GENDER AND ICT IN THE PHILIPPINES: 
A PROPOSED POLICY FRAMEWORK

Jointly-prepared by the Philippine Legislators’ Committee on Population and Development Foundation, Inc., and WomensHub (Philippines) • 28 May 2003

“The State shall provide the policy environment for the full development of Filipino capability and the emergence of communication structures suitable to the needs and aspirations of the nation and the balanced flow of information into, out of, and across the country, in accordance with a policy that respects the freedom of speech and the press.”

Article 16, Section 10 of the Philippine Constitution

The Constitution sets the national mood for the development of Information and Communication Technology (henceforth, ICT), yet we need to keep an eye on how the State does this and check if it adjusts to the needs of the present time - and how.

As the country joined the global trend of ICT, both the private and the public sectors adopted numerous schemes that propagate and shape the access, utilization, and development of ICT in the country.

There is a correlation between the level of human development and the prevalence of ICT access and use. Countries with high human development indices prove to have high ICT availability.

Women’s development, as a highlighted concern of human and sustainable development, must therefore be considered in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of ICT development and utilization in the country.

The Philippine Constitution sets the framework of the State’s responsibility to make the country ready to employ the potentials of ICT. It also unequivocally champions the equality between men and women in all areas of human activity. What we further need is a refinement of such responsibilities that will respond to the needs of the present time.

The rapid growth and development of ICT are creating opportunities for the economic empowerment of the country and its citizenry. However, reactive and short-sighted adaptation of ICT to anchor the country’s development strategy and goals is bound to contribute to the creation of new forms of economic and social inequities and greater exploitation and discrimination of women.
This paper seeks to recommend a policy framework that will address the goal of mobilizing ICT to advance gender equality and women’s empowerment.

This paper is therefore hopeful that it is still possible for ICT to become a tool that bridges the gender gap when it comes to freedom of expression, that provides women access to opportunities for income and employment, and that opens up spaces and networks where women can organize themselves, and participate and launch actions towards nation-building.

**ICT and National Development**

The last ten years have seen the rapid world-wide growth and development of ICT and the tremendous impact such have had on the economic, socio-cultural as well as political spheres.

In the Philippines, the development of ICT can be characterised by:

1. Proliferation of communication services due to the liberalisation of the telecommunications industry
2. Augmentation of poor telephone density due to the availability and deployment of mobile telecommunications
3. Increased in the number of establishments primarily engaged in ICT-based and ICT-related activities
4. Relative increase in the personal computer penetration index
5. Convergence of traditional communication media with new communication technologies

Undoubtedly, the development in the use and access to ICTs has created many opportunities for various sectors of Philippine society. For example, the electronics industry (which is the country's top export earner) earned total receipts of $27.2 billion in 2000. This accounted for 71.3 percent of total exports and a 7.0 percent growth.

For a particular section of the labor force, the growth of ICT has also created new job opportunities and a certain degree of social and economic mobility. In the last four years, the ICT sector has employed around 567,802 skilled labor. In 2002 alone, there were 35,949 job openings in the ICT sector, while 347,976 job openings are projected for the period 2003-2004.¹

**Opportunities for Women**

The development of ICT has also been widely touted as a harbinger of economic and social growth for the Filipino women. There is a dearth of comprehensive studies on the impact of ICT on the Filipino women. However, certain indicators point out that the economic opportunities created by the development of ICT is opening economic prospects to a particular section of the female labor force.

Women make up 39% of the overall workforce in Philippines and outnumber men in certain occupations, including professional and technical (64%), clerical (57%), sales (67%), and services (56%).² Significantly, 47% of research and development personnel and 53% of scientists and engineers are women.³

Filipino families are attuned to such economic opportunities for their daughters. By the end of 2000, the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) estimates that women constitute about 62% of tertiary-level students in the Philippines. More than 600 higher education institutions in the country offer ICT-related academic programs and courses. Half to more than half of the enrollees in these institutions are women.

Old Obstacles and New Divides

Will ICT be able to finally achieve the heretofore unimaginable that is the rise of the status of Filipino women to equal that of men?

