutional mechanisms are needed to support women's local media in the new digital environment? How do different policy approaches to knowledge – public domain, commons, commercial licensing, community ownership – impact women's appropriation of techno-social spaces? What are the interconnections between 'open technology paradigms' and emancipatory feminist frameworks?

## F. Research Assumptions and Approach

This research program will be based on feminist multi-disciplinary approaches to interpret women's citizenship in the information society. It will test the citizenship framework advanced by this proposal through inquiry of situated experiences of women (and men), in order to build grounded theory.

The Program will focus on the experiences of marginalised women from developing countries in the Asian context. Based on feminist methodological perspectives, it will draw on a variety of methods, including ethnography (also global ethnography, which in recent times has emerged as an important method in social research); survey research, action-research, cross-cultural research, philosophical argument, discourse analysis and case study. In keeping with feminist research tradition, it will underscore a commitment to 'knowledge as emancipation', privileging knowledge creation for progressive social change.

Two key contexts frame the issue of methodology here. One is that this research program is being undertaken in times of rapid technological change and therefore examines rapidly 'moving targets'. This requires forward-looking epistemic models. Secondly, the 'information society' context is, by definition, cross-sectoral and in a way, meta. This makes the need for connections across very wide conceptual terrains, in order to develop a broad theoretical framework that can then form the basis of more intensive inquiries in specific sub-domains. It is expected that the individual research projects will contribute collectively in nuancing the tentative theoretical framework forwarded by this proposal, as well as testing its hypotheses, by providing the necessary groundedness. The final Program Report will revisit the core questions of this research endeavour, bringing the emerging concepts together within a theoretical canopy.

This program will be relevant to feminist centres of learning and research, including women's studies departments, non-profit centres undertaking research for policy action; research-action and global policy networks engaged in globalization and women's rights lobbying, especially from a southern feminist perspective; and activist-scholars.

## G. Outcomes

The outcomes of the proposed program will be as follows:

- The individual research projects under the Program will provide a composite analysis that will nuance, qualify and build upon the tentative theoretical framework offered. This final theoretical framework, coming as it is from grounded analysis, will be a useful benchmark in the evolving field of information society studies and for further research in gender and development as well as in rights, citizenship and governance arenas.

- The framework that the Program builds will provide useful points of departure for policy and program design processes at national, sub-national, sub-global and global levels. These directions will be set out in the composite report that comes out of the different research projects under this program.

- The process of analysis and knowledge creation will also be a useful collaborative platform for engaging gender and development scholars in 'new' questions that pertain to contemporary challenges for and opportunities in realising gender equality. This outcome needs emphasising also in view of the development dead-ends that confront scholar-activists in the gender arena globally.

- The Program will also make use of existing networks in the region and globally to position the process as a significant endeavour in social science research, thus eliciting academic, policy and advocacy interest on the issues the program seeks to address. The research network set up through this Program will interface with other networks through the contacts that the Program secretariat has as well as through the individual networks of participating researchers.

- Active pushing of the findings and the framework of the research program will be attempted through online spaces and modalities, which the program secretariat will continue to support post the 18 month period of this Program.

- The Program will publish a book that will be disseminated through IDRC's networks in addition to the networks of the participating researchers and institutions.

- The Program will attempt to mobilise additional funding to hold a post-Program workshop that can bring together researchers, policy makers and grassroots actors from the global south to reflect upon the relevance of, and share their insights to build upon the findings of, this Program in research, policy and programmatic areas.

- Policy bodies will be actively encouraged to take cognizance of the research outputs through a clear advocacy strategy that is collectively designed and implemented by the grantees and Program secretariat. This will include UN regional offices, including the UNECOSOC, UNIFEM, UNIGF, UNGAID as well as national level agencies, and leading donors in the region working on broad issues of citizenship, rights and gender. The secretariat will

actively explore strategic communication design for this purpose, to get beyond academic language into making 'real' change possible.

## H. Eligibility and Selection Process

The Program seeks to attract mid-career scholars from developing countries in the Asia region, working in the domain of gender studies. It will use a combination of an open call and invited proposals. The latter will be based on the knowledge of that the Program secretariat has on existing scholars in the region whose past contributions to gender and public policy has been significant and whose commitment to the citizenship and rights of marginalised women is well demonstrated. The final selection will be done by the Program Advisory Committee that will have 3 to 4 external / independent advisors in addition to 2 members of the secretariat. Reviews of the research will be provided by the advisors and through a peer review process set up by the secretariat. Ongoing reporting will be mandatory and will enable quality control.

**Details of the selection and eligibility are laid out in Annexure 3 titled Program Overview, Eligibility and Procedures.**