

ICTs as Infrastructure
- Explorations through a gendered prism

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IT for Change

Why information and communication infrastructure count?



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Not just a tool but a regime

- Network society as 'destiny'; ICTs constitute a structural element in global geo-politics and international political economy
- Basis of production and communication
- Hard infrastructure and a reconstitutive ingredient of all soft infrastructures – gov, economy, society, culture

Digital networks meet contemporary capitalism

Convergences between

- the space of economic discourse (being the global news media)
- and the discourse of economic space (economic globalisation in the network society)

“The brutally condensed dimensions of 'time' in contemporary financialized global capitalism and its inter-networked information flows was in fact the critical issue in the financial crisis of the late 2000s.”

Pol economy perspective

- Web 2.0 – Privately owned 'commons'; social media platforms are profit-oriented sites that commodify user data
- Women equal men as consumers online - even as they fall behind as producers of online tech
- Largest commercial enterprise on the net – directed at men; innovation driven by and for the pervasiveness of the porn industry
- Global work flows in the information economy built on the flexible labour of women of the South.

Global development discourse

- The politics of broadband
 - Internet interconnection costs favour developed economies – traffic travels to the US and back
 - Eco growth imaginaries – more delocalization of wealth, employment and production
- Erasure of public ownership and universal access
 - Rhetoric of 'affordable' ICTs/ broadband rather than universal access
 - Essentialising market led access as 'public' access
 - In the meanwhile development support to telecentres is not only withdrawn but the discourse declares it a failure

“While private sector companies develop and disseminate the innovations that advance societies, governments play a critical role by creating an overall vision for how technology can accelerate national development. National policy is crucial for setting an open and competitive playing field where the best ideas prosper. Market-based structures and incentives allow for innovation to flourish and benefit all stakeholders.”

**Planning for Progress – Why broadband plans matter, CISCO
and ITU, July 2013**

ITU report 2012

Mobile broadband

Global development discourse

- Rhetoric of mobiles for africa and women's entrepreneurship
 - Obfuscates the need for public infrastructure;
 - Hobson's choice for women.
 - Mobile society as a sop in place for membership in the network society
- Unprecedented opportunity for informed and active citizenship for women and access to public services reduced to e-government, e-health etc.

This is today's America in full splendor: What cannot be accomplished through controversial legislation will be accomplished through privatization, only with far less oversight and public control. From privately-run healthcare providers to privately-run prisons to privately-run militias dispatched to war zones, this is the public-private partnership model on which much of American infrastructure operates these days. Communications is no exception. Decentralization is liberating only if there's no powerful actor that can rip off the benefits after the network has been put in place. If such an actor exists – like NSA in this case – decentralization is a mere shibboleth. Those in power get more of what they want quicker – and pay less for the privilege.

Information Consumerism The Price of Hypocrisy. Evgeny Morozov. July 2013

An infrastructure for social justice

- Development as freedom - access to ICTs is a foundational capability
 - An infrastructure of individual freedoms and collective rights
 - A precondition for participation and citizenship
 - Potentially, a game changer for gender justice

“The Internet has become a key means by which individuals can exercise their right to freedom of opinion and expression, as guaranteed by Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights”. By acting as a catalyst for individuals to exercise their right to freedom of opinion and expression, the Internet facilitates the realization of a range of other human rights”

Frank La Rue, Special Rapporteur on Human Rights, 2011



Private, social and institutional access

- For women, effective use of ICTs is an opportunity for renegotiating historical injustice.
- Eco and pol rights
 - Costa Rica, South Africa
 - Chinese women activists, Iranian bloggers
 - Migrant women domestic workers
- ICT development Index – absence of gender disaggregated data



Gender and Citizenship agenda for ICTs

- Universal public access
- Public spectrum – community radio
- Community networks
- Public content – Video will be 90 percent of all consumer Internet Protocol traffic and 64 percent of mobile traffic
- From the technical layer to use – digital literacy in embedded contexts