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Women's Struggles in the IS - From Beijing to WSIS and Beyond

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The opportunities for gender equality need to be reassessed within the new paradigm of the information society. The context of the information society and the flux in social institutions that it implies provides new spaces for negotiating gender concerns, and a way out of some of the impasse and failures of gender mainstreaming approaches. The opportunity here is one for women to redefine their relationships with social institutions.

Yet, these opportunities seem to be limited by the fact that the strategic interests of women and the opportunities specific for women's empowerment through ICTs have not found specific focus in policy and programmatic efforts of international donor agencies or of national country governments. Much of what is cast as the IT opportunity in countries of the South is seen within narrow frameworks of economic gains, interpreted within the dominant ICTD (Information and Communication technologies for development) paradigm.

In a complete departure from feminist and development discourse that is critical of neo-liberal influences, the ICTD discourse has been mostly market-driven. In its unbridled enthusiasm for the role of markets, the mainstream ICTD approach has bypassed traditional development ideation and practice, especially those that are political.

For women, it is important to engage in IS debates at global and local levels to direct ICTD policy and practice in their countries and regions towards gender equitable outcomes.

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