E-Government for Women’s Empowerment in Asia and the Pacific
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For further information on this report, please contact:

Social Development Division
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
United Nations Building
Rajadamnern Nok Avenue
Bangkok 10200, Thailand
Tel: (66–2) 288–1513
Fax: (66–2) 288–1030
Email: escap-sdd@un.org
Website: www.unescap.org

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This report was prepared under the overall direction of Cai Cai, Chief, Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Section, Social Development Division, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

The report was drafted and prepared by Anita Gurumurthy, Executive Director, IT for Change, with the assistance of Nandini Chami, Senior Research Associate, IT for Change. National consultants for the country studies were Jan McConchie (Australia), Susanna Kelly and Roshika Deo (Republic of Fiji), Maria Macapagal and Mina Peralta (Philippines), and Jung-soo Kim (Republic of Korea).

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Executive Summary

As governments transition towards e-government in Asia and the Pacific, there is growing acknowledgement of the role that e-government could play to harness ICTs for women’s empowerment and gender equality. However, much of e-government policy and implementation still do not take into account the differentiated access to, and impact of, technology for men and women. Recognizing the potential of e-government for women’s empowerment, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) undertook a project in 2014–2015 on “E-Government for Women’s Empowerment in the Asia Pacific”, in partnership with the United Nations Project Office on Governance (UNPOG). The project aims to enhance knowledge and awareness of good practices of gender-responsive policies, programmes and strategies in e-government, in order to help build the capacity of governments to harness this tool towards women’s empowerment.

An institutional analysis of e-government and women’s empowerment

The intrinsic link between e-government and good governance requires that any study of e-government and women’s empowerment examine both the technical dimensions of digitalized public administration and services, as well as the political goal of women’s empowerment and gender equality, through the lens of good governance. The study therefore posited that e-government can be considered gender-responsive if it meets the tenets of good governance, including promoting transparent, accountable and inclusive institutions and services, as well as its gender dimensions. The study addressed the following questions to look at how e-government norms, rules and practices impact institutional shifts towards gender equality and women’s empowerment:

1. What new norms are introduced (in e-government systems) with the introduction of technology? How are emerging norms impacting women’s empowerment and gender equality?

2. What are the new rules legitimizing the structures and procedures of e-government? Do they have a legislative mechanism? How do they impact women’s empowerment and gender equality?

3. What new, everyday practices and cultures of interaction between state and citizen are evident with the introduction of technology? How do they impact women’s empowerment and gender equality?

Focusing on the three key components of e-government: service delivery, citizen uptake and connectivity infrastructure, the study adopted an institutional analysis framework to examine the state of play with respect to e-government policies and interventions in five countries (Australia, Fiji, India, the Philippines and the Republic of Korea), and conducted a deeper analysis of twelve good practices across these countries.
Ingredients of a gender-responsive ecosystem

The findings of the study indicate that gender-responsive e-government policies and programmes require the following key ingredients.

Service delivery

- Balance between digital processes and human mediation
- Robust governance of emerging boundary spanning arrangements in service delivery
- Investments in both data and connectivity capacities
- Gender-responsive data governance to balance transparency and privacy

Citizen uptake

- Technology design that aims to expand women’s choices and engagement in government structures
- Frontline workers to nurture women’s appreciation for, and trust in, digitalized service delivery
- Leadership of national women’s machineries to encourage gender-responsive e-government

Connectivity

- Models to promote meaningful online participation for women
- Subsidized access and safe public spaces for including all women
E-government as an innovative tool to achieve women’s empowerment

The country cases suggest that gender-responsive e-government interventions lead to many positive outcomes for gender equality. They enhance women’s self-esteem, enable women to challenge traditional norms and build peer connections, boost their confidence to participate in the job market, bring them vital information on entitlements, and give them access to mechanisms of redress. They also transform public institutions, making them technically and politically more capable of delivering gender inclusive services.

The move to digital by default in public service delivery must therefore be seen not merely as a shift in tools used by governments. E-government is increasingly a sine qua non of sound public administration that expands the meaning of good governance, giving governments the wherewithal to reach out to, and promote the rights of, women. E-government can and should be seen as a creative policy instrument to achieve the normative goal of women’s empowerment.

The findings of the study also indicate that:

- Gender-responsive practices in e-government depend on strong norms and rules, but institutionalizing gender in e-government also entails wider changes in public institutional cultures and human resource capacities.
- Where there are gender mainstreaming laws and policies and gender budgeting rules, the institutionalization of gender in e-government design and implementation is stronger.
- Well-designed e-government strategies not only tackle women’s exclusion from development services, but also give them the space to participate in shaping development agenda.

The study hence calls upon governments to explicitly adopt gender e-government policy vision and plans, and recommends that the following actions be undertaken with regard to the norms, rules and practices governing the areas of service delivery, citizen uptake and connectivity. These suggestions are aimed to help institutions implementing e-government to foster the required normative and institutional shifts towards gender equality and women’s empowerment.
## Summary of Recommendations

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**E-Government for Women’s Empowerment in Asia and the Pacific**
Setting the scene
1.1 BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Governments in Asia and the Pacific are increasingly transitioning to e-government as a tool to manage back-office systems as well as to enhance the reach and impact of public service delivery. However, much of e-government policy and implementation does not take into account the differentiated access to, and impact of, technology for men and women. In order to address this deficit, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) is undertaking a project on “E-Government for the Empowerment of Women (Phase I)”, in partnership with the United Nations Project Office on Governance (UNPOG), and with generous sponsorship from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea. The project aims to enhance the knowledge and awareness of good practices of gender-responsive policies, programmes and strategies in e-government, in order to help build the capacity of governments to harness this tool towards women’s empowerment.

The project builds on previous research by UNPOG in 2013, which examined national mechanisms promoting gender equality in eleven countries, based on policy surveys and an EGovernment Readiness Index for Gender Equality. The research findings demonstrated that e-government provisions for women still remain an emerging policy issue and governments should be proactive in gender mainstreaming their e-government initiatives, as well as providing women-specific services. The research also concluded that it is crucial to develop e-government strategies targeted specifically towards the empowerment of women, if the digital divide is to be bridged.

This report is an outcome of the project on E-Government for the Empowerment of Women (Phase I), which has sought to develop knowledge and awareness of good practices to understand how e-government can contribute to women’s empowerment. Through case studies from, and country overviews of, five countries in the region, the report presents recommendations on key areas of action required to ensure that e-government responds to the needs and interests of women.

The report also serves as a basis to develop government capacity in this area. It is envisaged that Phase II of the project will build on the report and findings to enhance further knowledge, awareness and capacity of government officials in this area.

The project represents an important initiative to ensure that, in their transition to digital forms of government, public administrations promote women’s empowerment. It is a useful addition to the body of knowledge on e-government, highlighting the significance of gender based outcomes in e-government policy and programming.
1.2 INTRODUCTION

The critical role of e-government in harnessing ICTs for women’s empowerment and gender equality has been widely acknowledged.¹ Digitally mediated interaction presents new possibilities to overcome the traditional barriers to women’s participation in governance processes.²

Governments in Asia and the Pacific have been proactive in harnessing ICTs to enhance their governance systems and service delivery through e-government. The high-demand for ESCAP capacity development services in e-government highlights the increasing interest and demand in this area. However, there is little awareness and capacity to address the gender dimension of e-government. Only 28 per cent of countries in Asia and 29 per cent of countries in Oceania offered some sort of online services for women in 2014.³ It is, therefore, vital that governments in Asia-Pacific ensure that their e-government strategies provide opportunities and equal benefits to women through gender-sensitive public service delivery and inclusive decision-making processes.

The 2014 United Nations E-Government Survey highlighted the potential of e-government to facilitate participatory decision-making and inclusive service delivery for vulnerable groups, including women, through e-participation and a multi-channel approach. E-government can advance the rights of women through better institutional coordination and gender mainstreaming across line ministries, accountability mechanisms that help respond to women’s needs, as well as online channels to engage women in co-creating or co-producing⁴ services that better serve their own needs. The study by UNPOG identifies four areas in which e-government can make a difference for women: access to ICTs, information literacy, effective service delivery, and participation in the online public sphere.⁵

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⁴ Co-production is a mode of public service delivery in which citizens are actively involved in the creation of public policies and services. In contrast to being passive recipients, citizens may be engaged not only in the design but in the running and management of services as well. Bason, C. 2010. Leading public sector innovation: Co-creating for a better society, Bristol: Policy Press
However, as government increasingly moves towards becoming ‘digital by default’, women may not be able to effectively use emerging opportunities and realize their full potential through ICTs owing to persisting social, economic and political inequalities and historical and cultural barriers. This is especially true for developing country contexts, where women lack the same opportunities as men in accessing and using ICTs.\(^6\)

E-government efforts, therefore, may not automatically have an impact on women’s empowerment and gender equality. As many scholars and policy practitioners have pointed out, bringing gender into e-government needs to be a conscious endeavour in e-government efforts. An inclusive and equitable e-government initiative has to ‘think gender’, by design.

This report synthesizes insights from country studies that set out to identify and explore the parameters contributing to women’s empowerment and gender equality in e-government ecosystems. Towards this, the study adopted an institutional analysis framework examining e-government policies and interventions in five countries (Australia, Fiji, India, the Philippines and the Republic of Korea) representing the regional diversity of Asia and the Pacific.

1.3 A GENDER ANALYSIS OF THE E-GOVERNMENT ECOSYSTEM

In the decade after the World Summit on the Information Society, considerable progress has been made on e-government globally. The United Nations E-Government Survey 2014 reveals that all countries have a web presence and “almost all countries in Europe — and the majority of countries in the Americas and Asia provide online information on education, health, social welfare and labour”. By 2012, over 70 per cent of countries were providing one-stop-shop portals, a sharp increase from the mere 26 per cent that provided such a service in 2003. There is strong evidence that income levels of countries are closely related to ICT infrastructure development. This gives countries with high income a head-start over middle and low income countries in e-government efforts. This edge is especially pronounced in e-participation (such as e-information, e-consultation and e-decision making) services.

Similarly, as far as the issue of the connectivity backbone of e-government efforts is concerned, lower middle and low income countries have a long way to go when it comes to including women, older persons and other disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in e-government systems. For instance, in 2014, the United Nations E-Government Survey covering 193 Member States, revealed that out of the 55 high-income countries studied, over 46 offered downloadable forms (for services) specifically directed at vulnerable and marginalized groups, whereas only 1 out of the 36 low income countries studied offered such services.

The following section provides a gender-based review and analysis of e-government. The literature is organized under three major subsections representing the constituent components of the e-government institutional ecosystem, namely, online service delivery, citizen uptake and connectivity architecture. From an analysis of current scholarship, the discussion identifies ‘what matters’ in order to make these three areas gender-responsive.

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8 Ibid.
9 ITU, 2014, op.cit., p. 64.
13 In this study, citizen uptake is understood as a composite idea that includes uptake of e-services among citizens as well as e-information, e-consultation and e-decision-making.
1.4 SERVICE DELIVERY

The world over, e-government design and implementation is largely gender-neutral. The Broadband Commission’s Working Group on Gender and Broadband (2013)\(^\text{14}\) has noted that in the majority of countries, national e-governance policies do not explicitly tackle gender or acknowledge the differentiated impact of these policies on women and men. By assuming a homogenous user group, e-government services may not be able to respond to specific needs and use patterns of different segments of the population, which in turn could exclude them from such services. Moreover, such policies and approaches can undermine the potential of e-government to promote the empowerment of marginalized groups and risk further entrenching existing social exclusions.

According to the United Nations E-Government Survey 2014, the percentage of countries providing online services that are specifically directed towards women is as follows: 23 per cent in the Americas, 26 per cent in Europe, 29 per cent in Oceania, 28 per cent in Asia and a mere 2 per cent in Africa.\(^\text{15}\) The online services referred to here mainly include: availability of application forms pertaining to schemes and services for women on integrated web portals for transactional services, and the availability of information specifically targeted at women users on the websites of ministries and government agencies. On allied strategies, such as the use of mobile phones for targeted information outreach to women and girls, and one-stop-shops that mediate women’s access to online services in contexts with high levels of female illiteracy, the information that we have is limited to specific case studies or documentation by policymakers.\(^\text{16}\) On the demand side, there is little available data on usage and uptake of e-services and m-services by women, as countries do not maintain sex-disaggregated statistics of citizen usage and uptake of e-government.\(^\text{17}\)

Although sporadic small-scale research studies exist, until systematic efforts are made at the national level to collect, and make available, relevant sex-disaggregated data, it will be difficult to examine how the transition to ICT-enabled service delivery systems impact women’s uptake of public services. Many research

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studies approach this issue from a gender digital divide perspective, looking at the correlation between ‘gender’ as a user attribute and the uptake of digitalized services in specific contexts.\textsuperscript{18}

One limitation of this framework is the tendency to “essentialize gender”,\textsuperscript{19} whereby ‘gender’ is treated as an independent variable. This approach fails to take into account the underlying social divides in education, income, employment status etc., which hinder women’s uptake of ICTs and of e-government services. Thus, the underlying gendered patterns and factors behind differentiated outcomes tend to be overlooked. A social constructivist framework can therefore help explain the ‘gender’ dimension to this gap in technological uptake by identifying patterns of behaviour, underlying power dynamics, discrimination based on social identities and attributes, and other factors that contribute to unequal outcomes.\textsuperscript{20}

The implications of digitalization on women’s inclusion in public service delivery systems and the pathways to women’s empowerment that digitalized services open up are significant. In order to effectively understand how e-services impact gender equality, there is the need to go beyond the limited mapping of supply-side targeting of women, and demand-side uptake by women.

However, there is very little existing literature on the impacts of e-services and the transformations they have catalyzed for women’s citizenship,\textsuperscript{21} especially in developing countries.\textsuperscript{22} In spite of the paucity of such studies, some key insights from existing literature are outlined below.
Implications of digitalization for women’s inclusion in public service delivery

The few research studies in this area focus on key elements in the design of digitalized service delivery systems that determine women’s inclusion.

a Role of strategic intermediation

Existing research reveals that strategic intermediation of e-government services plays a critical role in guaranteeing their accessibility to poor and disadvantaged groups, such as rural women. Kuriyan and Ray (2007) and Bailur and Maseiro (2012) have observed how providing ICT access to marginalized rural women and other socially vulnerable groups (through initiatives such as ICT-enabled single window service delivery points) does not automatically ensure their accessibility to digitalized service delivery systems. They highlight the importance of human intermediation at the last mile to ensure that new, digitally enabled delivery systems promote social inclusion. Their research emphasizes the critical role of human intermediaries, such as telecentre assistants at last mile points such as service delivery kiosks or community multimedia telecentres, in opening up “spaces of (human development)”, by playing the role of mediators and translators between multiple community networks.

Other scholars have affirmed the need to pay close attention to the specifics of how practices of intermediation can create a knowledge exchange framework at the community level, through “facilitation (providing opportunities to others), configuration (creation of a social space that facilitates appropriation) and brokering (between individuals and institutions)”. These studies “counter the idea that information and its technologies can smoothly replace the nuanced relations between people”. Instead, they affirm the important function of intermediaries at telecentres and e-service delivery systems at the last mile in helping users, especially those disadvantaged by age, poverty, literacy, gender, disability,
or caste, to “realize the potential of ICTs and develop the capacity and confidence to explore technology independently”. While due attention to the technical soundness of e-government services is critical, this would be redundant unless effectively translated into meaningful use at the last mile. The role of human intermediaries is thus as essential and integral to the design of service delivery as the service itself.

b Balancing automation with human discretion

Accountability mechanisms ensure that core democratic values are furthered in the everyday functioning of governance systems such as service delivery. However, such mechanisms, especially those that focus on procedural accountability, may not always further the inclusion agenda. A case study from the United States of America is illustrative of the inflexibility of digitalized service systems. In Boston, a technical glitch on a federal government website resulted in an application for funding for an inner city education programme being filed 46 minutes late. Though the programme was an award-winning one, the Department of Education officials refused to consider the application saying that it had been submitted late. This is one example of the repercussions arising out of the failure to balance the efficiencies of automation with the need for flexibility, in the transition to digitalized governance systems.

The findings from the above case study highlight how exclusions could result from an overemphasis on automated procedures. The risk of exclusion is higher in contexts where connectivity architecture is underdeveloped, and access to digital technologies and capacities among marginalized groups, including women, to negotiate and overcome such hurdles is still limited, if not sub-optimal. Thus, processes should be designed to ensure that automation does not imply rigidity and initiatives can accommodate human discretion.

29 Ramirez, Parthasarathy & Gordon, op.cit.
Balancing efficiency in service delivery with data security

Digital technologies open up new opportunities for effective targeting of services, especially as they enable the creation of a singular personal identification and authentication system to track individuals accessing government services. Such a system clusters together core identity information, such as biometrics and personal history, pertaining to an individual with a unique, electronically generated identifier. It also facilitates the creation of a mechanism that enables data traces associated with a specific identifier, across multiple databases held by different agencies, to be assembled together.

Technology can thus pave the way for efficiency gains in digitalized service delivery systems. Although beyond the scope of this report, it is important to note that in building a digital service delivery system governments are also confronted with new complexities. Citizen identification systems are the basis for targeted services, but they also present challenges in the overall context of democratic governance in the need for legal frameworks that protect citizens’ data security, freedom from surveillance, and right to privacy.

Lips, op.cit.


1.5 CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT

The United Nations E-Government Survey’s concept of ‘e-participation’ serves as a useful peg for placing our analysis of women’s participation in, and engagement with, governance systems, structures and processes in relation to e-government. In the 2014 E-Government Survey, only 8 countries scored above 66.6 per cent in all 3 facets of e-participation — and of these 8 countries, all except one (Colombia) are high-income countries. E-decision-making tools are used by very few countries and mainly in the area of finance. More number of countries are engaged in e-consultation and e-information provisioning, but there is still a lot of ground to be covered.

As of 2014, 95 countries among the United Nations Member States conduct some form of e-consultation, while over 150 share archival information on various sectors of governance, namely in health, education, finance, and social welfare. However, only 46 countries have set up dedicated platforms for data sharing (open government data portals), of which 85 per cent are high income and upper middle income countries.

This section will focus on e-information, e-consultation and co-production of services as key vectors of e-participation. In addition, it will highlight the potential impact of e-participation initiatives for women’s engagement with, and participation in, governance mechanisms and processes. As gender-based literature in this specific area is scarce, where relevant, insights have been drawn from general studies available to examine the impact of e-participation on gender equality.

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35 According to the United Nations E-Government Survey 2014, e-participation may be defined as consisting of the following dimensions: 1) e-information that enables participation (and uptake of services) by providing citizens with public information, and access to information upon demand; 2) e-consultation by engaging people in deeper contributions to, and deliberation on public policies and services; and 3) e-decision making by empowering people through co-design of policy options and co-production and of service components and delivery modalities. United Nations, 2014, op.cit., p. 197.


E-information services

The potential of e-information services in enhancing citizen uptake of e-government is well-acknowledged among scholars of e-government. For instance, one-stop-shop web portals may enhance citizen uptake of digitalized services by smoothening citizen-state interfaces in service delivery. As Westcott observes, “the advantage of [a one-stop-shop portal] is that users can receive ‘one-stop service(s),’ and don’t need to know which government agencies are responsible. For a particular issue, users [are now able to] obtain procedures so that they know what to do under different circumstances.”

Similarly, as Arpit (2012) explains, e-information services — such as information on work flow processes and location of authority, outcomes of government decisions, performance indicators of government departments, can also enhance citizen engagement in governance processes, by opening up governance information that can be the basis of community audit of service delivery and of the governance system in its entirety.

However, it is important to keep in mind the following, which are some of the caveats with respect to the efficacy of e-information services in realizing these outcomes:

1. **Support for information literacy and access**

   To fully realize their promise, e-information services need to be supported by intermediation structures at the community level and digital literacy programmes for marginalized groups. As in the case of other ICT-enabled governance services, low levels of technological literacy and barriers in infrastructure prevent many segments of the population (such as women and other socially vulnerable groups) from accessing and benefiting from such e-information services. Thus, e-information services may not succeed in...
circumventing socioeconomic biases that structure political participation in democratic contexts. In fact, research suggests that e-information services can reinforce existing biases.  

Therefore, to fully realize the promise of e-information services, it is important for governments to invest in a combination of offline and online strategies for awareness-generation, and strategic facilitation and mediation of e-information services that can enable women and other marginalized groups to benefit from e-information. ICT-enabled community kiosks/information centres and digital literacy among these sections of the population are vital steps in this regard. Research on public access centres points to their contribution to encouraging civic interaction and engagement, offering the social infrastructure for converting information access into civic participation.

Existing studies emphasize how the idea of digital literacy cannot be limited to computer skills training. Instead, efforts to promote digital capabilities need to imagine digital literacy as an umbrella idea that involves a range of competencies: “competencies in actively finding and using information in ‘pull mode’ (information literacy)...abilit(ies) to deal with information formats ‘pushed’ at the user (media literacy)... and an understanding of sensible and correct behaviour in the digital environment, (including) issues of privacy and security (moral/social literacy)”.

Most importantly, digital literacy efforts need to recognize and connect to the multiple forms of literacies in the context they operate, including oral and folk forms of knowledge.
b Building capacity to ‘make sense’ of open data

Open data initiatives are a valued information source for their potential to enhance citizen engagement in governance processes.\(^{50}\) Open data/open government data is an umbrella term that refers to all initiatives that stem from the intention of making available “local, national and regional data, (particularly publicly acquired data) in a form that allows for direct manipulation using software tools, as for example, for the purposes of cross tabulation, visualization, mapping and so on.”\(^{51}\) As defined by the 2014 E-Government Survey, “Data is considered open when it is shared with an open license in a way that permits commercial and non-commercial use and reuse without restrictions.”\(^{52}\) However, it is important to understand that opening up access to governance information does not automatically enable effective use by citizens, especially those belonging to marginalized groups. Often, such groups lack access to the underlying ICT infrastructure, and the requisite skills for ‘making sense’ of the information and data sets thus published.\(^ {53}\) Moreover, it is important to ensure that the rights of marginalized groups are not compromised. At this point in time, government open data strategies are mostly limited to addressing supply side issues. Some studies do show that partnerships with public interest intermediaries in civil society are likely to be important in the medium term, to realize the transformative power of open data for citizen accountability.\(^ {54}\)

E-consultation

Scholars and policy practitioners have recognized the importance of consultative mechanisms (using a combination of online and offline strategies) for enhancing citizen uptake of e-government services.\(^ {55}\) Evidence indicates that e-government services can be inclusive only when they are contextually-relevant and meaningful to the group targeted by the service.\(^ {56}\) This requires mechanisms that elicit the participation of the target group in the design of such services and citizen feedback.\(^ {57}\) Existing research


\(^{51}\) Gurstein, op.cit.


\(^{53}\) Gurstein, op.cit.


also suggests that e-consultations work best where there is “political willingness, political listening, clearly formulated purpose and objectives, effective institutional preparedness and designated lines of authority for processing and responding to inputs”, all of which factors are highly contingent on the particular institutional system of e-government. This is therefore very much work in progress, with a steep learning curve for governments, even in developed countries. One study for example, on initiatives in Europe, found that “citizens are invited to the policy-making table and are consulted, but the extent to which institutions ‘learn’ and take citizens’ inputs seriously in the process is uncertain.”

**Co-production of services**

The co-production of services is a promising horizon for women’s empowerment and an exciting frontier for e-government. By engaging women to collaborate in the design and delivery of public services, informational services for women can encourage the local production of information in a manner that recognizes women’s pre-existing local knowledge.

Women can be part of specific service components if new modalities in e-government are based on partnerships and collaboration that brings women new strategic choices to expand their capabilities and to make services more responsive. Examples of ICT centres from Thailand highlight how access to such centres and digital literacy training for local communities and groups have led to enhanced community management, for instance, in water management. The engagement of dynamic intermediaries was considered a major factor influencing these positive outcomes, which included changes in public perception and interaction with technology, and resulted in the local community using technology in developing solutions. However, in a fledgling field, the engagement of women in co-design and in co-creation of services is yet to be explored systematically by governments.

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59 Ibid.

60 Huyer, op.cit.

1.6 CONNECTIVITY ARCHITECTURE

Accessible and affordable connectivity has been an important component for successful e-government efforts. Some key insights on creating a connectivity architecture that is gender-inclusive are summarized below.

Public access policies and programmes

Public access can complement private access, particularly for those segments of the population with limited digital capabilities, such as citizens from lower socioeconomic strata and older persons, even in contexts with high levels of connectivity. In fact, a recent eight-country research study led by the University of Washington on the impact of public access to ICTs concluded that:

“the value of public access ICTs is not limited to countries with very low levels of digital connectivity. Public access is equally important in higher connectivity countries, supporting multiple modalities of access, and ensuring that marginalized groups can access the resources to join the information society. There is reason for both widespread and strategic support for public access availability in low and middle income countries”.

Considering that the existing sociostructural divides between women and men have produced a global gender divide in terms of access to the connectivity architecture underpinning the information society, women ought to be a key constituency on which to focus efforts of public access. Public connectivity points also have the potential to become local hubs for educational and entrepreneurial activity that builds on the strength of local digital knowledge ecosystems.

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64 Sey et. al., op.cit., p. 4.


Though there is evidence of their potential to enhance women’s access to governance information and services, education, health, and leisure activities, research reveals that public access points do not automatically open up opportunities for women’s empowerment. This is because in many contexts, sociocultural norms may restrict women’s mobility and participation in the public sphere, and thus, public access points, such as Internet cafes, end up as male bastions that intimidate women. Therefore, the design of public access points needs to be consciously geared towards creating a space that welcomes women. It was found in one study that women tend to frequent libraries and community telecentres more than cybercafes.

The institutional design factors that make some public access points more gender-inclusive than others needs to be understood for framing appropriate policy directions. This is an urgent imperative, considering that gender concerns remain absent from ICT policies in most countries.

**Digital opportunity and mobile connectivity**

In developing country contexts, government strategies to build the connectivity infrastructure, especially for women and other marginalized groups, have mostly focused on tapping into the potential of mobile broadband. This has resulted in a situation where in the global South, mobile broadband has become a replacement rather than a complement to fixed broadband.

Though the investments required for mobile broadband are much lower than that of building fixed broadband infrastructure, it is important for country governments to fully consider the trade-offs involved in this exclusive pursuit of a mobile-based strategy for connectivity. As highlighted by the 2012 Report of the ITU on ‘Measuring the Information Society’:

“It is also important to note that while mobile-broadband technology helps to increase coverage and offer mobility, the mobile networks and services currently in place usually only allow limited data access, at lower speeds, which often makes mobile-broadband subscriptions unsuitable for intensive users, such as


68 Sey et.al., op.cit., p. 10.

69 Broadband Commission Working Group on Broadband and Gender, 2013, op.cit.

businesses and institutions. High-speed, reliable broadband access is particularly important for the delivery of vital public services, such as those related to education, health and government. The potential and benefit of mobile-broadband services is therefore constrained when mobile broadband is used to replace, rather than complement, fixed (wired)-broadband access.71

As has been discussed in the previous sections, e-government efficacy, especially to meet the goals of women’s empowerment, is contingent upon sensitivity and sophistication in the design of service delivery. The connectivity architecture is an important ingredient in this mix, and serves both institutional and individual capacities.

Thus, “...[t]he mobile is but one part of the menu, with a wide-ranging complex of servers, apps, platforms, wired and wireless connectivity, human organization and contextual priorities and much more, powering what we see as ‘use’.”72 For the majority of the world’s marginalized women situated in developing country contexts, the ability to access the full range of opportunities in the emerging digital ecosystem would require adequate attention to the connectivity architecture in e-government initiatives.

The literature reviewed above reveals some critical insights for what makes an e-government ecosystem gender inclusive and responsive. The following chapter attempts to piece together these guiding points into a framework that allows for a comprehensive stocktaking of if and how the e-government ecosystem, as a whole, effectively addresses the goal of women’s empowerment. It seeks to use the analytical pegs emerging from the various pointers existing in the literature as discussed above, within a coherent framework to investigate the gender quotient of e-government and its constituent components.

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72 Gurumurthy & Chami, op.cit., p. 2.
2 Framework
2.1 RATIONALE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Despite the development of global gender indices and greater awareness of the importance of mainstreaming gender in global indices, there has been little development of indicators, data collection and capacity to measure and capture the gender dimension of e-government. Any outcome-oriented analysis of e-government should be able to throw light on gender-based progress. Sex disaggregation of data at the national level — on the components of service delivery, citizen uptake and connectivity architecture — can be seen as an important starting point towards this. This will enable tracking questions such as “How many women-only online services are available?”; “Is women’s participation in the online spaces of state-citizen interaction equal to that of men?”; “How many services target women beneficiaries through mobile phones?”; or “How many women use the Internet compared to men?”. However, measuring the overall efficacy for gender equality would also require yardsticks that capture both institutional capacity and commitment, as well as the gains women experience in terms of shifts in their social status. Any robust analysis of e-government for women’s empowerment should therefore be able to reveal the underlying factors contributing to differentiated outcomes for women and men, and evaluate the contribution of e-government to shifts in women’s autonomy and well-being.

It has been argued that the raison d’être of e-government is good governance. Proceeding backwards from this goal, any gender-based assessment of e-government will have to examine whether and how the constituent characteristics of good governance are gendered and if this produces empowering outcomes for women. In relation to e-government, Parthasarathy (2011) argues for the need to tie the concept of good governance to the critical governance literature, in order to ensure that the concept of e-government is restored to its full integrity. Good governance would thus refer to both the technical dimensions of administrative simplification and political aspects of promoting transparent and accountable institutions in a democracy. Gender equality is a core dimension of such good governance, as gender constitutes a key axis of marginalization of citizens from governance structures.