Signs are rife that ICT is a double-edged sword. While windows of opportunities are indeed opening up to a specific section of the female population, the rapid growth of ICT is also threatening to exacerbate and create new forms of social and economic inequities between men and women; and equally significant among women themselves.

The Status of Women in the Philippines

The Filipino women who make up a little less than half of the country’s total population of around 80 million, are not excluded from the global realities of women discrimination, exploitation and low social status.

Gender stereotyping continues to exist in the fields of education and training. Courses that have anything to do with mathematics, the sciences and technologies are inevitably associated with male students. Courses that are leaned to the specifics of home economics and service trades are associated with female students (see Table 1 in the Appendix).

When it becomes an economic issue of choice of in cases where parents would have to choose only one of their children to go to school, it is most likely that it would have to be the male, as female children are regarded to be homemakers and house wives in their future.

When it comes to employment and economic activities, Filipino women comprise 39% of the total labor force - approximately 13 million, while their male counterparts comprise 61%. Of these 13 million Filipinas, 89.7% are employed. This further means that 10% of the women in the labor force are unemployed.

Decision-making and influence are fields that are still far from the majority of women’s reach when it comes to work. This is likewise true when it comes to women in the legislative (with 13.5% of representatives and 7.7% of senators), executive (with 18% of


cabinet positions), and judicial (with 21% of total incumbent judges) branches of the government.

On top of that, the marginalized employed women do not necessarily enjoy the full benefits of employment. Gender stereotyping, sexual harassment, and discrimination continue to plague their working and training environments, amidst legislated policies on anti-job discrimination and anti-sexual harassment.

The Emerging Digital Divide

One of the emerging problems caused by rapid growth of ICT is the so-called digital divide. The digital divide is characterised by dramatic differences in the levels of access to ICTs, like the Internet for example, among the population. The divide is most significant between the city-based and educated middle-class on one hand, and the rural-based population on the other. This divide is a product of the significant disparity in the access and availability to infrastructure and technology, as well as historical problems of poverty, lack of resources, illiteracy and low levels of education.

The number of Filipino Internet users is hard to pin down. But, estimates from both government agencies and private research groups pegged the number of Filipino Internet users at the end of 2000 at a low of 1.5 million users to a high of 4.0 million users. However, what the statistics providers commonly agree on is the disparity between the Internet access between the urban areas and the rural areas. Continuing low PC and internet penetration rates particularly in the rural areas is expected to keep a large section of Philippine citizenry sans access to knowledge and skills on how to use the Internet and how to take advantage of the vast amount of information, applications and services that are available on the Internet, particularly on the World Wide Web.

So while the Internet-having section of the Philippine population will have a greater chance of reaping some of the benefits of ICT, those without access to the internet and other ICTs are bound to be left on the roadside of development. That the latter is almost always the same section of the population that have been excluded from past development opportunities is not accidental.

The Gender Digital Divide

Although many Filipino women are now using new communication technologies and the internet, and are now having access to the economic opportunities created by ICT, a far greater number continue to fall by the wayside. This condition is referred to as the gender digital divide, and is a global trend which has caught the attention of the United Nations

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4 The National Telecommunications Commission estimates a total of 900,000 Internet subscribers equivalent to around 4 million users. However, a 2000 survey conducted by the market research firm AC Nielsen showed that the Philippine Internet population (those with internet access) numbered around 400,000 subscribers and are mostly found in the urban areas of the country.


The National Economic Development Authority in the document Medium-Term Philippine Development Plan (2001-2004) pegged the number of Filipino Internet Users at the end of 2000 at 1.5 million.

The private research group DigitalFilipino.Com estimates around 2 million users. (The Digital Filipino Stats Report (Issue No.3), DigitalFilipino.Com, August 2002.)
and various international multi-lateral agencies. This divide is considered to be most acute between the young, city-based, educated and middle-class men on one hand; and the elderly, rural-based and undereducated women on the other.5

The gender digital divide is a product of historical economic, socio-cultural and political inequities between men and women; as well as newer forms of inequalities wrought by the current global financial and technological structures.

