

PRIMERS IN GENDER AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE



## 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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The other four primers in the Primers in Gender and Democratic Governance Series are:

- Quick Entry Points to Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality in Democratic Governance Clusters
- Gender Equality and Justice Programming: Equitable Access to Justice for Women
- Electoral Financing to Advance Women's Political Participation: A Guide for UNDP Support
- Corruption and Gender: The Linkages and the Impact on Equitable Development

These resources are framed by the human rights-based approach to development, which now informs the work of the UN development system (see the Quick Entry Points primer for a discussion of the approach and what it means for gender equality). UNDP intends for these primers to contribute to the empowerment of women and the advancement of gender equality through democratic governance. We encourage colleagues to continue to share their experiences and ideas through [dgp-net@groups.undp.org](mailto:dgp-net@groups.undp.org), the electronic discussion network serving UNDP democratic governance practitioners and [ictd-net@groups.undp.org](mailto:ictd-net@groups.undp.org), the cross-practice

# Acronyms and Definitions

## 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

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





## Mandates for UNDP Work on ICT, Gender and E-governance

ICT for Development emerged as a new area of work in the mid-1990s at a time when the potential of new technologies was starting to be better understood. However, development programming in this field tended to focus on the provision of access to ICTs rather than on deploying innovative technologies to help address traditional development gaps and challenges.

This narrow interpretation of ICT for development as pertaining to access to ICTs later made it into the eighth MDG, which calls for making technologies available to all.<sup>1</sup>

UNDP follows a two-pronged approach to working on ICT for Development: (1) ICT for the poor; and (2) e-governance. One of the key concerns in both of these areas is ensuring that women and other marginal-

“ One of the key concerns of UNDP ICT for Development programmes is ensuring that women and other marginalized groups have the access and capacity to use new technologies. ”

ized groups have the access and capacity to use new technologies.

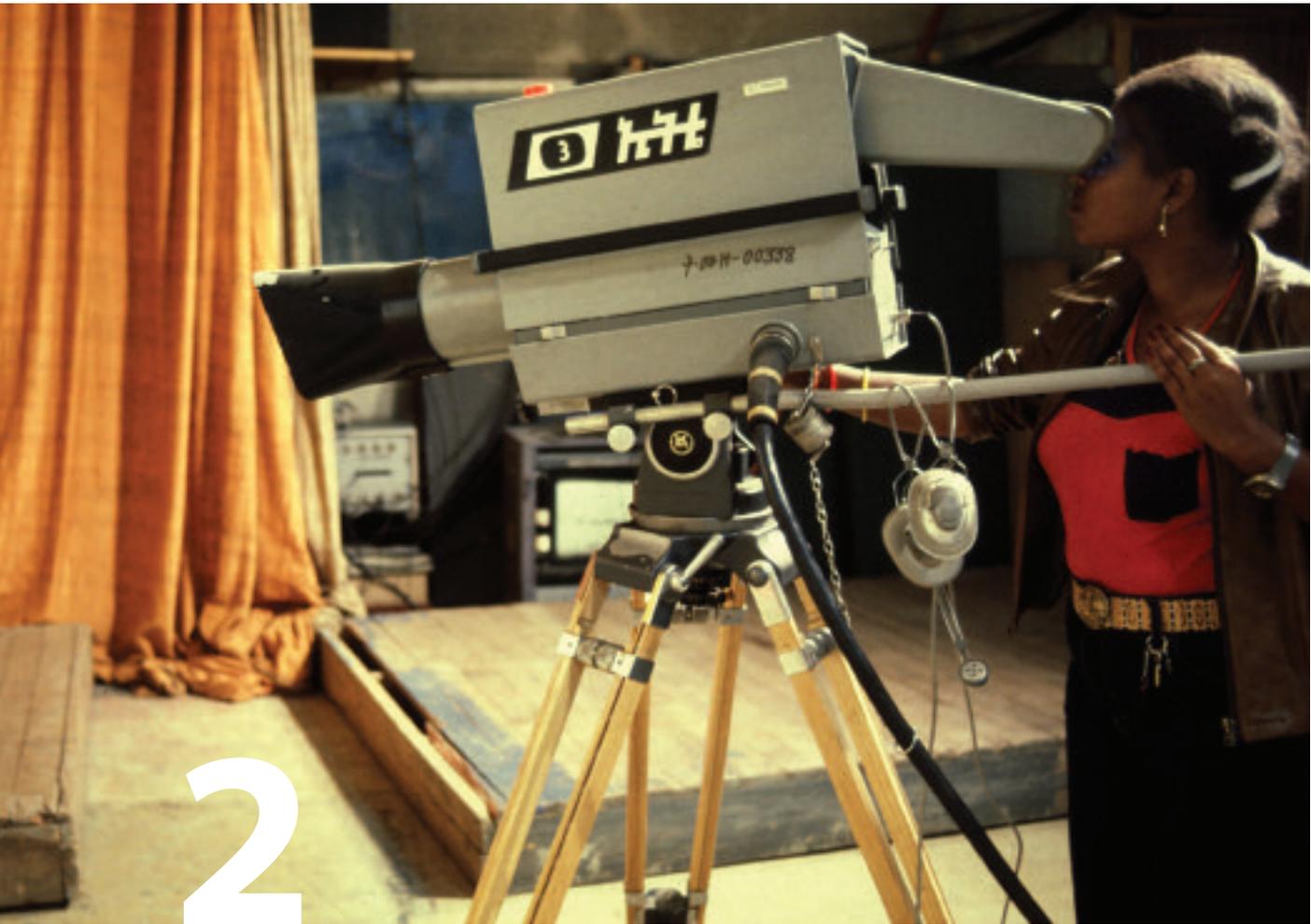
UNDP defines ICTs to include both new and “old” technologies, and does not limit it to the use of the Internet or personal computers. Many older technologies, such as the telephone and radio, are more accessible to the poorest sectors of the population and are regaining importance largely due to the gradual convergence of old and new ICTs.