Using this working definition, this research has sought to examine how in the contexts under study, the design and implementation of e-government has enabled the realization of good governance that encompasses the political goal of women’s empowerment and gender equality. The three constituent components of the e-government institutional ecosystem, online service delivery, citizen uptake\footnote{In this study, citizen uptake is understood as a composite idea that includes uptake of e-services among citizens as well as e-information, e-consultation and e-decision-making.} and connectivity architecture, were studied separately to answer this question. The research adopted a social constructivist and historical perspective on e-government in relation to women’s empowerment and gender equality. It studied why\footnote{Heeks, R., & Bailur, S. (2006). Analyzing e-government research: Perspectives, philosophies, theories, methods and practice. Government Information Quarterly, 24(2), pp. 243-265. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/240435446_'Analyzing_E-Government_Research_Perspective_Philosophies_Theories_Methods_and_Practice', 21 April 2016.} processes of the e-government system developed in particular ways, and how they evolved, and unpacked the norms, rules and practices that shaped its gender-responsiveness.\footnote{Kim, S., Kim, H.J., & Lee, H. (2009). An institutional analysis of an e-government system for anti-corruption: The case of OPEN. Government Information Quarterly, 26(1), pp. 42-50. Retrieved from http://mail.imb.usu.ru/docs/Bank English_Translated Articles/English/HR Management/An institutional analysis of an e-government system for anti-corruption_ The case of OPEN.pdf, 21 April 2016. In institutional theory, the following mechanisms are considered to be at the core of institutional systems: normative, regulatory/coercive, and cognitive/mimetic. Normative mechanisms refer to the norms underpinning the domain in which a particular institution operates. Regulatory mechanisms refer to rules and other mechanisms for legitimation of institutional functioning. Mimetics or cognitive mechanisms are the practices that shape institutional systems. Hence, an institutional study of e-governance has to focus on norms, rules and practices.}

The overall questions that the research study sought to answer are as follows:

1. What new norms are introduced (in e-government systems) with the introduction of technology? How are emerging norms impacting women’s empowerment and gender equality?
2. What are the new rules legitimizing the structures and procedures of e-government? Do they have a legislative mechanism? How do they impact women’s empowerment and gender equality?
3. What new, everyday practices and cultures of interaction between state and citizen are evident with the introduction of technology? How do they impact women’s empowerment and gender equality?
2.2 MATRIX FOR INSTITUTIONAL ANALYSIS OF GENDER AND E-GOVERNMENT

An analytical framework, represented in Table 1, was developed to examine the institutional ecosystem of e-government for its responsiveness to women’s empowerment and gender equality. The framework was used to study the state of play with regard to gender and e-government in the countries of study and to evaluate good practices and case studies for the changes they have effected in gender norms, rules, identity and relations.

The table elaborates certain ‘pegs’ to facilitate a nuanced understanding of why and how institutional shifts that have effected women’s inclusion in governance systems have taken place. The pegs are indicative, rather than exhaustive, in scope, and presented through a matrix that brings together the key components of e-government of a) online service delivery, b) citizen uptake and c) connectivity architecture, together with the 3 key dimensions of institutional analysis, a) norms, b) rules and c) practices.

The methodology used for the case studies is further elaborated in Chapter 3, Methodology.

While institutional transformation can advance gender equality, and is necessary to sustain women’s empowerment over time, it is important not to conflate the analysis of such systemic shifts that impact institutional inclusion of women, with the end-goals and outcomes of empowerment.80

Therefore, as part of the research framework, a suitable evaluation model was also proposed.

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### TABLE 1: A MATRIX FOR GENDER ANALYSIS OF THE E-GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONAL ECOSYSTEM

**What new norms are introduced (in e-government systems) with the introduction of technology?**

**How are emerging norms impacting women’s empowerment and gender equality?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NORMS</th>
<th>Analytical Peg</th>
<th>Probing questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SERVICE DELIVERY</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Shift in the room for human mediation</td>
<td>Analytical Peg</td>
<td>In e-service delivery, is arbitrariness in decision-making reduced? What is gained?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Is there room for human discretion reduced at the local level? What therefore is lost?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Is there a tension between gender equity and efficiency, when things become automated/digitized or when human mediation is eliminated/minimized?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 New frameworks of mediation/new intermediaries</td>
<td>Analytical Peg</td>
<td>What are the premises of intermediation of service delivery in the e-service delivery system?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>What protections exist for women’s rights with the virtualization of service delivery? How is accountability envisaged and built into the present system?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Shifts in the predictability of state-citizen interaction</td>
<td>Analytical Peg</td>
<td>How is the issue of building women’s trust addressed in e-service delivery?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>How is the issue of ensuring the predictability of the new digital system being viewed? Is it seen only as a supply side issue — about assuring technical robustness of the new platforms/portals supporting digital service delivery? Or is it seen as a larger normative concern about trust, emerging from the changing role of the state in public service delivery?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 New norms in interdepartmental and government-citizen-private sector arrangements</td>
<td>Analytical Peg</td>
<td>In the development of e-service delivery systems, what are the new intergovernmental and interstakeholder partnerships that are emerging?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>What are the ensuing normative shifts with respect to guaranteeing women’s rights in public service delivery?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Convergence in service delivery</td>
<td>Analytical Peg</td>
<td>How does the e-service delivery framework address the question of making last mile convergence effective and efficient for marginalized women?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CITIZEN UPTAKE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6 Shift in the norms of citizen use of/access to services, and citizen feedback</td>
<td>Analytical Peg</td>
<td>How do existing policy frameworks address the question of using the digital opportunity for women’s participation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>How are inclusiveness and contextual issues addressed in the design of e-participation initiatives?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CONNECTIVITY</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7 Assumption about ICT access and connectivity</td>
<td>Analytical Peg</td>
<td>What is the vision of ICTs and the Internet that is guiding mainstream policy in the context being studied? Are they seen as public goods?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>How does this vision impact affordability, access and meaningful use? Are existing ICT and broadband policy frameworks responsive to the need to address sociocultural barriers that hinder women’s access to the Internet and ICTs?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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81 In e-governance literature, human mediation is a concept that is used to emphasize the fact that the transition to digital governance may not imply complete virtualization of state-citizen interaction. In developing country contexts especially, human intermediaries/facilitators (for instance, at the last mile — in telecentres, public access points, one-stop-shops etc.) play a critical role in mediating citizen interaction with state structures.
What are the new rules legitimizing the structures and procedures of e-government? Do they have a legislative mechanism? How do they impact women’s empowerment and gender equality?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RULES</th>
<th>Analytical peg</th>
<th>Probing questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SERVICE DELIVERY</td>
<td>2.1 Authority to process, authenticate and modify transactions</td>
<td>In the e-service delivery system, where is the authority to modify and authenticate transactions located? What are the changes in the location of such authority, when compared to the pre-digital system? How have such changes impacted the interface of women and marginalized groups with public service delivery? Are the new locations of authority with respect to transactions clearly visible to citizens?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.2 Transparency mechanisms in e-service design and entitlements processing</td>
<td>Does the e-service delivery system provide clear information on work flow processes? What laws/policies/rules govern transparency? Are there mechanisms for public audit of platform architecture underpinning the e-service delivery system?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.3 Mechanisms for responsiveness to citizens' concerns in entitlements processing</td>
<td>What are the guarantees in place to ensure that minimum service level standards are guaranteed to citizens? Is there a grievance redress policy?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.4 Data security law/policy</td>
<td>How do legal and policy frameworks ensure that data-based tracking in e-service delivery does not compromise privacy? How do existing data systems impact women in situations of high vulnerability (both positively and negatively)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CITIZEN UPTAKE</td>
<td>2.5 Policies on openness of the technical architecture</td>
<td>Is there a clear open standards policy directive for e-government? How are vendor lock-ins in e-government public-private partnerships addressed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.6 Rules/laws on right to information and proactive disclosure of public information</td>
<td>How are existing laws on citizens' right to information addressing the issue of proactive disclosure of information through online spaces? What is the existing policy framework on open government data?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONNECTIVITY</td>
<td>2.7 Policies for universal and affordable access of ICTs</td>
<td>How do existing policy frameworks address the question of taking connectivity to remote and disadvantaged populations? Are they informed by perspectives on gender-based exclusion? How is the question of public access infrastructure being taken up in policy frameworks? Is there a national broadband plan?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### What new everyday practices and cultures of interaction between state and citizen are evident with the introduction of technology? How do they impact women’s empowerment and gender equality?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRACTICES</th>
<th>Analytical peg</th>
<th>Probing questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SERVICE DELIVERY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 New forms of intermediation</td>
<td>Do the new forms of intermediation in the digitalized service delivery systems empower women in accessing government? Or are they merely replacing traditional middle-men?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 New forms of stakeholder arrangements</td>
<td>What kinds of practices (including coordination arrangements) have been put in place in new partnerships in the e-service delivery system to ensure accountability and responsiveness? Are there mechanisms for social audit in place?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Practices for making tacit work flows explicit in virtualized service delivery.</td>
<td>What kind of practices have been put in place to ensure that women and marginalized groups are made aware about the eligibility criteria for various entitlements provided by government? Is the status of their claims/applications clear to citizens? Do all citizens (including those from vulnerable socio-economic groups) receive timely updates on the status of their transactions? Is the rejection of applications for service delivery communicated in a timely manner?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Practices to promote equity considerations in service implementation.</td>
<td>What has been the impact of e-service delivery on the time and other costs of marginalized women accessing the service? What are the practices that have been put in place to build the gender-responsiveness of e-service delivery? (Management Information System for sex-disaggregated data on entitlement allocations, women-only time slots in one-stop-shops etc.) Have they led to the intended outcome?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CITIZEN UPTAKE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 Offline mechanisms to strengthen online uptake (including digital literacy efforts)</td>
<td>What are the offline mechanisms that exist for strengthening online uptake? Are these offline mechanisms responsive to the issues/concerns women raise? What kind of digital literacy efforts exist? What is their impact in building women’s capacity to use e-services?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6 Use of technological platforms for wider and gender-inclusive reach (SMS outreach)</td>
<td>What digital possibilities are being harnessed for citizen outreach? Is there any attention to specific strategies for reaching out to women?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONNECTIVITY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.3 EVALUATION MODEL FOR E-GOVERNMENT AND WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT

A specific need that this study has tried to address is the development of a measurement tool that will allow particular e-government ecosystems to be assessed for their actual gender-based outcomes. Even when designed and implemented to be gender inclusive or targeting women citizens, services may or may not bring gains for women and realign gender relations. Knowing the pathways to and place holders of intended and actual change therefore becomes important.

Scholarly explorations see women’s empowerment as an enhancement of women’s control over resources, material and symbolic, which transforms power equations in gender relations.\(^{82}\) Even if end-goals and outcomes of women’s empowerment may be best captured through initiative-specific indicators, empowerment indicators must be underpinned by a “recognition of the universal elements of gender subordination that underpin local gender systems”.\(^{83}\)

The study uses the Domains of Change framework,\(^{84}\) provided in Figure 1. This framework captures the multidimensionality of women’s experiences of empowerment, and traces gender-based power at the individual and systemic/institutional level, and across formal and informal domains. The framework was adapted to the context of e-government, as outlined below, to gauge the gender-related shifts observed in each case study. For the application of this evaluative framework for each case study, please see the case study synopsis in Annex II.

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\(^{83}\) Malhotra, Schuler & Boender, op.cit.

FIGURE 1
DOMAINS OF CHANGE FRAMEWORK TO CAPTURE GENDER RELATED SHIFTS
AT THE INDIVIDUAL AND INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

In this framework, the y-axis captures the scale at which change takes place—from the individual to macro-level systemic shifts. The x-axis maps the continuum of change from the informal to the formal socioeconomic, cultural and political domains. Each of the quadrants maps specific changes at the intersections of these 2 axes. The quadrants are discussed below:

**Quadrant 1: Individual-formal**

This refers to changes in individual women’s access to, and control over, resources. This includes access to assets, symbolic resources as well as entitlements guaranteed under state laws. E-government programmes can contribute to such shifts by enhancing women’s access to digital literacy, public information and entitlements.

**Quadrant 2: Systemic-formal**

This refers to institutional shifts that further women’s empowerment and gender equality. An effective policy framework for e-government needs to address women’s digital citizenship, combining traditional rights to information and participation with new entitlements that ensure effective and meaningful access to e-services.

**Quadrant 3: Systemic-informal**

This refers to traditions, beliefs, practices etc. that are deeply embedded in a culture and the deep structures that inform gender norms in a society. These are extremely difficult to change, and need action that goes beyond the legalistic. E-government interventions in the area of enhancing women’s public participation and political voice have the potential to challenge hegemonic gender discourses, thus enabling a cultural shift.

**Quadrant 4: Individual-informal**

This refers to attitudes, beliefs and capabilities of individual women and men—in other words, their consciousness. E-government interventions, especially those in the area of digital literacy and skills training for women, can contribute to an expansion of women’s information and communicative capabilities and self-esteem.

The quadrants are not mutually exclusive. A single intervention has the potential to lead to changes across all these domains. Notably, changes that occur may not only be those desired by the initiative under scrutiny, but also those that are unanticipated.
3 Methodology
3.1 COUNTRY REVIEWS AND CASE STUDIES

The findings of this research are informed by a country overview of the e-government institutional ecosystem in the five countries covered and country-based case studies of ‘good practices’ in the area of gender-responsive e-government. The country overviews covered a gender analysis of the historical evolution of e-government in the country, the current status of e-service delivery and an assessment of the legal frameworks on a range of issues implicating e-government (see Annex I). Country overviews are issued separate to this report at egov4women.unescapsdd.org/country-overviews.

Desk research and key informant interviews served as the main information sources for the country overviews. The desk research covered the following:

1. Global reports on the status of e-government, ICT development, and gender equality in the country-contexts, such as the United Nations’ biennial e-government development surveys, the ITU’s annual reports on “Measuring the Information Society Report”, the “Global Information Technology Report” and “Global Gender Gap Report” of the World Economic Forum.

2. National level policy documents on the strategic vision guiding e-government and the design and implementation guidelines underpinning service delivery, citizen uptake and connectivity architecture (such as national e-governance plans and policies; ICT and broadband plans; digital literacy programmes/campaigns; and laws governing data security and privacy, right to information, open data, public-private partnerships in service delivery, open standards, citizen charters etc.)

3. National statistics on status of women, country level reports and assessments highlighting key priorities for women’s empowerment and gender equality in the country, and policies at the intersections of gender and ICTs.

Where feasible, policy makers involved in the design of e-government systems, and research scholars and civil society actors engaged in e-government and gender issues were interviewed as key informants.

In addition to the country overviews, in each of the countries under study, two or three case studies on good practices in the area of e-government for women’s empowerment and gender equality were undertaken. A synopsis of these case studies can be found in Annex II.
The following criteria informed the case selection process:

1. The initiative should be a government-led one that meets at least one of the following criteria:
   - Incorporate a vision/mandate for women’s empowerment and gender equality
   - Seek to mainstream gender in its core strategies
   - Cater mainly to women beneficiaries

2. Government-led initiatives here refer to initiatives that are completely owned and operated by state agencies as well as initiatives implemented by state agencies through partnership arrangements with private sector or civil society organizations.

3. The initiative should be able to offer insights about good practices in at least two of the three components of the e-government institutional ecosystem: service delivery, citizen uptake and connectivity architecture.

Based on these criteria, twelve case studies were selected across the five countries.

### 3.2 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

During the implementation of the study, the lack of initiative and awareness on this issue within governments in the region became apparent. Moreover, as a thematic area that is relatively underexplored in the theoretical literature, there were very few guiding tools through which to analyze e-government for women’s empowerment. Given the very scarce availability of data, information and research in this area, the report can be seen as one attempt to build some systematic evidence. It does not claim to present a comprehensive account of the issue but offers a normative approach to look at e-government through a gender lens.

With regard to the case studies, although consistent criteria for the selection of case studies were applied for all countries, in the case of Fiji, despite consultation with multiple stakeholders, there were very few initiatives that mapped clearly onto the research criteria. Two initiatives were nevertheless selected after some modification to the criteria.
The lack of initiatives and availability of information indicates that further efforts are required to develop capacity and understanding in this area. Despite these shortcomings, it is intended that this project will contribute to much-needed dialogue and capacity development to promote e-government for women’s empowerment.

3.3 OVERVIEW OF CASE STUDIES

Initiatives with a mandate for women’s empowerment and gender equality

a Our Watch, a joint initiative of the State Government of Victoria and the Commonwealth Government of Australia (Our Watch)

This is a joint initiative of the state government of Victoria and the Commonwealth Government of Australia that seeks to create a “sustained and constructive public conversation with the aim of improving the public’s awareness of violence against women in Australia”. Our Watch has used a combination of traditional and social media-based outreach and community events to challenge the prevailing culture of silence on gender-based violence. It has adopted a number of innovative strategies such as: creating a safe social media space for survivors of violence to share their stories, a social media-based campaign targeting youth that aims at changing attitudes and behaviour that condone violence against women, and a national media engagement project for sensitive reporting on gender-based violence.

b Interactive Voice Response System (IVRS) Reporting System for Gender Based Violence (GBV) of the Society for the Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP), Government of Andhra Pradesh, India (IVR-SERP)

The Society for the Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP) works towards lifting rural women out of poverty through a collectivization and skills-development approach. Addressing gender-based violence is one of its critical priorities, and towards this, it has created a network of Social Action Committees at the village, sub-district and district levels, comprising representatives from its women’s collectives. The IVRS-based reporting system set up by SERP enables women volunteers of the Social Action Committees to bring...
instances of gender and social injustice to the attention of the officers of the Gender Unit of SERP, in a timely manner, and effectively coordinate follow-up action.

c  Sreesakthi Portal of the Kudumbashree programme, Government of Kerala, India (Sreesakthi Portal)

The Sreesakthi Portal aims at providing a web-based open space for dialogue and discussion, for members of the Kudumbashree programme’s women’s collectives spread across 1072 local government units of the state of Kerala. The portal aims at creating an online forum where women can develop informed perspectives on gender issues, and question/challenge prevailing gender norms. The portal also enables dialogue between women members of Kudumbashree collectives, and public authorities and political leaders.

d  Cyber-mentoring for Women via Web Portal, Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, Republic of Korea (Cyber-mentoring Initiative)

The Cyber-mentoring Initiative provides a space where young women who are fresh graduates or in the early stages of their careers can seek mentoring and guidance from senior women professionals. Using its online database of mentors, the portal matches applicants with mentors, based on shared professional interests. Each mentoring arrangement is for a period of 60 days, and is renewable twice, at the behest of the mentee.

e  Safe Return Home Mobile App, Ministry of Security and Public Administration, Republic of Korea (Safe Return Home)

Safe Return Home is a personal safety app that provides users the means to share information about their whereabouts. Features of the app include:

1  Notifications about user’s geolocation in real time with select contacts via text messages or SMS platforms.

2  Auto-notifications to key contacts when the user passes through areas that she has marked as ‘dangerous’.
Information about key emergency services such as hospitals/clinics, pharmacies, police station, fire stations, emergency shelters etc. in the neighbourhoods that the user is passing through.

**f** Sex Offender Alert, Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, Republic of Korea (Sex Offender Alert)

Sex Offender Alert is a public alert system that alerts members of the public to the presence of ‘known’ sex offenders in their neighborhoods through three channels: a website, a mobile app and a mail notification service. The service effectively balances survivor-confidentiality and the offenders’ right to privacy, with the larger public interest of issuing alerts about sex offenders, through legal and technical safeguards that restrict republication of the data shared on the service.

**g** mWomen e-service, Department of Women and Vodafone, Government of Fiji (mWomen)

mWomen is a subscription-based SMS service that seeks to provide free advice on women’s and children’s legal rights, family law and gender based violence. The service also has an additional SMS Counsellor component — a free short code number where individuals can phone in to seek legal advice and counselling. Callers who access this service are referred to ‘Empower Pacific’, an NGO partner in the initiative.

**Initiatives that have sought to mainstream gender**

**h** Blended Learning Programme of the TESDA Women’s Centre, Philippines (Blended Learning programme)

The Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) in the Philippines aims at shaping policies and programmes for quality technical education and skills development. The Women’s Centre serves as TESDA’s lead training institution for integrating gender and development perspectives in technical and vocational education programmes. The Blended Learning Programme is an innovative initiative of the TESDA Women’s Centre that has complemented traditional classroom-based methods with online learning, to support women learners pace their own learning and benefit from peer-support.
Initiatives in which women are a large proportion of beneficiaries

i SA Community, Government of South Australia

SA Community is an online community information directory in South Australia that informs citizens about governmental and non-governmental services in the areas of “health, welfare, housing, education, community participation, information, legal services, arts and recreation”. The information for the directory is compiled through a process of crowdsourcing, with some verification checks in place. Older women constitute a large proportion of the users of the service. Moreover, SA Community serves as the key information resource for the Women’s Information Service run by the Office of Women, Government of South Australia.

j Grievance Redress System (GRS) of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino (Conditional Cash Transfers) programme — Department of Social Welfare and Development, Philippines

The Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino programme is a cash transfer programme of the government of the Philippines, with health and education conditionalities for the participating households. Women constitute over 82 per cent of the beneficiaries, and a major proportion of the cadre of community leaders (‘Parent Leaders’) recruited by the programme for community monitoring and facilitation of grievance redress processes. The Grievance Redress System underpinning the programme is a basic but critical e-government service that enables community members in effectively demanding accountability from concerned authorities.

k Community eCentres in the Municipality of Malvar, Philippines (CeCs)

The Community eCentres (CeCs) programme is a national initiative for digital inclusion in the Philippines. As part of this, over 1400 telecentres, which provide access to ICT infrastructure, digital literacy training and e-government services have been set up in remote municipalities. At the national level, the programme adopts a gender-neutral approach. However, Malvar Municipality, due to the efforts of two e-government ‘champions’, has been able to make inroads in encouraging women from local communities to use the centre. The municipality has made dedicated allocations in its annual budget for the skills training of marginalized women through the CeCs, and taken special efforts to reach the benefits of the programme to...
women health workers, daycare teachers, and young women who want to enroll in alternative education courses.

| Community Telecentre Initiative, Government of Fiji (Community Telecentres) |

The Fijian Government Community Telecentre Initiative aims at enhancing access to IT services and e-government for rural populations, especially members of socioeconomically disadvantaged groups. Most of the 26 telecentres set up under this programme are located in rural schools. Access is free and there are lab assistants to provide technical support. Though the design of these telecentres is gender-neutral, there is empirical evidence of women comprising a large number of beneficiaries.
4 E-government evolution
E-government evolution in research countries
This chapter traces the evolution of e-government ecosystems in the countries covered by the research from a gender perspective. Towards this, it first takes stock of the level of socioeconomic and e-government development of each country. Then it traces the key milestones in e-government policy, examining them for their gender based assumptions and assertions. The insights from this chapter draw upon existing global indices that assess human development, gender equality and ICT development as well as the country overviews produced as part of this research.

4.1 SOCIOECONOMIC AND E-GOVERNMENT DEVELOPMENT

The five countries in this research study are at different stages with respect to progress on gender equality, economic growth and informatization\(^87\) (see Table 2). Generally, the countries have similar rankings for both GNI per capita and the ICT development index. This can be expected, as the level of GNI per capita (and disposable income within societies) influences “both investment in infrastructure and the adoption of ICT service.”\(^88\) However, the Global Gender Gap rankings reveal that neither ICT Development nor GNI per capita levels correspond to national gender equality gains. Gender equality is thus an important social goal that may not automatically accompany growth or ICT diffusion and use.

Table 3 provides a comparative analysis of the level of e-government development in the five countries covered by this research, based on their rankings in the UN EGDI 2014. Australia and the Republic of Korea are world leaders in e-government. Fiji is at the bottom rung of the high-EGDI category. All 3 countries seem to be on a robust trajectory of e-government development, according to the United Nations E-Government Survey 2014. Both India and the Philippines are in the middle-EGDI group. Notably, they are a part of a small set of 7 countries that have made clear advances in e-government, despite their relatively lower levels of national income. Similarly, Fiji has made immense progress in e-government development between 2012–2014, with its ranking having improved by 20 places within the same timeframe.
## TABLE 2
### SOCIOECONOMIC AND ICT DEVELOPMENT IN THE 5 COUNTRY CONTEXTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measurement Index</th>
<th>Australia</th>
<th>Fiji</th>
<th>India</th>
<th>Philippines</th>
<th>Republic of Korea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Global Gender Gap Index of the World Economic Forum (2015)</strong></td>
<td>Rank 36</td>
<td>Rank 121</td>
<td>Rank 108</td>
<td>Rank 7</td>
<td>Rank 115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Global Gender Gap Index of the World Economic Forum ranks 145 countries in the world in terms of their gender equality attainments measured using a composite index along the 4 dimensions of economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, political empowerment, health and survival. Scores fall between a range of 0-1 with 1 indicating absolute gender equality.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>These rankings have been computed for 214 economies by the World Bank.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ICT Development Index of ITU (2015)</strong></td>
<td>Rank 13</td>
<td>Rank 101</td>
<td>Rank 131</td>
<td>Rank 98</td>
<td>Rank 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This is a composite index developed by the ITU for a comparative assessment of ICT development. It uses 11 indicators to measure 3 key dimensions: ICT readiness defined as level of networked infrastructure and access to ICTs; level of ICT use/uptake in society; and ICT skills of the population. The Index ranks 167 global economies along these parameters, and its values fall between 0-10.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The set of ranks based on the Atlas methodology.*
### TABLE 3
**LEVEL OF E-GOVERNMENT DEVELOPMENT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country name</th>
<th>EGDI 2014</th>
<th>EGDI ranking 2014</th>
<th>Online Service Index 2014</th>
<th>Telecommunication Infrastructure Index 2014</th>
<th>Human Capital Index 2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Score falls between 0-1</td>
<td>Comparison of all 193 UN Member-States</td>
<td>Score falls between 0-1</td>
<td>Score falls between 0-1</td>
<td>Score falls between 0-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>0.9103 (very-high-EGDI)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.9291</td>
<td>0.8041</td>
<td>0.9978</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>0.5044 (high-EGDI)</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>0.3937</td>
<td>0.2872</td>
<td>0.8322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>0.3834 (middle-EGDI)</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>0.5433</td>
<td>0.1372</td>
<td>0.4698</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>0.4768 (middle-EGDI)</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>0.4803</td>
<td>0.2451</td>
<td>0.7051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republic of Korea</td>
<td>0.9462 (very-high-EGDI)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9764</td>
<td>0.9350</td>
<td>0.9273</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The EGDI uses a four-way schema to classify online services:

**Stage 1. Emerging information services:** Informational services that are not interactive.

**Stage 2. Enhanced information services:** Enhanced one-way or simple two-way communication between citizens and government, such as provisioning of downloadable forms for applications on government websites, or acceptance of digital requests from citizens for information.

**Stage 3. Transactional services:** Regularization of financial and non-financial transactions between government agencies and citizens on web platforms, backed by electronic authentication mechanisms to determine citizen identity.

**Stage 4. Connected services:** Integrated service delivery applications for the seamless sharing of information, data and knowledge across departments and a citizen-centric approach in e-service delivery.
Table 4 provides a comparative picture of where the five countries stand, with respect to the development of each of the 4 stages of online services. Australia and the Republic of Korea have made good progress in all stages. Fiji, India and the Philippines have made considerable progress in stage 1 services, but have a long way to go in the development of stage 2, stage 3 and stage 4 services. Fiji lags behind India and the Philippines in the overall level of online service development.

**TABLE 4**

**LEVEL OF ONLINE SERVICE DEVELOPMENT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Stage 1 progress</th>
<th>Stage 2 progress</th>
<th>Stage 3 progress</th>
<th>Stage 4 progress</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republic of Korea</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


4.2 **GENDERED HISTORY OF E-GOVERNMENT POLICY**

Drawing upon the country overviews, the following section highlights the history of e-government policy development in each of the five countries covered by this research, particularly focusing on identifying the extent of strategic commitment to gender equality. For further information on the country policy scenarios, please refer to the country overviews at egov4women.unescapsdd.org/country-overviews.
Australia

Genesis of e-government in the recognition of the digital opportunity for economic growth: The genesis of e-government in Australia can be traced to the launch of the Creative Nation Report (1994) by the Australian Federal Government. The report outlined a strategic vision for transforming Australia into a competitive nation. Consequently, e-government programmes in the initial years revolved around educating industry about the digital opportunity for economic growth.

The framing of digital inclusion as a social rather than technical issue: The national digital divide policy was announced by the Federal Government, in 1996. This policy was immediately followed by the launch of Networking the Nation (1997), the first of a series of large-scale infrastructure development initiatives of the government, which aimed at reducing disparities of access especially for rural and remote communities. Over the years, there was increasing recognition in policy circles that digital inclusion was a social, rather than a technical, issue. As the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts observed in a 2006 statement on its website:

“Current research indicates that the ‘digital divide’ is best understood as part of a socio economic context and related to the issue of social exclusion. As such, solutions need to go beyond technology. Furthering digital inclusion will require a detailed understanding of the relationship between information, people and technology.”

The movement towards ‘digital by default’ service delivery: Over the years, the Australian Federal Government and State/Territory Governments have recognized that online service delivery supported by a legislative push for open data and transparency, are key strategic components for realizing the vision of citizen-centric service delivery. From the start, there has been effective coordination between multiple levels of governments in this transition to increasing digitalization of governance services, including in enacting supporting legislation. Also, the Offices of Women and educational bodies have been closely involved in policy development in this area.

A major milestone in the evolution of e-service delivery was the adoption of the ‘digital by design’ perspective by many state/territory governments, as part of their update of existing digital strategies during 2014. Some of these governments, such as South Australia, have gone a step further, by adopting a ‘digital by default’ approach, which holds that:

“Digital services will be available online, mobile-ready, easy to use and accessible...The government also recognizes that not all members of the community can access digital services equally and that consideration will always be given to their particular needs.”

However, on-ground implementation of these policy frameworks needs further improvement, as noted by the report of the Australian Government National Commission of Audit.

**Lack of institutionalization of the gender equality agenda:** There is an absence of gender-based thinking in the formulation of e-government policy frameworks. There are women-directed e-government services (as Section 5.1 on service delivery reveals) but they are not backed by a strategic recognition of e-government as a public policy instrument for addressing gender-based exclusion.

Even a decade after the recognition that the digital divide is about the relationship between information, people and technology, the transition to ‘digital by default’ through e-government is not articulated in gendered terms. This lack of an explicit institutional commitment to gender equality handicaps e-government initiatives such as the newly established Digital Transformations Office that attempts to redesign services from the ground up. As highlighted by Martin and Goggin (forthcoming) in their research on the politics of gender in digital government efforts:

“It is difficult to conceive, in its current trajectory, that Australia’s Digital Transformations Office will contribute much to gender equality and empowerment. A commitment to these objectives is not built into the shape of Australia’s information policy, let alone its proposals for online government service design or delivery.”

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Fiji

**The absence of an overall guiding strategy in the initial years of e-government:** E-government development in Fiji can be traced back to a 2001 Strategic Plan and the subsequent establishment of a fact finding mission in 2003, on the feasibility of e-government. Some of the key areas covered by the E-Government Strategic Plan (2001) were:

- Fiji's IT development
- Public sector development and e-governance
- E-business

In the initial years, implementation progressed at a slow pace. As a 2006 survey on Fiji’s state of e-readiness highlighted, over 50 per cent of ministries had no ICT budget plans in place. Further, at this point in time, e-government services were restricted to the provision of application forms on government websites, and no transaction services were possible.

Thus, despite the existence of the E-Government Strategic Plan, during the initial years, there was a lack of a concerted overall strategic commitment to e-government development. The launch of the Fiji E-Government Programme (2006), the E-Government Master Plan (2007) and the Governance of E-Government Report (2008) attempted to remedy this state of affairs.