In a country where women are stereotyped and discriminated in education and in employment, it is not surprising that our science and technology sector becomes dominated by the males, whom society perennially regards as the worthy experts in the fields of sciences and math. Women may equal and sometimes outnumber men in the research and development and engineering departments. But men continue to dominate administrative, executive and management work. In other words, men continue to hold the decision-making positions despite the growth of female employment.6

Various writers and researchers have shown that the most critical issues for women with regards ICT are: technology access and know-how; education, training and skills development; employment and industry practices; content and language; power and decision-making; and last but the least privacy and security.7

The ICT Policy Situation

The Philippine government is positioning the country to be the so-called “E-Services Hub of Asia,” attracting big companies to co-locate while outsourcing projects in the areas of animation, data transcription, call center operations, and software development. For leverage, the Philippine government is banking on the country’s deep pool of engineers, ICT-skilled workers and managers, and the English-language competency of its human resource base.8

To meet such a goal, the Philippine government in the last ten years has adopted several policy reforms and new formulations. Beginning with the Ramos administration, the Philippine government has been cognizant of ICT as tool to reinvigorate the economy and to carve a niche for the country in the emerging new information economy in the Asia-Pacific region.

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5 Since statistics on Internet usage in the country is not gender-differentiated, it is difficult to establish the male and female ratio among Internet users. One private market research group estimates that women comprise 51 percent of Internet users in the Philippines (bizreport 2000.com)


8 The Philippines ranked eighth in the knowledge jobs category of the global new economy index. It also ranked third in the availability of competent senior management, ninth in the availability of IT skills, and tenth in the availability of qualified engineers. Overall, the Philippines ranked 32nd in the global new economy index of 2000. (Rubin Systems Inc, www.metricnet.com)
ICT Policy Initiatives in the last 10 Years

There are several major policy initiatives in the last ten years, which consistently hold to the stated goal of regional competitiveness in the ICT labor market, and are designed to enhance, if not create, the socio-economic and policy environment that will advance said goal. These policy initiatives have also served as parameters for the Philippine ICT legislative environment in the last few years.

Legislation plays a major role in the intervention, regulation, or promotion of any efforts in the form of goals, solutions, or preclusions. Legislation also comes in the forms of parallel systems, means, and mechanisms that are deemed prerequisites to major development programs and wide-reaching national policies.

Below are the key policy initiatives that have framed the Philippine ICT legislative environment since ICT’s major escalation in 2000.

**National Information Technology Plan 2000**

The first strategic ICT plan of the Philippine government was the National Information Technology Plan 2000 (NITP 2000), which was formally adopted through Executive Order 190 of then President Ramos. NITP 2000 documents an overall strategy to spur the country to global competitiveness through Information Technology (IT) diffusion. NITP 2000 was designed to contribute to people empowerment and socio-economic development. It was the IT sector plan of the Medium Term Development Plan for 1993-1998 or Philippines 2000.

NITP 2000 has twin strategies: IT use and IT production. IT use refers to the widespread application of ICT in government, business, education and home, while IT production refers to the accelerated creation and provision of state-of-the-art of IT products and services.

NITP 2000 identified five components, with the acronym TIGER (pertaining to Tiger Philippines), with corresponding key result areas targeted to be achieved by 1998: 1) Telecommunications, 2) Industry, 3) Government, 4) Education, and 5) Research.

The telecommunications component was meant to lay the groundwork for a national information highway that would allow data exchange and inquiry between and among national and local offices. Through the Government Information Sharing Technology Network (GIS-NET) program, the component would set up a national telecommunications backbone that would run on top of commercial carriers. The VAN/VAS Development Program meanwhile would accelerate use of Value Added Network/Value Added Services such as electronic trading, electronic mail, data transfer, and fund transfer.

The promoted industry component had two concerns: IT in industry and IT industry. The former sought to promote the extensive use of IT in various industries to enable them to take advantage of global business opportunities and produce competitive products and services.

IT industry was defined as the business of creating IT products and services for local consumption and largely for export.

The government component sought to undertake a National Government Computerization Program and a Local Government Computerization Program for more effective governance and service delivery.

The education component sought to develop a critical mass of IT professionals and workers for domestic requirements through an IT Literacy Program and IT Manpower Development Program. The research component focused on R&D activities relative to IT products.
development with the view of creating 10 niche products through promoting industry-academe alliance, network of R&D centers, and network of R&D specialists.

