Gender Dimension of ICTs in Latin America

Aimée Vega Montiel, Centro de Investigaciones Interdisciplinarias en Ciencias y Humanidades, Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico (CEIICH-UNAM), Mexico City, Mexico

ABSTRACT

The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action posed strategies to have in media and information technologies an ally for gender equality. “Chapter J” identified core areas for this agenda: content and representation, access of women to decision-making positions at media and ICTs, gender mainstreaming in communication policy, access and use of women to media and ICTs. These strategies were reinforced by the World Summit on Information Society, that pointed out the prominent role of ICTs in women’s human rights. The aim of this paper is to contribute to a constructive debate on gender and ICTs, by presenting some of the most significative trends in Latin America.

Keywords: Gender Dimension, Human Rights, ICTs, Latin America, Women

INTRODUCTION

The Beijing Platform for Action (1995) drew attention to the importance of communication and information technologies to encourage gender equality and women’s human rights. The Strategic Objective J1 emphasized the urgency to increase participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media, as well as in the call that women and girls should be empowered by enhancing their skills, knowledge and access to information technologies.

In 2003, the WSIS Declaration of Principles and Plan for Action, stressed specifically the importance of ICTs in reaching that goal:

DOI: 10.4018/IJEP.2015100101
We affirm that development of ICT provides enormous opportunities for women, who should be an integral part of, and key actors in, the Information Society. We are committed to ensuring that the Information Society enables women’s empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society and in all decision-making processes. To this end, we should mainstream a gender equality perspective and use ICT as a tool to that end. (WSIS, 2003)

However, in the context of the new media environment several social, political and economic divides are being produced. As the effects of those changes are not neutral, because of the gendered division of power, the status of women’s human rights in the digital age - particularly, their human right to communicate - are precarious.

At this point though the question is: To what extent does the new media environment promote women’s human and communication rights or contribute to sustaining the oppression of women in society in Latin America?

A FEMINIST POLITICAL ECONOMY FOCUS

According to the feminist political economy perspective, capitalism is not the only process of class relations. As patriarchy is the first social construct, class is not generically neutral. For this reason, the capitalist structure does not have the same implications for men than for women, then both patriarchy and capitalism reproduce together social injustices (Riordan, 2002: 7).

With this base, ICTs –the driving force of the digital communication- are not a ‘natural’ effect of the development of society, but a product of hegemonic interests who seek to gain maximum benefit from these technologies; which bases its benefits in the exploitation of the labour force (Martin, 2002: 54). ICTs neither exist in a ‘neutral’ way. As they are produced by the gendered structures of power, the ICTs represent the male culture.

Then communication and information technologies are playing a double role. On one hand, they constitute a key element for social, political and economic women’s empowerment, as they could help to reduce poverty, illiteracy, gender-based violence and social segregation. On the other hand, they are also exacerbating gender and class inequalities (Martin, 2002: 54).

In addition, given that women are involved in capitalism as workers, but also as consumers, their interests are largely in the hands of communication and information industries (Martin, 2002: 57). ICTs are responding to the stereotyped association of both women and men to patriarchal identities –women as commodified bodies and sexual objects for the male consumption and men as subjects of power (Byerly, 2002; Ross, 2012: 112). As result, most of the contents that circulate in
Internet-Based Protest in European Policymaking: The Case of Digital Activism
www.igi-global.com/article/internet-based-protest-european-policymaking/38969?camid=4v1a

Mailing Lists and Social Semantic Web
www.igi-global.com/chapter/mailing-lists-social-semantic-web/39731?camid=4v1a