**Emphasis on operational efficiency at the expense of development and social inclusion:** The Fiji e-government programme was instituted in 2006, aided by a loan from the Government of the People’s Republic of China. The main components of the programme, that continues to date, are:

- the development of e-applications and web services
- the upgrading and maintenance of a digital backbone for service delivery (entitled GOVNET) in order to enable e-service delivery at the community level, through eCommunity Centres (‘Telecentres’) located in schools.
- the establishment of Government Call Centres that serve as a point of assistance and redress for citizen services.
The e-Government Programme (2006) and the e-Government Master Plan (2007) have contributed to some advancements in the digitalization of services, as has the Governance of e-Government Report (2008) which has served as an “extant policy framework for digital public service delivery”. Fiji has also made some progress in terms of online service development, but there has been no shift in the way “government does business”. The overwhelming focus of e-government policy and programming has been on maximizing operational efficiency with little attention to the digital opportunity for poverty alleviation, human development and social inclusion. In 2013, the Government of Fiji contracted the delivery and management of the e-Government Programme to a private service provider ‘Pacific Digital Technologies’, without explicitly articulating oversight arrangements. It remains to be seen whether this will impact governance concerns related to social inclusion and gender equality.

**The missed opportunity for gender equality:** The efficiency-oriented approach to e-government has resulted in a missed opportunity for advancing the gender equality agenda. The Fiji e-government Master Plan (2007) does not draw explicit connections between the gender mainstreaming agenda and e-government programming. The ‘Governance of e-Government’ Report (2008) does not offer a strategic perspective on institutionalizing gender in e-government, and merely makes a reference to women as a key target group for e-services. And though the National Broadband Plan (2011) considers social inclusion to be a general benefit of broadband access, it does not specifically address women’s inclusion.

The National Gender Policy (2014) attempts to address this gap by highlighting equitable access to technology for women and the incorporation of gender perspectives in ICT policy development, as critical issues. However, the policy has been endorsed only very recently, and actual outcomes are yet to be seen.

**India**

**New Public Management paradigm and genesis of e-government:** The emergence of e-government in India coincides with the liberalization of the economy in the 1990s. During this period, the New Public Management (NPM) paradigm, with its emphasis on economic efficiency and expediency in administration, had captured the imagination of Indian policy makers. E-government was seen as an effective tool to further the NPM agenda.
National e-Governance Plan and its limitations: From the 1990s to the early 2000s, e-government efforts were largely in the nature of decentralized, district-level experiments championed by enterprising civil servants, without an overall guiding framework. The first systematic framework for e-government was the National e-Governance Plan (2006), which emerged as a result of the realization that:

“a programme approach would need to be adopted, which must be guided by a common vision, strategy and approach. This would have the added advantage of enabling huge savings in costs, in terms of sharing the core and support infrastructure, enable interoperability through standards etc., which would result in the citizen having a seamless view of Government.”

The National e-Governance Plan, with its push for digitalized service delivery and encouragement of e-government innovations across agencies, provided for “a well-integrated and solid basis for technology and financial enablement of e-governance activity in India which was hitherto missing.” It also created an enabling climate in which officials and agencies could design innovative e-service delivery experiments, including in the area of women-directed e-services.

However, it failed to draw clear strategic linkages between digitally-enabled governance reform, and the social inclusion and gender equality agenda. There were other shortcomings as well in the implementation of the National e-Governance Plan. As the SWOT analysis (2014) of the National e-Governance Plan conducted by the Department of Electronics and Information Technology (Government of India) noted:

“...(The National e-Governance Plan) could not produce the expected impact on the common man, especially in the rural areas. Emphasis on standards and interoperability is weak. The degree of process engineering is quite low. Problems of connectivity in rural areas continue to plague the program. Adoption of PPP model has not been adequate. Monitoring and Evaluation systems are weak. There is no accountability for producing timely implementation and for producing qualitative outcomes. Allowing NeGP to proceed along the current direction and at the current pace may result in mass scale disillusion leading to e-governance losing its appeal for transformation of the public sector.”

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To overcome these limitations of the National e-Governance Plan, the Government of India launched a new umbrella programme titled Digital India in 2014–15, in which e-service delivery has been positioned as one among many dimensions of the project of transforming India into “a digitally-empowered society and a knowledge economy”.

The three main elements of the Digital India vision are:

- on-demand provisioning of government services through digital platforms,
- universalizing access to digital infrastructure, and
- the digital empowerment of citizens.

Unlike its predecessor, the National e-Governance Plan, Digital India recognizes the interlinkage between e-service delivery, connectivity infrastructure development and citizen participation. However, it sidesteps the strategic question of making e-government systems deliver effective governance for women and/or enhance women’s status. Digital India is a programmatic framework rather than a policy document. To date, India does not have a comprehensive national e-governance policy.

An ad hoc approach to the gender agenda: India’s e-government strategies lack an institutionalized commitment to gender equality and women’s empowerment. The women directed services that have emerged (detailed in Section 5.1 on service delivery), are a result of the initiative of visionary officials in public administration, and hence, do not add up to a coherent strategic direction. Just as there is no gender in e-government policy and programming, the Ministry of Women and Child Development also lags behind in its digital uptake.
Philippines

**Constitutional recognition of the role of ICTs in democratization:** The first governing dispensation in the Philippines to recognize the potential of digital technologies for democratization was the Corazon Aquino administration that came to power in 1986, following the People Power Revolution. This administration adopted a new constitution in 1987, which recognized the vital role of communication and information in nation-building.

The broader acknowledgement of the need for public policy frameworks on ICTs translated into an e-government strategy only in 1997, with the launch of the National Information Technology Plan. Some of the key priorities of this plan were:

- Internet connectivity for all government agencies
- Outsourcing of IT projects within government agencies for ICT growth
- Enabling the growth of the web in the Philippines
- Developing the Philippine Information Infrastructure Network

The move towards citizen-centred decentralized e-government: The next significant milestone in e-government development was the introduction of the Government Information Systems Plan (2000) which provided the strategic foundation for “online government”.

The Plan adopted a citizen-centric approach and focused on empowering local government units to develop web services for citizens, provide digital capital, and invest in human capital development.

The push for interagency coordination in e-government implementation: The launch of the Government Information Systems Plan (2000) was accompanied by the establishment of the Information Technology and eCommerce Council (ITECC), to “provide effective and focused leadership in the implementation of ICT policy”, by streamlining the efforts of various government agencies.

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One of the key steps taken by the ITECC was the establishment of the EGOV Fund to fund “mission-critical, high-impact and cross-agency” ICT projects of government agencies. Some critical e-government projects such as creation of the e-government portal and local government portals, and the establishment of Community eCentres at the municipality level as part of connectivity infrastructure development, were supported by this fund.

The articulation of the vision of a gender-inclusive knowledge society: The Philippine Digital Strategy (2011–16) clearly articulates a vision of a “digitally empowered, innovative, globally competitive and prosperous society where everyone has reliable, affordable and secure information access in the Philippines... a government that practices accountability and excellence to provide responsive online citizen-centered services”.¹⁰⁰ Most importantly, it acknowledges the need to move beyond previous e-government strategies that were gender-blind, foregrounding the issue of harnessing ICTs for women’s empowerment. The e-Government Master Plan (2011), developed with civil society participation, reaffirms the commitment to design inclusive e-government. However, further efforts are required to ensure the implementation of the forward-looking vision of these national e-government policy frameworks.

Legislation on the right to Internet access, capacity building and digital literacy, and for the creation of a national government agency dedicated to ICT (Department of Information and Communications), is pending. The Magna Carta for Philippine Internet Freedom is an important law that is under review by the Philippine Congress. Further, the tendency of government agencies to continue their historic silo-based modes of functioning needs to be addressed.

Strategic commitment to gender equality, but implementation lags behind: There is a clear strategic commitment to making e-government gender-inclusive, as is evidenced by explicit articulations of the need to leverage the potential of ICTs for women’s empowerment, in the Philippine Digital Strategy (2011–16).

The country’s policy framework on gender equality, the 2009 Magna Carta of Women that institutionalized gender mainstreaming, serves as strong scaffolding to these commitments. Most importantly, the Implementing Rules and Regulations of the Magna Carta of Women which provide directions to government agencies to help them align their existing efforts for furthering gender equality, extend to

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the realm of e-government. At the implementation end, there is attention to gender-inclusion in e-service development, including the creation of women-directed services. However, government personnel involved in the implementation of e-government have varying levels of understanding of gender issues, and gender perspectives are not integrated into the government’s capacity-building initiatives for e-government officials.

**Republic of Korea**

**An early start:** The first step towards e-government was taken by the Government of the Republic of Korea in 1975, with the establishment of the Committee on Promoting Administration Computerization, under the Ministry of Government Administration. Over the next two decades, this committee focused on creating the digital backbone for online service delivery—starting with the creation of an integrated administrative database and network, bringing together information scattered across multiple departments and agencies.

**A strategic commitment to creating a knowledge-based nation:** The next major milestone in the evolution of e-government in the Republic of Korea was the launch of the national ICT Plan (1996), also known as the first Basic Plan for Promoting Informatization. This plan aimed at enabling the transition of line ministries to the digital governance era. Close on its heels came the second Basic Plan for Promoting Informatization (1999), which was subsequently transformed into the Cyber Korea 21 initiative that aimed at creating a ‘knowledge-based nation’. Towards this, it set a number of specific objectives: expanding Internet infrastructure, increasing investments in knowledge-based industries, improving e-services for citizens and business, and undertaking digital literacy training for citizens. One of the major outcomes of this initiative was the creation of the super high-speed information and communications network covering 1400 towns in the country. Other significant outcomes were: expansion of online services and improvements to the information systems of government agencies. The e-Korea Vision 2006 Plan furthered this strategic direction, and reaffirmed the commitment to improving efficiency and transparency of the government.

**Promoting interministry coordination and harmonization:** In 2001, a Presidential Special Committee on e-government was established and the Electronic Government Act was enacted, in order to promote interministerial cooperation in e-government efforts. Subsequently, progress was made in areas such as integrating ministerial databases for an online one-stop system on administrative affairs, creating a national financial information system for real-time monitoring, and integrating online systems for social insurance.
schemes. Another key milestone in this area was the establishment of the e-government road map (2003) by the Roh Moo-Hyun administration which came to power the same year. This road map attempted vertical and horizontal integration of government systems among ministries, enhancing information sharing within the government, and improving e-participation. In 2004, with the enactment of the National Government Organisation Act, e-government activities were transferred from the Ministry of Information and Communication to the Ministry of Government Administration and Home Affairs. This was done in order to separate e-government efforts from national informatization efforts.

The re-integration of e-government and national informatization efforts: The next government, the Lee Myung-bak administration, focused on detechnicalizing national informatization by dissolving the Ministry of Information and Communication and transferring the informatization mandate to the Ministry of Public Administration and Security. In addition, the government set up a Presidential Committee on National Informatization Strategies to integrate efforts for national informatization and e-government. Subsequently, the Electronic Government Act was revised in 2010 to unify operational processes for national informatization with e-government efforts.

The advent of Government 3.0: In 2011, the Republic of Korea launched the Smart E-Government Plan that emphasized the need for enhancing convergence in e-service delivery, and exploring innovative technologies in this area. This recognition of the ‘Smart Society’ was followed up with the Government 3.0 initiative, that signaled a paradigmatic shift in public administration:

“Government 3.0 is oriented more to the individual citizen, and pursues the value of expanded democracy with proactive release of public information, promotion of active participation of citizens, and more communication and cooperation.”

Informatization recognized as a women’s human rights issue in the early days of e-government, but gender blindspot in Government 3.0: The Kim Dae-Jung government that was in power from 1998–2003, actively supported the idea of informatization being a women’s human rights issue. During the 1990s, as there was no dedicated ministry handling gender equality concerns, the Ministry of Information and Communication led informatization programmes for women. The establishment of the Ministry of Gender
Equality in 2001 marked a turning point in gendering e-government. In 2002, the Ministry launched the Basic Plan on Women’s Informatization (2002–2006) whose focus areas included:

- enhancing women’s access to ICT infrastructure;
- providing information literacy to women; and,
- evaluating progress towards women’s informatization.

The subsequent informatization policy directions issued by the MOGEF are in line with the overall policy priorities for women’s rights.

Though the development of e-government has proceeded at a rapid pace, there has been some dilution of the gender agenda along the way. Around 2008–2009, with the dissolution of the Ministry of Information and Communication and the abolition of the Act on Eliminating Digital Divide, the focus on women’s informatization programme diminished. And in subsequent e-government policy frameworks, such as the Smart E-Government Plan, explicit strategic directions for addressing gender discrimination and inequality have not been spelled out.

\[102\] Since renamed the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family.
Institutional stocktaking

Applying the institutional matrix in country contexts
This chapter provides insights based on an interrogation of the e-government ecosystems of the five countries covered by the research, using the institutional analysis matrix detailed in Table 1.

## 5.1 SERVICE DELIVERY

The parameters that have been used to understand e-service delivery are:

a. Approach to gender mainstreaming in e-service delivery

b. Availability of sex-disaggregated data about uptake of services

c. Data security and privacy legislation

d. Effective management of accountability issues in new partnership arrangements

e. Shift from silo-based functioning to a convergent approach

f. Dedicated strategies to promote women’s uptake of services

### a. Approach to gender mainstreaming in e-service delivery

The Philippines has made the most headway in addressing gender-mainstreaming considerations through e-government policy. The Republic of Korea leads as far as on-ground implementation is concerned. In the case of Australia, women-directed services exist and they are integrated with the one-stop-shop portals set up by various state agencies. However, the strategic vision of e-service delivery as an instrument for tackling gender-based exclusion does not go beyond identifying women as a key ‘community in need’ to be covered by such efforts. In Fiji and India, a strategic vision on gender is completely absent in e-government policy.

**Australia** Women-directed services exist in many areas such as health, GBV prevention, employment etc. Australia has also ensured that all women-directed services find a place in the common one-stop-shop portals set up by state agencies. However, the strategic potential of e-government for addressing gender-based exclusion is not fully tapped into, beyond identifying women as a sub-set of a larger target group of ‘communities in need’, including indigenous people, people with disabilities etc., who must be covered by e-service delivery efforts.
**Fiji** The only reference to gender considerations in official policy frameworks is in the Governance of e-Government Report (2008) which promotes “considering women as a target sector (along with “rural, youth, elderly, disadvantaged, industry, schools, health professionals, media, ministerial advisers”) in the communications and marketing strategy”.

103 The absence of strategies for gendering mainstreaming service delivery extends to the implementation level as well. Fiji has no women-directed online services and only one mobile based service for women, mWomen. The website of the Ministry for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation has information but no online services or links to the e-government portal.

**India** The country lacks a policy framework on e-government and a systemic approach to gender in e-government. As a result, though there are some innovative experiments in gender-responsive service delivery that have been initiated by public administration officials, they remain ad hoc and do not add up to a cohesive strategic direction. Also, the Ministry of Women and Child Development has not recognized the strategic importance of the digital opportunity for women’s empowerment and gender equality, and its initiatives in e-government remain limited to routine digitalization.

**Philippines** The Philippine Digital Strategy 2011–16 makes a firm policy commitment to harnessing ICTs for women’s empowerment and making e-government gender-responsive. Women-directed services exist, for example in health, violence against women, and vocational education. Women’s agencies have a web presence. Coordination between the ICT offices and agencies that are part of the national women’s machinery is an area that can be strengthened further.

**Republic of Korea** The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family (MOGEF) has attempted to actively use online channels to improve its effectiveness. Through the Women-net portal, all services of the Ministry are brought together on an integrated platform. The portal is designed in a user friendly way that classifies information according to the different needs of women at various stages of their life cycle. There is evidence about the positive impact of the MOGEF’s efforts.


104 Choi & Zoo, op.cit.
b  Availability of sex-disaggregated data about uptake of services

Out of the 5 countries covered by the study, the Republic of Korea, Australia and the Philippines have such data.

Australia  Sex-disaggregated data on uptake of e-services reveals that older women are at high risk of being excluded from service delivery.

Fiji  There is a lack of information on women's uptake of e-government. Anecdotal evidence suggests higher risk of exclusion for women in rural and remote communities.

India  Data about women's access and use of e-services not available. Further, data systems underpinning planning and administration systems are also not sex-disaggregated.

Philippines  Recently, the Philippines has made some progress in the creation of sex-disaggregated data sets for e-government. The ICT office, along with the International Telecommunications Office, launched the Philippine ICT statistics portal in 2012. The portal intends to make available "ICT statistics from various sectors like e-health, education, gender, telecommunications, cyberservices, e-commerce, e-government, cyber-security, business process outsourcing, e-entertainment."

Republic of Korea  Sex-disaggregated data on uptake of e-services are available. The data reveals that the gender gap in awareness of, and use of, e-services increases with age.

c  Data security and privacy legislation

Australia and the Republic of Korea have strong legislative safeguards for protecting personal data. The Philippines is in the process of creating an implementation mechanism for enforcing its Data Privacy Act. Fiji and India do not have legislation in this area.

Australia  Complex and thorough legislation exists in the area of protection. However, the storage of metadata of citizens in the age of digital government is still an unresolved issue. As a result, Australia

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does not have a national identity card-based system for authenticating digital service delivery transactions. It has instead adopted a transparent ‘federated technology’ approach in which users access government services of different departments through a common portal using a single name and password, with the guarantee that no information about them is exchanged between departments.

**Fiji** Technical aspects of data security are entrusted to the Information Technology and Computing Services Unit, the agency implementing the e-government programme. Except for the Right to Privacy guaranteed in the country’s Bill of Rights, there is no legislation on data protection.

**India** India does not have robust privacy and data protection legislation. However, the government is going ahead with creating a national citizen identification database through which interlinking of citizen data across different departments will be possible.

**Philippines** In 2012, the Philippines Congress passed a Data Privacy Act which provides the legal framework for the protection of the personal information held by governments and companies and the constitution of a National Privacy Commission. However, implementation guidelines are yet to be formulated and the National Privacy Commission is yet to be set up.

**Republic of Korea** In 2011, Republic of Korea enacted the Personal Information Protection Act for the protection of sensitive personal data. In addition, the IT Network Act regulates the collection and use of personal sensitive information by IT service providers.

**Effective management of accountability issues in new partnership arrangements**

E-government opens up a number of opportunities for creative ‘boundary spanning’, an approach in which the traditionally rigid boundaries of governance organizations become more flexible, through increase in intra-governmental and intergovernmental collaborations.

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107 Boundary Spanning is a term from organizational theory, which originally referred to the role played by individual innovators in linking the internal networks of the organizations that they are a part of, to external informational resources. The term has since been borrowed by e-governance scholars, who use it to refer to the new partnerships with corporate and civil society actors that government agencies enter into, in order to leverage digital expertise in the transition to e-governance. See Edwards, M., Halligan, J., Horrigan, B., & Nicoli, G. (2012). Public Sector Governance in Australia. Canberra: Australian National University E Press. Retrieved from http://press.anu.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/whole1.pdf, 21 April 2016.
These new governance arrangements work best when accountabilities are clearly specified. Australia and the Republic of Korea have made significant progress in this area. In the Philippines, judicial intervention has upheld the primacy of government agencies in determining the terms of Private Public Partnerships (PPP). In India and Fiji, there is a significant push for PPPs in e-government, without appropriate governance arrangements. Needless to say, weak accountability mechanisms in PPP arrangements can compromise public interest and the gender equality agenda.

**Australia** There is widespread recognition of ‘boundary spanning’ in e-government, the modalities through which governments increasingly rely on private and third sector partners in e-service delivery. There are strong provisions for Service Level Agreements included in partnership contracts in service delivery, to safeguard citizen interests.

**Fiji** The delivery and management of the national e-government programme has been contracted to a private service provider, Pacific Digital Technologies. However, the precise terms of the contractual arrangement and the oversight mechanisms that the government has put in place have not been shared in the public domain. This is an impediment to citizens seeking redress for service quality.

**India** The countrywide one-stop-shop network for last-mile service delivery lacks effective PPP governance frameworks. PPPs are also common in the development and maintenance of software applications and database management systems underpinning specific service delivery initiatives. However, data governance arrangements in these partnerships are not robust.

**Philippines** The Philippine Digital Strategy 2011-16 considers the PPP route critical to realizing the vision of a “thriving knowledge economy”. One key milestone in the evolution of frameworks for governing PPPs was a recent Supreme Court ruling upholding the primacy of government agencies in all such arrangements.

**Republic of Korea** In the management of PPP arrangements, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family has moved from initial contracts with IT companies for management of e-services, to domain experts who can then subcontract an IT agency for platform management. Technical support in e-governance is seen as subservient to the overall domain strategy rather than the other way around.
Shift from silo-based functioning to a convergent approach

The Republic of Korea leads the way through its dedicated one stop portal for women-directed services. Australia too has made information about women-directed services clearly searchable on its one-stop-shop portals. Portal design recognizes that women are not an undifferentiated homogeneous category. In the Philippines, India and Fiji, convergent service delivery itself is nascent.

**Australia**  Single entry portals that enable interlinkages between information about departmental services and multi-filter search options have been a key strategy in Australia. Online information about women-directed services is linked to these single entry portals, and is clearly searchable. For example, a search for the key word ‘women’ on the single window portal set up by the South Australian government, returned some 347 results.

**Fiji**  Fiji has an e-government portal that pulls together services of different departments online, but it needs updating. Also, the review was not able to find any women-directed online service on this portal.

**India**  The Digital India programme launched in 2014 emphasizes integrated rather than individual services. However, more progress needs to be made on the ground to implement this vision.

**Philippines**  E-service delivery in the Philippines is still at a nascent stage, and there is still a lot of progress to be made in terms of interoperability of databases adopted by different agencies, in order to facilitate convergent service delivery. In 2014, the Department of Science and Technology announced the plan to integrate government services into a single portal.¹⁰⁹

**Republic of Korea**  The Women-net portal is an integrated platform that brings together all services of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family. The portal is designed in a user friendly way that classifies information according to the different needs of women at various stages of their life cycle. Additionally, services of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family are well-integrated into the national ‘Government for Citizen’ (G4C) web portal.

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Dedicated strategies to promote women’s uptake of services

With the exception of Fiji, all countries covered under the study recognize the need to develop dedicated strategies to promote women’s uptake of e-services. Human intermediation at the last mile to promote uptake of e-services by women is seen as a useful strategy in Australia and the Philippines, and adopted to some extent in India. In the Republic of Korea, with its very high rates of ICT diffusion, mobile platforms are seen as the next frontier for enhancing e-service outreach.

**Australia** The Government of Australia recognizes the importance of human intermediation at the last mile, especially by civil society organizations and the public library network, to ensure that older women and women from aboriginal communities are not marginalized.

**Fiji** E-services are seen as gender-neutral.

**India** Some efforts in one-stop-shop centres for enhancing marginalized women’s access to service delivery exist, but such experiments have remained at the level of pilots and have not been scaled up.

**Philippines** The Community eCentres programme of the government of the Philippines recognizes the importance of human intermediation at the last mile for enhancing the uptake of digitalized services among marginalized groups. In some instances, the local administration has focused on enhancing outreach efforts to women.

**Republic of Korea** In the context of extremely high levels of mobile diffusion, mobile applications are seen as the critical strategy for reaching out to women. The gender gap in the uptake of mobile e-government services is less than that for online services.
5.2 CITIZEN UPTAKE

The parameters that have been used to understand citizen uptake are as follows:

a. New norms of citizen engagement and strategic attention to women’s e-participation
b. Maturity of open data frameworks
c. Open standards
d. Digital literacy efforts directed at women

a. New norms of citizen engagement and strategic attention to women’s e-participation

The Republic of Korea and Australia are pioneers in exploring the digital opportunity for re-imagining government-citizen engagement. Both countries are global leaders in the area of e-participation, and have taken significant strides in recasting the citizen as an active collaborator rather than a passive recipient of services. Neither country has made an effort to strategically address the question of ensuring women’s e-participation. However, in the Republic of Korea, the push for mobile e-government services as part of Government 3.0 may have unintended positive impacts on women’s uptake of services. India and the Philippines have started working on this area, though they have a long way ahead. In Fiji, there seems to be no recognition of the strategic opportunity for citizen participation that the digital age offers.

Australia The citizen is seen as an ‘active collaborator’ rather than a mere recipient of services, which is evidenced by the recent push for co-design of services. The e-participation supplementary index in the UN E-Government Survey, places Australia at number 7 in its global rankings. Policy guidelines for the design of online participation spaces specify the need to be sensitive to linguistic and cultural diversity, and the special needs of citizens living with disability. But gender based considerations are not discussed. The citizen-user is considered gender-neutral.

Fiji The emerging opportunities for government-citizen partnerships are not yet harnessed for women’s e-participation.
India  The government’s flagship programme ‘Digital India’ identifies digital empowerment of citizens as a key strategic objective, towards which the government-citizen dialogue is considered an important strategy. In 2014, the government set up the myGOV.in portal to provide a critical space for policy debate and dialogue among citizens. However, this portal is not tied to a concrete process of policy consultation, and hence citizen’s voices are not effectively translated into the ‘right to be heard’. Also, there is no clear strategy for ensuring the inclusion of women’s voices on the portal. Some exceptional initiatives creatively designed by public servants do exist, as in the case of the Sreeshakti portal in Kerala state.

Philippines  The e-participation supplementary index of the UN e-government survey 2014 places the Philippines at number 51 in its rankings. The Philippines does not have a citizen participation portal at this point. Additional efforts are required from state agencies to ensure participation of women, including in ICT policy development.

Republic of Korea  In the Government 3.0 vision of ‘expanded democracy’, active participation by citizens and enhanced communication and cooperation between government and citizens are values that occupy pride of place. In practice, this translates into extensive efforts in the provision of e-information, e-consultation and e-decision-making services. In fact, the Republic of Korea ranks second in the e-participation index of the UN EGDI, and its e-decision making services rank among the top 3 countries. There is no strategic perspective however, on enhancing women’s e-participation. Mobile services may bring unintended gains for women’s e-participation as women use mobile e-government services more than online services.

Maturity of open data frameworks

The Republic of Korea demonstrates how open data policy frameworks can be strategically used by the national women’s machinery to enhance women’s right to information. The experience of Australia indicates how the existence of open data frameworks may help in foregrounding women’s issues and concerns in the public domain, as illustrated by the case of the Office of Women in New South Wales publishing its data sets on women’s socioeconomic status. The Philippines has a robust open data policy framework despite a pending Freedom of Information bill, and has managed to effectively decentralize

open data implementation. In India, further efforts are required to ensure implementation of its policy on open data. Fiji does not have open data policies.

Australia Australia has been part of the Open Government Partnership since 2011. Open data policy frameworks exist, at both federal and state levels, and there is also a trend of using Creative Commons licensing on government platforms. There are instances of state governments independently deciding to release data sets in the public domain, in the larger public interest. For example, the Office of Women in New South Wales recently decided to publish its data on women’s socioeconomic status. However, the implementation of open data policies is mainly informed by what can be termed a ‘best endeavours’ perspective, due to cost constraints. Also, open data frameworks do not fully overlap with freedom of information legislation.

Fiji Fiji does not have an open data policy or a freedom of information law. However, the Government of Fiji has recently renewed its commitment to creating freedom of information legislation.

India India has a Right to Information Act, a National Data Sharing and Accessibility Policy (NDSAP) that serves as a policy framework for open data (including the specifications on technical standards) and an Open Government Portal on which central government agencies and departments can share their data sets. Progress in the implementation of open data frameworks has been slow, for multiple reasons, including lack of linkages between NDSAP and the Right to Information Act, lack of integration between data sets held by different departments and no progress on data privacy legislation. The last issue has had repercussions for women’s rights. For example, recently, a government agency in the state of Karnataka published personal data of women from backward classes, collected as part of a Socio Economic Census, on its website without due consideration of privacy risks.¹¹¹

Philippines Freedom of information is guaranteed in the Bill of Rights of the 1987 Constitution. A freedom of information law that would act as an enabling law for this constitutional guarantee is pending before the legislature. The Philippine government has made a number of significant strides in the area of open data. The Open Data Task Force aims at “mak(ing) national data searchable, accessible, and useful, with the help of the different agencies of government, and with the participation of the public.”¹¹²


The Full Disclosure Policy Portal by the Department of Interior and Local Government provides a space for local government units to share information and data with the public. Compliance with the policy is rewarded by the Seal of Good Local Governance (a national scorecard/ranking system).

**Republic of Korea**  Openness in government is a critical part of the vision of Government 3.0. In 2013, the government adopted the Promotion of the Provision and Use of Public Data Act that upholds the norms of transparency and citizens’ right to know. Following this, the government opened website portals for the release of public information and data. The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family website has a specific section for the release of public data. This section provides a list of public information that can be released without request — in other words, it educates women about the information that they have a de facto right to access.

### Open standards

In back-end technical architecture, open standards are important to ensure seamless operation in the e-government workflow through interoperability of software platforms or applications. This brings enormous efficiency gains. Further, open standards ensure that state agencies are not burdened by the costs of license renewals from a private vendor of a proprietary software application. The use of open standards in front-end applications such as e-government portals and platforms brings tremendous gains for citizens. It enhances their autonomy with respect to their choice of software and also provides protection from state surveillance, as data transmitted in government-citizen online interaction become visible to the individual concerned.

The Republic of Korea incentivizes the use of Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) by government agencies. The Philippines attempted to enact legislation mandating the use of FOSS and open standards in all ICT solutions/processes of government, but has finally opted to leave the choice of software to the discretion of individual agencies. India has policy guidelines recommending the adoption of open standards, but there are implementation lags. Australia does not mandate the use of open standards. Fiji has no guidelines in this area.
Australia In Australia, the use of open technology in e-service delivery is not mandatory.

Fiji There is no policy framework on technical openness.

India The National IT Policy affirms the need for open technical architecture. India has a policy on open standards (2010) that emphasizes interoperability and the need to prevent vendor lock-ins in e-government. It also has a Policy on Adoption of Open Source Software (2014) that emphasizes the need to compare closed source and open source solutions with respect to “capability, strategic control, scalability, security, lifetime costs and support requirements”\textsuperscript{114} when implementing e-governance solutions. However, these guidelines are not enforced universally by all government agencies, especially with respect to PPP arrangements.

Philippines In the early 2000s, there was an attempt by policymakers in the Philippines to enact a Free and Open Source Software Act, mandating the use of open standards and FOSS ICT solutions in all ICT projects and activities undertaken by the government. However, in 2009, an Open Choice strategy was adopted by the Philippines Commission on Information and Communication Technology.\textsuperscript{115}

Republic of Korea The Ministry of Information and Communication in 2005 launched an initiative to incentivize the adoption of FOSS in government, by offering 3 billion Won to agencies switching over from proprietary software.\textsuperscript{116} More recently, in 2014, the Republic of Korea stepped up efforts in this area with the Open Source Software Invigoration Plan.\textsuperscript{117}

Digital literacy efforts directed at women

In Australia, digital literacy efforts are a key policy priority but they are not women-focused in design. The Republic of Korea invested in women-oriented digital literacy initiatives in the early days of e-government. However, this investment has been discontinued. The Philippines has implemented small


\textsuperscript{116} Ibid.

scale initiatives in this regard. Currently, India is taking nascent steps in this direction. Fiji has not invested in this area.

