

# GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2013

Women's rights, gender and ICTs



ASSOCIATION FOR PROGRESSIVE COMMUNICATIONS (APC)  
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# Global Information Society Watch

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# INDONESIA

## Transformation of social roles through ICTs for rural women



Nieke Jahja

### Introduction

This report is a reflection on practical experiences that were the result of an evaluation on the effects and methodology used in training and facilitation of the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) for women in Indonesia. The training programme has been conducted since 2009. The beneficiary is a women's organisation. The evaluation that uses a gender perspective is intended to obtain an appropriate and adequate methodology in endorsing the success of the intervention. In addition, it also tries to see how ICTs can change the position of women in the social and cultural structures.

### Providing ICT training to a rural cooperative

ICT training was given to a women's cooperative organisation consisting of more than 1,600 members. The vision of the organisation is to promote women's independence to achieve positions equal to those of men through activities such as revolving fund management, savings and loan activity, productive activities, and business assistance for the cooperative members.

If viewed from the perspective of culture, especially that of Indonesian pastoral culture which operates in a collective way, women play multi-layered roles in their daily lives. On the one hand, their reproductive role as wives and mothers requires them to carry out domestic tasks. On the other hand, as an extension of their domestic role, they have social responsibilities as women in their communities. The reproductive role in socio-cultural values ranks the highest compared to the other roles women must play.

Most of the members of this women's organisation are trained to fulfil the roles of reproduction and production at the same time. However, so far, the production activities are part-time jobs done even while nurturing their children and doing domestic tasks, and are often not appreciated as activities with economic value. However, these activities are those sustaining the local economy.

At the beginning of the intervention, training was given on the assumption that there are no

obstacles of time and distance for the women. However, their time management for fulfilling their multi-layered roles proved this assumption wrong.

In terms of methods of training, the orientation is developed more in practice because it is more appropriate that the knowledge and skills gained can be directly tested and evaluated. The participants are introduced to tools such as a computer; they learn how to use technology to help them complete their work and meet their needs. They also learn to use the internet as an instrument for communication and for browsing for information. Although it must be done gradually, learning through practice is easier and more effective than beginning with an introduction of the concept and terms. The women master the skill of using the technology first, before understanding the theory or concepts that they may find difficult to relate to their daily work and habits. Moreover, most technological terms are still written in a language foreign to the women.

### The impact of ICT skills on rural women

For rural women who are not engaged in the public domain, mastering technology such as a computer has proven to produce significant effects. For example, a facilitator said that several members who had obtained basic computer skills have more frequently been asked to participate in village meetings. Knowledge and skills they have received from the training can be used directly to do their tasks and jobs in their villages. They are invited by the village elites to help document activities or prepare print documentation. Therefore, knowledge and skills in using ICTs have successfully changed the position of women in accessing public affairs, which are strategic in their social life. Women eventually and gradually acquire important social positions, and even within their current capacity can have a bargaining position and influence village policies.

Although they create the opportunity to change women's social position, the use of ICTs cannot always challenge the issue of inequality in the gender-based distribution of jobs and resources that is controlled by a patriarchal system.

The skill of using modern technology for communication does not immediately contribute to equality and women's empowerment. The result of the evaluation on the ICT training that has been ongoing for three years proved that the skills can also increase the women's burdens. Nuraini, one of the women who have been able to use the internet, admitted that her spending has increased because of paying to visit an internet café. Several women even said that they had developed new consumer or spending habits soon after learning how to browse the internet. They are now interested in buying clothes that certain models wear which they see on websites. The consumerism trap for these village women can be an obstacle for the prospect of social transformation potentially offered by ICTs.

### Action steps

Based on the above lessons learned, it was clear that a project intervention that merely provides infrastructure, access and skills is not enough. The capacity for using ICTs must be directed toward resolving the problem of unequal distribution of resources rooted in the culture. The use of the internet must be geared to increasing women's knowledge and productive skills. When the internet can be used by women who make snacks to learn techniques such as product packaging, then it can boost their economic productivity. When it is used by a woman who teaches a preschool play group, it can help her obtain information to expand her knowledge of teaching. When ICT training is aimed at tackling the challenge of unequal gender roles, then the transformation of social roles through the acquisition of knowledge and skills can change the status of women in the society. ■