**IT21 Philippines**

IT21 was launched in February 1998 to guide the nation’s ICT development through the early part of the 21st century. The plan maintained the focus of NITP 2000 made it more specific by setting specific time frames for the achievements of its goals: Lay the infrastructure for every business, every government agency, every school, and every home to have access to IT by the turn of the 21st century; make IT use pervasive in daily life by 2005; make Philippines a Knowledge Center in Asia within the 1st decade of the 21st century.

IT21 sought out the development of a government information infrastructure through the RPWeb. As mandated by Administrative Order No. 332, issued by President Ramos in November 1997, all government agencies would connect to the Internet. The connection would eventually extend to the academe and homes.

**Government Information Systems Plan (GISP) - “Philippine Government Online”**

An overhaul of government strategies and plans took place by 2000 with the adoption of the Government Information Systems Plan or Philippine Government Online. GISP was the IT component of the MTPDP for 1999-2004, also called “Ang Pinoy 2004.” Approved in July 2000 by then President Estrada, GISP became the nation’s master plan for ICT in government.

GISP provided the development framework, strategies, and solutions for the realization of e-governance in the Philippines. It set the deadline for putting in place the necessary infrastructure and ensuring that every Filipino shall have access to government information. Charged with executing GISP was the Information Technology and Electronic Commerce Council (ITECC). The IT super body was a merger of the NITC and the Electronic Commerce Promotion Council. The implementation of GISP was disrupted with the political crisis in the last quarter of 2000 and eventual change of leadership in 2001.

**The Medium-Term Philippine Development Plan for 2001-2004**

The MTPDP for 2001-2004 considered technology as the foundation for the country’s future economic development. Stated in the whole of Chapter 4, “Building on the Country's Strengths in Information and Communications Technology,” it laid the policy framework for utilizing ICT as a means to leapfrog into the new economy and make the country the e-hub of the Asia-Pacific region. The ICT plan builds on the country’s strengths in ICT: “an English-speaking, highly educated, easily trainable, and skilled workforce with a growing track record of successful ICT work; a basic policy environment that is right for business; government commitment at the highest levels, with strong private sector support in the pursuit of a common ICT agenda; and rising entrepreneurial abilities suitable for a globalizing economy.”

It is aimed at enhancing the country’s competitive edge through the following: 1) building the physical infrastructure to ensure wider, faster and reliable access at low cost to information and other ICT resources; 2) enhancing the policy and legal environment to promote ICT development and universal access to information and other ICT resources; 3) developing the country’s human potential to enable Filipinos to compete in the digital age; and 4) promoting the use of ICT to streamline business processes and modernize government operations for greater productivity.
In its policy framework, MTPDP focuses on promoting the development of the needed ICT skills, improving conditions for access, developing the infrastructure and establishing the appropriate legal basis for ICT operations. It wants to develop ICT as an effective instrument for job and wealth creation, as well as poverty reduction.

MTPDP particularized its targets and strategies for three to four years on the following: 1) Building the physical infrastructure to ensure wider, faster and reliable access at low cost to information and other ICT resources; 2) Enhancing the policy and legal environment; 3) Developing the country’s human capital to enable Filipinos to compete in the digital age; and 4) making government transactions more accessible, transparent, and cost-effective to business and consumers.

**Republic Act 8792 or The E-Commerce Act of 2000**

A landmark law as far as e-commerce is concerned was enacted in June 2000: the Republic Act 8792 or the Electronic Commerce Act of 2000. This law gives validity and legal recognition to electronic documents, electronic signatures and electronic transactions; facilitates the admission of electronic documents and electronic signatures as evidence in cases of disputes; outlaws and penalizes unauthorized access to information and interference in communications systems; and call upon government to formulate and institute programs on Information Communications Technology.

**What’s missing: The challenge for policy makers**

“*ICT will be our leading sector for economic growth... We expect ICT to be the key to finding our proper niche in the global village in the 21st century.*”

-President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo

Significantly missing in the many incarnations of the ICT policy initiatives and formulations as well as ICT legislations in the last ten years is a clear-cut and unequivocal commitment to advance the gender equality and women’s empowerment through ICT. The Philippines’ strategic framework for ICT development is silent on gender issues and considerations. 9

**This situation should be remedied.**

One of the often missed characteristics of the country’s current ICT labor pool is the high percentage of women workers, engineers and managers. This is an advantage the country’s decision-makers and development planners should leverage not only in its bid to be the so-called “E-Services Hub” in Asia, but also to gain ground in advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment.