**Australia** From the 1990s, state and territory governments in Australia rolled out digital literacy programmes, to target remote communities. After the launch of the National Broadband Network in 2011, two programmes were initiated: (a) The Digital Hubs programme, which has aimed at establishing spaces for digital literacy training in local libraries, civic centres and community colleges and (b) The Digital Enterprises programme that has sought to equip small and medium businesses and non-profit organizations with the skills to effectively participate in the digital economy. These initiatives are not specifically directed at women. However, it can be argued that small and medium businesses and non-profit organizations are sectors which are likely to have a high percentage of women, and hence a focus on these sectors contributes to a focus on women. Both these programmes are supported by the Internetbasics.gov.au website that aims at providing a guide to Internet novices to stay “confident, comfortable and safe” in online spaces.

**Fiji** Currently, there are no programmes that address women’s digital literacy needs. The network of Community Telecentres set up by the Government of Fiji offers a theoretical possibility for women’s ICT skills development if interwoven with this initiative.

**India** Universal digital literacy received a massive push under the Digital India programme, through the launch of the National Digital Literacy Mission. This is a countrywide initiative that aims to train 5 million citizens in acquiring ICT skills in order to “participate effectively in the democratic process, and enhance their livelihood”. The Digital India programmatic framework does not specify a concrete vision for women’s digital literacy, but digital literacy programmes for female frontline workers in health and child development services have been initiated.

**Philippines** In 2011, the Philippine Digital Literacy for Women Campaign was launched by the government of the Philippines with the objective of providing free digital literacy training to 10,000 marginalized women nationwide. This initiative was spearheaded by the ICT Office, leveraging the nationwide Community eCentre network of public access points — enlisting the support of private sector partners and non-profit organizations. Not much progress in systematic institutionalization has been made since this campaign, due to the lack of policy leadership in this area.
Republic of Korea  The Republic of Korea has focused on digital literacy trainings, including exclusive trainings for women, from the mid 1990s, when the Framework Act on Informatization Protection and Elimination of the Digital Divide in 1995 was enacted. The 2001 Plan for the Informatization of Ten Million Citizens focused on e-literacy for farmers, fishermen and homemakers. The number of Internet users increased from 3.1 million in 1998 to 24.4 million by the end of 2001, i.e., 56 per cent of the country’s population. The percentage of women among Internet users rose from 7.7 per cent in 1998 to 57.8 per cent in 2001. The Second Step Training Plan on Informatization of Citizens aimed at equipping 5 million citizens to become information producers.

As a part of this, a series of e-Biz trainings directed at homemakers were launched. In addition, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, since its inception in 2001, has launched women-directed literacy efforts. Between 2002 and 2008, the Ministry pursued this agenda by identifying women's informatization as one of its five key focus areas. After 2008, with the disbanding of the Ministry of Information and Communication that had previously led national informatization efforts, and the abolition of the Elimination of the Digital Divide Act, digital literacy initiatives for women have greatly reduced.
5.3 CONNECTIVITY ARCHITECTURE

The following dimensions have informed the analysis of the connectivity architecture of the 5 countries:

a Gender gaps in connectivity
b Universal access
c Gender in connectivity and broadband policy frameworks

a Gender gaps in connectivity

In the Philippines, the rate of Internet uptake among women and men is nearly equal, and the mobile Internet has been growing at an exponential rate. However, there is much more to be done to ensure that the connectivity backbone is robust. Currently, users are in a situation where “they end up paying more for slow connectivity”. In Australia and the Republic of Korea, the gender gap in Internet access is pronounced among older age groups. In India, the gender gap is significant, and Internet penetration levels are still low. Data about the gender divide in connectivity is not available for Fiji.

Australia  Australia has one of the highest rates of smart phone penetration in the world—almost 90 per cent. Over 83 per cent of citizens aged 15 years and above are Internet users, according to 2012–13 data. The 15–17 year age group has the highest number of Internet users, and the 65 years and above age group has the lowest proportion of Internet users. In the latter, a noticeable gender divide in Internet access is seen. Further, studies have revealed that older women are clearly disadvantaged when it comes to accessing e-services. Aboriginal communities constitute another segment of the population that is extremely disadvantaged when it comes to access to the Internet.

Fiji  The recent moves by the Government of Fiji to deregulate the telecommunication sector, through the Settlement Agreement of 2007 and Telecommunications Promulgation of 2008, contributed to a decrease in mobile phone costs and a phenomenal increase in mobile phone subscriptions from 35 per 100 inhabitants in 2006 to 101.1 per 100 inhabitants in 2013. This development, coupled with the rise of

Internet-enabled smart phones and the adoption of 3G and 4G broadband, has contributed to a growth in Internet connectivity. However, the extent to which women’s access to the mobile phone, the Internet, and e-services has increased, is not known.

**India**  About 19 per cent of the Indian population and 3 per cent of Indian households use the Internet. Further, technology adoption within government and by business is limited. The access divide is amplified along gender lines. In fact, less than 40 per cent of Internet users in the country are women — a proportion that is far lower than other countries.

**Philippines**  The 2014 Nielsen Pinoy Netizen report revealed that Internet penetration in the Philippines doubled from 27 per cent in 2010 to 52 per cent in 2014. The bulk of this growth can be traced to an exponential growth in mobile phone penetration. Concomitantly, mobile Internet diffusion increased from 9 per cent in 2012 to 35 per cent in 2014. Fixed broadband penetration is about 9 per cent. The Philippines has one of the slowest Internet speeds in the ASEAN region. The Philippines has nearly equal rates of Internet use for women and men aged 15 years and above, with slightly higher rates of Internet use among women.

**Republic of Korea**  Over the past few years, Internet use by women and men has been increasing, and the gender gap is about 8 per cent. When Internet use statistics are disaggregated by age, a more nuanced picture emerges. The gender gap between women and men Internet users in their 20s has reversed, with women users outnumbering men. Among users in their 30s, the gender gap has evened out while for users in their fifties and sixties, the gender gap continues to persist. Mobile broadband plays a key role in Internet diffusion. Smart phone access is high among both men (95.4 per cent) and women (94.7 per cent).

**Universal access**

The Republic of Korea has achieved near universal Internet access. The Philippines has pending legislation on the right to Internet access. Australia, India and Fiji have policy guidelines for expanding Internet access, but do not have legislation guaranteeing universal access.

**Australia**  No legislative guarantee on Internet access, though there is policy backing for the construction of a National Broadband Network to expand access for remote communities.
Fiji  Universal access to internationally competitive ICTs\textsuperscript{120} is a policy priority, but there is no legislative guarantee.

India  Constructing a national optic fibre network connecting the entire length and breadth of the country is a programmatic priority, but no legislative guarantee.

Philippines  A bill on the right to Internet access has been filed in the Senate (the draft Magna Carta for Philippine Internet Freedom that has a provision which makes it obligatory for the state to protect and promote universal access)\textsuperscript{121}

Republic of Korea  The Republic of Korea is a global leader in universalization of Internet access and over 92.4 per cent of its population is online. The country has made dedicated investments in the development of broadband infrastructure. However, the country does not have legislation that guarantees citizens’ access to the Internet.

**Gender in connectivity and broadband policy frameworks**

The Republic of Korea is a pioneer in gendering the policy framework on connectivity. The Philippines Digital Strategy 2011–16 also addresses the gender dimensions of connectivity, but its implementation falls short. Australia and India are both intensively engaged in the development of a national broadband network, but policy frameworks in both countries lack a clear strategic vision for addressing women’s rights. In Fiji, the National Broadband Policy was developed only in 2011 and does not have a gender vision.

Australia  The National Broadband Network seeks to “...ensure all Australians have access to very fast broadband as soon as possible, at affordable prices, and at least cost to taxpayers”,\textsuperscript{122} Reaching broadband to remote and rural communities is a key policy priority. However, there is no specific gender strategy for broadband policy. A 1998 policy note on ‘Extending Australia’s digital divide policy: an examination of the value of social inclusion and social capital policy’, is silent on the subject of gender.

\textsuperscript{122} Letter from the Minister for Communications to the Executive Chairman NBN Co Limited. (2014, April 8).
Fiji  In 2011, Fiji launched its first National Broadband Policy that explicitly foregrounded the idea of universal access, by highlighting the need to bring the benefits of connectivity to communities “bypassed by market forces.” One of the critical objectives of this policy is to provide “broadband service availability to 95 per cent of all urban, suburban and rural communities, and 100 per cent of all primary and secondary schools, by 2016.” The policy does not include any strategic objectives for promoting women’s inclusion or a gender budget, even though social inclusion is a stated objective of the policy.

India  In 2012, the Government of India launched the national optic fibre network to provide broadband access to villages across the country. But this scheme has not addressed relevant services for local communities, and building gender-responsive cultures of use at the last mile. It stops short of providing a basic infrastructural network across the length and breadth of the country and leaves the question of last-mile broadband retailing to the market. However, the Department of Telecommunications ran a few pilot projects with private sector partners to provide subsidized mobile-based value added services, such as information on market prices, and rural livelihoods, to members of women’s collectives in select locations. The funding for this initiative was drawn from the gender budget of the Universal Service Obligation Fund.

Philippines  The Philippines Digital Strategy 2011–16 aims for increased broadband integration and broadband skills training for marginalized social groups living in poverty. The strategy also seeks to embed broadband policy frameworks in different ministries, for “addressing gender and environmental aspects of ICT and ICT awareness as cross-sectoral themes.” Community eCentres have been a critical strategy for reaching the benefits of connectivity to poor and marginalized groups. More effort is required at the implementation end, in order to ensure that women are not left out from the benefits of connectivity.

Republic of Korea  As early as 2002, the Republic of Korea adopted a proactive ICT policy for gender equality in its Basic Plan for Women’s Informatization (2002–2006). The Republic of Korea is considered a pioneer in adopting a gender perspective in ICT policymaking.
Findings

E-government for gender equality
This research studied the e-government institutional ecosystem in order to understand better how norms, rules and practices relating to e-government can contribute to women’s empowerment and gender equality. Starting with the premise that any scrutiny of e-government can be meaningful only if it is held up against the test of good governance and citizen accountability, the study looked at how women’s citizenship rights are being impacted by e-government. Focusing on five country contexts, and 12 case studies, it tried to explore how e-government addresses women’s exclusion from governance, recognizing their equal claims as citizens. It also mapped the many different ways by which e-government, when designed gender-responsively, contributes to shifts in gender orders.

This chapter discusses the key insights from the case studies on the potential of e-government to lead to transformative outcomes along the four quadrants of the Domains of Change framework (the highlights of this discussion are summarized in Figure 2). It also presents a detailed analysis of the findings regarding the norms, rules and practices found to be significant to engender e-government.

6.1 WHAT THE CASE STUDIES REVEAL ABOUT EMPOWERMENT PATHWAYS

The 12 case studies of ‘good practices’ in service delivery, citizen uptake and connectivity that were undertaken across the 5 contexts reveal that e-government has the potential to create positive outcomes for women’s empowerment, at the individual and institutional level, and in formal and informal realms. The Domains of Change framework has been used to reflect the key empowerment outcomes emerging from the case studies (see Figure 2). For a case-specific analysis of empowerment outcomes, see Annex II.
FIGURE 2
EMPOWERMENT OUTCOMES OF ‘GOOD PRACTICES’

**Individual**

- Enhancement of self esteem, psychological rewards, confidence
  - SREESAKTHI PORTAL, CYBER-MENTORING, BLENDED LEARNING PROGRAMME
- Enhanced personal security
  - SAFE RETURN HOME
- Courage to move away from gender norms
  - SREESAKTHI PORTAL, CYBER-MENTORING
- Confidence to participate in job market
  - BLENDED LEARNING PROGRAMME
- Active agency; as citizenship consciousness improves; expansion of informational and communicative capabilities
  - COMMUNITY E-CENTRES

**Informal**

- Emergence of new counter-discourses on women's issues and concerns, challenging hegemonic mainstream discourse
  - SREESAKTHI PORTAL, OUR WATCH
- Transformation at household level as women gain public recognition
  - SREESAKTHI PORTAL
- Strengthening of peer solidarities among women
  - SREESAKTHI PORTAL, CYBER-MENTORING, BLENDED LEARNING

**Formal**

- Access to public information on entitlements
  - COMMUNITY E-CENTRES, BLENDED LEARNING PROGRAMME
- Opportunity to contribute to knowledge commons
  - SA COMMUNITY
- Access to educational resources on GBV and positive gender relations
  - OUR WATCH
- Access to redress mechanisms
  - IVR-SERP, MWOMEN
- Increased trust in claims-making
  - GRS
- Timely access to institutional support for women seeking assistance/realization of their right to be heard
  - IVR-SERP
- Access to career options
  - BLENDED LEARNING, COMMUNITY E-CENTRES
- Opportunity for digital skills development
  - BLENDED LEARNING PROGRAMME, COMMUNITY E-CENTRES, SREESAKTHI PORTAL, COMMUNITY TELECENTRES

**Systemic**

- Dedicated communication platform/forum for women's issues and concerns, especially GBV
  - SREESAKTHI PORTAL
- Effective balancing of right to privacy and public interest in law enforcement
  - SEX OFFENDER ALERT
- Dedicated mechanism for women's safety
  - SAFE RETURN HOME
- Techno-learning platform/knowledge commons responsive to women
  - SA COMMUNITY
- Higher systemic capability for gender inclusive service delivery
  - GRS
Shifts in Quadrant 1: Individual-Formal

E-government initiatives can open up access to new information and knowledge resources for women, strengthen their claims-making vis-a-vis public institutions, and bring easier access to redress mechanisms. SA Community has brought new opportunities for women to participate as producers of, and contributors to, the digital information and knowledge commons. The Blended Learning Programme provides women participants access to new digital skill sets. As one woman participant in the programme reflected during the field research for the case study, “The Blended Learning Programme contributed to widening our knowledge and sharpening our skills.” By providing facilitated public access and through digital literacy trainings, the Community Telecentres and Community eCentres have boosted ICT skill levels of women beneficiaries.

The championing of GRS by Parent Leaders from the local community has contributed to trust-building among women beneficiaries, who are gradually beginning to use the online grievance redress mechanism. The timely and coordinated response from state agencies to GBV reports that IVR-SERP ensures access to redress for women fighting GBV.

The Blended Learning Programme has enhanced women’s awareness about the existence of online government services and their entitlements. Similarly, mWomen has the potential to educate women about their legal rights, in the context of domestic violence.

Shifts in Quadrant 2: Systemic-Formal

E-government initiatives can strategically leverage the digital opportunity for making governance accountable and responsive to women’s needs and interests.

As evidenced from the experiences of Our Watch and the Sreesakthi Portal, the ICT opportunity for creating a dedicated communication platform for women’s issues and concerns, such as GBV, can enable inclusion of women’s perspectives in public-political discussions.

Making the techno-design architecture of e-services gender-responsive can bring a number of gains for women’s empowerment, as supported by insights from the GRS, Safe Return Home, and Sex Offender Alert initiatives. The GRS has adopted the practice of using the metadata about grievances to correct design...
flaws in compliance monitoring, payment releases and household targeting systems of the programme. This has helped in refining the programmatic design to make it more responsive to beneficiaries, the majority of whom are women. Safe Return Home has effectively used the open GIS database developed by government to create a personalized safety app for women, which enables them to inform their friends and family members about their whereabouts. Sex Offender Alert has focused on balancing public interest in issuing notifications about convicted sex offenders with the right to privacy of the offender by instituting a number of legal and technical safeguards that restrict republication and recirculation in media of information accessed through this system.

**Shift in Quadrant 3: Systemic-Informal**

E-government initiatives that harness peer networking and communication possibilities can bring women’s voices into the public sphere and help them gain peer support and solidarity. Such initiatives can also lead to status gains for women at the household level.

Our Watch challenges the prevailing culture of silence on GBV, as does the Sreesakthi Portal. As one woman user of the Sreesakthi Portal reflected:

“Earlier women were alone in the confines of their homes and had nowhere to turn to, when faced with violence and harassment. The portal provides them a space in addition to their immediate neighbourhood group where they can come out in the open about these problems, and seek help. Women no longer need to be quiet. The portal makes individual experiences of violence public and connects women to many other women who are their peers. This helps in reducing abuse in the home.”

Another area where shifts can be discerned is in the strengthening of peer solidarities. For example, through the Blended Learning Programme, women have been able to expand their networks of peer support. In fact, a group of female students have put together a social media group to support each other in their training. The Cyber-mentoring Initiative has facilitated the emergence of strong mentoring relations between women in the early stages of their career and senior women professionals. Similarly, the Sreesakthi Portal is instrumental in the trans-local solidarities forged by members of women’s collectives of the Kudumbashree programme, across different districts.
Shifts in Quadrant 4: Individual-Informal

E-government initiatives can build women's self-esteem and confidence, help them acquire the critical discernment that is necessary for challenging gender norms, and further their active citizenship agency, through an expansion of informational and communicative capabilities.

Sreesakthi Portal, Cyber-mentoring Initiative, and Blended Learning Programme have provided a number of psychological rewards for women participants. The Sreesakthi Portal has enhanced women's self-esteem through its training programmes for digital literacy and creation of a space for women's self-expression. In the case of Cyber-mentoring, the support received by women mentees has helped them step out of prescribed gender roles and even pursue offbeat careers. As one mentee recollected:

“At the start of this year, I was distressed that my dream was to become a soap drama playwright. I was alone as most of my university friends were pursuing careers as office workers or thinking about studying at a graduate school, while those who studied drama with me were from a different age group. My mentor, (herself a senior playwright), helped me to ask myself why I wanted to be a playwright and what I really wanted. She gave me a lot of advice. I realized what was really bothering me, and the answer came out very easily.”  

The Blended Learning Programme has reaffirmed women's self-confidence to participate in the labour market.

E-government interventions can equip women to challenge prevailing gender norms, as the case of Our Watch illustrates. The social media outreach strategies of Our Watch seem to have been especially successful in this area. The Line campaign has led to a shift in attitudes towards VAW among participants, as more and more youth exposed to the campaign have started calling out instances of behaviour that crosses the line (i.e., behaviour that may be abusive or disrespectful).

Finally, as the case studies on blended learning and Community eCentres demonstrate, digital skills training programmes directed at women expand their informational and communicative capabilities, making it possible for them to reap economic and social gains.

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127 Based on research conducted by Our Watch and the Department of Social Services, Government of Australia.
6.2 INGREDIENTS OF A GENDER-RESPONSIVE ECOSYSTEM

What are the ingredients of e-government that lead to empowering outcomes for women? This central objective of the study is addressed in the following discussion. The section lays out key findings from the case studies about service delivery, connectivity and citizen uptake, the three elements of the e-government ecosystem, synthesizing the critical parameters that seem to matter in e-government design for gender equality.

Service delivery

Ingredient 1: Balance between digital processes and human mediation

A fine balance between standardization of digital processes and agility of human mediation is critical for building women’s trust in e-government services, but institutional cultures of governance also matter in trust perception.

The rapid diffusion of mobile phones has spurred many developing country governments to design m-government initiatives on scale. However, literacy and affordability barriers prevent economically disadvantaged women from taking advantage of these endeavours. Smart phone access also tends to be lower for women. Even as new cultures of interface with government are evolving, the role of human mediation is still recognized as important for service efficacy, as community level programmes show. SMS push services (like mWomen in Fiji, which sends SMS based information nuggets) need complementary services to ‘close the loop’, when women victims call in and require direct services. Even in developed countries, e-government programming for women explicitly needs to synergize its online approaches with offline services. Our Watch does not provide counseling or emergency services to those at risk of, or who have experienced, domestic violence. However, all social media sites of the programme are continuously monitored and moderated by experts, and anyone at immediate or potential risk is directed to the national emergency phone number and also advised to contact the 1800 RESPECT counselling service. This information is displayed prominently in all Our Watch publications.

Encouraging women to get online and enabling them to transact with public institutions virtually is an important step to building their confidence as active citizens. In the case of first generation users, human intermediation can facilitate this process and break down the distance between individual women and their public service entitlement. Facilitation to become familiar with e-government and acquire the technical skills to navigate websites and seek public information is the basic step where the role of ‘facilitated access’ cannot be overemphasized. E-jaalakam, in India uses college students as facilitators who train neighborhood groups to start using e-government services. However, eliminating or minimizing human processes in online services potentially offers citizens the advantage of predictability and better levels of efficiency through standardization. The IVR-SERP case shows how a gender-responsive e-government system is programmed through a strategy where routinized technology systems and a personalized response system come together. IVR-SERP enables problem resolution through a rule book; but it also has a simple tracking method that can escalate difficult cases to higher levels of authority, when personalized problem solving is needed. Our Watch recognizes that gender equality is not about techno-deterministic ‘plugs’ to ‘fix’ problems, but “the ability to collaborate, foster partnerships and engage communities”, even as it uses multiple technology platforms not only for information processing, but also discourse shaping. Their website testifies to this approach: “We will genuinely engage organizations and communities to ‘co-produce’ solutions as people, communities and networks hold the tacit knowledge needed to come up with the best solutions for their situation”. Further, technological choices and methods are reviewed continuously for optimizing user experience on different technology interfaces even with low speed connections.

In the GRS case of the Philippine Conditional Cash Transfer programme, complaints resolution and appeals work through a data system that captures, resolves, and analyzes grievances from beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries about the programme. Grievance resolution strategies are clearly defined in the operations manual and the estimated maximum timelines for complaint resolution are established. The programme has also rolled out numerous trainings for grievances officers, staff who are designated as city/municipal links, and parent leaders who are community level outreach staff, to address queries and problems at all levels. Selected non-government agencies are formally engaged to monitor the programme and the same feedback mechanism is available to them. There are regular monthly reviews of grievance status. The procedures of how complaints are filed and reported are published online and offline. These are shared to all partners and beneficiaries. Periodic metadata analysis has helped address concerns by alerting

programmatic administrators to the magnitude of particular concerns and by improving compliance monitoring, payment releases, and household targeting systems. A high degree of agility characterizes the interplay between technological and human processes.

However, affordability, accessibility and connectivity barriers as well as prevailing attitudes that consider grievance-reporting to be a futile exercise create a trust deficit in the grievance redress system of the Philippine Conditional Cash Transfer programme. Even though the possibility of anonymous reporting has contributed to some increase in grievance reporting, existing problem-solving structures may be perceived as too removed and therefore less credible.

Also, what Mission Convergence, a single window service delivery system meant for women in New Delhi, India, shows is that tamper-proof beneficiary tracking is no guarantee of inclusion. Guarantees for being heard by higher authorities, as in the IVR-SERP case, can foster trust. Citizens’ trust in the predictability of e-services may also require collective representation mechanisms that can transmit the shared concerns of women from marginalized social groups.

**Ingredient 2: Boundary spanning in service delivery and robust governance of new partnerships**

Boundary spanning in e-government initiatives brings the much needed flexibility in taking public services to women citizens, but it also requires strong and transparent governance measures to ensure that new service delivery arrangements do not undermine women’s interests.

Boundary spanning refers to the blurring of organizational boundaries of governance institutions, due to the shift away from traditional, hierarchical structures to collaborative modes of functioning that stress cross-sectoral partnerships between governmental agencies, private sector and civil society to address knowledge and expertise gaps in the human resource pool of the government.

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The OECD points to how this shift in recent times to horizontal or non-hierarchical forms of governance with boundaries that blur across organizations and sectors, nationally and globally, presents fundamental public governance challenges.133

The research indicates the many different ways by which service delivery spans boundaries:

a **Interdepartmental convergence.** Safe Return Home mobile app in the Republic of Korea was made possible thanks to the opening up of government GIS data and interministerial agreements.

For the Blended Learning Programme in the Philippines, e-TESDA has entered into agreements with the ICTO for the use of the Community eCentres and public library facilities for all, especially women, who may prefer to use safe spaces other than those at the TESDA Women’s Centre. It also seeks the support of local government units in information dissemination through social media.

b **Citizen involvement in design.** SA Community facilitates informational convergence across a wide range of stakeholders who provide information, without impacting service delivery arrangements at the citizen end. Through partnerships with local organizations that contribute to the portal, it manages integration of information at the content level without integration of the technical architecture. Content is licensed under Creative Commons licensing which enables information reuse. Authorization and verification of information is largely dependent on interagency trust. The creative use of flexibilities enables maximization of information at minimal cost.

c **Private sector partnerships.** In the IVR reporting system for GBV of SERP India and the Cyber-mentoring Initiative of the Republic of Korea, private partners have been contracted for the management of the technical platform underpinning the service.

d **New organizational forms.** Our Watch is an independent, not-for-profit organization, set up by Australian governments (initially the Commonwealth and Victorian State Governments), and works closely with state, territory and federal governments, in the development and delivery of government-funded projects.

These trends in e-government also shift the structures of power and control, as new decision-makers outside of government now get involved in public policy processes. Some examples, emerging from this research, of how ‘boundary spanning’ arrangements have been creatively and effectively managed, are detailed in Box 1.

133 Edwards, Halligan, Horrigan & Nicoli, op.cit.
BOX 1

MAKING BOUNDARY SPANNING WORK FOR GENDER-RESPONSIVENESS

One key area in e-government innovation pertains to managing new stakeholder relationships that governments get into for technical and other expertise. From a gender equality standpoint, these arrangements to span boundaries and maximize efficiency must also pay due attention to accountability and sustainability. The research has suggested a few pointers in this direction:

Overcoming the silo model of functioning: In South Australia, as noted in the case study, when SA Community and its partner organization sa.gov.au came together, resolving the negative consequences of the silo structure of government was the principal design requirement. Achieving this was not easy and called for working contra to the hierarchical structure of the bureaucracy through effective public sector stakeholder management, change management and governance arrangements to put the citizen at the centre.

While allowing for flexibility at the edges to ensure gender-responsiveness, these emerging governance practices in e-government have relied on responsibility- and role-sharing, with differing degrees of contractual formality.

Effective division of roles in interdepartmental convergence: In the case study of the Sex Offender Alert system in the Republic of Korea, work flow arrangements were modified for greater efficiency — with a division of roles between the Ministry of Justice that began dealing with all the registries on sexual offenders, and the Ministry of Gender Equality which took on the role of disclosing and notifying all information on the sexual offenders.

Prioritizing domain expertise rather than IT expertise, in contracts: In the Cyber-mentoring Initiative, Republic of Korea, the decision to hire a specialized women’s agency for managing the web portal for connecting mentors and mentees was taken when it was felt that a technical IT agency was not effective in handling the project on its own. Currently, a women’s agency with domain expertise is responsible for the initiative in its entirety, and this agency subcontracts a technical IT agency for maintenance of the portal.
Optimizing contracts with technology service providers: In the case of SERP, the organization in India that runs the IVR reporting system for GBV, there is a realization that integrating data across its programmes can support beneficiaries much more. As a result, SERP is now looking to rationalize its software applications and reduce the number of contracts with technology service providers. Mandating open technical standards is another consideration e-government initiatives seem to be using, in the interest of project sustainability. The IVR of SERP runs on an Asterisk open platform to work around vendor lock-ins.

Despite the many lessons and emerging tactics in managing new modalities of service delivery, bigger challenges do remain. In the age of boundary spanning, unconventional modes of citizen outreach become more and more common, such as through social media and SNS sites, as government becomes increasingly non-hierarchical in all aspects of its functioning. However, governments may or may not have a social media policy. In the Philippines, we see a laissez-faire approach to social media, with variations across departments and initiatives, while the Our Watch case in Australia shows the strategic deployment of social media. The question of fixing responsibility for protecting user data and privacy on social media platforms remains unanswered in both approaches. This is a critical gap, since there is ample evidence of intermediaries who are unresponsive to cyber attacks faced by women who may challenge prevailing gender norms on these platforms.

There are also significant risks for women’s privacy rights in the ‘big data’ age, where a lot of data are interlinked. Governments resort to extensive collection of personal data of citizens to create foolproof beneficiary authentication systems. The interlinking of data across different agencies, and sometimes between government-held and private data sets, also makes it difficult for citizens to have control over how their private information is put to use.

Public private partnerships involving corporate players, which comprise one key modality of boundary spanning, are strategically useful for public sector agencies to gain access to technical expertise that they
traditionally lack, and overcome bureaucratic inflexibilities of legacy systems. At the same time, PPPs that are not managed well can present a number of challenges for women’s rights, as discussed below:

a **Blurring of accountability in service delivery systems**: Privatization of service delivery at the last mile or e-services management must have clear service level guarantees for the citizen. Accountability arrangements are therefore important from the standpoint of citizen rights. In the case of this research, this was found to be an issue of concern for Fiji, whose e-services are managed by Pacific Digital Technologies, a private company. In India, the privatization of one-stop-shop kiosks for last mile service delivery has created a situation whereby village entrepreneurs running these kiosks prefer higher income groups, paying less attention to the service needs of vulnerable groups.134

b **Weakening of long-term sustainability**: PPPs in this area could pose long-term sustainability challenges. The CeCs in Malvar entered into a partnership with Microsoft to obtain basic software applications for their digital literacy trainings, but this arrangement provided free access only for a limited period of time. As a result, in the long run, costs of digital literacy trainings went up. India’s experience under the National Digital Literacy Mission (NDLM) reveals another challenge. The NDLM selects private partners to implement digital literacy trainings, through a bidding process, and offers a piece-rate compensation135 for successful completion of the qualifying exam by training participants. Such a for-profit approach may lead to a prioritization of the instrumental objective of skills training over the wider goal of expanding citizenship capabilities, while transacting digital literacy.

c **Private management of citizen data**: Oftentimes, governments enter into private sector collaborations for the design and implementation of services underpinned by data backbones, without data governance guidelines. For example, in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, the Management Information System (MIS) of the state’s rural wage employment programme136 availed by the poorest women has been developed in collaboration with a private sector company, who continues to handle its maintenance. In the absence of data governance guidelines, there have been delays from the private partner in responding to data requests from government, and of inaccuracies in reporting, which is an impediment to timely payment of wages to the poor.137 Similarly, in Fiji, in the mWomen mobile-based informational service, all data is collected and managed by Vodafone Foundation, which is under no contractual obligation to share these data.

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134 Kuriyan & Ray, op.cit.
136 This MIS serves as the data backbone that contains information about worker attendance and wage payment status across all villages of the state, where the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme is operational. This programme has contributed enormously to rural women’s economic empowerment.
137 Based on field research conducted for the study in India.
details with the government. Such privatization of sensitive personal citizen data (individuals seeking assistance for GBV, in this case) potentially poses a risk of privacy violations.

