GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2013

Women's rights, gender and ICTs

Global Information Society Watch

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Preface

At the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, ICTs were recognised as critical for achieving women's empowerment and gender equality. In 2003, the World Summit on the Information Society reinforced that the development of ICTs will provide opportunities for women's full and equal participation in all spheres of life. Since then the internet has become a critical global resource that enables women to exercise their right to speak, impart opinions, share ideas, build knowledge and access information. Access to the internet enables women to participate in the information economy, exercise citizenship rights, get access to health information and other services, form communities, engage in formal and informal processes to determine their social, cultural and political life and more. By the end of 2013, 1.3 billion women are expected to be online. We believe this increase in the number of connected women must be, and can be, accompanied by greater empowerment of women and more widespread gender equality.

However, human rights online are connected with human rights offline, and to achieve these goals we need to combat discrimination and gender-based violence. Online harassment, cyber stalking and other ICT-enabled violations are on the increase, as are shutdowns of networks by governments, and censorship of sexual rights and reproductive health websites and other content that is particularly relevant to women. The very spaces that allowed women to increase their participation in the public sphere and amplify their demands for justice are under threat.

This edition of GISWatch examines how the internet and other ICTs have extended the public sphere and created new opportunities and freedoms for women. It highlights the threats to these freedoms and explores the role of technology in resistance to these threats.

No struggle for social justice is a better measure of success than that for women's rights and gender equality. This can also be applied to the internet. A truly free internet that fulfils its potential as a tool for social justice is an internet that is not just used by women, but also shaped by them through their involvement in its governance and development. It is an internet on which women have the freedom and capacity to actively tell their stories, participate in social, political and economic life, and claim their rights to be empowered, equal citizens of the world who can live free from discrimination and the fear of violence. ■

Edwin Huizing
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, HIVOS

Anriette Esterhuysen
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, APC