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9 This statement is not made lightly. Appendices 1-3 provides a summary of a four-month study done by WomensHub to review the ICT policy environment in the Philippines in the last 10 years. The review covered (1) National ICT Plans and Strategies from the Ramos administration to the Macapagal-Arroyo administration; (2) Major ICT-related Legislations; (3) Conferences and Major ICT-related Covenants and Declaration of Commitments; (4) Publicly-funded ICT Projects and Initiatives which promotes citizen’s access and use of ICT; and (5) Pending ICT-related House and Senate Bills. The review’s objective was to find out whether gender equality and women’s empowerment are considerations in the government’s ICT strategies, policies and actions.
The Philippine government and economic planners are banking on ICT to play a critical role in the country's bid to be globally competitive. In particular, it is imperative that we establish measures that will provide the country not just the assurance of sustained utilization and enjoyment of the boons of ICT, but also of the necessary safety nets that will ensure that ICT leads to the promotion of the status of Filipino women.

Gender mainstreaming as a policy and legislative framework and goal has long assumed legitimacy. The Philippines has a number of progressive and pro-active policies to support women’s economic and political participation. Some examples of these are the laws promoting the integration of women in national development; legislation providing women equal opportunities in military school education; the law against sexual harassment in employment, education and training environments; the establishment of ministerial Focal Points for Women; and the organization of a Women’s Studies Consortium at the higher education level.

A continued failure to address and incorporate the twin goals of gender equality and women’s empowerment in Philippine policymaking and legislation would not only threaten the goal of using ICT to advance economic growth, but further exacerbate and intensify the marginalisation of majority of women in the country.

The challenge to legislators is two-fold: (1) getting national ICT policies, initiatives and laws to redress the growing gender digital divide and (2) aligning ICT policies, initiatives and laws with gender-mainstreaming objectives and goals.

Currently pending ICT-related legislations can only gain resonance from the incorporation of a coherent gender and ICT policy framework.

**Current Legislative Initiatives in Relation to ICT**

ICT lawmaking in both Houses of Congress complements President Arroyo’s policy thrust reflected in her State of the Nation Address during the opening of the Twelfth Congress in July 2001. Corresponding with her goal to make the Philippines a regional leader in ICT, she has asked Congress to enact laws allowing for multi-media convergence, creating a Department of Telecommunications and Information Technology, and addressing Internet privacy and security. The logic is that ICT will "jumpstart the economy."

There are at least 32 bills—22 in Congress and 10 in the Senate—pertaining to ICT pending in various committees. At least five bills point toward an evolving redefinition of ICT, encompassing converging technologies and services: HB Nos. 3940, 4356, and 5159, and SB Nos. 1496 and 1706. Convergence is defined as “integration of segments of the information and content industry, including telecommunications, broadcasting, electronic commerce, and data processing into a single economic market based on distributed digital technology” (Marcos, HB No. 3940).

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10 The government’s national gender mainstreaming program is mandated by several laws that integrate gender and development in all government institutions: (1) Republic Act 7192 or the Women in Development and Nation Building Act which promotes the integration of women as full and equal partners of women in development and nation building. (2) Executive Order 273 directing all government agencies to "institutionalize all efforts in government by incorporating Gender and Development (GAD) concerns in their planning, programming, and budgeting purposes.” (3) Local Budget Memorandum 28 that directs local governments to mobilize resources and mainstream GAD programs using the 5% development plan.
The authors note that existing laws (such as Republic Act 7925 or “The Telecommunications Law”) do not cover cable television, Internet, and other multi-media services. As more and more technologies are being introduced, the authors assert the need to promote and develop convergence over the medium and long-term development of the country’s communications program.

The focus of the bills is on legal and regulatory issues, covering all network service and communications service providers. The emphasis is on opening these service providers to local ownership and foreign nationals (limited to their proportionate share).