**Ingredient 3: Straddling investments in data and connectivity capacities**

**Investment in creating robust public data systems and women’s access to quality connectivity must go hand-in-hand to ensure the relevance and effectiveness of e-government innovations for women.**

The role of government in taking the steps to close the loop between informatization-digitization and connectivity cannot be overemphasized. The basis of gender-responsive e-government is an agile information system with sex-disaggregated data (on development and social welfare indicators), data that can be put to gendered use (like spatial data about the city) and feedback data that can help improve e-services for women. This is borne out by the experience of the Republic of Korea — whose early efforts at informatization paid off in the design of the mobile app Safe Return Home. The spatial data set used by this initiative was a product of systematic collation and digitization of administrative geographic information undertaken in the 1990s, engaging various stakeholders, including the Ministry of Government Administration and Home Affairs, the Ministry of Land, Transportation and Maritime Affairs, and local governments. Near ubiquitous mobile connectivity in the Republic of Korea can ride upon the publicly owned spatial data repository, creating a data-connectivity opportunity for responding to women’s safety needs.

Conversely, it is the quality of connectivity and accessibility of the Internet that drives accelerated use of e-government services. For example, in the case of SA Community, Australia, information is continuously crowdsourced for the portal while its uptake is democratized through state libraries and local government agencies on high speed broadband. The instinctive value that communities engaged in ICT based local knowledge and information processes perceive for connectivity is illustrated in the simple finding that in the Philippines, between Community eCentres that have connectivity and those that don’t, users clearly prefer the former.

On the one hand, data readiness is vital to efficient services; on the other, service efficacy itself is a product of continuous and active use by women. Where connectivity is a challenge and project or government staff are recruited to relay women’s messages, such mediated connectivity can only be an interim solution. Therefore, what the research tells us is that long term gender-responsiveness hinges on the virtuous cycle
of service provision, use, contextualization and citizen participation, that is a product of the seamless twinning of quality connectivity and data readiness.

**Ingredient 4: Gender-responsive data governance**

The redefinition of governance through data regimes demands new gender-responsive legal, policy and implementation frameworks underpinning e-government.

As data becomes foundational to governance, good governance practice must adapt to new data-embedded processes. Data can be considered as not only a technical detail, but also a sociological artefact. It is therefore important that principles of privacy and anonymity are at the centre of debates on governance. Personal data in e-government databases can endanger women's privacy rights, especially since control over data by state and non-state actors who may have access to such data brings disproportionate power. Unless well managed, technical systems can centralize authority, transgressing individual rights and undercutting local control over problem solving. In the case of vulnerable women, considerations of privacy are magnified. Data protection legislation is therefore vital. Beneficiary rights in the Philippines are protected by a privacy law. The TESDA Women’s Centre, in the Philippines, strategically invoked the law for gender mainstreaming to formulate its institutional data security policy and processes, thereby ensuring that the rights of women in their Blended Learning Programme are not compromised.

The possibilities to manage data in disaggregated and geographically bounded ways through localization expand the scope of good governance significantly. The Sex Offender Alert system in the Republic of Korea shows how the right to privacy (of the offender) and information personalization/localization (for access by registered individuals and schools) work in tandem. The IVR-SERP initiative in India is able to track GBV in a disaggregated manner thanks to the Management Information System. The efforts of the Grievance Redress Scheme in this regard show how offline systems must work in tandem with online ones, especially to connect women who may not have the means to communicate with regimes of data governance that are distant and remote.

Some governments are also adopting open source and open standards policies for interoperability of platforms and data for greater efficiency or integrated or convergent service delivery, as SA Community in Australia demonstrates. The FOSS Act in the Philippines for instance mandates the use of open source and open standards.
Also, open data is emerging as an important measure of transparency and accountability. Safe Return Home builds on the integrated national geographic information system, a repository of public spatial data, indicating the role of robust data sets in the public domain to meet the demands of e-government innovation.

What is clear is that legal provisions and administrative protocols for data governance are vital for good governance that promote women’s empowerment and rights. As discussed in Box 2, the principles of data governance are still evolving.

BOX 2
DATA RELATED CHALLENGES IN E-GOVERNMENT: SOME GENDER PERSPECTIVES

The age of data poses various challenges to women’s citizenship and rights.

Existing national statistical systems do not adequately capture sex-disaggregated data needed for effective design and implementation of e-government. Data on women’s use of the internet, online services, m-services, level of ICT skills, nature and extent of VAW online, are not available, and if they are, they are based on small-scale surveys. A dedicated mechanism for data collection and situation analysis is absent.

As state agencies and their private partners collect massive amounts of data, the interlinking of data sets and resultant loss of privacy makes women in particular much more vulnerable. This is exacerbated by the lack of appropriate legislative frameworks to govern data regimes in a way that effectively balances concerns of privacy and transparency.
Citizen uptake

Ingredient 1: Technology design that aims to expand women’s choices and engagement in government structures

Achieving women’s uptake of e-government is about triggering a sense of entitlement that can expand their choices as citizens. The values underlying governance guide the techno-design, either ‘gendering’ such a sense or reinforcing the role of technologies in furthering structures of gender inequality.

The real indicator of e-government maturity for women’s empowerment is not just the readiness of government to deliver. It is about how much or to what degree e-government services are able to bring a sense of entitlement to women citizens. This depends on the values guiding the techno-design aspects. For example, the Community eCentres from the Philippines have opened up new empowerment pathways for women users, as their design is guided by a wider capabilities approach to provisioning access and implementing digital literacy programmes for citizens. Similarly, Our Watch in Australia encourages women and youth to debate, question and challenge prevailing gender norms. The design of the Sreesakthi Portal in India underscores the value of an ‘online public’ for women. When government officials or community and political leaders participate and respond to women in such online public platforms, e-government processes reinforce women’s ‘right to be heard’. Allowing for the anonymous reporting of grievance, as in the GRS case from the Philippines, is another example of a measure to encourage women to use the service, bringing a minimum service level guarantee in claims-making.

Design elements in policies, rules and implementation could also prevent women from accessing information and the public services to which they are entitled. For example, telecentres could require proof of identity/residential address and signatures. Such bureaucratic requirements can pose barriers to those who have low literacy, are homeless/transient or otherwise marginalized because of lack of formal identification. Similarly, moderation of women’s online participation could promote paternalism, in the name of protecting women from bullying or trolling. To illustrate, discussion forums in the Sreesakthi Portal of the Government of Kerala are moderated for online posts. Similarly, system operators in the Cyber-mentoring Initiative in the Republic of Korea have the authority to monitor and review the mentoring processes. Such moderation may be a double-edged sword, undermining women’s rights through censorship or protectionism.
The endeavour to design in a way that the technical responds to the social and does not exacerbate inequality and discrimination is therefore a key test for e-government maturity. Technological design is a set of choices. It can compromise rights or unleash citizenship.

Open data, without protocols for data protection can lead to the publication of data that endangers citizen privacy. The challenges associated with this are illustrated by the case of IVR-SERP in India. In this initiative, data about survivors and perpetrators of Gender Based Violence, recorded on the IVR system, are published online. Open data, especially on women’s rights violations is important. It is a means to reflect the extent of a problem that is heavily underreported. At the same time, the granularity of the data is of key concern, and so, decisions to publish information about individual women must also reckon with the need to respect and protect their confidentiality and safety. The Sex Offender Alert initiative of the Republic of Korea illustrates one possible solution to address the question of effectively balancing privacy and ‘transparency in public interest’ requirements through effective techno-design. This initiative uses both technical sophistication (such as identity authentication for data access and software that restricts the creation of local copies of information at the user end) and legal checks (legal restrictions on republication of information accessed through this service) in an effective manner, to balance the public interest requirement of issuing alerts about known Sex Offenders and their case histories, with the requirement of maintaining survivor confidentiality.

Reliance on proprietary software could compromise longer term considerations of cost and sustainability. For example, in the case of the Community eCentres in the Philippines, the proprietary products used in the digital literacy trainings need to be purchased after the expiry of the trial period. This has cost implications for sustained provision of the services. Hardware and software lock-ins may be attractive and even useful for short term impacts, but as the SA Community initiative shows, public technology choices in terms of technical (vesting the ownership of the platform with a not-for-profit organization SA Connected; and mandating the use of a Creative Commons license) and techno-social (democratically managed information system processes and governance structures) aspects resonate strongly as accessibility enablers for women.
Ingredient 2: Frontline workers to nurture women’s appreciation for, and trust in, digitalized service delivery

Effective access to e-government services for marginalized women needs contextually relevant human facilitation at the last mile, often provided by a new cadre of extension workers.

Human intermediation plays a vital role in effective e-government service delivery for women, especially in developing country contexts. Not only because women may need technical support to navigate virtual spaces, but also to make e-government familiar and build trust. The cases reviewed point to a cutting edge role played by frontline intermediaries, including knowledge workers in Community eCentres of the Philippines, librarians in South Australia, and members of the local Community Development Societies in the case of Sreesakthi Portal, India, who have all been reported by users as teachers, guides and stewards. These frontline workers have been instrumental not only in ensuring that women’s personal transactions are dealt with, but in nurturing local appreciation for technological mediation of service delivery. A generic digital divide approach is now well recognized to have limitations. Disincentives and barriers to access are well documented and include women’s inability to pay for access to services, constraints on mobility and multiple burdens. Frontline intermediaries often go to where women are to enlist them for e-services. The GRS of the Conditional Cash Transfers programme in the Philippines uses a community orientation model that includes the participation of parent leaders at the last mile, in their operational design that includes the city/municipal links, the Conditional Cash Transfers programme’s officials at the municipal or regional level and independent NGO monitoring teams. Parent Leaders who are mostly women act as a conduit for information between beneficiaries and management of the Conditional Cash Transfers programme. They play an important role in capturing grievances and facilitating grievance redress in the community.
Ingredient 3: Leadership of national women’s machineries to encourage gender-responsive e-government

Women’s uptake of online services calls for system-wide appreciation and commitment to the gender transformative opportunity of e-government. The leadership of women’s machineries is vital in accelerating progress.

Gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting frameworks and laws for women have been referred to in high impact initiatives like Our Watch, Australia; the Blended Learning Programme of the vocational training authority, TESDA, in the Philippines; and cutting edge participatory governance models like Sreesakthi Portal in India that engages marginalized women across Kerala state in policy dialogues. These cases reflect a strong ownership of lead agencies, such as in education or rural development, which have appropriated the e-government opportunity. These initiatives also demonstrate a shared pan-organizational vision and willingness for boundary-crossing in design for effective impact, as well as the important role of local champions, femocrats and enterprising individuals in government.

However, the systemic assimilation of the gendered opportunity that e-government presents requires an agency that can drive the vision, guide the implementation and monitor the outcomes, across all sectors and levels of government. The experience of the Republic of Korea for instance shows how the women’s machinery plays a key role in aligning the national effort for informatization with women’s policies to use ICTs more actively for women’s empowerment (see Box 3). The mobile app in the Sex Offender Alert system was born out of an interministerial task force in which the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family worked with the Ministry of Justice on the issue of violence and safety.

Women’s machineries in all countries have unfortunately not risen to the challenge and opportunity for a gender-responsive e-government. They may also not be empowered with the necessary resources, technical, financial and human, to coordinate and inform e-government implementation. It is clear however that the next phase of e-government for women’s empowerment will need much more than occasional entrepreneurs from the system; ownership is key and there should be a central role for the national women’s machinery.
Before the establishment of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family in 2001 as the national women’s machinery in the Republic of Korea, it was the Ministry of Information and Communication that mainly led informatization programmes for women. The Framework Act on Informatization Promotion and the Act on Eliminating the Digital Divide (1995) provided an impetus for this. Subsequently, the Ministry of Gender Equality established the Basic Plan for Promoting Women’s Informatization (2002–2006), setting out a rather ambitious policy vision on women’s capacity to participate in the information society, and going one step forward from previous approaches on the gender digital divide that defined women’s role more passively.

Every five years, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family establishes a Basic Plan on Women’s Policy through which national policy directions for women’s empowerment and gender equality are broadly defined. The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family’s policy directions on women’s informatization are also in line with the Basic Plan on Women’s Policy. The approach here shows the lead that the national women’s machinery provides in bringing about the much needed alignment between digital inclusion of women and national policy directions for gender mainstreaming and women’s empowerment. It also indicates the role the Ministry plays in being proactive about a rapidly evolving scenario, so that women can stand to gain from emerging opportunities for active citizenship.
Connectivity

Ingredient 1: Models to promote meaningful online participation for women

Connectivity policy is not just a technical consideration for e-government. It is equally about promoting meaningful cultures of online participation through which women can experience active citizenship.

Broadband infrastructure, according to the Broadband Commission for Digital Development set up by the ITU and UNESCO, is critical for social inclusion in the digital age. However, mere availability of connectivity cannot bring about gender inclusion in e-government service delivery. This is especially true for countries where broadband adoption is new. Assumptions about connectivity matter most. In the SA Community initiative of Australia, the commitment to reach low speed users and hence a minimalist design of the website for easy and quick information access reflects premises that address social exclusion.

If being connected can enhance learning about the civic-public aspects of citizenship, it is more likely to be perceived as valuable, especially by first generation Internet users becoming familiar with e-government. Giving women access to a space for mentoring and being mentored (Cyber-mentoring Initiative, Republic of Korea); a safe space for self-paced and supported learning (Blended Learning Programme, Philippines); and a channel to voice their perspectives in the public domain (Sreesakthi Portal, India), the deployment of connectivity opens up various avenues for active citizenship. Where being online means an assertion of agency, women see connectivity as empowering. In the case of the Sreesakthi Portal in India, socially and economically marginalized women use an online portal for discussions about gender issues. Their training in the use of the platform is directed at their participation in public discussions. When connectivity cannot reap social returns, or expand existing networks and bring value, many women, particularly from rural and aboriginal backgrounds, are most likely to reject it.

Countries are exploiting new ways to reach women citizens through mobile-based services. Our Watch’s focus on young people through the Line campaign capitalizes on mobile connectivity diffusion, using out-of-the-box thinking to define gender-based violence as a public issue requiring social debate on norms.

Even where mobile access is still an issue, programmes are harnessing community volunteerism to respond to women’s needs, as the IVR in SERP does by involving local women leaders who relay messages.

Poor infrastructure is a roadblock to effective roll-out of e-government. Coupled with lack of human capacity and appropriate legislation, the absence of a strong connectivity backbone has impacted e-government maturity in the Pacific. In India, state policy on connectivity infrastructure and broadband continues to see connectivity as divorced from the key issue of meaningful cultures of use at the last mile. However, there is realization that connectivity cannot be reduced to a technical issue. As a key informant from the Department of Telecommunications, Government of India contacted for the India component of the research observed:

“While imagining a broadband infrastructure, it is important for us to go beyond a unitary imagination of the broadband at the last mile as an undifferentiated pipe — and think about the different types of services that will run on it — in specific, capacities to handle data-rich services need to be assessed and adequately planned for. Also, it may not be correct to assume that the last-mile broadband retail will be automatically taken care of, by market forces, once the basic infrastructural network up to the Panchayat level (rural local government) is provided by National Optic Fibre Network. As at this point, in rural areas, demand for broadband may not be large enough to attract private players, and so, other creative models for last mile retail involving women’s collectives, Gram Panchayats (local governments), local cable operators, need to also be examined. Finally, there needs to be investment in developing relevant content services for the rural population using the digital opportunity, in addition to providing for the infrastructure.”

Pilot projects like Sanchar Shakti, in India, have used the Gender Budget of the Universal Service Obligation Fund, to bundle connectivity with informational services for rural women. While gender based policies to bring women online and become citizen-users of e-government are an urgent policy imperative, approaches in this regard have to go beyond creating a client base for e-government.

The push for connectivity and informatization in the early 2000s in the Republic of Korea resulted in a plan to train 5 million people to build their capacities in information production and move beyond information consumption. The Second Step Training Plan on Informatization of Citizens 2003 aimed at equipping 3.5 million ‘e-Koreans’ to use information technologies at work and in their everyday lives, providing basic

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trainings for computer and Internet skills for 1.5 million people from vulnerable groups, through the Korea Agency for Digital Opportunity and Promotion.

Quality connectivity can propel new generation users to become e-citizens using a range of public services online. However, sociocultural barriers to access may also leave behind most women and older populations, unless connectivity goes with e-government literacy. While digital inclusion policies do recognize the role of digital literacy programmes, the success of such interventions is contingent upon how socially excluded populations perceive digital skills training as a means to join the mainstream. Rather than top-down modalities, bottom-up strategies are more likely to be effective in encouraging marginalized women to embrace emerging technologies (see Box 4).

The involvement of various arms of government is also a prerequisite. The Philippine Digital Literacy for Women Campaign is a programme that offers free digital literacy training to women nationwide. Launched in 2011, it engages multiple stakeholders, including the ICT Office, Telecenter.Org, the University of the Philippines, the Philippine Community eCentre Network, Intel Philippines, telecommunication companies and other non-government organizations. The programme aims to cover 10,000 women and give them the skills for informational access, networking, and exploring socioeconomic opportunities to improve their lives.143 Also, the Bureau of Alternative Learning System in the Philippine Department of Education uses its Community eCentres for basic computer education or digital literacy courses. Davao City, for instance, offers basic computer literacy courses to youth as well as to women from the ten tribes living in the city. 144

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BOX 4
BOTTOM-UP INITIATIVES FOR WOMEN’S DIGITAL LITERACY:
THE CASE OF E-JAALAKAM, KERALA, INDIA

E-jaalakam (literally, e-window) is a path-breaking digital literacy initiative that has been developed by the Department of Economics, St. Teresa’s College in Ernakulam district of Kerala state, in India, in partnership with the Kerala State IT Mission. The initiative, launched in 2012, focuses on using women undergraduate students of the college as Master Trainers to conduct digital literacy trainings for women and girls in neighbouring communities, through a cascade model. The Kerala State IT Mission has supported the college in the development of the training material and in developing the curriculum for the training of the Master Trainers. What makes this initiative stand out is its recognition of digital literacy as a pathway that enables women to attain full digital citizenship. As Nirmala Padmanabhan, the Head of the Department of Economics and the architect of this initiative shared in a key informant interview conducted for this research, “The focus of e-jaalakam is to ensure that women and girls know enough about computers and the Internet to access information about various schemes and services, and are familiar with all the government websites. Part of the task is also to change the way women think of their relationship with government. In one of our early trainings, one girl asked me ‘Why should I care about all these schemes and services? Someone else at home will take care of it anyway’. I told her, ‘It is precisely to counter such a perception about governance being a male preserve that girls should get into e-government transactions’.” In 2014, this initiative won the Chief Ministers’ Award for Innovation in Service Delivery in Kerala state.

Ingredient 2: Subsidized access and safe public spaces for including all women

Subsidized public access is important for gender-responsive e-government, especially as Internet and smartphone use among women is still low in many developing countries. In and of itself, public access seems to hold value for women’s networking, peer support and social capital.

Women-friendly e-government services need affordable and ubiquitous connectivity so that all citizens can be included. Creative service delivery ideas that target women will have to consider strong, locally viable solutions to make sure that connectivity reaches women. One important factor in this is the sustainable financing of such initiatives, in order to provide affordable and financially viable options. In some cases,
public access has been provided free-of-charge, such as the Sreesakthi Portal, which uses free public access infrastructure points provided at the village level, through the Department of Rural Development. These spaces assist women in accessing e-government services. Without full subsidy or universal access, e-government may not be able to make inroads, especially where the benefits of digital communication and transaction are not yet apparent to women. The lack of affordable and accessible broadband for poor households is one of the reasons for the slow uptake of online channels for grievance filing in the Grievance Redress Scheme.

Government outreach services in local communities can help engage women when they provide opportunities that expand life choices and are perceived as a welcoming space. Commercial Internet access points can be intimidating for women. Women beneficiaries of e-TESDA, Philippines prefer the Women’s Centre to cybercafés that they find unwelcoming. e-TESDA’s women beneficiaries see the Centre as a highly enabling space for technical assistance, and affirming for the collective learning and peer support received. The Community eCentres of Malvar, Philippines, are another good example of a gender-responsive public access facility.

In addition, public access points provide other benefits. The role of libraries in fostering ICT and information access, especially for women, has been well documented. The public library network in Australia, for instance, has been vital in the SA Community initiative that functions as a public information repository used extensively by local social service organizations. In South Australia, libraries have taken on the primary role (outside the formal education system) in digital literacy training and provide technical support especially to older women citizens. In the Philippines, Community eCentres have emerged as public access spaces that provide users a range of digital possibilities, ICT skills training, online courses for alternative education, and e-government services.

145 Sey et.al., op.cit.
7 Conclusions

How e-government policy and programmes must approach women’s empowerment
The most significant insight that has come out of this inquiry is that gender-responsive e-government constitutes a normative shift in the idea of governance. E-government can bring women new citizenship rights and opportunities. Its gender transformative potential hinges on measures to translate the vision of gender equality through rules and practices that make governance and democracy work for women.

The move to digital by default in public service delivery is not merely a shift in tools used by systems of government. E-government is increasingly a sine qua non of sound public administration that expands the meaning of good governance. Described as a route to “expanded democracy”, e-government can be seen as providing new design architecture for governance that can alter the very experience of citizenship.

What this means is that e-government can revolutionize many dimensions of accountable governance, it can make governance more open and inclusive, and give governments the means to reach out to, and promote citizen rights, of women. Gender-responsive e-government can therefore build a democracy in which women matter. A well designed and agile e-government ecosystem can be particularly path breaking for women from the margins, as it accords those without formal documentation the identity and locus standi to become eligible for entitlements upon which their basic needs and rights depend.

Research studies show that in certain cases, e-government has resulted in alienating the marginalized further from their access to entitlements. Social inclusion is often held up in policy documents, but women’s empowerment and gender equality are conspicuous by their absence. Without an explicit policy vision and plan of what it can potentially do for women’s rights, e-government runs the risk of bypassing women. While the more recent vision of Government 3.0 in the Republic of Korea commits to “transparency, competence, and citizen-oriented services”, it is the entitlements approach of the administration in the late 1990s and early 2000s to “actively support informatization as an issue of women’s human rights” that may be seen as the critical point that paved the way in the Republic of Korea for positive gender equality outcomes through e-government.
At the national level, multiple expectations are evident in the discourse of e-government, from aspirations to overcome developmental challenges in education, health, skills development, financial inclusion, employment generation, etc., and gaining competitive advantage for national economic progress, to delivering citizen-centric governance. E-government can and should also be seen as a creative and disruptive technique to reach the normative goal of women’s empowerment and equality. It should be envisaged and employed as a public policy instrument to deepen democracy so that women can gain full citizenship. The case studies suggest that an a priori twinning of gender considerations and digital techniques in service delivery can address women’s needs and interests as citizens, tackling their exclusion from development services and giving them the space to participate in shaping the development agenda. The Community eCentres case demonstrates how an entitlement approach to digital literacy and e-services has direct consequences for women’s life chances, while IVR-SERP shows how gender-based violence becomes a critical local governance priority thanks to the rights-based approach in the design of the initiative. Initiatives studied have also pointed to the role of e-government in giving women the ‘right to be heard’. The Sreesakthi Portal for example, demonstrates the possibilities for wider consultation with marginalized women across policy areas through a hybrid model even when connectivity infrastructure and mobile diffusion are not ubiquitous. By working through community access points and promoting local groups to share collective experiences, it allows women to shape public opinion through perspectives that are gendered. The Grievance Redress Scheme gives voice to women beneficiaries to express their concerns and assert claims with regard to a benefit transfer programme.

Norms, rules and practices of gender-responsive e-government will need alignment. At the foundational level, women’s citizenship must be invoked explicitly by e-government policy, and gender mainstreaming efforts must be institutionalized in all areas of governance, specifically in harnessing the ICT opportunity for women’s access to resources and entitlements. Often referred to as process reengineering, these efforts require much more than a systemic shift involving technology and policy; they also call for attention to human resource capabilities in, and cultures of, public institutions.

On the normative plane, the idea of ‘citizens at the centre of service delivery’ is a mandate that many governments have given for themselves in their e-government plans. Variously, this has included the understanding that the delivery of this promise requires putting more services online, opening up government, collaborating with citizens, accepting feedback on performance and then acting upon that...
feedback in a timely, effective and efficient manner. Legal frameworks on data protection and the right to information have accompanied policies on broadband connectivity, access to online services, open standards and digital literacy, with institutionalization of a national government agency dedicated to e-government capability. Where there are gender mainstreaming laws and policies and gender budgeting rules, the institutionalization of gender in e-government implementation is stronger.

In the Philippines, for example, the Republic Act No. 10650 (2014) attests to the aspirations of the government to “to expand and further democratize access to quality tertiary education through the promotion and application of open learning as a philosophy of access to educational services.” The law emphasizes that open and distance learning programmes must be delivered using information and communications technology. The case study of the Blended Learning Programme shows how the latter builds on the provisions of the law, offering women fully subsidized access to connectivity and to vocational training, in its service model. E-government policies, the Philippine Digital Strategy and the e-Government Master Plan in the Philippines recognize the role of ICTs for women’s empowerment and outline plans of action that are aligned. The country’s policies on gender equality and women’s rights provide a robust scaffolding to e-government policies and strategies. The government’s gender mainstreaming strategy has been institutionalized through the enactment of the Magna Carta of Women, in 2009.

Unfortunately however, the idea that e-government is a means to address the needs and rights of women is not always part of the vision statement of policy. Gender-responsive design in e-government service delivery remains ad hoc in India, despite the ambitious Digital India programme. Key components of the programme such as digital literacy are beginning to be rolled out on a nationwide scale in right earnest, but they are not supported by a vision to equip women for claiming digital citizenship. The policy gap in making e-government gender-responsive is true not only for developing country contexts, and can be a setback for e-government success, especially in its vital role as a catalyst for women’s citizen rights.

Gender-responsive practices in e-government certainly depend on strong norms and rules, but institutionalizing gender in e-government also entails wider changes in public institutional cultures. This is a long road, and requires strategies for building across-the-board institutional capacity. In Fiji, interviews with government stakeholders for this research indicated that e-government is viewed as gender neutral and responses show a techno-centric, rather than a sociocultural, understanding of equality of access.
When asked about e-government priorities for women, stakeholders shared a view that “technology does not discriminate” and so e-government is about “access on an equal footing”. The technicalization of e-government may also reduce gender based thinking to finding simple fixes, as reflected in a comment from an Indian official interviewed for this research: “In Digital India, we are committed to inclusion; this means like accessibility for the disabled, we will also think about women.” In the Philippines, despite gender mainstreaming policies, government personnel have varying levels of appreciation for gender concepts and issues. Critical issues such as online violence against women are not adequately covered in e-government capacity-building. Though there are courses offered by agencies such as the National Computer Centre and the Career Executives Service Board in the area of building e-government leadership, most of these courses are silent on women’s empowerment and gender equality issues in e-government. In fact, some trainers interviewed for this research insisted that it is difficult to integrate gender in ICT courses.

Even where gender concerns are institutionalized in the broader e-government roadmap through policy and legal measures, the commitment and agility to prioritize gender in implementation design may not obtain automatically. Despite national policy instruments on gender, digital inclusion and e-government and recent progress in overall e-government performance, Fiji, for instance, still lags behind in transactional and interactive service delivery possibilities, gendering data collection, targeting service delivery for women and citizen consultation for improving service delivery.

A close congruence between norms, rules and practices within the e-government ecosystem is required in order to promote women’s empowerment and gender equality. Without such congruence, women’s rights in the expanded democracy that e-government affects are likely to be circumvented.
Key recommendations
Gender equality and women’s empowerment may be seen as policy goals intrinsic to any e-government endeavour aspiring to deliver good governance. Based on the critical insights of this study on e-government and gender, this chapter presents recommendations for overall policy coherence in e-government design. It seeks to abstract the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of the e-government roadmap for gender justice based on the above discussion. Using, as relevant, international policy benchmarks, reports of key international development agencies, and policy research, the chapter draws out the normative underpinnings, legislative and policy frameworks, and implementation imperatives corresponding to the findings and conclusions of the study.

Taken together, these recommendations represent the key elements characterizing any gender-responsive e-government ecosystem (see Table 5). This may not be an exhaustive set, but comprises the insights rooted in this study.

### TABLE 5
**KEY ELEMENTS OF A GENDER-RESPONSIVE E-GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONAL ECOSYSTEM**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NORMS</th>
<th>Service delivery</th>
<th>Citizen Uptake</th>
<th>Connectivity Architecture</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promote e-government as a public policy instrument for pro-poor, gender-sensitive development</td>
<td>Guarantee women’s rights to fully participate in the information society</td>
<td>Promote universal access to the Internet</td>
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<td>Guarantee women’s digital citizenship</td>
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<td>Ensure that gender and e-government policies go hand-in-hand</td>
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<td>Balance effectively technology and human elements in service delivery design</td>
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<tr>
<th>RULES</th>
<th>Service delivery</th>
<th>Citizen Uptake</th>
<th>Connectivity Architecture</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formulate clear rules to cushion e-services from political volatility</td>
<td>Ensure that online citizen engagement is tied to women’s ‘right to be heard’</td>
<td>Deploy multiple policy instruments towards universalizing Internet access</td>
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<tr>
<td>Institutionalize the partnership between national women’s machinery and e-government agency</td>
<td>Actively involve women not only in implementation, but also design and co-production of e-government services</td>
<td>Make connectivity policies gender-responsive</td>
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<td>Promote robust governance of Public Private Partnerships in service delivery</td>
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<td>Support open data frameworks that promote the right to information</td>
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<td>Develop gender-responsive open standards for public data architectures</td>
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<tr>
<th>PRACTICES</th>
<th>Service delivery</th>
<th>Citizen Uptake</th>
<th>Connectivity Architecture</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Build awareness and capacity of e-government officials on gender issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monitor e-government through a ‘digital citizenship index’</td>
<td>Promote digital literacy as a strategic pathway to women’s citizenship</td>
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<td>Promote effective management of metadata of individuals</td>
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<td>Invest in partnerships with public interest intermediaries in open data initiatives</td>
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8.1 SERVICE DELIVERY

Norms

Promote e-government as a public policy instrument for pro-poor, gender-sensitive development: The information society offers the building blocks to bring women into democratic processes within an architecture of good governance. Access to public services is a lifeline for the poorest and most marginalized women. The first SDG on Ending Poverty emphasizes the role of new technology, pro-poor and gender-sensitive development strategies to address poverty in all its forms everywhere. Target 5.b exhorts governments to “enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women”. The current moment of technological flux however holds the risk of exacerbating gender-based exclusion, as access to the Internet and level of digital capabilities vary widely across sociostructural locations. Given this challenge, e-government can signal a fresh mandate for gender-responsive governance and address the interests of the poorest and most marginalized women, thus furthering the CEDAW vision of eliminating “any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex”.