UNDP’s e-governance strategy was adopted after a major review of its extensive participatory experience with practitioners in the countries and regions that it serves. This strategy aims to:

- Increase the efficiency, transparency and accountability of national institutions;
- Enhance access to information and improve the delivery of basic services to the overall population, in particular the poor; and
- Enhance citizen participation, in particular the participation of the poor, women and youth, in democratic processes and policy-making.

At the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, participants reflected on the issue of ICTs and gender, and the two topics were addressed in formal conference documents and in non-governmental forums. Likewise, at the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) in 2003 and 2005, women explicitly addressed the issue of the use of ICTs for governance and their involvement in such forms of governance. However, both of these events demonstrated the need for more work, particularly in the areas of policy, capacity development and governance mechanisms, to help catalyse social and political change in this field (Oxfam, 2005).<sup>2</sup>



## The Track Record on Gender and E-governance in UNDP Programming

In 2004, UNDP's Democratic Governance Group conducted a gender mapping of its service lines, in what was to be the first of several steps to fully mainstream gender in the practice of democratic governance.

This was followed in 2005 by a more in-depth review of DGG advisory services, an intensive electronic discussion on the 1,300-member global governance electronic knowledge network, and a learning day on gender equality for DGG practitioners.

The review concluded that there has been considerable progress in the area of main-

streaming gender equality considerations into governance programming. It found that DGG advisors were well able to assist the efforts of UNDP Country Offices (CO) to increase the numbers of women in elections, parliaments and the public service, as well as to disseminate lessons learned and experiences garnered across the globe. DGG advisors were also increasingly able

to support efforts to challenge structural discrimination seen in, for example, national and local resource allocation trends and access to citizenship rights, including access to justice.

To expand UNDP's contribution to e-governance programmes, an extensive mapping was completed at the end of 2005 of all related programmes supported by the organization and its partners.<sup>3</sup> The exercise uncovered 195 ongoing projects in 100 countries and revealed that **the demand for support covers five key areas of UNDP's e-governance programmes: (1) access to ICTs; (2) e-administration; (3) e-service delivery; (4) access to information via ICTs; and (5) e-participation via ICT networks and networking.** These areas are now part of DGG Cluster I: Fostering Inclusive Participation.

This review of projects also suggested that e-governance initiatives take two different forms: (1) direct intervention, as stand-alone programmes that have clear e-governance and ICT-related outputs and outcomes; and (2) indirect intervention, as a component of larger democratic governance programmes. Historically speaking, the former has led the way in introducing e-governance programming into CO portfolios. But once this has occurred, the indirect form seems to take precedence, which is a good indicator as to the degree that e-governance can be mainstreamed into more traditional areas of UNDP democratic governance work.

Even so, UNDP is still supporting projects that are, for example, almost exclusively focused on e-administration. However, at the same time, these e-administration projects are seemingly disconnected from broader



and/or related policies and programmes on Public Administration Reform (PAR): a logical partnership. By the same token, many PAR initiatives are lacking in e-governance components that could explicitly improve both public administration and service delivery. Initial results from new and ongoing e-governance mapping exercises indicate that this is now changing and interactions between the various service lines and clusters are increasing. In a handful of countries, using ICT as the entry point for broader democratic governance programming has been instrumental in getting such programmes off the ground.

E-governance activities are not limited to government institutions alone. For example, parliaments and electoral processes (including independent electoral bodies) are not government entities *per se* but part of broader democratic governance processes. The same can be said about human rights commissions and anti-corruption commissions, for example, for which ICT can be used to ensure transparent and accountable processes and to facilitate active stakeholder participation. It is thus not surprising to find UNDP already supporting ICT initiatives in these areas.

**All in all, important challenges remain in integrating gender equality considerations into e-governance.** Perhaps the most critical challenge identified by UNDP is the absence of programmes grounded in rigorous gender analysis. In many cases, data exists to keep track of who is using specific government services provided through e-governance solutions, but analysis is not carried out to track the gendered consumption patterns of such services. Understanding usage patterns would help reallocate resources based on demand.

Policy is another important area where gender equality considerations have largely been ignored. Policy advice has tended to be either gender-neutral or focused on women's empowerment. The main assumption here has been that ICTs are either neutral or that they somehow address gender gaps on their own. This was the case regardless of whether women or men were providing policy advice across focus areas as diverse as aid coordination, regional planning and decentralization, budget oversight, employment or minority rights.

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