Notably, eight bills call for the creation of a single Department to oversee the development of ICT in the country: HB Nos. 1086, 2154, 2621, 3516, 3280, 3860, and 4789, and SB No. 2166. To be called the Department of Information Technology (DIT), Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT), Department of Information Technology and Communications (DITC), or Department of Communications and Information Technology (DOCIT), it is expected to assume the communications functions of the Department of Transportation and Communication (DOTC). Among its mandates are: to set the framework that will establish the legal, regulatory policy, and business environment of the ICT sector; to lay down the infrastructure of government agencies in all levels to have access to information technology (IT); and to provide more information on government policies, programs and projects. It will also deliver the country’s postal system.

The proposed Department is expected to absorb the National Computer Center, the Information Technology Division of the Department of Science and Technology, and other related government agencies.

Another initiative proposes the creation of a regulatory body to oversee the ICT sector. HB No. 4240, the “Information Technology Act of 2002,” creates the Information Technology Authority. HB No. 131 meanwhile mandates the reorganization of the National Telecommunications Commission to formulate and implement policies, and develop and improve telecommunication facilities, systems, and services.

The Information Technology Authority is proposed as an alternative to the DICT. The author deems that the creation of a new department requires a huge budget, is difficult to pursue, and is impractical in view of the bad economy. The Authority will absorb the NCC, the Telecommunications Office, and other related agencies. It will be under the DOTC.

Three bills deploy ICT to improve government services and develop the IT competencies of government workers. HB No. 3101 connects every government agencies (especially local government units) to the Internet to facilitate information exchange. HB No. 2082 establishes ITC Literary Centers in every regional office of the Department of Science and Technology to provide basic computer literacy programs and advanced courses in their respective areas. SB. No. 767 requires the computer education of government employees.

Three bills integrate computer education in the curricula of public and private elementary, secondary, or both levels: HB Nos. 807 and 632, and SB No. 147. A fourth bill, HB No. 2258, provides for a free two-year college degree course in ICT in state colleges and universities. The authors assert that integration of ICT in education guarantees a continuing pool of trained human resources to capture a large share of global e-services.

The National Council for Information Technology and Development, to be created under SB No. 758, is expected to upgrade computer literacy and education to develop a workforce with higher level of knowledge and multiple skills. This initiative is expected to address industry and the globalized economy’s demands.
In addition, the NCITD will regulate local access to commercial online services to protect minors from exposure to cyber-related abuses such as pornography.

Two bills, HB. No. 310 and SB. No. 463, lay down a scheme for Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to expand their services and deploy broadband infrastructure outside metropolitan areas. The authors note the concentration of 90% of 200 ISPs in the country in Metro Manila and in selected urbanized cities and municipalities. Among others, the scheme grants ISPs automatic license to set up their own broadband network and allow them to operate in any area of their choice. In return, they are required to operate in at least one provincial area where there is equal demand for Internet access.

SB No. 103 promotes the use of Electronic Data Interchange to simplify trade procedures and facilitate exchange of business and trade information. ICTs will be used extensively to aide Filipino businesses in competing in the international trade community.

The need to address increasing cyber-related crimes is also a high priority in Congress. Authors of HB Nos. 4083, 1908, 3241, and 1310, and SB No. 470 assert in particular the Love Bug virus that reportedly originated from the Philippines resulted in lost of business confidence. The bills defined and classified computer-related crimes and identified corresponding penalties.

Meanwhile, SB No. 471 requires all libraries of public and private educational institutions with Internet to regulate student’s access to websites deemed violent, obscene, or pornographic. It entails them to install a blocking software technology to block or filter websites containing obscene and adult materials, using Filipino cultural values as standard. The bill also defines corresponding penalties against violators.

**Integrating Gender in ICT Legislations**

None of the presently pending House and Senate Bills dealing with ICT implicitly address specific gender concerns. The assumption seems to be that overall social and economic growth and development brought about by the use and deployment of ICT will eventually diffuse or trickle down to all sectors of society, including women.

Legislation on gender mainstreaming is premised on the idea that in order to advance gender equality and women’s empowerment, society must take a conscious and pro-active stance and not leave to chance the upliftment of the status of women. This same principle must also hold true for ICT-related legislations.