Guarantee women’s digital citizenship: E-government should address the social, cultural, economic and political issues impacting women’s active citizenship, as the necessary starting point for reaching e-services to women. The unique opportunities of the digital age can enable women to find their rightful place as equal citizens in processes of governance and democracy. This calls for specific steps by governments to guarantee women’s digital citizenship. Towards this, and as highlighted in the 2008 UNDP Primer, the goal of gender justice needs to inform the various dimensions of e-government, ranging from “(1) design of e-governance policies and strategies; (2) delivery of basic e-services; (3) e-participation; (4) access to ICTs; and (5) access to public information via ICTs”.

Ensure that gender and e-government policies go hand-in-hand: A well designed and comprehensive e-government policy is important. Such a policy needs to spell out the role that e-government can play in redressing women’s historical exclusion from governance and democracy. Explicitly connecting gender and e-government policy objectives will result in improved gender equality and women’s empowerment outcomes. Additionally, strong institutional ownership of the gender mainstreaming agenda in sectoral e-government policymaking processes (across agriculture, health, education and other domains) is key to create the overall momentum and sustain women’s empowerment through technology.

Plans and programmes to roll out e-government need to align gender-based considerations to the stages of e-government development (see Annex III for details). A roadmap for addressing gender equality across the different stages of e-government, proposed by UNPOG, is outlined below:

a. **Emerging stage**: There should be efforts for creating an online presence for the national gender machinery and putting gender policies online.

b. **Enhanced stage**: When e-government proceeds to this stage where applications for schemes and programmes are downloadable, care should be taken to ensure that such applications for initiatives of the ministry of women are available.

c. **Transactional stage**: Individualized services for women should be available.

d. **Connected stage**: There should be one-stop-shop portals for women-directed services as well as integration of such services with generic one-stop-shop portals.

**Balance effectively technology-human elements in service delivery design**: The introduction of technology in service delivery systems can lead to a shift in existing social accountability relations between beneficiaries, service providers and government. Research on the Conditional Cash Transfer programmes in the Philippines and Latin America reveals that contextually responsive human intermediation mechanisms can enhance local accountability. The programmes were able to effectively tackle inclusion-exclusion errors that creep into digital processes of beneficiary enrollment and authentication, and thus achieve effective targeting, thanks to agile human intermediation. Virtualization of service delivery does not automatically

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159 UNPOG, 2013, op.cit.
160 UNPOG, 2013, op.cit.
lead to gender based inclusion. The design challenge in e-services delivery therefore is to find a middle path to maximize technological and human elements, reaping the advantages of both universal, standardized procedures and localized, unique needs.

**Rules**

**Formulate clear rules to cushion e-services from political volatility:** It has been the experience of the past two decades that e-government development, and gender-responsiveness to e-government in particular, are contingent on political will and commitment in the highest echelons of government. Things have moved in the direction of special programmes for women, interministerial coordination and cooperation, infrastructure development and digital literacy, where specialized, high powered agencies have been set up with time-bound targets, along with appropriate resource allocation. The findings from this research also show that commitments to gender equality can lose momentum where incoming governments may not be sympathetic to their predecessor governments’ efforts.

The predictability and quality of services for women requires that clear rules are evolved through due legislative process in order to insulate e-government from political change. E-government maturity scores tell us that this is an area central to the digital divide between nations. Unless developing country governments put in place the legal and policy measures to promote digital citizenship for women, the qualitative gap between women and men in use of ICTs is bound to persist.

**Institutionalize the partnership between national women’s machinery and e-government agency:** The vanguard role of the national women’s machinery in leading e-government implementation cannot be overemphasized. The role of the ministry of women can be to roll out plans and programmes appropriate to emerging gender issues and women’s empowerment challenges in the wider society, as well as evolve policy guidelines on ‘women’s digital citizenship and e-government’ as a basic protocol for other departments and ministries across levels of government. The ministry of women should undertake efforts to ensure that decision-making structures in e-government include women, while engaging the participation of women’s organizations in service delivery, policy making and monitoring processes. The partnership between the e-government department and the national women’s ministry should also be institutionalized to ensure sustainability and credibility. The joint programmes developed through such partnerships will be effective if a multitrack approach that combines a mix of gender-integrated and gender-targeted interventions is adopted, as recommended by UN Women in its 2014 guidance note on
gender mainstreaming in development programming.\textsuperscript{162} The Philippines is a leader in this area, and as the country case for this research shows, it has institutionalized gender mainstreaming across all sectors of government, including e-government, through the 2009 Magna Carta of Women.

**Promote robust governance of Public Private Partnerships in service delivery:** Public-private partnerships have gained traction as a vehicle of implementation design of e-government systems. Favourable outcomes depend very much on the governance of such arrangements so that there are service quality guarantees that protect women’s rights. Partnership choices and innovative governance structures and mechanisms that support greater efficiency, while safeguarding accountability, become important. The separation of substantive (domain-related) functions from that of technological management, in the experience of the Cyber-mentoring Initiative, Republic of Korea, illustrates how different agencies come together with complementary strengths in the partnership.

Penalty or recourse in the event of noncompliance by the private partner(s) in PPP arrangements becomes necessary for a citizen-responsive and women-friendly e-government. As observed by the International Finance Corporation in its 2012 Synthesis Report of the gender impact of Public Private Partnerships, project conditionalities that are included in the financing agreements of such arrangements should specify the realization of gender-based outcomes as part of the contractual requirement.\textsuperscript{163} More research is required to understand the conditions under which public-private partnerships in e-service delivery can lead to the development of sustainable interventions for gender equality.

**Support open data frameworks that promote the right to information:** The full realization of the right to information will also depend on the digitization of government data, back-end integration and proactive dissemination of public information. The experience of applications designed for women’s safety for instance, indicates the need for systematic, robust, public data systems as in the case of government spatial data in the Republic of Korea, for a coordinated institutional response to women’s safety. Promoting user-end measures alone may be simplistic. The role of real time data must encompass possibilities for effective policing, interagency coordination and emergency services. This calls for extensive digitization that deepens availability of data in and for the public domain. Partnerships with local organizations can


be useful in building and sustaining open data and local information processes for local level use and empowerment.¹⁶⁴

**Develop gender-responsive open standards for public data architectures:** Technical standards for publishing in non-proprietary formats are crucial to ensure unrestricted use of government data by citizens. It would not be possible to recombine data sets²⁶⁵ to tease out gendered patterns without such standards. Standards that support local language content is another priority area for governments, so that women who may be unfamiliar with the dominant languages of the Internet can access information online and also engage in consultative processes with government.

Decisions on the data architecture are closely tied to inclusiveness and accessibility outcomes in e-government.¹⁶⁶ Choices pertaining to the features of data architectures (such as selectivity, coding for display, nature of tagging, language) have important social implications.¹⁶⁷ The process of informatization involves capturing lived social reality in the language of data.¹⁶⁸ To contain the seeds for transformative change therefore, data related decision making processes in government need to ‘think gender’. To illustrate with an example, the Indian state of Tamil Nadu came out with a welfare policy for transgenders, and also introduced provisions for gender dysphoric individuals to record their ‘third gender’ status in official food ration cards issued by the public distribution system,¹⁶⁹ and in application forms for college education.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷ Davies, 2014, op.cit.
¹⁶⁸ IT for Change, Making women's voices and votes count, op.cit., http://www.gender-is-citizenship.net/unwomen.
Practices

**Build awareness and capacity of e-government officials on gender issues:** Training public authorities, local government officials, parliamentarians, law enforcement agencies, and other relevant stakeholders is critical for a committed and concerted approach to women’s empowerment through e-government. Such training must include those in leadership positions as well as those at the last mile in e-service delivery systems to include all levels of officials involved in implementing e-government. For instance, from publicizing e-service delivery arrangements to helping women navigate online spaces and alerting them to the implications of virtual transactions, officials and authorities at different levels hold different responsibilities.

**Monitor e-government through a 'digital citizenship index':** The efficacy of e-government for women’s empowerment depends very much on adequate and reliable statistics. At the national level, it would be useful to build the data capacity for collecting and collating sex-disaggregated data for an index like the EGDI. For example, Mozambique is partnering with Cetic.br, the UNESCO Regional Centre for Studies on the Development of the Information Society, to explore how the collection of gender based statistics in the country’s new household ICT survey can be made robust.171 Furthermore, monitoring gender-responsiveness would also require attention to a) service delivery aspects including the number of women-oriented services and number of women accessing m-services; b) human capacity issues like digital literacy; c) telecommunications indicators like individual data subscription; and d) institutional maturity dimensions like gender policies in services and infrastructure, ICT policy integration in the women’s machinery and the gendering of data protection laws. There is a strong case for developing a ‘digital citizenship index’ that corresponds to the EGDI for agile and gender-responsive monitoring of e-government.

**Promote effective management of metadata of individuals:** Increasingly, state agencies are embarking on large scale projects with sophisticated management information system backbones. The conditional cash transfer programme in the Philippines is one example. State agencies are required to safeguard women’s privacy and ensure that confidentiality of their data is guaranteed. Many countries guarantee the right to privacy under the Constitution. More recently, countries have also passed data protection legislation. It is important that e-government initiatives recognize their duty to protect the private information of women when it is digitized. Personal data security requires adequate thinking about the

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legal safeguards to address vulnerabilities that digital platforms bring. The Sex Offender Alert initiative of the Republic of Korea uses both technical sophistication (such as identity authentication for data access and software that restricts the creation of local copies of information at the user-end) and legal checks (legal restrictions on republication of information accessed through this service) in an effective manner. The WEF's report on Rewards and Risks of Big Data recommends that:

“large data systems should store data in a distributed manner, separated by type (e.g., financial vs. health) and real-world categories (e.g., individual vs. corporate), managed by a department whose function is focused on those data, and with sharing permissions set and monitored by personnel from that department. Best practice would have the custodians of data be regional and use heterogeneous computer systems. With such safeguards in place, it is more difficult to combine data types without authentic authorization. Similarly, data sharing should always maintain provenance and permissions associated with data and support automatic, tamper-proof auditing. Best practice would share only answers to questions about the data (e.g., by use of preprogrammed SQL queries known as Database Views ) rather than the data themselves, whenever possible.”

**Invest in partnerships with public interest intermediaries in open data initiatives:** Research reveals that in developing country contexts, open data intermediaries play an important role in building the data capabilities of citizens, especially those belonging to socially marginalized groups. Additionally, in some instances, such intermediaries also become valued partners for local governments, supporting the latter’s accountability efforts. For example, in 2012, in the southern Indian metropolis of Chennai, ‘Transparent Chennai’, a data intermediary organization, took up the issue of urban poor women’s right to sanitation. Using the existing right to information law, they persuaded the municipal government to open up its data sets on the availability and quality of public toilets in different wards of the city. The organization then held community consultations in urban-poor neighbourhoods, documenting errors and discrepancies between the official data and on-ground reality. Subsequently, Chennai Municipal Corporation approached Transparent Chennai to sign an MoU that would enable the governmental agency build its data management capacities and integrate community-based data systems for updating of its records.

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174 Raman, op.cit.
8.2 CITIZEN UPTAKE

Norms

Guarantee women’s rights to fully participate in the information society: Rights-based international declarations and instruments in recent years have emphasized the importance of women’s access to ICTs as a key instrument of their empowerment. The WSIS plus 10 outcome document called for immediate measures to achieve gender equality in Internet users by 2020, especially by significantly enhancing women’s and girls’ education and participation in information and communications technologies, as users, content creators, employees, entrepreneurs, innovators and leaders. Countries reaffirmed their commitment to ensure women’s full participation in decision-making processes related to information and communications technologies.\(^{176}\)

In 2012, the United Nations General Assembly, through its resolution 66/130 on women and political participation, sub-paragraph 6 (h), urged member States “To improve and broaden women’s access to information and communications technologies, including e-government tools, in order to enable political participation and to promote engagement in broader democratic processes, while also improving the responsiveness of these technologies to women’s needs, including those of marginalized women”.

In 2013, the outcome document for the Commission on the Status of Women’s 57th session, for the first time, included the issue of technology and violence, calling for states to: “support the development and use of ICT and social media as a resource for the empowerment of women and girls, including access to information on the prevention of and response to violence against women and girls; and develop mechanisms to combat the use of ICT and social media to perpetrate violence against women and girls, including the criminal misuse of ICT for sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, child pornography and trafficking in women and girls, and emerging forms of violence such as cyber stalking, cyber bullying and privacy violations that compromise women’s and girls’ safety.” In 2014, the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), passed a resolution reaffirming that the human rights that people enjoy offline, including the right to freedom of expression, also apply online. These global norms lay the foundations of citizen participation in governance and alert national governments about the rights in the information society that need to be reflected in national policy. Harmonizing laws and regulations such as on free speech, the right to information, universal access to the Internet, as well as balancing the right to privacy with the right to know, are key steps to enable women’s participation in e-government.

Rules

Ensure that online citizen engagement is tied to women’s ‘right to be heard’: E-participation is an ideal that many governments have adopted in the transition to a digitally mediated society. E-consultations must be backed by policy instruments that guarantee citizens’ ‘right to be heard’. It is important to use methods that combine offline and online processes and use emerging opportunities for online participation to bring women and girls into discussions in the public domain. The role of local women’s organizations in helping women develop digital capabilities for political communication may be important, especially as recent research reveals that for the majority of marginalized women in developing country contexts, such capabilities do not come merely through the experience of going online.\textsuperscript{177} Government-led ICT-mediated public engagement efforts can be effective only when they take into account the fact that differences in gender-identity, sexual orientation, race and social class differentially impact the public-political participation of individuals.\textsuperscript{178} More context specific research is needed to illuminate the necessary conditions for successful and inclusive e-participation.

Actively involve women not only in implementation, but also design and co-production of e-government services: For most women, in addition to subsidized access to connectivity, the availability of information via channels and platforms that are accessible and affordable is an important consideration for the uptake of services. Older and differently-abled women have an unprecedented opportunity to engage with government through online platforms. Technical standards such as the W3C standards can bring to the design of services greater accessibility that includes women who have auditory, cognitive, neurological, physical, speech and visual disabilities.\textsuperscript{179}

Design principles in e-government are also critical for the very conceptualization of e-services. Taking women’s information and knowledge cultures into account in the design process of e-government will lead to sustainability in e-services uptake.\textsuperscript{180} The experience of the Kudumbashree self-help group (SHG) programme in Kerala state, India, that uses the Sreesakthi Portal studied under this research testifies to the power of participatory methodologies in e-government design. Women who are part of the SHG network identify issues and co-create content for gender modules. As market forces lead to greater diffusion of
ICTs, the relevance of e-government for women from remote and marginalized social groups depends on a dedicated budget and concerted action at national and local levels to be adaptive and contextual.

**Practices**

*Promote digital literacy as a strategic pathway to women’s citizenship:* In and of itself, digital literacy is important to realize the rights of women. A digital literacy effort must not merely provide technical skills, but also help expand equality of opportunity for women. Being digitally literate should bring a sense of empowerment so that women perceive themselves as active consumers of information and content. Digital literacy is also a moving target; with emerging technological innovations, and over time, citizens need to keep abreast of the latest e-government developments. Comfort and confidence with online spaces is intrinsic, in the current context, to participation in the public sphere. Digital literacy must address a wide array of literacies, including informational, data, media, and instill in women a reasonable degree of awareness about security and safety online. Curriculum design, module development and teaching-learning processes must be informed by the perspective that digital literacy is a strategic pathway for digital citizenship. Targeted efforts in this area that address marginalized women and young girls are particularly important. These must include programmes in partnership with different stakeholders and integration of digital literacy into school curriculum in the public education system. Chile’s Biblio Redes digital literacy campaign, which was rolled out in the early 2000s is a path-breaking initiative, whose effective use of the country’s existing public library network and effective targeting of women offers a number of lessons for other country governments. Similarly, as the country study of the Republic of Korea shows, between 2002 and 2008, women’s informatization was one of the critical focus-areas of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, and as a result, there were a number of women-directed digital literacy efforts implemented during this period. Policy development should also recognize the interconnections between digital literacy, accessible and affordable connectivity and e-services availability. Effective digital literacy depends on a dedicated budget and concerted action at national and local levels to be adaptive and contextual.

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8.3 CONNECTIVITY

Norms

**Promote universal access to the Internet:** In 2011, asserting that the Internet is an indispensable tool for the realization of human rights, the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression observed that “without Internet access, which facilitates economic development and the enjoyment of a range of human rights, marginalized groups and developing States remain trapped in a disadvantaged situation, thereby perpetuating inequality both within and between States”.182

The Internet has come to mean multiple things today; it is a public sphere, a global market place, a space for social interaction, a knowledge commons, and more. The role of the Internet in contributing to people’s basic social functionality and personal wellbeing therefore is increasingly evident. This fact has assumed significance in national policy and legal debates on Internet provisioning. In Europe, countries like Estonia, Finland and Greece have enshrined citizens’ right to Internet access in national law. In Asia and Africa, the debate on the right to Internet access has captured popular imagination in the wake of zero services offered by telecom operators in partnership with Internet companies (the most recent example being Facebook’s Free Basics service).

In the current context, where affordability and social barriers remain a serious concern inhibiting women’s access, these developments put the spotlight on the need for ensuring universal access to the Internet as a public good. Additionally, guaranteeing access to women, especially from marginalized groups, becomes a prerequisite, so that they can seek and claim their rights and entitlements.183

Rules

**Deploy multiple policy instruments towards universalizing Internet access:** Different policy options have been used by governments to finance connectivity infrastructure and achieve universal access. Existing experiences reveal that effective use of the Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) and local government investment in the creation of broadband networks are tried and tested strategies towards this. For example, in India, the Department of Telecommunications has used the gender budget of USOF to subside private sector and

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183 Broadband Commission Working Group on Broadband and Gender, 2013, op.cit.
civil society efforts that aim at providing public information services over SMS and IVR networks, to marginalized women.\textsuperscript{184} In the United States, there is an increasing trend where municipal governments are investing in the establishment of local broadband networks to ensure that low-income neighbourhoods are adequately serviced.\textsuperscript{185} Policy experts are also examining experiences of public utility provisioning to explore the feasibility of universal data allowance,\textsuperscript{186} for instance, through a Direct Benefit Transfer model.\textsuperscript{187} These and other ways to reach connectivity to the last woman is a cutting edge priority for government, in the coming years.

**Make connectivity policies gender-responsive:** Broadband access is fundamental to the reliability and quality of connectivity. As the Broadband Commission notes, National ICT/Broadband Plans need to incorporate gender perspectives.\textsuperscript{188} Nigeria's National Broadband Plan (2013–18) aims at closing the gender gap in access by monitoring specifically the number of women without access to the Internet; providing incentives for private educational centres and civil society organizations to train more women in the use of the Internet; and running dedicated centres at local government headquarters to serve as safe technology access centres for women.\textsuperscript{189} Courses on safe use of the Internet for girls are also planned using ICTs. Similarly, the Dominican Republic recently revived efforts to formulate a gender-responsive national digital agenda.\textsuperscript{190}

Promoting affordable access to mobile broadband is imperative to make Internet access an entitlement. By reducing licensing fees, spectrum prices and interconnection charges and lowering device-costs through measures such as removing luxury taxes, governments need to create the incentives for women mobile users to go online as active citizens. The development of fixed broadband is also seen as a precondition for institutional development in developing countries\textsuperscript{191} and for informational and public service needs of marginalized women. The participation of local government in last mile models for broadband penetration is an emerging area for policy, with tremendous potential for enhancing women’s and girls’ access to local public services.
Practices

**Promote the effective use of mobile phones in citizen outreach:** Smart phones are a promising platform for online citizen engagement. Given that mobile phones break the accessibility barrier for women, m-services are likely to be a critical frontier for women’s access to information, services and participation. The Philippines has 99 per cent mobile coverage\(^{192}\) and in Metro Manila alone, 45 per cent of mobile phone users use their phones to browse the Internet.\(^{193}\) Internet access on mobile phones can be a tipping point for women’s digital citizenship. Mobile phones have been used to address VAW;\(^{194}\) SMS updates are being used to inform women about subsidized monthly food rations in local outlets;\(^{195}\) and IVR messaging reaching health information to women. The game changing possibilities of mobile phones for women’s empowerment depend on active thinking and action on the part of telecommunications authorities with regard to emerging regulatory issues on equitable access to quality Internet.\(^{196}\)

**Catalyze meaningful cultures of use through a public access, telecentre model:** Public access points are a vital place to foster women-responsive e-government in developing countries. The local information worker or knowledge intermediary, often times associated with public access points, acts as a critical link to women’s digital citizenship, by facilitating access to government services and public information, and helping women ‘make sense’ of connectivity. Even with mobile access, public access centres remain meaningful for a variety of reasons, including as a space for media and data literacies, skill development, knowledge creation, reporting point for extension workers, and learning hubs for young girls. The multifarious, gender-transformative affordances of public access points and their potential for generating innovative cultures of use calls for a fresh look at telecentres and the role of local authorities, local private sector and women’s civil society organizations, in these models. National and global networks (such as Telecentre.org) that enable knowledge sharing and exchange of ‘good practice’ models in telecentre design for women’s empowerment can be leveraged towards this.

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194 As demonstrated by the IVR-SERP case study.


196 Net neutrality being one of such.
Annexes
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Questions addressed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Historical evolution of the e-government ecosystem | What is the historical trajectory of the country’s movement towards e-government?  
What is the strategic vision guiding e-government?  
What are the key priorities for women’s empowerment and gender equality in the context under study? How are they being addressed by the vision for e-government?  
Is there a separate e-government policy that addresses demand and supply side issues? Or is there only a piecemeal approach?  
Is the Department/Ministry handling women’s rights and gender justice closely engaged in envisioning and designing the e-government eco-system?  
Are there national/local efforts on digital literacy? How are they implemented? Are they adequate to the emerging needs for new literacies in the digital context? Do they go beyond building women’s skills in technical literacy? How do they focus on women’s capacities to interact with government, in the digital age? |
| Status of e-government services | What kind of services are provided? (ranging from e-health, e-agriculture, integrated online portal for citizens to access certificates and apply for entitlements, to online portals for citizen engagement, online grievance redress mechanisms, one-stop-shops in remote and disadvantaged areas, etc.)  
Are there services directed at women? (including e-health, m-learning, online spaces for women to file police complaints etc.)  
What is the uptake of these services? What is known about women’s uptake of these services? (In cases where women’s uptake is low, please identify potential reasons such as literacy barriers, prevailing gender norms etc.)  
Is the underlying connectivity architecture adequate for active use of e-services?  
What are current developments in building and provisioning connectivity infrastructure? (policies for subsidizing connectivity to remote and disadvantaged populations, programmes for building public access infrastructure and promoting digital literacy)  
Are these steps gender-responsive? (public access strategies directed at enhancing women’s uptake, mobile-based info-outreach initiatives directed at women, e-spaces that are exclusively for women to raise grievances/concerns) |
| Review of legislations that implicate e-governance | Legislative frameworks governing the connectivity infrastructure  
Is the right to Internet access guaranteed in law?  
Legal and policy frameworks regulating the delivery of digitally-enabled services  
Are there legal/policy frameworks on the following issues?  
| Legislative frameworks governing the connectivity infrastructure  
Is the right to Internet access guaranteed in law? |  
Legal and policy frameworks regulating the delivery of digitally-enabled services  
Are there legal/policy frameworks on the following issues?  
| Openness of the technical architecture underlying e-services | b Citizen charters guaranteeing responsiveness and accountability of e-government services, and specifying redress mechanisms. | c Data security and privacy | d Citizens’ right to ‘know e-government’ — through proactive disclosure on aspects such as work flow allocation, location of authority, terms of service, and the regular update of governance related information in the public domain | e In cases where government agencies have adopted a public-private partnership model for e-service delivery, do policy documents require specific service level agreements and data protection agreements)  
Conclusions | a The big picture on what is positive for women’s empowerment | b The big picture on what is positive in general that is likely to have favourable impacts for good governance (transparency, accountability, rule of law, responsiveness etc) and if harnessed through appropriate design and creativity, can help women’s empowerment. |
Annex II: Case Study Synopsis

1 Overview

This document provides an overview of the case studies undertaken as part of this study of e-government initiatives in the Asia-Pacific. In each of the five countries that were covered by the study (Australia, India, Fiji, Philippines and Republic of Korea), two to three case studies were undertaken in the area of ‘e-government for women’s empowerment and gender equality’ between December 2014 and May 2015. The case studies were undertaken by country consultants in each of the five sites of study, identified through an open call issued by UN ESCAP.

1.1 CASE SELECTION CRITERIA

1 The study included cases of government-led initiatives based on at least one of the following criteria:

- Initiative has a vision/mandate for women’s empowerment and gender equality.
- Initiative has sought to mainstream gender in its core strategies.
- Women are a large proportion of beneficiaries the initiative caters to.

2 Government-led initiatives refer to both initiatives that are completely owned and operated by state agencies as well as initiatives implemented by state agencies through partnership arrangements with private sector and civil society organizations.

1 Jan McConchie (Australia), Susanna Kelly (Fiji), Nandini Chami (India), Maria Juanita Macapagal and Mina Peralta (Philippines) and Jung-soo Kim (Republic of Korea).
Cases were selected for good practices in at least two of the three critical dimensions of the e-government institutional ecosystem: service delivery, citizen uptake and connectivity architecture.

The case studies covered are detailed below:

**Initiative has a vision/mandate for women’s empowerment and gender equality**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Initiative Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Our Watch, State Government of Victoria and Commonwealth Government of Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>IVR Reporting System for Gender Based Violence (GBV) of the Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP), Government of Andhra Pradesh, India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>Sreesakthi Portal of the Kudumbashree Programme, Government of Kerala, India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republic of Korea</td>
<td>Cyber-mentoring Initiative, Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, Republic of Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republic of Korea</td>
<td>Sex Offender Alert, Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, Republic of Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>mWomen e-service, Department of Women and Vodafone, Fiji</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Initiative has sought to mainstream gender in its core strategies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Initiative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>Blended Learning Programme of the TESDA Women’s Centre, Philippines</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Women are a large proportion of beneficiaries the initiative caters to**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Initiative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>SA Community, Government of South Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>Grievance Redress System of the Pantawid Pamiliyang Pilipino programme, Department of Social Welfare and Development, Philippines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>Community eCentres in the Municipality of Malvar, Philippines (CeCs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>Community Telecentre Initiative, Fiji</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Fiji, the criteria were relaxed since there were very few initiatives that mapped clearly onto the research criteria despite consultation with multiple stakeholders. Therefore, based on key informant interviews, a pilot initiated by a private-sector agency in partnership with the Ministry of Women, and the Telecentres programme of the Government of Fiji were selected as the closest fit.

**1.2 ANALYTICAL LENS USED IN THE CASE STUDIES**

Selected case studies/initiatives were examined through the lens of institutional analysis to unpack the norms, rules and practices of service delivery, citizen uptake and connectivity architecture underpinning them respectively, using the framework provided in Table 1. This approach was adopted to tease out elements of replicability in the good practices on gender-responsive e-government policy and programming.
2. Initiatives with a vision/mandate for women’s empowerment and gender equality

2.1 OUR WATCH, AUSTRALIA
COUNTRY CONSULTANT: JAN MCCONCHIE

FIGURE 1
SCREENSHOT OF OUR WATCH PORTAL

Overview

Our Watch is a not-for-profit organization that was set up by the Victorian state government and the Commonwealth Government of Australia in 2013 to facilitate a “sustained and constructive public conversation with the aim of improving the public's awareness of violence against women in Australia, growing the primary prevention movement...and encouraging people to take action to prevent violence against women and their children.”

www.ourwatch.org.au
Our Watch uses a combination of traditional and new social media outreach and community events, to create an alternative discourse on gender and sexuality, and break the silence on domestic violence. Currently, it has undertaken the following projects:

- A national media engagement project funded by the Commonwealth Government to improve reporting through media capacity training, website based resources, a national award scheme and a national survivors’ media advocacy program.
- A digital communications strategy on preventing violence that uses a range of social networking tools and social media platforms (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, and a blog on the Our Watch website) to target parents, teachers, family violence sector workers and media about the urgency of the issue.
- A social media service that enables survivors of domestic violence to share their stories, with empathetic listeners.
- The Line, a primary prevention youth-oriented social marketing campaign, initially developed by the Commonwealth Government, focusing on changing attitudes and behaviours that condone, justify and excuse violence against women by engaging young people in the age group of 12 to 20 years.
- Respectful Relationships education in Secondary Schools in Victoria supporting up to 30 schools to deliver new curriculum guidance, and embed a ‘whole of school’ approach to promoting respectful relationships.
- Strengthening hospital responses to family violence in two Victorian hospitals to ensure that doctors, nurses and other staff know how to respond confidently and sensitively when they treat women and their children who have experienced violence.
- Partnering with local organizations to develop tailored violence prevention programs for two culturally and linguistically diverse communities in Victoria.3
- Pushing for support for the iMatter App developed by the NGO Doncare that explains the connection between certain types of behaviour and abusive relationships. This is seen as extremely critical to expanding the Our Watch communication strategy, in a context where over 22 per cent of young women under the age of 20 have experienced domestic violence.4

Insights on creating an e-government institutional ecosystem that promotes gender equality

**Flexibility offered by a non-traditional organizational structure:** Our Watch has adopted a non-traditional organizational structure — that of an independent non-profit company limited by guarantee, with an independent board. Its funding is secured through partnerships with federal and state governments. Accountabilities are ensured through funding agreements, protocols and strategies with the respective government agency providing financial support. This arrangement has helped Our Watch function independently, without political interference in everyday functions, and yet be assured of continued financial support.

**Emphasizing continual involvement of citizens in design:** For a programme that works on preventing VAW, ‘messaging’ effectiveness is crucial. Our Watch has adopted a new-age approach markedly different from traditional public information broadcast that views citizens as passive beneficiaries. The approach adopted by Our Watch fosters dialogue with, and among, survivors of violence and youth, through the strategic use of social media. User feedback is periodically collected and the tools are reviewed. Emphasizing iterative design that is constantly responsive to citizen feedback has helped in enhancing the relevance of the messages and campaign-content developed by the initiative.

A concrete example of the effectiveness of this approach is evidenced in The Line campaign, which has stayed away from prescriptions. The campaign ensures that young people can identify with the language and content, encouraging them to ‘call out’ instances of VAW and other abusive behaviour. An evaluation of the campaign demonstrated that when young people are exposed to The Line, they are more likely to understand what behaviours ‘cross the line’ and are more likely to make positive changes to their behaviour than otherwise. In the future, Our Watch plans to strengthen The Line by constituting Youth Digital Committees to ensure that the content, tone and themes of the campaign continue to stay effective and relevant.

**Due cognizance of privacy:** Our Watch has clear safeguards to protect participants using its online discussion forums. These forums are the key spaces where VAW survivors seek peer support and share their stories. At present, these spaces are public, though discussion is moderated. But Our Watch is currently exploring the possibility of setting up closed discussion forums where anonymity is safeguarded.
Addressing equity considerations: By deploying a range of social media technologies, Our Watch reaches those accessing the service from low speed connections. Our Watch recognizes that discursive shifts can be achieved only through a strategy that combines social media campaigns with traditional media engagement. A lot of effort has hence been put into developing media partnerships, traditional and non-traditional media events, and engaging editors and academics of influence in the field, as part of the National Media Engagement project. Among these efforts, the Media Campaign on Sensitive Reporting of GBV stories from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities deserves special mention, as it focuses on sensitizing journalists to avoid stereotypical reportage of non-mainstream cultures.

3 Impacts on women’s empowerment

Our Watch has aimed at transforming deep-seated cultural norms and attitudes in communities so that the culture of silence around violence against women and children is broken. The social media strategies of Our Watch seem to have been especially successful in this area. The social media space for women survivors of violence has helped them forge networks of support where they can narrate their stories.6 The Line campaign has led to a shift in attitudes towards VAW among participants, as more and more youth exposed to the campaign have started calling out instances of behaviour that crosses the line (i.e., abusive or disrespectful behaviour).7 The iMatter app has contributed to promoting self-esteem and confidence among young women by educating them about disrespect and intimate partner violence and promoting conversations about healthy relationship behaviour.

6 Observations from field work conducted in 2015, for the purposes of this assignment.
7 Evidenced by research conducted by Our Watch and other studies conducted by the Department of Social Services, Government of Australia.
Figure 2
Analysis of Empowerment Outcomes of Our Watch Using Gender at Work Framework

**Individual**

**Internalized Attitudes, Values, Practices**
- Enhancement of self-esteem among young women

**Access to and Control over Public and Private Resources**
- Greater access to educational resources on GBV and positive gender relations for women, men, girls and boys

**Informal**

**Sociocultural Norms, Beliefs and Practices**
- Emergence of an alternative discourse on gender relations that challenges hegemonic masculinities

**Systemic**

**Laws, Policies, Resource Allocations**
- Creation of platforms for gender sensitization of service providers and survivor stories

**Formal**

**Enhancement of self-esteem among young women**

**Greater access to educational resources on GBV and positive gender relations for women, men, girls and boys**

**Emergence of an alternative discourse on gender relations that challenges hegemonic masculinities**

**Creation of platforms for gender sensitization of service providers and survivor stories**
2.2 IVR-SERP, INDIA

COUNTRY CONSULTANT: NANDINI CHAMI

1 Overview

The Society for the Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP) was set up by the Government of Andhra Pradesh, India, in the year 2000 to address rural poverty through social mobilization and empowerment of poor women and skill development. SERP constituted women’s self help groups at the village level, with a federated structure at the block and district levels, and equipped them with access to income generation and livelihood opportunities. In this process, the functionaries of SERP realized that the economic empowerment of women could not be achieved by these pathways alone, unless underlying structures of gender-based discrimination and violence were tackled head-on.

Therefore, in 2008, Social Action Committees (SACs) were constituted at village, block and district levels, comprising representatives from the self help groups. SACs were entrusted with the responsibility of addressing in their local communities rights education for adolescent girls as well as critical instances of gender and social injustice such as domestic violence, human trafficking, sexual assault and child marriage. The idea behind this three-tier SAC structure was to create a mechanism for enabling marginalized rural women to challenge the prevailing culture of silence around violence against women and gender based discrimination in their communities, by using other women like themselves as a peer support network.

2 How SACs further the fight against GBV and rights-violations

All incidences of rights-violation identified by SAC members are brought to the notice of the village level gender forum and registered as ‘cases’. In instances where home-visits are not fruitful, gender forums refer the affected parties to the family counselling centres managed by block-level SACs. The block-level SACs are linked to crucial linedepartments and the police force and draw on their support.

Cases where intermediation and counselling fail are referred to the district-SAC which facilitates access for the affected women to the Free Legal Aid Cell and the Lok Adalat (People’s Court — an official alternative dispute resolution system in India) set up by the state.
Factors that led to the development of the IVR reporting system

Historically, a manual reporting system was adopted by block-level and district-level SACs. As the work of the SACs expanded, a number of shortcomings in this manual reporting and tracking mechanism started becoming evident. It was difficult for the district gender anchor officer to track pending cases or ascertain that pending cases were not dropped accidentally.

Therefore, in 2012, an IVR based reporting and monitoring mechanism to track and provide on-going support to block and district SACs in a more effective manner, was conceptualized by the State Project Management Unit. The IVR system seeks to do the following:

a. Enable a voice-based reporting and monitoring system for cases handled by SAC members, and timely support and guidance from SERP functionaries (at the district level), especially in cases which have encountered bottlenecks at the stage of seeking legal assistance.

b. Provide informational services to SAC members on issues such as women’s rights guaranteed by various statutes and laws, legislative changes and other dimensions of legal and rights literacy.

To implement this proposed idea, in 2012–2013, Evolgence IT Systems Pvt Limited was identified through a formal tendering process as the technology service provider for the initiative. Between 2013–2015, using the Asterisk Open Source Platform, Evolgence has designed part of the call-in functionality for reporting that was conceptualized by the founders of the initiative, and rolled it out across the state. The broadcast functionality is yet to be developed.

In its present form, Evolgence’s system enables recording of cases by SAC members at only 2 stages; at the point of registration and at closure. A case is considered as closed/resolved when the affected party (a woman or child who has suffered a rights-violation) is satisfied with the redress received through informal intermediation by SAC members, counselling and/or legal intervention. Users can call in or give a missed call to the IVR number to utilize the call-back option from the system in order to record their report.

At the registration stage, SAC members who call in are required to record the specifics of the case on the voice call, and then note down the unique case identity assigned by the system, before disconnecting the call. Using this number, they call again to report closure, upon resolution of the case.

Currently, the reports of case registration and closure that are received through the IVR system are transcribed at a centralized location (Evolgence’s office) by data entry operators. They are then published...
on a web application that Evolgence has developed for SERP. Though data entry and modifications are password-protected processes, the data published is accessible to all, and not just to SERP functionaries. The web-application enables effective internal tracking of pending cases within the Gender Unit of the State Project Management Unit (SERP). The consolidated data can be sorted in multiple ways (by district, across districts by time-period, by type of disputes) as well as accessed for specific, individual case reports (case details in text format, the audio files about registration and closure). Members of the public can view the published case reports by accessing the web-application through the official website of SERP.

FIGURE 3
WEB-BASED CASE REGISTER (SUMMARY OF CASES)
Insights on creating an e-government institutional ecosystem that promotes gender equality

**Predictability and citizen trust:** The data architecture of the IVR system enables easy identification and tracking of pending cases and comparisons of district-wise data. The system has reinforced an ethos of accountability among district SERP functionaries regarding pending cases in their jurisdiction.

**Effective management of PPP arrangements:** SERP has a streamlined process of entering into Public Private Partnerships for ICT interventions. In particular, it has a separate IT Division that takes care of drawing up the contract for terms of service, and the MoU with the private partner. The Director of the IT division works closely with the respective functional director (gender/livelihoods/agriculture) of SERP’s wider programmes to review the performance of the technology service provider. The normal practice in SERP is to issue contracts for 3 years, at the end of which the performance of the private sector partner is reviewed and a decision is taken about whether the relationship can be continued. In the case of the contract with Evolgence Systems Pvt Ltd for the IVR programme, these norms have been applied.
**Technical openness:** Open standards and the question of interoperability in all its ICT initiatives is currently a key priority at SERP, and the IVR system is also built accordingly on the Asterisk Open Source Platform.

**Transparency:** Transparent reporting of all its efforts is a core value at SERP. All the details of the cases that come to the notice of the SACs, including names and addresses of complainants, are published online. Voice calls are available for all cases except instances of sexual abuse/violence. Making information public is a decision on the part of the programme to “break the taboo around reporting GBV in a rural context where a woman comes forward to make public a violation or abuse normalized by the culture.”

**Equity considerations:** A separate field for recording the victim’s caste has been included in the IVR-based system, to ensure priority tracking of cases of rights-violation of women from marginalized socioeconomic groups whose rights are protected through special laws.

**Making the IVR and its objective familiar to rural communities:** When the IVR system was introduced in 2012, a Master Trainers’ programme was conducted by the Evolgence team and the gender team members of the State Project Management Unit of SERP. Five SAC members from every district got trained and they went on to train other SAC members in their respective districts. Thus, through this cascade model, it was ensured that all SAC members were familiar with the digitalized reporting system.

**Impacts on Women’s Empowerment**

The IVR system has contributed to SERP’s attempt to help survivors of GBV and Social Action Committee members in making gender issues legitimate public concerns. The systematic tracking and publishing of information about the incidence of GBV that the IVR system has enabled also helps in increasing the accountability of state agencies towards addressing this issue.

SERP functionaries at the State Programme Management Unit feel that the enhanced effectiveness in case-tracking of GBV enabled by the IVR has strengthened the efficiency and responsiveness of the SERP system to cases of GBV. Another advantage that they perceive is that the current IVR functionality of ‘call-in and file case reports’ reduces the time burdens of SAC members.

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9 Interview with Director (Gender and Institution-Building), SERP.
SERP functionaries at the district level feel that the IVR mechanism has some potential to contribute to individual empowerment of SAC members, especially if additional functionalities are introduced. Plans to send out information and thought-provoking messages on the IVR about gender discrimination, VAW and related issues are underway. A call-back functionality for SAC members to file reports of issues that come up in the gender trainings they conduct at the village level for adolescent girls or key campaigns they undertake is also on the cards.
FIGURE 5
ANALYSIS OF EMPOWERMENT OUTCOMES OF IVR-SERP USING GENDER AT WORK FRAMEWORK

**Individual**

**INTERNALIZED ATTITUDES, VALUES, PRACTICES**

- Timely access to institutional support for women seeking assistance for GBV
- Reduction in time-burdens of SAC reporters

**ACCESS TO AND CONTROL OVER PUBLIC AND PRIVATE RESOURCES**

- Enhanced commitment among state agencies to the GBV agenda

**Informal**

**SOCIOCULTURAL NORMS, BELIEFS AND PRACTICES**

- Recognition of GBV as a public issue, as culture of silence is challenged

**Formal**

**LAWS, POLICIES, RESOURCE ALLOCATIONS**

- Enhanced commitment among state agencies to the GBV agenda

**Systemic**
2.3 SREESAKTHI PORTAL, INDIA

COUNTRY CONSULTANT: NANDINI CHAMI

FIGURE 6
SCREENSHOT OF SREESAKTHI PORTAL

Introduction

Sreeshakthi is a government-led portal that aims at using the ICT-enabled networking opportunity for bringing marginalized women across the state of Kerala, in South India, onto a discussion and learning platform. The initiative was introduced by the Kudumbashree State Poverty Eradication Mission,
an independently registered society set up by the state government of Kerala for poverty alleviation and women’s empowerment. Kudumbashree works through a collectivization and community networking approach, setting up village-level women’s self-help groups organized under a three-tier structure: neighbourhood groups of 20 to 25 women from each locality as the foundation, federated into Area Development Societies at the electoral ward level and Community Development Societies for each rural and urban self-government unit (known as Gram Panchayats/Municipalities in India).

The Sreesakthi Portal was launched in 2010, with the primary objective of providing a web-based ‘open space’ for Kudumbashree groups across the state. Its stated goal is to shape gender discourse by challenging “received gender-norms”. It seeks to strengthen peer solidarities of geographically dispersed women’s collectives, by providing them a space to share reflections and insights in a manner that unpacks gender discrimination and enables new imaginations of society, based on equality and justice. The secondary objective was to provide a moderated platform for women to engage in online debate and dialogue with local leaders, and other community members, thus encouraging women to develop critiques of mainstream gender discourse.

The portal was developed in English and Malayalam (the local language) and funded by the Department of Electronics and Information Technology, Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, Government of India (DeiTY, MCIT). Technical support was provided by the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC) — a governmental agency set up by MCIT and entrusted with the task of building capacities in emerging/enabling technologies for providing IT solutions to different sectors of the economy, particularly in e-government initiatives.

The Sreesakthi web portal is first and foremost, a discussion forum for Kudumbashree’s Gender Self-Learning Programme that focuses on developing critical gender perspectives among women’s groups, through a participatory training process that breaks away from traditional top-down classroom models.

The State Gender Team initiates discussion on the portal. Comments are posted based on moderation in which the technical consultant/the portal administrator, the gender consultant and the Programme Manager of Kudumbashree participate. Comments that are libellous or politically sensitive are not posted — and the reasons for not publishing comments are explained to the concerned user over email. When the discussion has plateaued out (usually after 2 to 3 months), the thread is closed. Training modules are then finalized, and through a cascading model, transacted with neighbourhood groups. Discussion threads that enable women to share training experiences are then opened up on the portal. Currently, a module on the
issue of ‘Women and mobility’ is being developed — and discussion threads on this are open on the web portal.

Though the primary target audience of the web portal are the grassroots members of the Kudumbashree programme, membership is not restricted to the Kudumbashree women’s network. Any interested individual, residing in Kerala or outside, can participate in these online discussions, after registering on the portal and following a simple authentication process.

The portal currently has 13,089 registered users with 55,200 posts in the discussion forum. At least 5360 users are women members from the Community Development Societies of the network. There have been 21 discussion threads till date, on topics pertaining to women’s rights, health, women and work, environment and education.

2 Insights for creating an e-government institutional ecosystem that promotes gender equality

Online dialogue for building collective capabilities of women’s collectives: The portal uses online dialogue strategically to build a bottom-up gender mainstreaming model, in which economically marginalized women are seen as equal participants rather than as recipients of expertise provided by resource persons. Women members are not just approached for feedback and comments on pre-selected themes for training, but training ideas themselves are drawn from key issues/concerns discussed online. Secondly, the portal, because of its embedding in group-based face-to-face learning processes, also encourages the sharing of collective reflections and feedback — facilitating women’s collectives to use the online space to share and connect.

Connectivity backbone: Programme founders ensured that women’s groups who were part of the programme had free access to computers and the Internet at the offices of the programme’s Community Development Societies, before launching the web portal. Thus, adequate care was taken to provide a free and safe space for women to access the online platform. This was important, considering that women targeted by the programme are economically disadvantaged, and public access points are male-dominated spaces.

Stats accessed from website in August 2015 and information from interviews conducted in December 2014.
Moderation of online platform: Content is posted on the portal only after it is vetted by members of the State Gender Team of the Kudumbashree State Mission Office. The norms for content-vetting are decided by the State Mission Office. Moderation has an important role to play on public platforms where pro-women discussions could attract trolling and harassment.

Mechanisms for strengthening uptake: The training strategy of 10 to 15 women members from the Kudumbashree network in each district, as Master Trainers for the Sreesakthi Portal, has been an extremely crucial strategy for enhancing uptake of the portal. These trainings served not only as an introduction to basic digital skills for participants, but also as a means of higher order use of the Internet — as a space for peer sharing and deliberation. The strategy of using peer trainers rather than external experts for digital literacy and capacity-building has enabled better contextualization and localization.

Impacts on women’s empowerment

This initiative has demonstrated how ICTs can be effectively leveraged by governments to foster citizen-participation of marginalized women. It recognizes that this involves moving beyond the skills-training paradigm to investing in new cultures of use that enable women to leverage digital technologies for strengthening their capabilities for public participation.

The Sreesakthi Portal has contributed to participants’ sociocultural empowerment at multiple levels. At the individual level, it has contributed to increase in women’s skill building and self-confidence, through training programmes for digital literacy and use of the portal to express themselves. At the household level, field work for the case study points to multiple gains for women — ranging from enhancement of status due to their newly acquired digital skills-sets, to an increase in their negotiating power with other family members, and capacity to question discrimination and violence within the household. As one woman member from the Kudumbashree network shared during a Focus Group Discussion carried out for this research,

“Earlier women were cloistered and alone in their households — and had nowhere to turn to, when they faced violence and harassment. The portal provides them a space in addition to their immediate neighbourhood group where they can come out in the open about these problems, and seek help. Women no longer need to be quiet. The portal makes individual experiences of violence public and connects women to many other women who are their peers. This helps in reducing household-level abuse.”
At the community level, the portal has played a key role in opening up women’s access to institutional support. In one instance, when a woman who was facing domestic violence did not receive any support from the local police when she went to file a complaint, she wrote about her predicament on the portal. The Minister in the state government who is in charge of Kudumbashree read her post and immediately intervened, and also urged other women in similar situations to speak out.

The portal has also strengthened the translocal solidarities of the geographically dispersed groups of the Kudumbashree programme. As one woman participant reflected:

“The portal has become as important to us as mobile phones are (to most people). Now what will happen if you lose your mobile? You can’t express your emotions quickly to the people who matter, and you cannot bridge distance to communicate across geographies. This portal helps us talk to our peers in Kudumbashree in other districts, and engage with their thoughts — and this is very important.”
### Figure 7: Analysis of Empowerment Outcomes of Sreesakthi Portal Using Gender at Work Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Internalized Attitudes, Values, Practices</th>
<th>Access to and Control over Public and Private Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Increase in women’s self-confidence as they acquire digital skills and learn to exercise their voice</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Access to the ‘right to be heard’ through a committed communication forum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informal</th>
<th>Sociocultural Norms, Beliefs and Practices</th>
<th>Laws, Policies, Resource Allocations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive transformation in power relations at the household level as women’s issues gain legitimacy in public debate</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Communication forum for marginalized women to reach policy makers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Systemic | |
|-----------|
2.4 CYBER-MENTORING INITIATIVE, REPUBLIC OF KOREA

COUNTRY CONSULTANT: JUNG-SOO KIM

1 Introduction

The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, Republic of Korea launched a cyber-mentoring service directed towards women, on its web portal ‘Women’s Net’ in 2002, with the objective of enabling women to seek guidance and support for their career development. The specifics of how this service works are detailed below.

Young women who have just graduated from high school and college, and those with less than 3 years of work experience can register themselves as mentees. Women with more than 3 years of work experience can apply to be mentors, and they are asked to submit online certificates and other documentation as proof of their credentials. At the time of registration, mentees are required to enter their personal information along with details of the nature of work experience, interest areas etc. Once their registration form has been approved by the system operator, mentees can log in to the web portal and view profiles of registered mentors, and then apply to specific mentors (whose work and interests match theirs), seeking acceptance for mentoring. Mentors, when they log in to the portal, can go through the list of mentees who have sent requests to them, and accept or reject applicants, according to their preferences. When a mentor and a mentee have been matched, a private online space where the pair can converse, is opened up on the portal. Mentors and mentees can interact with each other, for a period of 60 days. The mentoring arrangement can be renewed twice, at the mentee’s request, within 2 weeks after the end of the first mentoring — and thus the maximum mentoring period is 180 days.

For the day to day management of the cyber-mentoring web portal, an implementing agency is selected by the Ministry for Gender Equality and Family through a process of an open call for tenders. All national agencies and organizations with expertise in the area of gender training and awareness generation about women’s rights are eligible to apply. At present, the implementing agency is the Korean Institute of Gender Equality Promotion and Education (KIGEPE).
Insights for creating an e-government institutional ecosystem that promotes gender equality

**Shifts in mentoring cultures:** The flexibility with respect to time and space that cyber-mentoring brings has opened up new opportunities in teaching-learning for women, giving them new options amidst their multiple time burdens.

**Connectivity backbone:** The initiative is able to reap the benefit of near-universal connectivity and negligible gender gap in Internet access for the target group of 20–30 year olds.

**Privacy:** When mentors and mentees sign up, they are required to abide by a code of ethics that prevents the disclosure of any personal information/content made known during the cyber-mentoring process. Such formalization is a useful measure of quality in such online interactions.

**Optimizing stakeholder arrangements in delivery of service:** The initiative has acquired a lot of maturity over the years, in terms of the forms of stakeholder arrangements it adopts. In the initial years, an IT agency was contracted as the implementing agency. However, over time, it was realized that it is more productive to have a women’s rights organization in this role. Similarly, partnerships with the Career Development Centres at Universities have been formalized through contractual arrangements, to ensure that convergences between such centres and cyber-mentoring are strengthened.

**Impacts on women’s empowerment**

There is evidence of the empowering impacts of the service from previous research\(^{11}\) and the Sisterhood Diaries\(^{12}\) maintained by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family in which the testimonials of mentors and mentees have been recorded. For the mentees, the psychological support provided by the cyber-mentoring relationship seems to have restored self-confidence, expanding their vision about their careers, and allowing them to step out of the box of prescribed gender roles. As one mentee reflected:

“At the start of this year, I was distressed that my dream was to become a soap drama playwright. I was alone as most of my university friends were pursuing careers as office workers or thinking about studying at a graduate school, while those who studied drama with me were from a different age group. My mentor,


(herself a senior playwright), helped me to ask myself why I wanted to be a playwright and what I really wanted. She gave me a lot of advice. I realized what was really bothering me, and the answer came out very easily."

For the mentors, the rewards of being involved in cyber-mentoring are psychological, including satisfaction at having contributed to someone’s self-development, and an opportunity for personal growth.

**FIGURE 8**
**ANALYSIS OF EMPOWERMENT OUTCOMES OF CYBER-MENTORING INITIATIVE USING GENDER AT WORK FRAMEWORK**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Forma l</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTERNALIZED ATTITUDES, VALUES, PRACTICES</strong></td>
<td><strong>ACCESS TO AND CONTROL OVER PUBLIC AND PRIVATE RESOURCES</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological rewards for mentors</td>
<td>Opportunity for personal growth for mentors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentees gain courage to move away from internalized gender norms</td>
<td>Expansion of career choice for mentees</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informal</th>
<th>Systemic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SO CIOCULTURAL NORMS, BELIEFS AND PRACTICES</strong></td>
<td><strong>LAWS, POLICIES, RESOURCE ALLOCATIONS</strong></td>
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2.5 SAFE RETURN HOME MOBILE APP, REPUBLIC OF KOREA

COUNTRY CONSULTANT: JUNG-SOO KIM

FIGURE 9
SAFE RETURN HOME INTERFACE

Introduction

The Safe Return Home mobile app has been developed by the Ministry of Security and Public Administration, Republic of Korea, to enable women to take precautionary steps to safeguard themselves, by keeping their friends and family members informed about their whereabouts.
The application has three key features:

a. Upon installation and registration, it allows users to share the details of their geo-location in real time with select contacts, via text messages or SNS platforms.

b. Users can intimate their key contacts when they have to pass through certain areas that they consider to be high-risk neighbourhoods, as the app has a feature for sending auto-notifications to key contacts when the user passes through areas that she has marked as ‘dangerous’.

c. The app provides information about key emergency services such as hospitals/clinics, pharmacies, police station, fire station, emergency shelters etc.

In 2007–2008, the Ministry of Public Administration and Security (since renamed the Ministry of Government Administration and Home Affairs) as part of its Informatization Strategic Plan on combining administrative information with geographic information, joined hands with the Ministry of Land, Transportation and Maritime Affairs, in developing an integrated national geographic information system. More recently, a governmental decision was taken to open up this data to the public as part of a larger push towards informational transparency in the movement towards Government 3.0. This has been a key driving force in enabling the development of the Safe Return Home mobile app.

2 Insights for creating an e-government institutional ecosystem that promotes gender equality

Interagency partnerships crucial for cutting edge ‘data in governance’ initiatives: This initiative demonstrates the benefits that e-government can bring, through promoting effective interagency partnerships. Its very inception was made possible through inter-ministerial cooperation. The day to day implementation is managed by the Korea Local Information Research & Development Institute with overall supervision from the Ministry of Government Administration and Home Affairs, and expertise from the National Information Society agency.

Bringing the benefits of open data to citizens: Safe Return Home app testifies to the personalization capabilities that Government 3.0 offers. The initiative allows the geographic information database to interact with user-specific data in a way that responds to women’s physical and psychological security needs.
**Public participation in implementation of service:** A consultative committee comprising representatives from the public and private sector and academia is involved in an advisory role in the initiative. User feedback on the features of the app is actively solicited.

**Promoting citizen uptake:** Efforts for promoting Safe Return Home mobile app are made in different ways. One strategy involves partnering with metropolitan and provincial Offices of Education. The Ministry of Government Administration and Home Affairs sends out information on the app via school newsletters addressed to parents. The Ministry also organizes periodic events to collect stories on how citizens are using the mobile services.

**Impacts on women’s empowerment**

At the individual level, the initiative contributes to the psychological well-being of women and young girls who use the service, by enhancing their sense of security and safety. At the sociocultural level, the initiative enables individuals to leverage their social networks in times of distress/emergency.
FIGURE 10
ANALYSIS OF EMPOWERMENT OUTCOMES OF SAFE RETURN HOME USING GENDER AT WORK FRAMEWORK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Formal</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTERNALIZED ATTITUDES, VALUES, PRACTICES</td>
<td>LAWS, POLICIES, RESOURCE ALLOCATIONS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women experience a greater sense of security</td>
<td>Creation of techno-enabled support mechanisms for women’s safety</td>
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<tr>
<th>Informal</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SOCIOCULTURAL NORMS, BELIEFS AND PRACTICES</td>
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Systemic
In 2000, faced with the rising incidence of the trafficking of young girls into the sex trade, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family started the Sex Offender Alert Service to pro-actively disclose details of
‘known’ sex offenders in their neighbourhoods, to members of the public. The service has three components — a website (www.sexoffender.go.kr) on which members of the public can access details of offenders, a mobile application that users can install on their phone to receive alerts, and the mail notification service (including email and postage mail) that alerts subscribers to offenders ‘moving in’ and ‘moving out’ of their neighbourhoods.

The work-flow process underpinning this service is as follows. The court has the authority to determine which cases of sexual offences mandate disclosure about the offender’s personal information, to members of the public. It will notify its judgment on disclosure to the concerned offenders and the Ministry of Justice. Within 30 days of receiving the Court order, offenders are required to register their personal information with their district police office. Following this, every time they change their address, offenders must notify ‘move-in’ and ‘move-out’ details with the concerned police offices, within 20 days. The National Police Agency transfers this information that is compiled by its various district police offices to the Ministry of Justice, and also undertakes a verification-check, once a year. The Ministry of Justice then registers this information on its mass data distribution system; and then shares it with the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family which manages the proactive disclosure systems — the website, the mobile app, and the e-mail notification service.

2 Insights for creating an e-government institutional ecosystem that promotes gender equality

Responsiveness to citizen needs: Prior to the introduction of the online Sex Offender Alert service, there were offline arrangements that allowed members of the public to access information about the sex offenders residing in their district. However, considering that most sex offenders tend to commit crimes in locations that are removed from their immediate communities, the utility of such a ‘district-level’ service was limited. The introduction of the online component has enabled citizens to access a consolidated databank about sex offenders across various regions stay intimated about their movements, and access details of their criminal records. The mail notification service directed towards schools and households with children and youth was initiated in 2012, as a strategy for enhancing awareness about sex offenders among groups for whom such information matters most.

Balancing survivor-confidentiality and public interest concerns of issuing alerts about sex-offenders: The initiative is a good example of balancing public interest concerns (of alerting citizens about sex offenders who pose a risk in their neighbourhoods) with survivor-confidentiality and the right to privacy.

of sex offenders (to them a fair chance of rehabilitation). Its online information system has a number of checks and balances with respect to identity authentication for data access. Personal information of citizens who use this service is encrypted, and there are clearly specified time limitation clauses for holding the data thus collected. To comply with legal safeguards preventing republication of the information, the software prevents copying/saving of content.

**Using the mobile opportunity effectively to enhance accessibility:** Mobile applications have more potential to improve accessibility. While the identity authentication process still remains in the case of mobile users of the service, such users do not have to download as many security software programs as required when accessing the service through the website. The mobile app has an additional feature of sending periodic alerts to citizens about offenders in their neighbourhoods.

**Commitment from the highest office of government:** The service has seen an active involvement of senior offices of government, sending out a clear signal vis-a-vis the priority to eliminate sex crimes. In fact, the impetus for the development of the mobile service was provided by a task force meeting held in August 2012, where it was discussed among various ministries including the Prime Minister’s Office, Ministry of Strategy and Finance, Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, Ministry of Justice, that a mobile component of the service is required as part of stepping-up efforts towards eliminating sex crimes.

**Impacts on women’s empowerment**

Research shows that the service contributes to an enhancement of the sense of personal security among young women and girls, as they feel adequately prepared about the ‘risk elements’ in their neighbourhoods. However, perceived dangers do not necessarily lead to increase in citizens’ collective responses to create safe neighbourhoods. According to a survey conducted in 2012, most of the respondents (93.5 per cent) who accessed the information on the sexual offenders via a website or a mailing notification took more than one preventive measures after being informed, but their preventive actions tended to be limited to avoidance behaviour rather than collective action at community level.

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16 Avoidance behavior means actions taken to change one’s daily lives to avoid risks of victimization in a passive way. Avoidance behaviors include making sure to secure the door (75.2%); discuss about how to avoid the crimes (60.8%); avoid walking secluded or dangerous areas; being on guard of strangers (56.6%); and trying to come back home earlier (55.8%). Kim et.al. op.cit.

17 Kim et.al. op.cit.
FIGURE 12
ANALYSIS OF EMPOWERMENT OUTCOMES OF SEX OFFENDER ALERT USING GENDER AT WORK FRAMEWORK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual</th>
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<td><strong>INTERNALIZED ATTITUDES, VALUES, PRACTICES</strong></td>
<td><strong>LAWS, POLICIES, RESOURCE ALLOCATIONS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women and girls experience enhanced personal security</td>
<td>Effective balancing of public interest concern of issuing alerts about sex offenders with survivor confidentiality</td>
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mWOMEN E-SERVICE, FIJI

COUNTRY CONSULTANT: SUSANNA KELLY

1 Introduction

The mWomen e-service is a subscription-based SMS service offering free advice daily, on women’s and children’s legal rights, family law and gender based violence. It was initiated in March 2013, as a partnership between the Department of Women, Government of Fiji and Vodafone. In November 2013, coinciding with the Fiji government’s new national policy, an additional SMS Counseller component—a free short code number that members of the public can phone to seek legal advice and counselling—was launched. Callers to this service are referred to an NGO, ‘Empower Pacific’, though there is no formal partnership arrangement.

The mWomen service and its SMS Counseller component seek to:

- educate people on options available to address the problem of GBV.
- provide a channel for women to link up with Empower Pacific.

There are currently 25,613 subscribers to the mWomen e-service, of whom 65 per cent are women.