Moreover, given that the Philippine government has hinged its economic and development strategy on the utilisation and deployment of ICT, it is imperative for ICT-related legislations to also include the advancement of gender equality and women’s empowerment in stated objectives and goals.

**Recommendations**

Where to begin then? Rather than propose an entirely new legislation, the proponents of this paper consider it much more potentially productive to engage legislators and other policymakers in a progressive dialogue towards the adoption and integration of gender considerations in the current proposed ICT legislative initiatives.

The strategies below are proposed for consideration:
1. Creation of the necessary institutional structure

Several bills deal with the creation of a permanent government body or structure what will lead the implementation of national ICT plans and strategies.

We propose the inclusion of the principles of sustainable development and gender equality in legislative actions to create any form of national ICT institution or mechanism. Such strategy will nurture the establishment of mechanisms that will ensure that key stakeholders of ICT are involved in the processes of ICT policy formulation, implementation, and review.

Any institution or mechanism that will be created to spearhead the implementation of ICT plans and strategies must ensure women’s participation in all levels of the country’s ICT advancement: from education, to employment, to maximum utilization, and more importantly, to decision-making and influence. This will ensure the recognition of women’s needs in various levels and aspects of ICT use and development.

Such institution will also provide the necessary space for civil society (especially women’s groups) evaluation and recommendations. It shall also be the main monitor of existing ICT-related laws such as the latest on Anti-Trafficking in Women and Children. This will, in the long run, prevent exploitation of women especially through pornography and on-line trafficking.

In order to address the gender issues properly and accurately, this institution or mechanism should likewise lead in the institutionalisation of gender-disaggregated ICT data gathering and information dissemination.

2. Infrastructure Development

The following strategies directly address the widening digital divide, a condition that feeds into the gender digital divide:

- Investment on physical infrastructure
- Enhancement of the policy and legal environment
- Improvement of the connectivity while increasing access and adopting schemes that will lower the costs
- Adaptation of gender-specific indicators for evaluating actions and plans designed to promote access and use of ICT and deployment of technology infrastructure

3. Human Resource Development

It is wise to employ policy interventions at the root. Education and human resource development are key areas that mold ICT awareness and sadly, widen the gender digital divide. The relevance to women of pending legislations addressing human resource development can be served by the adoption of the following strategies:

- Improvement of the education sector and integrating ICT in the achievement of functional literacy, especially and equally to male and female children
- Equitable and adequate allocation of education and training resources that will serve not just to increase the salary of teachers, but to arm our schools with spending and maintenance capacity for ICT equipment and facilities
• Inclusion of gender sensitivity in the school curricula and even ICT training modules in order to correct the existing cultural and social gender biases and stereotypes

• Improvement of the human capital’s general health and well being

• Development of the country’s human capital, especially women, to be ICT literate and ready

• Strengthening and valuing the existing technical expertise of the Filipinos in the ICT field, especially the ICT educators

• Ensuring that educational and academic curricula are gender-fair and context-appropriate

• Thorough advancement and monitoring of gender-fair hiring and employment opportunities that will end economic dependency of women upon men, thereby increasing ICT access

4. E-Commerce and Business Development Support

The Internet has been widely touted as a huge business opportunity for women. While there are indeed success stories of small enterprises becoming successful due to e-commerce, major reforms in the business and investment environment in the Philippines need to be realised before women can become successful entrepreneurs whether through e-commerce or traditional “brick and mortar” businesses.

In the area of e-commerce, the following strategies are proposed to advance and enhance the position of women as potential e-commerce participants:

• Fostering the necessary mechanisms that will encourage country participation in global e-commerce and e-networks

• Using the benefits of e-commerce and e-business to allow and highlight the advancement of women’s issues, especially in economic empowerment

5. E-Governance

Like e-commerce, e-governance is a new phenomenon that has dramatically caught the attention of policymakers as well as the public at-large. The following strategies are proposed to advance and enhance the role and participation of women in e-governance:

• Continuation and improvement of the existing e-government to make transactions and services more accessible and transparent

• Promotion of e-awareness with gender sensitivity of government officials and policy makers

• Encouragement of the private sector’s and the civil society’s support for, and monitoring of, gender fair e-governance

• Adaptation of gender-specific indicators for evaluating successful e-governance