2 Learnings from the initiative

Absence of a formal agreement and dilution of citizen accountability: Absence of a formal agreement between the Department of Women and Vodafone has resulted in a situation where the government’s involvement has tapered off over time, and Vodafone is now the primary driver. For citizens, this means that there is no way they can demand minimum levels of service, and the long-term sustainability of the service is also called into question, as it is highly unlikely that the government will pick up the service if Vodafone ceases its involvement. Similarly, there is no service agreement with the NGO provider of counselling services ‘Empower Pacific’. Public-private partnerships in e-government therefore need to foreground citizen accountability issues from the outset. Service guarantees are vital to secure the rights of the most marginalized. This may be even more significant as services move online without an offline counterpart. At the time of this research, there was one lawyer providing information and sending daily texts to subscribers. This position was paid for 18 months, but is now voluntary (due to the lack of funding...
Further, it was noted the effectiveness of the NGO counselling service enquirers are referred to is hampered by high staff turnover and lack of capacity.

**Accessibility barriers:** Although mWomen is based on the fact that more women have access to a mobile phone than computers, critical questions remain about the most marginalized/vulnerable women’s access to services provided through mobile phones. Many women lack secure and/or affordable access to a mobile phone, an issue that does come up in the case of other countries as well. Large scale efforts like the Grievance Redress System in the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino programme in the Philippines also point to this problem.

**Absence of public data:** All data relating to mWomen is collected and managed by Vodafone. Vodafone has not released any usage data (beyond number of subscribers or queries received) and it is not clear what data is collected. Vodafone has stated its intention of conducting a customer satisfaction survey in the future. The lack of information on uptake and results of mWomen reflect an overall low data environment in general, and a lack of sex-disaggregated data collection systems, in particular.

**Need for effective publicity and citizen-uptake measures:** For the first years of the service, offline promotion of mWomen was minimal. From April 2014, offline mechanisms to promote the mWomen service have included training local community women to advocate for ending violence against women and children. However, there seems to be confusion regarding the service’s target audience — for example, there have been instances of men accessing advice in Domestic Violence Restraining Order cases. Designing for gender equality and women’s empowerment must include clarity of goals and strategies across all levels of e-government.

### Impacts on women’s empowerment

The mWomen initiative has the potential for significant impact on women’s knowledge of their rights and the support structures that can help them access these rights, particularly in the context of domestic violence. Greater direction-setting by the government and formal service level agreements with private partners can make a difference, if the government, as a duty-bearer in the context of GBV, can refurbish and implement the programme.
FIGURE 13
ANALYSIS OF EMPOWERMENT OUTCOMES OF mWOMEN USING GENDER AT WORK FRAMEWORK

Individual

INTERNALIZED ATTITUDES, VALUES, PRACTICES
ACCESS TO AND CONTROL OVER PUBLIC AND PRIVATE RESOURCES
Access to redress for survivors of GBV

Informal

SOCIOCULTURAL NORMS, BELIEFS AND PRACTICES
Emergence of a new discourse on GBV as a rights-issue

Formal

LAWS, POLICIES, RESOURCE ALLOCATIONS

Systemic
3 Initiatives that have mainstreamed gender

3.1 BLENDED LEARNING PROGRAMME, PHILIPPINES

COUNTRY CONSULTANT: MARIA JUANITA MACAPAGAL AND MINA PERALTA

FIGURE 14
SCREENSHOT OF TESDA PORTAL

Introduction

The Technical Education and Skills Development Authority in the Philippines (TESDA) was set up in the 1990s to “provide direction (and shape) policies, programmes and standards towards quality technical education and skills development”. TESDA provides technical vocational education and training (TVET) in trade, agricultural and fishery schools across the country, and also collaborates with schools and institutions for accreditation, coordination, integration, and monitoring and evaluation of formal and non-formal TVET programmes. TESDA has set up 15 Regional Centres and 45 Provincial Training Centres
in the country, one among which is the TESDA Women's Centre (TWC). The Women's Centre is TESDA’s lead training institution for mainstreaming gender and development (GAD) in TVET and sustaining the integration of GAD components into existing technology-based training programmes.

In May 2012, TESDA launched the free TESDA online programme, e-TESDA, with the intention of making TVET more accessible, increasing quality and improving the teaching and learning process through the use of ICTs. The online learning space is an interactive menu with video demonstrations of embedded skills, and the content has been developed to facilitate self-directed learning, as part of which learners can freely navigate across topics. Following this, in 2013, TWC piloted a blended learning programme combining traditional face-to-face classroom training, with online training, in two of its courses — Food and Beverage Services, and Housekeeping. The idea underpinning this initiative was that blended learning rather than just online training would result in more effective learning outcomes for marginalized women, who constitute the majority of trainees in TWC programmes, when compared to online training. It was felt that in addition to online exchanges, classroom interactions would help in enhancing peer support networks, and guidance and mentorship from trainers.

2 **Insights for creating an e-government institutional ecosystem that promotes gender equality**

**A human touch to online training programmes:** The Blended Learning Programme has responded effectively to women learners’ need for flexible spacing of learning time, peer networking and support, and access to safe spaces for learning. In this model, trainers are available for dialogue during class hours and they also provide additional lessons to those who find the online training inadequate. Trainers can track the frequency of log-ins, monitor their trainees and check on the completion of their online training. These measures make for greater effectiveness of learning outcomes.

**Connectivity backbone:** TWC recognizes the affordability of Internet connectivity as a key concern for marginalized women. Therefore, the Blended Learning Programme offers spaces at the TWC where women learners can access the Internet for free, and also provides offline versions of the courses — so that even without continuous Internet connectivity, learners can still use downloaded content. Additionally, the Programme Management Unit of e-TESDA is working with the Department of Science and Technology-ICT Office’s iGov and e-Society Programmes to use Community eCentres and public libraries for enhancing access to the e-TESDA online programme.
Open technical architecture: TESDA makes use of open source platforms like Moodle (Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment), in the development of its Internet-based e-learning materials. Technical openness which reduces vendor lock-ins and design costs in e-service delivery, is critical in the transition to digitalized government.

Full subsidy of service to cater to the most marginalized women: e-TESDA provides a free web-based learning programme, based on a no-cost policy that encourages participation of citizens. TESDA has also entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with some companies (Microsoft, Intel and Google) for access and free use of applications by online learners.

Data security measures as per gender mainstreaming rules: To ensure protection of its learners’ information, e-TESDA has adopted the data security measures used by the PREGINET system of the Department of Science and Technology ICT Office. This takes care of data protection, including the registration information of TESDA users. Having an enabling law for gender mainstreaming has helped TESDA in the formulation of institutional data security policy and processes favorable to women.

Gender-responsive programme design: While the e-TESDA programme puts total responsibility on the user to complete the course, the TWC Blended Learning Programme provides a more gender-responsive learning programme. Women are provided motivation and guidance to complete the courses and also supported after the training, in finding employment. In addition to skills-training, the TWC provides empowerment training programmes such as Gender Sensitivity Training (GST), Work Ethics and Computer Literacy, which are part of the basic competency courses in the Blended Learning Programme.

Sensitivity to connectivity limitations: e-TESDA is accessible to any person using smart phones. Like-wise there are offline downloadable versions of lessons that are available for those with limited connectivity. Supporting software is not available for non-Android mobile units.

Digital literacy trainings that go beyond ‘en-skilling’: Blended learning offers opportunities to make digital literacy more relevant. The students learn how to create their curriculum vitae, write job application

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18 The Philippine Research, Education, and Government Information Network (PREGINET) is a research and education network established in the Philippines by the Advanced Science and Technology Institute of the Department of Science and Technology (DOST-ASTI). The DOST-ASTI continues to manage and operate PREGINET, the country’s National Research and Education Network (NREN) with direct links to international Research and Education Networks (RENs) such as the Asia Pacific Advanced Network (APAN), Trans-Eurasia Information Network 3 (TEIN3), School-on-the-Internet Asia and Collaboration for Network-eNabled education education, Culture, Technology and science Asia (CONNECT) Asia. These connections facilitate technology exchange and international research collaboration. PREGINET also provides other value-adding services such as voice over IP (VoIP); videoconferencing; video streaming; web hosting; server co-location; network design; network monitoring and management; site mirroring; and technical consultancy and support.
letters, and gain access to job sites where they can apply for work online after their certification. They are also made aware of other government online services that they can access in preparation for job application requirements.

3 Impacts on women’s empowerment

The Blended Learning Programme has contributed to improved self-confidence among women learners. Peer interaction and peer support has helped gain in self-esteem. The Gender Sensitivity Training course has been especially helpful in this regard. Women interviewed for this research said that after attending this programme, there has been a shift in the way they think about themselves:

“The TWC blended learning model contributed to widening our knowledge and sharpening our skills... we are confident that we can find jobs right away because when employers find out we got trained in TESDA, they know that we have good training.”

Some students said that through the course they were able to have “personal guidance” and also “interact with other people— their classmates and the public”. The programme has also enabled women to expand their networks of peer support. In fact, a group of female students have put together a social media group to support each other in their training. Women beneficiaries’ awareness of government services, especially those available online, has also increased. For example learners interviewed for this case study shared that now they are aware of other government agencies that offer online services.
### FIGURE 15
ANALYSIS OF EMPOWERMENT OUTCOMES OF BLENDED LEARNING PROGRAMME USING GENDER AT WORK FRAMEWORK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Formal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTERNALIZED ATTITUDES, VALUES, PRACTICES</strong></td>
<td><strong>ACCESS TO AND CONTROL OVER PUBLIC AND PRIVATE RESOURCES</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women trainees are more confident about participating in the job market</td>
<td>Women trainees have access to information about schemes and entitlements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SOCIOCULTURAL NORMS, BELIEFS AND PRACTICES</strong></td>
<td><strong>LAWS, POLICIES, RESOURCE ALLOCATIONS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergence of peer solidarities among women trainees</td>
<td>Creation of a techno-mediated learning model responsive to gender-based educational and economic needs of women learners</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Systemic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Systemic</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Initiatives where women are a large proportion of beneficiaries

4.1 SA COMMUNITY, AUSTRALIA

COUNTRY CONSULTANT: JAN MCCONCHIE

Introduction

SA Community is an online directory in South Australia that provides information to citizens about governmental and non-governmental services, “in the areas of health, welfare, housing, education, community participation, information, legal services, arts and recreation”.

SA Community was established in response to a request for such a service from an apex body of South Australian community organizations, in the pre-Google days, when the Internet was just taking off and the first directory created was not an online product. A new not-for-profit organization, ‘CISA/SA Connected’, was created for the management of this information directory. Initially, the information that was made available on this directory was that of the community organizations who advocated for the introduction of this service. Over time, with increasing Internet diffusion, the directory went online and the content was expanded through a process of crowd-sourcing. Currently, the SA Community site is also linked to, without being merged with, the official website of the South Australian government www.sa.gov.au. The funding for SA Community is provided by the state government of South Australia.

SA Community is used extensively by older women. Women also constitute a large proportion of the content-contributors, as the voluntary and NGO sector tends to be dominated by women. Further, SA Community is the key information resource used by the Women’s Information Service of the Office for Women, Government of South Australia, that provides face-to-face and phone assistance to women’s informational queries. Similarly, it is also a key knowledge resource that is used in state libraries in South Australia that cater very often to women visitors’ needs.

2 Insights for creating an e-government institutional ecosystem that promotes gender equality

Creative use of boundary-spanning: SA Community demonstrates how the creative use of new governance arrangements, where the traditional separation between government and civil society is
blurred, can help in increasing flexibility and enhance efficiencies of public services. As an information
directory managed by an agency that is a not-for-profit organization separate from government,
SA Community has a lot of room to cut the red-tape on approvals for adopting unconventional processes,
such as ‘crowd-sourcing’ information and posting information about both governmental and non-
governmental services, including those offered by community organizations. Similarly, SA Community’s
move to opt for informational interlinking with the government’s informational service www.sa.gov.au,
without technical integration (such as merging databases or backend architectures), also enables the
service to maximize efficiency.

**Optimizing user experience even under low-quality connectivity conditions:** SA Community seeks
to ensure that user experience, even at low internet speeds, is maximized. Therefore care is taken to
ensure that content remains unembellished, so that the service can be accessed even under sub-optimal
connectivity conditions.

**Innovative authentication and verification mechanisms to control quality of content:** Verification of
the authenticity of crowd-sourced content, without escalating human capital investment to unsustainable
levels, is not an easy task. But SA Community has managed to do this by putting in place an entry-level
check for non-governmental and community organizations that seek to put up information about their
services on the portal. Organizations that want to post information about their services on the portal must
provide accreditation information so that their bonafides can be checked in real-time against the database
of the relevant accreditation body. In addition to this, the information added by these organizations
are vetted by SA Community staff, and there is also a provision for citizen feedback that enables errors
and quality concerns raised by citizens to be flagged to the concerned organization that has listed the
information, so that appropriate changes are made.

**Information architecture:** SA Community contributes to enhancing proactive disclosure efforts by
providing the right metadata to citizens that enhances the ‘find-ability’ and ‘search-ability’ of information
about government and other community services. SA Community is licensed under Creative Commons
licensing, so the content on the online directory can be reused as open data. The initiative also adheres to
strict data security guidelines, and standard web privacy guarantees.
### Impacts on women’s empowerment

Though SA Community is not a women-directed service, its design has contributed to enhanced uptake among women, especially older women. This is because community organizations who contribute to the content are primarily staffed by women, and the users of community libraries also tend to mostly be women. Undeniably, for women, participation in an information and knowledge commons enables greater presence in the public arena, affirming women as producers of, and contributors to, important resources.

#### FIGURE 16
**ANALYSIS OF EMPOWERMENT OUTCOMES OF SA COMMUNITY USING GENDER AT WORK FRAMEWORK**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internalized Attitudes, Values, Practices</th>
<th>Access to and Control Over Public and Private Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced access to public information for women</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity for women to participate in the digital knowledge commons</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socio-cultural Norms, Beliefs and Practices</th>
<th>Laws, Policies, Resource Allocations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Techno-mediated low-cost knowledge creation model that creates spaces for women as contributors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Systemic**
4.2 GRIEVANCE REDRESS SYSTEM, PHILIPPINES

COUNTRY CONSULTANT: MARIA JUANITA MACAPAGAL AND MINA PERALTA

1 Introduction

The Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino (PPP) programme is a cash transfer programme with health and education-related conditionalities for the participating households, that is implemented by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Government of Philippines. Women beneficiaries make up more than 82 per cent of the programme grantees. The programme uses a Grievance Redress System (GRS) as a performance monitoring tool to ensure accountability and transparency in implementation. The programme has a cadre of community leaders (mainly women referred to as Parent Leaders) recruited as mediators between the programme management and beneficiaries to facilitate the grievance redress process and track beneficiary compliance in their neighbourhoods.

The GRS may be considered a basic type of e-government service, but it is an important mechanism for the government to measure the impact of its services on the lives of beneficiaries. The system enables citizens (beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries) to articulate complaints, concerns and preferences with the intention of holding the authorities accountable. The design features include tracking the nature, origin, location and status of complaints pertaining to a number of issues such as household targeting errors, payment irregularities, fraud and corruption. The system complements other MIS modules of the programme, such as beneficiary updation, compliance verification and payments.

The GRS is a way of ensuring the quality of service delivery in the PPP programme. The most common grievance categories identified by the system over two rounds of evaluation, between 2009–2013, are: payment and compliance and exclusion errors. The data received were acted upon, and additionally, the metadata about complaints alerted the programme administrators to make improvements to the compliance monitoring, payment releases and household targeting systems.

In the grievance system, the frontline workers are the City/Municipal Links who record grievances and ensure that it is registered. At the stage of registration in the digitalized GRS, a grievance number that helps future tracking is generated by the system. There are a number of channels through which grievances
can be reported, including emails, text messages, Facebook, Twitter, calls to a national hotline, complaint drop boxes, and direct reporting to independent NGO monitoring teams, PPP officials (primarily City/Municipal Links), and Parent Leaders.

Once recorded, the grievance is reviewed, verified and investigated. The Project Management Office of the Grievance Redress Unit is then in charge of reviewing and categorizing each grievance, and referring it to one of the following committees, based on the standardized procedure in place (mainly based on the nature of the complaint):

- A provincial/municipal advisory or grievance committee headed by local chief executives, consisting of representatives from partner agencies and NGOs.
- Regional advisory or grievance committees chaired by the Regional Director of the DSWD, with co-chairs from the Departments of Education and Health.
- National advisory or grievance committees chaired by the Secretary of the DSWD with co-chairs from the Departments of Education and Health.

The grievance is then taken up for fact-finding and resolution, and an official from the municipality or an upper tier of government is placed in charge of this. Based on the report, a decision is taken by the committee to which the grievance has been assigned. Complainants who are not satisfied with the outcome of the process can appeal decisions to the National Grievance Committee, whose decision is final.

2 Insights for creating an e-government institutional ecosystem that promotes gender equality

Maximizing effectiveness through human and digital processes: The programme uses a hybrid grievance processing mechanism, with a combination of a MIS support architecture and face-to-face intermediation by officials to ensure effective verification, fact-finding, resolution and citizen-feedback.

Consultative approach to grievance resolution: The DSWD refers concerns that emerge through the GRS to partners (the Department of Health, Department of Education, non-government organizations and local government units) that are part of the PPP programme implementation arrangements. Involvement of different departments and stakeholders in data analysis and resolution of complaints contributes to the overall quality of decisions, and thus to accountability and responsiveness.
Clear policy on data: The DSWD has a data security policy. It defines the levels of authority as to who can process and modify transactions. Only the key personnel in the PPP programme are authorized to access the information database. Securing the identity of grievance sources and respect for choice of anonymity is upheld. Reference numbers are generated for all grievances filed and reported, and every grievance is considered. Actions towards resolution of grievances depend on the nature and level of the grievance reported.

Investment in building citizen-trust: Orientations are conducted to familiarize grantees with the GRS. Grantees are also encouraged to approach their City/Municipal Links and Parent Leaders, if they have questions or concerns regarding the programme. Communication strategies cover the promotion of GRS at the village level through Family Development Sessions and orientation sessions with officials of the local government units. Parent Leaders have also motivated their peers (who are beneficiaries) to communicate using their mobile phones (and other online devices e.g. Facebook).

The integration of the GRS in all the activities of the programme benefits users and recipients. For instance, the face to face strategic communication efforts with various groups, such as beneficiaries, partners, NGOs, civil society, and the media, have helped improve public knowledge about the programme and the GRS, especially in a context with connectivity divides. However, field research revealed that more investment in such on-ground awareness-generation activities is required to improve citizen-trust in the programme.

Impacts on women’s empowerment

The Parent Leaders from the local community are often the champions of the GRS. This has contributed to trust-building in the grievance process. The practice of using the metadata about grievances to correct design flaws in the compliance monitoring, payment releases and household targeting systems of the programme’s MIS is worthy of emulation, as a good practice in the area of agile service delivery design.
FIGURE 17
ANALYSIS OF EMPOWERMENT OUTCOMES OF GRIEVANCE REDRESS SYSTEM USING GENDER AT WORK FRAMEWORK

**Individual**

**INTERNALIZED ATTITUDES, VALUES, PRACTICES**

**ACCESS TO AND CONTROL OVER PUBLIC AND PRIVATE RESOURCES**

- Women gain confidence in claims-making as their trust in government increases

**Informal**

**SOCIOCULTURAL NORMS, BELIEFS AND PRACTICES**

**Formal**

**LAWS, POLICIES, RESOURCE ALLOCATIONS**

- Enhanced responsiveness of government to the concerns of the last woman, as metadata about grievances is used to correct design flaws

**Systemic**
4.3 COMMUNITY eCENTRES, PHILIPPINES

COUNTRY CONSULTANT: MARIA JUANITA MACAPAGAL AND MINA PERALTA

1 Introduction

The Philippine Community eCentre (CeC) Programme is a national digital inclusion programme initiated in 2007. It seeks to establish Community eCentres that provide critical ICT, e-government and social services in rural municipalities with minimal or no access to information and government services, and where shared Internet facilities are absent. Between 2008–2011, more than 1400 CeCs were set up at the municipality level. A new strategic road-map for 2011–2016 was developed, that set its sight on deeper rural penetration at the barangay (village) level, in partnership with municipal governments.

The Malvar Municipal Government in Batangas province has set up 5 CeCs under this programme: Malvar Main CeC in the town where the Municipality is located; 3 satellite CeCs in the barangays of Poblacion, San Fernando, and San Isidro; and a ‘CeC on Wheels’. The Municipal Planning Officer has been assigned a concurrent appointment as the CeC Manager. This helped the CeC programme gain top level official support in the initial years, when it was still a fairly new initiative in the municipality. The Coordinator for Alternative Learning Systems (a governmental program for providing modularized non-formal education) has been appointed as Assistant CeC Manager. She has enabled linkages between the CeC and the eSkwela/e-school programme of the Bureau of Alternative Learning Systems, which aims at providing ICT-enhanced educational opportunities for the country’s out-of-school youth and adults. The everyday functioning of CeCs is taken care of by a team of knowledge workers, while mobile teachers who are staff of the Bureau of Alternative Learning Systems are in charge of the eSkwela programme.

Though the design of the CeC programme at the national level is gender-neutral, in Malvar, the programme has been able to make inroads in creating empowering cultures of use from which women in the community can benefit. This is because the two ‘champions’ driving the programme in Malvar—the Municipal Planning Officer and the Assistant CeC Manager—have focused on increasing the outreach of the programme to women from various socioeconomic groups in the community: ranging from barangay health workers, daycare teachers, young women in search of alternative education and mothers. The national policy in the Philippines that mandates gender budgeting in all agencies and institutions has
helped the municipality of Malvar in bringing in the women’s empowerment agenda into the varied activities of the CeCs. For example, dedicated budgetary allocations for training marginalized women have been made in the municipal budget, which enables the strengthening of the skills-training programme in the CeCs.

Most importantly, site-selection for the establishment of the CeCs has been guided by a gender perspective. For example, the decision to establish CeCs in Barangays Poblacion and San Isidro was taken after these areas were found to have low levels of female work-force participation and a high drop-out rate among young women, through the Community Based Monitoring system instituted by the municipality. For these efforts, the CeCs of Malvar have received national and international recognition.

**Insights for creating an e-government institutional ecosystem that promotes gender equality**

**Facilitated public access:** The CeC programme has given the citizens of Malvar a place where they can access e-government services through the Internet, on a regular basis. The efforts of the municipal government, through the digital literacy training has been critical to create citizen capabilities for accessing e-government services. The continued provision of Internet access in 3 of the CeCs (Malvar Main CeC, Poblacion CeC, and the CeC on Wheels) has enabled citizens to actually access these e-government services. Knowledge workers play an important role in assisting CeC users, especially in looking up e-government services online.

**Partnerships across scale — tapping into local philanthropy and building bridges with national and international programmes:** The Municipal Government persuaded a local club, during their 50th anniversary, to donate computers in order to establish the Poblacion CeC. This engagement has resulted in 13 computers and two printers being donated to the Poblacion CeC by the U&I Club since 2013. Additionally, this partnership proved to be beneficial in expanding the reach of the digital literacy training and the eSkwela programme in the municipality. In order to improve and increase the CeC services, partnerships have also been established with the Department of Science and Technology and its offices (the ICT Office and the National Computer Center), the Bureau of Alternative Learning Systems, and Microsoft. Further, the Municipal Government has joined the Philippine Community eCentre Network and Telecentre.org. These affiliations and partnerships add value to local beneficiaries of the programme, while bringing visibility.
Digital literacy and employment oriented applications: Digital literacy trainings are provided free to all citizens regardless of their gender or age. Citizens who want to attend the trainings need to sign up with the knowledge worker. Additionally, the Main CeC and Poblacion CeC have eSkwela installed in their computers and this service is available to learners 15 years old and over. The only requirement for those taking eSkwela is that participants should have completed the free digital literacy training offered at the CeC.

CeCs promoted as a new women-friendly local institution: Meetings of barangay health workers, daycare centre workers, and senior citizens, and announcements after church services, were key offline strategies that were used in the initial years, to enhance the uptake of the digital literacy training. The digital literacy trainings provided to barangay health workers and daycare centre workers (who are mostly women) and the word of mouth publicity generated by these trainees helped the CeCs emerge as women-friendly public access points in their communities. The ‘travelling’ CeC strategy, where the computers are sent to remote barangays for one week, has also proved to be a crucial strategy to build community awareness about the programme.

Impacts on women’s empowerment

Trainees in the Malvar CeC programme have learnt how to use the Internet, not just for social media but also for looking up information, communicating through email, and sending online college applications. Women who are undergoing training reported during the study that they have been able to expand their communication horizons and undertake new empowerment journeys, as they now have access to public information they were hitherto unaware of.

Digital literacy trainings have enhanced skill-levels and employability of women graduates and their access to the job market. For example, a knowledge worker interviewed for this research shared that one of the trainees in the first batch he taught, applied for a job as a production worker in a factory. She was promoted as line leader because she was computer literate. Another knowledge worker shared that a woman security guard who used to work at the municipality took the trainings, and is now working in Dubai where she uses her knowledge of computers in performing her job as a timekeeper.
FIGURE 18
ANALYSIS OF EMPOWERMENT OUTCOMES OF COMMUNITY ECENTRES USING GENDER AT WORK FRAMEWORK

**Individual**
- **INTERNALIZED ATTITUDES, VALUES, PRACTICES**
  - Expansion of women’s informational and communicative capabilities
- **ACCESS TO AND CONTROL OVER PUBLIC AND PRIVATE RESOURCES**
  - Enhanced access to public information
  - Increased access to employment opportunities for marginalized women

**Informal**
- **SOCIOCULTURAL NORMS, BELIEFS AND PRACTICES**

**Formal**
- **LAWS, POLICIES, RESOURCE ALLOCATIONS**
  - Resources optimization through interdepartmental convergence

**Systemic**
4.4 COMMUNITY TELECENTRE INITIATIVE, FIJI

COUNTRY CONSULTANT: SUSANNA KELLY

1 Introduction

The Fijian Government Community Telecentre Initiative (Telecentres) is a flagship initiative of Government of Fiji aimed at increasing IT and Internet access for rural, urban and peri-urban communities. The intention behind Telecentres is to facilitate free access to IT services for those who live in remote areas and to cater to socioeconomically disadvantaged groups in order to “enable maximum coverage for the Government of the Republic of the Fiji Islands’ online services.”

Currently, there are 26 Telecentres nationally. Government statistics show that by April 2015, over 125,000 users have accessed the Telecentres.

Though the design of the Telecentres is gender-neutral, empirical research for this research revealed that a large number of beneficiaries are women. Hence, this case was selected for its overall significance as a free, public access model in catering to women, a majority of whom have socioeconomic constraints in Internet access.

The programme was started in 2011 under the aegis of the Ministry of Communications. Most Telecentres are located in schools. Telecentres are open during school hours and after school between 4.00 pm – 9.00 pm. Access is free and there are Telecentre assistants (‘lab assistants’) to provide technical support.

2 Learnings from the initiative

Widespread connectivity an issue:
In serviced areas, Telecentres are significantly increasing access to IT and internet for Fijians who would otherwise have to pay for these services. But despite the policy pledge to increase rural access, telecentre coverage relative to national geography and population is small.

The limitations of a gender-neutral design:
The fact that Telecentres are free, located in community facilities, open during the evenings and on weekends, all contribute to the widening of potential access. However, there is no gender mandate to make Telecentres ‘female-friendly’ nor for lab assistants to respond to women service users’ gender specific needs (e.g. low computer literacy). Telecentres seek to promote women’s online participation within the overall policy goal of increasing internet access for

underserved communities, but there is no specific attention paid to gender in Telecentre design and delivery. Similarly, women’s rights in the digital space, or protecting these rights are not a visible policy concern.

**Lack of clarity in stakeholder partnerships:** There is little information available on the intra-initiative stakeholder relationships between government and local community/citizens. This makes it difficult to ascertain any shifts in the norms of state-citizen interaction in service delivery. Further, it is not clear if there are any grievance redress policies within the management and accountability agreements between government and local school committees running the Telecentres.

**Need to gender National Broadband Policy:** Social inclusion is a stated benefit of increased broadband availability (National Broadband Policy 2011: 3–4), and Telecentres represent an important plank in the Government of Fiji’s commitment to digital inclusiveness (National Broadband Policy 2011). However, the National Broadband Policy does not include strategic objectives to promote digital inclusion for women or other marginalized groups and does not include a gender budget.

**Registration requirements that pose entry barriers:** Telecentres have signing in logs which require users to show proof of identity, residential address and to physically sign in their name. These requirements are problematic as they pose barriers for some users with low literacy, no proof of address or formal identification.

**The limitations of connectivity and e-service delivery programmes not being in tandem:** Although Telecentres are envisaged as an access point for citizens to access e-government online services,25 such services are at a nascent stage, and therefore Telecentres are not yet necessarily facilitating shifts in state-citizen interactions.

**Impacts on women’s empowerment**

During the field research, when asked about the difference Telecentres have made in their lives, the most common response from women was that they had built their ICT skills as a result of visiting the Telecentre. Particularly significant to this outcome was the availability of technical support from the lab assistant. The next most commonly mentioned outcome was being able to access the Internet for free, which meant...
money from tight budgets could be spent elsewhere. Other examples of outcomes mentioned by individual women included being able to access news and keep up to date; being able to keep in touch with family and friends; and a positive impact on work and schoolwork. By virtue of having access to Telecentres (but noting restrictions for some women), women theoretically have access to public-political engagement facilitated by online availability of information, news, social media, discussion forums, and civil society participation. The extent to which this may be happening is not tracked.

FIGURE 19
ANALYSIS OF EMPOWERMENT OUTCOMES OF COMMUNITY TELECENTRE INITIATIVE USING GENDER AT WORK FRAMEWORK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internalized Attitudes, Values, Practices</th>
<th>Access to and Control over Public and Private Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>Opportunity for ICT skills development for women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociocultural Norms, Beliefs and Practices</td>
<td>Laws, Policies, Resource Allocations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systemic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Annex III: Addressing gender equality across the different stages of e-government

**Stage 1: Emerging**
- Information dissemination
- Outreach

**Stage 2: Enhanced**
- Access
- Usability

**Stage 3: Transactional**
- Service delivery capacity

**Stage 4: Connected**
- Citizen participation
- Interconnectedness

### Online presence
- Creation of website(s) for the national gender machinery
- Organization structure and contact information
- Static content links for gender policies and programmes
- Links to websites of related agencies and networks

### Stakeholder intake
- More sophisticated websites with interaction capacity
- Email newsletter subscription and SNS links of national gender machinery
- Downloadable forms and data for specific gender policies and programmes

### Online transactions
- Provision of complete online-based gender programmes
- Secure identity authentication and individualized services
- Available services including online registration and application to gender programmes and issuance of certificates e-learning, etc.

### Integration and transformation
- Integration with national government portal
- One-stop public service window across government agencies with services clustered among common needs
- Transformation of gender governance through integration of information, services and participation

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E-Government for Women's Empowerment in Asia and the Pacific